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The Agathon Scene in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*^{*}
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Abstract. This article interprets Agathon's speech of self-justification in light of the dramaturgical functions within the prologue of Aristophanes'

Thesmophoriazusae. Agathon refutes Inlaw's charges of homosexual effeminacy by outlining a theory of poetic composition according to which the poet changes his nature to create in himself the qualities of his characters and plays. The speech simultaneously works against Agathon's self-justification by portraying the tragedian as an elite intellectual whose theories are only valid within his own isolation.

The caricature of Agathon in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae* is a complex parody of the tragedian's public reputation as an effeminate homosexual, of his

use of the trendy New Music in his tragedies, and of a current theorization of composing dramatic poetry.¹ The parodies of Agathon's homosexuality and his musical style are already evident upon Agathon's entrance, when, dressed as a woman, he sings the roles of a Chorus of Trojan women and their Chorus Leader (*Th.* 101-29).² Euripides' Inlaw responds erotically to the song and to Agathon's effeminate appearance (130-45).³ Agathon attempts to justify his behavior by explaining his method of composition (146-72), a theory built around the term *mimēsis*. While not losing sight of the parody of Agathon's effeminacy⁴ or the parody of his music⁵--both of which critique (the fictionalized) Agathon for his lack of moral self-control--this article offers a new interpretation of Agathon's justification speech. It considers what dramaturgical functions the speech ought to fulfill in performance and then reads the speech in the light of these functions. For, although the scene is an interruption to the comedy's plot and although we do not expect Aristophanic comedy to possess a coherent or rational structure,⁶ it would be surprising if such a prominent scene had no dramaturgical function at all. I concentrate on the speech's functions as a sequel to the song and Inlaw's mockery, rather than on its function as programmatically introducing the comedy's anxiety regarding the performance of gender identity.⁷

We can identify two dramaturgical functions of Agathon's speech. First, on the level of plot, Agathon's speech must attempt to refute Inlaw's charges. Inlaw connects the effeminate character of Agathon's song with Agathon's feminine appearance, and reacts erotically to both. He also expresses confusion about the contradictory accoutrements that Agathon possesses: a low-toned musical instrument (βάρεβιτος) and a woman's gown (κροκωτῶ) (137-38), a mirror and a sword (140) and so forth. He possesses a surplus of clearly gendered accoutrements, yet he lacks both phallus and breasts (142-43). He is a man-woman (ὁ γύννις, 136), yet neither man nor woman. His appearance represents for Inlaw ἡ τάραξις τοῦ βίου (137), a mixture, a confusion, a disturbance of life.⁸ His contradiction-laden appearance, with its surpluses and lacks, suggests that he is unable to control life's basic desires and conventions. The lack of sexual organs, in contrast to Inlaw's prominently displayed phallus (see below), betokens an impossibility of normal sexual desire. The surplus of possessions signals a greed for multiple roles in life or an indecision about the proper role in life. One role Agathon might be ready for, even though Inlaw seems not to recognize it, is symposiast. Many of his belongings, including his clothing, reflect iconographic depictions of symposiasts.⁹ In this role, Agathon would stereotypically have desires for excessive consumption, desires which he has brought inappropriately "into the light of the sun" (as the Servant says, 69) even

though symposiastic consumption is best kept private. In sum, Agathon's mixed-up life--including his use of New Music and his effeminacy--betrays an inability to control his appetites and live the life of the good citizen.¹⁰ Inlaw's reaction is erotic because he faces an individual whose desires are so uncontrolled and who can therefore be expected to leap greedily at satisfying his desires. In his speech, Agathon looks to represent himself as a normative Athenian male. His speech must therefore explain away the confusion, justify his apparent moral turpitude and show that Inlaw's erotic reaction is inappropriate.

Second, the speech must function dramaturgically, against the character's intentions,¹¹ to advance the caricature of Agathon. To this end, its success in refuting Inlaw's charges must be only apparent. Inlaw's mockery merely reinforces aspects of the caricature that had already been introduced in the scene preceding Agathon's entrance: that he is an elitist poet with peculiar compositional practices (39-62), that he is effeminate in appearance (92, 97-98) and that he composes New Music (100, with Austin and Olson's note ad loc.). The structure of the play clearly precludes any move to rehabilitate Agathon's character. Agathon will refuse Euripides' request for help. He sets the stage for Inlaw to attend the Thesmophoria. He provides the negative paradigm by which the play will define both the cross-dressed Inlaw and Inlaw's betrayer,

Cleisthenes, the effeminate man who is happily accepted by the women.¹² In order for the play's structure to function properly, Agathon must remain in a state of denigration in the audience's eyes. His speech must confirm the humor of the caricature by allowing Inlaw's confusion to be validated and by proving the substance of Inlaw's criticisms true. It must show, despite its surface argument, that Agathon is in fact elitist, effeminate and self-indulgent.

