

INSULTS AND HUMILIATIONS IN FIFTH-CENTURY HISTORIOGRAPHY AND COMEDY

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Abstract: Herodotos, Thoukydides, and Xenophon, in that descending order, include anecdotal descriptions of systematic humiliation through verbal and nonverbal digs and insults. Examples include Hippokleides' symposiastic behaviour at Agariste's wedding competition, Peisistratid insult to the sexual purity of Harmodios' sister, Athenian mockery of a Spartan POW held in Athens after capture on Sphakteria, and Theramenes' witty toast of his executioner Kritias (τὸ παιγνιῶδες). Aristophanes and other Attic Old Comedy poets traditionally and pervasively present characters who deride politicians, pretentious poets and other public figures. They animalise, infantilise, and feminise targets with political, social, and especially sexual insults. Aristophanes mocked objectionable (to him) habits, views, and actions of prominent individuals and groups throughout the Peloponnesian War. He demeaned their patriotism and justifications for war with (pseudo-) historical reasoning in *Akhaians* (425) and elsewhere (*Peace*, *Frogs*). This paper explores the genres' mutual derivation and overlapping depictions of incidents from the pushful and derisory poetics of Attic (and Lakonic) manhood.

1. Introduction

Insults pervaded the rough-and-tumble confrontations of ancient Athenian street-life, one aspect of daily interaction among males for which substantial data (however biased) survive from comedy, historiography, oratory, and pottery images of everyday life. Verbal assaults, genealogical taunts, obscene allegations, physiological caricature, and witty puns on names replaced, accompanied, preceded, or followed physical assaults. The

vicious speech and acts of Attic Old Comedy reflect this inculcated intemperate behaviour and responses.¹

Aggressive humour, a form of communication prior to all literary genres, surfaces in epic, lyric, tragedy, biography, and philosophy. Early historians, especially when nasty acts have historical consequences, will likewise record moments of social friction and inflictions of humiliation. Moreover, the humour that constructs Old Comedy's plots often grows out of familiar personalities such as Perikles and Aiskhylos, as well as important contemporary public issues, and so can enrich historical understanding. Herodotos finds humour most congenial to his historiographical project featuring many sorts of private personal and public political confrontations. Thoukydides and his 'continuator' Xenophon feature examples of biting wit that emerge in moments of tense political and military competition.² All three exhibit elements of the ecology of insult in fifth-century Greece (v. *infra*).

The comic poets delight in reporting their competitors' fiascos, but eschew murders on stage as well as communal catastrophes. Historians approach certain topics that the

¹ David Cohen (1995) and Gabriel Herman (1994, 2006) disagree strongly about how vile and violent were Athenian individuals in the Classical period, but the data and standards of behaviour are hard to determine. Similarly, intensity of feelings—measuring happiness or other emotions—eludes historians. The data collected here tilt towards Cohen's less polite society, and no evidence suggests that other contemporary Hellenic communities were more civil than the better known and more publicly recorded Athenian. Dover (1974: 30–3) discusses continuity of Athenian 'vilification and ridicule', citing congruities between Aristophanes' staged abuse and Demosthenes' attacks on Aiskhines and his family a century later (Dem. 19. 199 ff., 287; 18.129ff.). Athenian distinctiveness from their contemporaries' practice or ours may mainly lie in state-financed comedy's airing of prominent citizens' alleged foibles.

² Kurke concludes a monograph (2011) 426–31 with a meditation on 'Aesopic', i.e. discreditable and dubious, elements and popular traditions in the Herodotean historiographical project—unprecedented and hardly imitated. See also Darbo-Peschanski (2000), Halliwell (2008), and Griffiths (1995) on the place of laughter in Greek historiography, especially Herodotos'.

evidence proves to have been under taboo on the comic stage: Herodotos recounts Phrynikhos' *Fall of Miletos* fiasco (6.21), and Thoukydides details the terrible Athenian plague (2.48–54). Mutilations, murders, mass deportations, and massacres are fodder for the historians, writers unbound by judges of the polis and popular acclaim (recall Thoukydides' disdain for *ἀγωνίσματα*, 1.22.4). Both these historians, revisionist in inclination, pause their main narratives to controvert popular misconceptions about Hipparkhos' initiatives to seduce and embarrass his amour, the sexually uncooperative Harmodios (Hdt. 5.55–7, 6.123; Thouk. 6.54–9). The comic poets never satirise the heroic liberators from tyranny, and, indeed, law prohibited speaking or singing ill of them.³ Xenophon's account of The Thirty reports various criminal acts of thuggery, thievery, and murder, although many acts were later amnestied (*Hell.* 2.3.2–22).⁴ Comic poets, producing a publicly financed event, understood and observed certain constraints, apart from the legal restrictions applicable to any citizen. Sommerstein specifies, e.g., naming names of current magistrates in accusations of military cowardice, shield abandoning, or parent-beating—*ἀπόρρητα*.⁵ On the other hand, the comic

³ Sommerstein (1996) on Hyp. *Phil.* col. ii (Kenyon). Such a law implies someone had already thus maltreated the liberators. Debate continues over Athenian libel and slander laws. See Halliwell (1991), Todd (1993) 258–62, Sommerstein (2004), and others. Herodotos reports anecdotes and narratives of *logoi kai erga* long after any litigable date, but Thoukydides' restraint towards competitors, even Kleon, once he came back from exile, might anticipate contemporaries' censure or actual litigation resulting from the amnesty of 403 BCE.

⁴ Many forms of insult and abuse were legal in Athens, such as law-court innuendo and explicit sexual insult, but others in Athens and elsewhere were tragic rather than comic, for example the tortures and punitive mutilations of Libyan Pheretima (4.202.1) and those of the Persian authorities. The Behistun inscription records Dareios' boasts of such punishments (e.g., DB 32–3, 50). Herodotos records the autocratic calques inflicted by Queen Amestris' live burials and mistaken revenge on the wife of Masistes (7.114.2, 9.112). Zopyros' willing and serious self-mutilation feigned imitation of actual Persian penal practices (3.154).

⁵ Sommerstein 2004: 211–12, 214, 216. This enlightening essay identifies all measures limiting freedom of Athenian speech, nine possibly

poets claimed legal protection⁶ and an educative function for their insults, slapstick obscenities, and bizarre caricatures of one-time cowardice or permanent appearance.

Herodotos includes comic, insult-laden moments—gossip, rumour, slander, even shameless buttock-baring. He often presents humiliating defamations as others' *logoi*—uncertified, but *erga* or *logoi* worthy of preservation (2.123; 7.152; cf. the Proem). One recalls Peisistratos' variant sexual practices with Megakles' daughter, Periander's necrophily with wife Melissa's cold 'oven', Gorgo's innuendo about Aristagoras' bribery, and even verbal *parachreseis*, more ominous to the ancients than the English dismissive label of 'pun' suggests (e.g., 1.61, 5.92γ, 5.41, 5.51; or 6.50.3, where the name of Krios is a *κλεηδών*, a presaging verbal omen of whose significance the speaker is unaware). Thukydides excludes most such material, especially details of the bawdy body, as *infra dignitatem historiae*.

2. The Ecology of Insult in Fifth-Century Greece

Men jockey for distinction in competitive, face-to-face sub-cultures and larger societies with essential 'expression games'.⁷ The vocabulary of manly insult features already in

relevant provisions penalizing utterances (206–8). Sommerstein shows that in extraordinary situations, and with particular parameters of indictability, comic *parrhêsia* encountered limits. Hyperbolos and Kleophon remained 'fair game' never holding office, and Kleon served as *stratêgos* only briefly. Kleon's *parrhêsia* indicted Aristophanes for his production of *Babylonians* for 'slandering the city' (426 BCE; see *Akhamians* for rebuttal). But, it is hard to determine which forms of vituperation were verboten since they were generally avoided. See Lys. 10.6–9. Even here, truth was a defence. Like crimes of *hybris*, pursuing complaints of victimisation forced the plaintiff to publicise his suffering and unmanliness (Dem. *Against Meidas*, for example).

⁶ Halliwell (1991) and Sommerstein (2004) survey the subject's critical literature.

⁷ One angry Athenian bit off his interlocutor's nose (in jail: Dem. *Against Aristag.* 25.61). Most (1989) dissects epic hero Odysseus' strategies to conceal or reveal himself to hostile and friendly publics. Narducci

Homer's hexameters. Many words describe gradations from jokes and joshing to unforgivable offences.⁸ Narrative historiography and staged comedy offer graded, strategically delivered insults: abusive words, insulting gestures, and humiliating deeds. Helping friends may be considered good clean 'ego enhancement', but it implies a flip-side, the need to affront and ridicule others: harming enemies. The perceived need to boast about oneself and friends, and conversely, to insult and ridicule opponents and competitors, reveals both personal and social facets and reflects the ecology of insult in fifth-century Greece.

