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Heine's Aristophanes: Compromise Formations and the Ambivalence of Carnival

IN ONE OF HIS numerous working notes, collected and published posthumously in 1869 as *Aphorismen und Fragmente*, Heinrich Heine remarked upon the correspondence between life and poetry in the culture of the ancient Greeks, a correspondence which, in Heine's opinion, accounted for the Greeks having produced no writers as great as those of modern Europe, "wo das Leben oft den Gegensatz der Poesie bildet." "Shakespeares grosse Zeh," Heine goes on, "enthält mehr Poesie als alle griechischen Poeten (mit Ausnahme des Aristophanes)" (7: 423) ("where life often opposes itself to poetry." "Shakespeare's big toe contains more poetry than all the Greek poets [with the exception of Aristophanes]").¹ This paper is dedicated neither to upholding nor to refuting Heine's remarkable proposition, but rather to suggesting what may allow the classical Athenian comic dramatist Aristophanes to hold his ground against the Elizabethan poet, at least in the standoff staged by this nineteenth-century cultural critic. For if Aristophanes manages to escape the charge of drab mimesis Heine levels at the rest of the classical canon, it is clearly in part because his measured grotesquery is as singular and inimitable, in its limited way, as the irregular and capricious style fashioned by Shakespeare. But Aristophanes' ascendancy in this historical period is perhaps also due to his specific methods of satire and allegory, his ways of discovering the comic in the tragic and vice versa, which seemed to be particularly in tune with the political undecidabilities and cryptic style of modernism's various forerunners. During a century of European ferment and counter-revolution, one which saw turns of the literary wheel through romanticism, idealism, and back to a revitalized realism, the comic

¹ All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

playwright's pastiche of naturalism and fantasy caused him to stand out ever further from an imagined ground of classical decorum and unity. Given such a programmatic relevance across the centuries, Aristophanes may then indeed be ripe, as Wolfgang Rösler has suggested, for re-examination in relation to the ideas of one of this century's most influential theorists of literary genealogy, Mikhail Bakhtin (28 ff.). As I will argue here, what makes Aristophanes so appealing to Heine—a writer whose political and aesthetic commitments are occasionally, if productively, at variance—is the comic poet's creation of an ambivalent and carnivalized literary space in which the social order can be at once overturned and upheld. This carnivalesque dynamics at the very heart of classical culture thus prefigures the various compromises worked out by the nineteenth century's literary and political modernization.

Ambivalence, of course, is not the intellectual mode solely of Aristophanes, not even in antiquity: it is in fact the formal condition of one particular strain of comedy, which Bakhtin made famous in our century under the name *spoudogeloion*, or serio-comic, associating it with the largely fragmentary Hellenistic satires of Menippus of Gadara. As Rösler has charged, however, Bakhtin's election of Menippean satire as the alleged bearer of the long-repressed energies of folklore and carnival in a Hellenistic period characterized by ideological chaos and a break with the formerly prevailing and now decadent order of classicism suffers by a certain repression of its own (28). Aristophanes, Rösler shows, and ancient comedy in general (not to mention ancient tragedy) are consistently written out of Bakhtin's history of the carnivalization of literature in favor of such nondramatic forms as the Socratic dialogue and of course the Menippean satire: Bakhtin's privileged modern genre is after all the novel (27-28). Rösler finds this omission "ominous" ("verhängnisvoll" 28) for the fate of Bakhtin's project; he notes the greater proximity of old Attic comedy to actual Athenian festivals such as the elaborate fertility-rite known as the *Thesmophoria* and the Demeter and Kore procession of the *Skira*, and he observes that most of the features proposed by Bakhtin as having been particularly distinctive of the Hellenistic period—religious and philosophical heterodoxy, an increasing democratization of even the most abstruse eschatological issues—also characterize the Attic fifth century (36-38). Bakhtin's particular hobby-horse, the derivative if formally innovative Menippean satire, could thus be said to have been inappropriately fetishized. But this does not mean that Rösler foresees no use for the theories of carnivalization and polyglossia in the study of classical literature. On the contrary, all that is required is the corrective admission that "an interrelationship between carnivalistic world-view

and literature in Greece arose substantially earlier than Bakhtin, with his bias toward a hieratic unity of 'classical' Greek culture, was able to acknowledge" (36).²

