

DIDASKALIA 

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Didaskalia is an electronic journal dedicated to the study of all aspects of ancient Greek and Roman performance.

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About Didaskalia

Didaskalia (διδασκαλία) is the term used since ancient times to describe the work a playwright did to teach his chorus and actors the play. The official records of the dramatic festivals in Athens were the διδασκαλία. *Didaskalia* now furthers the scholarship of the ancient performance.

Didaskalia is an English-language, online publication about the performance of Greek and Roman drama, dance, and music. We publish peer-reviewed scholarship on performance and reviews of the professional activity of artists and scholars who work on ancient drama.

We welcome submissions on any aspect of the field. If you would like your work to be reviewed, please write to editor@didaskalia.net at least three weeks in advance of the performance date. We also seek interviews with practitioners and opinion pieces. For submission guidelines, go to didaskalia.net.

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Note

Didaskalia is an online journal. This print representation of Volume 8 is an inadequate approximation of the web publication at didaskalia.net, which includes sound, video, and live hyperlinks.

A Gestural Phallacy

David J. Jacobson

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One of the most intriguing elements of Greek comedy, at least to modern audiences, is the phallus. Indeed, when modern productions do find it worthwhile to equip the actors with some sort of phallus, this prop is regularly employed to great comic effect: each wave, wag, and well-timed thrust invariably provokes a laugh. Of course there is nothing wrong or inappropriate with this type of staging, but if we are interested in understanding how an original performance may have looked, it behooves us to appreciate the textual clues offered by the plays themselves as to when a gesture was or was not made, and not to seek to insert the phallus where it does not belong.

In this article I propose that some scholars, despite their best intentions of identifying and explaining what appears to be a situationally appropriate action, have mistakenly posited the performance of a gesture at *Ecclesiazusae* 470, where in fact the playwright did not intend one. The evidence against this fallacious reading is demonstrative, quite literally. I will argue that by understanding how Aristophanes uses the medial demonstrative οὗτος we can ascertain more fully what may or may not have transpired onstage.¹

The passage in question reads as follows (*Ec.* 465-72):

Βλέπυρος: ἐκεῖνο δεινὸν τοῖσιν ἡλίκοισι νῶν,
μὴ παραλαβοῦσαι τῆς πόλεως τὰς ἡνίας
ἔπειτ' ἀναγκάζωσι πρὸς βίαν—

Χρέμης: τί δρᾶν;

Βλ.: κινεῖν ἑαυτάς. ἦν δὲ μὴ δυνώμεθα,
ἄριστον οὐ δώσουσι.

Χρ.: σὺ δέ γε νῆ Δία
δρᾶ ταῦθ', ἵν' ἀριστᾶς τε καὶ κινῆς ἄμα.

Βλ.: τὸ πρὸς βίαν δεινότατον.

Χρ.: ἀλλ' εἰ τῇ πόλει
τοῦτο ξυνοίσει, ταῦτα χρὴ πάντ' ἄνδρα δρᾶν.

Blepyrus: That's the danger for men our age:
if the women take over the reins of the city
they'll force us to ...

Chremes: To do what?

Bl.: To screw them! And if we can't
they won't give us breakfast.

Chr.: You, by Zeus,
better do that then so you can have breakfast and screw, together.

Bl.: It's awful when forced.

Chr.: But if it will benefit the city,
every man should do that.

Blepyrus is concerned that if the Athenian government should fall into the hands of women, the old men of Athens would be at risk of being forced to have sex and, if they did not or could not comply, of being denied their first meal of the day. Alan Sommerstein has suggested that just after Chremes says δρᾶ ταῦθ' (470) he gestures with his phallus so as to explain to Blepyrus precisely what he means. His

translation is expanded with very explicit stage directions: “Well then, by Zeus, you should do *this* [*bending forward and raising his long comic phallus to his lips*], to enable you to lunch *and* to screw at the same time!” (1998, 79, italics original). This interpretation has had some sway: Jeffrey Henderson changed his own earlier translation of “By Zeus you’d better do it then” (1996, 165) to “By god, you’d better do *this* then,” while reserving judgment as to the nature and significance of the gesture itself (2002, 303, italics original, with n. 45); Paul Roche follows suit with “Then you’ll jolly well have to learn to joggle, like *this*,” explaining “*this*” with the stage direction “Taking out his stage phallus and wagging it” (2005, 622).

In support of this staging Sommerstein (1998, 180-1), transforming an idea put forth by Henderson (1991, 186) that “breakfast” is a double entendre for cunnilingus, proposes that Chremes is telling Blepyrus that he should fellate himself since this self-made “breakfast” will facilitate the erection which his age has rendered difficult to achieve. As reasonable as this idea may seem, and thus as logical (and certainly dramatically entertaining) as a gesture involving Chremes’ long phallus being bent around his fat suit toward his mouth may appear at this moment, the argument in favor of performing self-fellatio or any other act rests heavily on the shoulders of ταῦτα. But the demonstrative cannot, in fact, bear this load, and the very idea that Chremes does anything at all collapses under the weight.

This is not to say, of course, that οὗτος is incapable of looking forward, simply that such cataphoric uses of the medial demonstrative in Aristophanes (and elsewhere) anticipate not gestures or actions, but rather some type of appositive (relative clause, expegetic infinitive, if-clause, etc.).² To be sure, οὗτος is used by Aristophanes to refer to a wide range of things (people, situations, places, times), but its overwhelming and expected use is as an anaphor.