In short, within the world of the play, the attempted justification must succeed or at least be reasonable. To the audience who laughs at the caricature, however, it not only must fail but also must confirm exactly what it attempts to refute.

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Aristophanes satisfies the first dramaturgical function by contrasting the ways in which Inlaw and Agathon conceive of identity. Before Agathon first appears onstage, Inlaw creates in the audience an expectation for stability of identity. The stability is grounded, on the one hand, in the character's body and, on the other hand, in the comic actor's costume.¹³ Inlaw's initial costume is most likely that of a typical comic male character: dark-red mask, wig of presumably graying hair, well-trimmed beard (which will later be shaved off), padded stomach, padded

buttocks, and phallus (Stone 1984, 267-69). His phallus is more prominent than most comic men's. Instead of being tied up so as to be only partially visible beneath his chiton, it dangles freely between his legs, like that of Philocleon in *Wasps* (at least at the end of that comedy; cf. V. 1341-44).¹⁴ The prominently displayed phallus signals the man's ever-present desire for sex, an eagerness also marked in the text: Euripides tosses off a crude joke about Inlaw's past sexual exploits (*Th.* 35),¹⁵ and Inlaw himself proclaims his readiness for sex with both the Servant¹⁶ (59-62) and Agathon (157-58). From the characters' perspective, masculine identity is found in the prominent male anatomy and in the prominent desire for sex. Gender identity is not a representation foisted onto, or derived from, the anatomy. Inlaw's phallus does not represent his masculinity. It *is* his masculinity. From the audience's perspective, the comic phallus may be a representation of the character's masculinity, but it is a representation that requires little to no interpretation. In most comic uses of the dangling phallus or even of the tied-up phallus (which, in iconographic depictions, can usually be seen), there is no ambivalence about its meaning. Its exposure and thus the character's nudity, not to be dismissed as merely comic convention or a meaningless remnant from the origins of comedy, guarantee that the character cannot deceive spectators, whether internal or external spectators, about his masculinity.¹⁷ From both the characters' and the spectators' perspectives, Inlaw's

identity is highly stable. Given its association with the unchanging and--for now--unchangeable nature of Inlaw's anatomy, it is fair to say that we find in both perspectives an essentialist conception of identity.

As Agathon enters and performs his song, Euripides and Inlaw step aside to become eavesdroppers. Euripides probably remains sidelined until he speaks at 173. Inlaw, though, bursts into a long speech at the conclusion of Agathon's song (130-45) and interjects obscenely during Agathon's justification speech (153, 157-58, 168-70, 172b). The audience is invited to interpret Agathon's identity through Inlaw's gaze. The result is a direct attack on the central target of Aristophanes' caricature: Agathon's effeminacy. In Inlaw's gaze, the effeminacy is essentialized and therefore inalienable from Agathon's identity. Many scholars legitimately wish to resist Inlaw's essentialist perspective and to study, in a broadly New Historicist vein, how text and performance construct Agathon's identity in sociopolitical contexts. Studies, for example, of Agathon's homosexuality or the New Music he sings (see nn. 4 and 5 above) are very important for our understanding the comedy in the contexts of Greek culture. Agathon too tries to resist Inlaw's essentialist perspective, but in a radically different way than the approach of contemporary scholars.

What Inlaw took to be an essential effeminacy Agathon, in the first part of his speech (146-56), insists is a byproduct of his compositional method. The method requires the poet to adapt his behavior (τοὺς τρόπους, 150) mentally (γνώμη, 148)¹⁸ and physically (τὸ σῶμα[α], 152)¹⁹ to the plays he is composing. If he does not already possess what his plays require, then *mimēsis* helps him “hunt down” what is necessary (155-56). Strictly speaking, Agathon does not say that the poet must adapt his behavior to the behavior of the characters he is creating, but to the *tropoi* (“character,” rather than “behaviors”) of the plays, whether they be “female” plays or “male” plays. He is dressed as a woman²⁰ and behaves as a woman because the play he is composing is feminine in character. He seeks to become the embodiment of the play itself. It is an idea similar to Aristophanes’ later characterization of Aeschylus and Euripides in *Frogs*, where Aeschylus is the brazen, no-nonsense composer of plays “full of Ares” (*Ra.* 1021) and Euripides is the sophistic, all-nonsense composer of plays full of Aphrodite (cf. *Ra.* 1045).²¹ Yet there is certainly in Agathon’s scene also a recollection of Aristophanes’ earlier representation of Euripides in *Acharnians*.²² There, Dicaeopolis finds Euripides composing with his feet up and surrounded by rags. “No wonder you create cripples . . . No wonder you create beggars!” he says (*Ach.* 410-13). Euripides is not the embodiment of his tragedies, but of specific, notorious characters in his tragedies. The same idea is evident in Agathon’s

behavior, even if it is not specified in his speech. He is dressed as a woman in order to create female characters. In either case, whether Agathon's effeminate behavior is necessary for his creating female plays or female characters, Agathon must take on the clothing and behaviors of a woman in order to create feminine things. He must construct his identity anew for the sake of his composition.