This same unity of the classical age is indirectly addressed by two rather different readers of carnival, Peter Stallybrass and the late Allon White. In "Bourgeois Hysteria and the Carnavalesque," a chapter in their *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Stallybrass and White trace the sublimation of carnival in the European culture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and suggest some of the ways the emergent bourgeois hegemony found to harness the threatening energies of festive rebellion (171-190). However, as Simon During has pointed out, we would do well to remember that that same "return of the repressed," conjured up by Stallybrass and White in their sketch of the progress of carnival from early-modern anathema to the motor of modernism, actually has its counterpart in much older, premodern systems of social regulation, such as those in place in fifth-century Athens (284). By nostalgically reconstructing the Periclean golden age as an organic symbiosis between Apollinian powers of order and Dionysian forces of carnival, then, we would at best risk overlooking the important way that the nineteenth-century dynamics of repression is already prefigured in ancient comedy's ambivalent relation to Attic democracy. At worst we would be repeating Bakhtin's slighting of the contribution of drama to the development of the modern carnivalesque. For as Jane K. Brown argues in "The Queen of the Night and the Crisis of Allegory in *The Magic Flute*," there is much to be learned from applying Bakhtinian methods to nascent theatrical forms like the comic opera of the late Enlightenment, with its dialogic tension between the allegorical and the mimetic played out in such carnivalesque figures as Schickaneder's *Nachtkönigin*; and insofar as comic opera carries into the nineteenth century the Aristophanic tradition of secular allegory, there is ample reason to reinsert Aristophanes into the Bakhtinian history of literary carnivalization and polyglossia.

We are lucky, then, to be able to turn to Heine, a satirical critic living in a century that would replay on a broader European stage some of the same ideological confusions and political end-games that characterized the age of Hellenism, according to Bakhtin—and that were also a hallmark of the Attic fifth century, as Rösler has reminded us. For Heine is also, as we know, both an idiosyncratic judge of Aristophanes' place in the aesthetic order, and, as we shall find out, a pre-Bakhtinian theorist of the *spoudogeloion*, or

² "Nur deutet sich eben an, daß ein Zusammenhang zwischen karnevalistischem Weltempfinden und Literatur in Griechenland wesentlich früher bestanden hat, als es Bachtin aufgrund seines Vorurteils von einer hieratischen Einheitlichkeit der 'klassischen' griechischen Kultur wahrzunehmen vermochte."

serio-comic, and its specific instantiation in ancient comedy. And it is Aristophanes' appearance as an allegory of this same mode in one of Heine's most stinging indictments of his time that suggests, I believe, the role that the classical comedian plays in the development of a modern literature whose hallmarks are also violent irony, ambivalent irreverence, and a continuous, carnivalesque breaking and reshaping of generic bounds.

Aristophanes is invoked by Heine in the last canto of his 1844 poem *Deutschland. Ein Wintermärchen* (*Germany. A Winter's Tale*), a mock-epic account of two trips to Germany Heine had made from his self-imposed exile in Paris during the previous year. But for its resolutely prosodic mode, *Deutschland* is the very type of Menippean satire, at least as defined by Bakhtin: it is free with its psychological and philosophical inventions; it mixes dialogue, symbolism, fantastical excursus and sometimes scatological—or perhaps eschatological—naturalism; and it is filled with scandal and eccentricity, the better to upset the epico-tragic unity of the Restoration world. By Rösler's account, all of these elements are also constitutive of ancient comedy. And Aristophanes, the Greek playwright most readily associated with that form, is claimed as a father by the German satirist, now happily preparing for a new generation of poets fit to hear the gospel of aesthetic and political emancipation emanating from Heine's lyre: for as he notes, "Es ist dieselbe Leier, die einst / Mein Vater ließ ertönen, / Der selige Herr Aristophanes, / Der Liebling der Kamönen" (1: 505) ("It is the same lyre that once my father made ring out, the late Mr. Aristophanes, the darling of the muses"). Heine goes on to name one of the characters sung about on that lyre, Pisthetairos, hero of Aristophanes' *Birds*, who founds an empire in the air and is wed to the goddess Basileia. He then points to the influence of that play on the penultimate canto of *Deutschland*, in which the returning poet celebrates in the ecumenical presence of assembled diplomats and clerics his wedding in a bedsitter with the tipsy Hammonia, *genius loci* of Hamburg (1: 505, cf. 1: 500-504).

