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In The Shadow of Defeat: Aristophanes and Postwar Athens

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any other form for another degree or diploma at any other university or institute of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

I also declare that I am familiar with the rules of the School of History, Philosophy, Religion and Classics and the University of Queensland relating to the submission of this thesis.

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Abstract

Traditionally Athens of the early fourth century BC has been seen as a city in crisis. Early scholarship argues that Athens was in a deep economic depression, that its citizens were impoverished and that social tensions were running high. It was a city on the brink of collapse. This view relies heavily on Aristophanes' final two extant plays, *Assembly-Women* and *Wealth*, for its evidence. These scholars use Aristophanes as a factual witness to the state of Athens in the 390s and early 380s. More recent scholars, though, have called this traditional view into question. They argue that Athens actually experienced a quicker than expected postwar recovery; and that Aristophanes, being a comic poet, was exaggerating the situation for comic effect. However, these more recent scholars have not satisfactorily explained what Aristophanes was doing, that is, why he represented Athens in this way. Additionally, debate continues over the seriousness of Aristophanes' plays. Many scholars believe that Aristophanes was a serious man whose plays commented on serious problems and offered serious solutions. Others believe his plays are pure fantasy with very little, if any, connection to reality. Consequently it is important to establish the value of Aristophanes' plays as a source for Athenian history. This thesis aims to examine Aristophanes' representation of the socio-economic situation of early-fourth-century Athens in his last two extant plays *Assembly-Women* and *Wealth*, and to assess the accuracy of that representation. Using contemporaneous evidence, it will determine that the plays cannot be used independently as evidence of a city in crisis. It will demonstrate that Aristophanes continued to write his fourth-century plays in the same way he wrote his fifth-century plays: he largely invented a crisis and solved it in a fantastical way. This continuity of technique significantly advances the debate on the seriousness of his plays and provides an explanation for what Aristophanes was doing in his depictions of postwar Athens.

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Abbreviations

<i>Ach.</i>	<i>Acharnians</i>
<i>Aeschin.</i>	<i>Aeschines</i>
<i>AJP</i>	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
<i>Andoc.</i>	<i>Andocides</i>
<i>Ar.</i>	<i>Aristophanes</i>
<i>Arist.</i>	<i>Aristotle</i>
<i>Ath. Pol.</i>	<i>Athenian Constitution</i>
<i>Cl. Ant.</i>	<i>Classical Antiquity</i>
<i>CQ</i>	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
<i>CR</i>	<i>Classical Review</i>
<i>Dem.</i>	<i>Demosthenes</i>
<i>Diod.</i>	<i>Diodorus Siculus</i>
<i>Diog. Laert.</i>	<i>Diogenes Laertius</i>
<i>Eccl.</i>	<i>Ecclesiastusae, Assembly-Women</i>
<i>G&R</i>	<i>Greece and Rome</i>
<i>Harv. Stud.</i>	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i>
<i>Hell.</i>	<i>Hellenica</i>
<i>Hell. Oxy.</i>	<i>Hellenica Oxyrhynchia</i>
<i>Hesp.</i>	<i>Hesperia</i>
<i>IG</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Graecorum</i>
<i>Isae.</i>	<i>Isaeus</i>
<i>Isoc.</i>	<i>Isocrates</i>
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hellenic studies</i>
<i>Leg.</i>	<i>Laws</i>
<i>Lys.</i>	<i>Lysander</i>
<i>Mem.</i>	<i>Memorabilia</i>
<i>Nic.</i>	<i>Nicias</i>

Abbreviations (cont.)

<i>Nub.</i>	<i>Nubes, Clouds</i>
<i>Oec.</i>	<i>Oeconomicus</i>
<i>Pl.</i>	<i>Plato</i>
<i>Plut.</i>	<i>Plutarch</i>
<i>Plut.</i>	<i>Plutus, Wealth</i>
<i>Pol.</i>	<i>Politica</i>
<i>P. Oxy.</i>	<i>Oxyrhynchus Papyri</i>
<i>Ran.</i>	<i>Panae, Frogs</i>
<i>Resp.</i>	<i>Republic</i>
<i>Thuc.</i>	<i>Thucydides</i>
<i>Trap.</i>	<i>Trapeziticus</i>
<i>Vesp.</i>	<i>Vespaee, Wasps</i>
<i>Xen.</i>	<i>Xenophon.</i>
<i>ZPE</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally Athens of the early fourth century BC has been seen as a city in crisis.¹ Early scholarship argues that Athens was in a deep economic depression, that its citizens were impoverished and that social tensions were running high. It was a city on the brink of collapse. This view relies heavily on Aristophanes' final two extant plays, *Assembly-Women* and *Wealth*, for its evidence. These scholars use Aristophanes as a factual witness to the state of Athens in the 390s and early 380s. More recent scholars, though, have called this traditional view into question. They argue that Athens actually experienced a quicker than expected postwar recovery; and that Aristophanes, being a comic poet, was exaggerating the situation for comic effect. However, these more recent scholars have not satisfactorily explained what Aristophanes was doing, that is, why he represented Athens in this way. Additionally, debate continues over the seriousness of Aristophanes' plays. Many scholars believe that Aristophanes was a serious man whose plays commented on serious problems and offered serious solutions. Others believe his plays are pure fantasy with very little, if any, connection to reality. Consequently it is important to establish the value of Aristophanes' plays as a source for Athenian history. This thesis aims to examine Aristophanes' representation of the socio-economic situation of early-fourth-century Athens in his last two extant plays *Assembly-Women* and *Wealth*, and to assess the accuracy of that representation. Using contemporaneous evidence, it will determine that the plays cannot be used independently as evidence of a city in crisis. It will demonstrate that Aristophanes continued to write his fourth-century plays in the same way he wrote his fifth-century plays: he largely invented a crisis and solved it in a fantastical way. This continuity of technique significantly advances the debate on the seriousness of his plays and provides an explanation for what Aristophanes was doing in his depictions of postwar Athens.

Chapter one begins with a review of the scholarship on early fourth-century Athens. Early scholarship uses Aristophanes' fourth-century plays as accurate evidence for a postwar Athens in decline. More recent scholarship breaks from this traditional use and proposes a more cautious use of the plays, suggesting that Aristophanes exaggerates the socio-economic issues of Athens for comic purposes. By providing expositions of Aristophanes' last two extant plays, *Assembly-Women* and *Wealth*, the chapter identifies five features which suggest that Athens was experiencing a postwar decline: food crisis and impoverishment, a weak

¹ All dates in this thesis are BC unless otherwise stated.

economy, antagonism between rich and poor, redistributive solutions and weak public finances. Because both plays belong to the genre of Old Comedy the chapter then examines their performance context, placing particular emphasis on the role of the audience. Finally, the chapter presents a review of the long-running debate between the two schools of thought on the seriousness of Aristophanes. One school argues his plays are based on fact; the other that they are based on fantasy.

Chapter two puts Aristophanes' fourth-century plays to the test. It explores the five issues which appear to support the assumption that early fourth-century Athens was in crisis, and seeks to determine their value as evidence for decline. Firstly, the historical background of the plays is set. The chapter then takes each issue and systematically compares it to other contemporaneous evidence to determine its accuracy. The results are significant. Aristophanes exaggerates the intensity of food crises and impoverishment, the economy and antagonism between the rich and the poor in Athens. Additionally, he appears to have completely invented his comical redistributive solutions. However, the testing does confirm that during the late 390s and early 380s Athenian public finances were indeed in crisis. These findings prove that Aristophanes does not rely completely on fact or completely on fantasy to create his plays. This has important implications for the debate about the seriousness of Aristophanes, his value as a source for Athenian history and why he misrepresented the state of Athens in the early fourth century.

Chapter three concludes the thesis by addressing these implications. It restates both sides of the debate about the seriousness of Aristophanes. The findings of chapter two clearly support the fantasy side of the debate. However they do so with qualifications. The results show that Aristophanes used not only fantasy, but reality and popular culture as well, to create an Athens in crisis during the early fourth century. To which he then provided a fantastic solution. This provides evidence that Aristophanes continued to use the same technique he used in his fifth-century plays. This continuity of technique indicates that ancient historians have been inconsistent in their use of Aristophanes as an historical source. Consequently, Aristophanes' plays cannot be used as solid evidence for a postwar Athens in decline, but must be used with caution in conjunction with other evidence. Clearly, Aristophanes misrepresented the state of Athens in the early fourth century because he was using Old Comedy's tried and true method for making the Athenians laugh.

CHAPTER 1: ARISTOPHANES AND SCHOLARSHIP ON EARLY-FOURTH-CENTURY ATHENS

1.1 Scholarly Views of Early-Fourth-Century Athens

Athens is ‘dead in the water!’ (*Eccl.* 109). So Praxagora emphatically proclaims in Aristophanes’ extant play of 392. So too does modern scholarship on Athens in the early fourth century by Victor Ehrenberg, Maurice Croiset, Claude Mossé and Ephraim David.² These scholars have hailed Aristophanes’ last two extant plays, *Assembly-Women* and *Wealth*, as solid evidence that Athens was a city in crisis post-Peloponnesian War. They argue strongly that the plays prove Athenians in the 390s and early 380s suffered from abject poverty and famine; that the city was plagued by disease; and that crime and corruption ran unchecked. They believe that the plays show that the state was penniless and the economy broken; and that the *dēmos* was torn apart by a bitter antagonism between the rich and the poor. In addition they argue that things were so dire in Athens that the *dēmos* believed the only way forward was to consider a radical redistribution of wealth. Their arguments are not difficult to accept at face value. The Peloponnesian War in particular left Athens with severe social problems, devastating human losses, the destruction of the countryside and a deep economic depression. Additionally the last years of the fifth century saw Athenians suffer through the tyranny of the Thirty and the restoration of democracy. And now, in the early decades of the fourth century, Athens had committed itself to the Corinthian War, putting additional pressure on an already fragile state.³ However, more recently, works by Barry Strauss, Matthew Dillon and Paul Cartledge have tempered this picture of a postwar Athens in decline. These scholars agree that Athens was suffering and that more than likely solutions to the problems were being considered. However, they strongly caution against relying on the two plays alone as definitive evidence for the socio-economic state of Athens in the early fourth century.

Victor Ehrenberg clearly states that he relies on the plays of Old Comedy to provide an accurate historical account of Athenian life.⁴ He argues that the poets of Old Comedy took the

² Ehrenberg 1962: 70; Croiset 1973: 178; Mossé 1973: 12-13; David 1984: 3.

³ Croiset 1973: 168, 178; David 1984: 3.

⁴ Ehrenberg 1962: 1.

very real problems of Athenian society and gave them fantastical fairy-tale like solutions.⁵ He labels *Assembly-Women* and *Wealth* ‘social comedies’ which must be taken seriously on the grounds that they are accurate reflections of the political and social life of the Athenian citizens of the early fourth century.⁶ He believes that *Assembly-Women* makes a clear statement about the faults of the Athenian government in the early fourth century; that it provides evidence that Athens was in severe decline due to its bad politicians, the draining of state revenues, an uncertain foreign policy, a corrupt financial administration and a ‘chronic desire for change’ (173ff).⁷ He argues that the redistributive ideas put forward by the play clearly indicate that communist policies were discussed and seriously considered by Athenians. However, he provides no evidence for such a claim other than the similarities between the plays themselves and certain aspects of Praxagora’s scheme and Plato’s philosophical work the *Republic*.⁸

He argues that *Wealth* is a play based on the abject poverty that existed in Athens during the early fourth century; that it is evidence of the economic reality of the time and that Athens was in the grip of famine.⁹ He is particularly concerned with the plight of farmers and cites Aristophanes’ last two extant plays as ‘clear evidence’ of a decline in their living conditions in Athens after the Peloponnesian War.¹⁰ These men, given a voice by Aristophanes through Chremylus and his chorus in *Wealth*, Ehrenberg suggests, are a strong indicator of the beginnings of a rural proletariat at Athens.¹¹ He argues that both *Assembly-Women* and *Wealth*, through their portrayal of the impoverished majority, provide compelling evidence for the emergence of ‘revolutionary ferment’ amongst the lower classes.¹²

Maurice Croiset maintains that the last extant plays of Aristophanes are evidence that the Peloponnesian War had exhausted Athens; that almost all citizens were suffering and that the state was struggling to deal with the costs of that war.¹³ Like Ehrenberg, he seems to base his interpretation of the period on the plays of Aristophanes alone. In accepting Praxagora’s

⁵ Ehrenberg 1962: 38.

⁶ Ehrenberg 1962: 42, 67.

⁷ Ehrenberg 1962: 68.

⁸ Ehrenberg 1962: 67-8.

⁹ Ehrenberg 1962: 70-1.

¹⁰ Ehrenberg 1962: 81.

¹¹ Ehrenberg 1962: 72.

¹² Ehrenberg 1962: 71.

¹³ Croiset 1973: 168.

complaints (*Eccl.* 175-210) as an accurate assessment of Athens' problems after the Peloponnesian War, he also believes that her communistic solution is evidence that such hypotheses were part of Athenian public discourse of the time.¹⁴ Additionally, by declaring Comedy as the spokesperson for Athenian rural citizens he views *Wealth* as solid evidence for the impoverished state of small landowners in the early fourth century.¹⁵

Claude Mossé is in no doubt that Athens ended the Peloponnesian War defeated and humiliated. She argues that the plays, as texts of the 'immediate post-war period', provide evidence that the Peloponnesian War had caused immense suffering in Athens during the early fourth century.¹⁶ She maintains that both plays address the poverty of the people caused by this distress, and the inequalities of fortune between rich and poor.¹⁷ Additionally she argues that contemporary writers of the time 'echo' Aristophanes' words and also stress the increased suffering of the majority of Athenian citizens.¹⁸ Mossé believes *Assembly-Women* provides evidence of a distinct decline in the power of the *dēmos*. She asserts that Praxagora's description of the decrees of the assembly as similar to 'drunken men, marked with madness' (173) proves that the assembly, swayed by the latest demagogue, lurched from one contradictory decision to another.¹⁹ Mossé uses the number of legal actions against politicians and *stratego*i during the early fourth century to support Aristophanes' criticism of the *dēmos* and its decision making.²⁰

Ephraim David argues that *Assembly-Women* and *Wealth* provide 'precious evidence' for the socio-economic problems of Athens during the early fourth century and the possible solutions Athenians may have been considering at the time.²¹ He argues that both plays focus on abject poverty in Athens and that they emphasises the hunger and starvation of the poor, indicating Athens was in the grip of a food crisis. As a direct result of this impoverishment, David argues, the plays provide evidence that Athens experienced an increase in the spread of disease and crime. He believes that an antagonism between the rich and the poor is repeatedly

¹⁴ Croiset 1973: 172.

¹⁵ Croiset 1973: 7, 177.

¹⁶ Mossé 1973: 13.

¹⁷ Mossé 1973: 14.

¹⁸ Mossé 1973: 14.

¹⁹ Mossé 1973: 29.

²⁰ Mossé 1973: 29.

²¹ David 1984: 4.

emphasised in both plays.²² David points out that these attacks are not the opinions of just one character either, both plays have multiple characters verbally attacking the rich. All of which, he argues, provides ‘irrefutable evidence’ of significant animosity between the rich and the poor.²³ Like Ehrenberg, Croiset and Mossé, David takes the plays at face value.

In his comprehensive look at the effects of the Peloponnesian War on Athens Barry Strauss breaks from these earlier scholars’ use of Aristophanes and does not accept the plays at face value. He argues that even though Aristophanes’ plays portray the majority of Athenians as severely impoverished and that there was an unjust distribution of wealth, *Assembly-Women* and *Wealth* must be interpreted with caution.²⁴ He is wary of declaring Athens of the early fourth century ‘moribund’ on the basis of two escapist comedies.²⁵ He warns against the temptation to use the poor situation of farmers presented in *Wealth* as evidence for a rural proletariat on the verge of revolutionary ferment as Ehrenberg has done. Chremylus and his chorus are indeed very poor farmers; however Strauss’ argument is that Aristophanes’ representation of the poor is limited to the farmers. The non-elite urban citizens of Athens suffered just as badly as the farmers from the effects of the war. Strauss concludes that there is no doubt that these conditions existed in Athens but that Aristophanes has exaggerated them for comic effect. Consequently, he suggests, there must have been some kind of theorizing as to how the problems of Athens could be fixed; if not, surely the plays would have fizzled.²⁶ However, Strauss’ argument does not provide an explanation for why Aristophanes exaggerated the social and economic situation of postwar Athens.

Matthew Dillon warns similarly that *Wealth* cannot stand alone as evidence for the socio-economic problems of early fourth century Athens. He suggests that the play’s distinct lack of topicality indicates Aristophanes was trying to produce a work that had a general and lasting appeal.²⁷ Dillon’s argument is that the preoccupations of contemporary Athenian society reflected in Aristophanes plays, are in fact the same preoccupations that are common to all humanity.²⁸ He argues for example, that Aristophanes’ presentation of impoverished citizens

²² David 1984: 17.

