Ioannis M. Konstantakos

ARISTOPHANIC SHAPE-SHIFTERS: MYTH, FAIRYTALE, SATIRE

ABSTRACT: In *Clouds* 340–355 the deified Nephelai are described as shape-shifters, i.e. marvellous beings able to change their appearance at will. This fabulous concept was widespread in ancient Greek and Near Eastern myth and folklore; shape-shifting qualities are attributed to Olympian gods (Zeus, Dionysus), lesser demons (Proteus, Nereus, Thetis, Nemesis), heroic mortals (Periclymenus, Mestra), but also personages of the folk imagination, such as bogeys, wizards, and witches. Aristophanes loved this magical motif, which ultimately expresses the inexhaustible transformations of comic art. Philocleon in the *Wasps*, a paragon of vitality, performs a long series of simulated metamorphoses in the scenic space, imitating the movements and gestures of various animals or natural elements. The personified Nephelai, however, do not simply turn into anything they like. Rather, they select their form each time in such a way as to reflect the vices of the particular person they meet; they become e.g. deer before a coward, wolves in front of a greedy embezzler, or Centaurs before a lustful man. The Clouds' serial metamorphoses are thus subjected to an ethical typology of the animal world, similar to the one found in animal fables. Aristophanes combines the magical motif of the shape-shifter with the moral allegory of the Aesopic corpus, and thus turns the folktale patterns into satirical weapons against contemporary politicians. The shape-shifting Nephelai represent the polymorphous poetics of comedy, which uses mimetic forms to visibly criticize the evils of Athenian public life.

In Aristophanes' *Clouds* 326ff. the deified Clouds, which make up the Chorus of the play, enter the orchestra in the form of ethereal women. Their appearance causes surprise to the comic hero, the rustic and ignorant Strepsiades, who aspires to be instructed by Socrates in neoteric thought and science. Above all, Strepsiades has one query: if these girls are the Nephelai worshipped as divinities in the Socratic school, why do they look like mortal women? The clouds in the sky have a different shape; they look, for example, like spread-out tufts of wool. The wise Socrates explains the phenomenon (340–355):

ΣΤΡΕΨΙΑΔΗΣ λέξον δή μοι, τί παθοῦσαι,
εἴπερ νεφέλαι γ' εἰσὶν ἀληθῶς, θνηταῖς εἴξασι γυναιξίν;
οὐ γὰρ ἐκεῖναί γ' εἰσὶ τοιαῦται. ΣΩΚΡΑΤΗΣ φέρε, ποῖαι γάρ τινές εἰσιν;
ΣΤ. οὐκ οἶδα σαφῶς· εἴξασιν δ' οὖν ἐρίοισιν πεπταμένοισιν,
κοὐχὶ γυναιξίν, μὰ Δί', οὐδ' ὁτιοῦν· αὗται δὲ ῥῖνας ἔχουσιν.
ΣΩ. ἀπόκριναί νυν ἅττ' ἂν ἔρωμαι. ΣΤ. λέγε νυν ταχέως ὅ τι βούλει.
ΣΩ. ἦδη ποτ' ἀναβλέψας εἶδες νεφέλην κενταύρῳ ὁμοίαν
ἢ παρδάλει ἢ λύκῳ ἢ ταύρῳ; ΣΤ. νὴ Δί' ἔγωγ'. εἶτα τί τοῦτο;
ΣΩ. γίγνονται πάνθ' ὅ τι βούλονται· κἄτ' ἢν μὲν ἴδωσι κομήτην
ἄγριόν τινα τῶν λασίων τούτων, οἷόνπερ τὸν Ξενοφάντου,
σκώπτουσαι τὴν μανίαν αὐτοῦ κενταύροις ἤκασαν αὐτάς.
ΣΤ. τί γὰρ ἢν ἅρπαγα τῶν δημοσίων κατίδωσι Σίμωνα, τί δρῶσιν;
ΣΩ. ἀποφαίνουσαι τὴν φύσιν αὐτοῦ λύκοι ἐξαίφνης ἐγένοντο.
ΣΤ. ταῦτ' ἄρα, ταῦτα Κλεώνυμον αὖται τὸν ῥίψασπιν χθὲς ἰδοῦσαι,
ὅτι δειλότατον τοῦτον ἑώρων, ἔλαφοι διὰ τοῦτ' ἐγένοντο.
ΣΩ. καὶ νῦν γ' ὅτι Κλεισθένη εἶδον, ὁρᾷς, διὰ τοῦτ' ἐγένοντο γυναῖκες.

STREPSIADES: But tell me, what is the reason they look exactly like mortal women, if they are really clouds? Those ones up there do not look like women.

SOCRATES: Well, what do you think they are like?

STREPSIADES: I am not quite sure. They look, say, like pieces of wool that lie stretched out, but not like women, by Zeus! Not even remotely. Why, these ones here even have noses!

SOCRATES: Come on then, answer whatever I ask.

STREPSIADES: Go ahead, ask what you like.

SOCRATES: Have you ever looked up and seen in the sky a cloud resembling a Centaur, or perhaps a leopard, a wolf, or a bull?

STREPSIADES: Yes of course, but what of it?

SOCRATES: The Clouds can become whatever they want. So suppose they spot down here a long-haired wild man of the shaggy kind, like the son of Xenophantus. In order to mock his crazy obsession, they assume the shape of Centaurs.

STREPSIADES: And what if they see a person who filches the public funds, like Simon?

SOCRATES: Their appearance reflects his nature at once: they take on the shape of wolves!

STREPSIADES: That is why when they saw Cleonymus yesterday, that shield-discarder, they thought he is such a great coward that they turned themselves into deer!

SOCRATES: And when just now they saw Cleisthenes, that is why they turned into women![1]

The Clouds, therefore, may assume whichever shape they want, transform themselves and resemble any creature of nature or myth. This is a common fantastic concept, widespread in the popular traditions of many peoples: namely, the figure of the "shape-changer" or "shape-shifter", as it is usually called in modern mythological and folkloric research. The shape-shifter is a marvellous being which possesses supernatural powers and is able to change into multiple shapes and forms, to be assimilated every time to different living creatures, natural elements, or even inanimate objects. As there is hitherto no synoptic and comprehensive survey of this fantastic motif in the imaginary traditions of ancient peoples (the classical Greco-Roman world, but also the folklore of its Near-Eastern neighbours),[2] here is a brief encyclopedic digression on the ancient history of shape-shifting.

1. THE SHAPE-SHIFTER IN ANCIENT AND INTERNATIONAL TRADITION

In the folktale tradition, especially in Europe but also worldwide, it is primarily wizards and witches that display the capacity for long sequences of successive transformations. Sometimes, the young hero or heroine of the story has been endowed with the same superhuman quality in some way, e.g. by receiving this quality as a gift from magical helpers, supernatural relatives, divine beings, or grateful animals, or through the possession of miraculous objects.[3] In Native American myths and legends the weird figure of the trickster

1. The translation is broadly based on Halliwell (2015) 34–35, but with many adaptations.
2. The valuable monographs by Forbes Irving (1990) and Buxton (2009), which examine generally the motif of metamorphosis in Greek myths and comprise specialized sections on shape-shifting (see below, n. 8), focus only on the mythical tradition of Greece and Hellenized Rome; they do not include material from the folklore and popular imagination of ancient peoples, nor do they make reference to the narrative traditions of the ancient Near East.
3. Several international folktale types feature magicians, witches, fairies, spirits, imps, bewitched or otherwise supernaturally endowed personages who indulge in serial exploits of shape-changing. See e.g. types ATU 302, 310, 313, 316, 318, 325, 665, 667; Uther (2004) 180–181, 190–191, 194–197, 203–208, 363–365. See also Thompson (1955–1958) II 66–70, 77, 86, especially motifs D610, D611, D612, D615, D616, D630, D671, D757, and their subdivisions and congenital variants (e.g. D610.1, D615.1, D615.2, D615.3, D615.5,

— a cunning and mischievous cultural hero — appears as an accomplished master of metamorphoses, able to change into the forms of various creatures or objects. This applies not only to anthropomorphic tricksters but also to animal characters, such as the Coyote, the Raven, the Mink, the Hare, or the Blue Jay, who transform themselves in order to outwit their adversaries or gratify their natural appetites. The Coyote, for example, turns into a dish, so as to receive food, or into a tree, so as to capture birds. The Raven transforms himself into a hemlock needle, in order to be swallowed by a chief's wife, impregnate her, and be reborn as her child.[4]

In Norse mythology Loki, the trickster god, displays similar capacities. In various tales, recorded in the poems of the *Elder Edda* or in Snorri Sturluson's mythological handbook, he transforms himself into a salmon, a mare, a falcon, a woman, a milk maid, or a giantess, in order to achieve his purposes: e.g. to escape from his persecutors, trick his opponents, harm his enemies, extract secrets, or beget children. Another Norse figure, the avaricious dwarf Andvari, used to turn into a pike and swim in the waterfalls, so as to procure food. His equivalent in the Germanic Nibelungen legend, Alberich, is a fully-fledged shape-shifter, who can change into any creature, from dragon to toad. The clever Loki, however, manages to trap the dwarf, when the latter has the form of a small and weak animal, and thus extracts Alberich's gold as ransom.[5]

D630.4), all of them regarding repeated or successive transformations. Further useful material or enlightening discussions are provided by Hartland (1891) 119–120, 210–211, 242, 336; Zielinski (1891) 149–155; Köhler (1898) 138–139, 160, 168–175, 178, 264–265, 388, 556–558, 588; Lawson (1910) 86, 136–137, 179–184, 203–255, 276; Bolte – Polívka (1913–1932) I 328, 331, 442–443, 499–503, II 60-69, 77–79, 140–142, 205-206, 516–527, III 322–324, 407–411, 432–439; Ninck (1921) 146–148; Cosquin (1922) 501–612; Penzer – Tawney (1924–1928) III 194–195, 203–205, 230–232, VIII 79–80, 140–142; Kerényi (1939) 161–162; Mudrak (1961) 165–166, 171; Megas (1968) 211, 224–225; Schwarzbaum (1968) 5, 442; Thompson (1977) 39, 57–58, 69–70, 89–90; Ford (1977) 159–164; Horálek (1979) 935–937; Gerlach (1990) 965–970; Lindig (1990) 611–612; Uther (1993); Köhler-Zülch (1993) 1074–1075; Scherf (1995) I 51–54, 110–113, 136–138, 339–342, 492, 748–751, II 834–837, 868–871, 912–914, 1043–1050, 1096–1098, 1246–1247, 1393–1396, 1436–1441; Puchner (1999); Petzoldt (1999) 23; Tuczay (1999); Anderson (2000) 110–111, 113–114; Krasniewicz (2000); Clouston (2002) 210–237, 255–257; Köhler-Zülch (2002); Rausmaa (2002); Maspero (2002) ciii–cv; Marzolph – van Leeuwen (2004) 142, 338–339, 723–724; Garry – El-Shamy (2005) 125–131; Horn (2010); Benavides (2010); Katrinaki (2010); Goldberg (2014); de Blécourt (2014); Konstantakos (2016a).

