

Since the institution of the (now triennial) Cambridge Greek Play in 1882, the most performed play has been Aristophanes' *Birds* (1883, 1903, 1924, 1971, and 1995). This paper examines the promising undergraduate who played Peithetairos in 1903, J. T. Sheppard, who went on to become Provost of King's College and dominated the Greek Play between 1912 and 1950; it is part of a larger study of Sheppard's influence on the Greek Play. The Sheppard years were a period of amazing growth for the institution, and actively involved individuals who would determine the course of postwar British theatre (particularly though the National Theatre and the English National Opera). Sheppard's prominence began modestly, however, and came at a time he was emotionally involved with Lytton Strachey and was dealing with his mother's death. The success of Sheppard's interpretation of Peithetairos was recognized, and it is possible to see in his performance choices the aesthetic that governed these pre-war Greek productions (see also Easterling in C. Stray 1999).

The 1903 play was also notorious for A. W. Verrall's introductory lecture, which saw Aristophanes defending Greek values against Judaism. The production itself consciously emulated certain aspects of the 1883 production (such as the performance of Prometheus, described by Jebb in the *Cambridge Review*, November 5, 1903), and many of these returned in 1924 when Sheppard directed the play himself. By examining specific staging decisions (reconstructed from production stills, reviews, and reminiscences), it is possible to identify ways that humor was seen to operate in the play, as well as the way tradition exerted pressure across the decades. These choices include the metatheatrical mockery by one actor of the composer Sir Hubert Parry (who conducted some of the 1903 performances). Parry's music was discussed by E. J. Dent in 1904 (then a young Fellow at King's), and its continued use across these three productions can be correlated to much that is going on in the social circles shared by Sheppard and Dent into the 1920s.

This paper therefore situates the 1903 Cambridge Greek Play in its larger context, establishing the production as a key moment in understanding the history of the reception of Aristophanic performance in the English-speaking world.