Three observations undergird this comparative survey:

(1) Spartans and Athenians inhabited communities where men contended for social dominance in constructive and destructive ways.

(2) The 'poetics of masculinity' (Michael Herzfeld's resonant title), honour and infliction of DIS-honour, required pre-emptive aggression and retaliatory words, gestures, and sometimes physical assault—even murder.⁹ Lucid examples outnumber coded and ephemeral personal critiques.¹⁰

(1984) compares Roman scripts for comporting oneself in public life in Cicero's day.

⁸ E.g., αἰκίζω, ἀνα-καγχάζω, ἀτιμάζω, ἐφ-υβρίζω, κατα-γελάω, κερτομέω, κλώζω, λοιδορέω, μαστιγῶ, προπηλακίζω, ῥάβδῳ κοσμῶ, σκώπτω, συρίττω, τωθάζω, τύπτω, χλευάζω, κτλ. Compounds abound, especially those beginning with the derogating preverb κατα-. Lateiner (2004) discusses Homeric heroes and villains.

⁹ Even Sokrates acknowledges that, while scoffing words suffice for retaliation to verbal insult, punches must answer punches (Pl. *Chrm.* 155b–c, *Cr.* 50e–51a; cf. *Nub.* 1409ff.). Gleason (1990) explores the semiotics of gender, including gait, gestures, and postures. This topic frequently appears on images of Attic black-and red-figured pottery, e.g., Schauenberg's essay (1975) or more broadly, Mitchell (2009). Miller (1993) explores humiliation across cultures and literatures, including Icelandic. As for murder, see the cases of the Athenians Kylon, Kimon, Ephialtes, Hyperbolos, Theramenes, and the Spartans Kleomenes and Pausanias.

¹⁰ Cf. van Wees (1986), Fisher (1992), and Sommerstein (2004) on the nearly unlimited free speech permitted in Attic Old Comedy. Homeric

(3) Nonverbal dark looks, abusive gestures, postural abuse, verbal taunts, threats, physical humiliation, and attack constituted daily Hellenic modes of informal social policing and order. Sometimes such acts contributed to formal or state social cohesion and regulation, e.g., the verbally, physically, and gesturally brutal Spartan educational system, later denominated as the ‘training’, or *agôgê*.¹¹ Athenian conflicts produced ritualised courtroom dramas of law, public jury verdicts handed down by the People’s courts, and fines or executions.

Contentious honour-seeking among equals regulates ‘status-warrior’ competitors onwards from the Homeric epics and Hesiodic divine displacements.¹² Presentation and maintenance of a firm ‘face’ and ‘front’, that is, the cool and steady composure praised as *sôphrosynê*, constitutes a desirable item in every polis-age, manly Spartan and Athenian’s toolbox. Demaratos and many other Spartans, also Kimon, Perikles, and some few Athenians are noted, in both genres, for dignified ‘impression management skills’, but every person’s image rests in the hands and mouths of others to mutilate or destroy. Spartan kings like Kleomenes and Demaratos jostle for regal priority. Alkibiades in the

taunts, phony smiles, names, and condescending arm-stroking modulate personal honour and dishonour. Insult and humiliation, public and private, on the human and divine level, fuel the *Iliad*. No one escapes these social comedies, reading from Zeus to Agamemnon, from Thersites to Melanthios. Akhilleus insults Agamemnon: ‘greediest of men’ and ‘shameless profiteer’. Then he escalates his attack to aggravated, ritualised name-calling such as (158–9): ‘Shameless Deer-Heart’, ‘Big Goon’, and ‘Dogface’. Akhilleus describes anger, unexpectedly but incisively, as ‘sweeter than honey’, although even Akhilleus tires of heroic competitiveness. Cf. Lateiner (2004). The *Odyssey*’s suitors laugh as they threaten to mutilate and castrate Iros, Odysseus’ pathetic beggar-rival (*Od.* 18.87, cf. 22.476). Odysseus himself by kernelled insults cuts Eurymakhos and teasing Ktesippos down to size, and elevates his own position before executing the numerous and imposing imposters.

¹¹ Plato’s Athenian speaker in *Leges* was first to apply the word *agôgê* to the Spartan educational system (645a, 659d, 819d).

¹² Cf. van Wees (1992).

ekklésia and Sokrates in the agora and gymnasia practised democratic one-upmanship in public venues of status competition. Deference acknowledges superiors; therefore, Spartan *homoioi* and Athenian *zeugite* hoplites only reluctantly grant it.

The poetics of Hellenic abuse, like other verbal and non-verbal insult traditions, developed local and class-based vocabularies and styles. Athenian ‘gentlemen’ and Spartan officers and kings regularly carried so-called ‘walking sticks’—*baktérion*, *rhabdos*.¹³ These staffs also could knock heads (e.g., Hdt. 6.75) and stab bodies, when deemed necessary. The Athenians before others prohibited the carrying of ordinary weapons on Athenian streets: *ἐν τοῖς πρῶτοι δὲ Ἀθηναῖοι τὸν τε σίδηρον κατέθεντο καὶ ἀνεμμένη τῇ διαίτῃ ἐς τὸ τρυφερώτερον μετέστησαν*.¹⁴ But assault or battery needs no military equipment.

Knowledge of Persian customs also contributed to the ecology of Greek insult and abuse. The Achaemenid practice of mutilating defeated enemies, foreign and domestic, provided walking bill-boards that advertised the dreadful consequences of resistance (cf. the younger Kyros’ praised regime: Xen. *Anab.* 1.9). Two notable royal indignities were the brands burnt onto the heads of the hapless Boiotians who had deserted Leonidas’ camp at Thermopylai, and Amestris’ terrible mutilation of Masistes’ innocent wife (7.233 and 9.112 [tongue, nose, lips, ears, and breasts cut off]; cf. 2.162: *lumê*). Herodotos reports a serious Persian lesson: the authorities impaled three thousand prominent Babylonian rebels through the anus as a capital punishment (3.159). Herodotos is not exaggerating for effect or from the hyperbole of oral sources: Dareios’ Behistun

¹³ Hornblower (1998). D. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 20.13: Spartan custom charged the elders with an *obligation* to strike undisciplined men and boys with their staffs. Spartan officers struck even non-Spartans but with negative results, e.g., Thouk. 8.84; cf. Hornblower (2000).

¹⁴ Thouk. 1.6 observes how ancient practices changed, as life, law, and customs modified totally unpoliced country behaviour in the city. Hornblower (2000) and van Wees (1998) discuss weapons-displays, ‘open-carry’, as Americans now say.

Inscription repeatedly glories in such lethal punishments inflicted on ‘rebel’ victims to humiliate them, their families, and their clans—verbal insults, blinding, castration, executions, and public display of (rotting) corpses.¹⁵

In Sparta and Athens, public, non-contact insults may wreak more damage and cause more permanent outrage and grudge than actual blood-letting. Attic law-court procedures formalised permissible verbal combats over status and property. Attic law considered unprovoked assault, intentional humiliation, and public degradation, harming a citizen’s honour, worse than an unprovoked attack on an unknown party.¹⁶

Severely humiliating another Athenian citizen, from the epoch of the visitor Herodotos through Demosthenes, constituted *hybris* or *aikia*, infliction of dishonour. *Hybris* here is not a state of mind, a tragic ‘flaw’, or a moral judgement of ‘excessive pride’, but systematic, intentional affront, shaming public words, ‘looks’, and deeds directed at a fellow-citizen. Verbal or physical dishonour in Athens permitted criminal prosecution in the law courts, another venue for spectated and regulated status competition.¹⁷ *Hybris* lawsuits¹⁸ were public *graphai*, while *aikia* cases—easier to prosecute—were private *dikai*. Many court cases discuss but do not clearly define these two offenses, for example, Meidias’ premeditated, dishonouring smack on Demosthenes’ ‘chops’ at the Theatre of Dionysos. Demos-

¹⁵ Cf. Lateiner (2012) 141–3. Punishments of the Hebrew and Christian Bible, and those reported in Assyrian and other Near Eastern documents, brag about similar practices.

¹⁶ Cf. Todd 268–71.

¹⁷ Precedents from big-man conflicts, chieftain competitions, in Ionic Homer to polis-financed Attic comedy (and tragedy) illustrate status warriors’ careful choice of targets.