4. On the shape-shifting abilities of tricksters see Radin (1956) 3–4, 22–24, 35, 65–66, 75, 80–81, 84–85, 103, 128, 137–139, 159, 165, 188; Babcock-Abrahams (1975) 159–160, 168–170; Thompson (1977) 319–328; Hynes (1993) 34–37; Garry – El-Shamy (2005) 472–473, 475, 478; Geider (2010) 914.

5. On these shape-shifters of Norse myth see Genzmer – Schier (1981) 78, 83, 250–251; Byock (1990) 57–58, 126; Dillmann (1991) 75, 89–90, 93–94, 107, 115–120, 201; Koch

Apparently, the master shape-shifter is able to counter the shape-shifting of his competitors, a motif which recurs in the tales about combats of magical metamorphoses.[6] In the other great legendarium of the European North, the Finnish epic *Kalevala*, the rash and wanton hero Lemminkäinen possesses a demonic power to change his appearance at will. He becomes an itinerant bard, so as to compete for a bride. He can turn into an eagle, a duck, a tree, a wolf, or a pike, in order to escape danger and persecution. The talent of metamorphosis runs in his family: Lemminkäinen's awesome mother can also serially turn into a wolf, a bear, an otter, an ant, a wasp, and a hare, in order to make her way through wild lands and waters.[7]

There was no lack of such creatures in the collective imaginary of the ancient Greeks.[8] Zeus displays an unsurpassable capacity as a shape-shifter in the course of his multifarious love adventures; he transforms himself into a bull, an eagle, a swan, a cuckoo, Amphitryon, or liquid gold, in order to mate with any person he desires.[9] Analogous metamorphoses into various animals (bull, kid, lion, panther, serpent) or into male and female human forms are attributed to Dionysus,[10] who is called *αἰολόμορφος* and *μυριόμορφος* in poetic texts

(1994) 122–125, 263–264; Larrington (1996) 88, 95, 151–152, 258, 296–297; Dronke (1997) 338, 347–348, 361–362; Orchard (1997) 7, 105; Byock (2005) 51–52, 65–66, 68–70, 82, 90, 92–95; cf. Ninck (1921) 147; Fontenrose (1959) 524, 540; Garry – El-Shamy (2005) 478.

6. See Konstantakos (2016a), and below.

7. See Bosley (1999) 143–144, 171, 362, 392–393, 397–398.

8. On the shape-shifters of ancient Greek myth and folk imagination in general, see Zielinski (1891); Ninck (1921) 138–180; Lesky (1947) 112, 120–127; Pfister (1948); Rose (1958) 26, 39, 293–294, 300, 303; Fontenrose (1959) 57, 117–118, 233–234, 328, 331, 432, 471; Burkert (1979) 86, 95–97; Forbes Irving (1990) 171–194; Detienne – Vernant (1991) 20–21, 109–114, 128–129, 137, 142–144, 151, 157–159, 164–165, 172–173; Fantham (1993); Anderson (2000) 110; Hansen (2000) 7–16; Hansen (2004) 37–38, 302–305, 313, 319, 333–334; Ormand (2004) 303–326; Buxton (2009), especially 157–177; Buxton (2010). Buxton takes issue with some of the narrative patterns and magical qualities associated by other scholars with shape-shifters, and places this latter term in quotation marks. Still, he does not fundamentally object to this well-established appellation *per se*. On the contrary, he recognizes that these figures, which can perform serial transformations, do constitute a special group, broadly distinguishable from other, isolated mythical metamorphoses —though not strictly separable from them.

9. On Zeus' metamorphoses see Fontenrose (1959) 471; Schwabl (1978) 1309–1315; Arafat (1990) 64–87; Gantz (1993) 210–211, 300–302, 319–320, 374–377, 725–727; Hansen (2004) 37–38, 57, 304, 333–334; Garry – El-Shamy (2005) 284, 289–290; Dowden (2006) 39–52; Buxton (2009) 77–84, 126–130, 148–150, 158–160, 170; Buxton (2010) 86–88; Konstantakos (2014).

10. See e.g. Eur. *Bacch.*, especially 477–478, 1017–1019 (and cf. the illusions produced by the god in 616–631); Anton. Lib. 10; Nonn. *Dion.* 40.38–60; cf. also *Hom. Hymn* 7 (*To*

(*Orph. Hymn* 50.5, *Anth. Pal.* 9.524.13). The former of these compounds closely corresponds, in morphology and meaning, to the modern term "shape-shifter".[11] For Zeus and Dionysus, of course, this is simply one of the many facets that make up the god's complex and kaleidoscopic mythical portrait.

Greek myths also contain demons and heroes of another, special kind, for whom successive transfigurations are their central distinguishing feature, the trademark and recognizable imprint of their mythical identity. In these cases the multiple metamorphoses usually take place in a close and dense sequence, immediately following one another, and collectively build up the main episode of the corresponding character's adventures in the mythological repertoire.[12] This kind of shape-changer is usually presented as a trickster, a crafty character who exploits his abilities for continuous metamorphoses in order to fight back or protect himself from his enemies, safeguard his secrets, or escape from an unwanted fate. In the case of the great gods of the canonical pantheon, such as Zeus and Dionysus, their feats of transformation invariably lead to triumph over opposing forces, demonstration of their invincible powers, fulfilment of their desires, or accomplishment of their higher purposes. By contrast, these trickster figures are usually overpowered by a stronger opponent at the end of the story; their metamorphoses, however plentiful and masterly they may be, prove to be inadequate and futile in face of the indomitable will and force of a superior god or hero.[13]

Here belong Proteus and Nereus, the cunning old men of the sea, who assimilate themselves not only to all known forms of animal life (lion, serpent, leopard, boar, and other wild beasts) but also to plants and trees and even to inanimate elements, such as fire, water, and stone. They exhibit their extensive repertoire of transformations whenever a hero (Menelaus or Heracles) attempts to seize hold of them and extract their secret knowledge. Then the hero must steadfastly cling and tightly imprison the marine demon in his inescapable grip, until the old trickster becomes tired and submits to the hero's

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Dionysus) 3, 44–48; Ninck (1921) 142–143, 162; Forbes Irving (1990) 43, 191–194; Casolari (2003) 122–125; Buxton (2009) 50–53, 146–147, 150–153, 163–164, 169–171, 175; Buxton (2010) 85–86.

11. Cf. Detienne – Vernant (1991) 19–20, 25–26, on the semantics of *αἰολο-*, "shifting". In a lecture for a Greek-speaking audience (Konstantakos 2017a) I have introduced the term *ἀλλαγόμορφος* as the Modern Greek equivalent of "shape-shifter", by analogy to these ancient epithets of Dionysus.

12. As pointed out by Forbes Irving (1990) 171, this is "the defining feature of this class of heroes", namely "that they undergo a whole series of transformations rather than a single one". Cf. Zielinski (1891) 137–138; Buxton (2009) 168.

13. Cf. Forbes Irving (1990) 173–191; Buxton (2009) 170.

superior force. The use of shape-shifting as a means of fighting against a hero also extends to other myths. The river god Achelous took the form of a bull, a snake, and an ox-headed man during his struggle with Heracles.[14]

In a further group of narratives, transformation is practiced by a female deity who tries to escape from the erotic chase of a persistent suitor. Shape-shifting becomes the obstinate maiden's artifice for avoiding rape or matrimony —although ultimately it proves to be unsuccessful against the strong-willed male, who invariably prevails in the end.[15] When Peleus pursued the Nereid Thetis with amorous intentions, she assumed the shapes of many beings (beast, bird, tree, lion, tigress, fish, or snake, and even wind, fire, and water —depending on the source), trying in vain to free herself from the hero's embrace. Peleus held her tight, until Thetis resumed her normal appearance and consented to become his bride.[16] A similar myth features the supreme Zeus in the role of the male aggressor and Nemesis as his ladylove and victim. The cyclical epic *Cypria* contained the most expanded form of the tale, which was summarily retold in later mythographical compilations. Averse to Zeus' sexual intentions, Nemesis took flight and kept turning into various beasts; she became a fish in the sea and swam through the Ocean's stream; then she changed herself into many kinds of animals on the land. In the end, she took the form of a goose or a swan; Zeus assimilated himself to the same species of bird and thus managed to mate with her.[17] An almost

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14. On Proteus see Hom. *Od.* 4.415–419, 4.454–461; Diod. 1.62; Verg. *Georg.* 4.396–449; Ov. *Met.* 8.730–737; Hyg. *Fab.* 118; Nonn. *Dion.* 1.13–33, 43.230–252. On Nereus see Pherecydes, *FGrHist* 3 F 16a (= Schol. on Apoll. Rhod. 4.1396–99b, p. 315 Wendel); Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.5.11. On Achelous see Soph. *Trach.* 10–27; Ov. *Met.* 8.879–9.88; Sen. *Herc. Oet.* 495–498; Hyg. *Fab.* 31. In general see Ninck (1921) 138–139, 158–159, 161–162, 174–175; Lesky (1947) 107, 112–113, 123–125, 127; Rose (1958) 26, 39, 248, 293; Fontenrose (1959) 233–234, 331; Burkert (1979) 95–97, 186; Forbes Irving (1990) 172–179; Detienne – Vernant (1991) 20–21, 111–114, 128–129, 143–144, 151; Fantham (1993) 22–24; Hansen (2004) 38, 304, 319; Ormand (2004) 325–326; Garry – El-Shamy (2005) 126–127; Buxton (2009) 37–38, 84–89, 170–171, 174–175.

15. See in general Ormand (2004) 313–326. Mestra's story in the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women* (fr. 43a M-W) also belongs to this cluster of narratives; see below, n. 25–26.

16. See Pi. *Nem.* 4.62–65; Soph. fr. 150; Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.13.5; Ov. *Met.* 11.238–265; Quint. Smyr. 3.618–624; Schol. Pi. *Nem.* 3.60 and 4.101a (III pp. 51, 81–82 Drachmann); Schol. Tzetz. on Lycoph. 175, 178 (pp. 85, 88 Scheer). See also Lawson (1910) 136–137; Ninck (1921) 140, 162; Lesky (1947) 120–122, 127; Rose (1958) 26, 39, 293; Forbes Irving (1990) 181–184; Detienne – Vernant (1991) 20, 111–114, 128, 142–144, 157–159, 172; Slatkin (1991) 82–83; Fantham (1993) 24–29; Hansen (2004) 38, 319; Ormand (2004) 319–323; Garry – El-Shamy (2005) 127; Buxton (2009) 86, 88, 90, 165–166, 171, 174–175.