The *Birds* of Aristophanes, then, is the privileged classical intertext of Heine's verse travelogue, in which avian imagery is ever-present and the parochial state of German politics is summed up in terms explicitly reminiscent of Cloudcuckooland: "Franzosen und Russen gehört das Land, / Das Meer gehört den Briten, / Wir aber besitzen im Luftreich des Traums / Die Herrschaft unbestritten" (1: 452) ("The land belongs to the French and the Russians, the sea belongs to the British, but we are the undisputed masters in the airy kingdom of the dream"). Although it may have been the Frogs that moved Heine to reflect on the hypocrisy of the Prussian king, who was as we learn in *Deutschland* moved to laughter by a staging of Aristophanes' infer-

nal poetry contest, it is the *Birds* that Heine names as "das Beste von Vaters Dramen" (1: 505). And, of all of Aristophanes' plays, it is the *Birds* that most completely expresses carnival's peculiar apapage: reality turned inside-out, an eccentric familiarity of humans with their immediate world, erotic and social *mésalliance*, and a profanation of holy texts that stretches the bounds of the human. The *Birds* also contains the most exhaustive Aristophanic catalogue of *alazones* or impostor-figures and, in a Cloudcookooland where all social norms have been suspended, best stages the humiliations with which these hypocritical guardians of public propriety and private property will be met.

But Heine prized this particular Aristophanic comedy for more than its robust energies. In an 1825 letter to Friederike Robert, wife of Ludwig Robert, a minor Berlin playwright, Heine takes Ludwig to task for his recent adaptation of the *Birds*, *Der Paradiesvogel*, and declares his preference for the original, a preference dictated by Aristophanes' superior grasp of the tragic within his play's ostensibly comic mandate. "Kurz vor der Lektüre des 'Paradiesvogels,'" Heine explains,

habe ich ganz andere Vögel kennengelernt, nämlich "Die Vögel" des Aristophanes. Vielleicht, schöne Frau, haben Sie noch nie von denselben etwas gehört, oder Sie haben wenig Richtiges darüber gehört. Selbst mein nadelöhrfeiner Lehrer, A. W. v. Schlegel, hat in seinen dramaturgischen Vorlesungen unerträglich seicht und falsch darüber geurteilt, indem er es für einen lustigen, barocken Spaß erklärt, daß in diesem Stücke die Vögel zusammenkommen und eine Stadt in der Luft gründen und den Göttern den Gehorsam aufkündigen etc. etc. Es liegt aber ein tiefer, ernsterer Sinn in diesem Gedichte, und während es die exoterischen Kechenäer (d.h. die atheniensischen Maulaufsperrer) durch phantastische Gestalten und Späße und Witze und Anspielungen, z.B. auf das damalige Legationswesen, köstlich ergötzt, erblickt der Esoterische (d.h. ich) in diesem Gedichte eine ungeheure Weltanschauung; ich sehe darin den göttertrotzenden Wahnsinn der Menschen, eine echte Tragödie, um so tragischer, da jener Wahnsinn am Ende siegt und glücklich beharrt in dem Wahne, daß seine Luftstadt wirklich existiere und daß er die Götter bezwungen und alles erlangt habe, selbst den Besitz der allgewaltig herrlichen Basileia. (8: 209-210)

(Shortly before reading the "Bird of Paradise" I made the acquaintance of some entirely different birds, namely "The Birds" of Aristophanes. Perhaps, lovely lady, you have never heard anything about them, or you have heard little about them that was correct. Even my teacher A.W.v. Schlegel, though as fine as the eye of a needle, made an unbearably shallow and false judgement about them in his dramaturgical lectures, when he declares it a funny baroque game that in this play the birds come together and found a city in the air and announce the cancelation of their obedience to the gods etc. etc. There lies, however, a deeper, more serious significance in this poem, and while it greatly amuses the exoterical kechenaeans (i.e. the Athenian gapers) with its fantastical figures and games and jokes and playful allusions, e.g. to contemporary diplomacy, the esoteric (i.e. me) discerns in this poem an awful conception of reality; I see therein the god-defying madness of humankind, a real tragedy, all the more tragic since that madness wins out in the end and happily persists in the illusion that its city in the air actually exists and that it has defeated the gods and got everything, even possession of the

almighty glorious Basileia.)

