ARISTOPHANES IN EARLY-MODERN FRAGMENTS: LE LOYER'S LA NÉPHÉLOCOCUGIE (1579) AND RACINE'S LES PLAIDEURS (1668)

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Although Aristophanes was well known, in name at least, from the Renaissance onward, his work did not enjoy a very active reception in France before the very end of the eighteenth century. The sidelining of Aristophanic Old Comedy, with its bawdy and political *ad hominem* attacks, is easily accounted for by the triumph of a competing model. New Comedy, instantiated by the plays of Terence and Plautus, was used by theoreticians and practitioners alike to redefine comedy in France after the demise of medieval farce. Its predominance remained remarkably constant in theory and practice from Sebillet's *Art poétique françois* (1548) and Jodelle's *Eugène* (1553), to d'Aubignac *La Pratique du Théâtre* (1657) and Molière's *L'Avare* (1668). Half-way through the seventeenth century, tragic playwrights such as Corneille and Racine turned to Greek models -- in particular Sophocles and Euripides -- to redefine neoclassical tragedy in opposition to tragicomedy and earlier Seneca-inspired plays. There was, however, no shift of this kind for comedy, and Aristophanes' influence remained all but negligible. Throughout the period, only two extant comedies, written at an interval of ninety years, took one of Aristophanes' plays as a source of inspiration: Le Loyer's *Néphélococugie* (1579) and Racine's *Les Plaideurs* (1668). Nothing could be more different than the circumstances and times in which the two plays were composed, their dramatic structure, or their tone. On the face of it, the only common factor between the two texts is that they were written by Hellenists who decided to draw their inspiration from Aristophanes' *Birds* and *Wasps,* respectively. Yet, drawn into sharp relief by the differences between the plays, there is a commonality of technique. Neither play can be considered a translation, but in each case, translated fragments of the ancient play were fitted in the new. In other words, translated old material was broken up and interspersed with new plot twists and topical references, so that in both cases

Aristophanes' text is much more than a general source of inspiration; it is a definite presence. This chapter first endeavors to compare Le Loyer's and Racine's attitude towards Aristophanes as it is expressed in the forewords to their plays, before exploring this fragmented reception at work first in Le Loyer's *La Nephelococugie* and then in Racine's *Les Plaideurs*.

Fragmented Reception: Le Loyer's and Racine's Handling of Aristophanes

In his foreword "to the erudite and benevolent reader" (*Au Docte et Benevole Lecteur*), Le Loyer proudly placed his endeavor under the aegis of Orpheus, "bringing Old Comedy as though back from the tomb, and trying to have her live again among the French" (*Ramenant comme du Tombeau la vieille Comedie et essayant de la faire revivre entre les François*).[1] He justified the mixture of "sweet wantonness" (*gentillesses lascives*) and "grave erudition" (*choses serieuses et doctes*)[2] that can be found in his play through imitation: "in this I have imitated a Greek poet who very nearly handled the same argument as I did. The Greek I talk of is the Comic Aristophanes, whose writings you know well, seeing how prized he is and how highly he is placed" (*J'ay imité en cecy un Poëte Grec, qui a traitté peu s'en faut pareil argument au mien. Le Grec que je dis c'est Aristophane Comique, les Escriptz duquel te sont assez connuz, veu le pris qu'on en faict et le degré où ilz sont colloquez*).[3] He goes on to add, however, that he did not bring back his old Eurydice whole. He selected the good bits, "cutting and discarding the corrupted parts" (*en couppant et trenchant ce qu'elle avoit de vitieux*).[4]

Racine's strategy in his foreword to the reader (*Au lecteur*) is radically different. Talking about imitation would imply that Aristophanes is a model, and Racine chose to deny him that status. He claimed instead that he had only translated some of Aristophanes' witticisms,[5] adding that he would have gladly chosen Terence or Menander as a source of inspiration, had he not been

[1] Le Loyer (2004) 78. All translations in this chapter are my own.
[2] Le Loyer (2004) 71.
[3] Le Loyer (2004) 71.
[4] Le Loyer (2004) 78.
[5] Racine (2006) 35.

persuaded by friends to present "a sample of Aristophanes"[6]:

> Mon inclination ne me porterait pas à le prendre pour modèle si j'avais à faire une comédie ; [...] la régularité de Ménandre et de Térence me semblait bien plus glorieuse et même plus agréable à imiter, que la liberté de Plaute et d'Aristophane [...] mais enfin je traduis Aristophane et l'on doit se souvenir qu'il avait affaire à des Spectateurs assez difficiles. Les Athéniens savaient apparemment ce que c'était que le sel attique, et ils étaient sûrs quand ils avaient ri de quelque chose qu'ils n'avaient pas ri d'une sottise.
>
> My inclination would not have been to choose him [Aristophanes] as my model if I had a comedy to write; […] imitating the rule-abiding Menander and Terence seemed to me far more reputable and agreeable even, than the license of Plautus and Aristophanes… but I am translating Aristophanes, and it is worth remembering that his Spectators were hard to please. Athenians must have known what the Attic salt was, and when they had laughed at something they were certain that they had not laughed at nonsense.[7]

Calling his play a translation rather than an imitation was a way for Racine to avoid positioning himself as the Aristophanes of his day and age. Instead, he cunningly presented his comedy as an experiment conducted to see whether the Parisian audience of his time was as witty as Aristophanes' fellow Athenians. Whereas Le Loyer called his play "imitation" and thus placed it under the authority of the Aristophanic model, Racine distanced himself from the unorthodox ancient playwright, and described his comedy primarily as an attempt to translate Aristophanes' jokes.

