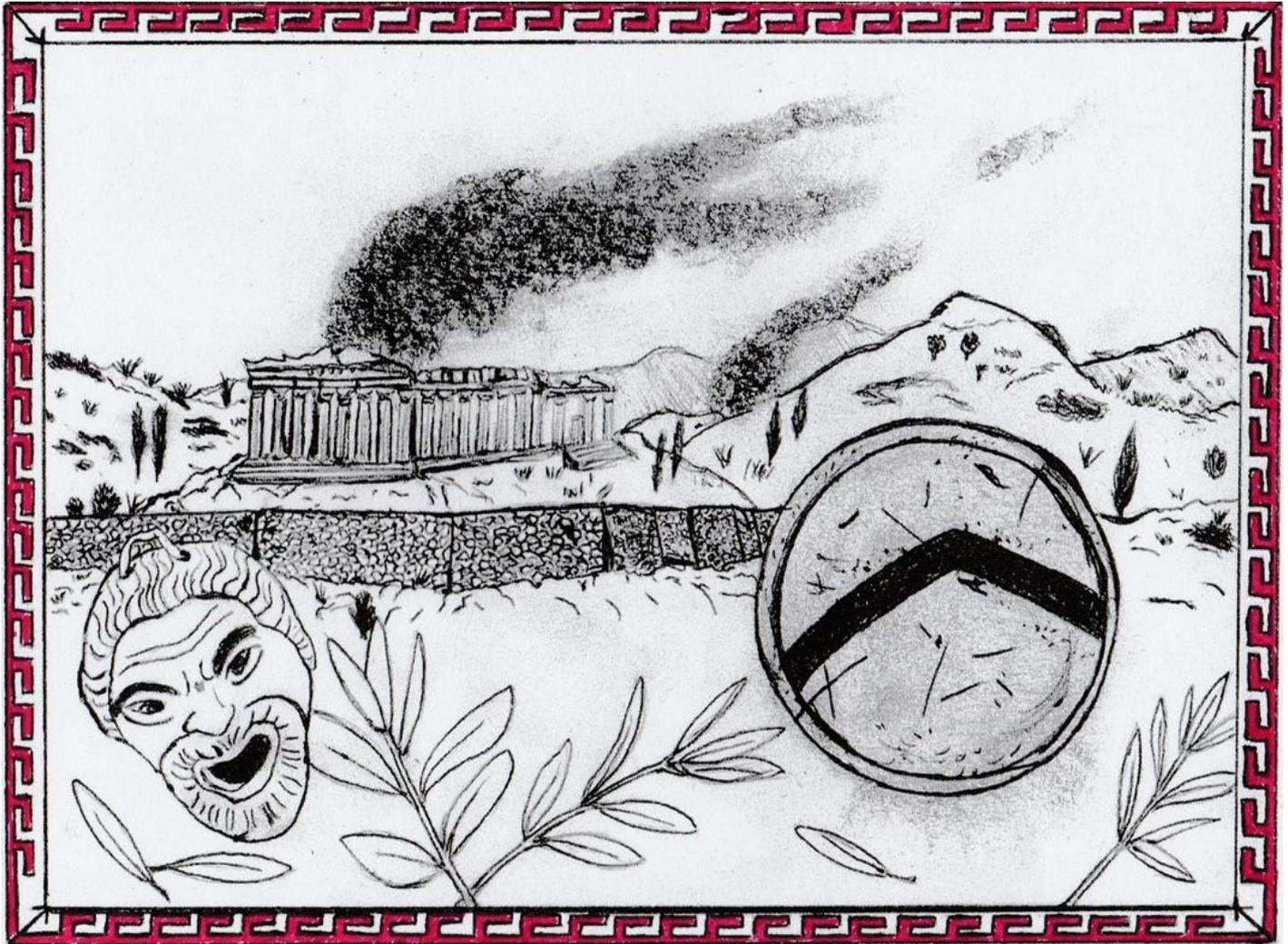


Comedy during the Peloponnesian War

-The application of humour and criticism in Aristophanes' *Acharnians*
and *Lysistrata*-



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Introduction

Questions concerning the societal role of humour in times of crisis have for decades not been as relevant as in the present. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, several media have occasionally compared the state of affairs surrounding the virus to war situations. Comedy has correspondingly been re-evaluated in the process. While some journalists have declared that humour, having an inherent healing effect, serves as a means to cope mentally with a critical situation, others express a certain intolerance for joking linked to tragic events¹. Even though people often consider humour and conflict to be incompatible, nearly every recorded tragic incident throughout history that is linked to war or crisis has been parodied in literature in one way or the other.

In the academic field, the nature of the genre of comedy has prominently featured in discussions and has been subject to constant re-examination as well. Stott (1988), for instance, provides many different theoretical methodologies by which one can approach comedy. Whereas some scholars denote it as a consistent literary genre, others underscore the countless deviations from an established pattern². One thing is certain: there exists no clear-cut definition of comedy or its effect.

The institutionalisation of comedy as a literary form is linked to fifth-century Athens and its two annual festivals: The City Dionysia and the Lenaea. Since the year 486 B.C., the genre was featured in competitions during these festivals. Dionysus, the god of wine, and his worship are intricately connected to comedy, and have been associated with multiple comic themes, such as festivity, sexual freedom, travesty, removal from the city and inversion³. The philosopher Aristotle, who is often identified as the first literary critic, has represented both tragedy and comedy as an imitation (μίμησις) of the world in his treatise *Poetica*⁴. Aristotle claims that tragedy shares features with the epic genre and discusses its different stylistic components in detail. For instance, tragedy is described to encompass elevated characters (σπουδαίους) and actions (πράξεις σπουδαίας) in terms of content, and it is ultimately declared to be superior to epos⁵. Aristotle denotes comedy to be ethically distinct from tragedy with regard to its featured characters, for this genre includes the imitation of inferior

¹ Walsum van, 2020, p.21.

² Stott, 1988.

³ Stott, 1988, pp.4-5.

⁴ Aristotle, *Poetica* 1448a 1.

⁵ Aristotle, *Poetica* 1448a 26, 1449b-1450a, 1462b 10-15.

people (μίμησις φαυλοτέρων)⁶. In addition to this, it dramatises laughable content, does not prominently feature death, and contains a happy ending⁷. Whereas the described characteristics of tragedy within the *Poetica* provide a solid basis for the genre within literary criticism, those of comedy are depicted in much less detail. Without doubt, Aristotle had covered comedy more extensively in the *Poetica*. Unfortunately, however, the sections of his treatise on comedy have been lost in time. Nevertheless, for a long time, literary critics had adhered to Aristotle's brief description and linked comedy to lower culture, providing the genre with a certain negative stigma in the process⁸. When conducting a literary analysis on comedies from antiquity, the application of Aristotle's definition alone proves inadequate.

Therefore, literary scholars have since deployed many different methodologies and theories when investigating the comedies of the fifth-century poet Aristophanes. This renowned poet of Old Comedy features the ongoing Peloponnesian War extensively in his eleven extant comedies⁹. Within these works, he oftentimes defames Athenian politicians or other public figures. This defamation and the pacifistic expressions of his main characters raises the question whether or not Aristophanes himself wished to convey a political message to his audience. This is still an ongoing debate. Central to this debate is the discrepancy between the nature of humour and political criticism within comedy. Is it possible to determine an intersection of these two domains and, if so, through which method?

On the one hand, there are academics who consider the comedies of Aristophanes to be actively engaged in affairs of public life¹⁰. A pacifistic message is often indicated as the underlying aim of the play. On the other hand, there are scholars who deem Aristophanes a professional comedian, who simply retrieves his material for laughter from public defamation, making below-the-belt humour the defining characteristic of the genre¹¹. The focus of this thesis lies in the exploration of the intersection between humour and criticism of the Peloponnesian War in Aristophanes' comedies. Two of his plays are analysed in order to acquire more insight in this intersection, namely *Acharnians* and *Lysistrata*, for which the following research question has been formulated:

⁶ Aristotle, *Poetica* 1449a 32.

⁷ Aristotle, *Poetica* 1448b 37, 1452a 38-39.

⁸ Stott, 1988, pp.21-25.

⁹ Sommerstein, 1980, p.2.

¹⁰ De Ste Croix, 1972; Heath, 1997.

¹¹ Dover, 1972; Halliwell, 1993.

To which extent and to what purpose has Aristophanes incorporated criticism towards the Peloponnesian War and contemporary politics in his comedies Acharnians and Lysistrata?

The historical background of the Peloponnesian War is considered to be known and is not further elaborated upon in answering this question. Instead, a close reading analysis of these two comedies, without explicit reference to other comedies of Aristophanes, is conducted¹². In order to investigate the properties of the intersection between humour and criticism, and the purpose of the latter, Bakhtin's theory of carnival is applied in the interpretation of the two plays, which may provide more insight with regard to the festival context as well. Whereas the more traditional philological methodologies, applied by literary scholars such as De Ste Croix and Dover, do not offer a sufficient framework or justification for political criticism in comical genres, Bakhtin's theory of carnival can provide these genres with a comprehensive context for the often underlying or implied incorporation of political criticism.

First, in order to answer the research question, the status quaestionis concerning the debate on the political significance of Aristophanes' comments on the Peloponnesian War is elaborated upon. In chapter 1, the methodology consisting of Bakhtin's theory of carnival is described. Subsequently, the comedy *Acharnians* is analysed in chapter 2 and the theory of carnival is applied to it. Chapter 3 covers the analysis of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, while using the theory of carnival in the analysis as well. Finally, chapter 4 comprises of the conclusions which are drawn from the analyses of the previous chapters.

¹² For both *Acharnians* and *Lysistrata* the text edition of Jeffrey Henderson is used. All Greek passages are translated by the author of this thesis.

Status quaestionis

This chapter focuses on exploring the various interpretations on the nature of humour and political criticism in Aristophanes' comedies. The views of literary scholars Dover, De Ste Croix, Halliwell and Heath, whose influences on this debate are eminent, are expounded.

Two names often found opposite one another inside the debate are Dover and De Ste Croix. Dover (1972) and the followers of his theory highlight the generic qualities of comedy, in which Aristophanes happens to incorporate the city of Athens and its politics. They place the manifestation of his criticism within a literary tradition. In this context, political criticism is not presented as an intentional layer within the plays, and a pacifistic implication is correspondingly refuted. Instead, Dover suggests that the development and expansion of comic ideas is essentially what shapes Aristophanes' comedies¹³.

De Ste Croix (1972) reacts to Dover by advocating that Aristophanes consciously focusses on undermining public figures and their policies, while adhering to the boundaries of comedy. Humour is presented as a prerequisite of the genre. Through this medium, De Ste Croix argues, one can deliver a serious message more effectively, for it can reach those people who would disregard its content in a more serious format. He nuances this assertion by noting that not all political references need to be scrutinised, but regarding certain passages of Aristophanes' plays, comedy does serve as a medium for his serious political views on the Peloponnesian War¹⁴. Another point of disagreement between Dover and De Ste Croix involves the social position of the characters within Aristophanes' comedies. Whereas Dover emphasises that the lower-class man standing up the higher classes, resembling contemporary satire on politicians, is the essential theme of Old Comedy, De Ste Croix states that Aristophanes seldomly attacks the highest social class. Specifically, De Ste Croix points out that Aristophanes occasionally praises the knights (*ἰππεῖς*), and in order to disprove Dover's claim even further, he remarks that Aristophanes does not elaborately defame two of the most conspicuous politicians of his time: Alcibiades and Nicias¹⁵. It is remarkable that De Ste Croix claims that the absence of political slander concerning these two contemporary figures

¹³ Dover, 1972, pp.83-88.

¹⁴ De Ste Croix, pp.355-357.

¹⁵ De Ste Croix, pp.360-363.

within Aristophanes' comedies can be used as an argument against critique on higher classes. As De Ste Croix himself points out, while Aristophanes does not refer to Nicias, references to Alcibiades as a political figure are in fact present in *Acharnians* line 716 and *Frogs* lines 1427-9¹⁶. While highlighting these examples, De Ste Croix also disregards the fact that only eleven of Aristophanes' plays are extant, so he may have commented on these politicians more extensively or Aristophanes consciously chose to focus on certain politicians in particular.