17. See *Cypria* fr. 7–8 Davies = fr. 9–10 Bernabé = fr. 10–11 West (from Athen. 8.334b–d and

identical story pattern was applied to another one of Zeus' consorts, the wise Metis; she is also said in a few sources to have transformed herself into many shapes in order to avoid having sex with the supreme god.[18]

There was also a warrior hero who used his powers of transformation in battle to baffle his enemies, much like Achelous in his fight against Heracles. Periclymenus, the son of Neleus, had received the gift of changing shapes from his divine grandfather Poseidon and thus performed many notable feats. In the thick of the fight, Periclymenus could change into any form he wished. He turned himself into an eagle and flew away; or he would become an ant and creep into the earth; or he came out again in the form of a biting snake. He could also become a lion and terrify his enemies. In the end, however, he was vanquished and slain by Heracles, during the latter's war against Neleus' clan at Pylos.[19] Some sources offer a graphic story about Periclymenus' end. Deceived by the goddess Athena, he made the mistake of transforming himself into a small creature and approached Heracles in this feeble form; the great hero thus found it easy to exterminate him. One variant has Periclymenus turn into a bird or another flying being and sit on the yoke of Heracles' chariot; the hero then killed him with an arrow.[20] According to another version,

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Philodemus, *On piety* B 7369 Obbink). Cf. Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.10.7; Ps.-Eratosth. *Catasterismi* 25 (p. 31 Olivieri, pp. 142–143 Robert) citing Cratinus, *Nemesis*, test. ii K-A. Cratinus' mythological comedy may have travestied the same story. See Cook (1914) 279–280; Ninck (1921) 140–141, 162; Severyns (1928) 267–271; Kerényi (1939); Lesky (1947) 122; Jouan (1966) 147–151; Luppe (1974); Luppe (1975); Forbes Irving (1990) 187-191; Gantz (1993) 9, 319–320, 855; Ormand (2004) 317–318; Buxton (2009) 162, 168–169, 174–175; Bakola (2010) 168–172, 220–222, 251; Henderson (2012) 1–6; West (2013) 72, 80–83; Konstantakos (2016a) 213–215.

18. See Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.3.6; Schol. Hom. *Il.* 8.39a (II p. 307 Erbse); Schol. Hes. *Th.* 886 (p. 110 Di Gregorio); Ninck (1921) 140–141, 162; Forbes Irving (1990) 184–188, 190; Detienne – Vernant (1991) 20–21, 109–114, 128, 142–144, 164–165; Ormand (2004) 315–317, 324–325; Buxton (2009) 171, 174–175. Other goddesses (Demeter, the Titaness Asteria, the Nereid Psamathe) perform a single transformation into an animal, in order to avoid erotic pursuit; see Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.4.1, 3.12.6; Paus. 8.25.5; Ninck (1921) 141; Fontenrose (1959) 106, 117–118; Detienne – Vernant (1991) 173; Buxton (2009) 161. But in these cases there is no chain of metamorphoses.

19. The main sources for Periclymenus are Hes. fr. 33(a) and 33(b) M-W; Euphorion fr. 64 Powell; Apoll. Rhod. 1.156–160 with Schol. on 1.156–60a (pp. 20–21 Wendel); Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.9.9, 2.7.3; Ov. *Met.* 12.556–572; Schol. Hom. *Od.* 11.286 (II p. 498 Dindorf); Nonn. *Dion.* 43.247–249; Eust. on *Od.* pp. 1685–1686. See Ninck (1921) 143–144, 162; Lesky (1947) 125; Fontenrose (1959) 328–329; Burkert (1979) 86; Forbes Irving (1990) 180–181; Detienne – Vernant (1991) 109–110; Anderson (2000) 110; Hansen (2004) 304; Ormand (2004) 325; Fletcher (2005) 311–314; Buxton (2009) 171, 174–175.

20. The Hesiodic text (fr. 33a.25–36) and the scholion on Apoll. Rhod. 1.156–60a (p. 21 Wendel) note that Periclymenus sat on the knob of the yoke, in front of Heracles (Hesiod:

Periclymenus became an insect, a fly or a bee, and Heracles crushed him between his fingers or with a blow of his club.[21] Metis fell into the same kind of trap, according to a scholion on Hesiod's *Theogony*; Zeus misled her and made her transform herself into a small creature, which he then swallowed.[22]

These tales recall the fate of the dwarf Alberich in the Nibelungen legend. The wily Loki feigns disbelief as to the dwarf's magical potency for metamorphosis and lures him into a practical demonstration. Alberich turns first into a terrible giant snake. But Loki insidiously wonders whether it might be more difficult to become something quite small and slender; and thus the silly dwarf transforms himself into a toad, which Loki easily captures.[23] The cunning protagonist of some magical folktales uses the same artifice to trap a supernaturally endowed adversary, such as a wizard or a shape-shifting ogre. For example, in the famous story of "Puss in Boots" (ATU 545B) the clever tom-cat induces the magician to turn first into a couple of large beasts (elephant, lion) and then into a small mouse. As soon as the opponent has taken this latter form, the cat seizes the mouse and devours it.[24]

A female equivalent of the hero Periclymenus is Mestra, the insatiable Erysichthon's daughter, whose story also had rich reverberations in the folk tradition. Like Periclymenus, Mestra received the ability of transformation as

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ζυγοῦ ἄντα βίης Ἡρακληείης / [*ὀ*]*μφαλῷ ἑζόμενος*; Scholion: *ἐπικαθεσθῆναι τῷ ὀμφαλῷ τοῦ ζυγοῦ τῶν Ἡρακλέους ἵππων*). This gesture implies that Periclymenus transformed himself into a winged creature, a species of bird or insect, which flew and perched on the yoke. The Scholiast vaguely glosses this metamorphosis with the words *μεταβληθέντα εἴς τινα τῶν συνήθων μορφῶν*; but it is clear that, among all the "usual forms" of Periclymenus' metamorphoses, only a flying being would be properly capable of this kind of movement. Possibly Hesiod had in mind the same story about Periclymenus' transformation into a fly or a bee, which is quoted in several late sources (see the next note). The epic poet may have declined to expressly name the humble insect for the sake of heroic dignity; cf. Detienne – Vernant (1991) 110. In Ovid's reworking (*Met.* 12.556–572) Periclymenus finally becomes an eagle and Heracles shoots him with an arrow while he is flying. This may well be Ovid's own creation; cf. Fantham (1993) 27.

21. See Schol. Apoll. Rhod. 1.156–60a (pp. 20–21 Wendel); Schol. Hom. *Il.* 2.333–335 (I p. 102 Dindorf); Hes. fr. 33b; Nonn. *Dion.* 43.247–249; Eust. on *Od.* p. 1686; Detienne – Vernant (1991) 110.

22. Schol. Hes. *Th.* 886 (p. 110 Di Gregorio): *πλανήσας οὖν αὐτὴν ὁ Ζεὺς καὶ μικρὰν ποιήσας κατέπιεν*. Cf. Detienne – Vernant (1991) 109, 128.

23. See the third scene of Wagner's *Das Rheingold*. Andvari, the corresponding dwarf figure in the Norse myths of the *Edda*, suffers a similar fate; he is swimming in the waterfalls in the form of a pike, when Loki entraps and catches him with a fish-net. See Genzmer – Schier (1981) 250–251; Byock (1990) 57–58, 126; Dillmann (1991) 120, 201; Koch (1994) 122–125, 264; Larrington (1996) 151–152; Orchard (1997) 7; Byock (2005) 95.

24. See Bolte – Polívka (1913–1932) I 328, 331; Köhler-Zülch (1993) 1074–1075; Detienne – Vernant (1991) 109–110; Scherf (1995) I 492, II 871–872; Goldberg (2014) 159.

a gift from Poseidon, her lover, and exploited it for a practical need: to feed her eternally hungry parent. Erysichthon used to marry off his daughter to some suitor who offered rich bridal presents in return (Hes. fr. 43a M-W, Palaephatus 23); or, following another version, he would sell the girl into slavery for a high price (Ov. *Met.* 8.848–874 and other late sources). In either case, the abominable father used the earnings to buy food and satisfy his unquenchable hunger. Mestra, on her part, would subsequently assume an animal shape (now a mare, a cow, or a sheep, next time a bird, a bitch, or a deer) and thus escape from her new master and return to her father, so as to undergo the same process all over again.[25] A similar storyline occurs in the widespread international folktale of the apprentice sorcerer (ATU 325, "The magician and his pupil"), in which a young fellow learns the art of shape-shifting from the master wizard and then uses it to sell himself in the market and enrich himself and his father.[26]

The vast corpus of Greek mythology contains more stories about polymorphic beings that undergo serial metamorphoses, often in close succession,

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25. See also Lycoph. 1393–1394 with Schol. Tzetz. (p. 384 Scheer); Zielinski (1891) 137–140, 144–155; Ninck (1921) 144–145; McKay (1962) 19–22, 26–33, 41–47; Fehling (1972) 175–181; Brillante (1983) 9–29, 56–63; Hopkinson (1984) 18–26; Forbes Irving (1990) 173; Fantham (1993) 25, 30–31; Ormand (2004); Rutherford (2005); Fletcher (2005) 311–314; Buxton (2009) 171.

26. On this tale type see the bibliography cited in n. 3 above. On the parallel with the myth of Mestra cf. Zielinski (1891) 149–153; Cosquin (1922) 601–604; Rose (1958) 294, 303; McKay (1962) 41–43; Brillante (1983) 19–20, 56–60; Scherf (1995) II 1438; Anderson (2000) 110–111. In the folktales the cunning apprentice is sold in the form of an animal (a horse, ox etc.) and then resumes his human appearance in order to escape from the buyer. By contrast, the story of Mestra, at least in the form transmitted by Hesiod and Ovid, follows the reverse course: the girl is given away in human form and turns into a beast so as to take flight. Nevertheless, it is likely that there existed a version of the myth closer to the story-pattern of the folktales: namely, Mestra would transform herself into an animal, be sold for money, and then return to her original woman's figure and walk away. Some of the Greek sources may reflect a storyline of this latter kind. See e.g. Schol. Tzetz. on Lycoph. 1393 (p. 384 Scheer): *Μήστραν ... ἥτις εἰς πᾶν εἶδος ζῴου μετεβάλλετο, καὶ ταύτην εἶχε μέθοδον τῆς λιμοῦ ὁ πατήρ. ἐπίπρασκε γὰρ αὐτὴν καθ' ἑκάστην ἡμέραν καὶ ἐκ τούτων ἐτρέφετο, ἡ δὲ πάλιν ἀμείβουσα τὸ εἶδος φεύγουσα πρὸς τὸν πατέρα ἤρχετο* ("Mestra ... who used to change into any form of animal, and her father found in her a treatment for his hunger. Namely, he sold her every day and nourished himself from the earnings; but she used to change back her appearance, flee, and return to her father"). Compare the comic vulgarization of the motif in *Acharnians* 729–835: the Megarian man disguises his daughters as piglets and sells them to Dicaeopolis in return for some foodstuffs to satisfy his hunger. The element of hunger underlines the parallel with Erysichthon's plight. In accordance with this comic scenario, sale in animal form would seem a plausible scheme also in Mestra's case. Cf. Zielinski (1891) 145, 153; Cosquin (1922) 602–603; McKay (1962) 30; Brillante (1983) 58–59; Ormand (2004) 306.

like the ones discussed above. Some of these myths revolve around canonical deities, such as Athena, Poseidon, Apollo, and other Olympians, who may assume a series of different shapes on particular occasions or under special circumstances, in order to serve their purposes —e.g. interact with humans, help a favoured mortal, pursue a love affair, seduce and rape a heroine, escape from a dangerous enemy, or avoid the chase of an unwelcome suitor. In fact, as noted by Richard Buxton, all the great gods have the potential for serial self-transformation as a weapon in their armoury.[27] Other stories are attributed to lesser figures, lower demons or spirits of nature, such as the marine Triton and Morpheus.[28]