²³ David 1984: 18.

²⁴ Strauss 1986: 163.

²⁵ Strauss 1986: 164.

²⁶ Strauss 1986: 166-7.

²⁷ Dillon 1987: 183.

²⁸ Dillon 1987: 155.

in both plays is really no different to the descriptions of the poor in works from the previous century. For example, in *Knights* dated 424, the poor eat ‘crumbs like dogs’ (414f), or as in *Wasps*, the chorus are deeply concerned they will go hungry (251-317). Thucydides’ description of living conditions in Athens at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War (2.17.1-3) evokes a picture of widespread poverty. Whilst not denying Athenians were in a poorer state than in the fifth century, Dillon’s point is that the symptoms of poverty remain constant over time and place and therefore *Wealth* cannot be used on its own as evidence that Athens was experiencing any sort of exceptional impoverishment during the 390s and 380s.²⁹

Paul Cartledge agrees that the Peloponnesian War certainly caused some difficulties for Athens; however he believes that the city had a fairly quick postwar economic recovery.³⁰ He argues that to place any substantial reliance on *Wealth* as evidence for socio-economic problems experienced by Athens after the Peloponnesian War, such as David has done, is to mistake the play for an ‘official government report’ rather than a piece of fantasy-comedy.³¹ He believes that Strauss provides a more plausible view of the situation of Athens in the early fourth century.³²

It is clear that earlier scholars viewed Aristophanes as a factual witness to the conditions in Athens during the early fourth century, and have relied heavily on *Assembly-Women* and *Wealth* as solid evidence for a postwar decline. Subsequent scholars, like Strauss, Dillon and Cartledge have had a different approach to Aristophanes. They see him more as a comic poet than an historian; a man whose job it was to exaggerate for comic effect. Consequently they assume that he cannot be taken at face value. However both groups of scholars approach Aristophanes in a naive way: earlier scholarship seems to unequivocally accept Aristophanes’ representation of early-fourth-century Athens; and later scholarship urges caution because of the poet’s exaggerations, yet this scholarship does not provide any explanation for understanding why Aristophanes has exaggerated. Therefore there is a gap in the understanding of what Aristophanes was doing and how his plays can be used as a source for the social and economic conditions in early-fourth-century Athens.

²⁹ Dillon 1987: 158-9.

³⁰ Cartledge 2001: 110.

³¹ Cartledge 2001: 110.

³² Cartledge 2001: 110.

1.2 Assembly-Women

References to contemporary events and public figures within *Assembly-Women* have been used by scholars to date the play to 392, possibly even 390.³³ Much of the evidence is found in Praxagora's list of recent events which have caused problems in the city.³⁴ Initially Praxagora mentions the anti-Spartan alliance of 393 (193), placing the play in the latter half of the 390s. Clearly important discussions on whether or not to launch a fleet have obviously been taking place in the assembly (197-8). Conon was arrested in early 392 and no large fleet set sail from Athens until 390 (Xen. *Hell.* 4.8.16, 24-25), consequently the line suggests *Assembly-Women* was produced during this time.³⁵ Later in the play the Dissident character mentions the failure of a two and a half percent tax proposed by Heurippides (825-9).³⁶ Scholarship suggests he made the proposal in 392 after the arrest of Conon.³⁷ Clearly enough time had passed for the tax to have been proposed and to have failed, before the play was produced. These two pieces of evidence combine to place the play no later than 390.³⁸ Additionally, Praxagora comments that 'salvation took a glance' (*sōtēria parēkypsen*): but Thrasybulus is angry because he has not been invited to take charge' (201-3). In 392 Athens looked breathtakingly close to *sōtēria* (salvation), with Sparta offering exceptionally good terms for peace. Athens rejected the offer due to issues raised by Thrasybulus (Andoc. 3.12).³⁹ Given that Praxagora is referencing an incident from 392, the play is more likely to have been produced a year later in 391.⁴⁰

In order to verify claims by modern scholarship that *Assembly-Women* provides evidence that early-fourth-century Athens was in crisis, an account of the play is required. The women of Athens, frustrated that their men cannot bring *sōtēria* to the state, disguise themselves as men and convince the assembly to place them in charge of running the city (99-109). Once in power the women, led by Praxagora, plan to run the city in the same fashion as the run their own *oikoi* or households, that is, by carefully controlling the use of resources and the spending of money.⁴¹ By implementing a radical 'communist' reform Praxagora and her

³³ Seager 1967: 107 n.110; Sommerstein 1998: 1.

³⁴ Dover 1972: 190; Ussher 1999 xxi; Sommerstein 1998: 154.

³⁵ Sommerstein 1998:6, 155.

³⁶ Sommerstein 1998: 6-7, 209-210.

³⁷ Sommerstein 1998: 210.

³⁸ Sommerstein 1998: 6.

³⁹ Seager 1967: 107-108; Sommerstein 1998:6, 157, 170.

⁴⁰ Sommerstein 1998: 7.

⁴¹ MacDowell 1995: 306.

gynaecocracy plan to revolutionise the city; all citizens shall be equal in property and family, the slaves will do all the work and the men will relax and enjoy life. Praxagora implements this radical redistribution of wealth in order to rid Athens of poverty and its associated ills; address the state's inability to raise funds; and to close the gap between the rich and the poor.

The most important social problem Praxagora seeks to solve is that of poverty and its associated ills: starvation, lack of clothing, disease and crime (590-3).⁴² Scholars argue that poverty is the central concern of the play, because Aristophanes depicts the living conditions of non-elite citizens very bleakly.⁴³ However, Douglas MacDowell believes this to be an overstatement.⁴⁴ He concedes that Praxagora seems to be concerned that some non-elite citizens are excessively poor (590-3), but takes issue with certain elements of the play which scholars have used to conclude that poverty is its central theme. MacDowell's objections are minor and cannot be used to dismiss the overwhelming evidence of poverty-stricken citizens in the play.

That food, or lack of it, is an issue in Athens is first attested to during a conversation between Blepyrus, Praxagora's husband, and his neighbour Chremes (372ff). The scene comes a third of the way through the play and sees Chremes filling Blepyrus in on the events at the assembly which ended in the women taking control of the state. He describes how Euaeon stood before them and presented his ideas on the salvation of the city. Blepyrus responds that Euaeon would have garnered more support had he suggested 'the corn dealers should supply all the poor with three *choinix* of corn each for dinner' (424-5). The implication here is that a large proportion of the population was in need of food.⁴⁵ Three *choinikē* of grain would be sufficient to feed a family of four or five per day.⁴⁶ Blepyrus also fears missing out on his assembly pay will leave him short of food, complaining to Praxagora that she had lost him 'a quarter-bushel of wheat, which I ought to have earned from the assembly' (547). This suggests Athenians relied heavily on assembly pay to supplement their food supplies.⁴⁷

⁴² David 1984: 3-20; Sommerstein 1984: 315; MacDowell 1995: 313.

⁴³ David 1984: 5; Sommerstein 1984: 315, 2007: 177; Strauss 1986: 165; MacDowell 1995: 313.

⁴⁴ MacDowell 1995: 313.

⁴⁵ Sommerstein 1998: 177.

⁴⁶ Ussher 1973: 134; Sommerstein 1998: 178

⁴⁷ Bowie 1993: 260.

MacDowell argues that Aristophanes' characters are often without enough money and that this is an expected feature of Blepyrus' comic persona. His other objection here is that over half the play has gone by without the issue of poverty being mentioned.⁴⁸

MacDowell is surely missing the point. The first half of the play is concerned with the women's machinations on how to infiltrate the assembly. Given that their communist plan is extreme, the women are careful to conceal their real reasons for taking over.

Talk of food and eating is everywhere in *Assembly-Women*.⁴⁹ Praxagora plans to turn the lawcourts and the colonnades into dining rooms (676), the speaker's platform will hold the mixing-bowls and the water-jars (677), and the allotment machines will determine where people will dine (684). Life under Praxagora's new scheme promises an abundance of food for everyone: plenty of bread, fish, barley-cakes, wine, chick-peas (600) and the gastronomical delights of

a dishy-slicy-sharky-dogfishy-heady-left-oversy-very-strong-sauct-silphiumy-bit-salty-honey-poured-overly-thrush-upon-blackbirdy-ringdovey-pigeony-chickeny-roast-cooty-wagtaily-rockdovey-haremeaty-boiled-winy-dippy-deliciously-wingedy thing! (1170-5).

This obsession with food clearly suggests the citizens of the play were dreaming of a time when no one would go hungry.

The speech which Aristophanes gives Euaeon in the opening assembly suggests non-elite citizens also suffered from inadequate clothing and housing. Euaeon presents himself at the assembly as barely having a cloak to cover him either during the day or as a blanket at night; for him *sōtēria* is a new cloak (414). MacDowell's objection here is that modern scholars have no information on the politician Euaeon, and, given Aristophanes' propensity to ridicule public figures, there is undoubtedly a joke here that only the original audience would get. It does not mean that many Athenians were without cloaks.⁵⁰ However, it is clear from Euaeon's speech that there are others without warm cloaks and even a warm place to sleep for the night (415-21). Additionally, there are citizens who have nothing but old worn out shoes and tatty cloaks to wear (849-50), and others whose children run around naked (92).

⁴⁸ MacDowell 1995: 313.

⁴⁹ David 1984: 7; Strauss 1986: 165.

⁵⁰ MacDowell 1995: 314.

Blepyrus and his neighbour both own only one cloak, without which they cannot attend the assembly and collect their pay (352-3, 535-48). Scholars have suggested that poverty has prevented the two men from owning more than one cloak.⁵¹ MacDowell argues that perhaps Athenians did not need to own more than one cloak at a time as under Praxagora's new scheme a man will only have one cloak which can be replaced if lost or stolen (670).⁵² He may well be right. Yet Praxagora is talking about replacing a cloak that is stolen not that citizens are only issued with one cloak.

The suggestion that some citizens are suffering through lack of appropriate clothing is difficult to ignore, as is the preoccupation with alleviating hunger. When the women take control of Athens their redistribution of wealth ensures no one goes without either food or clothing, therefore MacDowell's argument that poverty is not a central concern of the play cannot be sustained.

Aristophanes also draws the audience's attention to two other symptoms of poverty: disease and crime. In *Assembly-Women* the playwright specifically mentions the fear of contracting pleurisy in Euaeon's speech (416). Again MacDowell objects on the basis that Euaeon is unknown and therefore to conclude from his speech that Athenians lived in fear of pleurisy is tenuous.⁵³ However, it is more the fact that pleurisy is mentioned at all which has caused scholars to take notice. Alan Sommerstein argues that disease and death are subjects comedy otherwise normally avoids; for example there are no known references to the plague of 430-26 in comedy of the fifth century.⁵⁴ Regardless of whom Euaeon was MacDowell is wrong to so readily dismiss this unexpected mention of disease.

The play gives the impression that crime is rampant throughout the city, particularly cloak-stealing (312, 314, 321, 375, 526, 528, 565, 668).⁵⁵ Oratory of the fourth century consistently reminded Athenians that poverty was a driving force behind crime in the city.⁵⁶ Aristophanes reflects this element of Athenian culture by clearly establishing a connection between the two

⁵¹ Sommerstein 1984: 331; MacDowell 1995: 310.

⁵² MacDowell 1995: 310.

⁵³ MacDowell 1995: 314.

⁵⁴ Sommerstein 1984: 328 n. 82.

⁵⁵ David 1984: 11; Compton-Engle 2005: 172.

⁵⁶ Dover 1972: 109-112; Pritchard 2012a: 30.

in *Assembly-Women*: ‘Nobody will be doing anything under the pressure of poverty’ (605, 667-9), and that poverty compels ordinary citizens to commit crime (439-40).⁵⁷ Even Blepyrus accuses his wife of mugging him to pinch his cloak for her disguise (536).⁵⁸ Indeed he makes a point of confirming with Praxagora that her new regime will rid the city of thieves (667).

Scholarship on *Assembly-Women* suggests the play reflects a widening gap between the rich and the poor in early fourth-century Athens.⁵⁹ After the Peloponnesian War many Athenians were poorer than they had been in the fifth century. Admittedly, some of the wealthy were still wealthy, but many non-elite citizens were impoverished further, thus widening the gap between the two classes.⁶⁰ In one short speech Praxagora articulates the disparity between the rich and the poor which lies at the core of her reforms:⁶¹

...we should not have one man being rich and another wretched, nor one farming broad acres while another hasn’t enough land to be buried in, nor one man owning many slaves while another doesn’t have even one attendant... (591-3).

Furthermore, scholars rely heavily on another of Praxagora’s lines to provide conclusive evidence of a split between rich and poor, in particular on matters of war and empire:⁶²

ναῦς δεῖ καθέλκειν· τῷ πένητι μὲν δοκεῖ, τοῖς πλουσίοις δὲ καὶ γεωργοῖς οὐ δοκεῖ

We need to launch a fleet: the poor man says yes, the rich and the farmers say no.

(197-8)

The traditional interpretation maintains that the rich are reluctant because they would have to pay for war and the farmers are reluctant because they fear the destruction of their lands. However for the poor war meant salvation: wages, booty and the possibility of a cleruchy.⁶³ Strauss argues that interpretation is based on a mistranslation: *πένητες* and *πλούσιοι* share the generic article whereas the *γεωργοί* does not. Aristophanes then, means the ‘wealthy, especially the farmers’ not ‘the wealthy and the farmers’. Strauss suggests it is ‘especially the

⁵⁷ David 1984: 11; MacDowell 1995: 331; Pritchard 2012a: 30.

⁵⁸ Compton-Engle 2005: 169.

⁵⁹ David 1984: 15-, Ehrenberg 1972: 81, Strauss 1986: 57; Ussher

⁶⁰ Strauss 1986: 56.

⁶¹ Ehrenberg 1974: 81.

⁶² Strauss 1986: 58, 62.

⁶³ Ehrenberg 1974: 30; Mossé 1973: 12, 30; Ussher 1973: 102; Sommerstein 1984/2007: 155; David 1984: 15; Strauss 1986: 58.

farmers', as land cannot be concealed from the tax collector.⁶⁴ Scholars have also argued that the line provides evidence of an urban-rural split; the rich, who were owners of large plots of land, siding with the farmers against the townsfolk who had nothing to lose, nothing that could be burnt down or destroyed.⁶⁵ Strauss is not convinced that this is a valid argument, agreeing with Ehrenberg that the lines could be no more than a comic jibe at the farmers' fear of the sea.⁶⁶ They have a valid point. When isolated the lines are open for interpretation as evidence of a split. However, when taken in context the lines are part of a list of comically exaggerated grievances Praxagora has with recent decisions made by the assembly.

Assembly-Women stresses the inability of the state to raise revenues.⁶⁷ The subject of debate set down for the assembly at which Praxagora intends to make her play for power is how to 'save the city' (395). For Athens is, as Praxagora states bluntly, 'dead in the water' (109). References throughout the play stress the particular intelligence and resourcefulness of women in raising revenue (234-5, 442, 600). Clearly the state's revenues have been poorly managed by the men. The play suggests that the public purse has been consistently drained by corrupt politicians (176-7) and publicly funded wages for juries and assembly attendance (185-6, 205). Attempts at increasing public revenues by levying *eisphorai* (property taxes) on the rich have obviously failed: Heurippides proposed a two and a half percent tax intended to raise 500T (talents), however 'it turned out to be the same old story and the thing failed to yield enough' (823-8).⁶⁸ Enraged by the failure to raise the money the *dēmos* turns on Heurippides and he is covered in pitch (829); metaphorically, of course but the anguish and frustration of the *dēmos* is clear. By abolishing the need for juries (656), and other state funded jobs and by making land, money, and anything else everybody owns the common property of all Athenians (596-9), Praxagora's reforms will ensure state revenues return to and remain at an appropriate level.

Praxagora's solution to these problems in Athens is to implement a form of communism in which private property and marriage are abolished. All private property is to be handed in to the state and kept as a communal property; from this stock the *dēmos* will be maintained (597-

⁶⁴ Strauss 1986: 63; Sommerstein 1998: 155.

⁶⁵ Ehrenberg 1974: 50; David 1984: 15.

⁶⁶ Strauss 1986: 62. Citing Ehrenberg *Aristophanes* 62.

⁶⁷ Strauss 1986: 166.

⁶⁸ Sommerstein 1998: 6-7, 209-210.