Another aspect literary scholars frequently bring to light when researching the criticism in Aristophanes' works, involves the composition of his fifth-century audience. It is commonly believed that Aristophanes' political ideas were broadly accepted, and that he functioned as a spokesperson of the people, considering the collective participation in the context of Greek drama and the Great Dionysia¹⁷. Halliwell (1993) argues against this view by stating that, since there were only a few occasions for Greek drama per year in classical Athens, it is presumptuous to consider this form of entertainment as very influential in the general processes of publicity in the city¹⁸. This infrequency of performances is also proposed as an objection to the notion that comedy functioned as a reflector of current publicity in Athens, for the preparation time of the play would not allow contemporary issues to be integrated properly¹⁹. Even though Halliwell justly reacts critically on the tendency of a number of scholars to compare the content of Aristophanic plays to modern media, one could argue that it was still possible to address contemporary issues connected to the war. In fact, the infrequency of Aristophanes' plays can be said to enhance the impact of the political message, which reflects more on general issues relating to the Peloponnesian War.

Complicating factors surrounding the spectators of the comedies involve the heterogeneity of the audience. Since it consists of different social groups, Halliwell states that not every political reference within comedies holds the same meaning for each individual. Therefore, it is impossible to fully comprehend Aristophanes' political layer without taking the audience into account. He further denotes that comedy "did not

¹⁶ Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 716: "... δ' εὐρύπρωκτος καὶ λάλος χῶ Κλεινίου." | "...and the wide-arsed and chattering son of Cleinias.", Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1427-9: "μισῶ πολίτην, ὅστις ὠφελεῖν πάτραν βραδὺς φανεῖται, μεγάλα δὲ βλάπτειν ταχύς, καὶ πόριμον αὐτῶ, τῇ πόλει δ' ἀμήχανον." | "I despise the citizen, who appears to be slow to help his country, and quick to harm it greatly, and who is able to provide for himself, but who is unskilful for the city."

¹⁷ Stott, 1988, p.106.

¹⁸ Halliwell, 1993, p.324.

¹⁹ Halliwell, 1993, pp.334-5.

discernibly impinge on behaviour outside of the theatre.’²⁰. However, there is an account in Plato’s *Apologia* implying an extra-theatrical influence brought about by one of Aristophanes’ plays, namely *Clouds*. In the *Apologia*, Socrates himself is charged for impiety (ἀσέβεια) against the pantheon, and for corrupting the youth of Athens²¹. Socrates claims these accusations are unjustified, for the charges laid against him are the result of prejudice (τὴν διαβολήν), which emerged from a distorted depiction of his person in Aristophanes’ play: “ταῦτα γὰρ ἑώρατε καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν τῇ Ἀριστοφάνους κωμῳδίᾳ...” (“For you can see this in the comedy of Aristophanes as well...’²²).

Halliwell continues to advocate that comedy is not politically engaged by nature and that its generic qualities allow for unrestricted comments on society. He adduces this as the reason that the genre could not have had a significant effect on the lower classes. Halliwell denotes the view that Old Comedy would use laughter to comment on inappropriate social behaviour or the view that comedy is the power of public opinion as naïve, because there is no evidence for this. In opposition to this, he claims that Athens was no face-to-face society, suggesting that the content featured in comedies was generally not widespread²³. Halliwell himself provides no substantial evidence for this claim, which weakens his argument. Regarding the slander of political figures in Aristophanes’ comedies, Halliwell emphasises that not all investigations on possible political statements should be linked to extra-theatrical impact. Because the same satirical victims are used repeatedly, these can acquire personas of their own. In this way, entertaining fiction can be linked to the satirical exposure²⁴. While Halliwell makes a valid point, in showing the nature of fictionality in comedies, it is not justified to link all references of politicians to this formula. While some may be inserted in line with comic convention, they still referred to well-known, contemporary politicians.

In contrast to Halliwell, Heath (1997) declares that Aristophanes’ plays do contain clear political messages. According to him, classical comedies are linked to a mass audience, and contemporary issues are debated in the festival context, which is socially as well as politically significant. However, Heath nuances this declaration because the festival context was not per se political. He points out that there is a distinction between the contests of politicians and those of comic poets. Aristophanes

²⁰ Halliwell, 1993, pp.325, 338.

²¹ Plato, *Apologia* 26b 2-3, 35d 2-3.

²² Plato, *Apologia* 19b-c.

²³ Halliwell, 1993, pp.325, 338.

²⁴ Halliwell, 1993, pp.329-30.

had not been searching for success in extra-theatrical politics, but entirely in the comedy itself. Remarkably enough, Aristophanic comedy does resemble fifth-century political discourse on multiple levels: the speeches of its characters, the design of the comic world inside the play, the account of the extra-theatrical world that is implied and its depiction of Aristophanes as a commentator on this world²⁵. These features suggest an intricate connection to the contemporary world. Fictional as well as realistic aspects are present in the created world within the comedy, and like Halliwell, Heath draws attention to the conventions in the depictions and slander of politicians. In order to support the claim that Aristophanes did not aim at interference or power in the extra-theatrical world, Heath declares that the Athenians were capable of intervening in matters of state themselves, for they frequently executed leaders and intervened²⁶. However, one can point out Heath's reasoning to be short-sighted, for Aristophanes would not try to make a case if he considered the actions of the Athenians to be in accordance with his ideal. Furthermore, Heath's claim would imply that political engagement in modern democracies is by necessity absent in contemporary comedies as well.

Whereas Dover and Halliwell stress the apolitical nature of comedy (and Heath also with regard to its extra-theatrical impact), De Ste Croix is the only literary scholar to insist on the conscious integration of political criticism in Aristophanes' comedies, while still being mindful of the generic boundaries. In opposition to Halliwell and Heath, who search for historical evidence to support their claim concerning the non-political nature of comedy, De Ste Croix's statements are mainly based on text-internal analyses. As explained earlier, Heath's rebuttal of political impact, by mentioning the interference of the Athenians, is faulty. While Halliwell also acts too hastily in refuting any political influence by analysing the nature of the audience, he rightly mentions that comical conventions play a role as well. Therefore, as De Ste Croix has said, not every reference conveys the same degree of political involvement. Even though it is true that there is no independent evidence suggesting direct political interference in, for instance, contemporary legislature, it is necessary to consider political engagement on a different level. Would it be possible for Aristophanes' comedies to function as a medium, that offers moral advice or contains other philosophical messages connected to war politics? Since factors, such as the exact composition of the audience, can only be guessed at, conducting text-internal analyses of Aristophanes comedies would seem

²⁵ Heath, 1997, pp.237-8.

²⁶ Heath, 1997, p.241.

the most academically justified approach. De Ste Croix's notion of comedy functioning as an effective medium for political messages while focussing on text-internal analyses merits closer attention when answering the question: *To which extent and to what purpose has Aristophanes incorporated criticism towards the Peloponnesian War and contemporary politics in his comedies Acharnians and Lysistrata?* In order to interpret the properties of humour in combination with political comments, the investigation of the festival context, as touched upon by Heath, can offer a valuable insight.

In the next chapters, the nature of political critique within selected passages of Aristophanes' plays are examined while the visions of the aforementioned scholars are contrasted with or incorporated in the close reading analyses. In order to provide a theoretical context for these analyses and the religious settings of Aristophanes' comedies, the methodology of Bakhtin's theory of carnival is explicated first.

1. Method

The Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin coined the term ‘carnavalesque’ in 1929 and introduced it as a literary mode. It has since proved to be broadly applicable in multiple academic fields, such as sociology, philosophy, and anthropology. Literary critics have applied ideas of Bakhtin’s theory of carnival as well²⁷. Before the characteristics of carnival and the carnivalesque as described by Bakhtin are elaborated upon, it is important to note the following: firstly that, as Bakhtin himself has said: ‘carnivalization is not an external and immobile schema which is imposed upon ready-made content’²⁸. Its flexibility makes it possible to discover new layers within a text, but provides a challenge for any attempt to concretise Bakhtin’s approach to detect carnivalesque features in literature. Secondly, in the investigation of Bakhtin’s concept of carnival, it is necessary not to limit oneself to contemporary associations with the traditional Christian festival and its institutionalised practices. While this festival in all its forms is certainly a manifestation of carnival, Bakhtin focuses on all rituals, festivals or other activities linked to it, and he mainly lays emphasis on the sociological and anthropological implications.

1.1 Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of carnival

Bakhtin’s theory of carnival is featured in two of his most influential works, namely *Problems of Dostoevsky’s poetics* and *Rabelais and his world*²⁹. Even though Bakhtin frequently situates the ritualistic roots of carnival and its peak in antiquity, he does not himself elaborate on the context of classical comedies. His focus lies rather on medieval carnival and the exploration of the novel as a genre. However, it is possible to adopt a more general approach to carnivalization, by exploring its characteristics scattered throughout Bakhtin’s works.

Before discussing the institutionalisation of carnival within literature in more detail, Bakhtin draws attention to the characteristics of the genres that are intricately linked to the carnivalesque, namely the serio-comical³⁰. Even though this does not exclude other genres from incorporating carnivalesque qualities, Bakhtin touches upon an inherent quality pertaining to these genres: a narrative that is partially serious, and partially comical in nature.

²⁷ Bakhtin, 1984b.

²⁸ Bakhtin, 1984a, p.166. Bakhtin calls the transposition of carnival into literature ‘the carnivalization of literature’.

²⁹ The following English translations of Bakhtin’s texts are used in this thesis: Helene Iswolsky’s translation of *Rabelais and His World* (1984) and Caryl Emerson’s translation of *Problems of Dostoevsky’s poetics* (1984).

³⁰ Bakhtin, 1984a, p.107.

There are three features that are generally present in literary works belonging to these genres. The first one pinpoints the generic connection to reality and time. While the combination of serious and comical elements is not displayed in an epic or tragical register, which consists of legendary or mythical narratives of the past, they are incorporated in a narrative focussing on the present day. The second feature is in line with the first one, for it involves the rejection of content from legends. Instead, experience and free invention are relied upon. Thirdly, a stylistic multiplicity can be ascribed to these genres. In a way, Bakhtin argues, epic, tragedy, lyric and high rhetoric are renounced by serio-comical genres. This, in turn, allows for the utilisation of parodies, thematical mixing of high and low, the comical and the serious³¹.

The heterogeneous elements that mark these genres are held together by carnival and a carnival sense of the world³². Both the external festival sphere and the carnival spirit found in literature are presented as a second life of the people; the real, extra-carnival life is separated from carnival itself. Because of this, carnival is limited only in time and not in space, and laws and restrictions of non-carnival life are suspended during the ongoing festival. In addition, carnival, being a kind of performance, involves communal participation without any division between performers and spectators³³. This general participation, according to Bakhtin, is associated with the longstanding principle of folk culture and folk humour, which have not merged with the official culture of ruling classes. Folk humour, often denoted as carnivalesque itself, conveys a collective conscious of the people³⁴. Bakhtin designates a square or marketplace and its adjacent streets as the marked area for the festival and a recurrent setting within serio-comical genres.³⁵

All diverse forms of carnival and its festivals are complex when conducting a literary analysis, for the epoch and people in question need to be considered. However, the carnival spirit remains the same in essence, so it is unnecessary to comprehend all historical factors in detail³⁶. Symbolic language in carnivalized literature gives expression to a unified, carnival sense of the world. Bakhtin has listed five characteristics of this carnivalesque language in line with the carnival sense of the world. Firstly, hierarchical structures and socio-hierarchical inequality of non-carnival life are dealt with inside carnivalized literature. Free and familiar contact between all participants of carnival are established in the process. Within carnivalized

³¹ Bakhtin, 1984a, pp.107-8.

³² Bakhtin, 1984a, p.134.

³³ Bakhtin, 1984a, p.122.

³⁴ Bakhtin, 1984b, pp.321, 411.

³⁵ Bakhtin, 1984a, p.128, 474; Bakhtin, 1984b, p.255.

³⁶ Bakhtin, 1984a, pp.122-3.

literature, a new mode of interrelationships between individuals is formed in a “sensuous, half-real and half play-acted form” opposed to the relationships outside of carnival life. This familiarity leads to the destruction of epic and tragic distance within the narrative and determines a connection between the author’s point of view and its characters³⁷. Moreover, behaviour, gestures and discourse are freed from real-life authority, which is ridiculed and beaten. In accordance with this, the following carnivalistic acts can be highlighted: uncrowning and mock crowning. The attributes belonging to a king or other notable person of high standing in the extra-carnival world are demolished, whereas an individual pertaining to the lower stratum of the non-carnival hierarchy is crowned³⁸. The second characteristic is eccentricity. The carnival spirit permits the normally concealed sides of human nature to be expressed. Otherwise unacceptable, inappropriate behaviour is allowed without the expected consequences.