Magical shape-shifters were also familiar figures in the Greek popular imaginary, the great mass of fairytales, folk traditions, nursery stories, and sub-mythological demonologies that permeated the imagination of the common people and occasionally surface in literary references. As is usual in popular storytelling around the world, the capacity of changing forms was associated chiefly with magicians, demons, and supernatural monsters. The Empousa, a nightmare bogey of folk fantasy with a fiery face and a leg of bronze, was capable of transforming herself into a bull, a mule, a bitch, a beautiful woman, and a myriad of other creatures.[29] The mysterious Telchines, magical craftsmen of the sea who fabricated various objects for the gods, are also demonic tricksters that tread the fine borderline between mythology and folk fantasy. They were regarded as accomplished wizards, and among other miraculous qualities they could also change into fishes, men, or snakes.[30]

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27. Buxton (2009) 177; cf. already Ninck (1921) 176; also Goldberg (2014) 158.
28. With regard to Athena see e.g. Hom. *Od.* 1.105–323 and 2.267–3.372 (the goddess successively appears as the Taphian Mentes, a bird, the Ithacan elder Mentor, and finally again a bird), 13.221–310 (first a young shepherd, then a tall woman); cf. Odysseus' words to her, *σὲ γὰρ αὐτὴν παντὶ ἐΐσκεις*, "you can liken yourself to everything" (13.313). For Poseidon see below, n. 55. On Apollo see *Hom. Hymn to Apollo* 400–450 (dolphin, star, young man); Anton. Lib. 32 (tortoise and snake). On Triton see Apoll. Rhod. 4.1551–1619. Gods in general are said to undergo all sorts of transformations (Hom. *Od.* 17.485–486). For surveys and discussion see Ninck (1921) 139, 142–143, 146–157, 161–180; Fontenrose (1959) 57, 471; Hansen (2000) 7–16; Hansen (2004) 37–38, 302–304; Buxton (2009) 29–37, 124, 150–151, 157–177; Buxton (2010) 82–84.
29. See *Frogs* 288–295; Demosth. 18.130; Luc. *De salt.* 19; Schol. Apoll. Rhod. 3.861 (p. 242 Wendel). Cf. Fontenrose (1959) 115–118, 186; Borthwick (1968) 202–204, 206; Forbes Irving (1990) 172; Brown (1991); Buxton (2009) 170, 172–175.
30. See Diod. 5.55; Eust. on *Il.* pp. 771–772; Ninck (1921) 139, 161; Forbes Irving (1990) 178; Buxton (2009) 170, 173–174.

Plato repeatedly attributes to the wizards (*γόητας*) the ability to mutate their appearance and assume different shapes (*Rep.* 380d, 383a, cf. *Euthyd.* 288b). In the magical papyri of the Roman age the wizard invokes Thoth, the Egyptian god of scripture and magic, and asks for the same power: viz. to liken himself to all creatures, so as to appear as a wolf, a dog, a lion, fire, a tree, a vulture, a wall, water, or anything else he wishes (*Papyri Graecae Magicae* XIII 273–277, 4th c. A.D.).[31] The witch of the *Ass Romance*, one of the most celebrated literary fairytales from classical antiquity, uses magical ointments to metamorphose herself into animals and birds (*Lucius or the Ass* 12–14; Apul. *Met.* 3.21–25). In general, the witches of Thessaly, as described in Apuleius' novel, can turn themselves into any animal being, putting on the form of birds, dogs, weasels, mice, and even flies (*Met.* 2.22, 2.25, 2.30). In another tale of magic, parodied in Lucian's *Philopseudes* (14), a Hyperborean wonder-worker brings down the moon, which shows a flair for metamorphoses, becoming successively a woman, a cow, and a dog's puppy. Apparently, the fabulous people of the extreme north had a general reputation for such miraculous feats of self-transformation (Hdt. 4.105; Ov. *Met.* 15.356–360).[32]

In fact, the ancient stories about shape-shifting entities offer a prime example of the overlap between mythology, popular lore, and folk storytelling. The same capacity for accumulative transformations and more or less the same adventures of metamorphosis are shared, on the one hand, by the gods and heroes of the mythical and poetic tradition and, on the other hand, by the dark magicians and nursery bogies of the collective popular imaginary. This is a case that takes us back, in Forbes Irving's words, to "the folk-tale roots of Greek mythology".[33]

In many other ancient mythologies the divine beings possess the power of transforming themselves. Consider, for example, the metamorphoses of Horus, Seth, and Isis in the Egyptian myths of the conflict between Horus and Seth for the dominion of the universe.[34] Apart from mythical figures, the

31. See Preisendanz (1974) 101 (P. Leiden J 395). In general cf. Abt (1908) 51–53; Lawson (1910) 179–183; Ninck (1921) 145; Burkert (1962) 41–42; Borthwick (1968) 203–204; Veenstra (2002) 135–136, 143–146.

32. Cf. Pfister (1948); Burkert (1962) 41.

33. Cf. Forbes Irving (1990) 172.

34. See e.g. Lichtheim (1976) 217–219; Simpson (2003) 95–98; Bresciani (2007) 367–370; also Fontenrose (1959) 179, 182–186; Garry – El-Shamy (2005) 129. For other ancient mythologies (Iranian, Indian, Celtic) see selected examples and references in Fontenrose (1959) 203, 206; Garry – El-Shamy (2005) 127–130; Katrinaki (2010) 654; Buxton (2010) 88–89.

ancient cultures of the Near East also present other types of narrative lore in which magical characters with a talent for wondrous shape-shifting play prominent roles. A characteristic case is the celebrated Egyptian *Tale of the Two Brothers*, one of the best literary fairytales that survive from antiquity, preserved on a papyrus from ca. 1200 B.C. The protagonist Bata is a virtuous youth endowed with remarkable magical qualities; he can understand the speech of animals, create a river full of crocodiles to separate himself from a persecuting enemy, and also extract his own heart and store it in a cedar blossom for safety.[35] He is also an accomplished shape-shifter. When Bata's treacherous wife has him killed, so that she may become the Pharaoh's consort, the young hero is revived by his brother and sets out to take revenge. He turns himself into a bull and arrives at the Pharaonic court, where he is admired as a magnificent animal; but he reveals his true identity to the dreadful queen, who persuades the king to sacrifice the bull. Nonetheless, two drops of the bull's blood fall beside the doorposts of the great palace portal and grow into two large Persea trees, which preserve Bata's soul; the trees speak again to the evil woman, who asks the Pharaoh to cut them down. Still, a splinter of their wood enters into the lady's mouth; she swallows it, becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son, whom the Pharaoh naturally makes his successor. The boy is Bata reincarnated, and when he grows up and becomes king, he finally punishes the execrable woman.[36]

This narrative does not present an orthodox sequence of transformations undergone by the same living body, as in the aforementioned cases from Greek myth and folklore. Bata dies a number of times, and his body as a whole disintegrates; but every time a tiny fraction of Bata's body survives and channels his life-force and identity into a new creature. Thus, it may be said that Bata, in terms of his essential personality and nature, ends up experiencing a sequence of successive metamorphoses (into bull, trees, and boy), which take place one after the other, as in the traditional examples of shape-shifters.[37] In fact, this peculiar procedure of self-transmutation

35. This is the earliest known instance of the "horcrux motif", now rendered famous through the fantastic novels of Harry Potter.

36. For the text see Lefebvre (1949) 137–158; Lichtheim (1976) 203–211; Lalouette (1987) 161–172; Maspero (2002) 1–16; Simpson (2003) 81–90; Bresciani (2007) 376–385. The basic sequence of motifs, including the hero's successive transformations, survives in folktales: see type ATU 318 ("The faithless wife"); Uther (2004) 205–206; cf. Lefebvre (1949) 140; Brunner-Traut (1965) 259; Megas (1968) 224–225; Horálek (1979); Brunner-Traut (1982) 699–700; Maspero (2002) ix, xiv–xv, xxii, xxx, xxxiii, ciii–cvi; Bresciani (2007) 376.

37. Cf. Zielinski (1891) 149–150; Bolte – Polívka (1913–1932) IV 96–98; Lefebvre (1949)

through a chain of reincarnations represents a "mythicization" or a religious recast of the classic fairytale scheme. The standard folk story-pattern, with the straightforward successive transformations, may have been the authentic narrative form and the usual one in the folk tradition of ancient Egypt, as it is in the folklore of so many peoples. In that case, the author of the literary *Märchen* of the *Two Brothers* will have assimilated the popular form to distinctive concepts of the Egyptian mythology and religion by introducing the process of reincarnation or transmigration of the soul.[38] Ultimately, in spite of its deviation from the later mythical and folkloric norms, the Egyptian tale can be categorized as the earliest fully developed story of serial shape-shifting in world literature.

Other early examples from neighbouring Near-Eastern cultures offer a different variant of the shape-shifting motif, incorporated into the frame story of a contest in magic between rival sorcerers. The competing wizards do not personally assume the shapes of other creatures. Rather, they demonstrate their powers of transmutation by creating various independent physical entities by means of witchcraft. Out of thin air, or by transubstantiating common materials of their environment, they produce beasts, birds, fishes, or material objects. This happens in a Sumerian epic of the late 3rd millennium B.C., conventionally titled *Enmerkar and Ensuhgirana*; and in another Egyptian fantastic novella that is based on fairytale themes, the so-called *Tale of Setne Khaemwaset and his son Si-Osire*, which probably goes back to the Saite period (7th or 6th c. B.C.).[39] In this latter story one of the magical opponents also indulges in an occasional feat of personal metamorphosis: towards the end of the competition, when he is hard pressed by his enemy, the Nubian wizard turns himself into a gander, so as to fly away. Here, as more broadly in the world folk tradition, the magician's own metamorphosis and the production of independent creatures by means of wizardry are considered as equivalent and interchangeable wonder-working activities.

139–140; Thompson (1977) 258, 275–276; Horálek (1979) 928, 939; Lalouette (1987) 172; Scherf (1995) I 136–138, II 1394–1395; Maspero (2002) c–cvi; Goldberg (2014) 159.

38. Cf. Horálek (1979) 928, 939. For the same process of transformation through death and reincarnation see Thompson (1955–1958) II 483, motif E607.2, and Goldberg (2014) 159 (Irish, Indian, and Native American parallels); Bolte – Polívka (1913–1932) I 90, II 394, IV 97 and Thompson (1977) 115, 254–255 (European tales); Scherf (1995) I 136–138, II 1246–1247, 1393–1396 (German and Russian examples).

39. On these two texts see Konstantakos (2016a) 209–212 with many bibliographical references.

2. ARISTOPHANES, AESOP, AND THE SATIRICAL SHAPE-SHIFTERS

Aristophanes loved this magical motif, which ultimately expresses the inexhaustible metamorphoses of his own poetic art, along with the overflowing vitality and versatility of his central characters.[40] In the *Wasps* the comic poet actually dramatizes a virtual materialization of the shape-shifter on stage. The protagonist of this play, Philocleon, the obsessed old judge, is kept incarcerated by his son in his own house, so that he stays away from the public courts and trials which he insanely adores. However, Philocleon does not give up; in a series of side-splitting scenes he energetically attempts to escape from the house, imitating the habits and manners of all kinds of living creatures or even inanimate substances (69–210).