Heine goes on to excuse Friederike Robert for her ignorance of this esoteric interpretation of a classical text: even had she read the recent German translation of the *Birds* by Johann Heinrich Voss, she would still have missed his point, because "kein Mensch vermag jene unendlich schmelzende und himmelstürmend kecke Vögelchöre zu übersetzen, jene nachtigalljubilende, berauschte Siegeslieder des Wahnsinns" (8: 210) ("no one in the world can translate those infinitely melting and heaven-stormingly impudent bird-choruses, those nightingale-rejoicing, intoxicating victory odes of madness"). Nevertheless, Heine insists on his Aristophanic prescription of tragedy in the midst of comedy, particularly when, as is evidently the case with Robert's *Bird of Paradise*, the type of play under discussion is a "romantisches Lustspiel" ("romantic comedy"), where the airy levity of its characters must be supplemented with "die großartige Weltanschauung, welche immer tragisch ist" (8: 210) ("the grand conception of reality, which is always tragic").

The letter to Friederike Robert was, of course, written while Heine still identified with the German romantics, particularly the movement's second generation gathered around Heidelberg. He makes his allegiance to the canonical masters of the *Frühromantik* (early romantic movement) clear both in the reference to Schlegel as his teacher and in the pointed way he dismisses the 1821 translations of Aristophanes by Johann Heinrich Voss (for Voss was an eloquent anti-romantic). Because this romantic Heine of the 1820s was to fade away to make room for the cynical realist who in the 1840s would produce *Deutschland*, it might be objected that his 1825 tragi-comic reading of the *Birds*, and of Aristophanes in general, has no relevance to his mock epic.

Indeed, as made clear in *Die romantische Schule*, his 1832 response to Mme de Staël's influential *De l'Allemagne*, Heine had by that date already distanced himself from the romantic project. He now praises the principled stand of the progressive, Protestant classicist Johann Heinrich Voss, whose prose is described as a stolid but dependable touchstone against the likes of the formerly eagle-eyed if occasionally fallible Schlegel, whom Heine implicitly demotes to the ranks of collaborator with "jenem jesuitisch-aristokratischen Ungetüm" (5: 38-39) ("that jesuitical-aristocratic monstrosity"). Aristophanes himself is in *Die romantische Schule* identified as "ritterschaftlich" ("chivalrous") and "olympisch-katholisch" ("olympic-catholic") (5: 72), an early romantic indeed, for his disparagement of the enlightened Socrates and of Euripides, forerunner of the bourgeois tragedian, for his destructive mockery of the gods coupled with his hatred of philosophy, and for his implacable hostility to rationalism and modernity. And

although in a later section of *Die romantische Schule* Aristophanes' tragi-comic audacity is presented as a foil to the derivative theater of Ludwig Tieck, the Greek dramatist is in that same passage improbably dismissed as too uniform, too strict, too metrical — in a word, too classical (5: 77-79).

Yet it is this same ambiguous Aristophanes who is resurrected in *Deutschland. Ein Wintermärchen* to join the parade of Heine's ancestors who warn the Prussian King not to abuse the poets living in his lands (1: 506-507). Furthermore, it is Aristophanes' *Birds* that provides the pattern for Heine's attack on the madness possessing Germany in the period preceding the revolutions of 1848. Unlike Schlegel, Heine's other literary father, Aristophanes has obviously not been subjected to the patricidal euthanasia Heine prescribes in *Die romantische Schule*. In fact, the Greek poet is lent an additional reflected glory in the last canto of *Deutschland*, where he is handed his pitchfork and called to dance with Dante around the fires of an inferno for illiberal monarchs (1: 507). The very Aristophanes who was mocked in *Die romantische Schule* for his proto-Catholic fustian and pre-romantic mediævalism is here enlisted in the ranks of the Jacobins.

