

Loredana Di Virgilio

‘Ar. *Eccl.* 889 ὁμως ἔχει τερπνόν τι καὶ κωμωδικόν. A Comedy’s Self-Consideration of Its Lyrical Forms at the Dawn of “Middle Comedy”?’

Introduction

The following pages are devoted to the analysis of a metatheatrical moment in the second half of *Ecclesiazusae*. In particular, at line 889 of the play something that is going to happen in the scene is, significantly, said to contain something τερπνόν and κωμωδικόν. This statement is made in order to reassure the audience. The actual meaning of the expression of line 889 is not completely clear to us because of its implicit connection with something strictly dramaturgical, which we can only try to reconstruct. In the past and in recent years, different interpretations of the expression have been proposed by some scholars, none of them fully convincing. This chapter intends to consider two new reconstructions of the scene in order to understand the scene better and the meaning of line 889 as well: the first hypothesizes a relationship with the actors’ song immediately following the scene; the latter, instead, implies a possible connection of that very moment of the play with the immediately preceding choral interlude.

A couple of clarifications are in order before going into the following paragraphs. Firstly, it should be noted that the proposed object of study for this investigation, implied in its title, should be extended to lines 887–888, as will become clear from the argument overall. Secondly, it seems appropriate to warn the reader that, for an ambiguous passage like the one considered here, we are probably going to remain necessarily in the field of speculation.

Nevertheless, it is useful to analyse *Eccl.* 887–889 in depth by trying to evaluate its coherence with the plot and its relationship with and between the different lyrical forms of this part of the play, and, last but not least, by considering possible connections of this passage with the innovations of the fourth century and by making comparisons with other texts. All of this could lead to

Notes: It is my due, as well as a pleasure, to heartily thank Drs. Valentina Dardano, Federico Favi, Nello Sidoti and Prof. Luigi Bravi for the precious conversations I had with them, which helped me better approach some of the ideas dealt with in this paper, and for their very careful reading of these pages and their valuable advice.

more plausible reconstructions of the dramaturgical sequence of scenes within which this passage appears and thus to a better understanding of the meaning of the metatheatrical sentence under question. In short, this investigation aims to re-open an important issue within this Aristophanic play.

Context and Main Questions

The plot of *Ecclesiazusae* is well-known: under the leadership of Praxagora, the women occupy the Assembly and gain political power. Included in the new constitution are the communality of properties and a special rule in the matter of sex: if a man wants to go to bed with a girl, he has to go with an older and ugly one first, so that every woman will be satisfied. After a choral interlude (*post* 729), two anonymous men discuss the idea of giving their goods to the city, even as one of them is already bringing out his possessions out of the house (730–876). To separate this episode from that which follows, after line 876 there is a second choral interlude, indicated on codex *Ravennas* 429 with the abbreviation ΧΟΡΟΥ.¹

The new episode (877–1111) deals with the consequences of the new laws pertaining to sex. The scene opens with an Old Woman, probably walking in front of the *skene*.² She is softly singing a melody by herself (880 μινυρομένη τι πρὸς ἑμαυτὴν μέλος), wondering why no man has come to her yet. Her attitude seems to be that of a prostitute waiting for men to approach (877–883):³

ΓΡΑΥΣ Α

τί ποθ' ἄνδρες οὐχ ἤχουσιν; ὥρα δ' ἦν πάλαι.
 ἐγὼ δὲ καταπεπλασμένη ψιμυθίῳ
 ἔστηκα καὶ κροκωτὸν ἠμφιεσμένη
 ἀργός, μινυρομένη τι πρὸς ἑμαυτὴν μέλος, (880)
 παίζουσ' ὅπως ἂν περιλάβοιμ' αὐτῶν τινὰ
 παριόντα. Μοῦσαι, δεῦρ' ἴτ' ἐπὶ τοῦμόν στόμα,
 μελύδριον εὐροῦσαί τι τῶν Ἴωνικῶν.

1 *Ecclesiazusae*'s double exhibition of the use of choral interludes detached from the comic narration, indicated twice (after lines 729 and 876) on codex *Ravennas* 429 with the abbreviation ΧΟΡΟΥ (*scil.* μέλος), belongs to a well-attested manuscript and papyrus tradition concerning indications of this kind. See for example Taplin (1976) on ΧΟΡΟΥ indications in papyri; Handley (1953) on ΧΟΡΟΥ indications in *Wealth*'s manuscripts; cf. also Imperio (2011) 130–134.
 2 On the reconstruction of the houses and the number of the doors in this scene, see Mastro-marco (2017).

3 Cf. Ussher (1973) 195; Sommerstein (1998) 214; Vetta/Del Corno (2008) 234; Mastro-marco (2017) 68.

Why haven't the men come? They were due long ago. And I'm standing here, plastered with white-lead and wearing a saffron dress, doing nothing, just warbling a little tune to myself, disporting myself in the hope that I might snare one of them as he passes by. [*Praying*] Muses, come here to sit on my lips, and find me a nice little melody in the Ionian style. (transl. Sommerstein)⁴

Trying to catch men's attention, the Old Woman prays to the Muses to inspire her with a μελύδριον τῶν Ἴωνικῶν (883), some Ionian tune, thought to be pleasant and lascivious.⁵

As regards the verb μινυρίζειν at line 880, it is important to notice that in Aristophanes this term is always related to songs composed in Ionian style, as in *Vesp.* 219 with its reference to the ἀρχαιομελισιδωνοφρυνιγήρατα (*Vesp.* 220) sung by the Chorus, and *Thesm.* 100, with reference to Agathon's song.

Considering the scene and the fact that the Old Woman is alone in front of the spectators, it is legitimate to assume that this character is expected to sing a monody. However, the proposal of the Old Woman is soon interrupted, because a Young Woman appears from a window, saying (884–889):

KOPH

νῦν μὲν με παρακύψασα προὔφηθς, ᾧ σαπρά.
 ᾧου δ' ἐρήμας, οὐ παρούσης ἐνθάδε (885)
 ἐμοῦ, τρυγήσειν καὶ προσάξεσθαί τινα
 ᾄδουσ'· ἐγὼ δ', ἦν τοῦτο δρᾶς, ἀντάσομαι.
 κεῖ γὰρ δι' ὄχλου τοῦτ' ἐστί τοῖς θεωμένοις,
 ὄμως ἔχει τερπνόν τι καὶ κωμωδικόν.