Both imitation and translation are notions that Le Loyer and Racine inherited from the Humanists' interaction with ancient texts at the Renaissance. In France, the rediscovery of ancient literature gave rise to a number of literary quarrels, from Le Loyer's mid-sixteenth century to Racine's late seventeenth century, debating whether new authors writing in modern languages would ever successfully emulate the splendor of ancient literature. The question was first answered in the affirmative in the case of the French language by the *Pléiade*, an association of nine like-minded Hellenists, poets and playwrights, counting Ronsard, du Bellay, and Jodelle in their ranks, and who were Le Loyer's contemporaries and friends. In the manifesto of the *Pléiade*

[6] Racine (2006) 33.
[7] Racine (2006) 34-5.

movement, *Défense et illustration de la langue française* (1549), du Bellay summarized Humanist theories of imitation and translation, and defined the core difference between imitation and translation with the help of Quintilian's categories of rhetoric.[8] At the heart of eloquence, there is *inventio*, finding what to write, and then *elocutio*, finding how to write it. If imitation entails finding new *elocutio* to fit ancient *inventio*, translation has the thankless task of preserving both *inventio* and *elocutio*, handling the same material in exactly the same way, without the freedom of reformulation. This clearly defines translation and imitation as opposites. Yet, later in the *Défense et illustration de la langue française*, du Bellay reminds fellow authors that they should only ever imitate works written in other languages. Imitation's only goal is to enrich the vernacular; imitating works written in French would mean trying to endow the French language with what already belonged to it.[9] This literary patriotism adds a necessarily trans-linguistic dimension to imitation, of which Le Loyer shows himself to be keenly aware in 1579, when he presented his imitation of Aristophanes as an attempt to "serve you [reader] and serve France, to whom I ought to give back however little erudition I have, as a faithful debtor; I pay her back, and will as long as I have life."[10] Translation and imitation are thus both opposite and complementary concepts.

The term "imitation," however, has long faded out of contemporary terminologies. The word now most often used in relation and opposition to translation is "adaptation." The change is a telling one. Imitation, as Racine stated very clearly in his foreword, presupposes a model; its ideal is to create a literary analogy whereby the new work reaches a similar level of excellence as the imitated work, while the new author achieves a similar status as the imitated author. An adaptation, however, presupposes that the text as it is does not fit a particular audience or medium, and adapting is the process that will give it what it lacks for its reception to be a successful one. An imitator aspires at sameness; an adapter's aim is to make changes. The technique and even the result of

[8] Du Bellay (1930) 51. For an analysis of Humanist imitation and translation theory, see Cave (1979).
[9] Du Bellay (1930) 59.
[10] Le Loyer (2004) 78.

adaptation and imitation may be comparable (the task is after all to keep some and change some), but the implied hierarchy between old and new is reversed.

In the case at hand, both early-modern and contemporary terminologies would be misleading. Le Loyer's and Racine's strategic presentation of their play as, respectively, an imitation and a translation in no way reflects how much or how little they have altered the Aristophanic source-text. According to modern philological standards, neither is a translation; but *La Néphélococugie*, presented as an imitation by its author, has a greater claim to the label translation than *Les Plaideurs*, despite Racine's contention that he translated Aristophanes. Yet, in both plays, some passages undeniably are translation-like reworkings of the ancient text. Reception of an ancient text could be seen, following Le Loyer's cue, as a trick of literary necromancy -- an author raises an old text from the dead by giving it new words. Many terms are used to describe or advertise a certain degree of proximity or distance between the ancient work and the new: imitation, adaptation or translation, but also version, re-working, or even looser phrases like "after" or "inspired by." However, in order to understand what kind of reception is at work here, it may be more telling to focus on the technique, rather than try to label the result. Beyond the opposite strategies presiding to their forewords, what Le Loyer and Racine describe in each case is a process of fragmentation; they have selected scenes and cut offending parts. Presenting the result as somewhere between translation (close to the source text) and imitation or adaptation (further away from the source text) would hint at a stable relation, implying the same degree of either freedom or faithfulness throughout the work. What is immediately striking for these two plays is that such homogeneity does not exist. Some passages closely translate the Aristophanic source-text while others introduce entirely new material. The source-play is broken up, new bits fitted in the gaps, with some parts of the original left out altogether, and others diverted from their original use. Not unlike the New Testament "grain of wheat" in John 12:20-33, the ancient plays gave new textual life through a process of dissolution; they had to "die," or rather be opened up, for a new work to

emerge. *Les Plaideurs* and *La Néphélococugie* examplify this fragmentation process in two very different ways.

Le Loyer chose to follow the pattern of Old Comedy, explaining in his preface that, at the time of Aristophanes, plays were not divided into scenes but followed a rhythmic pattern of "choruses, parabases, epirrhema." In a second foreword entitled "To the same reader, a note of warning" (*Au même lecteur, avertissement*) and presumably written after the play had circulated for a time, he forcefully stood by his choice of actually labelling his character's speeches "parabasis," "strophe," or "epirrhema," and refusing to use the usual scene system, even as he pointed out that some of his readers derided him behind his back for doing so.[11] Le Loyer thus preserved the composition of *Birds* and reflected its metric complexity by the use of mixed meter. The plot, however, he subtly but radically altered. His birds are not any birds but "cocus," which in sixteenth-century French could still mean either the breed of birds (in modern French *coucou*) or betrayed husbands. At the start of Le Loyer's play, two old men fly from unfaithful wives to find peace in the more congenial realm of cuckoos / cuckolds.