So far, Agathon's compositional method looks like nothing more than (an exaggeration of) an actor's performing a role or, better, a poet's enactment of Aristotle's advice to "place the plot before his eyes as much as possible" so that the poet will be one who "sees as if he were present at the events," even going so far as to use gestures while he composes (*Poetics* 1455a22-30).²³ Such a method would, at first, satisfy our dramaturgical need for a reply to Inlaw's innuendo. It implies that Agathon is not effeminate but a "normal" man performing fictional roles. He acts like a woman so that he can better experience a woman's perspective and so compose appropriate poetry for a female character. While a histrionic understanding of *mimēsis* is certainly in play here, a closer look at the technical term *mimēsis* shows that Agathon in fact defends himself in a much more subtle way.

Studies in the semantics of the term *mimēsis* and its cognates have shown that pre-Platonic writers did not use the term in the sense of “imitation” to signify a distinction between reality and appearance or to privilege ontologically a model over its copy.²⁴ The vocabulary of *mimēsis* does not necessarily distinguish between reality and fiction, nor between intentional and non-intentional similarities. Rather, the force of a *mimēsis*-word is that there is a relationship of similarity between two objects. Halliwell rightly calls the relationship between objects one of “correspondence” rather than the traditional “imitation.”²⁵ Because observers are able to identify characteristics of two objects as corresponding to each other, they may describe the temporally later object as a *mimēma* of the earlier one. This temporal distinction does not necessitate privileging the earlier object as an original, for it is a model only in the sense that it possesses characteristics that are recognizable and repeatable. It does not necessarily have any greater claim than the *mimēma* to be more true or real. Such differences are not significant in the vocabulary of *mimēsis*.²⁶

By asserting that *mimēsis* aids him in “hunting” what he does not possess, Agathon claims that his effeminate appearance and behavior are meant to correspond to a woman’s appearance and behavior. They are meant to be as similar as possible. Since *mimēsis* does not ontologically privilege the original

over the copy but merely identifies the two objects as possessing corresponding characteristics, Agathon can claim that he has come to possess the *tropoi* he is miming. He does not simply *act like* a woman but *makes himself into* a woman, if only temporarily.²⁷ The differences between Agathon and his fictional woman are effaced as much as possible. Agathon's justification therefore depends upon a conception of identity that differs markedly from Inlaw's. Inlaw's perspective, as we have seen, privileges a stable, essentialist view of identity. Agathon's perspective destabilizes identity by making identity categories historically and culturally contingent. They are contingent not only across spans of time but even from one moment to the next. If *mimēsis* enables the poet to acquire another's characteristics in order to match them to his dramas and, like Euripides in *Acharnians*, to his characters, identity categories such as gender, sexual orientation, class and even (again, in *Acharnians*) physical disability must be changeable at any given moment. The successful poet can cause his spectators to believe that he has adopted a genuinely new identity for himself.²⁸

The new identity, though, is not a constructionist manipulation of identity categories. Agathon's perspective does not correct Inlaw's by erecting an opposition of essentialism and constructionism. Instead, Agathon's speech accepts Inlaw's alignment of anatomy and identity. The male poet, Agathon says

(154-55), does not require *mimēsis* when he composes male plays because his anatomy already possesses the necessary characteristics. The male poet requires *mimēsis* for female plays because he needs to find what he does not possess (155-56). His body needs to gain a share in female ways (151-52). Agathon's perspective is not purely essentialist since, unlike Inlaw, he does not accept that one's given anatomy guarantees the character of one's behavior and identity. His perspective is not purely constructionist either, for one's behavior and identity do align with one's anatomy, whether it be natural or adopted. What a man is and what a woman is still exist in a one-to-one relationship with the individual's anatomy. Agathon defends himself, therefore, by proposing a hybrid theory of identity according to which essential identity categories such as gender exist and guarantee an individual's identity when the individual stably possesses the necessary qualities. No individual, however, stably belongs in any particular identity category across time. Individuals have the power to control the identity categories in which they place themselves through acts of *mimēsis*.

The hybrid conception of identity is further refined in the second half of Agathon's speech (159-72). Thanks to line 167 (ὅμοια γὰρ ποιεῖν ἀνάγκη τῇ φύσει), most interpreters have read this section of the speech as presenting a conflict with the first section.²⁹ The first part, it is thought, enables Agathon to

construct new identities for himself, while the second part argues for an essentialist correspondence between the poet's nature and his identity. Agathon undoubtedly shares Inlaw's presupposition that the effeminate song was caused by an effeminate nature. He would claim, though, that his nature is only temporarily effeminate. After Inlaw's quip about bad, ugly and frigid poets producing bad, ugly and frigid poetry (168-70), Agathon concurs with Inlaw's assessment. He says, "It's completely necessary. Knowing this, I gave myself this treatment" (171-72). He clearly means he beautified himself--Inlaw fears that he means he castrated himself--in order to compose beautiful poetry. The line implies that Agathon's practice of *mimēsis* changed his very nature. One's behavior follows directly from one's nature. But it is possible for poets to construct their natures via *mimēsis*.