So now you have poked your head out before me, you wreck! / But you thought you might harvest deserted vineyards, / me not being here, and entice someone to you / by singing. But, if you do this, I will sing in response. / And if the spectators, indeed, find this annoying, / nevertheless it has something pleasant and fitting with the comedy.

⁴ From this point on, when there is no attribution for the English translation of a Greek text, it means that the translation is my own. The Greek text of Aristophanes always follows Sommerstein's edition.

⁵ The adjective 'Ionian' was traditionally intended to be synonymous with 'lascivious', in music as in lifestyle or behaviour, as testified by many sources, including Ar. *Thesm.* 163; Ath. 12.524f–526d, 13.573b–c, 14.620e–621b. *Scholia vetera* to Ar. *Eccl.* 883 and 918 bear witness to this conception. Vetta/Del Corno (2008) 235, commenting on *Eccl.* 882–883, with reference to the kind of song intoned by the Old Woman, says: 'Con μελύδρια Ἴωνικά ci si poteva riferire a quello stesso patrimonio di canzonette popolari oscene che altrove troviamo definito come ψδαὶ ἔταρκαὶ ο πορνωδία ("canti puttaneschi"; *Ran.* 1301, Platone comico, fr. 620, 14 Kock)'. The fragment of Plato Comicus cited by Vetta is nowadays indicated as fr. 71 K.-A..

It is clear that at lines 887–889 the character of the Young Woman is speaking in the name of Aristophanes, introducing the skoptic duet (a contrast song) between the Old Woman and the Young Woman which covers lines 893–923.

The main questions about this piece of metatheatre are: why does the author feel the need to justify one of his choices in the matter of composition? What do the words of the Young Woman really mean? What could annoy people, how, why and in which way? Finally, how should the adjective κωμωδικόν be intended when viewed within the context of metatheatre, in a comedy that is experiencing new trends?⁶

Evaluation and Confutation of Current Interpretations

Interpretations of this statement provided by scholars can be summarized in three points, but none of them seems to be really convincing. After evaluating their plausibility, we will consider other solutions by analyzing the scene more closely.

1 A Rhetorical Expedient

Commenting on the expression δι' ὄχλου (888), Rogers asserts that this 'self-depreciation' is to be interpreted as a rhetorical expedient, 'intended merely to elicit from the audience a counter expression of encouragement'.⁷ Ussher takes

⁶ Apart from the strong presence of anonymous (yet playing important roles) characters among its formal elements of transformation, *Ecclesiazusae* shows a gradual approach to the episodic structure, which will become standard with five acts in Menander. The *parabasis*, 'shortened and simplified in Aristophanes' plays of 411 and later, has now vanished altogether' (Sommerstein [1998] 24). Of that part recognised by modern scholars as *agon*, *Ecclesiazusae* presents only an *ode* (571–580) and a *katakeleusmos* (581–582) introducing a long speech by Praxagora (583–688, including questions and interruptions by Blepuros and the Citizen), which ends with a *pnigos* (689–709). Reading the text of *Ecclesiazusae*, it soon becomes clear how often Aristophanes interrupts the comic illusion by addressing the audience, and thus paying attention to the spectators' tastes in the matter of comedy and politics, two elements that are strictly connected in this play (e.g., 580–585, 777, 797–798, 888–889, 1141–1143). Regarding the comedy's self-reflection in regard to content and form, it has also been rightly noted that, thanks to the numerous appeals for the audience's and judges' favours, 'what is striking about *Ecclesiazusae* is that we nevertheless find several traces of the *parabasis*, even with the form itself no longer visible' (Hubbard (1991) 248).

⁷ Rogers (1902) 137.

the same view: saying that the oncoming duet may be boring, it gives the audience the opportunity ‘for shouting “No!”’,⁸ so that the global expression of lines 887–889 simply represent Aristophanes playing with his spectators. Accepting this idea, Sommerstein and Ussher refer to an analogous example in *Lys.* 1218–1220 – already cited by van Leeuwen – where a character is threatening someone with his torch and then says that he knows that this gesture would be a boorish thing, but that he must do it to please the audience:

ΑΘ.^α ὑμᾶς κατακαύσω; φορτικόν τὸ χωρίον
 κούκ ἂν ποιήσαιμ'. εἰ δὲ πάνυ δεῖ τοῦτο δρᾶν,
 ὑμῖν χάρισασθαι ταλαιπωρήσομεν. (1220)

You don't want me to burn you up with my torch, do you? [*The slaves retreat from the door.*] Vulgar routine, that, though. I'm not going to do it. [*Some protests from the audience.*] Well, if it's absolutely necessary to do it, we'll suffer that bit more to do you a favour!

Despite similarities, the example from *Lysistrata* does not exactly correspond to our case in *Ecclesiazusae*. Through the character of the First Athenian in *Lysistrata*, Aristophanes admits that he is going to do something *to please the audience*, something which, for his part, he would rather *not* do. In *Ecclesiazusae*, on the other hand, the author says that he is putting something in the scene that *the audience may not like*; in other words, he is going *against* their tastes.⁹ This distinction is of fundamental importance, because in *Lysistrata*, Aristophanes postures himself as being condescending towards the vulgar tastes of the audience in an almost playful way, while in the *Ecclesiazusae* he appears almost worried about a negative reaction to one of his choices. Yet in the latter he does not renounce his own dramatic choices, but justifies them at a moment which is broader and much more important to the plot than that of the above passage in *Lysistrata*.

In general, this first interpretation seems to avoid a problem which, on closer inspection, turns out actually to be more complex. Before accepting it, one should at least ponder other possibilities.

2 Preventing a Bored Reaction to an Abused Feature of Performance

Massimo Vetta proposes two alternative solutions to the enigmatic metatheatrical sentence of the Young Woman.

⁸ Ussher (1973) 197.

