

This paper argues that Aristophanes' concentrated attention on tragedy in his plays from 411 to 404 BCE reflects intense, public debate about the role of tragedy and tragedians at the time. Wilson (2009) makes a case that theater, tragedy in particular, was ideologically significant for the restored democracy following the followed oligarchic coup of 411 to 410. It is worth considering, then, how dramas known to be produced following the coup and before Athens' surrender in 404 incorporate, repudiate or play on this public, ideological attention. In this context, that Aristophanes engaged tragedy repeatedly and on a large scale during this period deserves renewed attention.

Before the coup itself, when the democracy was already under oligarchic pressure in the wake of the failure of the Sicilian expedition, Aristophanes was tackling issues central to the functioning of the Athenian democracy and tragedy's role in it. The *Lysistrata* structurally invokes Aeschylus (McClain 1998) and the title character calls for more inclusive governance (Major 2003). In *Thesmophoriazusa*, the women stage a functional democratic assembly with Euripides' responsibility for the impact of his plays at the top of the agenda. In addition, through a series of parodies, Aristophanes analyzes Euripides' recent output, from the challenging but unpopular *Palamedes* of 415 to the more recent romantic fare of 412, *Helen* and *Andromeda*. Agathon also stands in to raise the stakes about tragedy and creativity (Zeitlin 1996, Given 2007). In the next few years, Euripides puts on *Phoenician Women*, which Aristophanes parodies (fr. 570-576; cf. Scharffenberger 1995 for the importance of *Lysistrata* for *Phoenician Women*). Aristophanes' *Lemnian Women* (fr. 372-91; cf. Euripides' *Hypsipyle* fr. 752-770) and *Polyidus* (fr. 469-76; cf. Euripides' *Polyidus* fr. 634-45) are also legitimate candidates for Euripidean parody during this same period. Aristophanes' *Gerytades* (fr. 156-204) probably belongs to these years, refers to Agathon at least, and features a trip to the underworld to renew tragedy, comedy and dithyramb. Following *Orestes* in 408, Euripides abandons Athens (Scharffenberger 1998 and Suter 1997/1998 find *Orestes* looming large in *Frogs*).

Most often comedy's engagement with tragedy, and Euripides' engagement with comedy in turn, are analyzed primarily in literary terms (e.g., Foley 2008). In Wilson's scenario, however, this flurry of engagement between genres suggests a decidedly urgent public, political and ideological debate. By the time of *Frogs*' debut in 405, two of Athens most prominent tragedians, Euripides and Agathon, have left the city. Euripides and Sophocles are dead, the latter likely tainted politically, if not personally, by his role as a *proboulos* during the coup of 411, and thus the role of Aeschylean revivals took on new importance for the democracy's public promotion of tragedy. Aristophanes' staging of the desire for Euripides giving way to the resurrection of Aeschylus, in a play shot through with debate about the civic role of tragedy, not to mention a parabasis addressing the coup of 411 which set all this in motion, makes immediate topical sense and suggests why Aristophanes was awarded a civic crown for addressing these issues.