This may not be as extraordinary as it seems at first. Recent work in ancient philosophy has shown that discussions of *phusis* in pre-Socratic writings did not conceive of "nature" as an unchanging essence. Gerard Naddaf writes:

phusis must be understood dynamically as the "real constitution" of a thing as it is realized from beginning to end with all of its properties. This in fact is the meaning that one finds nearly every

time that the term *phusis* is employed in the writings of the pre-Socratics. It is never employed in the sense of something static, although the accent may be on either the *phusis* as origin, the *phusis* as process, or the *phusis* as result.

He further argues that treatises written *On Nature* (*Peri Phuseōs*) share with early cosmogonic poetry the goal of explaining the present natural order and of guaranteeing that the present order will remain the same.³⁰ There is thus a tension in the concept of *phusis* between the recognition that the nature of something undergoes change over time and the desire for an unchanging present stability. Consider a passage (which Naddaf surprisingly does not discuss) from the Hippocratic treatise *Airs Waters Places* that describes people whose nature changes because of cultural customs. The medical writer describes the race of the Macrocephaloi, who possess elongated heads because of their custom of reshaping their children's heads. "In the beginning," says the writer, "the custom (νόμος) acted in such a way that the peculiar nature came about by force (ὑπὸ βίης τοιαύτην τὴν φύσιν γενέσθαι); but as time passed the trait became natural (ἐν φύσει ἐγένετο), so that the custom was no longer necessary" (*Aēr* 14).³¹ The writer describes both moments--the deliberate reshaping of an individual's head and the gradual evolution of the inherited trait--as changes in *phusis*. Consider

also Democritus fr. 33: “Nature and education are akin to one another. For education reconfigures the human being, and in reconfiguring him creates a second nature” (ἡ φύσις καὶ ἡ διδασχὴ παραπλήσιόν ἐστι. καὶ γὰρ ἡ διδασχὴ μεταρυσμοῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπον, μεταρυσμοῦσα δὲ φυσιοποιεῖ). Both passages suggest that one’s nature--in the first case, the constitution of one’s body; in the second case, the constitution of one’s soul--is pliable, even though the process of alteration is slow and difficult. Once the change in nature is accomplished, the new nature is stable enough to account for the somatic and psychic traits of the individual.

The same idea is at work in Agathon’s justification speech. He has made himself effeminate--or, rather, female--in order to compose female plays. He has done so by altering his nature temporarily to that of a woman. As one who possesses a woman’s nature, he can draw on that female nature to compose female dramas. Likewise, Phrynichus was a beautiful man. His *tropoi* matched his nature, and so he dressed beautifully. And, as the theory explains, given his beautiful nature and his beautiful habits, he composed beautiful poetry (164-66). Conversely, according to Inlaw, ugly Phrynichus composed ugly poetry, immoral Xenocles composed immoral poetry and emotionless Theognis composed emotionless poetry (168-70). The character of each tragedian’s composition is essentialized

insofar as it necessarily aligns with the tragedian's own nature. Agathon alone seems to be sufficiently innovative to use the technique of *mimēsis* to construct his own nature before he composes essentialized poetry.

This hybrid conception of identity meets the dramaturgical need for Agathon to rebut Inlaw's charges of effeminacy. Agathon is indeed feminine during his song. His mimetic behavior has caused his nature to become that of a woman. He is not merely acting as a woman so as to empathize with a female persona, as Aristotle recommends, but has altered his nature so as to become a woman. If Agathon is able to alter his nature so as to make himself a woman, then he can, *mutatis mutandis*, alter his nature again so as to make himself back into a man. The effeminacy is only temporary and therefore Agathon is, theoretically, saved from the charges of natural effeminacy and immoral self-indulgence.

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The complete dramaturgical function of the scene requires that Agathon save himself from the charges of natural effeminacy and self-indulgence in theory only. The second dramaturgical need identified above calls for the humor of the caricature to be preserved by affirming Inlaw's belief in Agathon's naturally

effeminacy. It must be true that Agathon does not require *mimēsis* to behave like a woman.³² The scene does this most clearly through costume. Agathon does not wear, or else he covers, the usual comic phallus. He does wear a white (female) mask. Presumably we ought to read his lack of phallus and his pale face as Agathon's "real" appearance, parts of him not altered through *mimēsis*. Even without mimetic behavior, then, Agathon already appears effeminate. The scene also accomplishes the dramaturgical need, though, by juxtaposing the caricature of Agathon as an effeminate homosexual with a caricature of him as an effete intellectual.³³ In this way, the audience sees him not as someone who temporarily puts on women's clothing and habits but as a member of the cultural elite.³⁴