⁹ Bremer (1991) 139 too seems to misunderstand the two different types of ‘compromise’.

Starting from the expected negative reaction of the audience to the Young Woman's ἀντάδειν, Vetta infers that, in the period of *Ecclesiazusae*, dramatists would have abused (888 δι' ὄχλου) the skoptic duet in their plays.¹⁰ By this reading, Aristophanes' statement apologises for following a current fashion. However, as Vetta admits, we are unfortunately unable to prove the exaggerated use of the skoptic duet in late fifth-century and fourth-century comedy. Furthermore, we should take into consideration that in our available sources the verb ἀντάδειν seems not to be strictly related to a specific kind of song: musical terms with the prefix ἀντι- are not so common, but one cannot overlook the fact that they always indicate simply something *in response*, not necessarily *in contrast*.¹¹ We have a definition of a *modality of performance*, not of a *musical genre*. In this sense, when Aristophanes' audience heard ἀντάσομαι (887), it may have expected a simple and traditional lyric dialogue. The audience, certainly, could even have thought naturally of the lyrical 'oppositions' already found in the early plays of Aristophanes, and thus not of something indicative of a newer trend.

Furthermore, the Aristophanic cases adduced by Vetta as similar to that of *Ecclesiazusae* are not entirely convincing. Among the examples provided as '*topoi* teatrali di cui non abbiamo diretto riscontro',¹² *Pax* 962 and *Eccl.* 1144–1146 can be omitted from our discussion: the first because its context is actually that of a sacrifice;¹³ the latter because the reference is to the banquet following the *exodos* of a comedy. The other examples all deal with something from which Aristophanes keeps *distance* with pride: in *Vesp.* 54–66, Xanthias warns the audience that in that play one should not expect the trivial jokes used by other dramatists to make people laugh; in *Ran.* 1–18, Aristophanes mocks some of the means used by Phrynichus, Lycis and Amipsias;¹⁴ in *Plut.* 788–799, Wealth stops

¹⁰ Cf. Vetta (1981) 86–87 and then Vetta/Del Corno (2008) 236.

¹¹ Cf. *Ar. Av.* 218 where the verb ἀντιψάλλω is used for Apollo responding with his *phorminx* to the Nightingale-*aulos*; *Anth. Pal.* 7.196 ἀντιφθός is a cicada responding to Pan; Pind. fr. 125 Maehler (= *Ath.* 14.635b) ἀντίφθογγος is the harp responding to *barbitos*. Other compounds used in tragedy are reported in Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistai* within a list of antiphonal typologies, for example 14.635c ψαλμοῖσιν ἀντίσπαστ' αἰείδοντες μέλη (Phrynichus, *TrGF* 3 F 11), πολὺς δὲ Φρυξ τρίωνος ἀντίσπαστά <τε> / Λυδῆς ἐφουμνεῖ πηκτίδος συγχορδία (Soph. *Mysoi TrGF* F 412 Radt), 14.636b ψαλμοῖς τριώνων πηκτίδων ἀντιζύγοις / ὀλκοῖς κρεκούσας μάγαδιν (Diogenes Athen. *TrGF* 45 F 1). Cf. also Poll. *Onom.* 4.107.4–5, where ἀντάδουσιν really is used (see here pp. 228–229).

¹² Cf. Vetta (1981) 87 and then Vetta/Del Corno (2008) 236.

¹³ Maybe with the intent of parodying, at the same time, the practice of other dramatists of making characters throw nuts or something else to the audience: cf. Sommerstein (2005) 179.

¹⁴ Cf. also schol. *vet. ad Ar. Ran.* 1b Chantray.

Chremylos' Wife from throwing figs. To these examples one could add the case of *Lys.* 1218–1220 discussed above.

In addition, one can recall the well-known passages from *Clouds* (537–548), *Wasps* (54–66 –also cited by Vetta– and 1043–1045; 1535–1537) and *Peace* (736–753). In all of these cases, Aristophanes strongly asserts the superiority of his comedy, or shows pride in something never seen before him.

Unlike these cases listed so far, in the passage of *Ecclesiastusae* on which we are focusing, Aristophanes does not provide the name of any other poet, nor does he use metaphors (as he often does in his *parabasis* celebrating his own art¹⁵) or indicate duets in comedy as a common *praxis*.

The central issue, therefore, is to understand whether Aristophanes is referring to the *general* comic production of his time, implicitly involving reference to other poets, or whether he is referring instead to that precise scene in *Ecclesiastusae*, to something which has just happened or is about to happen in that comedy in a *precise* moment for some *precise* dramaturgical reason(s).

3 A Boring Succession of Songs

In considering an alternative meaning for the metatheatrical sentence of *Eccl.* 887–889, Vetta focuses his attention on the proximity of the Young Woman's ἀντάσομαι (887) to the indication ΧΟΡΟΥ (*post* 876): only 10 iambic trimeters separate the choral interlude from the announcement of the duet. He underlines how this circumstance concretely represents a further delay in the fluidity of the plot. The events, in fact, stop at line 876 with the interlude, and the Young Woman's ἀντάδειν would have caused disappointment because the audience may have expected the story to continue, instead of another song.

Vetta also supposes that the duet and the preceding choral interlude would have shared a 'thematic independence' from the script and an 'episodic character' if compared to the continuation of the plot.¹⁶

¹⁵ Imperio (2004) 100: 'Il repertorio delle immagini metaforiche, che, com'è stato da tempo riconosciuto, rappresentano uno degli aspetti distintivi della lingua e della poetica di Aristofane, appare dunque particolarmente cospicuo nelle parabasi, dove assume una speciale pregnanza allorché si fa veicolo di una programmatica riflessione dell'autore sull'arte comica e sul fare poetico in genere, e sulle prerogative che connotano in maniera peculiare e originale il proprio prodotto artistico'. Imperio dedicates a paragraph to the metaphorical language of Aristophanes' *parabasis* in Imperio (2004) 99–104.

¹⁶ See Vetta (1981) 87.