The specific way in which Aristophanes first appears in *Deutschland* is itself similarly ambivalent. He is first conjured up in courtly terms as a literary progenitor and is credited with a masterpiece, the *Birds*, which Heine claims to have been imitating in the previous canto. Yet Heine then immediately mentions another play by Aristophanes which is "auch vortrefflich" ("also excellent"): the *Frogs*, produced that very year in Berlin "zu königlicher Ergötzung" ("for the amusement of the king"), which the treacherously illiberal King Friedrich Wilhelm IV apparently adored (1: 505). Once again, there is a certain duality about Heine's representation of the Greek comedian: on the one hand, Aristophanes is *Die romantische Schule's* unregenerate apologist of the *ancien régime* invoked here only for the nominal prestige of an ancient pedigree; on the other, he is a writer of moderate conscience and engagement more in the mold of a Beaumarchais. These contradictory versions of the Greek playwright are associated, respectively, with the *Frogs* and the *Birds*, two very different plays that are explicitly compared in *Die romantische Schule*, much to the detriment of the former. Heine disparagingly notes that the recent "deutschen Aristophanesse" have typically lacked the ambition to take on the philosophic empyrean staked out by Aristophanes in his *Birds*: instead, "über die zwei wichtigsten Verhältnisse des Menschen, das politische und das religiöse, schwiegen sie mit großer Bescheidenheit; nur das Thema, das Aristophanes in den "Froschen" besprochen, wagten sie zu behandeln: zum Hauptgegenstand ihrer dramatischen Satire wählten sie das The-

ater selbst" (5: 79) ("with great modesty they were silent about the two most important human relations, the political and the religious; they dared only to handle the theme that Aristophanes discussed in the "Frogs": as the main object of their dramatic satire they chose the theater itself"). Of course, Heine will himself oscillate in *Deutschland* between exactly these two unequal but equally Aristophanic frequencies, the sturdy aesthetic conservatism of the *Frogs* and the manic utopian vision of the *Birds*.

For modulation of voice is all, at least in the kind of political satire purveyed by this poet of exile. *Deutschland* is flooded with nostalgia in the midst of repugnance, with respect mingled with loathing, with painful regret for murderous impulses—with, in other words, ambivalence. And this ambivalence is expressed by exactly that doubling of energy conventionally associated with carnival: in the union of holy and profane, high and low, wise and foolish; in the eroding of the distance between spectator and spectacle; and, most importantly, in the coronation and subsequent humbling of the carnival king, the dualistic ambivalent ritual that attends the choice of the *pharmakon*.

Heine's poem is filled with *pharmaka* of all kinds, from the most conventional impostor-figures, like the Prussian border-guards with their lightning-rod helmets (1: 441), to Christ himself, crucified outside the provincial town of Paderborn and scolded by Heine for always mixing in and not keeping his big mouth shut (1: 465-466). At the center of the poem stands Heine's encounter with Frederick I or Barbarossa, the twelfth-century Holy Roman Emperor now become the stuff of legend as he slumbers away the centuries in his mountain stronghold. In cantos 15 through 17 (1: 470-478), Heine describes his dream visit to Barbarossa's lair, where he explains to the curious Kaiser various points of recent society life, foremost among them the invention of the guillotine. As Barbarossa grows incensed at the cheek of this last and rather spectacular evidence of *lèse-majesté*, Heine swells with republican ardor and dismisses the fairy-tale emperor to eternal oblivion.

