

Philocleon at the Banquet in Aristophanes' *Wasps*: The First Known European Case of Sundown Syndrome?

The first two-thirds of Aristophanes' *Wasps* show a high degree of dramatic unity, suffused with comedic satire and exaggeration. Themes include interplay among the *demos*, socioeconomic classes, jury, and οἶκος; the latter entails a father (Philocleon) and son (Bdelycleon) quarreling about the populist politician Cleon (see, *inter alios*, Konstan, 1985; Crichton 1991; Bowie, 1997; Pütz, 2007; Hutchinson, 2011). This unity is retained even after Bdelycleon arranges a mock trial in the family courtyard. However, the banqueting scene after the trial, culminating in an inebriated Philocleon displaying obscene language and behavior toward a flute girl (1341-5), has led to scholarly concerns about triviality and disunity (e.g., Biles and Olson, 2015).

One potentially unifying feature is the development of Aristophanes' characterization of Philocleon through the course of the play. Philocleon's rationales for earning his regular three-obol pay for jury duty wins the support of his daughter (607) and wife (610), along with like-minded chorus members. Philocleon's discomfort with unfamiliar symposiastic garments (1126-1150) would merit sympathy from non-elite Athenians. Aristophanes is also broadly consistent with some of Philocleon's less endearing features, most notably a proclivity toward violence, as in desiring to go to the law courts "to do something bad" (322 κακόν τι ποιῆσαι) (Dover, 1972).

For these reasons, the striking changes in Philocleon's behavior later in the play appear credible. Early on, Xanthias, an enslaved member of the household, explains to the audience that Bdelycleon treats Philocleon's jury obsession as an illness (70 νόσος ... νοσεῖ). Xanthias uses the same term to describe issues with gambling (75 φιλόκυβον) and drinking (80 φιλοπότην). Bdelycleon compels his father to spend a night at the temple of Asclepius at Aegina, to no avail

(121-123; see Laes, 2019) and later locks him into the house. Although Philocleon blends in with other jurors once he escapes, concerns, fed by Bdelycleon, lurk in the background.

The audience should thus not be surprised when the situation changes markedly during the mock symposium. Philocleon still recognizes his surroundings and is demonstrably himself, although he realizes that he will not return to the courtroom as a juror (1337-1340). He experiences a loss of household authority and is guarded like a child (1355 νέος γάρ εἰμι καὶ φυλάττομαι σφόδρα; see Crichton, 1991). In terms of personality, his threats now extend to barbecuing his opponents with a torch (1331-2). The term describing his state of mind is the stronger *μανία* (1487 and 1496) instead of *νόσος*.

Literary evidence, including Cicero's later *De Senectute*, and statistics from life tables have left scholars, most recently Caleb Finch and Stanley Burstein (2024), reluctant to use "dementia" in connection with this period. Nevertheless, the depiction of Philocleon in *Wasps* should lead us to reconsider this supposition. Philocleon's symptomatic behavior is most similar to "sundown syndrome," a description originating in 1987 based on clinical observations showing the symptoms of elderly patients appearing or worsening in the evening (Angulo Sevilla 2018). Alexandre Boronat *et al.* observe in their scoping review of the medical literature (2019) that other signs of dementia do not always reveal themselves in patients with sundown syndrome, and studies are inconclusive as to whether people presenting only with sundown syndrome will eventually develop other markers of dementia. We may compare David Konstan's similar uncertainty (1985) as to whether Philocleon's symptomatic aberrations are likely to recur.

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