Racine, on the contrary, preserved exactly the main plot of Aristophanes' *Wasps* up to 1008ff. A son tries to convince his father to put a stop to the old man's passion for passing sentences, and then organizes a domestic trial as a substitute for real public ones. Yet, just as he preserved the plot, Racine gave his play an un-Aristophanic three-act structure and an added love subplot, since the son of the demented judge is in love with the daughter of a rabidly litigious neighbor. The judicial theme merges Old Comedy material and New Comedy narrative in order to fulfill the generic expectations of seventeenth-century audiences. In each case, beyond changes in structure or plot, a number of ancient fragments can be clearly delineated, even as they are given new meaning and new dramatic function.

Fragments and fragmentation bring to mind through association the idea of a collision

[11] Le Loyer (2004) 75.

between an ancient text and new tastes, as the ancient text resonates with other more recent textual traditions. Le Loyer's and Racine's plays have one of these modern references in common. The later part of Rabelais' oeuvre, *The Third Book*, *The Fourth Book* and *The Fifth Book* (*Tiers livre*, *Quart livre* and *Cinquième livre*) (1554) are used by both authors as a linguistic and imaginative medium allowing them to handle Aristophanes' highly sexualized and satirical sense of the burlesque. This is particularly prevalent in Le Loyer's *La Néphélococugie*, but Rabelais is also, and more surprisingly perhaps, present as one of the relays that Racine used to make sense of Aristophanes' *Wasps* in his own farce.

Le Loyer's Farcical Utopia: To Resuscitate and To Redress

In 1579, Pierre Le Loyer, seigneur de la Brosse, published *La Comédie Néphélococugie*[12]*, ou la Nuée des Cocus, non moins docte que facétieuse* in a volume comprising various poetic works. He was born in 1550, and first studied the humanities for five years in Paris before leaving for Toulouse to take a course in law, possibly around 1570. He then went back to Paris, where his first two collections of poems and plays were published in 1576 and 1579, respectively. By 1584, he was a judge (*Conseiller*) at the Tribunal (*Présidial*) in Angers, where he lived until his death in 1634.[13] Beside his legal career, he was also a prolific and eclectic humanist writer, a poet in his early years, and a specialist in demonology and biblical exegesis later in life. A formidable linguist, Le Loyer knew Hebrew, as well as Latin and ancient Greek.

La Néphélococugie was not his first foray into the writing of comedy. In *The Mute Fool* (1576) (*Le Muet insensé*), a lovelorn student solicits the help of a magician to seduce his ladylove with fair speeches. Unfortunately, there is no way of knowing whether either play was ever performed. In the preface to the *Néphélococugie*, Le Loyer states that he showed the manuscript to

[12] "Néphélococugie" is a French transcription of the name of the city built by the birds in Aristophanes' play, Νεφελοκοκκυγία. The spelling twist from "coccygie" to "cocugie" reflects Le Loyer's main transformation of the plot, in which birds become cuckoos/cuckolds.
[13] Le Loyer (2004) 12.

friends who persuaded him to publish "this comedy, or rather this pastime from my youth."[14] Since the publication in 1579 was a Parisian one, it seems probable that the friends mentioned here were Parisian acquaintances. Yet, in the play itself, the two main characters leave Toulouse behind, not Paris or Athens, to look for the city of cuckolds, so it would seem that the play was composed five to ten years before the date of its publication, during Le Loyer's law studies in the South of France. Now, law students had been renowned since the thirteenth century for putting on shows. The *Basoche*, a playful abbreviation of the word *Basilique*, was the name given to guilds of clerks who organized festivals and staged indoor plays. They were banned by Henry III as late as 1582, a full decade after Le Loyer's training as a clerk, so that it is tempting to imagine that Le Loyer's involvement with theater was not merely abstract. However, no record have been found proving that Le Loyer belonged to one of these guilds in Toulouse or elsewhere, and the *Néphélococugie* significantly differs in tone and subject matter from the morality plays favored by the Basochiens. So it is only a matter of conjecture, seeing the importance of acting in the guild, that an early version of the play may have been written and staged for an audience.[15] Le Loyer may have composed a first, presumably terser, version of the play for the *théâtre de la Basoche*, since Le Loyer's play, which is over 4000 lines long, is at least three times as long as Aristophanes' *Birds*. Later in Paris, Le Loyer would have had the leisure to add some of the pastiches and rhetorical *tours de force* that pepper the play. Performed or not, *La Néphélococugie* was, in any case, his only attempt at reviving an ancient play.

In his foreword, Le Loyer makes two parallel claims about the play. He starts confidently with the statement that its source of inspiration, Aristophanes, needs no introduction, since he is both well-known and highly thought of; and he ends with the boast that he is the first to try and bring the living form of Old Comedy back from the dead.[16] The first statement rings slightly hollow

[14] Le Loyer (2004) 71.
[15] Perret (1992) 26.
[16] Le Loyer (2004) 71.

in view of the dearth of translations and adaptations, but there is a trace of the *Pléiade*'s awareness of Aristophanic material, which may qualify Le Loyer's otherwise legitimate boast. A fragment corresponding to the first 264 lines of *Plutus* was first included in the complete works of Pierre Ronsard in the 1617 edition. Because of this late publication, it is difficult to date, and the rest of the play, if it was ever written, has not survived. It is surmised that Ronsard was given the task of imitating *Plutus* by Daurat, his Greek master and fellow member of the *Pléiade*.[17] The extract shows that important changes to the plot were contemplated, but an Aristophanic fragment in French may indeed have predated *La Néphélococugie*.