We can see the juxtaposition between effeminate and intellectual more precisely if we investigate an issue sidestepped above. Agathon's theory of *mimēsis*, as we said, relies on the identification of a correspondence between two objects. We neglected to define who qualifies as a proper identifier of such a correspondence, i.e. for whom Agathon's performance is intended. Clearly, Inlaw does not qualify. From his comic and essentialist viewpoint, he recognizes differences, not similarities. The differences between the behaviors of Agathon and a real woman are, for him, significant and deserving of ridicule. Agathon does not explicitly mention his intended audience, but there is only one possibility: himself. During

his song, he believes that he is alone. Since *mimēsis* requires spectatorship, Agathon must be the spectator. So when Inlaw taunts him, Agathon is not stung by the reproach (146-47) because his performance was not aimed to persuade others of his new identity. He has persuaded himself, and that is enough.

More than this, Aristophanes has given him a grander set-up to mark his isolation. The Servant's purpose in coming out of the house earlier in the scene was to chant a prayer asking for silence (39-40). At first, the silence seems to be for the presence of the Muses (40-42), but the Servant later specifies that "Agathon of the fine phrases, our leader" (49-50) will soon appear on the scene. The prayer creates a quasi-religious space, demarcated from the profane world of Euripides and Inlaw.³⁵ In this sacred space, the poet can work in total isolation.³⁶ Instead of the Muses who traditionally had the authority to tell truths and falsehoods that resembled truths (cf. Hes. *Theog.* 27-28), Agathon himself will be the arbiter of truth and falsity in his own ritually circumscribed space and thus able to adopt identities for himself. Josiah Ober has argued for a specific concept of "democratic knowledge" in fifth- and fourth-century Athens. Knowledge in the democratic polis was subject to ideological negotiation among the democracy's citizens (Ober 1998, esp. 33-35). There are no political truths without the community's collective license. As Ober notes, this ideological attitude

toward truth and knowledge does not extend to “brute facts” like from what direction the sun rises each morning. *Thesmophoriazusa*, though, raises the question whether gender identity is an object of political knowledge whose definition is negotiable by the community. On the one hand, the play has presented Inlaw and indeed the implied author as proponents of a conception of identity that would not be subject to community definition. On the other hand, Agathon’s theory and behavior are predicated on a conception of identity that allows for gender redefinition. The marked construction of the isolated sacred space for Agathon’s self-performance signals an anxiety about being subject to the community’s definition. He isolates himself in a truth-defining community of one person so that he may avoid the inconvenience of democratic strictures on his truth-defining activities.³⁷ He alone has the privilege of defining, or redefining, his own identity. Since gender identity would not normally be something subject to democratic knowledge, Agathon elaborately finds a way to include it among those objects of knowledge that can be redefined through ideological or rhetorical negotiation with others. Because the other with whom he negotiates, however, is only himself, he also finds a way to immediately remove it from the space of political negotiation.³⁸

The result is that Aristophanes simultaneously scores two points against the tragedian. First, he is the arrogant intellectual, perhaps a sophist, who tries to set himself up as the expert who stands outside the political community.³⁹ Second, he is the fool who theorizes a conception of identity when none is necessary. As the elite intellectual, Agathon's beliefs about his own identity are true only within his own tightly circumscribed, one-member truth-defining community. He does not aim to persuade non-proper observers of the truth of his mimetic behavior. His isolation ought to prevent others from witnessing what can only appear ludicrous to the spectator ignorant of the reasons behind the mimeticism. The need for isolation, however, points out the ludicrous nature of *mimēsis* itself and ultimately undermines it. For Agathon's isolation enables him to ignore his real gender identity, whereas other spectators--who either make up the correctly larger truth-defining community of the polis or who accept Inlaw's essentialist conception of identity--do not have that option. He himself sees himself as a normatively masculine person altering his nature to a woman's. Inlaw and the audience see him as an arrogant intellectual who lacks the self-control to maintain a proper gender role. The more Agathon tries to perform femininity for himself, the more Inlaw and the audience recognize his effeminacy as the smoking gun of his real, deviant self. The self-performative nature of Agathon's behavior, then, in fact confirms Inlaw's essentialist viewpoint for the world of

comedy, the world of common non-intellectuals. The hybrid essentialist-cum-constructionist theory proves to be valid only for the elite intellectual in his isolation.