600). With no lawsuits, courts or crimes, with no division between rich and poor, and with ample food the state will prosper. Scholarship has often made a connection between the communist schemes proposed in Aristophanes' *Assembly-Women* and those made by Plato in his *Republic*.⁶⁹ Questions arise as to whether Aristophanes is ridiculing Plato or if Plato is building on the ideas put forward by Aristophanes, or indeed whether both men were dependent on ideas floating around Athens at the time.⁷⁰ The play presents Praxagora's scheme to the audience as completely new (578-580, 583-5), and therefore Sommerstein is of the belief that it was Aristophanes' 'coherent, well-rounded' blueprint for social equality that initially sparked Plato's ideas.⁷¹

Scholarship is divided over whether or not Praxagora's new social order succeeds or fails in addressing Athens' problems. In the second half of the play three scenes illustrate the consequences of her program, each of which can be viewed as either a success or a failure.⁷² There is the dissident who wants the best of both worlds (769-77, 787-829), the unfortunate young fellow besieged by three hideous old hags who by law he must sexually satisfy (1083-90), and, finally, the communal feast (1112-83). Scholars, such as Susanne Saïd and Helene Foley, argue that the new order is a failure: no law can abolish selfishness nor is a *polis* simply a large *oikos* requiring only food, clothing and sex to function.⁷³ Josiah Ober and Barry Strauss suggest Aristophanes is merely illustrating egalitarianism and its limits, deliberately leaving the question of the scheme's success unanswered and letting the audience make up its mind.⁷⁴ MacDowell, however, argues that success or failure must be determined by looking at the very end of the play: Blepyrus departs for an enormous feast with a young girl on each arm. Thus, it is in his opinion a resounding success.⁷⁵ Interpretations such as these give the impression that Aristophanes was giving serious attention to the idea of a redistribution of wealth as a solution to Athens' problems, and that *Assembly-Women* could be seen as evidence that the *dēmos* was considering such schemes. Alternatively, David Konstan and Matthew Dillon suggest that these scenes are not a critique on Praxagora's scheme, but are the 'randy, boisterous, grotesque triumph of comic energy'.⁷⁶ These differing views on the

⁶⁹ David 1984: 41; MacDowell 1995: 321, 314; Sommerstein 1998: 13-18.

⁷⁰ Ussher 1973: xvii; Sommerstein 1998: 15.

⁷¹ Sommerstein 1998: 15.

⁷² Sommerstein 1984: 316.

⁷³ Saïd 49-60. Cited by Sommerstein 1984: 316 and MacDowell 1995: 322. Foley 1982: 16-18.

⁷⁴ Ober and Strauss 1990: 265-66.

⁷⁵ MacDowell 1995: 322-23.

⁷⁶ Konstan and Dillon 1981: 382.

seriousness of Praxagora's scheme tie in with debates between different schools of thought on the interpretation of Aristophanes which will be outlined in section six of this chapter.

1.3 *Wealth*

It is universally accepted that Aristophanes' last extant play, *Wealth*, was produced in 388.⁷⁷ Some scholars believe this play is a revised version of another *Wealth* produced in 408.⁷⁸ As in Aristophanes' other plays topical references provide key pieces of evidence to substantiate that the extant play is the 388 version of *Wealth*.⁷⁹ The most concrete evidence can be found early in the play as Chremylus and Carion inform the god Wealth how dependent the world is on him. The slave and his master reference events or people of prominence that can be dated to the late 390s or early 380s: Agyrrhius, an important politician of the time (176), and his three obol assembly pay thought to have been implemented in the late 390s (171; Arist. *Ath.Pol.* 41.3);⁸⁰ the mercenary forces at Corinth (173; Xen. *Hell.* 4.8.8) had been stationed there by Conon in 393; Pamphilus (175; Xen. *Hell.* 5.1.2-5) was a cavalry commander who was charged with embezzlement in 389; and Conon's son Timotheus (180; Lys. 19.40) who in 392/1 had built a mansion with his inheritance from his father.⁸¹ Given that these topical references stop at 389 a composition date of 388 rather than 408 seems much more plausible.

This evidence for a production date of 388, so neatly packaged together in the one section, is used by MacDowell to support his theory that this version of the play is merely a revised version of the 408 *Wealth*.⁸² He suggests a change in audience preferences and Aristophanes' advancing age as reasons for the playwright to expunge all topical allusions to 408 and insert these few for 388.⁸³ In addition to pointing out that themes established in *Assembly-Women*

⁷⁷ Ehrenberg 1962: 70; Dover 1972: 202; Croiset 1973: 177; Dillon 1987: 158; David 1984: 2 n.2; MacDowell 1995: 324; Sommerstein 2001: 1.

⁷⁸ Strauss 1986: 164; MacDowell 1995: 324.

⁷⁹ MacDowell 1995: 325; Sommerstein 2001: 146.

⁸⁰ Sommerstein 2001: 146-7.

⁸¹ MacDowell 1995: 325; Sommerstein 2001: 146-9.

⁸² MacDowell 1995: 326; Sommerstein 2001: 31.

⁸³ MacDowell 1995: 326-27; Sommerstein 2001: 31.

are carried further in *Wealth*, Sommerstein gives a detailed nine-point rejection of MacDowell's proposal.⁸⁴

MacDowell's issues stem from the fact that almost half of the topical allusions in *Wealth* are in one small passage of eleven lines (170-80) and that there appears to be some confusion amongst the *scholia* suggesting the commentator mixed-up his copies of *Wealth*. Other references accorded a date of 388, he believes, could either also refer to a date of 408 or are not 'essential to the passage in which it occurs'.⁸⁵ Sommerstein dismisses the confusion of *scholia* by proving, using the *scholia* itself, that the copies could not have been mixed-up.⁸⁶ He agrees that the play would work without certain references, for example the allusion to Thrasybulus and Dionysius. He insists, however, that the omission of these lines would interfere with the run of dialogue.⁸⁷ Sommerstein argues that comparisons between the text found on a fragment of the 408 *Wealth* and the text of the 388 version show a difference in metre and rhythm.⁸⁸ He also suggests that there are certain structures and styles missing from the 388 version that are integral to Aristophanes' fifth century plays, such as the length and number of iambic trimeters.⁸⁹ Sommerstein concludes his defence of the *Wealth* of 388 as a new play by suggesting the topical allusions in the play just simply 'fit better' to the 388 date. Sommerstein's arguments cannot be ignored and therefore the surviving *Wealth* must be regarded as a new play in its own right.

From the opening scene of *Wealth* to its festive end it is difficult for the audience to deduce anything other than that the economic outlook in Athens was very bleak indeed.⁹⁰ *Wealth* is a play in which there are two central themes: poverty and the unfair distribution of wealth.⁹¹ From the very beginning we are made instantly aware of the lack of money of our protagonists. Chremylus and his slave Carion have been to visit the Delphic oracle for Chremylus has concerns about how to raise his son: should he be good, virtuous and poor as Chremylus is or should he be wicked, dishonest and rich like the politicians, generals and informers (35-8). The oracle's advice results in Chremylus following a blind, scruffy-looking

⁸⁴ Sommerstein 2001: 28-33.

⁸⁵ MacDowell 19995: 324-7; Sommerstein 2001: 31-2.

⁸⁶ Sommerstein 2001: 31-32.

⁸⁷ Sommerstein 2001: 32.

⁸⁸ Sommerstein 2001: 32.

⁸⁹ Sommerstein 2001: 33.

⁹⁰ Sommerstein 2001: 4.

⁹¹ Konstan and Dillon 1981: 378.

old man, who turns out to be the god Wealth. Blinded by Zeus, Wealth has only been able to reward bad men and therefore good men have suffered (87-92). Chremylus, in his desire for riches himself, aims to restore Wealth's sight and make good men rich and bad men poor (386-88). This he does and by the end of the play all men are rich (1178) and Wealth is installed on the Acropolis to guard the Athenian treasury (1191). The play constantly refers to the problems of poverty: hunger, crime, disease, lack of clothing, lack of shelter. It debates the meanings of poverty and destitution. It attacks the rich and sympathises with the poor. Subsequently, the audience is left with the notion that things are so bad in Athens that only a miracle will save it.

Chremylus describes himself as a poor man (*penēs* - 29), and there is no doubt that he and his friends see themselves as living in abject poverty. He provides a harrowing description of what it is to be poor in Athens: no comfortable place to keep warm, crying and starving children and grannies, lice, gnats and fleas, rags for clothing, no proper bed, no blanket, no matting, no pillow, no bread, withered rotting food, broken jars for furniture and cooking implements (535-47). Starvation is the most pressing of their problems.⁹² These citizens toil in their fields (225) and are weak (258); they munch on thyme roots (253) and often come home to find 'no groats in the sack' (763). These men long for the festival of Theseus where they can receive bowls of porridge and barley-meal (627-8); and are so poor they steal the offerings left at the crossroad shrines for Hecate (594-7). Chremylus' suggestion that starvation through poverty gives men the figures of wasps (562) is a particularly powerful image and cannot suggest anything other than emaciation. Carion is kept awake at night by hunger pangs (668-74); the priest of Asclepius steals food at night from his temple (674-81); and even Zeus is starving by the play's end because men no longer sacrifice to him (1189-90). The message is clear: Athens is starving.

Although hunger is the main concern, Aristophanes presents other symptoms of poverty throughout the play. Clearly people cannot afford proper clothing (540, 841-49); or housing, getting 'blisters from the bath-house' (535). A list of insects (538) and bugs which deprive the poor-man of sleep (541) conjures up images of a city infested with disease. Poverty has forced men to pawn their worldly goods (450). A life of crime seems to be the only way to escape,

⁹² David 1984: 7.

forcing honest men to do illegal things (959-1094).⁹³ Blepsidemus cannot believe Chremylus has become rich honestly and accuses him of behaving like ‘a man who has done something un-wholesome (*ouden ugies*)’ (355). In fact, a life of crime is represented as the ‘way that’s regular in these parts’ (47, 50): it is the criminal who gets rich and leaves poverty behind.⁹⁴

Another theme central to Aristophanes last extant play is the unfair distribution of wealth throughout Athens.⁹⁵ Aristophanes attacks the rich, *hoi plousioi*, throughout the play labelling them villains (30-1), cowardly (202), miserly (237), wasteful (244), gouty, pot-bellied and obese (559-60), insolent (564), penny-pinching (558-9), less than honest, sour-faced (754-5) wicked criminals (502-3). Chremylus declares that the only rich people are temple-robbers (*ierosuloi*), orators (*rhētores*), informers (*sykophantai*) and other wicked dangerous people (*ponēroi*). Wealth himself insists that once people become rich they ‘show wickedness absolutely beyond measure’ (107-9). The goddess Poverty (*Penia*) suggests that once politicians enrich themselves from the ‘public purse’, they immediately become wicked, plot against the masses and make an enemy of the people (567-70). The attacks are moral ones: there are no specific accusations of financial neglect by the *plousioi* in *Wealth* as there are in *Assembly-Women*.⁹⁶ Aristophanes is making a clear link between wealth and immorality.⁹⁷ Geoffrey De Ste. Croix proposes that this antagonism towards the wealthy is plot-driven and is unique to this particular play.⁹⁸ However, whilst this ‘poor versus rich’ contrast is central to the conflict in the play, many of Aristophanes’ previous works provide hostile attitudes towards the wealthy.⁹⁹ David counts *Wealth* as ‘irrefutable evidence’ for hostility between poor Athenians and their wealthy counterparts.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, De Ste Croix ignores the evidence of tension between the wealthy and poor found in *Assembly-Women*.¹⁰¹ In addition his assertion fails to consider that the fourth century began with an oligarchic coup that resulted in the violent deaths of hundreds of non-elite citizens, which may account for any notable increase in the portrayal of the tension between the fifth century and the fourth century plays. Thus the impression of significant tension between upper- and lower-class Athenians provided by *Wealth* is entirely believable.

⁹³ Pritchard 2012a: 29.

⁹⁴ Dillon 1987: 165.

⁹⁵ Dillon 1987: 163; Olson 1990: 225.

⁹⁶ Dillon 1987: 163.

⁹⁷ Dillon 1987: 163.

⁹⁸ De. Ste. Croix 1972: 360; Pritchard 2012a: 19.

⁹⁹ Pritchard 2012a: 21.

¹⁰⁰ David 1984: 18.

¹⁰¹ Pritchard 2012a: 21.

A pivotal moment in the play, which has scholarship debating Aristophanes purpose in writing *Wealth*, occurs as Chremylus and his friend Blepsidemus are preparing to take Wealth to the temple of Asclepius to regain his sight (415). Chremylus has declared that once Wealth's sight is restored, only good men will be rich and therefore bad men will strive to be good (495-8); poverty will be driven from Greece (463).¹⁰² Poverty (*Penia*), a frightful looking woman with a white painted face (423-8), confronts them claiming she is responsible for all the good that happens not Wealth. She declares that their plan to redistribute wealth will not succeed because without poverty 'no person on earth would practice any craft or skill' and so there will be nothing to buy and ultimately they will live a 'much more distressful' life than they currently do (511-34).¹⁰³ Her point is that poverty spurs people on, wealth makes them fat and lazy (560).¹⁰⁴ Chremylus' response makes it abundantly clear that life for the desperately poor of Athens could not get any more distressing than it already is:¹⁰⁵

And what good thing can you give us, unless it be burns in the bath, and swarms of brats and old women who cry with hunger, and clouds uncountable of lice, gnats and flies, which hover about the wretch's head, trouble him, awake him and say, "You will be hungry, but get up!" Besides, to possess a rag in place of a mantle, a pallet of rushes swarming with bugs, that do not let you close your eyes, for a bed; a rotten piece of matting for a coverlet; a big stone for a pillow, on which to lay your head; to eat mallow roots instead of bread, and leaves of withered radish instead of cake; to have nothing but the cover of a broken jug for a stool, the stave of a cask, and broken at that, for a kneading-trough, that is the life you make for us! Are these the mighty benefits with which you pretend to load mankind? (535-47).

Poverty believes that being poor means 'to live economically and to keep at one's work, not having any surplus but not having a shortfall either' (553-4). She says that what Chremylus is describing is the life of a beggar; that is, destitution (*ptōchia*) not poverty (548). That Chremylus is poor there is no doubt; Poverty agrees she has been his constant companion for many years (437). However he is not destitute; he owns slaves (27) and a house (231), he drinks at the tavern (435), he spends wisely and cautiously (249).¹⁰⁶ Regardless, there is evidence throughout the play that people are certainly doing it as tough as Chremylus says.

¹⁰² Sommerstein 1984: 317; MacDowell 1995: 333.

¹⁰³ Sommerstein 1984: 328; Bowie 1993: 285-86.

¹⁰⁴ Croiset 1973: 179.

¹⁰⁵ David 1984: 6; Sommerstein 1984: 328-9; Dillon 1987: 158; Olson 1990: 225

¹⁰⁶ David 1984: 40.

For example, as a dedication to Wealth the Honest Man offers his thin, shabby cloak and worn out shoes in which he has been freezing for the past thirteen years (823-48). The *agōn* (competition) continues with Poverty making arguments and Chremylus dismissing them until he shouts at her to leave and declares:

οὐ γὰρ πείσεις, οὐδ' ἦν πείσης.

You won't persuade me even if you persuade me! (600)

Scholarship is divided on just who wins the *agōn* or indeed if there is a winner at all. Traditionally in Aristophanic comedy the loser admits defeat or the chorus or another party declares a winner.¹⁰⁷ In *Wealth* neither of these actions happen. Some believe Chremylus is the winner, symbolically chasing Poverty from the stage as he will later chase her from Greece.¹⁰⁸ Sommerstein argues that despite Poverty's initially strong theoretical stance that it is poverty which drives people to succeed, she has only managed to promote moderate poverty as an ideal and has failed to effectively counter the audience's fear of extreme poverty which Chremylus so piteously described.¹⁰⁹

The majority, however, seem to fall on the side of Poverty arguing that Chremylus does not adequately refute Poverty's relatively weak arguments, because her views are those of Aristophanes himself. These scholars believe Aristophanes is being ironic, that he is trying to convince his audience that even though everyone desires wealth the reality is that a more realistic dream, to work hard and be self-sufficient, is more appropriate.¹¹⁰ This theory aligns itself with German scholarship that believes Aristophanes wanted his audience to agree that it is good to be moderately poor.¹¹¹ This line of thinking neglects to consider the number of non-elite citizens in the audience who are *penētes* and fear that *ptōcheia* is but a missed assembly-sitting away.¹¹² Additionally, if Aristophanes' aim was to promote 'slender fortunes', he should have highlighted in the scenes following wealth's restoration of sight just

¹⁰⁷ Sommerstein 1984: 319.

¹⁰⁸ Sommerstein 1984: 330; MacDowell 1995: 335.

¹⁰⁹ Sommerstein 1984: 328-30

¹¹⁰ David 1984: 42; Bowie 1993: 290; MacDowell 1995: 334-5, 346; McGlew 1997: 38; Zumbrennen 2006: 330.

¹¹¹ MacDowell 1995: 335.