First or not, Le Loyer's resurrection of Aristophanes is particularly striking for its attention to the dramatic and metrical structures of Old Comedy. As mentioned earlier, he kept in his text the technical names of the parts of Old Comedy as the 1484 Alde Manuce edition presented them, such as the *parabasis*, *strophes*, or the *epirrhema*, and he carefully preserved metrical patterns. Since French poetry follows syllabic patterns and rhymes, Le Loyer varied verse lengths and rhyming schemes to translate Aristophanes' poetry, choosing for example the decasyllable to translate the iambic trimeters of the dialogues, and Alexandrines (lines of 12 syllables) for the longer tetrameters in the two *parabases*. In the lyrical passages, he used shorter hexameters, heptameters and octosyllables.[18] The new metric system he created to reflect metric variety in his Greek model is a feature that Le Loyer took pains to comment on and justify in a preface entirely dedicated to that question.[19] He obviously felt this aspect of his imitation was likely to be misunderstood. Lyrical homogeneity of meter was increasingly in favor with both poets and theoreticians of his time; plays wholly written in decasyllables or Alexandrines were preferred by the generation of the *Pléiade* to the mixed forms and shorter lines favored by the previous generation of poets, the *Rhétoriqueurs*.

Le Loyer does not exaggerate when he claims he has revived Old Comedy. Similarities

[17] Delcourt (1934) 3.
[18] See Le Loyer (2004) 297-305 for a complete correspondence between Le Loyer's metric system and Aristophanes'.
[19] Le Loyer (2004) 79.

between *Birds* and *La Néphélococugie* run deeper than meter. As Donald Perret showed in his analysis of the play, it is the agonistic structure of Old Comedy itself that Le Loyer preserved:

> The old comic structure does not build toward a climax; its distinguishable feature is not the telos, but rather the agon or verbal contest […] the question in the audience is never "how will it end" but "what will come next."[20]

His play engages not only with Aristophanic characters and situations, but also with poetic and dramatic rhythms.

Yet if Le Loyer's play revives Aristophanes so completely, how are we to understand his claim that he has cut and trimmed what was faulty in his model? The main elements of Aristophanic comedy that drew criticism from early-modern writers were the direct nominal attacks and the scurrility of his humor. In that they followed Plutarch, whose vision of Aristophanes is both recalled and deflected in Le Loyer's foreword who calls for the authority of John Chrysostom, Cicero, and Plato to support Aristophanes' cause. It is clear, however, that Le Loyer sets out to redress the virulent nature of Aristophanes' satire. This he does quite effectively through his choice of play, since *Birds* is rather less topical and ribald than other extant comedies. Through his transformation of the birds into a flock of *cocus*, he further reduces the political dimension of *Birds* to the merely private concern of two elderly husbands. Aristophanes' two main characters, Peisthetairos and Euelpides, leave Athens in a mock attempt to found a new colony. One of their main sources of discontent is Athenian litigiousness, and the city in the sky is clearly an anti-Athens. In the French play, Toulouse is simply a starting point, not the butt of satire, and the two characters, Genin and Cornard, leave because they are tired of being mocked and want to find other *cocus*. This switch from the political to the personal makes La *Néphélococugie* a play about adultery, the stock comic situation of medieval farce and Greek New Comedy.

This avoidance of overt political implications is all the more interesting as Le Loyer published the play in 1579, in the midst of a decades-long religious civil war. In the foreword, the

[20] Perret (1992) 37.

author endorses this choice of the "frivolous" (*folastre*) over the "grave," (*grave*), and Jacques Le Gras, an erudite friend of his whose laudatory sonnet features as one of the paratexts, praises him for the wisdom with which he has managed to avoid flattery without putting himself in danger. The sonnet associates wisdom with the fact of keeping one's mouth shut, in what may be a play on and a reversal of the title of Le Loyer's other comedy, *Le Muet insensé*. In this case, Le Loyer's choice to remain silent about the troubles of his time is wisdom, not folly, and the only way of avoiding both flattery and danger.[21] So however tempting it might have been to choose one of Aristophanes' peace comedies in the context of what is sometimes called the seventh religious war of the period, some seven years after the Saint-Bathélemy massacre, the author explicitly and prudently stresses in the paratexts that he has chosen to gladden the hearts of his readers.[22] Le Loyer's choice of *Birds* and his reticence concerning the troubled times in which he lived, is reflected in his characters' escape away from human troubles. His two characters take the reader with them into a long Humanist exploration where farce and erudition rub shoulders.

The paradoxical consequence in terms of reception is that Le Loyer replaces social satire by adding a fresh layer of licentiousness to a play rather less scurrilous than other Aristophanic comedies. In so doing, Loyer gives the reader a fragment of Aristophanes' comedies generally rather than specifically Aristophanes' *Birds*. Le Loyer adds numerous sexual jokes about cuckolds to his play, inspired by a conscious borrowing of Rabelaisian stylistic and comic devices providing the reader with the licentiousness expected of Old Comedy, but safely centering it on the stock motif of cheated husbands. This playful pitting together of Aristophanes and Rabelais is highlighted by Le Loyer at the very beginning of his play. In Aristophanes' *Birds*, Euelpides and Peisthetairos each have a bird that they bought at the market as guides to lead them to the hoopoe. One is a crow, and the other a jackdaw. In Le Loyer's play, the two old cuckolds, Genin and Cornard, are on their own and very lost. One tells the other, as a joke, to go and ask a crow for directions:

[21] Le Loyer (2004) 69.
[22] Le Loyer (2004) 83.

Genin: See this crow who never stops crowing?
Ask him our way, if you want.
Cornard: Stop making fun of me

Another guide is immediately chosen:

Genin : Voy ce Corbeau qui croasse sans fin,
Demande-luy si tu veuz, le chemin.