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At the beginning of this essay, I identified two dramaturgical functions that Agathon's justification speech needs to fulfill. It must respond to Inlaw's mockery and it must at the same time allow the audience to continue laughing at Agathon. Aristophanes fulfills these functions by attributing to Agathon a theory of poetic composition that, on one level, sounds like a sophisticated principle worthy of a highly intellectual poet. In order to explain how tragic poets achieve coherent characterization in their plays, Agathon proffers a hybrid conceptualization of identity wherein the poet uses his subjective observation of his own behavior to create the objective conditions necessary for a new identity. From his (her) new identity position, the poet is successfully able to speak and sing as his fictional character without the threat of his normal self corrupting the perspective. Agathon's rhetoric may be especially persuasive to Inlaw because he accepts Inlaw's presumption that the body is an essentialized guarantor of identity, especially gender identity. On another level, though, Agathon's theory

sounds like a piece of sophistic drivel worthy only of someone trying to deceive the democratic community. Aristophanes signals Agathon's elitism particularly through his isolation in the one-person truth-defining community, an isolation circumscribed by the arrogantly intellectual poet's sacrilegious usurpation of the Muses' prerogatives. The only person Agathon deceives is himself, if he believes that he can alter his nature to become a woman. He cannot, and he need not. Agathon's effeminate poetry, as it turns out, takes its nature from the nature of its author.

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Notes

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¹ That the theory is genuine, albeit comically exaggerated, is suggested by similar ideas at E. *Supp.* 180-83 and Ar. fr. 694 *PCG*, as well as in the Euripides scene of *Ach.* and the second half of *Ra.* See Muecke 1982, 52-53 and Sommerstein 1994, ad 149-150 for later articulations of the theory in oratory and philosophy.

² On the identity of the Chorus and their Leader, see Sommerstein 1994, ad 101-29.

³ Agathon's song and Inlaw's reaction are themselves probably a parody of current theories regarding the ethical reception of music, theories most associated with the music theoretician Damon. In particular, it echoes Damon's anxiety about New Music's hyper-emotional character and his association of particular ethical effects with specific notes, modes, rhythms and tempi. On Damon's musical and ethical theories, see Pl. *R.* 400B-C, 424C; Aristid. *Quint.* Bk. 2 §14; Csapo 2004, 230-32; Moutsopoulos 2004; West 1992, 246-49 (p. 248 catalogs Platonic passages showing Damon's influence). On elites' (including Damon's) critiques of New Music, see Csapo 1999-2000.

⁴ The standard reading of Agathon's sexuality has been that he is a passive (i.e., anally penetrated) homosexual, especially because Inlaw calls him *κατάπυγον εὐρύπρωκτος*, "wide-assed bugger" (200). See, e.g., Henderson 1991, 219-20; Muecke 1982; Pretagostini 1997; Sommerstein 1994, ad 29; Stark 2004, 274-84. The reading goes back at least to Dover 1978, which describes the historical Agathon's "unwillingness to grow out of the eromenos stage into sexual dominance" (144). The model of homosexuality as a socially constructed zero-sum game of power and pedagogy between pederasts and pathics has been trenchantly challenged by scholars such as Davidson and Hubbard, each in their

very different ways. Davidson, who studies the ethical basis on which people criticize homosexuals, only mentions the Agathon scene in passing (Davidson 2001, 48-49 n. 75). Hubbard, who focuses more on class dynamic in the censure of homosexuals, studies the scene in more detail (Hubbard 1998, 57-59). Both agree that the dominator/dominated model fits neither this scene nor most literary and iconographic evidence that is marshaled in support of it. The point is not that Agathon is penetrated, but that he lacks moral self-control (Davidson) or that the criticism against him is an example of popular prejudice against the elite practice of pederasty (Hubbard), whether the activity be active or passive. Hubbard even goes so far as to say that homosexuals were, for most Athenians, “in every sense an identity category” (1998, 59), i.e., not (from the Athenians’ viewpoint) socially constructed. See further Davidson 1997, 139-82; Hubbard 2003a, 1-20; Hubbard 2003b.

⁵ Csapo (2004, 232, in combination with Csapo 1999-2000) unpacks the upper-class disdain for New Music. (For an analysis of Agathon’s song as an example of New Music, see Zimmermann 1988; cf. Rau 1967, 103-8. On comic criticism of New Music, see also Dobrov 1997a; Zimmermann 1993a; Zimmermann 1997a.) Csapo carefully shows how elites degrade New Music by castigating it “as

inferior by all the tropes familiarly used to designate the free male citizen's 'Other.' New Music was characterized as barbarous, servile, anarchic, uncontrolled, and effeminate" (1999-2000, 405). Bringing together the work of Csapo with Davidson and Hubbard (previous note), we find Agathon satirized in the cross-hairs of both elitist and popular prejudices, yet in both cases on the grounds that he lacks the self-control that characterizes the good citizen.

⁶ On the scene as an interruption of the plot, see Austin and Olson 2004, ad 97-176. This is not a criticism. Aristophanes' comedies offer no expectation for an ever-progressing or coherent plot. See Silk 2000a, 256-300, and Given 2005, both of which compare discontinuous Aristophanic plots to the lack of coherence in some twentieth-century American musicals.