Finally, he provided a personal interpretation of the adjective *τερπνόν* (889):

‘Dopo un corale con ogni probabilità estraneo alla commedia, viene annunciato sulla scena un duetto scoptico che è anch’esso, come il corale, un *τερπνόν* in qualche modo fuori dall’intreccio, un *τερπνόν* che apprendiamo come sempre meno gradito ad un pubblico che ha già condizionato una drastica riduzione delle parti liriche dell’antica struttura della commedia.’¹⁷

Concerning the duet, in his view *τερπνόν* would signify something pleasant but having no connection to the plot, simply a *divertissement*, and just like the choral interlude.

Although Vetta is the only one who takes into account the context in which the duet is inserted (a fundamental aspect indeed), his interpretation still fails to convince for multiple reasons.

First, Aristophanes’ plays prior to *Ecclesiazusae* provide plenty of examples of two different lyric sections coming one after the other. Already in *Acharnenses* and *Wasps*, the monodies of Dikaiopolis (*Ach.* 263–279) and Philocleon (*Vesp.* 317–333) follow the respective *parodoi* (*Ach.* 204–236; *Vesp.* 230–316) after only a few lines. In *Birds*, the two monodies of the Hoopoe (*Av.* 209–222 and 227–262) are separated by only five lines. In *Thesmophoriazusae*, the long choral piece in lines 947–1000 follows the longest paratragic monody of the Inlaw (*Thesm.* 1015–1055) and then, after very few lines, another monody by him (*Thesm.* 1065–1072); at the end of *Lysistrata* there is a sequence of three songs following one after the other (*Lys.* 1247–1272 first Spartan monody; 1279–1294 song of Athenian Chorus; 1296–1321 second Spartan monody). In *Frogs*, Aeschylus and Euripides compete by singing four monodies in succession (*Ran.* 1264–1277; 1284–1295; 1309–1328; 1331–1363). Even in *Wealth* a XOPOY immediately follows the *parodos* (*Plut.* 257–321), and this circumstance could lead us to revise the idea of a declining interest on the part of the audience in the lyric parts of comedy.

It is also important to notice that it is specifically the ἀντάσομαι of the Young Woman that may cause annoyance, not ‘a song’ in general. In fact, after the choral interlude Aristophanes not only stages a single lyrical piece but also two additional songs (938–945; 952–975). So why would the author need to justify himself, foreseeing a boring effect on the audience for one excessive song, and then continue with two more songs over many more lines (until line 975)?

Furthermore, even *before* the appearance of the Young Woman (884), the audience is introduced into a ‘musical episode’. The Old Woman appears, in fact,

¹⁷ Vetta (1981) 88.

while singing something to herself (880) and, only a few seconds later, decides to invoke the Muses for a Ἴωνικῶν μελῦδριον (883). She is *alone* and a *monody* is expected, and this does not appear to be a problem for the audience. Therefore, it cannot be the simple succession of lyrical pieces that is annoying.

As regards the theme of the songs, Vetta seems to be missing the main point. While it is normally assumed that ΧΟΡΟΥ remains in manuscripts and papyri to indicate a choral song not belonging to the comedy script,¹⁸ the duet between the two women in *Ecclesiazusae* is indeed *very* relevant to the narration in that it represents a chaotic and comic actualisation of the new orders.¹⁹ Thus, it seems inappropriate to put the choral interlude and the duet on the same level.

Despite the hypothesis of Vetta, the adjective τερπνόν – as much as κωμωδικόν – is used in the text with an evident *positive* connotation, designed to prevent the audience from refusing what is to come, but rather to gain its favour. In Aristophanes, τερπνός is a rare adjective, but it always has a positive meaning;²⁰ similarly, the verb τέρπειν has the positive meaning of ‘giving pleasure, delight’, as it does in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, for example.²¹ So we can assume that in *Ecclesiazusae* the meaning of τερπνός is also ‘pleasant, delightful’, though referring, significantly, to something that is not expected to be pleasant: we must not forget that we are dealing with a ‘defense’ of the author.

Ultimately, it is clear that we are missing something that was immediately comprehensible to Aristophanes’ audience. Still, a pair of new reconstructions, both based on the meaning of individual words and with respect to the ongoing scene, deserves to be taken into account in order to understand the ‘voice’ of the poet and the dramaturgical meaning of these lines of *Ecclesiazusae*.

The question must be addressed first by identifying *what* represents the real problem for the author, and then trying to understand *how* the author justifies his choice. In this vein, it is worth trying to analyse closely the single passages of the text as well as the scene.

18 Along the same lines of tragic *embolima*. On ΧΟΡΟΥ and ἐμβόλιμον see, for example, Maidment (1935); Handley (1953); Taplin (1976); Hunter (1979); Scattolin (2011); Martina (2016).

19 It has the same function as the two following songs: the *skolia* of the Young Man and the Old Woman (938–945) and the *paraklausithyron* of the Young Man and the Young Woman (952–975).

20 Apart from our case, it is used in *Ach.* 881 with reference to a tasty plate of foods, and in *Lys.* 553 to describe sexual delights.

21 Cf. Wartelle (1982) s.v. τέρπειν.

Dramaturgy of ᾄδειν and ἀντάδειν

Line 887 contains three important elements that explain the development of the scene in its different moments.

ᾄδουσα refers to what the Old Woman is about to do before the appearance of the Young Woman. The ‘normal’ situation is thus that of people expecting a monody from the Old Woman, as she declares at lines 882–883.

ἦν τοῦτο δρᾶς, placed after the pronoun ἐγὼ and the particle δέ, which both have an important contrasting function, underlines that the possibility that the Old Woman will sing something alone represents the reason that the Young Woman is going to do something special in reply.

ἀντάσομαι marks the unexpected element of the scene: the Young Woman exclaims to the Old Woman that ‘if you do that, then I will do something to prevent you’. It is precisely for the Young Woman’s ἀντάδειν (‘singing in response’), which represents a novelty in the plot, that Aristophanes needs to prepare the audience and gain its ‘permission’. Significantly preceded by γάρ, at line 888, the pronoun τοῦτο refers precisely to that ἀντάσομαι, not to something general.