Thus, the old man is said to flow like water through the holes and the drainpipes of the building (126–128). He resembles a house-bred mouse: he scurries about in the kitchen, crawling on all fours to find a chink in the wall (139–140); or he sticks himself through the bath drain, like vermin (141). He roams about on the tiled roof, as though he were a rat or a snake (202–206). He gnaws the net that covers the windows, like a rodent (164–165, 367–371). He tries to fly like a sparrow from the roof (207–209) or like a jackdaw, by hopping on the pegs of the courtyard wall (129–130). He feigns to be the smoke, so as to climb up and leave from the chimney (144–151, cf. 324). He suspends himself under the belly of the donkey, when the latter is brought out to be sent to the market, like another Odysseus in the Cyclops' cave (179–198). From another point of view, he looks like a donkey's foal, attached to its parent (189).

Other characters, while describing Philocleon in these early scenes of the play, assimilate him to further species of the animal kingdom. The old man attaches himself to the notice board of the court-house like a limpet (105). He has his finger-nails full of wax, because of his continuous scratching of the juror's wax tablets, and thus looks like a bee or a bumble-bee (106–108; cf. the endearing appellation addressed to the old man by the Chorus of his comrades, *ὦ μελίττιον*, 366). Philocleon himself, as he is being closely guarded by the men in his household, declares that he feels like a ferret that stole the

40. Cf. Reckford (1987) 99; Buxton (2009) 71–75; Nelson (2016) 170–171. The best general discussion of the transformative and ever-shifting nature of Aristophanic comedy as a poetic form is offered by Silk (2000), e.g. 123–124, 235–255, 282–289.

meat (363). Later in the action the old hero is further compared, in graphic similes, to a trained hound (704–705) and a well-stuffed ass (1306, 1310).

This almost endless sequence of virtual transformations or assimilations, most of them accumulated within a couple of hundred lines, creates the illusion of an ever-shifting multiplicity of shapes, a personality made up by an incessant merry-go-round of metamorphoses.[41] It is one of the aspects that strongly contribute to Philocleon's liveliness as a character and to his irresistible scenic charm. This Aristophanic hero truly belongs to the tribe of the "great vitalists", to use Harold Bloom's term for this type of comic personage: the larger-than-life poetic creations that combine a droll roguishness with indefatigable vivacity, a merry cunning and mischievousness with inexhaustible energy, and total egotism with an indomitable will for life; and they possess all these qualities to such a degree that it becomes impossible not to heartily like them, in spite of their severe moral defects.[42] Like all great vitalists of literature, Philocleon bears the blessing of life; he is a comic genius that dominates the play, produces and unifies the entire plot by means of the interminable manifestations of his life-force.

Philocleon's metamorphoses are not fully realized in a physical sense; the old man neither transforms nor disguises himself into beasts, water, or smoke. Several of the animal images attached to him (e.g. the bee and bumble bee, ferret, hound, and feeding ass, 106–108, 363, 366, 704–705, 1306, 1310) are purely verbal constructs, similes and droll comparisons forwarded by Philocleon himself or by other personages, who perceive some abstract analogy between the old man's conduct and particular qualities of the corresponding animals.[43] In other instances, however, Philocleon

41. On Philocleon's *penchant* for shape-shifting cf. Whitman (1964) 162–163; Paduano (1974) 111–117; Brillante (1991) 15–28; Silk (2000) 250–255; Frazier (2001) 88–90, 93–95; Auger (2008) 504–508; Telò (2010) 313; Corbel-Morana (2012) 144, 252–253; Nelson (2016) 160, 166–171.

42. See in general Bloom (1994) 47–49, 112–119; Bloom (1998) 4–9, 273–314; cf. also Lazarus (2014) 87–141 with the remarks of Konstantakos (2016b), as well as the earlier concept of the "comic hero" introduced by Whitman (1964). In particular, on the polymorphism and dynamism of Philocleon's character see Whitman (1964) 144–166; MacDowell (1971) 7–11; Dover (1972) 125–127; Paduano (1974) 29–41, 107–132, 170–202; Thiercy (1986) 268–277; MacDowell (1995) 153–154, 171–179; Konstan (1995) 15–28; Silk (2000) 239, 246–255, 369–375, 426–434; Auger (2008); Pertsinidis (2009) 223–224; and Nelson (2016) 95–96, 146, 160–174, who aptly compares Philocleon to other rascally and enjoyable tricksters of Western literature, such as Shakespeare's Autolycus and Ben Jonson's Face. One might include here Bloom's favourite vitalists, Falstaff (cf. Whitman [1964] 144) and the Wife of Bath, with their enormous will for life.

43. Cf. Paduano (1974) 111–112; Brillante (1991) 21.

is described by the people of his milieu as replicating the motions and physical postures of various creatures or natural elements in the course of his escape attempts or his other activities; thus, he is said to imitate the flow of water, the crawling and burrowing of mice, the hopping of the jackdaw, the tight clinging of the limpet (105, 126–130, 139–141). The audience does not actually see him perform these grotesque simulations; but the descriptions are so bizarrely vivid that we feel as though we can view them with our mind's eyes.

Finally, in some cases the comic hero conspicuously appropriates the movements and gestures of beasts or material substances, mimicking their behaviour and position in space, while he is in the performance area, before the spectators' gaze. Philocleon thus physically performs with his own body the figurative expressions that compare him to all these creatures or elements; he literalizes the comic metaphors and similes and renders them visible on stage. In this respect, the old hero becomes indeed, albeit temporarily and in simulation, a rat or snake on the roof, a fluttering sparrow, a gnawing rodent, a climbing and talking smoke, a donkey foal, or a second Odysseus (144–151, 179–198, 202–209, 367–371).[44] Even though the external *opsis* of the simulated beings is not reproduced, their motions, corporeal attitudes, and overall spatial dimension are visually incarnated by the performer's malleable body. Through this optical metaphor, Aristophanes renders in an effective theatrical manner the fantastic concept of the creature that changes forms. The marvellous, the magical, all that is impossible to encounter in the ordinary world, is yet materialized on stage by means of this most Aristophanic of dramatic techniques, the scenic realization of metaphors and imagery.[45] Unlike the modern cinema director, the great comic poet did not need special effects.

In the *Clouds* the same magical capacity is attributed to the divine Nephelai. It should not be assumed that Aristophanes has in mind one specific mythical narrative from the many that are listed above. Rather, he borrows the shape-shifter's motif from the rich substratum of the popular imaginary and the folk narrative repertoire.[46] That the clouds in the sky often change form and may at times become similar to the figures of various creatures of

44. Cf. Paduano (1974) 114–116; Brillante (1991) 21; Sharrock (2008) 3.
45. On this peculiar technique of the Aristophanic theatre see handily Taillardat (1965) 65–67, 337–338, 430–431, 504–506; Thiercy (1986) 103–119.
46. Cf. Anderson (2000) 110–111, who detects far-reaching echoes of fairytales about shape-shifting magicians in the plot of the *Clouds*.

experience, this was a phenomenon familiar to the ancients. After Aristophanes, it was observed and noted down by several authors of the Hellenistic and the Roman age.[47]

The clouds are creatures of the air, similar to steam or smoke, described as *καπνός* by the comic hero (330, cf. 320). The insubstantiality and near-immateriality of their aerial bodies render them susceptible to mutations of shape and appearance. Significantly, Philocleon in the *Wasps* also impersonates the smoke (*καπνός* again, 144–151) and tries to launch himself from the chimney up into the air, as though he could evaporate. This is one of the most extended and impressive gags in Philocleon's series of staged transformations, and perhaps it is meant to emblematize the old man's ideal of self-transmutation.[48] By turning into *καπνός*, Philocleon would assimilate himself to the substance of the Clouds and hence acquire also their ability of continuous shape-changing, so as to effortlessly perform the multiple metamorphoses he attempts in the prologue. The smoke scene of the *Wasps*, produced one year after the original *Clouds*, may be a retrospective allusion to Aristophanes' earlier play and its volatile Chorus-heroines. The divinized Nephelai have found in Philocleon a faithful imitator on earth.

Apart from air, another cosmic element is crucial for the identity of the Clouds and determines their capacity for metamorphosis. In Greek mythopoeia, as has been often remarked, shape-changing figures are usually associated with water. Most of them are divinities or spirits of the aquatic world, whether of the sea or of freshwater.[49] Proteus and Nereus are marine

47. See Diod. 3.50.4–51.3; Lucr. 4.133–142; Cic. *De div.* 2.49; Forbes Irving (1990) 174; cf. Revermann (2006) 198. This is not the place to address the broader question of the relation between this self-metamorphosing capacity of the Nephelai and their overall role as the Chorus in the plot of the comedy. Clearly, the cloud goddesses, who can transform themselves and imitate any form, were figures apt to represent the polymorphic and delusive nature of sophistic discourse. However, examination of this issue is beyond the scope of my essay; see the analyses of Köhnken (1980); Ambrosino (1983); O'Regan (1992) 52–56; Lauriola (2010) 74–77; cf. Pucci (1960) 33.

48. Cf. Brillante (1991) 18–23; Auger (2008) 504–506. On the Nephelai as smoke see already Dover (1968) lxviii.

49. The connection of shape-shifting with water has not been generally retained in the international folk tradition at large (cf. Forbes Irving [1990] 173; but contrast Ninck [1921] 146–148, 153–157, for some counter-examples from European and Oriental traditions). Still, this combination is a very old pattern, traceable not only in Greco-Roman mythology but already in the most ancient cultures of the Near East. The Sumerian epic *Enmerkar and Ensuhgirana* and the Egyptian magical novella about Setne Khaemwaset (see above) associate the aquatic element (especially river water) with a contest in magical transformations; see Konstantakos (2016a) 216–217 for detailed discussion. Native American tricksters with shape-shifting abilities, such as Wakdjunkaga of the Winnebago tribe, are also

demons, the wise "old men of the sea", and Thetis is Nereus' daughter. Metis is a daughter of Oceanus, the broad mass of water that surrounds the earth; so is Nemesis, according to some sources, and she was worshipped as an Oceanid in her famous Attic sanctuary at Rhamnous.[50] Achelous is a river personified. The Telchines were called the sons of Thalassa, "the Sea", and were believed to have nursed Poseidon as a baby; their sister Halia ("the marine one" or "the salt-sea girl") was later loved by Poseidon and bore his children. Dionysus himself has some connection with the water world; he frequently appears as a creator of springs and is associated with the sea and with rain in cult practice and religious songs.[51] Significantly, even mortal shape-shifters, such as Periclymenus and Mestra, owe their talent to the supreme god of the sea, Poseidon, who is Mestra's thankful lover and Periclymenus' gift-giving grandfather.[52] Other water spirits and nymphs, minor aquatic deities, or children of river gods are said to have transformed themselves at least once, on a particular occasion or for a special purpose.[53] In a variant form of legend, water functions as a medium of metamorphosis: the hero or heroine is turned into a different shape upon being immersed in the sea, falling into a lake, or simply being sprinkled with water —as though the contact with the liquid element were the crucial factor triggering off the magical power of transformation.[54] Essentially, the self-transformative capacities of all these figures reflect the fluidity and mutability of water, *par excellence*

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associated with water and water spirits; see Babcock-Abrahams (1975) 176–177. It seems that water and magical metamorphosis have formed a pair in the popular imagination from very early times, ever since the dawn of mythical thinking.