[…] En mon esprit un moyen m'est venu,
Dont j'apprendray ce chemin inconnu:
Divin flascon qui tiens la douce goutte,
Entre en ma bouche et m'asseure du doubte,
De ces chemins incertains et divers!
[...] O le bon vin, le vin a une oreille!
Je sens desja que je diray merveille

Genin: A means has come to my mind
how to find the way we lost
this holy flask holding sweet dew
slide between my lips and dispel my doubts
about the many uncertain ways
...
Such good wine, it has an ear!
I can already feel that I will say wonders[23]

Le Loyer jokes with his reader that the proper French guide is not a bird but the *dive bouteille* ("divine bottle"). This is a pointedly Rabelaisian joke, since "divine bottle" is the name of the oracle that Pantagruel and his friends, Panurge and Frère Jean, visit at the end of Rabelais' posthumous *Fifth Book*. Rabelais' divine bottle functions both as a farcical element and as an allegory. When Panurge is led by the prophetess Bacbuc to the oracle, the invocation itself takes the shape of a bottle; conversely, when he fails to understand the oracle, he is given a silver flask in the shape of a book to help him with his deciphering. Replacing Arisophanes' guiding birds by Rabelais' *dive bouteille* is a humorous way of placing his own play under the auspices of Rabelais' injunction "Trinch," drink at the source of erudition. It also makes the point that the text is a multi-layered act of imitation open to a wide range of intertextual references, and it prepares the way for Le Loyer's first fragmentation of Aristophanes' play. Shortly after Genin found his way in the oracular wine, he launches into a long speech explaining why he and Cornard have left Toulouse. The beginning of

[23] Le Loyer (2004) 84-6.

the passage closely mirrors Euelpides' direct address to the spectators (*Birds* 30), when Cornard asks Genin to tell "spectators who have long desired to hear it," what it is that ails them.[24] However, this is followed in Le Loyer's play by some 140 lines in which Genin enlarges on the fickle nature of women and the bitter fate of cuckolds.[25] The main source for the character's misogynistic vituperations is clearly Hesiodic (inspired by the creation of Pandora in *Theogony* 570-610 and *Works and Days* 59-105), but, as Doe and Cameron make amply clear in the preface to their 2004 edition of the play, the text resonates with Virgilian and Ovidian echoes: the sin of women is as deeply rooted as the elm in *Georgics* II, 291-292 or the oak in *Aeneid* IV, 445-446; the evils they are responsible for teem as ants on an anthill or bees on a flower (Ovid, *Ars Amatoria* I, 93-96).[26] The erudition displayed here is highly tongue-in-cheek; the image of the powerfully rooted tree is at odds with the moral corruption it is meant to illustrate, and the Ovidian quote reflects playfully on Genin's denunciation of womanly sins, since the same images were used by Ovid in *The Art of Love* precisely to describe the throng of available women who gather in theatres. Le Loyer's virtuoso approach to intertextuality explains how it is that while he followed the unfolding of the ancient play faithfully, his own comedy is 4046 line-long to *Wasps*' 1537 lines; and despite its playful sophistication, the passage makes poor sense in strict dramatic terms. In a staging of the play, this long speech would mean that the two actors would have to either stand still or walk back and forth for a long general development about female wantonness which advances neither plot nor character development. In marked contrast with the very beginning of the play, or the first encounter with Jean Cocu (the Tereus of *Birds*), this speech seems written for the erudite reader, rather than for the spectator. This could be interpreted as a hint that Le Loyer wrote different versions of his comedy: the first for performance, the second for the pleasure of the "Docte et bénévole Lecteur" to which he addressed his play in the 1579 preface.

[24] Le Loyer (2004) 87
[25] Le Loyer (2004) 87-94
[26] Le Loyer (2004) 19.

Genin's bombastic vituperation against women is an example of the source play bursting at the seams, to allow for non-Aristophanic fragments to be inserted in the interstices. Other passages are closely imitated from the source text but given new meaning. For instance, Le Loyer turns the first parabasis, whose rhetorical and dramatic function was unlikely to be familiar to readers or spectators, into an immediately recognizable satirical encomium redolent of Erasmus' *Praise of Folly* (1511). Le Loyer uses the theory of humors to justify the couple formed by the cold and lymphatic Jean Cocu and the hot-blooded crested quail (*Caille coiffée*). In the ancient myth, Tereus' wife was Procne, the nightingale, and in Aristophanes the part of the nightingale is played by a non-speaking flute player. Le Loyer, on the contrary, transforms the melodious nightingale into a *caille* (quail) -- a word also used to designate prostitutes -- and gives her both an important speaking part and a role in his cuckold allegory.[27] The quail sings the praise of prostitution, and her position is doubly fitting: not only because as her husband, Jean Cocu might indeed be considered as the king of cuckolds, but also because as the queen of cuckolds, she presents prostitution as an institution which protects old married men from adulterous young bucks who might otherwise have shown too much interest in their younger wives. Their civilizing influence is described as universal. Prostitutes rein in the folly of youth; they regulate the passions of young men and help control their appetites and the violence of their lust; but the sexual release they provide is also presented as having beneficial effects on the whole temperament, so that men eventually become less cruel in their dealings with both men and women.[28]

Le Loyer thus turns the *parabasis* into a paradoxical praise of prostitution, and at the same time builds his farcical mythology, playing with bird names and their double meanings. In a world where men are cuckoos, women are quails. It is exactly such a world which is described at the end of the play, as soon as the Utopian *cité des cocus* has been built. A herald describes the world as it was

[27] The city of birds is often taken as an allegory, see Vickers (1997).
[28] Le Loyer (2004) 166-8.