Each element leads to the conclusion that this is all something strictly *dramaturgical* before it is musical and poetic: it is the unexpected ‘interference’ of the Young Woman in the intentions of the Old Woman that causes something potentially unpleasant.

The Meaning of δι’ ὄχλου

The expression δι’ ὄχλου (888) is glossed by the schol. *ad loc.* as ἐπιβαρές, ‘heavy’. This is to be interpreted as a ‘heaviness’ resulting from something unpleasant, unwanted and nonetheless to be endured, as shown in general by the ancient attestations. Taking into account the relevant *loci similes*, in the fifth century the expression δι’ ὄχλου εἶναι is attested elsewhere only once, in Thuc. 1.73.2:

τὰ δὲ Μηδικὰ καὶ ὅσα αὐτοὶ ζύνιστε, εἰ καὶ δι’ ὄχλου μᾶλλον ἔσται αἰεὶ προβαλλομένοις, ἀνάγκη λέγειν.

The reference is to the Persian Wars, presented as something already well-known and frequently retold, but which must be narrated again, even if this might annoy the audience. In fact, Dionysus of Halicarnassus (*Amm.* 2.10) notes the use of ὄχλος for ὄχλησις. The structure of the Thucydidean sentence is quite similar to that of Aristophanes (εἰ . . . δι’ ὄχλου εἶναι), although in Thucydides the dative

(προβαλλομένοις) indicates people *toward which* one may feel annoyance, whereas in Aristophanes (888 τοῖς θεωμένοις) it stands for people *who* will feel annoyance themselves.

Another relevant attestation, with γίγνομαι in the place of εἶναι, is Pl. *Alc.* 103a3, where the lovers of Alcibiades turn out to be annoying him (δι' ὄχλου ἐγένοντό σοι) with their conversation:

. . . ἐραστής σου γενόμενος τῶν ἄλλων πεπαυμένων μόνος οὐκ ἀπαλλάττομαι, καὶ ὅτι οἱ μὲν ἄλλοι δι' ὄχλου ἐγένοντό σοι διαλεγόμενοι, ἐγὼ δὲ τοσούτων ἐτῶν οὐδὲ προσεῖπον.

The global meaning is the same: repetition of a same thing causes annoyance.

Apart from these examples is the focus on the simple word ὄχλος, which could help in our interpretation. ὄχλος in itself means 'crowd', and so an exaggerated or large number of people or things, generally carrying a negative or dismissive undertone. Attestations of the word are so many that it would be pedantic to cite them all, but, in addition to the case of line 888, ὄχλος appears three other times in the *Ecclesiazusae* itself: 383–384 πλεῖστος ἀνθρώπων ὄχλος, / ὅσος οὐδεπώποτ', ἦλθ' ἀθρόος ἐς τὴν πύκνα, a statement made by Chremes to Blegyros to explain that a mass such as never was seen before had crowded together towards the Pnyx, preventing him from arriving on time to the assembly; 394–395 ἀτὰρ τί τὸ πρᾶγμ' ἦν, ὅτι τοσοῦτον χρῆμ' ὄχλου / οὕτως ἐν ὄρᾳ ξυνελέγη;, where the same term is recalled by Blegyros in asking for explanations; and 745 τὰ χυτρίδι' ἦδη καὶ τὸν ὄχλον ἀφίετε, something said by the Neighbour who has already brought all the goods he intends to deliver to the city out of his house and so tells his servants to leave, for the moment, the pots and the other things (of evidently minor importance).²²

The sense of 'crowd', anyway, can be extended to something that gives annoyance or is boring because of its 'repetition' – precisely its 'crowding' effect – of the same thing, as can also be deduced from the sources mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph.

It is interesting that the adjective ὀχληρός appears with an aesthetic nuance in the *Vita Euripidis* (*TrGF* V T1 IB 4), where the tragic poet is described with negative adjectives as regards in particular his dialogues (ἐν δὲ τοῖς ἀμοιβαίαις περισσὸς καὶ φορτικός, 'superfluous and vulgar') and his prologues (ἐν τοῖς

²² For Aristophanes we may also recall, for example, *Vesp.* 540–545, where the mass of the old men of the Chorus (πρεσβυτῶν ὄχλος) fears to be mistreated; *Lys.* 327–331, where ὄχλος is used within the description of a situation of general confusion; *etc.* See also 229 and n. 34.

προλόγοις δὲ ὄχληρός, ‘tedious’).²³ Even if the *Vita* does not provide a specific explanation for this judgement, the passage can be compared to the words pronounced by Aeschylus in *Frogs* for introducing his parody of Euripidean prologues, and it may be intended to be seen as full of insignificant things or, in an extended sense, too full of details and thus tedious.²⁴ Looking at our scene in *Ecclesiazusae*, the comparison could lead us to think of an accumulation of something which may cause annoyance.²⁵

Two New Interpretative Proposals

Given that everything within the dialogue seems to be related to the scene, Aristophanes may be referring to something repetitive happening at that particular moment of the play. What is this annoying ‘crowding’ referring to? We should take into consideration at least two possibilities.

a. An Impossible Monody: A ‘Crowding’ of Characters?

The first –and maybe more plausible from a dramaturgical point of view– new interpretation of the sentence pronounced by the Young Woman implies that the expression ‘being δι’ ὄχλου to the spectators’ may be relative to what follows the metatheatrical passage.

By taking a closer look at what is happening on the scene, it is possible to recognize in the Young Woman an intruder, a type of character appointed to hinder the protagonist from the execution of an action –and, in the case of the episode we are focusing on, the Old Woman should be considered the protagonist– as it happens in many of Aristophanes’ plays, which contain plenty of ‘intruders’ scenes’.²⁶

²³ Here, the complete passage with the aesthetic judgment of Euripides’ style (*TrGF* V T1 IB 4. 53–56): καὶ τοῖς μέλεσιν ἔστιν ἀμίμητος παραγκωνιζόμενος τοὺς μελοποιοὺς σχεδὸν πάντας, ἐν δὲ τοῖς ἀμοιβαίοις περισσὸς καὶ φορτικὸς καὶ ἐν τοῖς προλόγοις δὲ ὄχληρός, ῥητορικώτατος δὲ τῇ κατασκευῇ καὶ ποικίλος τῇ φράσει καὶ ἱκανὸς ἀνασκευάσαι τὰ εἰρημένα.