50. See Paus. 1.33.3, 7.5.3; Schol. Tzetz. on Lycoph. 88 (pp. 48–49 Scheer); Ninck (1921) 141.

51. See Ninck (1921) 142; Forbes Irving (1990) 173, 193–194; Buxton (2009) 175.

52. This was already noticed by ancient mythologists. See Hes. fr. 43c M-W (= Philodemus, *On Piety* p. 49 Gomperz): *πολυ[ε]ιδ[ίαν π]αντελῶς τα[ύτην Ποσ]ειδῶν λέγετ[αι] τῶν ἀνθρώπ[ων τι]σὶν περιθεῖν[αι τήν] τε αὐτὴν δ[οῦ]να[ι] Περικλυμέ[νωι] κ[αὶ Μ]ήστραι*. Cf. Euphorion fr. 64 Powell: (Periclymenus) *ὅς ῥά τε πᾶσιν ἴεικτο θαλάσσιος ἠύτε Πρωτεύς*. Cf. Brillante (1983) 24–26; Forbes Irving (1990) 173, 180; Fletcher (2005) 311–312.

53. See Ninck (1921) 141, 150, 152, 159–161, for a list of cases (the Nereid Psamathe and other Nereids and Oceanids, the sea-demon Triton, Daphne and Syrinx, who were born of a river god, etc.) with references to ancient sources.

54. See again Ninck (1921) 148–157, who lists and documents many examples: the werewolves of ancient Arcadia; Perimele the daughter of Hippodamas; Asteria, a maiden loved by Zeus; Kyknos, the Aetolian hunter and Heracles' adversary; Aesacus the son of Priam; Alcyone the wife of Ceyx; Derketo or Atargatis, the Syrian goddess; Ascalaphus the son of Acheron; and a series of heroes who fall into water and turn into marine demons (Ino-Leucothea, Glaucus, Aegeus, Hylas).

the substance that has no fixed form or outline in itself but takes each time the shape of the particular container in which it is placed.[55]

From this point of view, the transfer of the motif to the personified Nephelai is very apt. The cloud-goddesses originate from water, as Socrates teaches at length in the play; they are born from the evaporation of rivers and ocean waters (271–272, 276–280), roam about in the sky full of water (376–378, 383–384), and of course bring the rain (267–268, 338, 368–371).[56] The members of the Chorus themselves admit these watery qualities in their entrance song, as soon as their voice is first heard in the play (276–280, 288, 299), and afterwards in the course of their self-introduction in the two parabaseis (580, 1117–1130). There was indeed a folkloric or mythical prototype for this association of clouds and water in the context of magical metamorphosis. In ancient Greek lore the Telchines, the shape-shifting wizards who were sons of the Sea and nurses of Poseidon,[57] were also able to magically control the clouds, gather them, and produce rain, hail, or snow whenever they wished (see Diod. 5.55.3).

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55. On the connection of the ancient Greek shape-shifters with water see mainly Ninck (1921) 138–180; Frazer (1921) 68; Lesky (1947) 112, 121–127, 137; Rose (1958) 293–294; Fontenrose (1959) 117–118, 234, 328; Brillante (1983) 24–25; Detienne – Vernant (1991) 20, 111–112, 137, 142–144, 157–159, 165, 173; Hansen (2004) 38, 304, 319; Buxton (2009) 86, 88, 174–176; Konstantakos (2016a) 216–217. Reservations are expressed by Forbes Irving (1990) 173–174, 179, 183–191, who points out that shapelessness and mutability do not play a significant part in the perception of the watery element by ancient authors, and also that not all water deities or spirits are endowed with shape-shifting capacities; the most prominent counter-example, according to Forbes Irving, is Poseidon himself, the god and master of the sea. In Forbes Irving's view, the metamorphosing abilities serve rather to demarcate such figures from the orthodox Olympian and heroic world, turning them into the representatives of a marginal universe, a dark and dangerous "other" with potentially subversive intent (cf. Burkert [1979] 86–97, who associates the shape-shifters of Indo-European mythology with the Beyond, the weird Otherworld). These capacities are also the main defensive weapon of the corresponding figures, who are otherwise weak creatures (old men or female entities) and become formidable opponents only because of their powers of shape-shifting. See however the response of Buxton (2009) 86, 88, who reaffirms the link between the shifting sea (and more generally the fluidity of the watery element), the hybrid nature of the water divinities, and their capacity to change shape. Concerning Poseidon in particular, it is not true that he is deprived of the gift of metamorphosis, as Forbes Irving thinks. A number of ancient sources narrate how Poseidon assumed the forms of diverse animals or elements, becoming a ram, a bull, a stallion, a bird, a dolphin, or a river, in order to approach and seduce heroines or goddesses whom he desired: see Hom. *Od.* 11.235–253; Paus. 8.25.5; Ov. *Met.* 6.115–120; Hyg. *Fab.* 188; Lawson (1910) 86–87; Ninck (1921) 151; Anderson (2000) 177–178; Buxton (2009) 159, 161.

56. Cf. Pucci (1960) 31, 39.

57. See above, n. 30.

Nevertheless, the Aristophanic description of the Nephelai is not confined to the fantastic idea of the shape-shifter. It contains an additional ingredient of a quite different order, which turns the fairytale image into a sharp satirical weapon. In expounding his explanation, Socrates specifies and narrows down the transformative capacity of his goddesses. The Nephelai do not turn generally into anything they wish. Rather, they choose every time their particular form according to the man they find before them, as they are observing the world from above. At each junction the cloud-goddesses assume such an appearance as to match the offences, the ethical shortcomings, and the peculiar criminal physiognomy of the specific individual whom they encounter.[58] For example, they become wolves if they see a greedy man, or turn into deer when they are facing a coward.

This comic idea is an odd invention; it makes the mutable Clouds function like an airborne ethical mirror which reflects the moral deficiencies and character idiosyncrasies of the people on earth. A partial analogue can be found only in works of modern fantastic fiction. The weird "boggart", from the magical universe of the Harry Potter novels, bears some functional resemblance to the Aristophanic notion. The boggart is a shape-shifting being whose authentic looks are unknown, because they have never been witnessed by humans —it may even be conjectured that the boggart is formless and has no original shape of its own. This entity guesses every time what the observer standing in front of it fears most; and it assumes precisely the appearance of this paramount object of fear. The only way to repel a boggart is to force it, by means of a magical spell, to assimilate itself to another thing, one that the onlooker finds most ridiculous and amusing.[59] Like the Nephelai, the boggart operates as a mirror of diverse psychical states and reflects properties of the confronted person's soul.

J. K. Rowling's creature was foreshadowed by an earlier fantastic invention: the voracious extraterrestrial monster in Stephen King's novel *It* (1986). "It" is a demonic entity from an unknown dimension of outer space, which

58. On the Clouds as mocking reflections of moral characteristics and defects cf. Pucci (1960) 32–33; Köhnken (1980) 156–163; O'Regan (1992) 52–53; Lauriola (2010) 76–77.

59. Rowling (1999) 133–142, 154–156, 236–242, 318–319, 346. In different episodes of the novel (*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*) the boggart terrifies one or the other of the pupils of Hogwarts by taking the form of a fearfully stern professor, a bloodstained mummy, a banshee demoness, a bloody eyeball, a severed and moving hand, a giant spider, a dementor, a sickening moon, or an announcement of failure in the exams. Most of the times it is countered and forced to turn into a ridiculous contraption (the stern professor dressed in a middle-aged lady's clothes, a slapstick figure, a mousetrap, a silvery-white orb).

haunts a dreary American town. It has the ability to read a person's mind (especially the minds of children, who are his preferred prey) and assume the shape of the thing this person is most afraid of. It's most iconic and favoured form is that of a clown, the unsurpassable fright of small children. But in the course of the narrative the mysterious monster also turns into many other creatures, such as a leper, a hideous woman's portrait, a mummy, a werewolf, a ghost, a swarm of monstrous leeches, a giant predatory bird, or a flow of blood.[60]

These fictional constructs of modern fantasy writers correspond to the metamorphosing Clouds purely in terms of structure and technique; in all cases the successive transformations are conditioned according to particular states of the observing individual's interior world. But beyond formal aspects the correspondence is limited, because there is an important difference between the ancient example and the modern analogues. The magical entities of the contemporary fantasies reflect emotional states (fear or amusement), while Aristophanes' Nephelai assimilate themselves rather to negative moral traits and defects of ethical character, which produce aberrations of social behaviour (lust, greed, cowardice, effeminacy). Consequently, the predominant mood in the modern narratives is the shiver of horror and the frisson of suspense: the sombre, unadulterated horror of Steven King's novel, or the childlike scariness of fairytale in Harry Potter's adolescent universe. By contrast, Aristophanes' creation is humorous and satirical. Its purpose is to produce fun and mocking blame, so as to ridicule character shortcomings that can be observed in ordinary everyday life.

On the other hand, in the ancient Greek imaginary tradition the Aristophanic concept of a selective, character-mirroring shape-shifter finds no equivalent. There is no Greek story, whether from mythology or magical fairytales or any other kind of ancient lore, in which the form taken by the shape-shifter is determined by a particular quality of another personage. This peculiar trait must be viewed as Aristophanes' own invention, clearly inspired by the comic poet's lampooning vein and the requirements of his satirical genre. With regard to form and function, this distinctively Aristophanic version is a composite product and has arisen from an unusual but felicitous combination of the shape-shifter's fantastic figure with a different folk imaginary pattern: namely, the basic allegorical technique of the Aesopic fables —another popular narrative genre that was dear to the comic author's heart.[61]

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60. King (1986), e.g. 218–221, 282–287, 315–320, 377–383, 396–398, 452–453, 663–665, 817–819, 853–857, 862, 989–991, 997–999, 1006–1012, 1019–1022, 1029–1030.