¹¹² Sommerstein 1984: 330; MacDowell 1995: 335.

what Chremylus would have lost by becoming extremely wealthy, that he does not suggest that his aim was simply to amuse.¹¹³

Both interpretations suggest Aristophanes' purpose in writing *Wealth* was to influence Athenian thoughts on the redistribution of wealth at the time. Therefore both interpretations presuppose that the *dēmos* has agreed to redistribute wealth but are having trouble deciding on what basis. Consequently the purpose of the *agōn* was to debate whether or not a redistribution of wealth on the basis of just deserts was desirable.¹¹⁴ Alternatively, Aristophanes may not have had any intention of influencing his audience in any other way than to make them laugh.¹¹⁵ In this case the *agōn* is merely an amusing scene within which Aristophanes is able to show off his inventively comic mind.¹¹⁶ Again, both views reflect the differences in scholarly views about the interpretation of Aristophanes (see section 1.6).

Wealth is a play that would have connected with the ordinary citizen at Athens; not only would farmers have related to its themes so too would have the citizens of the town. Chremylus' complaints about being poor and the unfairness of the distribution of wealth would have resonated with each audience member. *Wealth* is a comic fantasy; it does not offer any realistic solution to perceived problems in Athens at the time.¹¹⁷ Moreover, Aristophanes was trying to win a competition, so he took everyman's desire for riches and a life of ease and miraculously made it a reality.

1.4 Main Features Represented in Aristophanes' Plays

It is clear from the expositions of both plays that there is evidence to suggest that five main features stand out as problems in early-fourth-century Athens: the hunger and impoverishment of the majority of Athenians, weak public finances, a weak economy, antagonism between the classes and the consideration of redistributive schemes by the *dēmos*. Both plays suggest

¹¹³ Croiset 1973: 179; MacDowell 1995: 346.

¹¹⁴ Sommerstein 1984: 327; Zumbrennen 2006: 330.

¹¹⁵ Sommerstein 1984: 315.

¹¹⁶ Croiset 1973: 181.

¹¹⁷ McGlew 1997: 47.

leave no doubt that one of the core problems facing early-fourth-century Athens was a lack of food as a direct result of poverty. Clearly the population is starving and impoverished. The farmers who form the chorus in *Wealth* are obviously finding life difficult after the Peloponnesian War; grain-dealers come under attack in both plays; people are becoming ill; and crime is a constant problem. This destitution drives the protagonists to put some sort of fantastical solution into action. In the end they succeed and there is an abundance of food and money for everyone.

The state appears to have revenue problems. Praxagora's harsh criticism of the state funded assembly pay makes no bones about the drain it is placing on the public finances. Additionally Athens was obviously seeking *eisphorai* from the elite citizens, but as illustrated in *Assembly-Women*, they were consistently failing to collect the anticipated amounts. The plays continually comment on political corruption that is so entrenched even good people once they become politicians turn dishonest. The plays name several Athenians accused of financial impropriety against the state suggesting prosecutions in the law courts were on the increase.¹¹⁸

With the *dēmos* impoverished and public finances seemingly depleted *Assembly-Women* and *Wealth* suggest that the Athenian economy of early-fourth-century Athens was in dire straits. At the end of the Peloponnesian War Athens had lost its empire and suffered a decline in mining and agricultural production and an increased dependence on imports.¹¹⁹ The plays suggest that these conditions resulted in an economy on the verge of collapse in desperate need of salvation, with high unemployment and a low standard of living.

Both plays are scathing of the rich as a social class, suggesting an increase in tension between the classes which resulted in a perceived widening of the gap between rich and poor. The plays also indicate the elite were not happy with paying *eisphorai* and therefore in the eyes of the non-elite were shirking their civic responsibility. The fourth century began with the mass executions of Athenian citizens by the Oligarchs creating an enormous gulf between the haves and have-nots; wealth became concentrated in the hands of the few. The *agōn* in *Wealth*

¹¹⁸ Dillon 1987: 165.

¹¹⁹ Strauss 1986: 43-50.

between Poverty and Wealth makes it clear that the non-elite citizen of Athens desired a better life and resented the Athenian elite. Moreover the plays suggest non-elite citizens were becoming more concerned about their individual lot in life rather than the well-being of the *polis*.

In both plays Aristophanes takes the problems of impoverishment, public finances, economy and social tension and actively tries to present a solution to them. Both solutions, although fantastical, provide a redistribution of wealth to the lower classes. This suggests that there may have been serious attempts by the lower-classes to redistribute wealth on the agenda in the political discourse of early fourth century Athens. Strauss comments that the communism in *Assembly-Women*, that so closely resembles Plato's *Republic*, suggests that amongst the intelligentsia at least, there was a widespread concern about the distribution of wealth in the 390s and that ideas about the redistribution of wealth were being considered.¹²⁰

1.5 Performance Context

In determining how Aristophanes treated the socio-economic realities of early fourth century Athens it is important to examine the performance context of *Assembly-Women* and *Wealth*. Both plays were written to be performed at a specific time and place: the dramatic competitions of either the Lenaea or the City Dionysia, two of the city's most important religious festivals.¹²¹ Aristophanes wanted to win these competitions and to do this he needed the support and influence of the audience (Pl. *Leg.* ii 659a, iii 700c-701b).¹²² Scholars have suggested that Aristophanes used a different approach in writing plays for each festival dependent on the composition of the audience.¹²³ In particular, the line from Aristophanes' *Acharnians*, 'We are by ourselves: it's the contest of the Lenaea, and there are no foreigners here yet' (504-7), suggests the audience at the Lenaea may have been limited to Athenian citizens and metics, giving the smaller of the two festivals a reputation for being more parochial than the City Dionysia.¹²⁴ Scholarship suggests that *Assembly-Women* contains a

¹²⁰ Strauss 1986: 57.

¹²¹ Dearden 1976:1; MacDowell 1995: 16; Robson 2009: 13.

¹²² Pickard-Cambridge 1968: 97; McLeish 1980: 34-6; MacDowell 1995: 16; Pritchard 2012a: 17.

¹²³ Deardon 1976: 6-7; Robson 2009: 15.

¹²⁴ Robson 2009: 15.

number of topical attacks on well-known politicians and individuals that an entirely Athenian audience would appreciate more readily than a broad-based audience; concluding that it must have been performed at the Lenaea.¹²⁵ Using this approach scholars argue that *Wealth*, with its lack of topicality, would have been performed at the City Dionysia.¹²⁶

Classifying these two plays in this way is problematic. It ignores the fact that during the fifth century, with the Athenian Empire at its peak, thousands of allies participated in the City Dionysia. However, postwar Athens had considerably fewer allies and consequently fewer foreign audience members. Additionally, the theatre of Dionysus in the fifth century held a much smaller audience than that of the late fourth century.¹²⁷ Therefore Aristophanes' last extant plays were performed in front of an audience of between four and seven thousand with a small number of foreign allies present. Thus regardless of which festival *Assembly-Women* and *Wealth* were performed at, both plays would have been aimed at a predominantly Athenian audience and therefore contained themes that they would respond to.

Attendance at these dramatic competitions was a special occasion for Athenians and the theatre was generally filled to capacity.¹²⁸ This huge crowd would have consisted mainly of adult male citizens from the city, possibly some of the same citizens who regularly attended the Assembly (Pl. *Leg.* iii 700c-1a; *Resp.* vi 492b-c).¹²⁹ The remainder would have been a mix of foreigners, rural citizens, the poor, metics, boys, perhaps women and possibly slaves.¹³⁰ Introduction of an entry fee of one to two obols at the City Dionysia restricted spectators to those who could afford it.¹³¹

Playwrights awarded the honour of presenting plays at either competition were assigned a *chorēgos* to provide the financial backing for the performance.¹³² The Athenian upper class took their financial responsibilities for funding public festivals seriously in order to benefit themselves politically and legally: funding a winning play at a dramatic competition brought

¹²⁵ Dearden 1976: 8.

¹²⁶ Dearden 1976: 8; Dillon 1987: 1-2.

¹²⁷ Csapo 2007: 96-100, 116-21; Pritchard 2012a: 17.

¹²⁸ Pickard-Cambridge 1968: 263; McLeish 1980: 40; Henderson 1990: 271; MacDowell 1995: 7, 13.

¹²⁹ MacDowell 1995: 16; Pritchard 2012a: 17, n.21.

¹³⁰ MacDowell 1995: 14-16; Robson 2009: 26.

¹³¹ Pickard-Cambridge 1968: 263-5; MacDowell 1995: 13-14; Csapo 2007: 97.

¹³² Pickard-Cambridge 1968: 86; McLeish 1980: 31.

with it city-wide prestige.¹³³ Consequently *chorēgoi* were known to invest heavily in the plays; for example, one elite citizen spent 1,600dr. (drachma) on production costs for a comic play (Lysias 21.4).¹³⁴

The winner of the comic *agōnes* (competitions) was determined by a group of ten publically appointed judges (*critai*).¹³⁵ This panel of *critai*, selected immediately before the performances, were drawn by lot from lists submitted by each of the ten tribes of Athens.¹³⁶ Each judge then compiled a list of the plays in order of merit and placed it in a jar from which the archon randomly chose five. These five determined the winner.¹³⁷ Numerically it was possible to win by a majority of judges but still lose because the wrong five ‘order of merits’ were selected.¹³⁸ Therefore it was important for the playwright to have all ten judges on side. Technically, a playwright’s success or failure rested in the hands of the judges, however their decision was heavily influenced by the approval or disapproval of the audience.¹³⁹ Aristophanes himself provides evidence of this in *Frogs* when the *dēmos* declares that they are the ones who judge the best playwright (778-9).¹⁴⁰ Consequently it was the primary purpose of Aristophanes to please the audience in order to win the competition.¹⁴¹

In his comedy *Frogs* Aristophanes’ chorus describes the comic poet’s job as saying ‘much that is humorous and much that is serious, and to win the prize by playfulness and mockery, worthily of the festival’ (389-93). Athenian audiences of the early fourth century expected to be entertained with music and dancing, costumes and special effects, obscenity and ridicule.¹⁴² More than this though the audience expected the plays to allude to current events and to make fun of prominent individuals, even, to a certain extent, to make fun of the *dēmos* itself.¹⁴³ It was important therefore that the audience identified with the characters and the themes of the play.¹⁴⁴ Unsurprisingly then most of Aristophanes plays centre on the politics

¹³³ McLeish 1980: 31.

¹³⁴ Pickard-Cambridge 1968: 87; McLeish 1980: 31; Robson 2009: 21.

¹³⁵ Dover 1972: 16; Pritchard 2012a: 17.

¹³⁶ Dover 1972: 16; McLeish 1980: 34

¹³⁷ McLeish 1980: 35.

¹³⁸ McLeish 1980: 35.

¹³⁹ Pritchard 2012a: 17.

¹⁴⁰ Pritchard 2012a: 17.

¹⁴¹ Meiggs 1972: 2.

¹⁴² Dover 1972: 212-213; MacDowell 1995: 16-26.

¹⁴³ Henderson 1990: 271; Pritchard 2012a: 41-2.

¹⁴⁴ Henderson 1990: 308-9; Zumbrennen 2012: 128.

and public discourse of Athens at the time.¹⁴⁵ Alternatively Aristophanes could rely on old clichés for comic relief; for example, in *Assembly-Women* Praxagora lists the benefits of giving political power to women, most of them based around the well-known cliché that Greek women were addicted to wine and sex (215-28).¹⁴⁶

The audience was an integral part of the competition, sometimes included in the action (*Plut.* 406-8) and always voicing their approval or disapproval through hissing, whistling, hooting, clapping and foot stomping (*Plat. Leg.* iii 700; *Resp.* vi 492b; *Dem. Meid* 226).¹⁴⁷ The onus was on Aristophanes and his contemporaries to cater adequately to the expectations of as many theatre goers as possible as the more vocal their responses the more they influenced the judges.¹⁴⁸ It was vitally important, therefore, that playwrights kept the values and expectations of their audience in mind.¹⁴⁹ Given Aristophanes' success at the comic competitions and the fact that he was consistently given a chorus by the city throughout his career, it is safe to say that even in his old age Aristophanes was a keen social observer and knew his audience very well.¹⁵⁰

1.6 Interpretations of Aristophanes

Finally, there appears to be two schools of thought on how Aristophanes' last two extant plays should be interpreted.¹⁵¹ In using *Assembly-Women* and *Wealth* as evidence for a crisis in fourth-century Athens and in seeing Aristophanes as a witness to problems in the 390s and 380s scholars such as Ehrenberg, Croiset, Mossé, David and others assume that he was a serious commentator, with a serious purpose. This ties in with a school of interpretation of Aristophanes, led by Jeffery Henderson, which says that he did have a serious intent, that he sought to change people's minds and that he changed the way people saw the world.¹⁵² The second school of interpretation, led originally by A. W. Gomme and more recently by

¹⁴⁵ Pritchard 2012a: 16.

¹⁴⁶ Heath 1987: 24; Sommerstein 1998: 158.

¹⁴⁷ ; Pickard-Cambridge 1968: 272; Pritchard 2012a: 17.

¹⁴⁸ Bowie 1993: 10-11; Pritchard 2012a: 17.

¹⁴⁹ Pritchard 2012a: 17, 41.

¹⁵⁰ Dover 1972: 1-2; Dillon 1987: 156; Pritchard 2012a: 17.

¹⁵¹ Sommerstein 1984: 315; Cartledge 1990: 66.

¹⁵² De Ste. Croix 1972: 356; Cartledge 1990: 66; Henderson 1990: 271-2.

Malcolm Heath, insists Aristophanes' plays have very little to do with the reality of the economic and social issues facing Athens; that his use of these elements in his plays is 'comic opportunism'.¹⁵³ Additionally, debate ensues within the schools of interpretation, over just exactly what Aristophanes' intent was.¹⁵⁴

Henderson argues that the comic poets of Old Comedy had a unique freedom of speech during the dramatic festivals and used it to encourage the audience to think about their lives, to open their eyes to the problems with their leaders and society, and to remember that, ultimately, the *dēmos* was in charge.¹⁵⁵ He relies on Aristophanes' own declaration of his purpose in *Frogs* to 'say much that is humorous and much that is serious' (389-93) as evidence that Aristophanes' plays had a serious intent.¹⁵⁶ Additionally, he relies on the Old Oligarch's description of comedy as an institution of the *dēmos* to underline the seriousness with which Old Comedy was received by the public (2.18).¹⁵⁷ It is Henderson's contention therefore that the *dēmos* in fact expected Aristophanes and his contemporaries to comment on and to actively attempt to influence public discussion on matters of great importance to Athens.¹⁵⁸

He argues that this freedom of speech enjoyed by the comic poets allowed them to join in on debates taking place in the assembly or the law courts and, in particular, to say things that may not have been permissible in these environments.¹⁵⁹ He proposes that in actual fact the plays of Old Comedy acted as an intermediary between the establishment and the people by providing a review of the state's performance over the past year at the comic festivals.¹⁶⁰ The intention of these annual reviews, Henderson believes, was to provide a lesson to the *dēmos* on the social and political problems of Athens.¹⁶¹ He argues that Aristophanes chose his themes based on widely held public concerns and that personal attacks on individuals were designed to hold leaders to account.

¹⁵³ Heath 1987: 23.

¹⁵⁴ Cartledge 1990: 67.

¹⁵⁵ Henderson 1990: 312-3.

¹⁵⁶ Henderson 1990: 271.

¹⁵⁷ Henderson 1990: 275.

¹⁵⁸ Henderson 1990: 271.

¹⁵⁹ Henderson 1990: 273-4.

¹⁶⁰ Henderson 1990: 273-4.

¹⁶¹ Henderson 1990: 308; c.f. Ober 1998: 152.

Henderson therefore argues that Aristophanes' plays consistently present arguments about the 'most important and divisive issues of the day' and that he represents the ideas and theories of real groups within Athenian society.¹⁶² All of this, he believes, is evidence that Aristophanes' plays were driven by the poet's serious intention to influence the *dēmos*. That his plays succeeded in having an impact on the public, Henderson argues, is evidenced by the crown awarded to him for the 'advice' he offered in *Frogs*, by the lawsuits against him for defamation by Cleon, by Plato's assertion that his comic portrayal of Socrates was instrumental in the philosopher's execution and by the fact the assembly passed special decrees to limit comic outspokenness.¹⁶³ Additionally, this school of thought predicates the traditional use of Aristophanes as good evidence for crises in early fourth-century Athens. Scholars who have used the plays of Aristophanes in such a way assume that the poet wanted to highlight real problems in Athens and that he wanted to propose serious solutions to those problems (see sections 1.2,1.3).