Heine was careful to point out that the first two of these three cantos, along with the fourteenth, in which the Barbarossa theme is introduced, form a coherent whole: he even insisted in 1844 that Karl Marx not publish them separately when excerpts from the poem were reprinted in the German exile journal *Vorwärts* (9: 172-173). Heine thus tacitly encouraged in Marx's journal reprint the suppression of the canto that follows this sequence and therefore the undercutting of the carnivalesque dialectics constantly at work in the poem, as the poet begs the Kaiser's pardon for having spoken so roughly, even in a dream, and calls for the reinstatement of the genuine middle ages rather than the pale late-romantic imitation currently on offer. In the same letter Heine forbids

editorial tampering with another sequence of cantos, equally savage in tone and undivested this time of the sign of their ambivalent dialectics. Yet here, too, Heine displays signs of retrenchment. The focus of this earlier sequence is the mediæval state of Germany's religion, rather than its politics—the other of those “zwei wichtigsten Verhältnisse des Menschen” (“two most important human relations”) (5: 79): Heine encounters the putative remains of the Three Kings, brought home during the Crusades and kept in a reliquary in Cologne cathedral, and is upbraided by them for his evident lack of respect for monarchs old and new (1: 454). However, the poet's uncanny helpmate quickly destroys the skeletal Kings with the blow of an axe (1: 455). Death must make way for life, Heine defiantly reasons, and the cathedral is needed to billet “der Zukunft fröhliche Kavallerie” (“the gay cavalry of the future”) (1: 455)—just as it had in fact already served as a stable for Napoleon's forces during the French occupation of the Rhineland earlier in the century. But as is the case in the poet's interview with the Emperor, there is a coda of regret and terror at the drastic revolutionary violence of the measures taken: as the sound of the axe-blow echoes throughout the cathedral vault, streams of blood shoot from a wound in Heine's own breast, and he starts awake out of his iconoclastic dream (1: 455).

It may be, as I've suggested, that Heine thought the evidence of such religious ambivalence would be more palatable to the readers of *Vorwärts* than the passage of ostensibly monarchist retraction following the Jacobin freedoms of the Barbarossa episode. His republican bona fides is on show elsewhere in the poem, so he could allow himself the eerie tension at work in this vision of his own bleeding heart, where the minatory value of the wound inflicted on the revolutionary by the violence of his very actions can be explained away by a soothing dream-logic, just as Heine's rebellious encounter with Barbarossa will also be oneirically undercut. Thus Heine is able both to criticize established political institutions, and to register his aesthete's discomfort with sudden innovations.

Heine's choice of Aristophanes as the paternal guarantor of this sort of dialectical satire, and his explicit emulation of a highly lyrical genre known for its scattershot tactics of blame and abuse in the service of a social agenda by turns reactionary and utopian are the signs of a particularly vigorous compromise on the part of a poet whose aesthetic and political ideals did not always coincide. They also recall the compromise effected by Aristophanic pedagogy in its own milieu, where its blend of local politics, strategic ruptures of the theatrical illusion, vicious name-calling and allegorical mating rituals had both destructive and creative functions. Jean-Claude Carrière, in *Le Carnaval et la politique*, a sociological

history of ancient comedy, has stressed this double function of the form. Carrière notes that its mingling of critical and conformist voices was a reflex of comedy's origins in what he calls "peasant democracy" ("démocratie paysanne" 110). Ancient comedy was ready, he contends, to criticize both the prevailing order, and any novelties that appeared excessive in relation to that order; ancient comedy, therefore, in Carrière's view, "seems predisposed to function as a kind of socio-political regulator" (110 ff.).³ A socio-political regulator that operates through the medium of performance, familiarization, profanity and *mésalliance* sounds very much like Bakhtin's carnival. And the heart of so many Aristophanic comedies is the unlikely figure of the miserable old man made young again, the quintessential carnival king: Philokleon, Pisthetairos, Trygaios and Khremylos, to name just the most obvious candidates for sexual and political rejuvenation. The canonical second movement of the carnival motif, however, that of the crowned king brought low, is of course suspended in these coronations. Pavlos Sfyroeras has in fact suggested recently that two of Aristophanes' plays, *Plutus* and *Peace*, may contain vestiges of the ritual surrounding the foundation of a local cult, rather than the chaos of a temporary lifting of civic ordinances. But as in Heine's ambivalent humbling of the Three Kings, of Barbarossa, and even of his kinsman Christ, there is in Aristophanes' scenarios of rejuvenation the tension of discordant voices: a conservative nostalgia for the imagined unities of a bygone golden age, and the anarchic reflex of the utopian revolutionary. These disparate energies are mediated in Aristophanes by an irony that spares nothing and no one, since the parabasis allows the poet to introduce the spectacle of his own ritualized presence (see Hubbard) into the stream of mocked and mocking voices to comment on the loathsome ethics of the imagined and undeserving audience for whose benefit these contortions are being performed, and out of whose ranks the poet himself has arisen. Heine's irony, tempered in part by his attempt at damage control in the edited sequence offered to Marx, is more fleeting than Aristophanes' profane self-implication in the parabasis: but it is there nonetheless, as when in the Cologne episode he notes that the chauvinistic campaign of his day to rebuild the cathedral, unfinished since the Reformation, has taken to raising money among the most unlikely donors: heretics and Jews, of all people! In fact, the same Heine for whom baptism was the entrance-ticket to the salons of Europe had once been numbered among that odd collection of contributors.