before "they (men) were getting by with no solace,"[29] war was taking its toll, Mars "in the fields piled up the bodies of men as food for crows."[30] Corruption was everywhere:

> Qui la vertu, qui le vice servoit,
> Qui tous les deux en mesme temps suivoit
> […] et ensemble de vice
> Et de vertu s'armoit en sa malice…
>
> Some served virtue, some vice
> Some followed both at the same time
> […] and armed themselves in their malignity with virtue and vice both…[31]

Nothing could be more different now that the city *Néphélococugie* is built:

> La paix, l'amour et la saincte concorde
> Unist les coeurs qui estoient en discorde,
> […] chacun de meurs aux Cocus est semblable
> […] l'homme n'est plus jaloux de son espouse
> Et du mary n'est la femme jalouze
> […] les deux espoux pondent au nid d'autruy
>
> Peace, love, and holy concord
> Unite all the hearts that were in discord
> […] Everyone's ways are similar to that of cuckolds/cuckoos
> […] man is no longer jealous of wife
> And wife no longer is jealous of husband
> […] the two spouses lay eggs in other nests.[32]

As a result, everything and everyone becomes *cocu*, and even sings "cocu." Since the name of the bird is also its song, the whole world resonates with the call: "cuckoo echo the woods, cuckoo the fields / the hills break into cuckoo song," as if "cuckoo" were a new alleluia.[33]

If this cuckoo peace replaces a state of war in which evil is done in the name of virtue, it is tempting to wonder if a hidden political statement is hiding under the mask of cuckoldry. In the foreword, Le Loyer's words are rather ambiguous: "comme luy, accusant aussi les affections et vicieuses passions des hommes et les vains tourmens d'une chose qui ne leur touche rien, quoy qu'ilz dissent, ny à leur honneur ny à leur reputation" (Le Loyer "like [Aristophanes] denounc[es]

[29] Le Loyer (2004) 244.
[30] Le Loyer (2004) 244.
[31] Le Loyer (2004) 245.
[32] Le Loyer (2004) 245.
[33] Le Loyer (2004) 247.

the affections and corrupted passions of men, and their meaningless torments about something that has no part, whatever they say, in their honor or their reputation").[34] Of course, in his play his words apply to cuckolds -- men feel dishonored, even in situations when they should not. Yet the words used by Le Loyer retain a vagueness which makes it possible to project a more serious reading on the universal love shared among the "*saincts cocus*" at the end of the play, as a plea against religious warfare which kills in the name of divine love. If so, *La Néphélococugie* might be, in a very round-about way, closer to *Lysistrata* and other Aristophanic peace plays than initially meets the eye, presenting as it does a utopian world in which cuckoos and quails make love, not war.

The Paradoxes of Racine's Selective Translation

The second and last pre-nineteenth-century reworking of Aristophanes is Racine's *Les Plaideurs*, the author's one and only comedy. It was first performed in 1668 at the Hotel de Bourgogne, and remained Racine's most frequently performed play at the Comédie Française from the company's creation in 1680 up to 1900.[35] When Racine wrote *Les Plaideurs* in the winter of 1668, the political context could not have been more different from Le Loyer's times of religious civil war. France was prospering under the aegis of a (still) victorious, art and theater-loving Louis XIV, and the young author had already had significant success with two tragedies: *Alexandre le Grand* (1665) and *Andromaque* (1667). Writing his one and only comedy at that precise point in his career can only be taken as a way to position himself as the equal of Corneille, who was celebrated both for his comedies and for his tragedies, but also as a superior to Molière since Molière's only attempt at heroic comedy, *Dom Garcie de Navarre* (1661), was a flop. Racine's short three-act farce was successful, especially at court, and it long remained one of Racine's most performed play.

The play is full of paradoxes. In the first place, Racine claimed that he initially conceived the play for Scaramouche, main actor of the Italian Company, in the role of the mad judge. The

[34] Le Loyer (2004) 74.
[35] Joannidès (1901) XVII.

Parisian Italian company performed commedia dell'arte, that is to say performances relying on the actors' skillful improvisations on a plot pattern. However, *Les Plaideurs* was very clearly not written as a pattern to improvise on. This rather short farce was written in Alexandrines, and not in prose, as Molière's latest farces had been. Secondly, the play is poised between Old and New Comedy. Most of the characters and situations of the play come from Aristophanes' *Wasps* even if Racine follows only a third of his ancient model (the last two thirds, consisting in Philocleon's disastrous attempts at living the aristocratic life, are left out). Yet Racine managed to add to the Aristophanic material the love plot which is typical of New Comedy. Lastly, the comedy oscillates between slapstick farce and a sophisticated social and literary satire.

Unsurprisingly, most of the farcical elements are derived from Aristophanes' *Wasps*; these are the translated "jokes" that Racine mentions in his foreword to the reader. The old judge's attempts to escape from every opening in the house, as in the source play: first through the window (I.3); then climbing down the gutter (II.8); and finally from the attic (II.9). At the end of act II, he desperately tries to judge a case from the cellar through a basement window (*un soupirail*) until one of the two parties falls through with him into the basement (II.13). The final domestic trial takes place in the first three scenes of Act III, and follows very closely 765-1005 of *Wasps*: the accused is also a dog (Labes is renamed *Citron*, Lemon), the stolen Sicilian cheese becomes a capon from Le Mans (the reference here is not political as in Aristophanes, but culinary, since the breed was reputed for its taste), and the joke of the silent witnesses is kept, even if they are not actors standing in as kitchen utensils, but the actual head and feet of the dead fowl.

