Theatre Oral History Report Essay, Research Paper

Theatre History Oral Report

Aristophanes (448?-385 BC), Athenian playwright, considered one of the greatest writers of comedy in

literary history. His plays have been produced through the centuries and have remained popular because

of their wit, comic invention, and poetic language.

Aristophanes is believed to have been born in Athens, Greece, in the deme, or township, of

Cydathenaeum. Presumably, he was well educated and may have had property on the island of Aegina.

He had three sons-Philippos, Araros, and Nikostratos-all of whom were comic poets.

Aristophanes was first and foremost a satirist. During his lifetime Athens underwent a period of

convulsive cultural and social change, and he found a ready target in the politicians, poets, and

philosophers of his day. It would nevertheless be misleading to describe Aristophanes as a reactionary or a

conservative, since his works show no sympathy for the aristocratic party in Athenian politics. No class,

age, or profession was exempt from his satire. Aristophanes wrote more than 40 plays, of which 11 are

extant. His first three plays were produced under pseudonyms, including The Acharnians (425 BC), a plea

for ending the war with Sparta. The Knights (424 BC), the first of the plays of Aristophanes to be

presented under his own name, is a devastating satire about Athenian politician and military leader Cleon,

champion of the democratic forces and leader of the war party. The Clouds (423 BC) satirizes Greek

philosopher Socrates, whose penetrating analysis of established values Aristophanes considered opposed

to the interests of the state. In The Wasps (422 BC) Aristophanes satirized the courts of justice of the

day, and in The Peace (421 BC) he again argued for peace between Athens and Sparta. The Birds (414

BC) is a fantasy in which an Athenian persuades the birds to build a city in the clouds and then imposes

his own terms on the gods. Lysistrata (411 BC), another satire on war, in which women strike for peace

by practicing celibacy, is his most famous work. Thesmorphoriazusae (411 BC) and The Frogs (405 BC)

include attacks on Athenian playwright Euripides. Ecclesiazusa (393 BC) is a satire on the idea of

communal ownership of property, and Plutus (388 BC) reduced to absurdity the concept of redistribution

of wealth in Athens. These works, basically fantasies, were written in a form related to that of

contemporary tragedy. They include dialogue scenes, long choral harangues, lyric passages, and a great

deal of music and dance.

The plays of Aristophanes exerted considerable influence on English satire, notably that of English

playwright Ben Jonson in the 17th century and English novelist Henry Fielding in the 18th century.

ARISTOPHANES TIMELINE

Aristophanes was born in 450 b.C. or a few years later. We make the conclusion for the year since in

“Nefeles”-(”The Clouds”) (528-533) the writer leaves us to think that he was extremely young and

he didn’t have self-confidence when the play “Thetalis” (his first play) was staged.

431 Pelloponesian war starts, between Athens and Sparta.

430 Pestilence in Athens.

429 Death of Pericleus.

428/7 Plato is born.

427 “Thetalis” (lost)

426 “Babylonians” (lost). Kleon lawsuits Aristophanes, with the accusation that by that play ridicule

the elective rulers of the city, infront of the audiense and among them a lot of foreigh visitors, in Grant

Dionesia. The suit didn’t seem to have any consequence for him.

425 “Aharnes”. First prize in Linea

424 “Heppeas” (”Horsemen”). First prize in Linea

423 “Nefeles” (”Clouds”). First form (lost) that won the third and last prize in Grand Dionesia.

Peace settlement, temporarily stops the hostilities between Athens and Sparta.

422 “Sfikes” (”Wasps”), second prize in Linea.

421 “Peace”, second-best prize in Grand Dionesia.

417 “Nefeles”, partially revised form (saved) that never staged in ancient years.

415 Athens sends in Sicily a big expeditionary legion.

414 “Amfiaraos” (lost) in Linea. “Ornithes” (”Birds”), second prize in Grand Dionesia.

413 Sparta restarts warfare. Athenian army destroyed in Sicily.

411 “Lysistrata” in Linea, “Thesmoforiazouses” in Grand Dionesia. Oligarchic revolution

dominated temporarily in Athens, but democratic polity restored a few months later.

408 “Ploutos” (lost), it’s not the play that staged later.

406 Euripides & Sophocles death.

405 “Vatrahee” (”Frogs”), 1st prize in Linea. Plastering and naval blockade of Athens.

404 Sparta lays peace. An oligarchic group (The Tyranny of Thirties) takes up rule.

403 Local war and reinstatment of democracy.

399 Sentence and deth of Socrates.

395 The war with Sparta restarts, but with diferent correlation of allies. First steps of Athenian navy

towards reprisal.

392 “Heclesiasouses” (the chronology is based mostly upon internal criterions and probably trown

off a year.)

388 “Ploutos” (”wealth”) (saved)

After 388: “Heolosikon” (lost) and “Kokalos” (lost). Produser and director was one of poet sons.

From “Aharnes” we make the conclusion that at the time this play was staged, Aristophanes lived in

Eagina, the island the Athenians had colonized in 431 b.C. when they threw out the old dwellers (as

philolaconists). We know that his sons where comedy writers but we know nothing for his father

(Phillipos his name) nor for his social or economic status.