¹⁸ Just what *hybris* entails in an Athenian courtroom is a contentious issue. See MacDowell’s commentary on *Against Meidias* (1990), Fisher’s (1992) exhaustive study of honour and shame in ancient Greece, and Hunter (1994). State of mind seems paramount in Greek literature, but in Attic law, an action that caused another to lose face ranked higher (and would be easier to prove).

thenes' prosecution speech injects *hybris*-words more than 125 times.¹⁹

Full 'ritualised Hellenic masculinity' required stylised 'trash talk'. Vilifying repartee elegantly suggesting revolting sexual and excremental obsessions, the two disgusting elements mixed together, if possible. The goal was to erase your opponent from the list of *respectable* warriors and citizens.²⁰ When one reduces others' honour by bad-mouthing, flustering, and intimidation, one inflicts loss of face on young and old males, forces them to 'leak' embarrassing clues to disturbed emotions. Associating rivals with polluting excretions and their relevant organs is the crude first step in the Art of Dissing: Aristophanes supplies explicit and metaphorical vocabulary for defecate, urinate, crepitate, and expectorate (spit or vomit).²¹ To *animalise*, *feminise*, *infantilise*, and/or *barbarise* (after Mykale) your opponent, diminishes his standing. Actual sexual penetration (rape or its analogues) ultimately degrades domestic and foreign opponents, short of delimiting or murder.

If one turns to Peloponnesian materials, methods of humiliation through insult were ubiquitous, above all in Sparta, but the historical sources are scattered in time, genres, and intent. A typically ethnocentric Spartan proverb runs: 'In Athens, anything goes.' The Spartans occupied themselves, of course, in preparing for beautiful deaths, dressing and combing their long hair. When not grooming

¹⁹ Meidias caused him *atimia*, serious 'loss of public standing' (Dem. 21.72—this speech appears as a *probolē*, for legal reasons; Ar. *Rhet.* 1374a13–15). Demosthenes accuses his opponent of committing *hybris* 74 times with the verb and another 46 times with the noun or adjective. The previous note provides bibliography for Demosthenes' impressive range of Attic insult. No extant speech claims it brings a *graphē hybreōs* (cf. Todd (1993) 270 n. 13).

²⁰ Demosthenes and Aischines' mutual slanders and defamations aim to inflict de facto if not de iure *atimia*, disenfranchisement. Aristophanes hoped his abuse of Kleon would produce public disregard and social shunning of the Assembly's leading demagogue.

²¹ See Henderson (1991).

and exercising, they were whipping and wittily taunting the next age-class of youths drafted (from the age of seven) into the educational assembly-line, the grim socialisation (*agôgê*: Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 2.1–14; Plut. *Lyk.* 12.4,²² 14.5, 25.2–3). The Spartans institutionalised and ceremonialised insults and abuse, verbal (*skômmata*) and physical. The *paidonomos* or Educator-in-Chief had whip-bearing assistants, and the *Eirens*, his adolescent assistants, bit the thumbs of those providing insufficiently ‘laconic’ responses.²³ Such mandated punishments in no way decreased off-the-cuff chastisements, administered to advance the state, to make them better Spartans. They trained their teenagers for silent endurance of verbal (*skômmatos anekhesthai*) and physical humiliation. Insult infliction and retort extended throughout the hierarchy and even across sexes, as Plutarch’s compendium of Spartan exceptionalism, *The Customs of the Spartans*, makes clear.

The dehumanised and defenceless helots provided their lords with easy target-practice for jibes. The Spartans, after they forced Helots into drunkenness, made them dance on tables wearing ugly masks and funny clothes (Plut. *Lyk.* 28). This ugly ‘funning’ was the least of their scary problems and daily fears, since the Spartiate *krypteia* could assassinate them at will (Thouk. 4.80; Arist. F 538 Rose).

But even surviving to Spartiate adulthood never guaranteed successful continuing incorporation into the

²² Here (12), Plutarch praises Spartan ability to endure a joke at one’s expense: *σφόδρα γὰρ ἔδοκει καὶ τοῦτο Λακωνικὸν εἶναι, σκώμματος ἀνέχεσθαι· μὴ φέροντα δὲ ἐξῆν παραιτεῖσθαι, καὶ ὁ σκώπτων ἐπέπαντο*. In the next passage (25), moreover, Plutarch downplays the damage done by mockery and correction. Plut. *Inst. Lak.* 237C alleges that the Spartans deem resentment a weakness. By contrast, the story of Aristodamos the ‘trembler’ shows (Hdt. 7.229–31, 9.71) that Spartan insults drove comrades in arms to suicide.

²³ Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 2.1, Plut. *Lyk.* 18.3, the rare word for thumb: *δῆγμα* ... *εἰς τὴν ἀντίχειρα*. The most famous form of Lakonian sadism and masochism were the competitions of the boys in their endurance of whipping at the shrine of Artemis Orthia, Disney-like re-creations of which Plutarch himself and his friends witnessed long after as a tourist attraction (*Lyk.* 18; cf. *Arist.* 17).

Männerbund, unless one conformed to all approved procedures at all times. Adult male *homoioi* who remained bachelors (*agamoi*), contributing no children, had to parade naked in winter around the agora while singing a song that insulted themselves—a double degradation (Plut. *Lyk.* 15). The Spartan *Tresantes*, or ‘Tremblers’, men who had not met Spartan fighting standards, endured a spectrum of punishments to promote fellow warriors’ military morale. They were beaten, if they looked cheerful; they were denied verbal communication with their fellow Spartans; and no one would give them light for their fires at home (Hdt. 7.231; cf. on Spartans showing themselves as less than brave, Xen. *Hell.* 3.1.9, *kêlis*, ‘a blemish’; *Lak. Pol.* 9, *kakos*, a coward). As Xenophon later observed, death is far preferable to such an existence (*ibid.*). These shunning institutions were enforced to promote the traditional values of the alleged founding-father, Lykourgos (further, Plut. *Lyk.* 15.1–3). The widely admired (if rarely emulated) Dorian police state of the Lakedaimonians thus employed mockery and isolation as pedagogy and used young citizens and helpless chattel as the polis’s instruments to inculcate brutal social policies.

Hellenic comic and historical texts re-present private and public conflicts or imagine tense competitions in this culture (or sub-cultures). Contexts of success and failure, momentary honour and shame, extended fame and infamy offer exciting, instructive, and sometimes humorous opportunities. The two genres, unlike epic and tragedy’s mythic and legendary populations, convey stories describing ‘real’ men and women as they were and are (social conventions changed slowly), or were perceived to be, in historical accounts, and as fantasised exaggerations or as foolish stereotypes in comic scripts. Collections and comparisons of historiographical and comedic examples of Hellenic one-downmanship are yet to be published, a fact that invites us to offer examples.

3. Early Greek Historiography: Herodotos, Thoukydides, and Xenophon

A. 'Father of History, Father of Historical Insults'

Historians of events feature personal enmities as much as civic and inter-state conflicts. This is true for Herodotos and his successors. Insults raise the ante in many Herodotean *logoi*. Many stories allow barbarians (Egyptians, Persians, Babylonians, Skyths) to one-up each other or Greeks in cleverness or wisdom.²⁴ Whether true, or not, they apparently entertained Herodotos' Hellenic audiences, and the following section of this paper provides examples of Herodotos' treatment of insult in anecdote and story.

When Pharaoh Apries' plenipotentiary demanded that the Egyptian rebel Amasis surrender (2.162), the insolent commander raised himself in his saddle and farted for his reply.²⁵ Herodotos' folktale trickster-thief insults Pharaoh Rhampsinitos right and left. He allegedly penetrates this ruler's safeguarded bank's gold-heap, and incapacitates and half-shaves the guards keeping watch over his brother's desecrated, headless corpse (hanging in public). The anonymous thief steals the headless body for his mother, and deceives Pharaoh's prostituted daughter once she agrees to have sex with him. He escapes her grasp leaving her with only a conveniently bespoke corpse's arm. Eventually he comes in from the cold and happily marries her, and he presumably inherits the kingdom (2.121).²⁶ Kambyzes, the Persian master of sadistic humiliation, scourges one royal Egyptian corpse and forces the defeated Egyptian king Psammenitos to watch friends and family

²⁴ Their alien wisdom often resembles another Hellenic view, allowing Greeks both to laugh at a countryman bested by a barbarian and to feel superior to his folly.

²⁵ See material on 'Farting' in *RE*, s.v. *Porde*, 22.235-40 (L. Radermacher). Another rebel Egyptian points to his penis (2.30), indicating where he will find a family, when he rejects a pharaonic appeal to return to duty and wife and children.

²⁶ Cf. Munson (1993). Lateiner (2015) surveys obscene moments in Herodotos' text.

walk to their execution so as to double royally his humbling (3.14, 16).²⁷ The Babylonians, having revolted from their Persian conquerors, dance derisively on their city-walls, cavorting with obscene gestures and contemptuous words—safe from Dareios’ impotent Persian troops besieging them (3.151: *κατωρχέοντο καὶ κατέσκωπτον Δαρεῖον καὶ τὴν στρατιήν ...*).²⁸ Xerxes feminises his men, a favourite patriarchal ploy, allegedly asserting that they have become women, and his women men (8.88): *οἱ μὲν ἄνδρες γεγόνασί μοι γυναῖκες, αἱ δὲ γυναῖκες ἄνδρες*.²⁹ Commonalities bind these examples together: they are obscene, they are demeaning to the interlocutor(s) (Lateiner 2015). They feminise opponents or infantilise them. As we see below, Kleisthenes of Sikyon’s tribal names animalised his subjects (5.68: ‘Swine-ites, Pig-ites, Ass-ites’), another key category of insult. Along with Aristophanes’ barbarising many of his targets, and often with sexual or excremental ornaments, these are the four favourite modes of diminishing your peers and enemies in Hellenic literary genres as well as everyday life.