Heine's mock epic is therefore no more actual carnival than is

³ "Parcequ'elle est prête à critiquer à la fois l'ordre existant et les nouveautés 'excessives' par rapport à cet ordre, elle semble prédisposée à fonctionner comme une sorte de régulateur social et politique."

Aristophanes' comedy: they are both only species of carnivalized literature, in which a babble of voices and tendencies threatens at every moment to break loose and scupper the carefully nurtured illusion of unity. The difference between these two forms of carnivalization resides in their respective politics, not in the degree to which each poet adheres to his particular program—for ambivalence and irony are equally constitutive of both polygloss styles, however different the general social tendencies thus pursued. Expressed in the inflated coin of the French revolutionary century, Aristophanes becomes the reactionary champion of the lumpenproletariat yearning for its 18th Brumaire, yet still plagued by memories of Waterloo; while Heine is the liberal partisan of the Orléanistes, making amends for a father's opportune regicide by recreating the *ancien régime*, only this time in the new-and-improved image of the bourgeoisie. Both poets resurrect old men, and both do it in a posture of only ostensible control over the ghosts they thus raise. Louis Bonaparte, with his faithful recreations of avuncular Empire, enlightened despotism, and imperial over-extension, was thus a distant descendant of the peasant heroes of Aristophanes, those rascally adventurers similarly tricked out in imperial costume, distributing an antique version of champagne and garlic sausages to the rank and file and similarly rebuilding the city in their own images. Louis-Philippe of Orléans, meanwhile, Heine's type of the carnival king, was actually the poet's patron and protector: Heine had arrived in Paris in 1830 during the first days of the July Monarchy, enthusiastic about the promises of the hybrid bourgeois regime, and had stayed on to become a disillusioned pensioner of the state, reconciling his emancipatory politics and patrician aesthetics at least provisionally in the elite socialism of Saint-Simon. Heine's metaphor-laden note during that period to a sympathetic princess, Christine Belgiojoso, suggests yet another component of this compromise: "Soyez sûre, Madame," he writes in 1834, "que j'ai beaucoup pensé à vous depuis la soirée d'avant-hier . . . En effet vous avez livré une bataille, qui valait bien celle du juste milieu; vous avez mitraillé le peuple, c'était un feu terrible, et peu s'en fallut que mon cœur, qui est une république, ne soit devenu une monarchie" (8: 433) ("Be assured, Madame, that I have thought about you a great deal since the evening before last . . . You waged indeed a battle well worth that of the *juste milieu*; you shot down the people, it was a terrible fire, and my heart, which is a republic, very nearly became a monarchy"). The scene of the battle for Heine's mind is laid significantly in his heart, which, as Richard W. Hannah has shown in a study of the Passover imagery in *Deutschland*, is the emblem of the poet's *Zerrissenheit* or ambivalence. And the bathetic mix of violence and small-talk, the risqué whiff of morganatic eroticism,

prefigures the *mésalliance* of Heine and the goddess Hammonia in the last cantos of *Deutschland*, which is itself of course an allusion to the grotesque wedding of Pisthetairos and Basileia in the *Birds*. But whereas the ancient spirit of Hamburg is actually the apotheosis of petty-bourgeois mores, scatological humor and fetid mediævalism—aspects of the Aristophanic festival to which the liberal poet is wed holding his nose—the nuptials solemnized in Aristophanes' play are those of a common, vulgar demesman, Pisthetairos, with the divine projection of Athenian rule, Basileia. Each poet invokes a union of his own stand-in with an allegory of the other poet's ideals, as it were: and in these strange bedfellows may be glimpsed the tensions that attend carnivalization and link the conservative Athenian playwright and the progressive German satirist.