Within this scholarship debate exists over precisely what Aristophanes' serious purpose was in writing *Assembly-Women* and *Wealth*.¹⁶⁴ Some scholars, such as Sommerstein, argue that the two plays show that in the early fourth century Aristophanes was deeply committed to the causes of the poor.¹⁶⁵ Previously, based on his fifth-century plays, scholars, most notably de Ste. Croix, had considered Aristophanes a conservative thinker who aligned himself with the wealthy; therefore the suggestion is that *Assembly-Women* and *Wealth*, both plays which champion the poor, mark a distinct change in Aristophanes' political views late in life.¹⁶⁶ There are others though who disagree. Much German scholarship, along with scholars such as James McGlew and Douglas Olson, argues for an ironic interpretation of Aristophanes' last two extant plays.¹⁶⁷ This scholarship contends that Aristophanes had not changed his politics at all and that the plays, more than ever, reflect his hostile attitude towards any kind of radical change in society.¹⁶⁸ They argue that the plays, while they provided immense enjoyment to the ordinary folk with their outrageous proposals to make everyone rich, make it very clear that any such schemes will never work.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶² Henderson 1990: 273; McGlew 1997: 38.

¹⁶³ Henderson 1990: 273.

¹⁶⁴ Cartledge 1990: 66.

¹⁶⁵ Sommerstein 1984: 315.

¹⁶⁶ De Ste. Croix 1972: 358-9; Sommerstein 1984: 315.

¹⁶⁷ Sommerstein 1984: 316; Zumbrennen 2006: 321.

¹⁶⁸ Sommerstein 1984: 315; Konstan and Dillon 1981: 371-94; McGlew 1997: 35.

¹⁶⁹ Zumbrennen 2006: 320-1.

The second school of thought argues that the plays have nothing to do with economic or social issues, that they are merely fantasies with the sole intention of entertaining the audience.¹⁷⁰ Scholars of this school see Aristophanes as a dramatist not a politician.¹⁷¹ Heath, a leading proponent of this school, argues that Aristophanes' plays are pure 'entertainment' and that seriousness, or serious intent, within these plays is 'rare or non-existent'.¹⁷² He believes whatever material Aristophanes borrowed from everyday life at Athens became poetic-fantasy. This fantasy, however, was not meant to have a reciprocal effect on reality.¹⁷³ Heath analyses several of Aristophanes' fifth century plays and demonstrates that where possibilities of serious intent exist, those possibilities are made impotent by comic devices or the comedic action around them.¹⁷⁴ He makes the point that these plays invented crises and then solved them with fantastical solutions because that was what the audience wanted; that was what the audience laughed at.¹⁷⁵ Additionally, some scholars, such as Halliwell, question the appropriateness of Aristophanes' comedies being considered serious given the festival context within which the plays are performed.¹⁷⁶

This school of thought believes that Aristophanes' plays simply made fun of the unfairness of life and were the poet's bid to win first prize at a comedy festival.¹⁷⁷ Clearly winning was important; Aristophanes' anger at losing the 423 City Dionysia competition with *Clouds* is attested to in his revised version where he criticises the audience (521-5). Additionally, at the conclusion of *Assembly-Women*, he includes a plea to the audience and judges to remember the 'intellectual bits' and 'laughs they've had and vote for me' (1155-1162). Winning brought civic distinction and probably a celebrity-status that no doubt brought political and legal advantages with it.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁰ Sommerstein 1984: 315; Cartledge 1990: 66.

¹⁷¹ Gomme 1938: 97; Heath 1987: 27.

¹⁷² Heath 1987: 16, 20, 27, 41; Silk 2000: 306.

¹⁷³ Heath 1987: 21, 23, 40, 42.

¹⁷⁴ Heath 1987: 9-17.

¹⁷⁵ Heath 1987: 23.

¹⁷⁶ Halliwell 1984: 13.

¹⁷⁷ Sommerstein 1984: 315; MacDowell 1995: 344.

¹⁷⁸ Henderson 1990: 290-1.

1.7 Conclusion

Chapter one has established that early scholarship on Aristophanes' fourth-century works accepts the plays at face value as evidence of a postwar decline in Athens and, that later scholarship breaks with this traditional use and cautions against using the plays as evidence because they are comic fantasies and the poet has exaggerated the issues. Strauss' view on the use of Aristophanes has led the way in re-assessing Athenian society in the early fourth century; however, his research is now thirty years old. Since its publication there have been new developments in the costing of war, new developments in demography and its effect on society and economics, and new debates on the serious intent of Aristophanes. These new developments require that a fresh look be taken at Aristophanes and his extant plays of the early fourth century. It is important then that the accuracy of the social and economic conditions featured in the plays is tested with these new developments in mind. Looking closely at the accuracy of what Aristophanes writes on the social and economic problems of Athens in his early-fourth-century plays will do three things: establish his value as a source for Athenian history, advance the debate about his seriousness and provide an explanation for why later scholarship believes he was exaggerating these problems.

CHAPTER 2: PUTTING ARISTOPHANES TO THE TEST

As presented in Chapter one, modern scholarship has used *Assembly-Women* and *Wealth* as evidence to support the general assumption that the social fabric and the economic framework of Athens was in decline after the Peloponnesian War. It is the aim of this chapter to take the five main features represented in these plays (see section 1.4) and to test them against other contemporaneous evidence in order to establish whether or not in fact these two plays can be used as evidence for decline.

2.1 Historical Background of Early-Fourth-Century Athens

But before doing so it is important to review the background against which these plays are set. The last decade or so of the fifth century saw the final phase of the Peloponnesian War, the Decelean War, and the defeat of Athens by Sparta. The terms for peace, brokered in 404, included the demolition of the long walls, the return of exiles, a limited fleet of twelve ships and a commitment from for Athens to be Sparta's ally (Xen. *Hell.* 2.2.2). Thirty men then governed Athens in a reign of terror that lasted eight months before democracy was restored. However, peace was not to last long and by 395 Athens had committed itself to the Corinthian War, reinvigorating its imperialistic ambitions and putting immense financial pressure on the state.

During the second year of the Peloponnesian War Spartan forces invaded Attica, laid waste to the land and left (Thuc. 2.47.2); establishing a pattern that was to repeat itself every summer.¹⁷⁹ However, in 413 the Peloponnesian forces that invaded northern Attica stayed. They fortified the village of Decelea and from here, within sight of Athens, they constantly dispatched sorties to plunder the plain of Athens and the richest parts of Attica (Thuc. 7.19.1-2).¹⁸⁰ Provisions which had once come to Athens through Decelea now had to be imported by sea at a great expense (Thuc. 7.28.1). Some scholars argue that these raids on the farmlands of Attica caused such severe agricultural devastation that it took nearly fifty years to recover.¹⁸¹ They claim that the Peloponnesian raiders ravaged the countryside, engaging in the wide scale destruction of olive trees, vines and grain crops. Indeed, Mossé argues that the

¹⁷⁹ Tritle 2010: 165.

¹⁸⁰ Hanson 1983: 127.

¹⁸¹ French 1964: 169; Hanson 1983: 130.

Decelean War was a direct cause of the widespread poverty and starvation so prominent in *Assembly-Women and Wealth*.¹⁸²

With the end of the Peloponnesian War and the coming of peace in 404, Athens lost not only its long walls but, more importantly, it lost its empire. Gone were the allies and their tribute which contributed so much to state revenues; gone was its supreme naval power; and gone was its governing democracy. An oligarchy of thirty men, loyal to Sparta, was installed to govern Athens (Xen. *Hell.* 2.3.2; Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 34.3; Diod. 14.3.7).¹⁸³ Under the rule of the Thirty Athens plunged into civil war: the haves (oligarchs) against the have-nots (democrats); the few against the many (Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 35.4).

The Thirty ruled over Athens with cruelty and wickedness (Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 37.2). They excluded all but three thousand citizens from not only living in the city proper but also from participating in government, thus disenfranchising the majority of Athenians (Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 37.1; Lys. 25.22; Diod. 14.32.4; Xen. *Hell.* 2.3.18, 2.4.1-2). They rebuilt the Pnyx to face inland instead of towards the sea; for the fifth century naval empire was built by democracy (Plut. *Them.* 19.4).¹⁸⁴ They erased laws of significance to the democracy (Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 35.2).¹⁸⁵ They gave themselves the power of life or death over the excluded citizens and took away their weapons (Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 37.1; Xen. *Hell.* 2.3.20). They executed any prominent citizen they felt was a threat to their authority and confiscated his property (Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 35.4; Diod. Sic. 14.32.1). Sources indicate that the Thirty were responsible for the deaths of at least 1,500 Athenians during their eight month reign (Aeschin. 3.235; Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 35.4; Isoc. 7.67, 20.11; Diog. Laert. 7.5). Ultimately Thrasybulus, his band of rebels and the so-called men of the Piraeus united against the oligarchs and the democracy was restored.

Upon its restoration in 403 the two factions were reconciled (Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 39.1; Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.38). One of the most intriguing and important provisions of the reconciliation agreement was an amnesty on past wrongs committed by anyone except the Thirty and the officials under their government (Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 39.6). These men could either retire to Eleusis or, if

¹⁸² Mossé 1973: 13.

¹⁸³ Krentz 1982: 49-50.

¹⁸⁴ Fingarette 1971: 333; Krentz 1982: 61.

¹⁸⁵ Krentz 1982: 62.

they wished to stay in Athens, undergo *euthynai*, that is, to submit themselves to an investigation of their conduct in office. If they passed their *euthynai* they would be covered by the amnesty (39.6). Additionally the oligarchs could keep whatever property they had acquired from the confiscations or sell it back to the original owner (*P. Oxy.* 1606).¹⁸⁶ But what is truly remarkable about this reconciliation agreement is that the entire citizen body swore an oath to enforce the amnesty: ‘to forgive even the Thirty, whom you had to thank for sufferings untold’ (Andoc. 1.90).

In the mid-390s Athens broke with Sparta and committed itself to the Corinthian War forming an alliance with Corinth, Thebes and Argos. Over the next ten years Athens waged war incessantly placing a huge financial burden on the state. By 392 Athens had regained possession of the islands of Lemnos, Imbros and Scyros (Xen. Hell. 4.8.15)¹⁸⁷ and by 389 Thrasybulus had secured the northern Aegean thereby ensuring the safety of the grain route (Xen. Hell. 4.8.25-7). However, victories like these were few and by late 387 Sparta had taken control of the Hellespont and initiated attempts to cut off the supply of grain to Athens (Xen. Hell. 5.1.28). In 386 Athens had no other alternative than to accept Sparta’s terms for peace.

2.2 Food Crisis and Impoverishment

Assembly-Women and *Wealth* are often used by scholars as evidence that early-fourth-century Athens suffered an ‘agrarian crisis’, which led to extreme poverty and lower production for at least half a century (see section 1.1).¹⁸⁸ It is an easy conclusion to come to; talk of food fills the lines of both plays: the lack of food, the desire for food, the imagining of an abundance of food. Additionally, both plays give the impression that many Athenians were unemployed and that the poor were reliant on assembly pay to feed their families. To test whether or not Athenians were indeed as hungry and as impoverished as Aristophanes would have these scholars believe, this section will examine the state of domestic food production and the importation of grain during the early fourth century. It will argue that there was no agrarian crisis in Athens during the early fourth century, because the domestic production of

¹⁸⁶ Krentz 1982: 105.

¹⁸⁷ Garnsey 1988: 134.

¹⁸⁸ E.g. French 1964: 169; Mossé 1973: 13; Hansen 1988: 129.

agriculture resumed directly after the end of the war or perhaps even before then, and because the importation of grain at the time was secure.¹⁸⁹ Additionally, it will look at the demography of Athens after the Peloponnesian War and its effect on the standard of living and will conclude that with a smaller population Athenians had fewer mouths to feed and enjoyed a better standard of living than in the fifth century.

To support the argument of an agrarian crisis, scholars cite passages from Thucydides and others which describe the devastation of the Athenian countryside by the Spartans during the Peloponnesian War. According to the ancient sources, Spartan forces, having fortified Decelea, regularly dispatched soldiers to damage and plunder the Attic countryside. Athenians were not only denied access to their farms but suffered the loss of livestock, beasts of burden, furnishings and even the timber and roof tiles of their farmhouses (Thuc. 7.27ff; Hell. *Oxy.* 12.4; Lys. 22.14-15, Isoc. 8.92).¹⁹⁰ If all of Attica had suffered such destructions as these, there would be no doubt that Athens would have suffered an acute agrarian crisis. However, it did not.¹⁹¹ Strauss suggests the pattern of suffering throughout Attica was uneven.¹⁹² Victor Hanson agrees, demonstrating that some of the richest land of Attica lay in areas nearest the city which were undoubtedly protected by the military.¹⁹³

Scholars have also relied on Lysias 7 *On the Matter of the Olive Stump* as evidence for the widespread destruction of farms: the speaker testifies that where the land was once thick with private and sacred olive trees it was now bare (7.7).¹⁹⁴ However later in the speech he contradicts himself when he states that he cares for many other olive trees upon which he could commit the offence he is accused of (7.24-26).¹⁹⁵ Therefore, there cannot have been a widespread destruction of the land.

Hanson argues that Sparta's main objective in raiding the Attic plain was not to destroy Athenian agriculture forever; it was to disrupt their food supply (Xen. *Hell.* 1.1.35). He points

¹⁸⁹ Hanson 1983: 139.

¹⁹⁰ Hanson 1983: 128-9.

¹⁹¹ Hanson 1983: 137-9.

¹⁹² Strauss 1986: 45.

¹⁹³ Hanson 1988: 134.

¹⁹⁴ Mossé 1973: 14; Hanson 1983: 130.

¹⁹⁵ Hanson 1988: 130-1.

out that none of the ancient sources specifically mention the destruction of agriculture. The Spartans occupied Decelea for nine years and during this time it is clear that they raided the plain for food and supplies, and any booty they could find (*Hell. Oxy.* 12.4; *Thuc.* 7.27.3-5). Thus any damage done to crops was more than likely incidental.¹⁹⁶

Besides this, Hanson argues, there is clear evidence that many Athenian farms were intact and producing fruit and grain during the war and immediately after it.¹⁹⁷ For example, the speaker of *Lysias* 7 provides evidence that the property was farmed consistently throughout the Decelean War by listing those who had previously rented it from him (7.9-10). Xenophon states that the Thirty evicted Athenians from their farms (*Hell.* 2.4.1), tried to prevent the men in Phyle from accessing farms for supplies (2.4.4) and executed men from the Piraeus heading to their own farms for provisions (2.4.26). One of the best pieces of evidence for the quick recovery of domestic food production is the amount of olive oil required for prizes at the Great Panathenaea. Julia Shear suggests that over 2,100 prize amphorae filled with olive oil would have been needed at just one of the Great Panathenaeas of the 380s, and David Pritchard has calculated that this would have required at least 75,845 litres of oil.¹⁹⁸ This is a substantial amount and even though Athens may have had some oil in storage it would not have been enough to cover prizes in the five Great Panathenaea of the early fourth century plus the other festivals where oil was awarded as a prize.¹⁹⁹ Other evidence, such as the availability of employment on farms (*Xen. Mem.* 2.8.3) suggests that farmers had returned to their fields and were harvesting their crops.²⁰⁰ This evidence indicates that Athenians were working on their farms, harvesting and supplying produce to feed the *dēmos* immediately after the war.

However as Peter Garnsey's research shows, even in times of peace, domestic grain supplies alone could not feed the entire Athenian population.²⁰¹ During the Peloponnesian War Athens, no longer in control of Attica in its entirety, became even more dependent on imported grain.²⁰² In the fifth century Athens had done much to secure its grain supply by establishing a

¹⁹⁶ Hanson 1988: 133.

¹⁹⁷ Hanson 1983: 136, 140.

¹⁹⁸ Shear 2003: 103; Pritchard 2012b: 25.

¹⁹⁹ Shear 2001: 553-9.

²⁰⁰ Hanson 1983: 139.

²⁰¹ Garnsey 1988: 89.

²⁰² Garnsey 1988: 132.

network of diplomatic ties which continued into the fourth century (e.g. Bosporan Kings, Isoc. *Trap.* 17.57; Dem. 20.31). However, it was one thing to secure the grain, ensuring it arrived in Athens was another. After the war, grain destined for Athens, from the Hellespont in particular, was at the mercy of Sparta's goodwill.²⁰³ Until, of course, the Corinthian War.

During the years *Assembly-Women* (392/1) and *Wealth* (389/88), were written and produced, the grain supply to Athens seemed relatively assured. In 392 Athens had regained control of the islands of Lemnos, Imbros and Scyros which secured the trade route from the Hellespont to Athens.²⁰⁴ In addition, through the efforts of Thrasybulus in 390 Athens enjoyed the support of the Northern Aegean and controlled the grain route through there (Xen. *Hell.* 4.8.25-7).²⁰⁵ The danger posed to supply now was Athens' lack of naval power to eliminate the threat of piracy or an attack on its grain ships by the enemy. Despite this there was no food crisis in Athens during the 390s or early 380s.²⁰⁶ This means grain was getting to Athens and Athenians were being fed.

Aristophanes' last two extant plays also give the impression that assembly pay was being used as a form of income support by the poor. Assembly pay, three obols by 393, was designed to encourage citizens to attend the assembly by compensating them for having to leave their jobs for the day. The number of citizens who received payment for attendance was limited to 6,000 and any latecomers missed out (*Eccl.* 187, 282, 380), leading to members of the *dēmos* arriving before daybreak (282) and 'jostling' with each other to ensure they received a payment (*Plut.* 329-30). *Assembly-Women* suggests the money was an important contribution to the family's food budget (382, 547).²⁰⁷ All this implies that there was widespread unemployment in Athens.