Herodotos (5.68) reports that the Sikyonian tyrant Kleisthenes, after dishonouring the local hero Adrastos, insulted, subjected to ridicule [*kategelase*], his entire populace by removing their traditional Dorian tribal names and supplying new barnyard animal substitutes: ‘Pig-ites, Swine-ites’, and ‘Ass-ites’. The confused onomastic legend of the revised names suited Attic prejudices (and forms of humour) directed against backwards Dorians and *their* tyrants:

²⁷ Kambyses laughs at the wrong time and place, for Herodotos a marker of insanity (3.35, 37–8; cf. Lateiner 1977).

²⁸ Note the contempt in the use and iteration of *kata-* preverbs, cf. above, p. 35 and n. 8.

²⁹ Other examples: the African Atarantians hurl insults at the Sun itself (Hdt. 4.184: *καταρῶνται ... πάντα τὰ αἰσχρὰ λοιδορέονται*) when the heat oppresses them. This extremely childish expression of a pointless insult (from a Greek viewpoint) fed Athenian and Hellenic sentiments of superiority. The report of Xerxes’ unlikely whipping of the Hellespont (7.35) similarly offers a pleasant shock to Greek piety and worldliness.

μετέβαλε ἐς ἄλλα οὐνόματα. ἔνθα καὶ πλεῖστον κατεγέλασε τῶν Σικυωνίων· ἐπὶ γὰρ ὑός τε καὶ ὄνου <καὶ χοίρου> τὰς ἐπωνυμίας μετατιθεὶς αὐτὰ τὰ τελευταῖα ἐπέθηκε, πλὴν τῆς ἑωυτοῦ φυλῆς· ταύτη δὲ τὸ οὐνομα ἀπὸ τῆς ἑωυτοῦ ἀρχῆς ἔθετο. οὗτοι μὲν δὴ Ἀρχέλαοι ἐκαλέοντο, ἕτεροι δὲ Ὑᾶται, ἄλλοι δὲ Ὀνεᾶται, ἕτεροι δὲ Χοιρεᾶται.

He changed the Sikyonian tribal names. In this he severely mocked them. Replacing the endings, he gave them names taken from swine and ass and pig—except for his own tribe which he named from his own rule. This tribe, then, was called ‘Rulers of the People’, **while the others were called ‘Swine-ites’, ‘Ass-ites’, and ‘Pig-ites’**.³⁰

To animalise your fellow-citizens expresses your dominance and domestication of inferiors, part of this tyrant’s confirmation of his superiority. But from any Athenian source’s point of view, the Dorian’s derision of his own citizenry has also insulted himself.

The severely traumatic Spartan social policing, summarised above, extends to king insulting king in Herodotus’ descriptions and narratives of their extreme social organisation. The unexpectedly elevated King Leotykhidas mocked and gleefully insulted (*epi gelōti te kai lasthēi*, in the hendiadys of Hdt. 6.67) Demaratos, the king recently deposed from his throne. Leotykhidas eventually made it impossible for his rival to reply. Once goaded to humiliated but wordless fury by his dubiously elected replacement, Demaratos left behind forever Spartan public spaces and society. He chose Persian exile as a lesser punishment than continual humiliation at home (6.70).

³⁰ Forsdyke (2011) and (2012) reconstructs a possible historical basis for this offensive, comic nomenclature. Formally relevant to Aristophanes’ choral scurrility in ritual contexts (cf. *Wasps* 1362) is Epidaurian practice: the males revile with jests women celebrating their fertility goddesses (Hdt. 5.83.3; cf. 2.60 for Egyptian analogues).

Demaratos' enemy in all these machinations (6.50–1), King Kleomenes, later responded to Aiginetan verbal *propêlakismos* (6.73), mud-slinging humiliation. Kleomenes, in Herodotos' telling, stymied as 'diplomat' by Aeginetan recalcitrance, puns on and animalises his opponent's speaking-name, Krios (Ram). The Spartan tells him to armour his horns for the coming troubles that Kleomenes can bring (Hdt. 6.50). The animalisation mocks his opponent. He threatens physical revenge and disaster on the Peloponnesians' uncooperative island allies who had verbally insulted him. He tries to bully them, implying that he will captain an armed force to coerce the Aiginetans (see below for Aristophanes' parallel *paronomasia*).

Herodotos' Spartans talk back to their enemies. The Spartan wit Dienekes allegedly shared a dialogue in Doric with a Trachinian enemy scout before battle at Thermopylai. The Persian collaborator tried to frighten him with the number of Persian troops and their arrows (as King Alexander later tries to frighten the Athenians, Hdt. 8.140). The reported interchange culminates in the laconic sentry's indirectly reported put-down of the scout, sardonically called 'friend' for his 'good news'. After the Trachinian indicates the enemy's coming, overwhelming numbers (of launched arrows), Dienekes responds, 'Then we shall fight in the [launched missiles'] shade' (7.226: πάντα σφι ἀγαθά ... εἰ ὑπὸ σκιῇ ἔσοιτο πρὸς αὐτοὺς ἢ μάχη καὶ οὐκ ἐν ἡλίῳ).

Several Herodotean scenes of *symposia* dispute, test, and prove proper masculine comportment. Social advance in that competitive drinking culture expected teasing, joshing, bad-mouthing, and fast come-backs, image-risking, and image-tarnishing. That same Sikyonian status-enhancing Kleisthenes held a Hellenic worldwide bride-contest for his daughter Agariste's 'hand' and consequently his hard-won domain. The tyrant host celebrates a concluding, eristic symposium to announce the winner. At the climax of excitement, however, a free-choice dance-contest occurred (καὶ κως ἐωυτῶ μὲν ἀρεστῶς ὀρχέετο ...). The somewhat inebriated and exhibition-fond Athenian finalist Hip-

pokleides danced a third set on a serving table (Λακονικὰ σχημάτια, μετὰ δὲ ἄλλα Ἀττικά), but then gesticulated³¹ with his legs—upside-down. Given the absence of any crotch-covering pants or underpants, the gravity-drawn chiton covered Hippokleides' face, and the necessarily bobbling genital display—with concomitant buttock-baring—constitutes a serious breach of etiquette. The aggressive, obscene act, understood by Kleisthenes as an insult to his Bride Contest, concludes Herodotos' inserted but extended suitor drama with an under-appreciated Insult Contest.³²

The angry and offended social-climbing Father of the Bride tartly informs the aristocratic Athenian³³ that 'You've danced away your marriage.' The unique verb 'αφ-*orch-ésao*', here in the aorist, probably puns on *orchis*, testicle, so the suitors also heard: 'You've balled up your marriage.' The Athenian's famous (yet not proverbial) verbal retort, 'Hippokleides doesn't care', must contain a responding (*hypolabôn*) pun—'Horse-Bolt [= 'Big-Prick'] does not care.'³⁴ The high-stakes exchange of derisive verbal malice characterises competitive symposiastic effrontery. Echoing the hoplites' manoeuvre of pushing back opponents' lines in hand-to-hand combat, called *ôthismos*, Herodotos in his own

³¹ *Hapax* here in Herodotos: χειρονομέω. Pellizer (1990) discusses the protocols of Archaic symposia, and cf. Murray (1990).

³² The lewd incident unpleasantly explains the unlikely rise of the upstart aristocratic Alkmaionids. Its placement registers it as one deflationary or anticlimactic conclusion to the glorious Athenian victory at Marathon (6.126–31). Even-handed Herodotos likes to humble objects of adulation, whether cities, institutions, families, or individuals.

³³ Hippokleides the son of Athenian Tisander was related to the Korinthian Kypselids (6.128).

