

Scapegoat Ritual and Aristophanes' *Wealth*

I argue that scapegoat (φαρμακός) ritual is responsible for certain plot episodes and character traits in Aristophanes' *Wealth*. My argument rests on four features of the play: the similarity of Wealth's and Poverty's roles to the roles of a scapegoat ritual attested by Plutarch; the similarity of Wealth to Sophocles' Oedipus, who acts as a scapegoat; Cario's threat to throw the initially uncooperative Wealth from a cliff, a fate common for scapegoats; and Chremylus' related threat to throw Poverty into the pit at Athens.

Scapegoat rituals were practiced annually at the Thargelia in fourth-century Athens, and Plutarch provides a later parallel from his hometown (*Quaest. conv.* 6.8.1). This ritual has been linked with Aristophanes' play because it involves the god Wealth (Bowie 1993), but its full import as a scapegoat ritual has not been explored. The ritual cast a slave in the role of Boulimos, Hunger, and drove him out of the house to the chant of 'Out with Hunger; in with Wealth and Health!' (Faraone 2004). Aristophanes presents Poverty as a character analogous to Plutarch's Hunger. She is driven offstage and out of the polis (598-609). This final expulsion is prefaced not only with physical force but also with language that strongly emphasizes exclusion (430, 462-65). The character Wealth, by contrast, is rehabilitated and welcomed in, just as Plutarch's Wealth/Health (1191-93).

Beyond this parallel, there are other indications of the importance of scapegoat ritual for the play. For instance, several of Wealth's character traits link him with Sophocles' Oedipus, as he appears in both *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Oedipus at Colonus* (Compton-Engle 2013). In particular, Wealth is blind and guided by others (13), old (265-67), wretched (80, 266), and heralded by the oracle of Apollo (8-10, 39-43). Several scholars have noted the importance of scapegoating for Sophocles' Oedipus plays (Vernant 1978, Pucci 1990, Foley 1993). Vernant

focuses on Oedipus' oscillation between expelled victim and divine savior. Oedipus' experience, therefore, provides an example of how Plutarch's Hunger and Wealth/Health might be subsumed into one character, a scapegoat who can later act as savior. The outward similarity of Aristophanes' character Wealth to Oedipus, then, suggests Wealth's positive ritual role. Poverty plays the equal and opposite role within the same ritual complex.

Two other passages highlight the importance of scapegoating for this play. The first comes before Wealth takes on his positive role. At first, he won't tell Chremylus and Cario who he is, so Cario threatens to throw him from a cliff (67-70). Being thrown from a cliff is a common fate for scapegoats in various sources (Str. 10.2.9, Suda s.v. περίψημα, *Vita Aesopi* G 128). The second comes when Poverty, who will play the more negative role of expelled scapegoat, is threatened with a similar fate: being thrown into the pit (βάραθρον) at Athens (431). The pit was an archaic form of capital punishment closely associated with scapegoating and sacrifice (Thür 1990, Rosenbloom 2002).

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