²⁴ Cf. *Ran.* 1202–1204. Cf. also schol. *vet. Ran.* 1202 Chantry.

²⁵ ὄχληρά is used to describe Echo in *Ar. Thesm.* 1075 by Euripides’ Inlaw, who is trying to sing a monody but is continuously interrupted by the voice of Echo repeating his words.

²⁶ Examples can be found in Aristophanes’ *Acharnians*, where many characters crowd and disturb Dikaiopolis’ own market (719 ff.) or especially in *Birds*, which contains two large ‘intruders’ scenes’: at lines 904–1057 five ‘visiteurs inopportuns’ – following the definition of Kakridis (1997) – interrupt Peisetaerus’ sacrifice for Nephelokokkygia; at lines 1308–1469 three

The Young Woman interrupts with the intention of causing trouble for the Old Woman and of contrasting her song. In this sense, ὄχλος should be intended as a ‘crowding’ of characters, i.e. of voices, where only one (for the monody of the Old Woman) was expected. Not only the presence of the Young Woman, but her ἀντάδειν itself is assumed to be annoying to the spectators, namely because it represents an obstacle to the monody.

On closer inspection, it is also meaningful that the Old Woman, after the metatheatrical sentence, ignores the Young Woman (though not before having insulted her) and –with another metatheatrical trick– addresses the *auletes* as if nothing had happened (890–892):

ΓΡ.^α τούτῳ²⁷ διαλέγου κάποχώρησον· σὺ δέ,
φιλοτάριον ἀλλητά, τοὺς ἀλύους λαβῶν
ἄξιον ἐμοῦ καὶ σοῦ προσαύλησον μέλος.

[*bending over and presenting her posterior to the Girl!*]: Talk to *that*, and be off with you!
[*To the piper who has been accompanying the Chorus*] And you, piper sweetie, take your pipes and play a tune to show your quality – and mine. (transl. Sommerstein)

She prays the *auletes* play something appropriate for her and for him: she wants to sing her monody, not a duet. The first *strophe* of her song (893–899), before its development into a duet, seems to be just the beginning of the μελύδριον Ἴωνικῶν (883) that she had already decided to sing alone:

ΓΡ.^α εἴ τις ἀγαθὸν βούλεται πα-
θεῖν τι, παρ' ἐμοὶ χρῆ καθεύδειν·
οὐ γὰρ ἐν νέαις τὸ σοφὸν ἐν- (895)
εστιν, ἀλλ' ἐν ταῖς πεπείροις,
οὐδέ τοι στέργειν ἂν ἐθέλοι μᾶλλον ἢ ἰώ
τὸν φίλον ὤπερ ξυνείην,
ἀλλ' ἐφ' ἕτερον ἂν πέτοιτο –

more characters burst onto the stage asking Peisetaerus for wings. For the intruders in Aristophanes' plays and in Old Comedy in general see also Hartwig (2009) 66–68.

27 This is the word we find in manuscripts; the *scholia* to this passage explain that ἡ γραῦς ‘τῷ αἰδοίῳ’ λέγει. As Sommerstein says in his edition of *Ecclesiazusae*, ‘as often . . . the text uses a demonstrative pronoun to refer to an object which the audience could see, with the result that we as readers cannot identify the object with certainty: here we know only that the object is masculine or neuter in grammatical gender, that the invitation to talk to it is an insult, and that, in view of the whole tenor of the scene, the insult is likely to have some sexual content or connotation’ (Sommerstein [1998] 215). While working from both a textual and a dramaturgical point of view, the text was the object of conjecture by some scholars, who proposed to amend τούτῳ to τύμβῳ (Meineke) or σαυτῇ (Blaydes), but there is actually no need to modify a well-functioning text, which is also supported by *scholia*.

If anyone wants to have a good / time, he should sleep with *me!* / For expertise is not to be found / in the young, but in the mature. / And I tell you she couldn't be more ready than I am / to cherish my boyfriend; / no, she'd fly off to another – (transl. Sommerstein)

It is at this point that the Young Woman violently interrupts her, giving birth to the real 'burning' contrast song (900–924):

- KO. μή φθόνει ταῖσιν νέαισι (900)
 τὸ τρυφερὸν γὰρ ἐμπέφυκε
 τοῖς ἀπαλοῖσι μηροῖς
 κάπτι τοῖς μήλοισ ἐπάν-
 θεῖ· σὺ δ', ὦ γραῦ, παραλέλεξαι κἀντέτριψαι
 τῷ Θανάτῳ μέλημα. (905)
- ΓΡ.^α ἐκπέσοι σου τὸ τρήμα
 τό τ' ἐπίκλιντρον ἀποβάλοις
 βουλομένη σποδεῖσθαι,
 κάπτι τῆς κλίνης ὄφιν προσελκύσαιο
 βουλομένη φιληῆσαι. (910)
- KO. αἰαῖ, τί ποτε πείσομαι;
 οὐχ ἤκει μούταῖρος·
 μόνη δ' αὐτοῦ λείπομ'· ἡ
 γάρ μοι μήτηρ ἄλλη –
 καὶ τᾶλλα μ' οὐδὲν τὰ μετὰ ταῦτα δεῖ λέγειν.
 ἀλλ', ὦ μαῖ', ἱκετεύομαι, (915)
 κάλει τὸν Ὁρθαγόραν,
 ὅπως ἂν σαυτῆς κατόναι',
 ἀντιβολῶ σε.
- ΓΡ.^α ἤδη τὸν ἀπ' Ἰωνίας
 τρόπον, τάλαινα, κνησιᾶς·
 δοκεῖς δέ μοι καὶ λάβδα κατὰ τοὺς Λεσβίους. (920)
- KO. ἀλλ' οὐκ ἂν ποθ' ὑφαρπάσαι-
 ο τὰμὰ παίγνια· τὴν δ'
 ἐμὴν ὄραν οὐκ ἀπολεῖς
 οὐδ' ἀπολήψει.