In line with the first characteristic and also connected to the carnival sense of the world is the third feature: *carnivalistic mésalliances*. The free and familiar attitude is spread over all areas in serio-comical works, such as values, thoughts and phenomena. In effect, this characteristic in particular refers to carnival’s inherent quality to unify binary oppositions. Carnival is a world turned inside out and its images in literature are always dualistic, combining elements such as praise and abuse, stupidity and wisdom. Another common example is the utilisation of things in reverse, such as putting clothes inside out, men being cross-dressed as women, and the use of household utensils as weapons³⁹. More importantly, however, is the observation that extra-carnival life is often parodied within serio-comical genres. The fourth characteristic Bakhtin describes is called profanation. It contains blasphemies, debasing and bringing down to earth in line with the carnival spirit. Bakhtin emphasises that this does not refer to abstract thoughts, but sensual thoughts, experienced in form of life itself, which have survived for thousands of years⁴⁰.

A fifth carnivalistic characteristic that Bakhtin elaborately describes is the application of the grotesque. Grotesque images are exaggerated and eccentric, and designed to degrade what is considered to be noble⁴¹. In line with these characteristics, the lower stratum of the body is often depicted out of proportion. This depiction is linked to satire, in which the grotesqueness of the human body and the connected abundance is represented by its primary

³⁷ Bakhtin, 1984a, pp.123-4.

³⁸ Bakhtin, 1984a, pp. 124-125; Bakhtin, 1984b, p.370.

³⁹ Bakhtin, 1984a, p.126.

⁴⁰ Bakhtin, 1984a, pp.123-4.

⁴¹ Bakhtin, 1984b, p.303.

needs, such as eating, drinking, urinating and sex. This is the reason why carnivalistic images often emphasise the mouth or genitalia⁴². Even though exaggeration is an important element of the grotesque, Bakhtin notes that this is not its essential feature. He mentions that “a grotesque world in which only the inappropriate is exaggerated is only quantitatively large, but qualitatively it is extremely poor, colourless and far from gay”⁴³. Subsequently, he explains that the grotesque conveys both a negative and a positive pole of change. Therefore, Bakhtin adduces the key notion inside both of his works, which leads towards an interpretation of the application of carnival in literature: ambivalence. Apart from a certain negative display within satire, a positive pathos, laughter, is aimed at in the incorporation of the grotesque within carnival as well⁴⁴.

This laughter linked to carnival builds its own world in opposition to the official one as well. It degrades, materialises and is directed towards all the participants of carnival. Therefore, it is necessary to perceive it as a communal, instead of an individual reaction to a comic event. Consequently, carnival laughter is also highly ambivalent, since it is gay, and simultaneously, mocking and deriding⁴⁵. Ambivalence can be attributed to nearly every feature of the carnivalesque. The carnivalistic act of mock crowning hints at an inevitable uncrowning in the future, and the actual marketplace shines through the depiction of the carnival square⁴⁶. As a result, the boundaries between a performance and life are intentionally abolished; life is represented on stage. This, combined with the suspension of political and socioeconomic structures, enhances the possibility to integrate criticism of extra-carnival life⁴⁷.

Considering all mentioned carnivalesque features, the following question arises: To which end does the longstanding carnivalization of literature serve, according to Bakhtin? Due to the fact that everything is drawn into the zone of free and familiar contact, the emerged sense of community has a liberating effect from fear. Life can be understood in the form of art⁴⁸. Change and renewal, expressed in the ambivalence pertaining to all carnivalesque features, is the most significant principle connected to folk culture and the sense of community. This change and, most of all, a certain relativity or replaceability of the extra-theatrical political and socioeconomic organisation, is celebrated in carnival.

⁴² Bakhtin, 1984a, p.26.

⁴³ Bakhtin, 1984b, p.307.

⁴⁴ Bakhtin, 1984b, p.308.

⁴⁵ Bakhtin, 1984b, pp.20, 88.

⁴⁶ Bakhtin, 1984a, pp.125-8.

⁴⁷ Bakhtin, 1984a, pp.255-258

⁴⁸ Bakhtin, 1984a, pp.157-160.

Carnivalization of the present represents a hope for the future and a victory of the expressed future over the past⁴⁹. Therefore, Bakhtin proposes that the carnivalistic second world of the people contains a utopian character towards the future. This created, utopian realm is characterised by community, freedom, equality and abundance. Feasts and festivals, according to Bakhtin, have historically been linked to moments of crisis, death, revival, change and the created renewal led to a festive perception of the world⁵⁰. However, apart from the celebration of relativity, a certain liberation from the state of affairs of real life, and an optimistic view towards the future, it is necessary to consider the nature of criticism towards non-carnival life. Bakhtin argues that people have applied comic images pertaining to the carnival spirit to express criticism, deep distrust of official truth and aspirations⁵¹. Much is allowed in the form of laughter that was branded impermissible in a serious format. For example, when applying grotesque imagery, critique towards political conflicts can be veiled in the depiction of human anatomy. Uncrowning is also a typical act of degrading a real-life political figure inside a performance. Even though the symbols of authority have been removed, there is no question of an entirely negative disclosure of a public figure, for the features of the carnivalesque lead to a pathos of changes and renewals as well⁵².

1.2 Carnival and Aristophanes

In order to determine whether or not it is possible to apply Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnival to Aristophanes' comedies, the serio-comical qualities of his plays must first be taken into account. All three features described by Bakhtin are in accordance with those found in the fifth-century comedy: the narrative focusses on the present day, its content generally rejects legendary elements and it features a multiplicity of style. Regarding the integration of criticism, the theory of carnival provides the following context: the hierarchical structures and relations of real life are suspended during carnival, which allows for a unique way of communicating with other people from all social classes, as was not possible in real life. External conditions of the fifth-century Lenaea and Great Dionysia possibly facilitated this communication, for there is no evidence from antiquity suggesting the exclusion of any social class. In Plato's *Gorgias*, a reference to women, children and even slaves being part of

⁴⁹ Bakhtin, 1984a, p.256.

⁵⁰ Bakhtin, 1984b, p.9.

⁵¹ Bakhtin, 1984b, p.269.

⁵² Bakhtin, 1984b, pp.126-129.

the audience, supports the communal attendance of these festivals⁵³. Regardless of the exact composition or number of the spectators inside the theatre, more people from Attica congregated in comparison to other public occasions⁵⁴. Activities related to these Dionysian festivals such as processions, in which the phallus was ostentatiously presented, suggest a direct manifestation of carnival. However, the question if grotesque images have arisen from Dionysian rituals lies beyond the scope of this thesis.

The key notion in Bakhtin's theory is ambivalence, which may shed a better, defining light on the integration of political criticism of the Peloponnesian War. Both the ambivalence, and the display of humour and criticism can be conveyed by Bakhtin's five carnivalesque characteristics: the destruction or inversion of non-carnival hierarchies resulting in new interrelationships between individuals, sometimes illustrated by acts of crowning and uncrowning; eccentricity, as is often shown in the actions and behaviour of characters; the display of familiar and free attitude over all areas of serio-comical narratives, denoted as *carnivalesque mésalliances*; the debasing of the noble or sacred called profanation; grotesque imagery.

In order to identify political, carnivalistic messages, it is necessary to conduct a literary analysis on the passages relating to critique of the Peloponnesian War whilst also investigating the application of the carnivalesque characteristics in these fragments as defined by Bakhtin. In the next two chapters, passages referring to the Peloponnesian War in *Acharnians* and *Lysistrata* are examined while concentrating on the presence of these five characteristics. In addition, the presence, manifestation, and possible implications of utopia found within Aristophanes' comedies are investigated as well.

⁵³ Plato, *Gorgias*, 502b-d. Socrates, when deliberating with Callicles on the rhetorical nature of tragedy, states: “Νῦν ἄρα ἡμεῖς ἠύρηκαμεν ῥητορικὴν τινα πρὸς δῆμον τοιοῦτον οἷον παιδῶν τε ὁμοῦ καὶ γυναικῶν καὶ ἀνδρῶν, καὶ δούλων καὶ ἐλευθέρων,…” | “Now, then, we have found a type of rhetoric for such a township comprised of children, women, men, slaves and freedmen,…” Since comedies were often performed after tragedies during festivals, the composition of the audience most likely pertains to this genre as well.

⁵⁴ Henderson, 1998, p.9.

2. Acharnians

The oldest of Aristophanes' eleven extant comedies, *Acharnians*, won the first prize at the literary competition of the Lenaea in 425 B.C. The few remaining fragments of Aristophanes' supposed second play, *Babylonians*, and its extra-theatrical consequences have fuelled speculation on political implications in *Acharnians*. Cleon, a contemporary politician who is often slandered within Aristophanes' comedies, had taken legal actions after the performance of this comedy. His attacks were founded on the content of the play, which included a defamation of Athens' magistrates in the company of foreigners⁵⁵. However, whether or not a legal attack was actually launched against Aristophanes himself, or Cratinus, the director of both *Babylonians* and *Acharnians*, still remains putative⁵⁶.

In this chapter, a close reading analysis is conducted with regard to four instances of political criticism in Aristophanes' *Acharnians*, including one on Cleon and his policies. This is done in order to establish their purpose in the play as a whole, while investigating the integration of Bakhtin's five carnivalesque characteristics. Before these four instances related to critique are zoomed in on, a description of the main elements within the plot of *Acharnians* is provided, after which a more general relationship between this comedy and the carnivalesque is examined first.

2.1 Plot *Acharnians*

The comedy starts off with a monologue by its protagonist: Dicaeopolis ("he of the just city-state"). He is an elderly, lower-class man from Athens who complains mainly about his misfortunes, while referring to extra-theatrical politics. Dicaeopolis is most enraged at the absence of the assemblymen, who were supposed to convene on the Pnyx. He states early on: "εἰρήνη δ' ὅπως ἔσται προτιμῶσ' οὐδέν'" ("But they do not pay heed to peace in any way;")⁵⁷. Dicaeopolis expresses his intent to intervene if the assemblymen do not address political actions towards peace. Subsequently, these men, including two council-presidents (οἱ πρυτάνεις), the herald (ὁ κήρυξ), and Amphitheus enter the stage. The latter is dragged off, after having asked for funds to arrange a treaty with the Spartans. In opposition to this, two Athenian ambassadors, who have returned from the Persian king, are provided with a

⁵⁵ Olson, 2002, p.30; Biles, 2011, p.59. This is in line with Dicaeopolis' statement on Cleon in *Acharnians* lines 377-82, in which he addresses a slanderous attack on him, or perhaps on comedy itself, consequent to last year's play. Lines 502-5 support an actual attack by Cleon as well, since Dicaeopolis states that Cleon would be unable to accuse him of slander in the presence of foreigners during the winter festival Lenaea.

⁵⁶ Sommerstein, 1980, p.2; Henderson, 1998, p.48.

⁵⁷ Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 26-7.

substantial salary of two drachmas by the council-presidents. However, Dicaeopolis discovers the ambassadors have misinterpreted the Persian king's words, indicating a futile distribution of Athenian war funds⁵⁸. The herald cannot be swayed by Dicaeopolis' admonitions, and Dicaeopolis, having frequently mentioned the injustice of the Athenians' actions, calls on Amphitheus. He sends him away to arrange a private peace treaty for him, his wife and children with the Spartans. After Amphitheus' departure, the king of the Odrysai in Thrace is called forward, whom Dicaeopolis exposes to be undevoted to the Athenian cause as well. Despite Dicaeopolis' attempt to convince the council-presidents not to pay the Thracians, they remain unaffected and the assembly is eventually adjourned.

Upon his return, Amphitheus is being chased by the Acharnians, who were angered at the discovery of Dicaeopolis' treaty. Dicaeopolis opts for a treaty lasting thirty-one years, liberating him, among other things, from Athens' limited food rations resulting from the war with Sparta. In the *parodos* the chorus, consisting of Acharnians, emphasise their commitment to the war and their resentment towards the Spartans, who have devastated their countryside. Dicaeopolis does not pay attention to the enraged chorus, but commences a procession and offering ritual for the Rural Dionysia. The Acharnians finally intervene and Dicaeopolis attempts to explain his fortunate position, while stating that the Spartans are not to blame for everything regarding the current situation of war.