Scatological references are also present in Racine's farce, albeit not in the same passages as in *Wasps*. In the Greek play, the pissing pot provided for the old judge's convenience is rather scandalously doubling as a *klepsydra*, the hydraulic time-piece which guaranteed equality of speech; in Racine's play the little dogs brought in to move the judge to pity end up peeing on him, and the lawyer claims that the moisture actually comes from their tears. In the Greek play, the

association between *klepsydra* and pissing pot is highly satirical and political in that it ridicules a symbol of Athenian democratic power, whereas in *Les Plaideurs* the joke resides in the lawyer's skill in interpreting in a favorable light even the most unseemly conduct of a witness. Finally, the joke of the collapsing judge is taken up and reinterpreted as well. In Aristophanes' play, Philocleon faints because he has acquitted a claimant for the very first time in his career as a *heliast*, and it is a sign that the cure invented by his son has been successful. In Racine's comedy, Dandin collapses too, not from shock at his own verdict, but from boredom during the prolonged oratory of the defense.

However, some of the slapstick also comes from other sources. Aristophanes' whole chorus of waspish *heliasts* is replaced by only two characters, who are both obsessed trial mongers, and both come from the tradition of farcical novels: Chicanneau and the Comtesse de Pimbêche. The name Chicanneau recalls Rabelais' chicanoux, a people of bailiffs who are desperate to be beaten since they earn their living from the damages they receive everytime someone strikes them (chapter 12 in the *Quart Livre*). The countess de Pimpêche, whose name could be translated as Countess Stuck-up, recalls a famous character from Antoine Furetière's almost exactly contemporary *Roman bourgeois* (1666): the ever litigating Collantine, a woman whose whole life revolves around trials. Chicanneau and Pimbêche take on the function of the chorus as far as plot is concern, since they clamor for the return of the judge, but they are litigants, not fellow judges as in *Wasps*. In fact, the two claimants bear the brunt of the play's satire against institutional justice; Dandin, the compulsive judge is mad, but his madness does not reflect on the institution as a whole. Not only do Chicaneau and Pimbêche stand in for Aristophanes' chorus when the plot requires it, but they also form a chorus of sorts towards the end of act II. In scene 9, they are joined by L'Intimé, Dandin's glorified secretary, and the three of them start clamoring in unison: "you see here before you my adverse party," then "Sir, I have come here for a little writ," and finally "I have been insulted!"[36] This is an

[36] Racine (2006) 86.

interestingly parodic recreation of a chorus. Although these three characters speak as one, each pleads for his or her own case and their unison hides a cacophony of interests. This querulous harmony is part of the satire leveled against litigants who in suing each other become entirely indistinguishable. The scene has no direct equivalent in *Wasps* and nothing in what Chicanneau or Pimbêche say throughout the play is imitated from choral odes, but Chicaneau and the comtesse de Pimbêche are clearly the wasps, the two *Plaideurs* that give their name to the play.

Racine skillfully articulated these elements drawn from Old Comedy and early-modern farce with a New Comedy love plot, in order to give his play the structure audiences of his time expected. L'Intimé is characteristic of this articulation. His name is a technical term of the time for a defendant in an appeal case, and at the end of the play he becomes the dog's lawyer (a role played by Bdelycleon, the son, in *Wasps*); but he is also a New Comedy valet who plays a crucial role in the love plot since his function is to convince Chicanneau that he is a Baillif (*Sergent*) in order to hoodwink him into signing a wedding contract between his daughter, the beautiful young Isabelle, and Léandre, the judge's son. In order to convince Chicanneau that he really is a bailiff, he acts like one of Rabelais' Chicanoux and lets himself be beaten against a fine. The father's doubts immediately disappear, and he signs his assent to his daughter's marriage without realizing what he is doing. At the end of the dog's trial (Act III.3), one last scene is added in which the two fathers are made to acknowledge the signed document and bless the union. However, this love plot is not the structure of the play; it does not reorganize Aristophanic material. It is, so to say, introduced at the seams, between fragments. The whole love plot is developed in only nine of the shortest scenes, while the rest of the play follows *Wasps.* Act I.1- 4, corresponds quite closely to the prologue, and scenes 6-8 can be seen as an imitation of the conflictual *parodos* opposing Bdelycleon and the chorus of *heliasts* first physically and then rhetorically (lines 230-759). The romantic sub-plot is introduced between those two Aristophanic fragments (I.5); then it is developed in the first six scenes of act II, and brought to a rather abrupt end in the last scene of the play (III.4). It is clearly

the motif of the judge who will not stop judging and the plaintiffs who will not stop suing that gives Racine's play its unity, not the imported New Comedy plot.

Reducing the chorus of *heliasts* to a couple of ridiculous litigants is a way for Racine to make the play acceptable to his audience, but it also has profound impact on the tone and range of the satire. Aristophanes aimed his satire at an institution, the *heliaia*, Athens' supreme court, and its judges, whereas Racine chose as the butt of his mockery the litigious person who misuses institutional Justice, not the institution itself. In *Wasps*, the son Bdelycleon tries and succeeds in changing his father's mind not only about being a *heliast* but also and more importantly about the benefits of the institution itself. Léandre, on the contrary, only has to deal with his father's madness.

There is, however, a passage in *Les Plaideurs* which recalls the political and generational debate of Aristophanes' *Wasps.* In act I.4, Dandin upbraids his son for wanting to appear more aristocratic than he actually is, opposing the two sources of nobility that existed at the end of the seventeenth century: the new "noblesse de Robe" (obtained through public offices) and older nobility, inherited from the time when titles and lands were obtained through services in war. The father mocks the son for wanting to hide where his own wealth and status comes from: "A judge's son, pshaw, and you are posing as a nobleman."[37] Racine's satire cuts both ways. It attacks the upstart who wants to hide his origins, but also old nobility *courtisans* who leads the life of useless lifers and flatters judges.