GIRL [*interrupting*]: Don't be jealous of the young; / for voluptuousness has its natural abode / in tender thighs / and blooms on firm breasts; / while *you*, old woman, are plucked and plastered / to be the darling of Death!

FIRST OLD WOMAN: May your hole fall out / and may you lose your lie-upon / when you want a shag, / and may you, on your bed, draw a snake to your arms / when you want a kiss!

GIRL: 'Ah me, what will become of me? / My boyfriend hasn't come, / and I'm left alone here, / because my mother's somewhere else –' / [*speaking*] and I've no need to add what comes after that! / [*Singing again*] 'Oh, nurse, I implore you –' / [*maliciously, to the Old Woman*] invite the Hard Man round, / so that you can five yourself some pleasure, / [*passionately again*] 'I beg you!'

FIRST OLD WOMAN: Already, poor soul, you've got the itch / in the Ionian fashion, / [*speaking*] and it looks to me like you've got the big L as in Lesbos too!

GIRL: But you'll never rob me / of my playmates, and / my youth you will not destroy / nor grab a share of! (transl. Sommerstein)

One way of reading this would be to see Aristophanes as trying to prevent the annoyance of the spectators, for a new character that is going to impede the normal lyrical progression of the script.

b. Choral Interlude and Actors' Duet: A 'Crowding' of Similar Songs?

If δι' ὄχλου (888) is 'retroactive', then the skoptic duet introduced by ἀντάσσομαι (887) must be bothersome because something similar has happened immediately before. In this case, the repetition would be that entailed by the presence of two similar songs, a 'crowding' of similar musical-poetic genres one after the other.

From this point of view, even if we know very little about the interludes indicated by XOPOY, we could assume that the choral interlude performed after line 876 was a contrast song, characterised by *skommata*, in which two parts contend in a lyrical way, a 'cut and thrust' in which what is said by one is recovered and twisted by the other. In this case, the Young Woman's proclamation of ἀντάδειν to the Old Woman would be seen by audience as the introduction to another contrast song, and this would cause annoyance. The interlude and the duet could have been similar: it does not really matter if one were choral and the other not, or if one were disconnected from the plot and the other is relevant to it, because they would be of the same genre in their sharing of the same basic characteristics.

Even if this hypothesis cannot be proved, there are important elements to consider. The most similar case comes in *Wealth*. The song of the *parodos* and the choral interlude indicated by χοροῦ are placed one after the other, as in *Ecclesiazusae* (where, however, the interlude comes first, followed by the duet). Besides, the *parodos* of *Wealth* is a skoptic song, and one of the same character as *Ecclesiazusae*'s duet, because the slave Karion and the Chorus alternate their parts, each upturning what was said by the other previously.²⁸ Furthermore, it is also important to notice that, at the end of the *parodos*, Karion addresses the

²⁸ On the *parodos* of *Wealth*, see in particular Totaro (2015), which deals with the *onomasti komoidein* characterizing this dialogical *parodos*; cf. also Bravi (2017) 186–189.

Chorus by saying ‘stop with your *skommata*, now turn to a different kind of song’ (*Plut.* 316–317):²⁹

ἀλλ’ εἶά νυν τῶν σκωμμάτων ἀπαλλαγέντες ἤδη
ὕμεις ἐπ’ ἄλλ’ εἶδος τρέπεσθε(ε).

After this invitation comes the interlude, not transmitted in the *codices*. This makes us think that the author knows that two lyrical pieces one after the other should be different,³⁰ so as not to bother the audience. It is a sort of ‘rule’, which would explain why the ‘exception’ in *Ecclesiazusae* needs to be justified.

The case in which a character speaks with reference to something from the interlude is very interesting, and again it has a parallel in *Wealth*. At line 771 of the play, in fact, *Wealth* appears on the scene just after a choral interlude (the indication KOMMATION XOPOY following line 770 is retained in some manuscripts, among which are the ancient *Ravennas* 429 and *Venetus Marcianus gr.* 474, and it is testified also by the *scholia vetera* and *recentiora ad Ar. Plut. post* 770). His words –a reference to the sun– seem to refer to something said immediately before, as his first line opens with καὶ . . . γε (καὶ προσκυνῶ γε πρῶτα μὲν τὸν ἥλιον, κτλ.). Nevertheless, at the end of the previous episode, there was no ‘sun’, nor does it appear at the beginning of the new episode. Therefore, it is possible that, during the interlude, the Chorus has been singing something about the sun, even if something disconnected from the plot, and that *Wealth* takes that reference as opening the new scene.³¹

Finally, a Chorus singing a contrast song as interlude would not be an absurd hypothesis at all: more than once in Aristophanes it is possible to identify a Chorus divided into two parts (e.g., in *Ach.* 557 ff., in *Ran.* 324 ff., and in *Lysistrata* up to the reunification of men and women),³² one responding to the other. Ancient *scholia* to Aristophanes likewise show awareness of these cases of διχορία.³³

Given the above, it is interesting that when Pollux, in his *Onomasticon*, talks about the chorus, he says (4.107.4–5):

²⁹ Cf. Handley (1953) 59; Sommerstein (1984) 141 (though actually speaking of ‘another kind of entertainment’; cf. also Sommerstein (2001) 160 and 151 n. 16 with the confutation of other proposals; Imperio (2011) 141 evinces some doubts about the interpretation of these words.

³⁰ For the different shades of meaning of εἶδος in Antiquity, see Grandolini (1999), in particular 11–12.

³¹ Cf. also Hunter (1979) 31–33; Sommerstein (1984) 141–142; Sommerstein (2001) 185.

³² Cf. *Lys.* 1042 ἀλλὰ κοινῇ συσταλέντες τοῦ μέλους ἀρξώμεθα.

³³ Cf. also schol. (*vet. Tr.*) *Eq.* 589a, 589b on the composition of the comic chorus and the possibility of *hemichorus*.

ὅπoταν γὰρ ὁ χορὸς εἰς δύο μέρη τμηθῆ, τὸ μὲν πρᾶγμα καλεῖται διχορία, ἑκατέρα δ' ἡ μοῖρα ἡμιχόριον, ἃ δ' ἀντάδουσιν, ἀντιχόρια.