⁷ This issue is beyond the scope of this paper, and has been well studied elsewhere. See, among others, Bobrick 1997, 179-82; Hansen 1976, 167-71; Moulton 1981, 112-21; Saetta Cottone 2003; Zeitlin 1996, 383-86.

⁸ On the connotations of *ταράττειν* and its cognates in Aristophanes, especially connections with problems of political stasis, see Edmunds 1987.

⁹ Snyder 1974. Snyder shows that the paradigm for Agathon's costume, as for many symposiasts on vase paintings, is the poet Anacreon, whom Agathon later cites as one of his inspirations in mimetic composition (160-63).

¹⁰ Cf. Davidson 1997, 238, on class and desire: "in the Greek obsession with self-control we can see the relationship between class and consumption completely inverted. The true gentleman manages his appetites. He is in charge of himself. . . . It is the profligate and the incontinent who really engage in menial tasks as they are for ever running back and forth trying to fill their leaky jars of desire."

¹¹ Interpreting Agathon's speech against his (of course fictional) intentions is not an example of Aristophanes' anti-realism and mobility of character that Silk (2000a, 207-55) explores so well. It is merely the common literary technique of making a character ironically say more than he or she means. If anything, Agathon is one of the more realistic characters in the Aristophanic corpus. Realist consistency is necessary if Agathon's speech is to refute Inlaw's charges and if he is to successfully engage in the consistent *mimēsis* characteristic of tragedy.

¹² Stehle 2002 traces how Inlaw becomes more and more like Agathon in the second half of the play. The turning point, in Stehle's view, is Cleisthenes'

entrance. For the contrast between Agathon and Cleisthenes, see Bobrick 1997, 181.

¹³ Stehle 2002 is an excellent work on body and costume in *Thesmophoriazusae*.

¹⁴ Inlaw's phallus must be already untied when Cleisthenes undresses him (643-48), and is probably already untied when he grabs it and offers to use it with Agathon's Servant (59-62). Unfortunately, the scene on the Würzburg Krater takes place when Inlaw is fully dressed as a woman and so his phallus is not visible at all. Ussher (1986, xxxviii) argues that only Aristophanes' clownish *bōmolochoi* wear the phallus. Inlaw would certainly qualify. It is more likely, however, that the phallus dangled freely on the *bōmolochoi* but was tied up on most male characters. Stone (1984, 92) is non-committal on which characters wore the dangling phallus.

¹⁵ We cannot rely on this line too heavily for characterization of Inlaw. As Silk (2000a, 210) points out, it is a fine example of Aristophanes' hallmark "stylistic mobility" and "discontinuity," i.e. Aristophanes' anti-realist penchant for putting the immediate need for a joke or other local effect ahead of coherent characterization.

¹⁶ There is little indication in the text what the Servant looks like. Given that Aristophanic doormen usually resemble their masters in some way, it may be that this doorman is effeminate as well as pompous. Cf. Dicaeopolis's appreciation of Euripides' doorman: ὦ τρισμακάρι' Εὐριπίδη, | ὅθ' ὁ δοῦλος οὕτωςι σοφῶς ὑποκρίνεται (*Ach.* 400-401), and Olson 1998, ad *Pax* 180. Austin and Olson 2004, ad 39-40, however, suggest that Inlaw's later fuss over Agathon's costume suggests that the Servant's costume was not remarkable.

¹⁷ The phallus is thus frequently a reliable symbol of male power: see Stehle 2002. See also Bassi 1998, 113-15, on male nudity as marking freedom from deception and on clothing, especially female clothing, as raising the spectator's suspicion of deception.

¹⁸ I follow the interpretation of line 148 by Sommerstein 1994, ad loc., *contra* Austin and Olson 2004, ad loc. and Sansone 1987.

¹⁹ After Agathon's speech, Inlaw begins to wonder, apparently, whether Agathon has gone so far as to castrate himself, but Euripides cuts him off before he gets the question out.

²⁰ He wears a white (i.e., female), beardless mask, a long woman's himation that covers any phallus that the actor wears, a hair-net and possibly a breast-band. See Stone 1984, 346-47.

²¹ Cf. Mazzacchera 1999, 210; Stohn 1993, 200-4.

²² Euripides says as much when he tells Inlaw, "I used to be the same sort of character as he when I began composing" (174-75).

²³ Mazzacchera (1999, 211-14) explores the similarities between Agathon's *mimēsis* and an actor's mimesis. She finds that they both require assimilation to another's behaviors. She usefully compares *mimēsis* to Damon's theories of music that are founded on the hypothesis that there is "una relazione di somiglianza tra la musica e l'anima" (214). Also worth noting here is the scholarship of Lada-Richards, who describes the empathy Athenian audiences were expected to show toward theatrical performances, at least tragic performances with their coherent characterization. See Lada 1993, Lada-Richards 1997, Lada-Richards 2002.