However, the chorus is reluctant to listen to Dicaeopolis, so he declares that he must pay a visit to the tragic poet Euripides. There Dicaeopolis is equipped with the clothing and stage props belonging to one of Euripides' characters: Telephus. After his change of costume, Dicaeopolis addresses the Acharnians, revealing the underlying cause of the war. After his speech the chorus separates in two semi-choruses: one agreeing and one disagreeing with Dicaeopolis. The latter half calls forth Lamachus, a contemporary Athenian general in the Peloponnesian War. Lamachus points out the difference in rank between Dicaeopolis and himself, indicating that Dicaeopolis is in an inferior position to speak. Dicaeopolis, in turn, mocks him and mentions that Lamachus acquired a powerful position through a poorly attended assembly. The leader of the chorus declares that Dicaeopolis has defeated Lamachus in speech and the choruses merge again. The chorus leader then continues to praise the poet, whose intention is to prevent the Athenians from being deceived by foreigners⁵⁹. In addition,

⁵⁸ Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 101-3. The Athenian ambassadors surmise the Persian king will provide Athens with gold, in order to aid their cause. The Persian Pseudo-Artabas, who is called the King's Eye (τὸν βασιλέως Ὀφθαλμόν), appears at the assembly and reveals that no gold will be given to Athens.

⁵⁹ Henderson, 1998, pp. 25, 133: Henderson denotes lines 626-664 as the *parabasis*, which is usually marked by the use of anapaests. It is customary to refer to the poet of the comedy itself in this speech directed at the

the chorus leader expresses to the audience: “ἀλλ’ ὑμεῖς τοι μή ποτ’ ἀφῆσθ’ ὥς κωμωδήσει τὰ δίκαια.” (“But you, do not ever discharge him; for he will compose comedies about righteous matters.”) and “...ἀλλὰ τὰ βέλτιστα διδάσκων.” (“...but while he teaches the best things.”)⁶⁰.

The latter half of the play features Dicaeopolis’ personal marketplace prominently. This market is open for trade with Peloponnesians, Megarians and Boeotians. The chorus sings about Dicaeopolis’ success and mentions contemporary politicians who are excluded from his market. During one of his trades, eels (ἐγγέλεις), a delicacy, become once more available to him. In return, Dicaeopolis trades an Athenian informer (συκοφάντης), who branded eels and other goods from hostile ground as contraband. When Lamachus finally arrives at the market and asks to trade fish for drachmas, Dicaeopolis refuses to share his peace. In reaction to Dicaeopolis’ fortunate situation, the leader of the chorus declares to avert warfare as well, and the personification of Reconciliation (Διαλλαγή) is subsequently invoked by the chorus. Not only does Dicaeopolis refuse Lamachus’ request, but he also rejects others who beg for a small portion of his peace, with the exception of a bride. Instead, Dicaeopolis is focussed on continuing preparations for a feast. The comedy ends with Dicaeopolis enjoying the feast and entertainment, while Lamachus returns wounded from battle. Dicaeopolis is once again declared victorious, having emptied a wineskin, and the chorus, while singing, accompanies him off stage.

Considering the plot development, the use of binary and contradicting elements, inherent to the carnivalesque, already becomes apparent by Dicaeopolis’ name in relation to the injustice and lack of active participation displayed during the assembly. Although the discussions on peace and war contrast the characters in *Acharnians*, it is important to note that the attention becomes more drawn away from Spartans and direct warfare, and more focus lies on criticising Athenian politics and the use of civic funds instead. In Aristophanes plot, both fictional characters and non-fictional characters, such as the Athenian general Lamachus and the Acharnians as a people, are incorporated. While Cleon, being a contemporary politician, is frequently attacked, he plays no active role within the plot. The setting explicitly focuses on contemporary Athens and its surrounding demes, directly affected by its war policies. Although Aristotle identifies a contemporary setting as common

audience. There is uncertainty whether the praise refers to Aristophanes or Cratinus. However, the former is more likely when examining the context; a personal attack on Cleon follows (lines 659-664).

⁶⁰ Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 655, 658; Olson, 2002, p. 48. The comedy is suggested to possess an explicit educational purpose in the *parabasis*. In line 628, Aristophanes as a comic poet is called: ὁ διδάσκαλος.

within comedies, its application gives rise to ambivalence, for locations as the Pnyx dissolve the boundaries between extra-theatrical life and the play.

Since abundance, freedom, equality and community are characteristics of a utopia, one can argue that Aristophanes has created a utopian realm for Dicaeopolis as a result of his private treaty. Abundance and freedom are featured prominently after the protagonist has set up his private marketplace. The means and circumstances by which he acquires a peace treaty with the Spartans, and trades with people from hostile regions surrounding Attica, are eccentric. However, this behaviour is accepted, producing a comic ambience. An example of this is Dicaeopolis' highly exaggerated yearning for eels, which may come across as trivial. The freedom to trade leads to abundance and the accessibility of certain goods, which are unavailable in the extra-theatrical crisis of war. Another notable instance featuring these utopian qualities concerns the role of the Rural Dionysia in the play. The opportunity to hold this festival appears to be directly linked to these qualities as the result of peace. The opposition between the advantages of peace, as presented in the utopia, and the turmoil of war is mainly depicted in the difference between Dicaeopolis and Lamachus.

Finally, the Acharnians partake in a song celebrating Dicaeopolis' triumph. In this manner, a sense of community is conveyed, which leaves a lasting impression in line with the carnival spirit. However, before the play as a whole can be thoroughly examined regarding the theory of carnival, it is necessary to concentrate on carnivalesque characteristics found within specific instances connected to or displaying criticism on warfare.

2.2 Political criticism and the carnivalesque

The first instance, not displaying, but directly linked to the criticism in Aristophanes' play, is the incorporation of Euripides and one of his tragedies: *Telephus*⁶¹. While there are few references to tragic content within *Acharnians*, almost all allude to this specific play. Previous to the scene in which Dicaeopolis changes clothes, one other allusion can be identified:

⁶¹ Henderson, 1998, p.50; Collard & Cropp, 2008, pp.192-223: The version of this tragedy by Euripides is not completely extant. However, fragments of this play have been written down by later authors, such as Hyginus and Diogenes the Cynic.

Dicaeopolis

βάλλετ', εἰ βούλεσθ'· ἐγὼ γὰρ τουτονὶ
διαφθερῶ. εἴσομαι δ' ὑμῶν τάχ' ὅστις
ἀνθράκων τι κήδεται.

Throw them, if you want; for I will kill this.
I will soon see which one of you has any
care for these charcoals.

Chorus leader

ὡς ἀπωλόμεσθ'· ὁ λάρκος δημότης ὄδ' ἔστ'
ἐμός. ἀλλὰ μὴ δράσης ὃ μέλλεις, μηδαμῶς,
ὦ μηδαμῶς.

How we are destroyed! This charcoal-basket
is from my deme. Do not do what you are
about to do, do not, oh, do not.

(Ar. *Ach.* 311-4)

These lines immediately follow after the confrontation between the angered Acharnians and Dicaeopolis, who is about to be killed. Henderson (1998) indicates that this scene is a reference to the hostage situation in *Telephus*. Orestes, who is still a small child, is taken hostage by Telephus, who is being threatened with death. Aristophanes' allusion is clearly a parody. Charcoal, a trademark of Acharnian industry, is the implied hostage⁶². This exaggerated act leads to the inversion of power with regard to Dicaeopolis and the Acharnians, who then concede to listen. However, when the chorus expresses its impatience towards Dicaeopolis, it is decided to exploit the character of Telephus more evidently:

Dicaeopolis

ἀλλ' ἀντιβολῶ πρὸς τῶν γονάτων σ',
Εὐριπίδη, δός μοι ῥάκιόν τι τοῦ παλαιοῦ
δράματος. δεῖ γὰρ με λέξαι τῷ χορῷ ῥῆσιν
μακράν· αὕτη δὲ θάνατον, ἢν κακῶς λέξω,
φέρει.

But I beg by your knees, Euripides,
give me a rag of the old play.
I must give a long speech to the chorus;
This leads to death, if I will speak
badly.

(...)

⁶² Henderson, 1998, pp.50-1; Hyginus, *Fabulae* 101.2.

οἶδ' ἄνδρα, Μυσὸν Τήλεφον.

I know the man, the Mysian

Telephus.

(Ar. *Ach.* 414-7, 429)

Dover (1972) claims that both references to Euripides' *Telephus* illustrate a low level of seriousness within Aristophanes' *Acharnians*. He states that within Dicaeopolis' justification of his private treaty with the Spartans, by dressing up as the beggar Telephus and parodying his speech, Aristophanes draws the attention of the public away from the actual criticism to the incongruous humour of parody⁶³. However, one could argue that Dover's interpretation is too literal, since he leaves no room for a connection with criticism. Moreover, the rags of Telephus serve as a disguise, and being the son of Heracles, he is in fact of noble birth⁶⁴. Having acquired all the attributes of Telephus, Euripides exclaims: "ἀπολεῖς μ'. ἰδοῦ σοι. φροῦδά μοι τὰ δράματα." ("You will destroy me! Take it! My plays are gone.")⁶⁵. The transfer of Telephus' stage props can be interpreted as a metaphorical transfer of the authority of tragedy, by which Bakhtin's carnivalistic acts of crowning and decrowning come into play. This act is linked to the first carnivalesque characteristic: the destruction of hierarchies. This is supported by the subsequent increase of authority in Dicaeopolis' speech, which can be said to enhance the serious nature of the criticism within the comedy. In this speech, Dicaeopolis accordingly states: "τὸ γὰρ δίκαιον οἶδε καὶ τρυφῶδία." ("For comedy also knows what is just.")⁶⁶.

The second selected passage within *Acharnians* covers the eventual exception of Dicaeopolis' rejection to share a portion of his peace, when a bridegroom's best man enters the scene:

Best man

Δικαιοπόλι.

Dicaeopolis!

Dicaeopolis

τίς οὔτοσί; τίς οὔτοσί;

Who is it? Who is it?

⁶³ Dover, 1972, pp.87-8.

⁶⁴ Henderson, 1998, p.51.

⁶⁵ Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 470.

⁶⁶ Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 500.

Best man

ἔπεμψε τίς σοι νυμφίος ταυτὶ κρέα ἐκ τῶν
γάμων.

A bridegroom sent you this meat from the
wedding.

Dicaeopolis

καλῶς γε ποιῶν ὅστις ἦν.

He acts kindly, whoever he is.

Best man

ἐκέλευε δ' ἐγγέαι σε τῶν κρεῶν χάριν, ἵνα
μὴ στρατεύοιτ', ἀλλὰ κινοίη μένων, εἰς τὸν
ἀλάβαστον κύαθον εἰρήνης ἔνα.

He requests, in exchange for the meat, that
you pour one ladle of peace in his
alabastron, so that he does not have to wage
war, but can have sex while staying.

Dicaeopolis

ἀπόφερ', ἀπόφερε τὰ κρέα καὶ μὴ μοι δίδου,
ὡς οὐκ ἂν ἐγγέαιμι χιλιῶν δραχμῶν. ἀλλ'
αὐτῆι τίς ἐστιν;

Take it away, take away the meat and do not
give it to me, because I would not pour it in
for a thousand drachmas. But who is she?

Best man

ἡ νυμφεύτρια δεῖται παρὰ τῆς νύμφης τι σοὶ
λέξαι μόνω.

The bridesmaid requests something from the
bride to you alone.

Dicaeopolis

φέρε δὴ, τί σὺ λέγεις; ὡς γελοῖον, ὦ θεοί,
τὸ δέημα τῆς νύμφης, ὃ δεῖταί μου σφόδρα,
ὅπως ἂν οἰκουρῆ τὸ πέος τοῦ νυμφίου. φέρε
δεῦρο τὰς σπονδάς, ἵν' αὐτῆι δῶ μόνῃ, ὅτι
γυνὴ ἴσθι τοῦ πολέμου τ' οὐκ ἀξία.

Come then, what do you say? How amusing
the bride's entreaty is, o gods; what she very
much requests, is that her husband's penis
can stay at home. Bring the treaties here,
that I will give something to her alone,

since her being a woman, she does not
deserve war.

