

## Male Stage-Nudity in Aristophanes

How many of the male characters in extant plays of Aristophanes appeared stage-nude? How do we know? These questions are prompted by considering the material evidence for performance of Greek Old and Middle Comedy. By one calculation (Hughes 2006: 46), twenty percent of all male figures on surviving comic vases are stage-nude, that is, wearing only the padded comic bodysuit, phallus, and mask. The proportion is higher among earlier depictions and decreases throughout the first half of the fourth century. Should we expect a corresponding amount of male stage nudity in the extant plays of Aristophanes? Although there has been quite a bit of scholarly discussion about the nudity of *female* characters such as Reconciliation in *Lysistrata* (Zweig 1992; see Stone 1981: 147-50 with further bibliography), the prevalence of *male* stage-nudity has not been adequately examined. The default assumption of scholars has been that male characters are wearing standard Athenian clothing, namely a tunic (*chiton* or *exomis*) and cloak (e.g., *himation* or *tribon*). This paper will first identify scenes in Aristophanes in which brief male stage-nudity is certain or likely. Then I will consider the possibility of more extensive stage-nudity in *Knights* and *Peace*, two plays that make virtually no mention of their protagonists' clothes.

Temporary stage-nudity can be identified with certainty when the text indicates explicitly that both layers of the character's clothing are removed. The fullest example occurs in *Lysistrata*, where both male and female semi-choruses explicitly state that they are removing both layers of clothing (*Lys.* 615, 637, 662, 686). Another character left completely naked is the slave at *Birds* 934-48, after Peisetaerus commands him to take off both his *spolas* and his *chiton* to give to the poet. Sometimes when the text indicates that a character removes his cloak, it is not clear how many layers he wore to begin with, and therefore how naked he is upon removal of the cloak.

Since vase-painting presents us with multiple examples of a character wearing only a *himation* without a tunic underneath, we should reconsider whether the same could be true—and therefore whether brief stage-nudity occurs—in these Aristophanic scenes: Euripides' Relative in *Thesmophoriazusae* takes off his *himation* to put on the female *krokotos* and *enkyklon* (213-61); in *Wasps* 1122-46 Philocleon at his son's urging removes his *tribonion* in order to put on a fancier *chlaina*; and at *Clouds* (497) Strepsiades is commanded to take off his *himation* before he enters the Thinkery.

But the material evidence suggests more than these brief moments of stage nudity. Several vases (for example, *PhV*<sup>2</sup> 37, 38, 49, 118, plus both Goose Play vases) depict entire scenes in which multiple stage-nude male characters participate. Can we find evidence of such practice in Aristophanes? The likeliest candidates are *Knights* and *Peace*, two plays in which there is a conspicuous absence of reference to clothing worn by their protagonists. In *Knights*, only two passages refer to clothing. First, at 881-93, the dueling Sausage-Seller and Paphlagon each offer clothing for Demus, whom the Sausage-Seller observes is “without chiton” (881). The only other reference comes at the play's conclusion, when Demus appears in new clothing (1331) and offers a robe to the Sausage-Seller (1406). Given the play's relentless focus on bodily grotesquerie and violent physical attacks, a performance dominated by stage-nude characters would be thematically consistent and also rather practical. Likewise, the text of *Peace* does not refer once to any clothing worn by its protagonist Trygaeus (although stage-props play a significant role). The only significant clothing mentioned in the play is the *phoinix*, a crimson military cloak, which is mentioned twice (303, 1173) only to stress that it has no place in this play. While the advantages of imagining Trygaeus stage-nude are less clear than in the case of *Knights*, stage-nudity could help to convey the pan-Hellenic spirit of *Peace*. While particular

clothing might suggest a specific social class or citizenship status, Trygaeus if depicted stage-nude can function more generally in his capacity as comic character.

### Bibliography

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