However, starvation and impoverishment are, to a certain degree, dependent on population figures.²⁰⁸ Research conducted by Morgens Hansen suggests that an acceptable figure for the

²⁰³ Garnsey 1988: 148.

²⁰⁴ Rhodes 2010: 262.

²⁰⁵ Cawkwell 1976: 270; Rhodes 2010: 262.

²⁰⁶ Garnsey 1988: 148.

²⁰⁷ Bowie 1993: 260.

²⁰⁸ Akrigg 2007: 28.

population of Athenian adult male citizens in 400 is 25,000.²⁰⁹ He bases his figures on the number of adult Athenian citizens living in Attica during the second half of the fourth century adjusted for likely population growth.²¹⁰ This figure of 25,000 Hansen estimates to be 40% of the total number of adult male citizens calculated for 431. The population of women, children and slaves of course is unknown. However given the male population had decreased by such a significant proportion, birth rates during the 390s and 380s were not going to compensate for the loss.²¹¹ This meant fewer children to feed and look after. The population of slaves had decreased significantly, mostly due to the 20,000 who escaped during the Decelean War (Thuc. 7.27.4-5) and who were too expensive to replace in the early fourth century.²¹² The population would also have been affected not only by an influx of expatriates returning to Athens after the loss of the empire but also the emigration of a large number of metics.²¹³ Consequently in the early decades of fourth century Athens there were considerably fewer mouths to feed than in the fifth century.

A reduced population confers considerable advantages. A smaller number of citizens would lead to less demand for land, thereby decreasing land values and enabling more people to purchase land.²¹⁴ Owning land brings with it the necessity to employ labourers; with a smaller population, labour would have been in greater demand, and therefore greater opportunities for employment, and as a consequence wages would have risen.²¹⁵ Therefore, as Ben Akrigg argues, Athenians of the early fourth century should have been better off in material terms and enjoyed an improved standard of living than Athenians of the fifth century.²¹⁶

The evidence presented in this section clearly shows that Athens was not in the grip of a food crisis nor were the majority of its citizens impoverished. It has been established that domestic food production was not devastated by the Decelean War and that during the 390s and early 380s Athens imported grain supplies with little disruption. Additionally it has shown that Athens' significantly reduced population in the early fourth century led to an increase in employment and a better standing of living.

²⁰⁹ Hansen 1988: 26.

²¹⁰ Hansen 1988: 26-8; Akrigg 2007: 33; Pritchard 2010: 22.

²¹¹ Akrigg 2007: 42.

²¹² Akrigg 2007: 33, 42.

²¹³ Akrigg 2007: 33.

²¹⁴ Akrigg 2007: 40.

²¹⁵ Akrigg 2007: 40.

²¹⁶ Akrigg 2007: 40-1.

2.3 Weak Economy

Assembly-Women and Wealth give the impression that the early-fourth-century Athenian economy was weak: there is unemployment and a low standard of living, state revenues are suffering, the city is in need of saving, and the costs of joining an alliance against Sparta could bankrupt the city (see sections 1.2, 1.3). The Athenian economy had suffered during the Peloponnesian War: exports had decreased, the silver mines had stopped operating, the reliance on imports had increased and most importantly the annual tribute of 1200T had evaporated. However, this section will provide evidence that in addition to the recovery of agriculture (see section 2.2), trade and commerce flourished at the end of the fifth century and continued to grow in the fourth. And although Athens suffered financial stress during the Corinthian War, trade in the Piraeus ensured its economy continued to strengthen.

Athens relied on the income from its *pentekostē* (a two percent tax) on imports and exports to pay for its festival program and its increasing bureaucracy (see section 2.6). The Piraeus had established itself as the largest, most stable trading port of the eastern Mediterranean.²¹⁷ A centre for international exchange, it offered good port facilities, access to credit finance and the certainty of a valuable return cargo.²¹⁸ Trade in the Piraeus was not controlled by the state but by individuals who desired commercial gain, therefore defeat in the Peloponnesian War did not stop traders from doing business in Athens. Strauss argues that during the Decelean War trade and commerce prospered in the Piraeus.²¹⁹ With the re-establishment of exports in the early fourth century trade and commerce continued to grow; Isocrates' young Bosporan client heads to Athens in the mid-390s to 'trade and see the world' (17.4). The collection of the import/export taxes was a lucrative business and tax farmers bid highly for the right to collect the duties in 402/1 and 401/0.²²⁰

The Piraeus was a thriving commercial centre with its own marketplace, providing employment for non-elite citizens such as dock-hands, ferryman, stall owners and citizen guards (Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 24.3).²²¹ As trading increased offshoot businesses benefitted: visitors

²¹⁷ Strauss 1986: 48; Garnsey 1988: 139

²¹⁸ Strauss 1986: 48; Garnsey 1988: 139; French 1991: 30-31.

²¹⁹ Strauss 1986: 50.

²²⁰ Strauss 1986: 49.

²²¹ Strauss 1986: 48.

needed somewhere to sleep and eat, to buy provisions, to hire transport and perhaps even to visit a prostitute.²²² Additionally, many merchants and ship owners were dependent on already established banking facilities for borrowing money or exchanging currency.²²³ Capital investment would have been essential to maintain infrastructure and this, in turn, would have contributed to economic growth.²²⁴ Strauss estimates that the total volume of imports and exports at Piraeus in 402/1 was 1,800T, considerably less than amounts of the fifth century but not catastrophic.²²⁵ This all indicates that during the early fourth century trade played an important role in the growth of the Athenian economy.

Demographic data can be used again to show the benefits of a reduced population to employment. With less competition for jobs in the early fourth century non-elite citizens had greater opportunities for employment than in the fifth century. Additionally, the smaller population would have meant fewer citizens operating businesses in either the *agora* or the Piraeus. Fewer market traders would mean less competition in the market place. This would present capital investment opportunities for citizens to either start up or take over an established business. Either way they would benefit substantially from reduced competition.

The economy, even though it was growing during this period, did have its setbacks. The heaviest burden during the 390s and 380s was the investment in warmaking. As section six will show Athens consistently went to war between 396 and 386 and the money required to sustain such a commitment was substantial.²²⁶ Imports experienced some disruption during this time from piracy and from the seizure of ships and the forced unloading of their cargoes by other states (*katagein*).²²⁷ Manufacturing exports in the early fourth century were less than those of the fifth primarily, it is thought, of the desertion of slaves during the Decelean War.²²⁸ Raiding parties by Spartan forces from Aegina to the Piraeus in 387 (Xen. *Hell.* 5.1.29) also disrupted trade in and out of the Piraeus.

²²² Strauss 1986: 49.

²²³ Strauss 1986: 49.

²²⁴ French 1991: 34.

²²⁵ Strauss 1986: 50.

²²⁶ French 1991: 34; Pritchard 2012b: 47, 56 table 5.

²²⁷ Garnsey 1988: 143.

²²⁸ Strauss: 1986: 46; French 1991: 33.

In conclusion, at the time Aristophanes was writing the Athenian economy was growing. Agriculture had recovered quickly and though exports may have been down, the increase in imported goods saw trade continue to thrive. As commerce in the Piraeus grew so too did offshoot businesses ensuring the economy continued to strengthen. Additionally, the smaller population would have created increased opportunities for employment and investment in small business.

2.4 Rich v. Poor

A sense of antagonism between the rich and the poor, exacerbated by the huge gap in the ownership of wealth between the two classes, pervades both of Aristophanes' last extant plays: the entire play of *Wealth* concerns the desire of the *penētes* to be wealthy and the envy they have for the *plousioi*, and *Assembly-Women* describes the gulf between the haves and the have-nots in Praxagora's stirring speech about what her new Athens will not have (see sections 1.2, 1.3).²²⁹ As I stated in chapter one, it would appear that Aristophanes is giving voice to an increased hostility towards the wealthy in early-fourth-century Athens. This section aims to demonstrate that the early-fourth-century Athenian *dēmos* was not significantly more hostile towards the wealthy than they were in the fifth century. The violence perpetuated by the oligarchs against non-elite citizens during the rule of the Thirty suggests that the poor had legitimate cause for increased hostility towards the wealthy. However, the commitment of the *dēmos* to the amnesty agreed upon after the restoration of the democracy controlled any civil unrest and retributive action. This is not to say there was no tension between the classes at all.

Aristophanes' characterisations of the wealthy in *Assembly-Women* and *Wealth* are mostly moral in tone:²³⁰ *penētes* act with *sōphrosunē* (moderation), *plousioi* with *hubris* (violence); *penētes* are honest, *plousioi* lie; the wealthy are bad, the poor good, and so on (see sections 1.2, 1.3). Some scholars argue that these characterisations of the wealthy and the poor give the impression of significant antagonism between the elite and non-elite citizens of Athens during

²²⁹ Strauss 1986: 165.

²³⁰ David 1984: 15; Dillon 1987: 163.

the early fourth century.²³¹ However, attributing such qualities to these two classes is not new to Aristophanes' plays. In his fifth century comedies the rich are also arrogant and haughty (*Nub.* 48; *Vesp.* 145), are accused of *hubris* and a dislike of the *dēmos* (*Vesp.* 1251-5; 464-70); and the poor are hard-working (*Vesp.* 611) courageous and good (*Ach.* 697-8; 595-6).²³²

The mood at Athens after the Peloponnesian War undoubtedly would have been one of depression. The loss of the empire had affected the fortunes of the wealthy and the poor alike. Many of the rich lost huge sums of money but were still rich (e.g. Ischomachus, *Lys.* 19.46-7), some poorer citizens had become wealthy (*Lysias* 26.22), some of the wealthy had become poor (*Xen. Mem.* 2.8.1; *Aeschin.* 2.147) and some of the richer families had been completely destroyed.²³³ Some of the poor became poorer: ancient sources tell of the poor being forced to take jobs normally reserved for slaves or required manual labour (*Dem.* 57.45; *Xen. Mem.* 2.81-6).²³⁴ What resulted was a divided society in which the few had much and the many had little. The rule of the Thirty only served to increase the tension.

Under the rule of the Thirty non-elite citizens suffered a number of atrocities (see section 2.1) and it is not hard to imagine the sort of revolutionary ferment Ehrenberg speaks of taking hold (see section 1.1). However, all Athenians took an oath after the restoration of the democracy to forget the wrongs of the past, except those of the Thirty and their associates. And for the most part that is exactly what the Athenians did. The violent struggles between oligarchs and democrats in Corcyra, Rhodes and other parts of Greece so chillingly described by Thucydides (3.81) and the Oxyrhynchus Historian (10) did not happen in Athens. These democratic revolutions saw horrific bloodshed and the exile of many elite citizens.²³⁵ Admittedly, in 401 the *dēmos* attacked and killed oligarchic leaders living at Eleusis (*Xen. Hell.* 2.4.43) and in 399 members of the cavalry who had served under the Thirty were sent to aid Sparta against Tissaphernes in the hope that they would perish (3.1.4). However, these two acts of acute hostility took place at the turn of the century and did not continue throughout the 390s and early 380s when Aristophanes was writing these plays.

²³¹ E.g. David 1984: 17-19.

²³² Pritchard 2012a: 27-9.

²³³ Davies 1971: 460, 311, 31; Taylor 2007: 79.

²³⁴ Strauss 1986: 56.

²³⁵ Kagan 1987: 415; Bruce 1961: 168.

This is not to say that relations between the two classes were totally free of tension. Scholars argue that the postwar political trials at Athens may not have breached the terms of the amnesty by outrightly charging oligarchs, but they breached it in spirit by charging those who had connections to the oligarchy, no matter how weak those connections were.²³⁶ The *dēmos* convicted politicians, generals, and ambassadors on various misconduct charges from 403 to 386; even ordering at least three executions. Socrates, one of those executed, was convicted partly because of his connection to the oligarchy (Aeschin. 1.173).²³⁷

Some scholars have argued though that the greatest area of tension between the two classes is that of war and empire.²³⁸ Athens' decision to enter the Corinthian War placed considerable financial pressure on elite citizens. Wealthy citizens of the fourth century were expected to use their wealth for the benefit of the *dēmos* through the payment of *eisphorai*, liturgies and *epidoseis* (voluntary contributions).²³⁹ The scene in *Assembly-Women* where Eurippides fails to raise 500T hints at a *dēmos* that quickly turns vengeful when it does not get what is promised (see section 1.2). Likewise, the *epidosis*: the names of those volunteering a contribution, together with what they had promised to contribute were written on tablets and placed in the *agora* until that promise was fulfilled. Those who defaulted were publicly humiliated by having their names transferred to another list in the *agora* headed those 'who voluntarily promised the people to contribute money for the salvation of the city and failed to pay' (Isae. 5.37-8).²⁴⁰

Scholars have argued that the Athenian wealthy were reluctant to pay these taxes and saw them as unfair.²⁴¹ This argument is often based on Aristophanes' famous line from *Assembly-Women*: 'We need to launch a fleet: the poor man says yes, the rich and the farmers say no' (197-8).²⁴² The implication being that the wealthy, tired of being continually taxed for the purposes of *eisphora*, were preventing the poor from salvation. Public finances were weak during the early fourth century and the wealthy were expected to make up the shortfall (see section 2.6). These huge costs had the potential to bankrupt elite citizens (Xen. *Oec.* 2.6).

²³⁶ Cartledge 2001: 111.

²³⁷ Strauss 1986: 3-4, 57.

²³⁸ Strauss 1986:58.

²³⁹ Dillon 1987: 162; Taylor 2007: 79, Pritchard 2012a: 20.

²⁴⁰ Fawcett (forthcoming): 14.

²⁴¹ Mossé 1973: 16; Dillon 1987: 162; Fawcett (forthcoming): 30.

²⁴² Strauss 1986: 5, 58.

Certainly, in the speeches of Lysias the wealthy complain about taxation (18.21), seeing themselves as oppressed ‘by special levies’ (28.3-4) and lamenting that they ‘have to equip warships’ (29.4).

For the poor, of course, war meant wages, booty and the chance of cleruchies.²⁴³ For the thousands who were sent back penniless to Athens during the Peloponnesian War by Lysander (Plut. *Lys.* 13.3; Xen. *Mem.* 2.8.1), it meant the possible restoration of the empire and therefore the chance to reclaim their lives.²⁴⁴ Therefore if the wealthy did resist paying their taxes a certain amount of friction between the two classes would be expected.

However, other speeches show quite clearly that many elite citizens boasted about having paid their taxes, particularly liturgies. By performing festival and/or military liturgies, such as the *chorēgia* (sponsorship of a chorus) or *trierarchia* (maintenance of a trireme), elite citizens enjoyed significant political and legal advantages in the assembly and law courts of Athens.²⁴⁵ A victorious *chorēgos* could depend on political support from the *dēmos* (Plut. *Nic.* 3.2).²⁴⁶ Likewise by detailing his liturgical spending before the courts an elite citizen could build up *charis* (goodwill) among the jurors in order to secure their leniency (Lys. 3.46, 12.38, 21.1). Others freely admit that securing leniency was their sole purpose for performing liturgies (Lys. 18.23, 20.31, 25.11-13).²⁴⁷ Clearly, even though there is evidence that the wealthy complained about wealth taxes, it cannot be argued that they strongly objected to paying them.²⁴⁸

In conclusion, the evidence suggests that a certain antagonism existed between the rich and poor in the early fourth century and that it was exacerbated by the rule of the Thirty. However, despite the postwar trials the *dēmos* stayed committed to the amnesty and there was no violent democratic revolution. Certainly the wealthy may have grumbled about paying wealth taxes and the poor undoubtedly longed to have the empire back. However, the

²⁴³ Strauss 1986: 58.

²⁴⁴ Hansen 1988: 22.

²⁴⁵ Fawcett (forthcoming): 13, 30; Pritchard 2012b: 28.

²⁴⁶ Pritchard 2012b: 28.

²⁴⁷ Dillon 1987: 180; Fawcett (forthcoming): 13; Pritchard 2012b: 28.

²⁴⁸ Strauss 1986: 58; Fawcett (forthcoming): 30.

evidence does not support the deep divisive antagonism between the classes on the scale which scholars argue Aristophanes implies in *Assembly-Women* and *Wealth*.

2.5 Redistributive Solutions

Aristophanes' last two extant plays suggest that the only hope Athens had to save itself from the social and economic problems which ailed it was to consider a radical redistribution of wealth in the form of either communism as in *Assembly-Women* or a miracle as in *Wealth*.²⁴⁹ Scholars have long argued that the plays are evidence that Athenians of the early fourth century were seriously considering ways to achieve this redistribution.²⁵⁰ Some argue that *Assembly-Women* is based specifically on the ideas expressed by Plato in his *Republic*.²⁵¹ However there appears to be no discussion of any sort of redistribution of wealth based on any communistic model in the oratory of the fourth century. In fact, there is no evidence at all to suggest that during the 390s and early 380s Athenians were publically discussing the introduction of any type of model or tax to redistribute wealth and provide relief for the poor.