61. On Aristophanes and Aesopic fables generally, see the fundamental studies of Rothwell

In the corpus of the Aesopic fables every creature of the animal kingdom embodies, as a rule, a standard, typified character trait: an ethical quality, a moral virtue or defect, a capacity of the mind, a merit or a shortcoming of human idiosyncrasy, or a particular way of behaviour. This trait conditions the actions and conduct of the corresponding animal in the plot, at least in the majority of the tales.[62] For example, the fox is a symbol of cunning and craftiness; he devises all kinds of clever stratagems and artifices in order to achieve his purposes, acquire food or secure his prey, extract himself from hardship, save his own life, or simply enjoy the pleasure of deceiving others. The cat often appears in the same role of the shrewd and wily intrigant, mainly for utilitarian purposes, such as the procurement of food. The lion represents power, along with the concomitant qualities of force, violence, and bravery. The wolf is distinguished for his gluttony and avidity, a model of greed and rapaciousness. The hare incarnates cowardice. The monkey and the jackdaw usually display vanity, ostentation, a tendency of putting on airs. The snake embodies the force of destruction, a manifestation of physical evil which cannot be restricted by law or will. The deer is portrayed as the victim *par excellence*, continuously hunted and unlucky, unable to escape doom. The donkey is the emblem of hard labour and of those that suffer it; as a character, he is slow-witted and silly. The flies symbolize the irrational drive of desire, the blind surrender to voluptuousness. The ant is emblematic of industriousness and thrift.[63] The same kind of moral or ethological typification is applied to many other animal species.[64]

(1995); van Dijk (1997) 188–229; Schirru (2009); Pertsinidis (2009); Hall (2013). See also Reckford (1987) 76–78; Adrados (1999) 12–14, 145–148, 152, 155, 211, 216–218, 243–244, 384–387, 390–393, 401, 408–409; Holzberg (2002) 12–13, 16, 18–21; Corbel-Morana (2012) 92–98; and my discussion in Konstantakos (2017b) and Konstantakos (2017c) concerning the use of Aesopic material in the scene of the dogs' trial in the *Wasps*.

62. Cf. Nøjgaard (1964) 284–296, 303–309, 317–318, 350–352; Noel (1975) 63–64, 92–93; Leibfried (1982) 22–24, 28; Knapp (1984) 294; Dithmar (1988) 198–201; van Dijk (1997) 17–19, 24.

63. References to the Greek fable corpus follow throughout the edition of Perry (1952) (whose numbering is also reproduced in Perry [1965]) —arguably the best and fullest collection of the Greek material to date. Fox: e.g. fables 9, 12, 17, 41, 107, 124, 142, 149, 191, 232, 241, 252, 258, 333, 336, 337, 345, 416. Cat: e.g. fables 16, 79, 389, 435. Lion: e.g. fables 132, 141, 144, 145, 149, 151, 191, 258–260, 334, 339–341, 344, 347, 394, 406, 450. Wolf: e.g. fables 38, 97, 98, 134, 153–160, 187, 190, 209, 210, 234, 261, 267, 342, 345, 347, 348, 365, 366, 392, 417, 451, 452. Hare: e.g. fables 138, 256, 331, 334, 450. Monkey: fables 14, 73, 81, 83, 203, 364, 463, 464. Jackdaw: fables 101, 123, 129. Snake: e.g. fables 51, 96, 128, 176, 221, 227, 395, 458. Deer: fables 74–77, 305, 336, 341, 351. Donkey: e.g. fables 82, 149, 151, 179–183, 185, 186, 188, 189, 191, 237, 263, 279, 357–359, 411, 452, 458. Flies: fables 80 and 167. Ant: fables 112, 166, 373.

64. On this practice in the Aesopic fables see Chambry (1927) xxxix; Cocchiara (1981) 61–64;

Analogous animal symbolisms were exploited more broadly in the imagery and the rhetorical comparisons of ancient Greek poetry. A similar typology of animal figures as representatives of largely moral forces or emotional drives seems to underlie the similes of the Homeric epics; it must have been developed to some degree by the early Archaic age. A little later, the same pattern of ethological animalism resurfaces, very colourfully and vigorously, in the satirical poetry of the iambographers (Archilochus, Semonides of Amorgos, Timocreon of Rhodes), and occasionally also in more exalted forms of lyricism, such as the odes of Pindar.[65] In all these cases connections can be traced with the corpus of the Aesopic fables. The Homeric epics do not contain any example of true fable, but they were composed more or less at the very time when the stories of Aesopic type were being widely disseminated and established in the Greek-speaking world. A near-contemporary poem, Hesiod's *Works and Days*, provides the first known specimen of a proper animal fable composed in Greek, the tale of the hawk and the nightingale (202–212). The iambic and lyric poets of the Archaic age were good connoisseurs of the Aesopic genre and often reworked such animal parables in their texts.[66]

Josifović (1974) 26–27; Thite (1984) 44–45; Bonnafé (1984–1987) II 14–17; Dithmar (1988) 198–200; Jedrkiewicz (1989) 225–226, 231–232, 239–240; Demandt (1991) 417–418; Jacquinod (1996) 94–96; Adrados (1999) 158–161, 236–238, 353–354; Corbel-Morana (2012) 92–97; and the surveys of relevant scholarship in Nøjgaard (1964) 304–309 and Zafiropoulos (2001) 28–29. Of course, it must not be assumed that this stereotypical characterization of the animal personages is always and invariably maintained in the fable corpus, without exceptions. On the contrary, surprise, unexpected reversal, and paradox are regular phenomena in the repertoire of Aesopic tales. In some fables the standard defining quality of one or the other creature, which has been rendered familiar to the audience through the vast majority of this creature's appearances in the overall tradition, may be undermined, upturned, or reversed. The narrative may offer variations of the animal's established character traits, or ironically play with these features, or turn them upside down. See the careful remarks of Nøjgaard (1964) 309–319; Zafiropoulos (2001) 29–30; Lefkowitz (2014) 12–15. Cf. also Thite (1984) 42–43, 45–46, 54–55; Jedrkiewicz (1989) 239–240; Adrados (1999) 256.

65. See Fränkel (1921) 59–86; Duchemin (1960) 387–415; Ogilvy (1972); Snell (1975) 185–187, 191–192, 311–312; Fränkel (1975) 146–147, 202–207; Schnapp-Gourbeillon (1981) 26–63, 85–94, 193–199; Bonnafé (1984–1987) I 41–74, 95–97, 122–134, II 14–25; Lonsdale (1990) 133–135; Jacquinod (1996); van Dijk (1997) 124–125, 674–675; Adrados (1999) 195–204; Treu (1999) 97–99; Corbel-Morana (2012) 84–87. In particular, on the exploitation of this allegorical typology of animals in Aristophanic drama see Taillardat (1965) 94–95, 174–177, 206–211, 227–228, 254–256, 299–300, 311–312, 416–418; Treu (1999) 99; Totaro (2000) 138–139; Hall (2013) 277–278, 285–287, 293; Corbel-Morana (2012), especially 88–136, 143–167. More broadly on the use of such animal symbolisms in the folk tradition worldwide see Benavides (2010) with many further references.

66. For a handy survey of fables in Archaic Greek poetry see van Dijk (1997) 127–134, 138–168, with opulent bibliography; see also Lasserre (1984); Adrados (1999) 240–271;

Beyond these associations with the repertoire of fables, it may be assumed more generally that this kind of animal typology had deep roots in the collective imaginary of the Greek people.

It is precisely this network of popular symbolisms that Aristophanes projects on the metamorphoses of his Nephelai, with a view to satirizing the vices of his contemporary Athenians. In this way, the comic poet exploits the materials of fairytale and folk fantasy in order to mock a series of well-known figures of his city; and it is noteworthy that most of these ridiculed figures were taking an active part in political life. Thus, the personified Clouds, thanks to their capacity of metamorphosis, become a mythopoeic emblem of the polymorphous art of comedy; like Aristophanes' work, the Nephelai use mimetic forms in order to visually depict and humorously criticize the wrongdoings of public statesmen.[67]

Following this tactics of satiric allegory, the cloud goddesses see Hieronymus the son of Xenophantus, a shaggy poet notorious for his headstrong pursuit of sex and unrestrained erotic appetites, and assume the appearance of Centaurs, who were emblematic of lewdness and lechery. In front of Simon, the embezzler of public money, they turn into wolves and thus render visible in the sky the man's greed and rapacity. If the Nephelai meet the cowardly Cleonymus, who tried to avoid military duty and was taunted for throwing his shield away in order to flee the battlefield, they become swift-footed and timorous deer. Finally, in view of the effeminate Cleisthenes, they immediately put on a female shape and become women.[68]

Much of this imagery is either directly copied from the repertoire of Greek animal fables or fashioned in accordance with Aesopic generic practices. The Aristophanic wolf symbolizes avidity and greed, like his equivalent in the fable corpus. The deer is in the *Clouds* an emblem of faintheartedness and desertion, while in the Aesopic stories it represents more properly fatality and victimization, the fate of the wretched and feeble prey which cannot

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Holzberg (2002) 11–21. On possible interactions between fable and Homeric similes cf. Fränkel (1921) 70; Duchemin (1960) 397–399, 405, 414–415; Bonnafé (1984–1987) II 14–17; Lonsdale (1990) 18.

67. See Pucci (1960) 33; Hubbard (1991) 108–112; Lauriola (2010) 74–78, 83; and O'Regan (1992) 53–55, 169–170, who views the dramatized Clouds more broadly as representing language (*logos*) with its power of transformation and chameleonic freedom. Cf. Ambrosino (1983) 17–23 and Hubbard (1991) 89 for the Clouds as a semiotic code or system of signs; and see above, n. 58.

68. On the symbolisms and personal satirical references in this passage see the comments of Pucci (1960) 32–33; Dover (1968) 147–148; Sommerstein (1982) 179–180; Lauriola (2010) 76–77.

avoid its ultimate destruction at the hands of the powerful. Nevertheless, the deer that appear in the Greek fables often display also excessive fear, to the point of pusillanimity (e.g. fables 75, 76, 336, 341, 351); and they are regularly presented as taking flight and swiftly running away before their enemy (fables 74, 76, 77, 336, 351), exactly like Cleonymus, the cowardly fugitive from battle in the Aristophanic satirical gallery.[69]

The comic list also includes, next to the animals, a mythical being, the Centaur, as an emblem of lewdness. This particular creature of myth does not appear in the extant corpus of Greek fables. Nonetheless, several Aesopic stories feature mythical figures as characters, mostly gods and celebrated heroes (Zeus, Hermes, Apollo, Athena, Prometheus, Heracles, Teiresias),[70] sometimes also fabulous monsters such as the Cyclops (fable 405) and the satyr (fable 467). These latter cases are close to the Centaurs' example in the Aristophanic text. The mythical personages of the fable generally retain the basic characteristics they have in the mythical tradition;[71] but frequently they are also subjected to the allegorical mechanism of the parable — just like the other characters of the Aesopic narratives, animals and humans — and represent ethical properties, moral defects, or typical manners of behaviour. Thus, Hermes embodies cunning and guile (fables 89, 103, 108, 309), but also vanity (fables 88, 307); Zeus is the emblem of supreme power and force (fables 102–104, 106–109, 240, 312, 313, 431); Apollo is a personification of haughtiness or arrogance (fables 104, 385); Heracles expresses the pinnacle of manly virtue and hardiness (fables 111, 291, 316). The monstrous beings undergo the same allegorical treatment. The Cyclops of fable 405, who amasses gold in his lair and slays himself out of despair when his treasure is stolen, stands for avarice and cupidity —a veritable Harpagon in giant's shape. The satyr of fable 467, who, upon seeing fire for the first time, thoughtlessly springs to embrace it, personifies the naive, unrestrained impulse of nature. In this respect, the use of the Centaurs in *Clouds* 350 as

69. Already in Homeric similes the deer is a cowardly animal which runs away out of fright; see e.g. *Iliad* 1.225, 4.243–246, 10.360–362, 11.113–119, 11.474–477, 13.101–104, 21.29, 22.1, 22.189–192; Fränkel (1921) 61–62, 64–65, 70, 85; Duchemin (1960) 404–406; Bonnafé (1984–1987) I 54–56, 66.