³⁴ Hdt. 6.129: οὐκέτι κατέχειν δυνάμενος εἶπε· “ὦ παῖ Τεισάνδρου, ἀπορχήσαό γε μὲντὸν γάμον.” ὁ δὲ Ἴπποκλείδης ὑπολαβὼν εἶπε· “οὐ φροντὶς Ἴπποκλείδῃ.” ἀπὸ τούτου μὲν τοῦτο ὀνομάζεται. Κλεισθένης δὲ σιγὴν ποιησάμενος ἔλεξε ... Ogden (1997) 117; *h. Herm.* 55–6. Aparicio (2006) notes this pun and tries to determine the second catachresis, although his suggestions for it seem obscure. Babylonian insult-dancers (3.151.1): καταρχέοντο. A referee thought the five previous appearances of *orch*-stems for dance 'blunts [rather than sets up] the impact of any pun'.

voice elsewhere (describing Greek allies' pre-battle contentions at Plataiai) refers metaphorically—and perhaps comically—to a major *ôthismos* of words, rivals pushing back rivals in verbal exchanges for a position of honour in the battle line before combat begins.³⁵ *ἐνθαῦτα ἐν τῇ διατάξει ἐγένετο λόγων πολλὸς ὠθισμὸς Τεγεητέων τε καὶ Ἀθηναίων.* Herodotos' text, then, through folktale-like humorous anecdotes (e.g., Pharaoh Rhampsinitos' repeated setbacks with the thief) and ludicrous incidents (e.g., Hippokleides' acrobatic but abortive suit of a rich maiden), comfortably incorporates comic narratives (cf. 4.30.1)—only anachronistically described as 'intrusions'.

B. Humorous Insults in Thoukydides' *Ἐυγγραφή*

Thoukydides more narrowly allows insulting words and low deeds into his glum record of diplomacy, *stasis*, and war. He eschews *bômolochia*, comedy's coarse abuse, and even crowd-pleasing *μυθῶδες ἐς ἀκρόασιν* (1.22.4), but he includes more significant *oneidos* and *loidoria* spoken by his characters than one would predict.³⁶ In the sea battle off Naupaktos, the trireme crews were abusing their enemies so loudly that their own commanders could not be heard above the din of battle (2.84).

The Thebans complain to the impatient Spartan judges that the Plataians on trial for their lives have unfairly abused them for their (blatant) Persian War medising (3.62). Kleon feminises and taunts Nikias with an insult ('his enemy and victim of his [feminising] jeer', *epitimôn*) in the Pylos debate (4.27.5, emphatically repeated in 4.28). He said

³⁵ Cf. at Thermopylai, Salamis, and Plataia: 9.26 and 62; 7.225; 8.64, 78; cf. 3.76: the Persian 'Seven' conspirators.

³⁶ Rusten discusses Thoukydides' claims to disregard narratological *terpsis* and anecdotes, but his narrative encompasses grimly humorous incidents ((2006) 547 on 2.52.4, pyre-thefts during the plague). Rusten (2011) 552 points out that the historian and the comic poets disagree about Perikles but unsurprisingly agree in condemning Kleon.

(reported in *oratio obliqua*), ‘if the generals were *men*’,³⁷ they would have captured the island already and he himself would have done this, had he been in command. Kleon and, later, Alkibiades intuit Nikias’ personal insecurities and political weaknesses.

This barb climaxes an account that notes nearly unique laughter, a response of allegedly ‘prudent’ assemblymen to Kleon’s fatuity.³⁸ It briefly anticipates the solitary one-line ‘joke’ in the *History*. An unnamed Spartan POW, captured while defending Messenian Sphakteria, later replied to an Ionian ally of the Athenians who taunted him (δι’ ἀχθηδόνα) for surrendering rather than dying ‘like a Spartan’ with the hardened *homoioi*. ‘It would be a smart arrow [*atraktos* = spindle; *hapax*], if it could distinguish brave men [from cowards]’ (πολλοῦ ἂν ἄξιον εἶναι τὸν ἄτρακτον ... εἰ τοὺς ἀγαθοὺς διεγίγνωσκε, 4.40).³⁹ As mentioned, Lakonians trained their youth by institutionalised and personal suffering to produce retorts and brusque badinage insulting competitors. Thουκυδίδης is characterizing the ethnos as well as reporting a presumably historical wisecrack.

Alkibiades, responding to slanders (*diabolai*) and explaining his behaviour as an Athenian citizen and general to the Spartans’ assembly, paradoxically complains (in the Attic dialect, at least in Thουκυδίδης’ Attic) of Athenian slander weaponised against himself. He seems to say (the text is contested) that he could insult democracy as well as anyone.⁴⁰ He speaks of this ‘most free’ Athenian political system as a tired topic about which nothing new can be said, since it is an ‘acknowledged folly’ (6.89: ὁμολογουμένη

³⁷ εἰ ἄνδρες εἶεν ... Kleon echoes Xerxes’ feminisation of his troops at Salamis, doubled by his praise of Artemisia ‘my women have become men’ (8.88).

³⁸ 4.28.5: τοῖς δὲ Ἀθηναίοις ἐνέπεσε μὲν τι καὶ γέλωτος τῆ κουφολογία αὐτοῦ, ἀσμένους δ’ ὅμως ἐγίγνετο τοῖς σώφροσι ...

³⁹ The wisecrack also feminises the wielder of the ‘spindle’.

⁴⁰ 6.89.6: ἐγινώσκωμεν οἱ φρονοῦντές τι, καὶ αὐτὸς οὐδενὸς ἂν χεῖρον, ὅσῳ καὶ λαιδορήσαιμι. ἀλλὰ περὶ ὁμολογουμένης ἀνοίας οὐδὲν ἂν καινὸν λέγοιτο.

ἄνοια). The final example in Thoukydides of the ‘L’ word, *loidoria*, again interestingly concerns Alkibiades. The returned exile and reformed traitor gains small praise for abusing/rebuking the unruly troops at Samos and constraining their impulse to sail home against the Peiraieus, the harbour now under the control of a new Athenian oligarchy. The censorious historian quite pointedly characterises this effective, apotreptic *loidoria* as the *first* time that Alkibiades had ever benefitted Athens.⁴¹

More pointed and notably Herodotean (cf. Hdt. 5.55, 62) is Thoukydides’ unique and analeptic digression refuting popular accounts of a long-past ἐρωτικὴ συντυχία. A handsome youth named Harmodios spurned his erotic admirer, the Peisistratid Hipparkhos.⁴² This son and brother of Athenian tyrants planned a nasty public vengeance (Thouk. 6.53–60) for his rejected sexual advances. He orchestrated an elaborate insult perpetrated on Harmodios’ aristocratic Gephyrean clan. That mortal offence depended on a sexual innuendo (*propélakiôn*) directed against the little sister of the prospective but unresponsive male lover. The sexually rejected younger brother of the tyrant Hippias invited this sister to participate as a basket-bearer in an Athenian religious procession. But then he publicly rejected the girl (*korê*), after she showed up, ‘as somehow unworthy’ (μὴ ἀξίαν εἶναι). The oblique if slanderous rejection of her service, dedicated to the eponymous Virgin Goddess, suggested serious sexual impropriety on her part and produced spectacular political consequences.⁴³ The ‘ostracism’ on grounds of religious

⁴¹ 8.86.4: δοκεῖ πρῶτον τότε καὶ οὐδενὸς ἔλασσον τὴν πόλιν ὠφελῆσαι. Hornblower (2008) ad loc. defends well the caustic interpretation.

⁴² The fact of the excursus itself (a severe correction of earlier accounts of a distant event), the role of a woman, the presence of (homo-) sexuality in Thoukydides’ narrative—explain its different tone and breadth.

⁴³ Τὸν δ’ οὖν Ἀρμόδιον ἀπαρνηθέντα τὴν πείρασιν, ὥσπερ διανοεῖτο, **προπηλάκισεν**· ἀδελφὴν γὰρ αὐτοῦ κόρην ἐπαγγείλαντες ἤκειν κανοῦν οἴσουσαν ἐν πομπῇ τινί, ἀπήλασαν λέγοντες οὐδὲ ἐπαγγεῖλαι τὴν ἀρχὴν

purity of a high-born maiden—but really the retributory fury of a lover scorned—produced the assassination of an Athenian tyrant-to-be. *Παρά λόγον* confutes more than military and political designs.

Perhaps the most sweeping and significant authorial reference to insulting behaviour comes in Thoukydides' account of Kerkyrean *stasis*, where the historian reports that *to euêthês*, 'traditional, decent character', was mocked, literally 'was laughed down' (3.83: *katagelasthai*) and disappeared.⁴⁴ The Syracusan *demos* belittles the likelihood of an Athenian fleet attacking Sicily. Democrats made a hostile, dismissive joke of it, laughing abusively at their political foe, the anti-democratic politician Hermokrates, whom they treat as an untrustworthy *Kassandra*-figure (6.35: *καταφρονοῦτες ἐς γέλωτα ἔτρεπον*).

Thoukydides rarely insults in his authorial voice, preserving his vaunted neutrality and objectivity (1.21–2). With perhaps a sense of justified superiority to the man who may have proposed the author's exile in the *ekklêsia*, he introduces Kleon as most violent, *biaiotatos* (3.36), and his presumptive proxy Diodotos implies he is *aksynetos*, 'unintelligent, inept, an imprudent rogue', a derisive word saved for ten occasions.⁴⁵ Kleon serves as his poster-child for

διὰ τὸ μὴ ἀξίαν εἶναι. χαλεπῶς δὲ ἐνεγκόντος τοῦ Ἄρμοδιου πολλῶ δὴ μᾶλλον δι' ἐκεῖνον καὶ ὁ Ἀριστογείτων παρωξύνετο. Her family was outraged, as expected, at the *hybris* of the tyrant's brother (6.57.3; cf. Hornblower (2008) ad loc.).