When used in the neuter plural as an adverb, here too is οὗτος anaphoric, even when it refers to an action performed onstage. In *Clouds*, just before Strepsiades knocks on the door of Socrates’ school he says, “Why do I keep loitering like this?” (131 τί ταῦτ’ ἔχων στραγγεύομαι); in *Acharnians*, the Chorus asks Dicaeopolis “Why are you twisting like that” (385 τί ταῦτα στρέφει). In both instances the actions referred to with ταῦτα precede the verbal reference to them. In English we may render ταῦτα as “thus” or “in this way,” and that certainly captures the sense, but pragmatically these instances are anaphoric and properly refer to what preceded. None of the examples of adverbial ταῦτα in Aristophanes is cataphoric.

When Aristophanes wants to point linguistically at an action performed onstage at the moment of utterance or immediately following it, he turns to forms marked with –ί or to the demonstrative adverb ὅδε (and ὀδί), which has a range of meanings: it operates as an adjectival modifier (“so”), a directional adverb (= δεῦρο), an anaphoric adverb (“like that”), and also as a cataphoric adverb (“like this”).³ In this respect it is the same as its forms marked with –ί, which, with only two exceptions (*Av.* 1457, *Ra.* 98), are cataphoric adverbs indicating an action being or about to be performed.⁴

Any movement or activity, including self-fellatio, could be marked verbally (or textually) by an adverb. *Wasps* 1210-1211 nicely illustrates the interaction between speech and gesture:

Φιλοκλέων: πῶς οὖν κατακλινῶ; φράζ’ ἀνύσας.
Βδελυκλέων: εὖσχημόνως.
Φιλ.: ὡδὶ κελεύεις κατακλινῆναι;
Βδ.: μηδαμῶς.

Philocleon: How, then, am I to recline? Hurry up and tell me!
Bdelycleon: Elegantly.
Phil: Are you telling me to lie down like this?
Bd: Not at all.

Philocleon responds to Bdelycleon's telling him to recline "elegantly" (1210) by collapsing awkwardly to the ground. The adverb ὥδῃ marks the action which takes place either as the words are spoken, or, as makes for better theater and is in keeping with the cataphoric use of ὅδε, at the conclusion of the sentence. After all, falling inelegantly to the ground while speaking is definitely one of the best ways to ensure that an audience does not hear the entirety of a line.

Since ταῦτα does not announce a forthcoming action, as we have seen, Chremes' diction at *Ecclesiazusae* 470 speaks strongly against the performance of any sort of gesture. The importance of the final exchange between Chremes and Blepyrus, then, must be evaluated in terms of the ideas expressed. Chremes, alarmed at the prospect of living in a world where the women do not give their men breakfast, replies excitedly to Blepyrus, "You, by Zeus, better do that then!" (469-70 σὺ δέ γε νῆ Δία / δῶτα ταῦθ'). His motivating concern that Blepyrus take action is appetitive, not sexual. It is the potential loss of breakfast that above all enrages Chremes—note the antilabic structure, the σὺ δέ γε, regularly employed in drama (comedy especially) in angry responses, and the excited oath νῆ Δία—and that leads him to demand, in essence, that Blepyrus do whatever it takes to avoid going hungry.⁵ Blepyrus, for his part, is anxious about the sexual politics of the whole situation. It is not so much that he is fearful that he will be unable to perform sexually, a reading that puts too much stress on δυνώμεθα (468), but that he wants the "performance" itself to be on his terms, much like governance of the polis. In replying with τὸ πρὸς βίαν δεινότατον (471) to Chremes, which I have translated above as "It's awful when forced," Blepyrus may, in fact, be making a much more emphatic pronouncement about the looming gynaeocracy, but one which is obscured by the ambiguity of the words themselves: πρὸς βίαν may be "by force" or "unwilling"; τὸ δεινότατον may mean "most awful" or "most dangerous." Blepyrus' reply to Chremes' insistent order to "do it" is, accordingly, a concise expression of Blepyrus' overarching concern about male loss of control, all of which is couched in a discussion about food, sex, and gender.

But Chremes, either ignorant of or willfully opposed to the "true" meaning of Blepyrus' words, cares not for his perspective and yet again promotes making sure "it" gets done (471-2). What we have in these lines, then, is not an instance of self-fellatio, but a straightforward plea by Chremes to Blepyrus that he "do those aforementioned things" precisely because "doing it" will be good for the city.

notes

¹ The claims made herein are based on my study of ὅδε and οὗτος in the Aristophanic corpus and a selection of Greek tragedies, the details of which I hope to present in another context. For the standard accounts of demonstrative usage see Kühner–Gerth 1898, 641–51; Humbert 1954, 29–34; Smyth 1956, 307–9; Schwyzler and Debrunner 1966, 207–11; Mendoza 1976, 92–6. See too the more specialized studies of Cooper 1998, 2290–5; Matino 1998, 108–13; Manolessou 2001; Ruijgh 2006; Bakker 2010; Jacobson 2011.

² *Ach.* 755–6; *Eq.* 520, 780; *Nu.* 418; *V.* 50, 701, 1117; *Pax* 1075; *Av.* 1221; *Lys.* 486, 649, 779; *Th.* 1013; *Ra.* 534–5, 1109, 1467; *Pl.* 10, 216, 259–60, 340, 471, 489, 594.

³ Adjectival modifier: *Ach.* 215; *Eq.* 385–6; *Lys.* 518, 1015; *Th.* 525; directional adverb: *Ach.* 745, 1063; *Av.* 229; *Th.* 987; fr. 362.2; anaphoric adverb: *Eq.* 837; *Lys.* 301; cataphoric adverb: *Av.* 1568; *Nu.* 771; *V.* 1109; *Lys.* 567, 634.

⁴ In both of these passages ὅδῃ is used cataphorically and points forward to a development of the idea.

⁵ E.g., *A. Supp.* 1056; *Ar. Nu.* 915, 920; *Av.* 1042; *Ec.* 648.

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