70. See fables 28, 61, 88, 89, 100, 102–111, 173, 174, 240, 266, 291, 301, 306, 307, 309, 312, 313, 316, 383, 385, 430–433, 442, 444, 455, 467.

71. For example, Zeus is the lord of the universe and master of the gods. Hermes is in Zeus' service and carries out his commands. Prometheus is associated with the human race, as a creator of humanity, and also with fire, which he steals. Apollo is an expert in prophecy, music, and archery. Aphrodite is the goddess of beauty and love. Teiresias has mantic powers, etc.

a symbol of another ethical vice conforms to the practice of the ancient fabulistic tradition.[72]

In short, by amalgamating the shape-shifter of *Märchen* with the allegory of Aesopic fable, Aristophanes harnesses the materials of the folk narrative tradition to the yoke of the iambic idea and the *onomasti kōmōidein*. Significantly, with the exception of Hieronymus, all the other *kōmōidoumenoi* of this passage were persons of political standing and known public activity.[73] Even the womanly Cleisthenes can be identified with an attested, wealthy and socially prominent Athenian citizen of the liturgical class and is reported to have served as a functionary or official of the *polis* at various times. Shortly before 422 B.C. this Cleisthenes was appointed a member of a sacred embassy (*theōria*), presumably an official state delegation to a great pan-Hellenic festival (*Wasps* 1187). Around the end of the Peloponnesian war he must have served as trierarch (*Frogs* 48–50). It was probably this same Cleisthenes who, at a later juncture in 411 B.C., played a prominent part in the purges against the oligarchic statesmen, after the fall of the short-lived regime of the Four Hundred. The speaker of Lysias 25.25–26 accuses Cleisthenes of having manipulated these purge trials in a most corrupt way, unjustly persecuting many citizens and causing great damage to the welfare of the city, in order to enrich himself.[74] Cleisthenes' forceful and passionate persecution of the oligarchs indicates that he was or posed as a strong adherent of radical democracy. In the same connection, it is perhaps significant that in the context of the aforementioned sacred embassy of around 422 Cleisthenes cooperated

72. The final element in the Clouds' quartet of mockery, the women reflecting the effeminate Cleisthenes, is not so much affiliated to the world of Aesopic fable (although ordinary men and women often appear as characters in the fable corpus); but it is dictated by the scenic appearance of the personified Clouds, whom Aristophanes wanted to bring on stage in the form of women.

73. As well observed by Lauriola (2010) 76–77 (cf. 176–180), by including Hieronymus, a representative of innovative dithyrambic poetry and music, in the list of *kōmōidoumenoi* alongside three corrupt politicians, Aristophanes implies a clear connection between bad poetry and political decline. This is, of course, a favourite theme of his, most prominently developed later in the *Frogs*.

74. See the enlightening summary of the evidence in Olson (2002) 109–110; cf. MacDowell (1971) 284–285; Dover (1993) 196; Austin – Olson (2004) 131; Biles – Olson (2015) 430. In view of this considerable network of indications about Cleisthenes' political connections and activities, I see no reason to follow the suggestion of Schwartz (1889) 121 and emend *Κλεισθένην* in Lysias 25.25 into *Κλειγένην*. Even though occasionally cited by Aristophanic commentators, such as MacDowell (1971) 285 and Sommerstein (1996) 218, Schwartz's speculation has not made its way into the text or the apparatus of the standard critical editions of Lysias.

with Androcles, a well-known demagogue of staunch democratic stance. Androcles, among other things, was heavily involved in the prosecution of Alcibiades for the profanation of the Mysteries and was instrumental in causing Alcibiades' exile; for this reason, he was murdered by the oligarchs in 411 B.C. (Andocides 1.27; Thucydides 8.65.2). He and Cleisthenes thus seem to have belonged to the same ideological frame and political circles.

Cleisthenes' political position, as it emerges from the aforementioned data, seems hardly fortuitous in its comic context. The other two statesmen satirized in the Aristophanic passage, Simon and Cleonymus, were representatives of the same radical demagogic faction. In ancient sources they are repeatedly and closely associated, as comrades or collaborators, with the prime exponents of populist demagoguery: Cleon, Hyperbolus, and Theorus. In *Clouds* 399–400 both of them are joined with Theorus as paragons of perjury. Simon is known solely from such satirical passages of comedy, but Cleonymus' political activity is also otherwise attested. In a number of Attic inscriptions (IG I^3 61.34ff., 68.5ff., 69, between 428 and 425 B.C.) and literary sources (Andocides 1.27, referring to 415 B.C.) Cleonymus is recorded as having proposed decrees on important matters of Athenian foreign and internal policy: treatment of allied states, collection of the allies' tribute, rewards for information concerning the profanation of the Mysteries, and award of proxeny to a benefactor of the city. In *Acharnians* 844–847 Cleonymus is coupled with Hyperbolus as one of the most annoying personalities of the Agora; in *Wasps* 592ff. he is included in the same catalogue as Cleon and Theorus, the populists who flatter the poor jurors of the Heliaia. In *Knights* 956–958 he is portrayed as a loud-mouthed and greedy demagogue addressing the populace. It is clear from all these passages that Cleonymus was a radical democratic leader of the same stamp as Cleon. He may well have been one of Cleon's collaborators, the politicians who worked together with the chief demagogue for the reform of the allies' tribute in the mid-420s.[75]

Therefore, in Aristophanes' hands the fairytale image of the shape-shifter becomes another instrument for fulfilling the poet's broader political

75. On Simon see West (1935) 75–76; Sommerstein (1982) 179; Storey (2003) 216, 226, 343, 345; Olson (2014–2017) VIII.2 274–275. Apart from the *Clouds*, he is satirized as an embezzler of public money also in Eupolis fr. 235. Cf. Schol. on *Clouds* 351b (p. 89 Holwerda) and Suda σ 447, which attests that Simon's name became proverbial for rapacity: *καὶ παροιμία· Σίμωνος ἁρπακτικώτερος*. On Cleonymus see Sommerstein (1982) 179–180; Schwertfeger (1982) 267–270; Storey (1989); MacDowell (1995) 23–25; Totaro (2000) 48–49, 138; Olson (2002) 100; Ornaghi (2008); Griffith (2012) 279–280; Olson (2014–2017) VIII.3 69–70.

programme: namely, to attack the faction of the hateful Cleon and the other leaders of radical democracy, who were largely administering state power in Athens during those times. It should be remembered that, apart from the embezzlement of public money, defection from battle and effeminacy were also counted in ancient Athens as offences of political gravity. Military desertion or illegal avoidance of war service was naturally a crime serious enough to deprive the guilty subject of his civic rights. So was also passive homosexuality, at least under certain circumstances —if a man prostituted himself, or was hired out for prostitution to another male, or adopted a submissive sexual role that was considered shameful and unworthy of a citizen. The Athenian male who placed himself in the passive, submissive position of a woman was irremediably dishonoured.[76] It is noteworthy that the Attic comic poets regularly attribute passive homosexuality, sometimes (but not necessarily) accompanied by self-prostitution, to the demagogues who are active in the Assembly, the lawcourts, and the political life; it is as though being a "pathic" were a standard quality of Athenian politicians, in particular of the leaders of radical democracy, such as Cleon.[77] These satirical passages bring out, through comic exaggeration and reversal, the political weight that the accusation of effeminacy would carry in the eyes of Attic audiences. Generally, in the opinion of the large Athenian public, both desertion and effeminacy would appear synonymous with political corruption and incompetence.

In this way, Aristophanes effectively politicizes a piece of the popular imaginary; he invests a widespread mythical and fairytale motif with political content and significance, turning it into a satirical weapon against the corrupt demagogues of Athens. Seen from this angle, the brief passage from the *Clouds* offers an emblematic synopsis of one of the most distinctive poetic methods of Aristophanic fiction. As I have argued in a number of recent studies and lectures, the trademark of Aristophanic comedy is the politicization

76. On avoidance of military service, cowardice, and desertion from battle see Andocides 1.74; Lysias 10.9, 10.12, 10.21, 14.5–8; Aeschines 1.28–29, 3.175–176; Demosthenes 15.32, 21.58, 24.102–104, 59.27; Isocrates 8.143; Harrison (1968–1971) II 205; Hansen (1976) 55–56, 66, 72, 79, 83, 91; MacDowell (1978) 160, 174; Schwertfeger (1982) 264–273, 278–280; Rainer (1986) 95–99; Storey (1989) 248, 258–259. On passive homosexuality, sexual submission, and prostitution see Andocides 1.100; Aeschines 1.13, 1.19–20, 1.27–28, 1.40, 1.87, 1.119, 1.134, 1.154, 1.160, 1.164, 1.188, 1.195; Demosthenes 22.24, 22.29–30, 22.53, 22.73, 22.77, 24.181. Cohen (1991) 171–202 offers the most illuminating analysis. Cf. also Harrison (1968–1971) I 37–38, II 172; Hansen (1976) 65–66, 74, 93; MacDowell (1978) 126; Dover (1978) 19–42, 106–109; Rainer (1986) 95–97, 106–114; Fileni (2012) 84.

77. See e.g. *Acharnians* 77–79, 664, 716; *Knights* 78, 377–381, 423–428, 878–880, 1242; *Clouds* 1089–1094; *Ecclesiazusae* 112–113; Eupolis fr. 104; Plato Comicus fr. 202; Dover (1978) 140–148; Fileni (2012) 84.

of the materials of magical fairytale. The comic poet often reworks patterns, motifs, and storylines from magical *Märchen*, but not for the simple escapist pleasure of fantasy, as seems to have been the case with the fairytale comedies of Crates and Pherecrates. Rather, Aristophanes blends the stuff of the *Märchenkomödie* with caustic criticism of public figures and burning issues of the *polis*, and thus retells Athenian political reality in the guise of a fairy story. The fantastic conceptions of the popular imaginary and the magical folktales become the aesthetic means for the scenic presentation of the poet's topical satire and ideological messages.[78]

Aristophanes usually applies this method to large-scale episodes of his works, such as the trial of the dogs in the *Wasps*, or even to the entire plot of a play, as in the *Peace*. But he may also politicize single fairytale motifs, which supply short individual passages within his texts, in the form of incidental jokes, memorable images, or auxiliary similes. The description of the shape-shifting Nephelai in *Clouds* 340–355 is exactly such an example, which displays Aristophanes' characteristic practice as though in a vignette or a miniature. In Shakespearean terms, we see here the infinite space of Aristophanic comedy bounded in a nutshell.[79]

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78. See Konstantakos (2017a), (2017b), (2017c), and Konstantakos (forthcoming).
79. Cf. *Hamlet* 2.2.256–257.

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NATIONAL AND KAPODISTRIAN UNIVERSITY OF ATHENS
iokonstan@phil.uoa.gr