(*Ar. Ach.* 1047-62)

The fifth of Bakhtin's carnivalesque characteristic, the grotesque, is featured within this scene, through the display and emphasis of primary needs pertaining to the human body: eating and sex. Both food, offered by the best man, and the bride's offer of sex are aimed at the benefits of peace, conveying a communal pacifistic sentiment. This sharpens the contrast between Dicaeopolis and all others, who are excluded from his utopian realm, as it were. In addition, the second carnivalesque characteristic, eccentricity, can be ascribed to the bride's behaviour; even though she is recently married, she resorts to having sex in order to achieve a peace treaty. The prominence of the identified grotesque and eccentric images in this scene, creating a strong comical effect, may lead towards the inclination to exclude any direct form of political criticism. Olson (2002), however, rightly underscores the content of line 1062: "..., ὅτι ἡ γυνὴ ἔστι τοῦ πολέμου τ' οὐκ ἀξία." In effect, the best man and the bridesmaid request the same. However, it can be argued that Dicaeopolis refers to women not being responsible for the origin or continuance of the war. Subsequently, it is implied that her husband can be, and he justly suffers the consequences of his behaviour, making the issue political⁶⁷. The carnivalesque characteristics in this scene can be said to give shape to the criticism, displayed through ambivalence.

The third fragment covered in this chapter involves a closer examination of the opposition between Dicaeopolis and Lamachus, which marks the second half of the comedy. Lamachus, who is severely wounded, re-enters the stage, while Dicaeopolis participates in a sympotic feast, having been invited by a Dionysian priest:

Lamachus

ἀτταταῖ ἀτταταῖ,

Ah, ah!

στυγερὰ τάδε γε κρυερὰ πάθεα· τάλας

These icy pains are hateful; miserable me!

ἐγώ. διόλλυμαι δορὸς ὑπὸ πολεμίου

I am utterly destroyed, after being

τυπεῖς. ἐκεῖνο δ' οὖν αἰακτὸν ἂν γένοιτο,

wounded by an enemy's spear. But it

Δικαιοπόλις εἴ μ' ἴδοι τετρωμένον

would certainly be lamentable if

⁶⁷ Olson, 2002, p.44.

κάτ' ἐγγάνοι ταῖς ἐμαῖς τύχαισιν.

Dicaeopolis were to see me, being wounded,
and grinned at my misfortunes.

Dicaeopolis

Ἄτταταῖ ἄτταταῖ,
τῶν τιθίων, ὡς σκληρὰ καὶ κυδόνια.
φιλήσατόν με μαλθακῶς, ὧ χρυσίω,
τὸ περιπεταστὸν κάπιμανδαλωτόν.
τὸν γὰρ χοᾶ πρώτος ἐκπέπωκα.

Ah, ah!
Those breasts, how hard like quinces!
Kiss me softly, my two treasures, one with
an open mouth and one with a lascivious
kiss. For I drain my pitcher first!

Lamachus

ὦ συμφορὰ τάλαινα τῶν ἐμῶν κακῶν.
ὦ ὦ τραυμάτων ἐπωδύνων.

Oh, miserable collection of my adversities!
Oh, oh my painful wounds!

Dicaeopolis

ἦ ἦ, χαῖρε, Λαμαχίππιον.

Hey, hey, greetings, little Lamachippus!

Lamachus

στυγερός ἐγώ

I am wretched!

Dicaeopolis

τί με σὺ κυνεῖς;

Why give me a kiss?

Lamachus

μογερός ἐγώ.

I am distressed!

Dicaeopolis

τί με σὺ δάκνεις;

Why bite me?

Lamachus

τάλας ἐγώ ξυμβολῆς βαρείας.

Miserable me, what a heavy price!

Dicaeopolis

τοῖς Χουσι γάρ τις ξυμβολὰς ἐπράττετο;

Because somebody at the Choes demanded
a payment?

Lamachus

ὦ ἰώ, Παιὰν Παιάν.

oh, oh! Healer, Healer!

Dicaeopolis

ἀλλ' οὐχὶ νυνὶ τήμερον Παιώνια.

But there is no Healer's festival today.

Lamachus

λάβεσθέ μου, λάβεσθε τοῦ σκέλους· παπαῖ,
προσλάβεσθ', ὦ φίλοι.

Take it, take my leg; ow! Take hold of it, o
friends!

Dicaeopolis

ἐμοῦ δέ γε σφῶ τοῦ πέους ἄμφω μέσου
προσλάβεσθ', ὦ φίλαι.

You both, take hold of the middle of my
penis, o dear girls!

(*Ar. Ach.* 1190-1217)

Within this scene, the opposition between Dicaeopolis and Lamachus, effectively presented by the use of stichomythia, is accompanied by two of Bakhtin's carnivalesque characteristics. Lamachus, who was an actual Athenian general in the Peloponnesian War, is uncrowned by the emphasis on his misfortunes, degrading his hierarchy in non-carnival life. The criticism within this scene involves warfare in general, by linking its consequences to the character of Lamachus. In addition, the grotesque is overtly featured by the explicit focus on sex, again expressed by Dicaeopolis, who is most likely in the presence of two prostitutes, befitting a sympotic setting. This grotesque imagery is part of the abundance and freedom of the utopian realm, which is emphasised by the exclusion of Dicaeopolis from the troubles of war. He appears to be no longer aware of Lamachus' war situation and relates the latter's misfortune to the Choes, thus being freed and completely immersed in the festival sphere⁶⁸. Earlier on in the play, when Lamachus came to Dicaeopolis' marketplace, he offered

⁶⁸ Henderson, 1998, p.181: The Choes, or Pitcher Feast, was celebrated on the second day of a festival for Dionysus: the Anthesteria.

drachmas for eels required for the celebration of the Choes, but was sent away empty handed⁶⁹. Biles (2011) accurately notes that peace serves as a prerequisite for the freedom and abundance to celebrate Dionysian festivals within *Acharnians*. This, in turn, displays ambivalence, since the rituals connected to these festivals can be linked to Aristophanes' performance at the Lenaea itself⁷⁰.

After this passage (lines 1190-1217), Lamachus is dragged off to a clinic and Dicaeopolis leaves the stage with the chorus, celebrating his victory in song. Dover (1972) refutes a political layer of any kind by stating that Dicaeopolis merely displays selfish behaviour in the second half of the comedy. According to him, Dicaeopolis does not concern himself with the interests of his city by refusing to share his wealth, and following his behaviour would not make Athens a better place⁷¹. However, as Olson (2002) points out, Dicaeopolis' character does not fully need to portray Aristophanes' ideal behaviour in order to make a political point⁷². Furthermore, by stating this, Dover neglects the utopian dimension of the play, in which the moral advice may actually be incorporated. As mentioned earlier on in this chapter, when considering the ending of the comedy, a unification of the people of Athens and Attica can be identified; the Acharnians eventually partake in the Dionysian feast, having invoked Reconciliation, and the herald, who at the beginning played a negative role in the assembly, joins as well⁷³.

Apart from Lamachus, there are references to another non-fictional character that need to be considered: Cleon. The fourth and final instance of criticism concerns the exploration of this contemporary politician and his role in war politics as mentioned in *Acharnians*. He does not actively influence actions within the play, but is mentioned five times in total. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the direct context of Aristophanes' caricature and slander of Cleon, and subsequently consider the relationship between Aristophanes himself and Dicaeopolis.

The first reference to Cleon, and the first occasion of degrading in line with Bakhtin's first characteristic (the destruction of non-carnival hierarchies), is situated at the very beginning of the comedy. While Dicaeopolis lists his misfortunes, one of his few delights include: “...τοῖς πέντε ταλάντοις οἷς Κλέων ἐξήμεσεν.” (“...five talents which Cleon

⁶⁹ Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 961-68.

⁷⁰ Biles, 2011, pp.61-5. Biles, while providing no external evidence, claims that the play conveys the involvement of the Acharnians in the Rural Dionysia. Their initial anger towards Dicaeopolis may have arisen from the lack of resources or liberty to celebrate festivals.

⁷¹ Dover, 1972, pp. 87-8.

⁷² Olson, 2002, p.47.

⁷³ Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 1000.

disgorged.’’⁷⁴. Apart from the slander of his person, there is not yet explicit mention of his role in the conduct of the Peloponnesian War. The second time Cleon is incorporated in the play, the Acharnians are chasing Dicaeopolis and are about to pelt stones at him, having discovered his private treaty with the Spartans. The chorus, consisting of Acharnian elders declare that: “ὡς μεμίσσηκά σε Κλέωνος ἔτι μᾶλλον, ...” (“I hate you even more than Cleon, ...”)⁷⁵. This critique, again, displays Bakhtin’s first carnivalesque characteristic and blurs the boundaries between the play and real life. However, it does not explicitly allude to Cleon’s warfare, but it may be implied. The third instance follows shortly after the second, in Dicaeopolis’ attempt to explain his motivations in defence of the Spartans. A more socially and politically engaged context can be established here:

Dicaeopolis

<p>τε γὰρ τρόπους τοὺς τῶν ἀγροίκων οἶδα χαίροντας σφόδρα, ἐάν τις αὐτοὺς εὐλογῆ καὶ τὴν πόλιν ἀνήρ ἀλαζῶν καὶ δίκαια κᾶδικα· κἀνταῦθα λανθάνουσ’ ἀπεμπολῶμενοι (...) αὐτός τ’ ἐμαυτὸν ὑπὸ Κλέωνος ἄπαθον ἐπίσταμαι διὰ τὴν πέρυσι κωμῳδίαν. εἰσελκύσας γὰρ μ’ εἰς τὸ βουλευτήριον διέβαλλε καὶ ψευδῆ κατεγλώττιζέ μου κάκυκλοβόρει κᾶπλυνεν, ὥστ’ ὀλίγου πάνυ ἀπωλόμην μολυνοπραγμονούμενος.</p>	<p>For I know the habits of countrymen; they are very joyful, when a vagrant speaks well of them and the city, whether justly or unjustly; and thereupon they are bought and sold unknowingly; (...) And for my own part I know what I suffered by Cleon, because of last year’s comedy. For after he drew me towards the council, he accused me and falsely talked me down and shouted like the Cycloborus and abused me, that I almost died having gotten into a dirty quarrel.</p>
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(Ar. *Ach.* 370-4, 377-82)

⁷⁴ Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 6.

⁷⁵ Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 299-300.

Apart from the first carnivalesque characteristic, an overt application of Bakhtin's other characteristics is not to be found in this fragment. This critique of Cleon is similar to an interjection, for the Acharnians do not respond to Dicaeopolis' remarks. Instead they express their impatience. However, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the character of Dicaeopolis may allude to an extra-theatrical accusation by Cleon, directed at Aristophanes himself. The fourth reference to Cleon can be viewed in this same light: “οὐ γάρ με νῦν γε διαβαλεῖ Κλέων ὅτι ξένων παρόντων τὴν πόλιν κακῶς λέγω.” (“For Cleon cannot accuse me now, that I speak badly of the city in the presence of foreigners’.”)⁷⁶. This, Biles (2011) claims, is the reason that Dicaeopolis and Aristophanes can often be assimilated in references to Cleon. In addition, he indicates that in lines 370-374 of the third fragment, Dicaeopolis berates the Athenians' inclination to be convinced by deceptive speakers, Cleon being a prime example⁷⁷.

Biles (2011) concludes that both Dicaeopolis and Aristophanes can be addressing this critique on the Athenians in *Acharnians*, which leaves the fifth instance of Cleon's slander, found in the *parabasis*. The chorus leader appears to be addressing the audience, and the direct context of critique of Cleon is in line with lines 370-374:

Chorus leader

φησὶν δ' εἶναι πολλῶν ἀγαθῶν ἄξιος	The poet says he deserves many blessings
ὕμῃν ὁ ποιητής, παύσας ὑμᾶς ξενικοῖσι	from you, for he stopped you from being
λόγοις μὴ λίαν ἐξαπατᾶσθαι, μήτ'	exceedingly deceived by foreign speeches,
ἥδεσθαι θωπευομένους, μήτ' εἶναι	and from being delighted after being
χαυνοπολίτας.	flattered, and from being gaping fools.
(...)	(...)
πρὸς ταῦτα Κλέων καὶ παλαμάσθω	With regard to this, let Cleon devise a plan
καὶ πᾶν ἐπ' ἐμοὶ τεκταίνεσθω.	and contrive anything against me. For
τὸ γὰρ εὖ μετ' ἐμοῦ καὶ τὸ δίκαιον	goodness and justice will be my allies, and I
ξύμμαχον ἔσται, κοῦ μή ποθ' ἄλῶ	will not ever be caught acting like him

⁷⁶ Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 502-3.

⁷⁷ Biles, 2011, p.77-8.

περὶ τὴν πόλιν ὧν ὥσπερ ἐκεῖνος
δειλὸς καὶ λακαταπύγων.

towards the city, cowardly and very
lascivious.