²⁴ Else (1958, 83) cites Democr. fr. 39 D-K as a fifth-century example of μιμῆσθαι used in contrast to εἶναι, and concludes that the philosopher was contrasting seeming and being, but he is rightly refuted by Sörbom (1966, 35 n. 33). On the

pre-Platonic history of *mimēsis*-words, in addition to Else 1958 and Sörbom 1966, see Gebauer and Wulf 1995, 27-30; Halliwell 1986, 109-15; Halliwell 2002, 13-33; Kardaun 1993, 19-42.

²⁵ Halliwell 1986, 111. Cf. Halliwell 2002, 15: "The common thread running through these otherwise various uses [of *mimēsis*-words] is an ideal of correspondence or equivalence--correspondence between mimetic works, activities, or performances and their putative real-world equivalents, whether the latter are taken to be externally given and independent or only hypothetically projectable from the mimetic works themselves." Cf. also Burkert 1972, 45, quoted at Kardaun 1993, 28. He too chooses the word "correspondence" in order to describe the mimetic relationship that the Pythagoreans posited between the cosmos and number. The relationship, he says, is "a two-sided correspondence, which makes it possible to interpret separate things following the same pattern, but without implying differences of rank or a relationship of ontological priority. . . . Nothing more is meant than the correspondence of cosmos and number, in the sense that one explains and illuminates the other." Burkert also notes (*ibid.*) that Hippocratic treatises can use *mimēsis* to describe either side of a correspondence: "One may just as well say that the human body 'imitates' the

cosmos as that the parts of the cosmos ‘imitate’ human organs.” This relationship changes by the time the Platonic corpus takes shape. Cf. *Menex.* 238A4-5: οὐ γὰρ γῆ γυναιῖκα μεμίμηται . . . ἀλλὰ γυνὴ γῆν.

²⁶ Contrast one recent theorist of mimesis: “*Mimesis* is inherently and always already a *repetition*--meaning that *mimesis* is always the meeting-place of two opposing but connected ways of thinking, acting and making: similarity and difference” (Melberg 1995, 1). My point is that the pre-Platonic usage of *mimēsis* foregrounded similarity at the expense of difference.

²⁷ Cf. Lada-Richards’s comment on this scene: “*mīmēsis* cannot leave the imitator’s own identity intact” (2002, 403).

²⁸ Zeitlin 1996, 375-416, has been a very influential work on *mimēsis* in this play. Zeitlin, from a perspective very different than my own, exploits the differences between the imitator and the thing imitated and finds an inextricable connection between mimesis and the feminine. For a critique of Zeitlin, see Compton-Engle 2003, 520-21. On *mimēsis* in *Thesmophoriazusae*, see also Mureddu 1982-83; Mazzacchera 1999.

²⁹ Among scholars who find a contradiction or at least inconsistency between the two halves of Agathon's speech are: Mazzacchera 1999, 209-10; Saetta Cottone 2003, 463; Sommerstein 1994, ad 167.

³⁰ Naddaf 2005, *passim*, especially 2-3 (quote from 3).

³¹ For further discussion, see Heinimann 1945, 15-17; Jouanna 1999, 223-24.

³² Other critics have recognized as the focus of the scene's satire the fact that Agathon does not need *mimēsis*. Cf. Mazzacchera 1999, 209-10; Muecke 1982, 54; Zeitlin 1996, 384.

³³ On intellectuals in Aristophanic comedy, see Given 2001; Whitehorne 2002; Zimmermann 1993b.

³⁴ On Aristophanic heroes' attacks on political elite, see Henderson 1993. Agathon's position as a member of the cultural elite is reinforced if the audience recognizes in him the Anacreon-like symposiast. See n. 9, above.

³⁵ On the Servant's song and Agathon's song as parodies of prayer, see Horn 1970, 94-106.

³⁶ The Servant, in a sense, takes to the extreme Dicaeopolis's creation of his private space in *Acharnians*. Whereas in *Acharnians*, permission to enter the space

is forbidden to Lamachus and other representatives of the Athenian political establishment, here it is forbidden to everyone except Agathon. On Dicaeopolis's manipulation of space and the plasticity of space in Aristophanes generally, see Silk 2000b; Slater 1993.

³⁷ Agathon thus resembles those intellectuals and wealthy men who represented themselves as living a life of quietude, or *apragmosunē*. See Carter 1986; Dover 1974, 188-90. On the relationship between *apragmosunē* and *sōphrosunē* in Aristophanes, see North 1966, 98-100.

³⁸ Cf. Nichols 1998, 89, which traces Agathon's failure to the fact the he "champions an autonomous poetry, one seeking no justification in public affairs."

³⁹ In a broader study of the representation of intellectuals in tragedy and comedy (Given 2001), I coined the term "intellectual's paradox" for the intellectual's need to assimilate himself or herself into the polis's democratic authority while still holding himself or herself apart as an authoritative expert. Agathon grossly fails in negotiating the intellectual's paradox.