⁴⁴ The insecure and uncomfortable Nikias, for example, worries that his potential Athenian allies in the assembly will be shamed in public, both by the fear of being feminised—thought 'unmanly' (6.13: *μαλακός*)—and by meeting public description as such. Although these prudent citizens also wish to vote against the proposed expedition, they fear slurs and comic, even obscene *eurypróktos* caricatures such as the one on the Eurymedon vase.

⁴⁵ The noun appears thrice. Diodotos twice asserts such lack of intelligent prudence in his unnamed opponent Kleon in the debate over Mytilene's fate (3.42). Kleon's Syracusan analogue, Athenagoras (6.36; cf. 39, 76.4 (Hermokrates)), accuses his unnamed oligarchic opponent Hermokrates of the same folly. The Spartans fail to pre-empt any Athenian aversion to be lectured to—as if 'fools' (4.17.3). Themistokles,

imprudent over-confidence in this *History of the Unexpected*, τὸ ἀπροσδόκητον. Kleon's vow (4.28), to take the Spartans on the island in twenty days or less, is uniquely called 'fatuous babble', *kouphologia*, and the 'real time' dismissive verdict of his prediction was seconded immediately by the Athenian *ekklēsia*'s contemptuous laughter (the only other laugh reported in Thoukydides). His death is described as that of a turn-tail coward who never planned to stand and fight (5.10)—a parallel to Aristophanes' *rhipsaspis* (shield-thrower) charge repeatedly flung against Kleonymos (*Vesp.* 19, 822, et alibi).

Perikles in Thoukydides' *Epitaphios* praises Athenian imperial power and Athens' men. The eulogy, as one would expect, never refers to Athenian cowards, cheats, draft-dodgers, and bullies.⁴⁶ Perikles' epideictic also praises Athenian tolerance in private life by notably contrasting it to the nasty and dirty looks that men encounter in other Greek communities. The 'Olympian' *stratēgos*, widely mocked on stage by the Attic comic poets,⁴⁷ here shows sensitivity to looks, words, and deeds. He focuses on slurs that convey derision or contempt.⁴⁸ Thoukydides' evidence paints a different picture. The narratives of *erga* and independent evidence suggest a more stressed community—e.g., the socially disruptive plague narrated immediately after the rosy community of the *Epitaphios*, the *Hermokopidai*, the assassination of Hyperbolos and other citizens (8.73), derisive *logoi* in assemblies. In addition, the images of brawling partiers available on contemporary red-figured

Perikles, and Phrynikhos are not *aksynetos*—an important litotes (1.122, 2.34.6, 8.27).

⁴⁶ Cf. Christ (2006).

⁴⁷ See n. 58.

⁴⁸ Thouk. 2.37.2–3, Perikles on 'dirty' looks: ἐλευθέρας δὲ τὰ τε πρὸς τὸ κοινὸν πολιτεύομεν καὶ ἐς τὴν πρὸς ἀλλήλους τῶν καθ' ἡμέραν ἐπιτηδευμάτων ὑποψίαν, οὐ δι' ὀργῆς τὸν πέλας, εἰ καθ' ἡδονὴν τι δρᾶ, ἔχοντες, οὐδὲ ἀζημίους μὲν, **λυπηρὰς δὲ τῇ ὄψει ἀχθηδόνας προστιθέμενοι.** ἀνεπαχθῶς δὲ τὰ ἴδια προσομιλοῦντες τὰ δημόσια διὰ δέος μάλιστα οὐ **παρανομοῦμεν** ...

symptotic pottery, nearly contemporary dicanic oratory, and especially Attic Old Comedy suggest that Perikles' idealised portrait of Athens and Athenians⁴⁹ hardly resembled the bustling and belligerent imperial city where everything could be sold and bought, indictments as well as figs and turnips (Eubulus, *PCG* F 74, *Olbia*).

C. Theramenes' Savage Quips in Xenophon's *Hellenika*

Xenophon admired Theramenes, the allegedly moderate thinker and politician among the Thirty's tight oligarchy and perhaps his own political patron. When Kritias seized control of the government and induced the Thirty to put on trial and quickly condemn Theramenes to death, in a kangaroo court ringed with thugs, Xenophon gives the defendant a persuasive defence and a dramatic death (*Hell.* 2.3.35–56). Satyros, Kritias' henchman, after this, threatened Theramenes with something to cry out about, if he did not keep quiet. The wit replied ironically, 'And if I do keep quiet, will I not find something to cry about?' When forced to take the poison, hemlock like Sokrates, he quipped about it, toasting his *de facto* executioner Kritias: *Κριτία τοῦτ' ἔστω τῷ καλῷ* ('Let this toast be for the noble/handsome Kritias').⁵⁰

Xenophon, continuing Thoukydides' *History* from the summer halt of 411 BCE, realised that these anecdotal last words deviated from his master's parameters. He therefore apologises for preserving such 'inappropriate quips' (*ἀποφθέγματα οὐκ ἀξιόλογα*). His prescient inclinations towards hero-worship and anecdotal biography (Kyros II,

⁴⁹ The 'education of Hellas' (Thouk. 2.41.1), an insult-free and slap-free Cloud-Cuckooland of the sort that Aristophanes' Euelpides (wrongly) thought he would prefer.

⁵⁰ While this mock toast differs from the more savage sallies tallied earlier here and later, it corresponds to Thukydidēs' Laconic prisoner of war—another defeated 'loser' of limited options (2.41, see above). Theramenes' last words also pre-echo Xenophon's hero, steady Sokrates, who—ironist to the end—queries his jailer about the propriety of pouring a poisonous libation for the gods (*Phaed.* 117b).

Sokrates, Agesilaos)—two developments with futures in subsequent historiography—defend the inclusion of humorous incidents and insolent quips. He says/observes that neither Theramenes' presence of mind nor ability to jest left him as he faced death (*μήτε τὸ φρόνιμον μήτε τὸ παιγνιώδες*).⁵¹ Since even tragedy contains irony and parody, and comic interchanges (e.g., Euripides' mockery of Orestes' tokens of identity in *Elektra*, old man Pheres' caustic rejection of self-sacrifice in *Alkestis*), so comic passages in historiography, such as Hippokleides' retort and Theramenes' repartee, ironise and lend tragic depth to political squabbles.

4. Old Comedy

The early fifth-century Sicilian comic poet Epikharmos (Ath. 2.36c–d, *PCG* F 146) summarised 'Saturday Night' in town: 'Sacrifice, feasts of food, wine—then mockery, swinish insult (*hyania*), trial and verdict—followed by shackles, stocks, and monetary fine'. Euboulos, the mid-fourth century Attic poet standing between Old and Middle Comedy, famously describes the symposion's ten kraters of wine, starting with three for good-fellowship, advancing to five for *hybris*, and winding up with ten undiluted kraters to produce jail, fines, and mania—craziness (Ath. 2.36b, *PCG* F 93).⁵²

The face-to-face, unrestrained assaults of comedy occur before a large public audience, greater than those real or imagined brawls preserved in accounts of drunken brawls at

⁵¹ Gray (2003) discusses this and other editorial interventions of Xenophon in the *Hellenika*. As she notes, Books 1–2, the first part of the work most strongly influenced by Thoukydides, produce no apologetic flourish by first-person intervention before this one (for others, see 2.4.27, 4.8.1, 5.1.4, 7.2.1). The Spartan cavalry commander Pasimakhos produced an analogously clever and courageous remark before death (4.4.10).

⁵² Cf. Rusten (2011) 75 on Epikharmos; on Euboulos, 469–86.

private party venues.⁵³ At the Attic dramatic festivals, abuse carried greater offense to victims' persons and personalities because of its more public nature.⁵⁴ The god Dionysos and the polis licensed and protected an astonishing degree of savage mimetic and verbal mockery. The comic world furnished unlimited *euryprōktoi*, 'gaping assholes'.⁵⁵ The *Clouds*' dialogue between 'Better Thinker' and 'Worse Thinker' clarifies this abuse: this word suggesting frequent homosexual passivity suffering anal penetrations describes six times in sixteen verses adulterous Casanovas, political speakers, lawyers, and finally, Aristophanes' own Attic audience, the not-always-so-good citizens.⁵⁶

⁵³ Cf. pottery scenes such as the brawling komasts on St. Petersburg Hermitage 651, or lawsuits such as Lysias 3.11–15, Demosthenes 54. The latter conflicts had an openly agonistic form of legal resolution, and large juries by our standards, while they were chastising or redressing physical and verbal insults.