(Ar. *Ach.* 633-5, 659)

In this fragment, Biles (2011) states, Aristophanes appears to have “counteracted the problem with regard to *xenikoi logoi*”⁷⁸. The comparison between the comic poet and his main character in references to Cleon, conveys an ambiguous message towards the audience by blurring the boundaries between extra-theatre life and comedy. The fact that the carnivalesque characteristics are featured less in fragments criticising Cleon, compared to other instances of criticism, may support this. However, as Olson (2002) touched upon, it is important to keep in mind that it cannot be stated that Dicaeopolis’ actions portray an ideal example for the citizens of Athens⁷⁹.

2.3 Conclusion on Aristophanes’ *Acharnians*

In this chapter, a closer examination of Bakhtin’s theory of carnival has been carried out with respect to its application in Aristophanes’ *Acharnians*. In order to conduct this analysis, specific focus has been placed on the identification of the theory’s five carnivalesque characteristics: the destruction of socio-hierarchical structures and inequality pertaining to extra-carnival life, the display of eccentric behaviour, *carnivalistic mésalliances*, profanation, and grotesque imagery. Subsequently, the presence of Bakhtin’s characteristics has been analysed in relation to the occurrence of political criticism found in four fragments within *Acharnians*, for the purpose of answering the question: *To which extent and to what purpose has Aristophanes incorporated criticism towards the Peloponnesian War and contemporary politics in his comedies Acharnians and Lysistrata?*

The first of Bakhtin’s characteristics, the destruction of non-carnival hierarchies, is featured prominently within three instances of political criticism, including the carnivalistic acts belonging to this category: crowning and uncrowning. The most overt illustration of this characteristic can be spotted in the defamation of Cleon. While Aristophanes has incorporated no reference to his explicit policies, a sharp critique on his person is expressed. A more general message to the audience, implying to be wary of deceptive politicians like him, is implemented in the play. A more covert example of the destruction of hierarchies, is

⁷⁸ Biles, 2011, p.78.

⁷⁹ Olson, 2002, p.47.

conveyed through the decrowning of Euripides' tragic character Telephus. Dicaeopolis acquires his authority when addressing the Acharnians in a speech, asserting the authority of comedy itself in the process. This may amplify the seriousness of the political criticism directed at Aristophanes' audience. The act of uncrowning can also be identified in the depiction of Dicaeopolis' opponent: the Athenian general Lamachus. The destruction of hierarchy, and thereby of Lamachus' authority, can be established in the hardships he is confronted with, resulting from the circumstances surrounding the Peloponnesian War. This stands in sharp contrast to Dicaeopolis' utopian realm, brought about by his personal peace treaty with the Spartans. The presence of Bakhtin's fifth carnivalesque characteristic, the grotesque, demonstrated in the overt sexual indulgence of Dicaeopolis, adds to the pervasiveness of humour in the fragments containing oppositions between him and Lamachus. At the same time, however, abundance, freedom, and unity, which are denoted by Bakhtin as typical elements of utopia, are displayed by these grotesque images. The advantageous living conditions at the Dionysian feast, where Dicaeopolis and the Acharnians celebrate in unison, can represent a utopian microcosm of peace. The application of grotesque imagery adds to the pacifistic sentiment in the scene in which Dicaeopolis concedes to provide a portion of his peace to a bride as well. The offering of food and sexual conducts are directly linked to peace, as is the second carnivalesque characteristic: eccentricity on the part of the bride. The prominence of this imagery, creating a humorous effect, offer a certain ambivalence to Dicaeopolis' comment on women not being responsible for the negative war conducts by men, and thereby gives shape to this instance of political critique.

As mentioned earlier in reference to Cleon, no instances of criticism seem to directly attack or imply the alteration of specific identifiable policies. However, more general disadvantages brought about by the Peloponnesian War can be distinguished within the plot of the *Acharnians*, such as the injustice and inattentiveness of the assemblymen resulting in the futile distribution of Athenian war funds, the limited food portions and contraband goods, and the devastation of the countryside. This criticism in combination with the prominence of carnivalesque features suggest that the theory of carnival is applicable to *Acharnians*, and that Aristophanes' text can be interpreted accordingly. Since carnival involves the celebration of the replaceability of extra-theatrical political and socioeconomic organization, the utopian character of the comedy may shed a defining light on the play's purpose. The integration of criticism can in this regard be viewed as being part of a prevailing communal hope for the future, since a positive pathos emerges in the context of the carnival sense of the world.

3. *Lysistrata*

Lysistrata was most likely performed at the Lenaea in the year 411 B.C., thirteen years after *Acharnians*. This comedy is considered to be the most popular of Aristophanes' plays, which is often associated with the dominant role of Lysistrata, being the first female protagonist of this kind⁸⁰. Lysistrata and the women around her form an unprecedented opposition against the established order, and thereby male hierarchy. The extra-theatrical exclusion of women in Athenian politics and the reduction of their social status can be traced back to a myth. A conflict between Poseidon and Athena concerning the patronship of Athens led to the intervention of the mythical king Cecrops, who allowed both women and men to vote. Since there were more women than men present at the time, Athena won, leading to the revenge of men. Henceforth women were prohibited to vote and identified as wives and daughters of the men of Athens⁸¹.

On the one hand, the inversion of gender roles in *Lysistrata* has led to the play being the subject of multiple feminist studies, which draw attention to the display of an unjust subordination. On the other hand, there are scholars who believe that a hysterical female world is being depicted, thus creating an extra layer of ridicule, by which the male order is re-established⁸². Bierl (2012) justly points out that, despite the symbols and inversions implying a possible proto-feminist stance, Aristophanes' exact position regarding these gender roles cannot be retrieved. A certain ambivalence to the use of women in the play predominates and it is therefore important not to lose sight of the Peloponnesian War and peace as the main thematic focus⁸³. This viewpoint is the guiding principle in this chapter's analysis of *Lysistrata*. Therefore, the unique position of women and their political engagement inside the play is reflected upon in specific relation to Bakhtin's theory of carnival. Similar to the previous chapter, the main plot elements of *Lysistrata* are described first, in order to determine a general relationship between the carnivalesque and the comedy. Subsequently three instances of political criticism are analysed while investigating the presence of Bakhtin's five carnivalesque characteristics.

⁸⁰ Henderson, 2000, p.254; Konstan, 1993, p.439.

⁸¹ Vidal-Naquet, 1986, pp. 216-8; Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 18.9.

⁸² Stott, 1988, pp.75-6.

⁸³ Bierl, 2012, p.258. This may be supported by the comedy's title and protagonist's name: "Λυσιστράτη" ("Disbander of armies").

3.1 Plot *Lysistrata*

At the beginning of the play, Lysistrata is joined by her neighbour Calonice, and awaits the arrival of the other invited women from different city-states. She reveals to Calonice the purpose of their meeting: “...ὅλης τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἐν ταῖς γυναιξίν ἐστιν ἡ σωτηρία.” (“...the salvation of whole Hellas rest in the hands of women!”)⁸⁴. Their late arrival is, on the other hand, denoted as typical of Athenians: “ἅπαντα δρώσας τοῦ δέοντος ὕστερον.” (“All the things they have to do, they do too late.”)⁸⁵. Subsequently, several women enter the scene, among whom Myrrhine (a young Athenian wife), Lampito (a Spartan wife), and other women from Acharnae, Boeotia and Corinth. Lysistrata asks them if they long for their husbands, who have been away at war for a long time. In addition, she requires the women to join her, in order to end the Peloponnesian War. These, in turn, show their strong willingness to achieve peace, but first decline the offer when Lysistrata explains that they must abstain from having sex with their husbands. Lampito is the first to agree with Lysistrata, and after a display of reluctance, the other women concede as well.

Since the funds stored in the temple on the Acropolis provide the Athenian men with the means to wage war, Lampito asks how they can be held in check. Thereupon Lysistrata suggests that the elderly women, who are represented as a separate chorus in the comedy, occupy the Acropolis in the pretence of sacrificing for war. The women take a collective oath so as to remain faithful to the sexual abstinence, for which they use a cup of wine. The elderly women then seize the Acropolis and refuse to open the gates unless the Athenian men agree to reconcile with the Spartans, while Lampito leaves the scene to effectuate a similar situation in Sparta. A chorus consisting of old men deliberate on the occupation of the Acropolis by the women who are in possession of the sacred image of Athena. Their chorus leader (κορυφαῖος) speaks of smoking out all the elderly women and the chorus subsequently approach the citadel while carrying logs. The chorus of old women and their chorus leader (κορυφαία) tend to each other and the fire, after which a dialogue between the men’s chorus leader and the women’s chorus leader takes place, who threaten each other with physical pains.

A magistrate (πρόβουλος) enters the scene, proclaiming the fastidiousness of women (ἡ τρυφή) and their acts of intemperance (ἀκολαστάσματα), of which their worship of

⁸⁴ Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* 29-30.

⁸⁵ Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* 57.

Sabazios is indicative⁸⁶. The leader of the men’s chorus complains to the magistrate about his treatment by the old women. Subsequently, the magistrate himself is being restrained by the women, when he is set on collecting money from the Acropolis. However, as he is about to force his way into the gates of the Acropolis, Lysistrata comes forward and says: “τί δεῖ μοχλῶν; οὐ γὰρ μοχλῶν δεῖ μᾶλλον ἢ νοῦ καὶ φρενῶν.” (“Why are crowbars needed? Because there is no need for crowbars, but rather for sense and thoughts’’) ⁸⁷. The magistrate calls for several archers to deal with the situation and tie Lysistrata up, but the old women fight against them and take the upper hand. The leader of the women’s chorus declares that, if not being bothered by anyone, “... ἴθελω ἴγὼ σωφρόνως ὥσπερ κόρη καθῆσθαι...” (“...I would rather like to sit chaste at home, as a maiden...’’) ⁸⁸. The magistrate then asks Lysistrata to explain their motives for occupying the Acropolis, to which she reveals that they intend to prevent the men from using money to wage war, and diminish the opportunities for Pisander and others who seek a political position to steal money. Instead, the women will manage the treasury themselves, since the situation is not too different from managing money inside the domestic sphere. She recalls the mistakes made by men, which the women have heard inside the home, while having to remain silent, for “πόλεμος δ’ ἀνδρεςσι μελήσει.” (“War will concern men’’) ⁸⁹. Lysistrata inverts the situation by telling the magistrate to remain silent instead, and declares that “πόλεμος δὲ γυναῖξι μελήσει.” (“War will concern women’’) ⁹⁰. Lysistrata tells the men that the women will handle the politics of war in the way they handle a spindle and wool.

Subsequently, after Lysistrata has explained the women’s disadvantages connected to the war, only the leader of the men’s chorus and the leader of the women’s chorus remain on stage. While the former compares the women’s actions to tyranny, the latter adds that, even though she is a woman, she may offer advice. Moreover, she states that the men are endangering everyone by wasting money. When Lysistrata re-enters the scene, she is struggling to keep the other women faithful to their communal oath of abstaining from sexual acts. Cinesias, Myrrhine’s husband, then approaches the Acropolis and tries to persuade his wife to come back to their house, which has become a mess. However, the most important reason for his appearance is the sexual frustration on his side caused by the abstinence. His

⁸⁶ Henderson, 2000, p.320: Sabazios (Σαβάζιος) is a Phrygian god akin to Dionysus. His worship was popular among women and slaves in Athens.

⁸⁷ Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* 431-2.

⁸⁸ Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* 473.

⁸⁹ Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* 520. Aristophanes parodies Homer’s epos, as these exact words are said to Penelope by her husband Hector in Homer’s *Ilias* 6.492.

⁹⁰ Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* 538.

wife declares not to listen, unless the men put a stop to the war. Cinesias agrees to Myrrhine's condition, but deceives her husband by slipping away. A Spartan herald then enters the scene and explains that the situation in Sparta is similar. Consequently, Cinesias urges the herald to make haste to Sparta, in order to send ambassadors for a peace treaty. The chorus of men and the chorus of women reconcile and merge into one, while Lysistrata calls forward the actual personification of Reconciliation (Διαλλαγή). When the Spartan and Athenian ambassadors have come to an agreement, Lysistrata informs them that the women can be retrieved from the Acropolis. At the end of the play Athenian and Spartan delegates sing to one another about their common war efforts in the past, which tie both city-states together, and the goddess Athena is declared victorious.