Scholars have often drawn comparisons between Praxagora's new model for society in *Assembly-Women* and that which Plato espouses in the third and fifth book of the *Republic*.²⁵² The two models are virtually the same, both recommending for example, communal ownership of property (416d, *Eccl.* 590-610); little or no use for court system (464d, *Eccl.* 655-61); no private dwelling places (416d, *Eccl.* 674-5); communal dining (416e, *Eccl.* 675-88); slaves will do all the work (416e, 463b, 464c, *Eccl.* 651-2); no marriage (457c, *Eccl.* 614-5); and no violence by the young against the old (465a-b, *Eccl.* 641-3). Scholarship argues that because the models are so similar, *Assembly-Women* is evidence that Athenians of the early fourth century were seriously considering a radical redistribution of wealth based on some type of communist model.²⁵³

²⁴⁹ Strauss 1986: 165.

²⁵⁰ Ehrenberg 1962: 67.

²⁵¹ Ehrenberg 1962: 67; David 1984: 21; Sommerstein 1998: 13.

²⁵² Sommerstein 1998: 13.

²⁵³ Ehrenberg 1962: 67-8; Croiset 1973: 172.

It is true that a comic poet such as Aristophanes would have sought inspiration for the subject matter of his plays through ideas circulating in Athens at the time, including the ideas of those who actively criticised the Athenian democracy.²⁵⁴ However, Plato's *Republic* was never in the public domain.²⁵⁵ It was a privately circulated work on the moral and political problems of Athenian democracy.²⁵⁶ Strauss takes a sort of 'where there's smoke there's fire' type view suggesting the plays would have fallen flat if there had been no public discussions about poverty and communistic theorizing.²⁵⁷ He states though that the discussions were only amongst the intelligentsia, which seems to undermine his argument.²⁵⁸ As Ober argues, despite the fact *Assembly-Women* was written several years before the *Republic*, it is difficult to believe the Athenian *dēmos* would have found the parody of a philosophical text remotely funny.²⁵⁹

The Athenian democracy required a high level of participation by its citizens. The 6,000 plus citizens who attended the assembly formed a formidable body of age and experience; they knew about life as a soldier or a sailor, a magistrate or a juror, a poor man or a wealthy man. The assembly was dominated by the non-elite citizens, it was the government of the poor (Aritot. *Pol.* 3.1279b17) and their decisions were binding.²⁶⁰ Other Greek city-states were known to have attempted redistributions of wealth: for example, Rhodes ca. 390 by bringing lawsuits against the rich, also Thebes and Syracuse (Arist. *Pol.* 5.1302b24, 1304b27-30). Research indicates that during the 390s and early 380s the assembly was operating legally, meeting its required quorum of 6,000 citizens in attendance.²⁶¹ Consequently, if there was any serious public discourse on the redistribution of wealth non-elite citizens had every opportunity to act on it. Yet they did not.²⁶²

Athenians believed wealthy individuals should spend a portion of their wealth on ensuring the security of the state and for the general benefit of the *dēmos*.²⁶³ The *eisphora*, liturgies and fines took money directly from the rich and redistributed it so that indirectly it benefitted the

²⁵⁴ Ober 1998: 154.

²⁵⁵ David 1984: 21.

²⁵⁶ Ober 1998: 154.

²⁵⁷ Strauss 1986: 57, 167.

²⁵⁸ Strauss 1986: 167.

²⁵⁹ Ober 1998: 154.

²⁶⁰ Ober 1989: 193.

²⁶¹ Hansen 1988: 25.

²⁶² Ober 1989: 198.

²⁶³ Ober 1989: 199; Taylor 2007: 79; Fawcett (forthcoming): 10-11.

poor.²⁶⁴ The *eisphora* was generally used to provide funds for military pay, thus enabling the non-elite citizens an opportunity to participate in the defence of Athens.²⁶⁵ The liturgies, which contributed money to triremes or festivals, were once a voluntary expense but by the fourth century the state allocated them out on a rotational basis.²⁶⁶ Fines against the wealthy generally contributed to state revenues aiding in the payment of state-funded wages such as assembly pay and jury pay.²⁶⁷ These three methods of redistributing wealth helped to quell the rise of any attempt to radically alter the unequal distribution of wealth in Athens during the early fourth century.²⁶⁸

Clearly Athenians were not as concerned about redistributing wealth to the poor as scholars of Aristophanes would like to believe. The communistic program proposed by Praxagora is not related to the ideas in Plato's *Republic* which was a privately circulated work that the majority of the *dēmos* would have been unaware of. The state continued with its direct taxes of *eisphorai* and liturgies to indirectly benefit the poor; however no new taxes or any schemes to provide help to the poor are known to exist in the early fourth century.

2.6 Weak Public Finances

Strong public finances were essential for Athens to maintain its extensive festival program, its ever-increasing bureaucracy and its military expenses. Aristophanes last two extant plays suggest the state was having difficulty raising the necessary funds to keep the city operating: attempts at *eisphorai* are not raising adequate funds, assembly pay and military wages are adding to the state's woes (see sections 1.2, 1.3). Defeat in the Peloponnesian War saw Athens lose its empire and with it a considerable amount of state revenue: the tribute from its allies. In fact, in 399 Athens found itself unable to repay a small debt of two talents to the Boiotians (Lys. 30.22). To test whether or not Athens was experiencing difficulty in raising funds in the early fourth century this section will examine the major expenses of the period and then determine if Athens was able to meet these expenses and if so how they managed it.

²⁶⁴ Ober 1989: 200; Fawcett (forthcoming): 11.

²⁶⁵ Ober 1989: 200.

²⁶⁶ Ober 1989: 199.

²⁶⁷ Ober 1989: 200-2.

²⁶⁸ Ober 1989: 202.

It will conclude that in the first years of the fourth century Athenian revenues recovered quickly and Athens was able not only to repay the Boiotians, but more importantly, maintain its festival program and cover state funded wages with little difficulty. However, the decision for Athens to break with Sparta and enter the Corinthian War in the mid-390s brought immense financial pressure to bear on the state. Consequently during the time period within which Aristophanes is writing the state did struggle to meet its costs.

Athens of the early fourth century administered and financed an extensive festival program, including celebrations such as the Great and Small Panathenaea, the City Dionysia and the Lenaea, and the Eleusinian Mysteries, the largest and most expensive being the Great Panathenaea and the City Dionysia.²⁶⁹ The Great Panathenaea, a festival in honour of Athena, was held every four years and the state bore financial responsibility for prizes, banqueting supplies for the *pannukhis* (all night celebration), including beasts for sacrifice, and the preparation, equipment and supervisors required for the *pompē* (procession).²⁷⁰ Restoration of a fragmentary list of events and prizes for the Great Panathenaea from the 380s indicates that the festival of the early fourth century offered the full program of musical, gymnastic, hippic and tribal *agōnes* (IG II² 2311).²⁷¹ Valuable prizes of gold crowns, Panathenaeic amphora, cash and cows were awarded to the victors and place getters of each event within these *agōnes*.²⁷² The City Dionysia, the theatrical festival which held theatrical *agōnes*, required a financial contribution from the state to cover pay for poets and musicians, equipment and beasts for sacrifice.²⁷³

These costs were substantial: David Pritchard estimates the state's contribution to the Great Panathenaea was between 10T and 15T with a further 7T contributed by wealthy citizens and 5T worth of olive oil from farmers; and research by Peter Wilson estimates the City Dionysia received 13T per year from the state plus 15T from private funding.²⁷⁴ In fact, Pritchard's research estimates that the entire annual festival program cost an incredible 100T overall.²⁷⁵ Admittedly, some of this funding came from upper-class liturgists and farmers. Nonetheless

²⁶⁹ Pritchard 2012b: 20.

²⁷⁰ Pritchard 2012b: 26-7, 32.

²⁷¹ Shear 2001: 555-6; Pritchard 2012b: 24-5.

²⁷² Shear 20003: 102; Pritchard 2012b: 25.

²⁷³ Pritchard 2012b: 20.

²⁷⁴ Pritchard 2012b: 20, 27, 32; Wilson 2008: 119.

²⁷⁵ Pritchard 2012b: 38.

the state probably contributed no less than half of this figure. Athens appears to have had little problem in covering these costs from the end of the Peloponnesian War as celebrations of the Great Panathenaea are known to have been held in 402/1, 398/7, 394/3, 390/89 and 386/5.²⁷⁶ Further evidence that the state's revenues recovered quickly is the introduction of a gold crown to be dedicated to Athena, and the addition of gold crowns to the prize list for each of the victors in the musical *agōnes* at the 402/1 festival.²⁷⁷

Another area of key expenditure for public revenue was the increasing cost of government itself. Praxagora is concerned that state pay is placing a strain on the state's revenues. A state-funded payment of one obol for attendance at the Athenian assembly had been introduced sometime after 404/3 (*Ath. Pol.* 41.3).²⁷⁸ The assembly of 6,000 citizens was held on 40 days during the year (*Ath. Pol.* 62.3), costing the state an annual amount of 6T. This amount was then increased to two obols and then again to three (*Ath. Pol.* 41.3), consequently costing the state the rather larger sum of 20T per year. Again, a substantial amount. By the 390s and 380s the Athenian state paid *misthos* or pay for an array of city officials including jurors (*Arist. Eq.* 51, 255-5,800), councillors (*IG* i³ 82.17-23), magistrates (*Arist. Ath. Pol.* 24.1-3), and assembly goers (*Arist. Ath. Pol.* 41.3).²⁷⁹ Adding to this list undersecretaries and public slaves Pritchard estimates the annual cost of running the democracy to be around 98T.²⁸⁰

A major source of revenue for Athens in the early fourth century was import/export taxes.²⁸¹ As shown in section 2.3 the Piraeus had established itself as the main trading port for the Aegean and increased imports and exports helped to keep the Athenian economy of the early fourth century growing. The right to collect the *pentekostē* (see section 2.3) was auctioned off and in 402/1 the state received 30T, while in the following year it got 36T (*Andoc.* 1.133-4).²⁸² Other taxes on merchant traders in the 390s were a five percent tax (*eikoste*) on trade in Thasos and Clazomenae, and a ten percent tax (*dekate*) on trade in the Bosphorus (*Xen. Hell.*

²⁷⁶ Shear 2001: 553-9.

²⁷⁷ Shear 2001: 553, 555.

²⁷⁸ Pritchard (forthcoming): 11.

²⁷⁹ Ehrenberg 1962: 230-1; Pritchard (forthcoming): 1-32.

²⁸⁰ Pritchard (forthcoming): 32 table 3.

²⁸¹ Fawcett (forthcoming): 5.

²⁸² Fawcett (forthcoming): 5.

4.8.27).²⁸³ However, these amounts fall considerably short of the 150T (50T for festivals, 100T for government) needed to cover the costs of Athens' festival program and running the government.

Even with the massive reduction in state revenues, for eight years, 404-396, Athens had managed to raise the revenue necessary to fund its state sponsored festival program and its bureaucracy. But, for eight years Athens had not waged war. It had sent small expeditions to the aid of Sparta (e.g. Elis, Xen. *Hell.* 3.2.25; Diod. Sic. 14.17.7) but it had not needed to spend any money on large expensive military campaigns. However, all that changed in 395 when Athens broke with Sparta and entered the Corinthian War. The alliance formed with Corinth, Thebes and Argos against Sparta saw Athens wage war consistently over the next ten years.²⁸⁴

A major component of military expenditure was the cost of naval operations; a cost which Vincent Gabrielsen believes was regularly 'exceedingly high' and 'incalculable'.²⁸⁵ To illustrate just how high these costs were it is worth examining the cost of Thrasybulus' campaign in late 391. Given the nature of the sources it is not known exactly how long Thrasybulus and his fleet were active in the Aegean until his untimely death at Aspendus (Xen. *Hell.* 4.8.30). Nonetheless what is known is that he departed Athens in the winter of 391 or early 390 and died in 389, which suggests that he was probably campaigning for between eighteen months and two years.²⁸⁶ He left with 40 new triremes and although he lost ships at some point, he continued with a reduced fleet of 17 (Xen. *Hell.* 4.8.25; Lys. 28.4; Diod. Sic. 14.94.2-3).

Pritchard has costed Athenian warmaking in the 370s at about 500T per year on average of public and private money.²⁸⁷ His figures suggest the cost of building a trireme was 1T 1234 dr., a figure which concurs with that suggested by Aristotle (*Ath. Pol.* 22.7).²⁸⁸ Therefore Thrasybulus' fleet required an initial capital outlay of 48T 1360dr. Even more substantial was

²⁸³ Fawcett (forthcoming): 7.

²⁸⁴ Fawcett (forthcoming): 35; Pritchard 2012b: 47.

²⁸⁵ Gabrielsen 2007: 257.

²⁸⁶ Cawkwell 1976: 273-5.

²⁸⁷ Pritchard 2012b: 56.

²⁸⁸ Pritchard 2012b: 51.

the cost of wages paid to sailors.²⁸⁹ Adequate naval pay in the fourth century meant high rates in order to attract and retain skilled crews.²⁹⁰ The gross pay of a sailor was one drachma per day and with 200 crew members the cost of wages per month for one of Thrasybulus' triremes would have been about 1T. Using the more conservative estimate of eighteen months, and assuming Thrasybulus had 40 ships for twelve months and 17 for six months, his total cost of wages would have been 582T. Therefore it can be argued that the entire expedition would have cost in the order of 630T 1360dr.

This is an enormous amount, which would have placed enormous strain on the state. It needs to be stressed here that Thrasybulus' campaign was only a part of Athens' warmaking expenditure of the early fourth century; naval battles continued around Aegina (Xen. *Hell.* 5.1.6-13) and in the Hellespont (Xen. *Hell.* 5.1.6-7). Additionally, the equipment costs and wages of the cavalry, the wages of hoplites and many other fixed and variable costs related to the maintenance of the military would need to be met. To do this Athens had to rely on Persian money, booty and wealth taxes.

In 393, following his illustrious win at the battle of Cnidus, Conon sailed into Athens with 80 triremes and a purse full of Persian gold (Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.11-13, 8.1-12). The money was vital to enable the completion of the long walls that had once offered Athens protection and security.²⁹¹ The triremes were crucial to the continued commitment of Athens to the Corinthian war even though Conon remained a Persian admiral (Xen. *Hell.* 8.12, 16; Diod. 14.85.4). The Persian subsidies were not to last long though and by 392 the Great King had withdrawn his support from Athens, leaving the treasury desperately short of money.²⁹² For Athens to move forward and realise any imperialistic ambitions it was essential that generals like Thrasybulus and Ergocles supplemented the state's revenues with booty from a strong campaign season.²⁹³

²⁸⁹ Gabrielsen 2007: 258.

²⁹⁰ Gabrielsen 2007: 258.

²⁹¹ Buckler 2003: 138.

²⁹² Seager 1967: 111.

²⁹³ Seager 1967: 111.

The importance of booty to the state's revenues cannot be underestimated.²⁹⁴ Often, during the fourth century, the Athenian treasury did not have the funds to pay the wages of personnel sent on campaign.²⁹⁵ In cases where this eventuality arose, Athens authorised its generals to cover whatever cost was outstanding (Diod. 16.57.2-3, Lys. 28.5-6) through the acquisition of booty (Diodorus 15.47.7; Xen. *Hell.* 6.2.36), the plundering of the countryside (Isoc. 15.111-12) or through the forced contributions of cities involved in the campaign (Dem. 8.24-6).²⁹⁶ The Athenian *dēmos* maintained official control of any booty won on campaign (*Dem* 24.11-14; Lysias 28.6; Xen. *Hell.* 1.2.4-5)²⁹⁷ and it was not unheard of for it to authorise its generals to plunder with impunity (Diod. 13.52.2).²⁹⁸ Riches in the form of money and bullion were kept, and captives, jewellery, livestock, clothing, furniture, drinking cups and works of art were sold for cash.²⁹⁹

To help support its military campaigns and its renewed imperialistic ambitions Athens levied *eisphorai* on its elite-citizens. *Assembly-Women* suggests the state's attempts at raising money thru *eisphorai* were not raising the amounts expected (see section 1.2). Euripides' proposed *eisphora* was expected to raise 500T. The scheme fails, by how much is not known. In 428/7 during the early stages of the Peloponnesian War, an *eisphora* of 1% yielded 200T (Thuc. 3.19.1) suggesting a tax base of 20,000T.³⁰⁰ To expect a yield of 500T from a two-and-a half percent tax suggests the taxable value of the wealthy in the late 390s was also 20,000T. Given that a little over a decade later, in 378/7, the recorded taxable wealth of Attica was a tiny 5,750T, it is hard to believe that any Athenian would expect an *eisphora* in the early fourth century to yield anywhere near 500T.³⁰¹ Aristophanes is either exaggerating or the Athenians have unrealistic expectations as to just how much they can raise.³⁰² Yet the speeches of Lysias clearly illustrate the pressure and expectation the state placed on the wealthy to raise the required revenue:

Do but observe, gentlemen of the jury, how slender are the revenues of the State, ... you ought, therefore, to see the surest revenue for the State in the fortunes of those who are willing to perform public services. (21.13)

²⁹⁴ Pritchett 1974: 68; Harding 1995: 110.