Racine's satire is also palpable in the lawyers' parodic speeches at the end of the play. The two improvised lawyers are exact opposites. Petit-Jean, the prosecutor, cannot read, let alone compose his own oration, and he enlists the help of the prompter to be able to plead.[38] L'Intimé, on the contrary, is well versed in bombastic legal prose, and this is where Racine's satire becomes very specific. L'Itimé's highfalutin references to Cicero is a parody of an actual speech pronounced in

[37] Racine (2006) 45.
[38] This comic touch comes from Antoine Furetière's *Roman bourgeois*, in which the judge, Belastre, is so crassly ignorant that he needs a lawyer to prompt him.

court by Le Maître, one of Racine's old masters at the religious and educational *Janséniste* institution of Port Royal where he had himself been brought up. The *Jansenists* had been the focus of a literary and religious quarrel in 1666, the "quarrel of imaginary heresy" (*La querelle des Imaginaires*), and Racine had written satirical letters against prominent figures of the *Jansénist* party, so that the references in L'Intimé's speech can be seen as a continuation of the same satirical vein.[39] The context throws light on what Racine says of Aristophanes' satire in his foreword. He says that Aristophanes' exaggerated characters and situations were meant to create universal types, and not to targeting individual: "it was important to exaggerate characters to prevent them from being recognizable."[40] However, this is clearly not what Aristophanes is doing in *Wasps* -- as the very names of the two main characters indicate, Cleon remains a very explicit target in that comedy -- and Racine had actually read Aristophanes and knew that the playwright meant the targets of his satire to recognize themselves and be recognized by others. This courage of the comic playwright is even the topic of the *parabasis* in *Wasps*, which presents Aristophanes as a Hercules cleansing the city of its ills and freeing it of its political monsters. Knowing the play as he did, Racine must have realized that what he was writing was not entirely exact, and he himself does not stick to the satire of vague types, so that in the end his praise of universal New Comedy satire may be as disingenuous in the case of his own play as it is in that of Aristophanes'.

The parodic element is also literary, since there are some parodied lines from Corneille in the play. Parody was a full-blown genre at the time, and Racine's last play itself, *Andromaque*, was being parodied in *La Folle querelle* (1668). But these parodies were whole plays devoted to the purpose. Racine uses in *Les Plaideurs* the same comic device as Aristophanes, borrowing tragic quotes and using them in a burlesque context.[41]

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[39] Racine (1966) 22-8. Racine's two satirical letters, entitled "Lettre à l'auteur des *Hérésies Imaginaires*" ("Letter to the author of the *Imaginary Heresy*") were not published during his lifetime, but they circulated sufficiently widely for them to be mentioned by Boileau. The quarrel was initially sparked by a pamphlet by one of the most prominent figures of the Jansenists, Pierre Nicole, in which he accused poets and playwrights of poisoning the public.

[40] Racine (2006) 35.

[41] Racine (2006) 50, 71, 95. Compare in particular : "Ses rides sur son front gravaient tous ses exploits" (line 154) and "Ses rides sur son front ont gravé ses exploits" (*Le Cid* (1637) line 21), then in act II scene 3 "Viens mon sang, viens ma

The mingled satire, literary parody, and slapstick in *Les Plaideurs* was criticized at the time and seen as a sign that the play lacked unity. But the scenes with Chicanneau and Pimbêche act as an emulsifier, blending not only Old and New comedy, but also different comic tones together. They occupy the narrative function of the chorus in *Wasps*, and some of its dramatic effect: they speak in unison and are ready to put up a fight against the protagonist ἀγών. These scenes are also where the two plots, the love plot and the Aristophanic plot, intersect: thematically they belong with the conflict between the judge and his son, but in terms of dramatic structures, they are part of the unfolding of the love plot. The dispute between Chicanneau and the countess provides l'Intimé with the pretext he needs to make the father sign the marriage contract unawares. Finally these scenes are also the passages in the play in which Aristophanes collides most with other references, Rabelais' *Tiers livre* 1546 and *Quart livre* 1552, and Furetière's *Le Roman bourgeois*.

Conclusion

Le Loyer and Racine both fragment Aristophanes' *Birds* and *Wasps*. Despite Racine's claim that he translated Aristophanes' jokes (so as not to say that he imitated him), and Le Loyer's presentation of his play as an imitation, a greater number of Aristophanes' fragments find their way in *La Néphélococugie*. Beyond the relation to their models, the strategies displayed in the two texts highlight another trait of early-modern reception of Aristophanes in France. Aristophanes did not find his place on the post-humanist stage, as it was being redefined through a twofold repression of overt sexuality and carnival-like inversion of hierarchies. But what both Le Loyer's and Racine's comedies show is that Aristophanes' bawdy politics and his extraordinary use of language found a literary relay in Rabelais' oeuvre. Until the first translations in prose at the end of the seventeenth century and the eighteenth century, Aristophanes reached the French-speaking public through

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fille, va je t'achèterai le *Praticien François*" parodies ("Viens mon fils, viens mon sang, viens réparer ma honte" (*Le Cid*, line 268), and later in act II scene 13 "Achève, prends ce sac, prend vite" recalls "Achève et prends ma vie après un tel affront" (*Le Cid* line 221).

Rabelais' riotous sensual and satirical linguistic orgy. Rabelais' writing worked for Le Loyer and, even if more indirectly, for Racine, as a textual *dive bouteille* holding forth the powerful Aristophanic wine and saying "TRINCH" -- drink.

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