The ubiquity of carnivalesque features within *Lysistrata* can already be established in the plot development. The two most prominent oppositions found within the comedy are the aforementioned reversal of gender roles and the alteration, even mixing, of the domestic and public sphere. An extra layer incorporated in the first binary opposition, which most likely adds to the comic effect of the play, can be identified in the cross-dressing of the actors. Bierl (2012) lays emphasis on the grotesqueness of the stage props in fifth-century comedy, such as typical masks and additional bodywear, which enabled the male actors to play women more effectively⁹¹. Wilson (1982) adduces the male actors as an argument against any political implication directed at the audience being present in the play, for the contemporary audience of Athens would find it "far too amusing"⁹². However, following the logic of this argument, the same should apply for tragedy. When examining this factor within context of Bakhtin's theory, it can be argued that non-carnival hierarchies are brought down in a subverted realm, displaying the women's engagement in the area of men's politics. The women community, being a novel element in drama, breaks the barriers of age, class and nationality⁹³. The extra layer, created by the use of male actors, is an ambivalent feature, which, as Bakhtin himself mentions in his theory, allows for criticism within a frame of humour.

With regard to the second opposition in the comedy, the incorporation of the domestic and the public sphere, a pervasive ambiguity can be identified as well. The first carnivalesque characteristic and a possible female utopian realm, are displayed in the women's community and liberation from the *oikos*. However, this liberation is accompanied by a concern for the disruption of the home, and in order to save their domestic domain, the women leave it in

⁹¹ Bierl, 2012, p.261.

⁹² Wilson, 1982, p.157.

⁹³ Konstan, 1993, pp.433, 439.

pursuit of a peace treaty. This pursuit is coupled with several instances of Bakhtin's second carnivalesque characteristic: eccentricity. An example of these comic absurdities is *Lysistrata's* accomplishment of convening women, who hail from different city-states, in times of war. Other contradictory aspects and motives are represented in the display of grotesque behaviour on the part of the women; they are portrayed as sensual and bibulous in line with traits typically ascribed to women in Greek literature of the fifth-century. This may be connected with the anxiety about women's independence, which is expressed by the male characters in *Lysistrata*, even though women are simultaneously regarded as guardians of the home. This, Konstan (1993) rightly proposes, creates tension⁹⁴.

Concerning the slander of politicians, unlike Lamachus in *Acharnians*, the characters presented on stage in *Lysistrata* are all fictional. No specific proposals in relation to policies of the Peloponnesian War are introduced by the women, apart from the negotiated peace. However, by describing their unique point of view on warfare, instances of political criticism can be identified, which is reflected on later in this chapter. Westlake (1980) and Wilson (1982) both refute the presence of any seriousness within the content of *Lysistrata*, and thereby the integration of political criticism. They argue that the dominance of comic elements, in particular the women's struggle with the continuation of the sexual abstinence, discards this seriousness. According to Wilson, the prejudices of men about the nature of women are confirmed in the process⁹⁵. However, one can argue that the men in the play are subjected to the same kind of prejudice and are caricatured correspondingly; they are affected by the conjugal sex strike as well, even worse than the women, which leads to the formation of the peace treaty.

Westlake (1980) and Wilson (1982) not only claim that the large display of humour serves as evidence against this critique of gender relations, but also argue against any pacifistic undertone. Westlake (1980) specifically attempts to undermine any recommendation or moral advice for the future on Aristophanes' part, by asking if a peace proposal as portrayed in *Lysistrata* is realistic with regard to the extra-theatrical developments of the war around the year 411 B.C⁹⁶. However, the purpose of the utopian character of the comedy does not have to be taken literally or result in the refutation of a pacifistic message. In addition, Westlake rebuts the possibility that Aristophanes conveys ideals for future politics by mentioning that Old Comedy focuses on the present, rather than

⁹⁴ Konstan, 1993, pp.436-7.

⁹⁵ Wilson, 1982, p.159.

⁹⁶ Westlake, 1980, pp.38-9.

the future⁹⁷. The setting of *Lysistrata* in Athens during the war is in accordance with this formula, enhancing the audience's carnival sense of the world by breaking the boundaries between carnival and extra-carnival life. With regard to Westlake's specific comment, however, idealistic elements or advice, which may possibly relate to the future do not have to be expressed literally, as is inherent in a utopia. He further denotes the audience's interpretation of *Lysistrata*'s ending to be along the lines of a vain dream, and therefore devoid of serious intent. The women return to their domestic sphere, thus destroying their utopia⁹⁸. In dismissing feminist ideals, the possibility of a different interpretation or message, specifically linked to a utopian realm of peace, is neglected by Westlake. At the comedy's ending, the Spartan and Athenian men and women are reunited and celebrate the achievement of peace in song, in agreement with carnival's festive perception of the world. In order to identify the extent to which Bakhtin's theory of carnival is applied and its purpose within *Lysistrata* in more detail, it is necessary to analyse passages of the play that contain political criticism of the Peloponnesian War in more detail.

3.2 Political criticism and the carnivalesque

The first excerpt that is examined for Bakhtin's five carnivalesque characteristics leads to a statement of political criticism expressed by Lysistrata. The Acropolis has recently been occupied by the chorus of old women, when the chorus of old men approaches, carrying burning logs:

Women's chorus leader

ἔασον, ὦ, τουτὶ τί ἦν; ἄνδρες	Stop it you! Oh, what is this? Vexing men!
πονωπονηροί· οὐ γάρ ποτ' ἂν χρηστοί	No good men, no pious men would ever do
γ' ἔδρων οὐδ' εὐσεβεῖς τάδ' ἄνδρες.	this.

Men's chorus leader

τουτὶ τὸ πρᾶγμα ἡμῖν ἰδεῖν	This matter here comes unexpected to us;
ἀπροσδόκητον ἦκει· ἐσμὸς γυναικῶν	this flock of women at the gates come to the
οὐτοσὶ θύρασιν αὖ βοηθεῖ.	others' aid.

⁹⁷ Westlake, 1980, p.42.

⁹⁸ Westlake, 1980, p.44.

Women's chorus leader

τί βδύλλεθ' ἡμᾶς; οὐ τί που πολλὰ
δοκοῦμεν εἶναι; καὶ μὴν μέρος γ' ἡμῶν
ὄρατ' οὐπω τὸ μυριοστόν.

What? Are you in deadly fear of us? Do we
perhaps seem to be a handful? And you
have not yet witnessed half of our force!

Men's chorus leader

ὦ Φαιδρία, ταύτας λαλεῖν ἐάσομεν
τοσαυτί; οὐ περικατᾶξαι τὸ ξύλον
τύπτοντ' ἐχρῆν τιν' αὐταῖς;
(...)

O Phaedrias, do we permit these women
here to keep chattering? Had no one deemed
it necessary to break these women by
striking them with logs?
(...)

Women's chorus leader

αἰρώμεθ' ἡμεῖς θοῦδατος τὴν κάλπιν, ὦ
Ῥοδίππη.

Let us take up the water pitcher, o
Rhodippe.

Men's chorus leader

τί δ', ὦ θεοῖς ἐχθρά, σὺ δεῦρ' ὕδωρ
ἔχουσ' ἀφίκου;

Why, o enemy to the gods, did you come
here, carrying water?

Women's chorus leader

τί δ' αὖ σὺ πῦρ, ὦ τύμβ', ἔχων; ὡς
σαυτὸν ἐμπυρεύσων;

Why, in turn, are you in possession of fire, o
tomb? So that you can set yourself on fire?
(Ar. *Lys.* 350-7, 370-3)

Within this passage three of Bakhtin's carnivalesque characteristics can be identified. The occupation of the Acropolis, which is transformed into a battlefield can be regarded as an instance of the fourth carnivalesque characteristic: profanation. The holy citadel has become debased, by which the sense of the sacred has been reduced. This characteristic strengthens the audience's experience of the extra-theatrical setting shining through, for the audience sitting inside the theatre had a clear view of the Acropolis during the play. This experience

becomes even more enhanced by the display of the third carnivalesque characteristic: *carnivalistic mésalliances*. This feature is represented by the use of a pitcher as a weapon, which is connected to the establishment of free and familiar contact between all participants of carnival, by means of parodying extra-carnival life and the merging of the domestic and public domain. The last carnivalesque characteristic elaborated upon in this scene is the grotesque, which can be identified in an extended metaphor, indicating the presence of degrading images pertaining to the lower stratum of the body. Bierl (2012) explicates that the Acropolis can be seen as a woman's uterus, thus creating a more intricate link between the plot's two plans designed to create peace: the sex strike and the occupation of the Acropolis⁹⁹. The men approaching the Propylaea, which represents the entrance of the uterus, while bringing burning logs are reminiscent of the men who carried phalluses during processions (φαλλοφόροι), as was customary during Dionysian festivals. This image in combination with fire, a metaphor for passion, are redolent of a lover's lament beside his mistress' door as found in the Greek elegiac motif: *paraclausithyron*¹⁰⁰. The polis, the *oikos* and the female body merge inside this imagery, thus shaping a context of carnivalesque familiarity leading up to Lysistrata's criticism, found in her declaration explaining the women's actions. Lysistrata here directly addresses the political issue of distributing public funds not for the benefit of the city:

Lysistrata

<p>ἵνα τὰργύριον σῶν κατέχοιμεν καὶ μὴ πολεμοῖτε δι' αὐτό.</p>	<p>So that we may keep the money safe and that you do not wage war by using it.</p>
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Magistrate

<p>διὰ τὰργύριον πολεμοῦμεν γάρ;</p>	<p>For we are at war because of the money?</p>
--------------------------------------	--

Lysistrata

<p>καὶ τᾶλλα γε πάντ' ἐκυκήθη. ἵνα γὰρ Πείσανδρος ἔχοι κλέπτειν χοὶ ταῖς ἀρχαῖς ἐπέχοντες ἀεὶ τινα κορκορυγὴν ἐκύκων.</p>	<p>And all other things are verily thrown into disorder as well. It was in fact so, that Pisander and those reaching for offices could steal while they always created some</p>
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⁹⁹ Bierl, 2012, p.264.

¹⁰⁰ Bierl, 2012, pp.266-76.

kind of tumult.

(Ar. *Lys.* 488-91)

By singling out Pisander as an abusive, real-life contemporary politician, the boundary between the comedy and extra-theatre politics dissolves.

The second fragment featuring political criticism within *Lysistrata* involves another extended metaphor, voiced more clearly by Lysistrata herself. Having expressed the women's objective of ending the Peloponnesian War, Lysistrata is asked by the magistrate how such a difficult task is to be accomplished. She then compares the just governance of the polis with the handling of wool:

Lysistrata

...καὶ τοὺς γε συνισταμένους τούτους	...and concerning those who cling together
καὶ τοὺς πιλοῦντας ἑαυτοὺς ἐπὶ ταῖς	and bind themselves together for offices,
ἀρχαῖσι διαζῆναι καὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς	comb them and pull out their heads; then
ἀποτῖλαι· εἶτα ξαίνειν εἰς καλαθίσκον	card it in the little basket combined with
κοινὴν εὖνοϊαν ἅπαντας	goodwill, mixing all; the settlers from
καταμειγνόντας· τοὺς τε μετοίκους κεῖ	abroad and any other stranger who is a
τις ξένος ἢ φίλος ὑμῖν, κεῖ τις ὀφείλη	friend of yours, and anyone who owes
τῷ δημοσίῳ, καὶ τούτους ἐγκαταμειῖσαι	money to the public treasury, and mix them
	together;

(Ar. *Lys.* 577-582)

Once again, the domestic environment becomes intertwined with public affairs, by the application of *carnivalistic mésalliances*, in the symbolic comparison of women's treatment of wool. Westlake (1980) claims that, even though a message of unity can be conveyed in this metaphor, the passage is only tenuously connected to the central theme, and therefore no political recommendation can be established¹⁰¹. However, within the context of Bakhtin's

¹⁰¹ Westlake, 1980, p.43.

carnival, and assuming that the *Lysistrata* and the other women work towards a utopian realm of peace, this advocacy of unison adds to the utopian ideals, which may hold implications for non-carnival life. As Konstan (1993) indicates, the women's sentiment towards warfare is depicted and subordinates the display of sex and its comical effects within the comedy. As a result of *Lysistrata* speaking on equal terms with the magistrate, having broken official life's hierarchies, her message can be seen as gender-neutral, promoting panhellenism. The women may offer a different model of social relations, using their own approach marked by solidarity¹⁰².