⁵⁴ Rusten (2011) 743–54 lists Attic *Komoidoumenoi*; Sommerstein (1996) also 'registers' the 'comedised'.

⁵⁵ Aristophanes employs the *polite* euphemism for genitals, *aidoia*, as rarely as Thoukydides, exactly twice (*Nub.* 978, *Vesp.* 578; *Thouk.* 1.6.5, 2.49.8). The former presents impolite words to provoke laughter, and the latter eschews bodily descriptions and bawdy functions.

⁵⁶ Aristoph. *Clouds* 1083–1100:

Δίκαιος/Κρείττων Λόγος. τί δ' ἦν ῥαφανιδωθῆ πιθόμενός σοι
τέφρα τε τιλθῆ
ἔξει τινὰ γνώμην λέγειν τὸ μὴ εὐρύπρωκτος εἶναι;
Ἄδικος/Ἦττων Λόγος. ἦν δ' εὐρύπρωκτος ἦ, τί πείσεται κακόν;
Δίκαιος Λόγος. τί μὲν οὖν ἂν ἔτι μεῖζον πάθοι τούτου ποτέ;
Ἄδικος Λόγος. τί δῆτ' ἔρεῖς, ἦν τοῦτο νικηθῆς ἐμοῦ;
Δίκαιος Λόγος. σιγήσομαι. τί δ' ἄλλο;
Ἄδικος Λόγος. φέρε δὴ μοι φράσον·
συνηγοροῦσιν ἐκ τίνων;
Δίκαιος Λόγος. ἐξ εὐρυπρώκτων.
Ἄδικος Λόγος. πείθομαι.
τί δαί; τραγωδοῦσ' ἐκ τίνων;
Δίκαιος Λόγος. ἐξ εὐρυπρώκτων.
Ἄδικος Λόγος. εὖ λέγεις.
δημηγοροῦσι δ' ἐκ τίνων;
Δίκαιος Λόγος. ἐξ εὐρυπρώκτων.
Ἄδικος Λόγος. ἄρα δῆτ'
ἔγνωκας ὡς οὐδὲν λέγεις;

Aristophanes satirises every kind of Athenian eccentricity and insults all the famous names—the laughs depend on immediately recognisable persons and types (like *Birds*' Decree-Seller). He caricatures Perikles and Kleon, Alkibiades, Nicias and Hyperbolos, the pillars and darlings of democracy and its institutions.⁵⁷ He presents Persian ambassadors and Olympian gods as buffoonish churls—clumsy barbarians. Perikles' pointy skull provided a ludicrous, non-obscene object of mockery for many poets of Old Comedy.⁵⁸ Kratinos never tired of abusing his Zeus-like pretensions.

Aristophanes' fifth-century Attic comedies, written while Thoukydides wrote, also suggest that the unpoliced towns of ancient Greece were unpredictable, sometimes dangerous places. The masculine person was legally warranted as inviolable but—shit happened. For example, Antimakhos, an Athenian poet in Aristophanes' *Akharnians* (1168–73), at night looks for a rock to retaliate against a drunken assailant who has assaulted him. Antimakhos unwittingly grabs a

καὶ τῶν θεατῶν ὀπότεροι
 πλείους σκόπει.
 Δίκαιος Λόγος. καὶ δὴ σκοπῶ.
 Ἄδικος Λόγος. τί δῆθ' ὄρᾳς;
 Δίκαιος Λόγος. πολὺ πλείονας νῆ τοὺς θεοὺς,
 τοὺς εὐρυπράκτους· τουτονὶ
 γοῦν οἶδ' ἐγὼ κάκεινονί.

⁵⁷ While Pelling (2000a) asks how useful Aristophanes can be for the historian, he eschews a pessimistic answer. One can laugh at Kleon and then elect him to office (134). Ercolani (2002) and Edwards (1991) explore offensive words and comic acts. Moorton (1988) and Sidwell (2009) look specifically at Aristophanes' treatment of Alkibiades. Müller (1913) provides a handy, if incomplete, list of abusive terms in Attic comedy.

⁵⁸ Plut. *Per.* 3 mentions and quotes Kratinos', Telekleides', and Eupolis' mockery of Perikles' cranium: 'squill-head'. Vickers (1997) finds Perikles everywhere in Aristophanes' texts. For mockery of Perikles, cf. e.g., Aristoph. *Akh.* 530–1, Kratinos F 118, Eupolis F 115, Telekleides F 17, Hermippos F 45; Thuk. 2.37.2–3; cf. Plut. *Per.* 3 and 33, *σκόμματα ἐφθυβρίζοντες*: Stadter (1989) with Schwarz (1971). Thoukydides observes that Phrynikhos claimed that expected *loidoria* (reproachful abuse) would *not* intimidate him (8.27).

fresh, still warm human turd. Aristophanes' chorus hopes that he will miss his target and might hit instead—surprise, *para prosdokian!*—his rival, the poet Kratinos. The excrement motif strikes again!⁵⁹

This poet's genital and excremental attacks mock poets, ordinary imaginary citizens (like Trygaios, Bdelukleon), politicians, the Spartan or Athenian people, and their gods (cf. *Nub.* 1084–99). Like any form of volatile, contemporary caricature, comedy provides a historical source, historical but not quite historiography, although historiography itself need not be solemn always.⁶⁰ To be made into comic fodder, to be 'comedised', as the poets' varied victims were *komoidoumenoi* (cf. Sommerstein (1996)), is to be ridiculed, insulted as a rogue, a sexual pervert, a disgusting substance, or worse. In Aristophanes' *Birds* alone, forty-five individuals are named—and none flattered. Some scholars have read Dikaiopolis' aetiology of the war that he has lived through—an explanation in the *Akharnians* (510–56), based on reciprocal whore-theft—as a parody mocking Herodotos' recently published proem and opening book.⁶¹ That false start itself quickly rejects an aetiology of the Persian War based on woman-taking. The reciprocal woman stealing in *both* works, regardless of literary priority, as Pelling ((2000) 151–5) argued, may parody popular explanations on the street of how this war arose. While the historian Herodotos mocks the concept suggesting that men would sacrifice their city for the lovely ladies of myth, as if

⁵⁹ Four references to feces occur in *Vespae*, two to farts, and one to urine (19, 23, 233, 626; 1177, 1305; 807). Miller (1997) explores the spectrum of substances and acts that disgust humankind, among which human odours, excrement, and signs of disease and bodily corruption feature prominently.

⁶⁰ Cf. Rusten (2006) 557.

⁶¹ Moggi (2012) examines the different motives for Aristophanes and Herodotos to recall (*inter alia*) the Persian Wars. The former exalts the earlier generation at the present's expense; the latter author also implies subtly negative comparisons for his own epoch.

women were sufficient to provoke or endure a war,⁶² the comic poets reduce goddesses, women, and little girls to sexual merchandise: the starving Megarian farmer's daughters called 'piglets', aka vaginettes, Simaetha, and Aspasia's stable in *Acharnians*, Basileia in *Birds*, and Diallagê in *Lysistrata*.⁶³

Animals—for example, snakes, insects, dogs, and fish—are favourite forms of abuse in Aristophanes' visual and verbal armoury. Kleon, often down-labeled by his stinky occupation or business of hide tanner, in *one* passage of *Wasps* is described as a monstrous bitch, a snake, a smelly seal, a camel's ass-hole—and, worst of all, and more incongruously, he has the dirty balls of Lamia, a monster Bogey-Woman (1031–5).

Old Philokleon, Aristophanes' rejuvenated and wily wasp, has been cured of *dikastêriomania*, but he has become Athens' drunkest and nastiest fellow. He snarls and farts at his foes, two forceful and noisy nonverbal expressions of contempt. The quarrelsome old man attacks casual passers-by for malicious fun (*hybris* gone berserk). According to his slave's narration of his post-sympotic hijinks, he mocks and threatens—intentionally insults and strikes everyone he meets (*Vesp.* 1300–23).⁶⁴ Laughter in the audience arises from his unrestrained and unpunished word and deed violence against all comers on the street. Further, the attribution of youth's dangerous and destructive male-bonding roughhouse and rivalrous games to a decrepit geezer is pleasantly incongruous, as well as a wish-fulfilment for the elderly theatre-goers.

⁶² E.g., Hdt. 1.1–5, 2.118–20. Aristophanic denigrations: *Av.* 1253–6 (*Iris*), *Lys.* 155. The entire play derides female lechery and bibulousness.

⁶³ Simaitha and Aspasia perhaps were active in the many-shaded sex industry, but the hungry Megarian farmer's little daughters represent a *reductio ad esuritionem* and a good pun when described as *χοιρίδια* (*Akh.* 524–2, 764–835).

⁶⁴ E.g., ἀτηρότατον κακόν, ... πολὺ παροινικώτατος, ... ὑβριστότατος μακρῶ, ἐσκίρτα, ἐπεπόρδει, κατεγέλα, ... περιύβριζεν ... σκώπτων ἀγροίκως, ... ἐμέθυσεν, ... τύπτων ἅπαντας, ... σφαλλόμενος ...