Aristophanes, then, becomes a sign for the compromise formations of the nineteenth century, for the balance of romanticism and realism effected by George Sand, for the truce between antiquarianism and modernization played out by post-Enlightenment anti-classicists like Heine, and for the negative idealism of a Daumier or a Balzac. The Aristophanic tone, too, the carnivalized voice that absorbs into itself the inanities of the very society it judges, can be detected in writers of ambiguous politics who are normally excluded from the Bakhtinian canon: in the free indirect style of Jane Austen, for example, where quotation marks serve as only a fragile barrier protecting the sardonic narrative voice against the ridiculous deluge of reported speech; or in the similar technique of Flaubert, whose obliquely quoted received ideas and meticulously italicized clichés freeze and preserve the besotted wisdom of the Second Empire.

But perhaps the most interesting intersection of the Bakhtinian and the Aristophanic comes in a text like the *Thesmophoriazusaë*, which explicitly takes into account the sort of carnivalistic release and recontainment of oppressed energies located by Rösler in the Athenian *Thesmophoria*, as well as the implication of theater, specifically tragedy, in the performative construction of social roles that underlies civic life and informs its tensions. In the suspended social animation between sittings of the male-dominated Athenian law courts and civic assembly, the women of this Aristophanic *Thesmophoria* hold sway, particularly in aesthetic matters. Aristophanes' comedy thus considers, as Froma Zeitlin puts it, the "intrinsic connection between the ambiguities of the feminine and those of art, linked together in various ways in Greek notions of poetics from their earliest formulations", (303). The women, whose symbolic fertility is released and pressed into civic service by the city, threaten to go beyond their immediate mandate into realms that are logically their concern, yet legally off-limits. In ad-

dition, the *Thesmophoriazusae* demonstrates the illocutionary power of the festival performance itself, as manifest in a ventriloquist genre like ancient comedy, in which the representation of the aesthetic judgments of a temporarily liberated underclass takes on the status of a speech act, and the unmistakable voice of the decorous civic rite that is tragedy is co-opted into conspiring in its own comic defamation.

In keeping with the exceptional festive atmosphere, the chorus of women, through whose mouths Aristophanes delivers his parabasis, is ultimately vindicated in its quest for justice, both in explicit vengeance on a Euripides now reduced to distracting his persecutors by decidedly non-tragic means, and in the way that their subordination is implicitly likened to that of the comic form under the tragic. At the same time, the unlikely spectacle of the patriarchal Aristophanes and the maligned women of Athens united in their common hostility to the sophist Euripides is also the supplement that alerts us to the presence of carnivalization at work in the very heart of this indecorously classical form: that element of instability, of productive ambivalence, of festive rebellion that escapes the bounds of the very text that would constrain it.

Here again is evidence of the perceptiveness of Heine's early view that Aristophanes was a particularly devastating observer of the tragedy within comedy; only now that observation is given a more sophisticated, less melodramatic twist, quite in line with Heine's 1825 characterization of Aristophanes as a deep-thinking philosopher of madness and power, a writer of "nachtigalljubilende, berausende Siegeslieder des Wahnsinns" ("nightingale-rejoicing, intoxicating victory odes of madness"), one who made use of the whole store of the fantastical and supernatural to point out the folly of the absolutely ordinary. Heine's Aristophanes, then, provided him with a priceless store of carnivalesque paradox, to be converted by the German poet into the irony and ambivalence that were his characteristic mode; and if Aristophanes could not quite fill Shakespeare's poetic shoes, even in the filial estimation of an indulgent Heinrich Heine, yet the Athenian's controlled chaos was to set the measure for a carnival reel we have not yet finished dancing.⁴

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