In fact, when the Chorus is divided in two parts, this thing is called διχορία, each part ἡμιχόριον, what they sing in response ἀντιχόρια.

Here we should also note the use of the verb ἀντάδειν.

A skoptic song, finally, would not be out of context in a comedy, if we consider also the *praxis* of the Middle and New Comedy to introduce the first appearance of the Chorus (for a so-called ‘χοροῦ’ μέλος, an interlude) as a group –note also the mention of ὄχλος in some texts–of drunk men.³⁴

Although, as I have said at the beginning, both new interpretations of the metatheatrical passage from *Ecclesiazusae* offered here are speculative, they are both more consistent with all factors and thus more plausible than what has been said before. In addition, they both draw our attention closer to the scene.

What is τερπνόν and κωμωδικόν? And in which Sense?

Speaking through the voice of the Young Woman, Aristophanes reassures the audience that what is about to happen on the scene is τερπνόν and κωμωδικόν (889). We have already said that τερπνός should be translated as ‘pleasant, amusing’.³⁵ But what about κωμωδικόν, a word so important and charged with metatheatrical significance, inserted into a metatheatrical moment of the play, and yet so elusive?

34 Martina (2016) 358: ‘mentre da una parte è innegabile che il coro fosse diventato talmente estraneo all’azione da essere usato solo come elemento di divisione della commedia in parti, dall’altra si può anche pensare che la ricorrenza di un coro di gozzovigliatori possa essere intesa come un ritorno alle origini, vale a dire al κῶμος, la “baldoria”, da cui era sorta la commedia antica’. See in particular Martina (2016) 349–350. Cf. Men. *Aspis* 247–248 ὄχλον ἄλλον ἀνθρώπων προσιόντα τουτονὶ / ὄρῳ μεθύντων κτλ.; *Dys.* 230–231 καὶ γὰρ προσιόντας τούσδε Πανιστάς τινας / εἰς τὸν τόπον δεῦρ’ ὑποβεβρεγμένους ὄρῳ; *Epit.* 169–170 μειρακυλλίων ὄχλος / εἰς τὸν τόπον τις ἔρχεθ’ ὑποβεβρεγμένων; *Pk.* 261 μεθύοντα μειράκια προσέρχεται. Note that in Antiphanes’ *Dodonis* (fr. 91 K.-A.) an ὄχλος of young men joining in revelry appears, and in Alexis’ *Kouris* (fr. 107 K.-A.) a similar κῶμος is seen moving forward: both situations seem to cause worry to the speakers.

35 On audience’s pleasure, see Duncan in this volume.

The adjective cannot simply mean ‘amusing’, because *τερπνόν* is already present in the text: this meaning would represent a pointless repetition and, most of all, the word would lose every metatheatrical meaning within the comedy, as the term itself seems to indicate. *κωμωδικόν*, especially in a metatheatrical moment immediately following a *ΧΟΡΟΥ*, and (we could add) in a comedy without *parabasis*, must carry an important meaning in itself.

Nevertheless, the word is attested very few times in Aristophanes. Elsewhere, in *Wasps* (1020; 1047) it refers to the ‘comic verses’ of Aristophanes himself; in fr. 31 K.-A., from Aristophanes’ *Amphiaraos*, it defines a mask; in *Eccl.* 371 it is an attribute of a chamber pot. In any case, the meaning of the word is not just ‘typical of comedy as a genre’, but more precisely is ‘admitted and used concretely in a comedy as an instrument of expression’, and it is so used for verses, masks, objects, and probably songs as well.

Aristophanes, in effect, always adopts the substantive *κωμωδία* as ‘play’ – so the relative adjective identifies everything that can be used in a play: *Ach.* 377–378; *Nub.* 534–535; *Vesp.* 64–66; *Ran.* 12–15.

To indicate the ‘genre’ of comedy, Aristophanes adopts *τρυγῳδία* and the related adjectives *τρυγῳδός* and *τρυγῳδικός*. These are always used to qualify elements of the comic ‘genre’ per se, in particular the comic chorus and the general comic production (also implying, almost sometimes, a comparison with tragedy): *Ach.* 497–500; *Vesp.* 1535–1537; fr. 347.1 K.-A. (*Thesmophoriazusaes B*’); fr. 150.1–3 K.-A. (*Gerytades*).

Therefore, admitting the first interpretation (a) proposed in this investigation: if Aristophanes does specify to the audience that the intrusion of the Young Woman, which is to create an undesired duet of what began as a monody, has in itself something ‘pleasant’ and ‘comic’, it is to make people aware that this circumstance will be amusing, that it fits well in a play, and that it belongs to *this* play, the one they are watching. By following, instead, the second interpretation (b), *κωμωδικόν* would be remarking upon the difference between the *χοροῦ* (*μέλος*)’s ‘non-involvement’ in the comedy plot, and the duet of lines 893–923 as belonging to the plot. In simple terms, it would be as though Aristophanes were saying: ‘Spectators, listen to me: you are going to hear a skoptic song. I know that you may find this annoying, boring, because you just heard this kind of song from the Chorus few minutes ago, but *that* was just entertainment, *this one* is nice and pertains to the facts of this play’.

In any case, Aristophanes might be explaining the dramaturgical meaning of his choices in composition at a moment in the play where the lyrical pieces could be misunderstood by the audience, i.e. just after a choral interlude which was disconnected from the plot and which represented one of the formal innovations of the Athenian theatre in that period. In fact, from this scene of *Ecclesiazusae* we

can infer that, among other things, ‘metatheatre’ can be defined as a dramaturgical technique created – or at least used – in an original and comic way by the poet for speaking, through his characters, about his own compositional process. In this way Aristophanes could be guiding his audience through the complex mechanics of the dramaturgy, the music, and/or the assembly of scenes.

As pointed out at the beginning of this article, the aim of these pages is not to provide definitive solutions but to re-open a dialogue on this passage by focusing attention on the scene and placing more importance on the voice of the author at a very delicate moment within the play, and within ancient Greek comedy as a whole.