The actual criticism pertaining to this fragment, may lie in the indication of the disrupted *oikos*¹⁰³. Subsequent to this metaphor, the magistrate derides *Lysistrata*'s comparison and states that women do not bear the burdens of war, to which *Lysistrata* replies:

Lysistrata

πρώτιστον μὲν γε τεκοῦσαι	First of all, giving birth to sons and sending
κάκπέμψασαι παῖδας ὀπλίτας—	them out as hoplites-
(...)	(...)

Lysistrata

τῆς δὲ γυναικὸς μικρὸς ὁ καιρὸς, κἄν	However, the bloom of a woman is short.
τούτου μὴ ἴπιλάβηται, οὐδεὶς ἐθέλει	And if she does not take this, no one wishes
γῆμαι ταύτην, ὀττευομένη δὲ κάθηται.	to marry her, and she sits while looking for
(...)	omens.
	(...)
	(Ar. <i>Lys.</i> 588-9, 596-7)

The women's unique views and disadvantages resulting from the war are explicitly mentioned here. These comments contribute to the revealed disruption of the domestic sphere, strengthening *Lysistrata*'s metaphor for advocating unison¹⁰⁴.

¹⁰² Konstan, 1993, pp.435-6, 442.

¹⁰³ Konstan, 1993, pp.439.

¹⁰⁴ Henderson, 2000, p.351: Henderson notes that these omens pertain to marriage.

The third and last excerpt analysed for Bakhtin's carnivalesque characteristics in this chapter involves the interaction and reconciliation at the end of the play. The Spartan and Athenian ambassadors have arrived, in order to make a peace treaty, for which they request Lysistrata's presence:

Lysistrata

πρόσαγε λαβοῦσα πρῶτα τοὺς
Λακωνικούς, καὶ μὴ χαλεπῇ τῇ χειρὶ
μηδ' ἀθαστικῇ, μηδ' ὥσπερ ἡμῶν
ἄνδρες ἀμαθῶς τοῦτ' ἔδρων, ἀλλ' ὡς
γυναϊκας εἰκόσ, οἰκείως πάνυ. ἦν μὴ
διδῶ τὴν χεῖρα, τῆς σάθης ἄγε. ἴθι καὶ
σὺ τούτους τοὺς Ἀθηναίους ἄγε·

(...)

λαβοῦσα δ' ὑμᾶς λοιδορῆσαι βούλομαι
κοινῇ δικαίως, οἱ μᾶς γε χέρνιβος
βωμοὺς περιρραίνοντες ὥσπερ
ξυγγενεῖς Ὀλυμπίασιν, ἐν Πύλαις,
Πυθοῖ—πόσους εἴποιμι' ἂν ἄλλους, εἴ
με μηκύνειν δέοι; —ἐχθρῶν παρόντων
βαρβάρῳ στρατεύματι Ἑλληνας
ἄνδρας καὶ πόλεις ἀπόλλυτε. εἷς μὲν
λόγος μοι δεῦρ' ἀεὶ περαίνεται.

First Athenian ambassador

ἐγὼ δ' ἀπόλλυμαι γ' ἀπεψωλημένος.

Bring the Spartans here first, while taking
hold of them, and not with a cruel nor self-
willed hand, nor ignorantly as our husbands
did to us, but as befits women, altogether
properly. If he does not give his hand, lead
him by his penis. You, go and bring these
Athenians as well;

Having taken hold of you, I wish to rail
justly at you both, who make use of the
same holy water when besprinkling the
altars, as relatives, at the Olympia, at
Thermopylae, Pytho—how many other
places could I name, if I was forced to
prolong this? —While enemies are present
with their barbarian army, you destroy
Greek men and cities. One argument of
mine is now brought to an end.

And I am destroyed because my penis bursts

out of its skin!

(Ar. *Lys.* 1115-21, 1128-36)

Mikhail Bakhtin's fifth characteristic, the grotesque, is strongly represented in this scene. The Athenian, as well as the Spartan ambassadors, are revealed to suffer from an erection, and react correspondingly to Lysistrata's plea for reconciliation. The actual physical imitation of this, displayed by the use of disproportional phalluses as stage props, strengthens the comic relief of this scene¹⁰⁵. While De Ste Croix (1972) denotes these words by Lysistrata to be "completely serious in character and without a single jest", through which political implications can be singled out, Wilson (1982) claims the exact opposite¹⁰⁶. However, when applying the carnivalesque qualities of Bakhtin's theory to this scene, a pervading ambivalence in motives can be established. Wilson (1982) is right when he underscores a defect in De Ste Croix's claim, for Lysistrata's remark "τῆς σάθης ἄγε" ("lead him by his penis") can be understood as an instance of ridicule. However, the presence of comical elements alone is insufficient to refute completely any pacifistic message or serious intent by displaying political criticism; the carnival sense of the world allows for its incorporation.

Henderson (2000) provides an interesting observation regarding the seriousness of this scene. Lysistrata's character has, especially in contrast to the other women featured in the comedy, shown signs of power, wisdom, discipline, and can be identified as a defender of the home and polis. These are typical traits reminiscent of the goddess Athena, acting as a voice of reason, who is declared victorious at the end of the play: "...τὰν δ' αὖ σιὰν τὰν παμμάχον, τὰν Χαλκίικον ὕμνη." ("And sing a song, in turn, for Athena of the brazen house, who is sufficient for every battle")¹⁰⁷. In this respect, another instance of profanation can be determined in Lysistrata's embodiment of the qualities of a goddess.

Lysistrata clearly expresses the Spartans' and Athenians' communal past and their connection through religion. She consequently criticises their violence against one another, while the Persians are presented as a more logical common enemy. A plea for panhellenism, and thereby peace, serves as a suitable interpretation in line with a carnivalesque utopian realm.

¹⁰⁵ Bierl, 2012, p.261.

¹⁰⁶ De Ste Croix, 1972, p.368; Wilson, 1982, pp.160-1.

¹⁰⁷ Henderson, 2000, pp.260-1; Aristophanes, *Lysisistrata* 1320/1.

3.3 Conclusion on Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*

In this chapter, the plot and three text fragments of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* displaying political criticism have been analysed by exploring the application of Mikhail Bakhtin's five carnivalesque characteristics: the destruction socio-hierarchical structures and inequality pertaining to extra-carnival life, the display of eccentric behaviour, *carnivalistic mésalliances*, profanation, and grotesque imagery. This analysis has been carried out, in order to answer the question: *To which extent and to what purpose has Aristophanes incorporated criticism towards the Peloponnesian War and contemporary politics in his comedies Acharnians and Lysistrata?*

The destruction of non-carnival hierarchical structures and ambivalence can be established most evidently in the reversal of gender roles; male actors who cross-dress as women occupy the Acropolis and organise a conjugal sex strike, in order to achieve peace between Sparta and Athens. *Lysistrata*, the female protagonist, also converses on equal terms with the magistrate, through which free and familiar contact between the actors on stage is portrayed. Consequently, the boundary between the comedy and extra-theatrical politics is obscured. This effect is amplified by the presence of Bakhtin's third carnivalesque characteristic, *carnivalistic mésalliances*, which is featured prominently in two of the analysed scenes: water pitchers are used as weapons, and the domestic and public sphere become intertwined in the scene in which the treatment of wool serves as a metaphor for managing Athenian politics. Political critique concerning the disruption of the home, can be identified in *Lysistrata*'s subsequent comments on children and marriage, expressing women's point of view on the consequences of warfare.

The presence of the fourth carnivalesque characteristic, profanation, contributes to the audience's experience concerning the interference of non-carnival life and setting. The Acropolis, a holy citadel, is occupied and transformed into a battlefield. The women's motive for doing so, as expressed by *Lysistrata*, involves criticism of the men's management of the city's public funds. The contemporary politician Pisander, and others like him, are associated with stealing from this treasury. Another instance of profanation can be found in the character of *Lysistrata*, who displays qualities of the goddess Athena. This debasement may contribute to the integration of criticism on Athenian and Spartan warfare, while the ideal of panhellenism is simultaneously being advocated.

The grotesque, Bakhtin's fifth carnivalesque characteristic, is prominently featured in several instances of the analysed scenes. The sex strike organised by the women gives rise to many occasions of sexual frustration displayed by both the men and women in *Lysistrata*.

Adding to the comic effect of the play, is the use of theatre props, such as long phalluses most likely worn by the Athenian and Spartan delegates at the end of the comedy. The extended metaphor, in which the Acropolis represents a woman's uterus, as suggested by Bierl, links the polis, the *oikos* and the female body, providing a familiar, degraded context for the integration of political criticism.

When considering the prominence of Bakhtin's carnivalesque characteristics, it is noteworthy to examine the presence of utopia in *Lysistrata*. Even though a specific female utopian realm can be identified in the play, which results in the women's community and liberation from the home, a great concern on the women's side concerning the disruption of the home remains a visible conflict. While women and men are continually positioned opposite one another, it can be argued that, only when peace is established, a true utopian realm arises. This sense of community, in agreement with the carnival spirit, includes peace with the Spartans in line with panhellenistic sentiments conveyed in the comedy; only then can the domestic domain function properly as well. Consequently, if *Lysistrata* is interpreted according to Bakhtin's theory of carnival, it allows for the incorporation of political criticism and indirect transmission of utopian ideals to its audience.

4. Conclusion

In this thesis, two of Aristophanes' comedies, *Lysistrata* and *Acharnians*, have been analysed for the purpose of answering the following research question:

To which extent and to what purpose has Aristophanes incorporated criticism towards the Peloponnesian War and contemporary politics in his comedies Acharnians and Lysistrata?

In order to answer this question, the presence of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnival, established by the application of his five carnivalesque characteristics, has been examined with regard to specific passages displaying political criticism within *Acharnians* and *Lysistrata*. This examination has led to several conclusions on the intersection of humour and criticism, which reinforces the carnivalesque interpretation of incorporating criticism within Aristophanes' comedies.

While no direct comments on contemporary legislature can be identified within the comedies, criticism of the Peloponnesian War and contemporary politics can be construed on several levels. First of all, within the slander of politicians, like Cleon in *Acharnians*. Sharp attacks against his person are made, while having no direct effect on the comedy's plot. Critique of Cleon's political conduct may be best conveyed in Dicaeopolis' admonition not to listen to deceptive people, who are not working in the best interest of the city. The appearance of Lamachus adds another layer in the opposition between Dicaeopolis' utopian realm of peace and the continuance of the Peloponnesian War. Within *Lysistrata*, no non-fictional characters play an active role in the comedy. However, the contemporary politician Pisander is mentioned in the context of stealing from the Athens' treasury and an unjust distribution of war funds in general. This critical point is explicitly mentioned by Dicaeopolis in *Acharnians* as well, being the result of the inattentiveness of assemblymen. Further disadvantages resulting from the Peloponnesian War are expressed in the comedies as well, such as limited food rations and the disruption of the household effecting both men and women.

As to the purpose of the incorporation of criticism of the Peloponnesian War and politics, it can be noted that the carnivalesque characteristics are featured prominently in the selected instances of political criticism in *Acharnians* and *Lysistrata*. These characteristics largely contribute to the comical effect of the comedies, especially with regard to the first, third and fifth carnivalesque characteristics: the destruction of non-carnival hierarchies

including the act of crowning and uncrowning, *carnivalistic mésalliances*, and grotesque imagery. This inclusion of humour surrounds the instances of political criticism identified in the comedies, resulting in degradation and a familiar and free attitude between all participants of carnival: the audience and the characters in *Acharnians* and *Lysistrata*. An ambivalence, arising from these new, sensuous, half-real and half play-acted relationships, is conveyed, resulting in the dilution of the boundary between real and carnival life. The humour surrounding the critique of the Peloponnesian War and contemporary politics results in an indirect display of political criticism. In this sense, carnival is in line with De Ste Croix's notion that comedy may serve as an effective medium for political criticism, as humour brings it to a lower, better understandable level. Change, renewal and replaceability are celebrated within the carnival spirit, which sheds a defining light on the utopian realms of Aristophanes' two plays. Both the private utopian realm of Dicaeopolis, which is extended to other characters near the end of the play, and the utopia within *Lysistrata* are defined by peace. Celebration in line with the carnival sense of the world, as reflected in the Dionysian festivals, are brought about properly only when peace is established. This can be seen as a communal hope for the future and renewal, and although placed within an overall humorous context, political criticism as a means of awareness plays a prominent role. Even though Aristophanes' influence may not have resulted in a direct political interference, it probably led to a re-evaluation of moral values and hierarchies in society, creating an indirect impact on war politics within the minds of his audience.

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