Sokrates in the *Clouds* describes his learning-disabled super-annuated student Strepsiades as a moron stinking of the age of Kronos. More coarsely, in the *Clouds*, traditional Mr. Right calls Mr. Wrong a ‘Shameless Butt-Fucker’ (909, 1023). This last word, *katapugôn*, is also an Attic name for the middle-finger gesture (Pollux 2.184). Strepsiades threatens to stab a creditor’s anus (1300). ‘Anus Surveillance’ (Jack Winkler’s (1990b) 54 memorable phrase) trapped the unwary citizen-soldier in the minefields of Attic public discourse. Strepsiades and Sokrates discuss name-calling street-attack strategies and legal revenge as if they were necessary, if not every-day, Athenian events.

Evidence of symposion, household, and assembly mayhem, sprinkled in the comic poets, historians, philosophers, and orators, confirms images of maladroit, road-rage confrontations and ambushing street encounters (of indeterminable frequency), such as paradigmatic Konon’s gang stomping spree on Ariston and their crowing victory over his prostrate body (Dem. 54).

4. Conclusions

Male status-enhancement was a zero-sum game. A man gained local credit when he creatively degraded those who presumed themselves to be his peers.⁶⁵ The recent historic exemplars of peak status (for Attic potters) had been the hoplite class of Marathon from whom descended rough-partying playboys of the awkwardly democratic Athenian polis. Who else would have purchased Athenian produced, fancy black- and red-figured pots that celebrated their symposiastic antics? Aristophanes and Herodotos simul-

⁶⁵ The *mythic* masters of humiliation and intimidation were the god Zeus and the hyper-masculine, blue-collar hero-brawler, impulsive Herakles. The legendary status warriors struggling for respect and restored honour were Homer’s Akhilleus and Odysseus, on campaign at Troy and back home on Ithaka. No one can out-talk or out-manoeuvre Peleus’ son, while the homeless vagrant insults and humiliates his ‘betters’ before redeeming his status and house with lethal metal weapons.

taneously lauded those brave Athenian *Marathonomachoi*, because they provided a useful foil to contemporaries at whom they jabbed. The heroes of yore threatened and penetrated (with weapons or sexually in metaphors) the feminised, butt-presenting, weak, and pants-wearing Persian soldiers. Their sons, the next generation, are portrayed thus, striding right on the Eurymedon red-figured *oinochoë* (in Hamburg). There the Hellene has weaponised his erection for buggering, anally penetrating, the effete and stationary, bent-over, ass-flourishing barbarian. The Persian looks at us and says: ‘I am EURY-MEDON,⁶⁶ I stand bent-over.’⁶⁷ The gestural dialogue conveys local pride, patriotic boast, ethnic and Athenocentric stereotyping. Meanwhile the image parodies the only easily available sexual relief and release while soldiers served on Athens’ imperial Eastern campaigns.⁶⁸ These ‘dissing’ strategies, shared by figures on-stage, images on pots, and narratives in texts, illuminate the theatrical nature and rough pleasantries (sometimes quite unpleasant) of everyday Athenian venues.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ That is, a gaping [-anused] Mede, eponymous with the site of Kimon’s Athenian triumph on the western Anatolian coast (ca. 466 BCE, Thouk. 1.100) over a Persian army and navy.

⁶⁷ Hamburg Inv. 1981.173: ΕΥΡΥΜΕΔΑΟΝ ΕΙΜ[Ι], ΚΥΒΑ[---] ΕΣΤΕΚΑ ... ; cf. Schauenberg (1975), McNiven (2000), Mitchell (2011), with Schauenberg (1975) and Mitchell (2009) 84–6.

⁶⁸ Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* fantastically portrays a sex strike by women, a teasing and humiliating embargo on sexual intercourse even with husbands, and other ludicrous solutions proposed for curing recurrent male war-mongering.

⁶⁹ *Raphanidosi*s, the alleged punishment of adulterers by the pressing of radishes up their anuses, however rare or possibly hypothetical, served as at least a potential deterrent to Lotharios. Dover (1968) ad *Nub.* 1083 (τί δ’ ἦν ραφανιδωθῆ πιθόμενός σοι τέφρα τε τιλθῆ), and schol. *Plut.* 168. Three women relatives were charged with raping by cucumber a convicted male child-molester in 1997, presumably extorting revenge in family-friendly Delaware, Ohio. The child-molester’s wife and mother-in-law, after the cucumber, shaved his pubic hair and rubbed down his genitals with ‘Icy Hot’ an externally applied topical aches and pain relieving medicament. Mr. Rodney Hosler’s sad story persists on the Internet (search ‘Cucumber Incident’, e.g., <http://lubbockonline.com/news/080897/wife.htm>, confirmed 11 Feb-

Herodotos' anthropological bent allows him to include more kinds of comic materials than Thoukydides' more circumscribed subjects. But, even the Lion could smile, as the scholiast (on Thuc. 1.126.3) admitted, acknowledging a different tone and style.

A century later, after Meidias swatted Demosthenes' cheek during Dionysos' theatre festival, the humiliated politician realised that better arguments existed for forgetting and suppressing the story than for publicising it at trial. He faced a lose–lose situation. Community disesteem and dishonour—and the likelihood of being 'laughed out of court' (Dem. 21.222; 54.20)—silenced many wronged parties. Ridicule and insulting laughter surface regularly in ancient Greek contexts as a safer and surer alternative road to revenge. Disrespecting humour was a powerful punishing mechanism of social control in Sparta, Athens,⁷⁰ indeed, all over the Aegean and Mediterranean, as far as meagre evidence allows us to judge.

Such one-upmanship persists in every culture, probably because police forces cannot be everywhere, and choose not to be. Nevertheless, men and women everywhere must address threats and challenges to their face and hierarchical place in their sub-cultures and the dominant culture.

Formal and informal methods regulate differences, status disputes, and annoying deviance. Gossip, public opinion, Athenian legal procedures, Lakonian shaming ceremonies, and violence in every polis assisted premeditated and spontaneous insult for raising and depressing status—one's

ruary 2016). A documentary film of the same title starts from the front page of the *Delaware Gazette*, 16 October 1997. The police wondered whether the crime was talionic revenge or a message to men in general. The women were convicted of sex offenses and kidnapping.

⁷⁰ Hunter (1994) explores formal and informal social controls discoverable in the Attic orators. The *dokimasia* scrutiny of *rhetores* dug deeper than the ordinary citizens' exam, *hoi idiôteuontes* (Aes. *Tim.* 195; Winkler (1990b) 59). MacDowell (1990), Wilson (1991), and Rowe (1993) explore the notorious case of Meidias' public slap and Demosthenes' response(s). Paoli (1947) examines the more brutal assault and battery recorded in Dem. 54. The alleged predator Konon bullied in the street and beat up an alleged law-abiding citizen, Ariston.

own and others'. Aristotle the ever-sane observer insightfully recognised the gut-deep pleasure one may get in committing *hybris* offenses, affirming oneself by *disconfirming* others. As Aristotle says of the motives for such acts, 'for instance, to bring disrepute upon his enemy and/or to please himself' (οἷον τοῦ ἀτιμῆσαι ἐκέλευον ἢ αὐτὸς ἠσθῆναι, *Rhet.* 1374a). Aristotle's acute observation conveniently bridges the no-holds-barred insults of Attic Old Comedy and the claimed historicity of early Greek historians. While a gulf exists between the genres' methods of delivering insults and contents of those humiliating aggressions, the strategies of self-realisation and the materials that they employ overlap. Old Comedy is intensely political, however funny; Classical Historiography is intensely enjoyable (not excluding funny), however political. Both genres flourished amidst a culture of insult in fifth-century Hellas, not least in Athens, an innovating city negotiating unprecedented relationships within the city and beyond Attika. What sort of power differentials separated birth-right aristocrats and birth-right native-born citizens, *hoi polloi* who populated the *ekklésia* and commanded the majority vote? The two genres, both based on narratives, record examples actual and fictional. Comedy, a popular genre that seated every viewer equally for the day and at state expense, and historiography, an elite genre that required many days' attention mostly for a literate audience reading at their own expense,⁷¹ share an infinite curiosity about men (and some women) pushed to their limits, fighting for status or life itself with weapons of steel and tongue—insults to body and person.⁷²

⁷¹ We set aside arguments for live performances that Herodotos may have given in Athens and elsewhere.

⁷² My thanks to Edith Foster and Emily Baragwanath, the organisers of the Association of Ancient Historians panel (2012, Chapel Hill/Durham) for which this paper was written. Both became editors of the present paper and provided clarifications and improvements of all types. If errors remain, they are, as you can easily imagine, entirely my responsibility.

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