²⁹⁵ Gabrielsen 1994: 116, 250 n. 25; Pritchard 2012b: 48.

²⁹⁶ Gabrielsen 2007: 268-71; Pritchard 2012b: 48.

²⁹⁷ Pritchett 1971: 416-25; Gabrielsen 2007: 255-6; Pritchard 2012b: 48.

²⁹⁸ Pritchett 1974: 424.

²⁹⁹ Pritchett 1974: 168-203.

³⁰⁰ Sommerstein 1998: 209; Fawcett (forthcoming): 11.

³⁰¹ Sommerstein 1998: 209-10.

³⁰² Fawcett (forthcoming): 20.

Three of Lysias' speeches from the late 390s and early 380s provide indirect evidence of a state desperate for money. The prosecution of Epicrates, a treasury official accused of embezzlement, begins with a statement that suggests that if the jury cannot establish that he is guilty they will not be paid their three obol wage for the day (27.1). Ergocles returned to Athens in 388 to face charges of embezzlement, bribery and treason.³⁰³ The speech against him notes that the jurors are all struggling to pay the special taxes that had been levied by the state (28.3). Upon the confiscation of Ergocles' possessions and his subsequent execution, the *dēmos* accused Philocrates of withholding 30T of Ergocles' property from the state. The speech makes a point of stressing that at this time the wealthy are being taxed to equip warships.

It is clear that Athenian public finances, whilst adequate in the very early years of the fourth century to maintain the festival program and its official bureaucracy, struggled from 396-386 to meet the heavy costs of war making. Using Thrasybulus' 391/0 campaigning as an example, Athens had gone from needing to find 150T to fund its festival program and its government costs for 391/0 to needing at least 678T to cover those costs plus the costs of warmaking. The economy was growing (see section 2.3) but the *pentekostē* only contributed to the costs of festivals and government. Consequently, the state relied heavily on booty and the very high taxes levied on the wealthy to fund its warmaking. Therefore, *Assembly-Women* and *Wealth* can be considered reliable evidence for weak public finances in early fourth century Athens.

2.7 Summary

In summary, the aim of this chapter was to take each of the main features of early-fourth-century Athenian society represented in *Assembly-Women* and *Wealth* by Aristophanes, and test them against other contemporaneous evidence to determine their value as historical evidence. What I have discovered is that in all but one case Aristophanes misrepresents the reality of early-fourth-century Athens and consequently scholars are misguided in using his plays as conclusive evidence for a postwar Athens in decline.

³⁰³ Lamb 1930: 587.

This chapter has shown that Athenians were not starving as scholars have thought; domestic agriculture had recovered swiftly and the importation of grain was stable. Additionally demographic data suggests Athenians of the fourth century had a greater chance of enjoying increased wages and a higher standard of living than those in the fifth century. The economy showed real signs of growth during the early fourth century due to the swift recovery of agriculture, and the continued growth of trade and commerce. Following the restoration of democracy, after the horrors of the oligarchic regime, the *dēmos* respected the terms of the amnesty and tension between the rich and the poor had only slightly increased from that of the fifth century. Despite the assumption that the *dēmos* was considering a redistribution of wealth, no evidence of any serious contemplation of such schemes can be found in the ancient sources. The only area Aristophanes plays can be said to truly reflect the conditions in Athens of the fourth century is the state of public finances. This chapter has established that although Athens managed to recover from the Peloponnesian War and adequately fund its festivals and government, by 395 the state could not accommodate the immense financial burden of the Corinthian War without heavily taxing the wealthy.

In four out of five areas Aristophanes fails to accurately represent Athenian society of the early fourth century. This means that more often than not Aristophanes was exaggerating, or inventing issues. However, his accurate reflection of the state of public finances cannot be ignored. This suggests that he was not randomly making things up but was basing some of his subject matter on popular problems of the time. That his plays are not entirely based on fact or fantasy suggests important implications for the debate about the interpretation of Aristophanes (see section 1.6) as well as the value of Aristophanes a source for early-fourth-century Athens. This finding also suggests an explanation for why Aristophanes misrepresented the socio-economic problems in Athens during the early fourth century.

CHAPTER 3: CONCLUSION/THE ART OF ARISTOPHANES

This chapter aims to examine how the findings from chapter two contribute to the debate about the intent of Aristophanes which was outlined in chapter one. Subsequently it will seek to determine Aristophanes' value as a source for the history of Athens directly after the Peloponnesian War. Initially it will restate the arguments of both schools of thought on the interpretation of Aristophanes. It will then argue that in his early-fourth-century plays Aristophanes combined reality, popular culture and fantasy to create a crisis at Athens which required a fantastic, comical solution. In writing his plays in this way Aristophanes was merely continuing to use the same technique as he had in the fifth century. This continuity in his technique has a significant impact on the debate about the intent of Aristophanes by lending support to the school of thought which Heath, among others, follows. However, as the plays are not entirely based on fantasy this support comes with qualifications. Consequently it will conclude that scholars such as Ehrenberg, Croiset, Mossé and David have incorrectly relied on Aristophanes as solid evidence for an Athens in a postwar decline and that this shows an inconsistency in the use of Aristophanes by historians. The continuity between Aristophanes' plays of the fifth and fourth centuries also contributes to the understanding of why Aristophanes misrepresents early fourth-century Athens: he was simply creating a comic play.

One school of interpretation in this debate maintains that Aristophanes, and the poets of Old Comedy, were genuine political commentators. This group of scholars argue that these comics intentionally tried to influence the assembly and the law courts by using their plays to comment on the serious issues affecting Athens. Henderson, who is currently this school's strongest advocate, relies on the parabasis of *Frogs* and the Old Oligarch to argue that Aristophanes believed it was his duty to provide serious comment on issues in Athens and that the *dēmos* expected him to just that (see section 1.5). This expectation, Henderson argues, allowed the poets the freedom of speech to comment on issues currently under discussion in the assembly or law courts. This connection to the civic processes of Athens provided the poets with a powerful and democratically sanctioned license to influence public discourse.³⁰⁴ Wielding such power meant that the poets of Old Comedy took their roles seriously and that

³⁰⁴ Silk 2000: 306.

consequently their portrayals of contemporary Athens are, for Henderson's school of thought at least, believable.³⁰⁵

An acceptance of this premise underpins subsequent debates about Aristophanes' political preferences. De Ste. Croix and others argue that Aristophanes used his plays as 'vehicles for the expression of serious political views' (see section 1.6). Additionally, the plays have sparked other debates in which scholars that have used Aristophanes as evidence of crises in the early fourth century, have assumed that he had a serious intent. Debates about whether or not Praxagora's communist scheme works and disagreement over the winner of the *agōn* between Poverty and Chremylus stem from an acceptance of the school of thought that Aristophanes had a desire to comment on serious problems and suggest serious solutions to them (see sections 1.2 and 1.3). Consequently, no matter how comical the play, Aristophanes is seen as a reliable witness to problems in Athens not only during the fifth century but also the 390s and early 380s.

The opposite school of interpretation begins with the idea that Aristophanes was not a politician, but simply a dramatist; that his purpose was to present a piece of entertainment not to advocate policy (see section 1.6). Heath, one of several scholars who hold this view, suggests that even though the poets may have taken their inspiration from political realities, the plays were fantasies and were not intended to have political force. The hallmark of Old Comedy is that the poet takes or - in this case - invents a crisis in the *polis* and solves it through a fantastic and comic way.³⁰⁶ Heath demonstrates that in the fifth century this is exactly what Aristophanes does. He maintains that Aristophanes' fifth-century plays have tenuous connections to the realities of fifth-century Athens, because they build on a 'comic stereotype'. This stereotype is defined as a city in dire straits which can only be saved by a far-fetched, extraordinary solution. As a result, Heath argues, in *Acharnians* and *Wasps* Aristophanes has invented an Athens in which public life is so out of control the only solution is for citizens to retreat into private worlds; in *Lysistrata* the city is in such a mess that the women must save it; and, even more far-fetched, in *Frogs* divine intervention and the resurrection of the dead are required to save the day. In Heath's opinion these fantasies with their fantastic solutions were everything that Aristophanes' audience wanted to see; and

³⁰⁵ Henderson 1990: 271.

³⁰⁶ Robson 2009: 3.

subsequently they rewarded him for it (see section 1.5). Add to Heath's argument Halliwell's concern about the juxtaposition of satire and seriousness at a comedy festival and it is clear that this school of interpretation believes that the plays of Aristophanes are complete fantasies with very little, if any, serious intent.

Chapter one of this thesis established that Aristophanes wrote his plays to be performed once; at a fixed time and place, in front of what was, during the early fourth century, a predominantly Athenian audience. It also highlighted the importance of making a connection with the audience in order to win the competition. Chapter two demonstrated that the majority of issues raised in *Assembly-Women* and *Wealth* were invented by Aristophanes. It is my contention, based on the importance of the audience and the findings of Chapter two, that Aristophanes composed *Assembly-Women* and *Wealth* by drawing on reality, popular culture and fantasy to invent a crisis which appealed to his Athenian audience and which was then solved on stage in a fantastic way just as he did in the fifth century.

As a keen social observer Aristophanes was attuned to the attitudes of the people. As a result in *Assembly-Women* and *Wealth* he took the real issue of weak public finance and enhanced or invented other aspects of Athenian life to create the image of an Athens in crisis and desperately in need of saving through some brilliant, fantastical idea. As shown in Chapter two Aristophanes accurately reflects the state's inability to cope with the costs associated with entering the Corinthian War. The state of public finances was, perhaps, his starting point; then, in order to build his crisis he drew on the popular culture of early-fourth-century Athens.

The decision by the Athenian *dēmos* to involve Athens in the Corinthian War signals its desire to return to the days of empire; the Peloponnesian War had affected the majority of Athenians for the worse and they longed for a time when everyone was better off. People were being fed but there was not an abundance of food; imports and exports were being traded but not as strongly as in the fifth century; and a certain tension lingered between the rich and the poor. For his crisis Aristophanes overstated these issues and made them bigger than they actually were: the people were starving, homeless and without clothing; unemployment was so widespread people fought for assembly pay; the rich were sycophants, criminals and orators (see sections 1.2, 1.3, 1.4). By doing this Aristophanes capitalised on

how Athenians were feeling in the early fourth century; that they were disgruntled about being worse off than they were in the fifth century. This allowed him to make a strong connection with his audience: for example, everyone, farmers and city dwellers, the rich and the poor alike, would have identified with Chremylus' moaning about not having enough money, how difficult it was to make ends meet and how unfair life was (see section 1.3).³⁰⁷

In both plays Athens is saved by a fantastic idea: a redistribution of wealth to the poor, upon the implementation of which comedy ensues. Given that there is no serious evidence of any kind of scheme to redistribute wealth in Athens at the time (see section 2.5), this element of Aristophanes' plays, and its consequences, are pure comic fantasy.

This combination of reality, popular culture and fantasy to create a crisis in the *polis* and then to solve it with a fantastic solution lends support to Heath's position as opposed to Henderson's. However, this support is not absolute. Clearly not everything, as Heath proposes, is fantasy; both Aristophanes' fourth-century plays represent the state of early-fourth-century public finances accurately. As chapter two demonstrated there were considerable, very real problems with public finances in the 390s and early 380s. Additionally, Aristophanes manages to capture the mood of the *dēmos*: whilst people were able to feed their families and enjoy opportunities previously unavailable to them, Athenians were still disgruntled about living in reduced circumstances.

However, despite these differences, there is a clear continuity of technique here between Aristophanes' plays of the fifth century and his plays of the early fourth century. In his fifth-century plays crises are invented and the city is in desperate need of saving; consequently Aristophanes invents fantastically brilliant solutions to help. As demonstrated in chapter one and above, *Assembly-Women* and *Wealth* follow this same pattern: Athens is in the grip of a partially invented economic crisis and needs to be saved; in *Assembly-Women* the women provide the fantastic solution as they did in *Lysistrata*, and in *Wealth* divine intervention is required just as it was in *Frogs*.

³⁰⁷ MacDowell 1995: 349.

By establishing this continuity, the use of Aristophanes' last two extant plays by scholars as evidence for a postwar decline in early fourth-century Athens must be called in to question (see section 1.1). I believe that traditionally scholars like Ehrenberg, Croiset, Mossé, and David, expected Athens to be in a state of crisis after the Peloponnesian War, and therefore they accepted *Assembly-Women* and *Wealth* at face value as evidence of decline. Scholars have not interpreted Aristophanes' fifth-century plays as clear evidence of a crisis in Athens as *Assembly-Women* and *Wealth* have been: *Knights* is a play about demagogues, *Wasps* about the law courts, *Peace* and *Lysistrata* about peace; yet these plays are not seen as evidence for fifth-century problems with demagogues, or with the law courts, or that people were clamouring for peace. Therefore, clearly ancient historians have been inconsistent in their use of Aristophanes as an historical source.

Additionally this continuity addresses the gap in the understanding of what Aristophanes was doing; why he exaggerated the social and economic conditions in Athens during the early fourth century. Strauss cautions against taking Aristophanes at face value, because his plays are escapist comedies and therefore he exaggerates things for comic effect. Dillon argues that the issues raised by Aristophanes are generalized exaggerations of issues which can be found in any society. And Cartledge believes that the plays cannot stand alone as evidence because they are comic fantasies not official government reports (see section 1.1). As chapter two demonstrates these scholars are correct to urge caution when using Aristophanes' last two extant plays as good evidence for the conditions in Athens in the 390s and 380s; the poet does exaggerate and even invents issues. The weakness in their work though is that they do not provide an explanation for why Aristophanes was exaggerating these issues. This thesis does. This thesis illustrates quite clearly that Aristophanes misrepresented the social and economic realities of Athens in the early fourth century, because that is what he always did. He exaggerated and invented issues to create a crisis which needed to be solved on stage in an extraordinary, fantastical way because this is what he did in the fifth century, this is what his audience wanted and this is what would win him first place in the comedy festival.

Other arguments support this conclusion by further weakening the school of interpretation which Henderson advocates. Henderson's argument is that Aristophanes, as a poet of Old Comedy, was expected to offer serious comment on serious issues within Athens (see section 1.6). This would mean that starvation and impoverishment, the weak economy, the

antagonism between rich and poor, the search for solutions to redistribute wealth and weak public finances, as presented in *Assembly-Women* and *Wealth* were the ‘most important and divisive issues’ of Athens during the 390s and early 380s.³⁰⁸ However, as Chapter two has demonstrated, none of these issues, save that of weak public finances, were areas of intense public debate during this period. Therefore it is difficult to discern just how Aristophanes’ last two extant plays fit with Henderson’s argument.

On this basis it is also difficult to determine any clear evidence for Aristophanes’ political views. The most that can be said is that in his early fourth-century plays Aristophanes continues the sympathetic portrayal of the poor and the articulation of their point of view established in his fifth-century plays.³⁰⁹ This clear continuity of Aristophanes’ representation of the poor indicates that de Ste. Croix’s argument that Aristophanes’ plays were a serious attempt by him to influence his audience with politically conservative views cannot be sustained. Additionally, it makes traditional arguments using Aristophanes as evidence for crises in the early fourth century, which are predicated on the assumption that he was commenting on serious problems and offering serious solutions, redundant.

The aim of this thesis was to examine how Aristophanes represented the socio-economic realities of early fourth-century Athens in his last two extant plays *Assembly-Women* and *Wealth*, and to assess the accuracy of that representation. It then sought to apply those findings to the debate about the intent of Aristophanes and consequently to determine his value as a source for the history of Athens directly after the Peloponnesian War. It has found that Aristophanes in fact was not accurately presenting the realities of early fourth-century Athens, and that his fourth-century plays combine reality, popular culture and fabrication to construct a crisis in the same manner as his fifth-century plays do. These findings impact significantly on debates about the intent of Aristophanes by supporting, with qualifications, position which Heath advocates. As a consequence, this thesis has established that scholars such as Ehrenberg, Croiset, Mossé and David have incorrectly relied on Aristophanes’ fourth-century plays as evidence for an Athens in postwar decline. Additionally, it has provided an explanation for why Aristophanes misrepresented the social and economic realities of early fourth-century Athens: he was just trying to be funny.

³⁰⁸ Quotation from Henderson 1990: 273.

³⁰⁹ Pritchard 2012a: 21.

End of thesis

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