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Cratinus' Metapoetic Fountains

This paper will examine how the rivalry between the Old Comic poets, Aristophanes and Cratinus, is expressed by means of an intricate intertextual relationship. Aristophanes' *Knights* (produced in 424 BCE) and Cratinus' *Pytine* (produced in 423) share the metaphor of flowing water to describe Cratinus' style. In the parabasis of *Knights* (526-8) Aristophanes uses the image to make fun of his rival, contrasting Cratinus' former flood of popularity with his current dried-up state. Cratinus' response (fr. 198 K-A) is to appropriate the metaphor and depict himself as a fountain producing torrents of poetry. This redirection not only emphasizes Cratinus' poetic power and vigor, but also connects his poetry with the topography of Athens.

Cratinus associates his poetic output with two sources of water, both located in the city of Athens. The first of these is his *dodekakrounon stoma*, "twelve-spouted mouth," which has been recognized as a play on the Enneakrounos fountain-house in Athens. According to Pausanias (1.14), it was the only natural fountain in the city, whose waters were famous for their coldness and purity, as well as a source of water for religious rites (Thucydides 2.15). The body of the poet is thus linked to civic topography, as a producer of one of the necessities of daily life.

The other is the "Ilisos in [Cratinus'] throat." The Ilisos was known for its force during seasonal floods (Strabo 9.1.24); in addition, it was closely associated with literary inspiration, and was an important cult site for, among other divinities, the Ilisian Muses (Pausanias 1.19). The connection with the Muses make it appear as an ideal spot for literary creation, as in Plato's *Phaedrus*, where it serves as the setting and where Socrates suggests that the dialogue has been inspired by the Muses (278a-c.).

Cratinus' connection between his poetic output and these specific sources of water allows him to make a programmatic statement as to the sort of poetry he writes: noisy and violent, but also vital and firmly based in the Athenian landscape and civil life. In doing so, he anticipates the similar usage of bodies of water as poetic icons in Hellenistic and later poetry.