Who Stole the Daedalen Statue? Mythographic Humor in Ancient Greek Comedy

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Who Stole the Daedalean Statue? Mythographic Humor in Ancient Greek Comedy

by

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Abstract

Who Stole the Daedalean Statue? Mythographic Humor in Ancient Greek Comedy

by

Alan Grau Sumler

Adviser: Joel Lidov

The following work adds another topic to the analysis of ancient Greek comedy. I cite excerpts from Aristophanes, Menander, ancient Greek comic fragments. I cover examples which contain mythological material. I compare them to ancient historiographic, philosophic, and mythographic approaches used by writers such as Hecataeus, Empedocles, Prodicus, Paleaphatus, Euhemerus, Heraclitus the Paradoxographer, and other writers. I am looking for instances of myth criticism, myth rationalization, and myth allegory in the comic material. My research adds another item to the list of ancient comic approaches and shows the prevalence of rationalism in ancient Greek world.

Regardless of time period (Old, Middle, New) ancient Greek comedy contained a variety of mythological references. When isolating all fragments with themes of myth criticism, rationalization and allegory, some observations can be made about each particular comic approach to myth. Myth rationalization was another approach for the comic poets to employ and parody. Scholars have touched upon this topic, but have not treated it in full. According to them the few examples of comic mythological rationalization are found in Middle and New Comedy. Scholars have not designated this trend in ancient Greek Comedy. I will show that ancient Greek comedy as a whole had the tendency to rationalize myths. Mythographic humor was part of comedy from its inception.
Preface

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Chapter 01 Introduction: Myth Rationalization, Mythography, and Comic Criticisms of Myth

I begin with a discussion covering four topics which are integral to my interpretation of ancient Greek comedy. First I cover some approaches to myth found in archaic Greek poetry, then instances of myth rationalization in ancient Greek historiography and philosophy, next I cover mythography as a genre, and finally the genre and approach called allegory. In each topic I will highlight different rationalizing approaches and other approaches to myth used by ancient writers. This survey will provide us with a repertoire of different ancient approaches to myth. Afterward I will describe the categories of comic approaches used in my analysis. Once the framework is briefly established, I will present a survey of ancient Greek comedy, its origins, writers, and themes as they pertain to my work.

The rationalization of myth as an approach to analyzing myth narratives has no clear origin. It does not evolve over time in a linear fashion so that each new approach replaces the old one. We see it more and more in ancient Greek literature beginning around the 6th c. BC. Just as Greek mythology consists of a myriad of narratives and explanations, so myth rationalization consists of a myriad of approaches to myth. These approaches culminate in the genre called mythography which was not recognized as genre until the Hellenistic times. In mythography we see the full repertoire of approaches. Some of them are rational, while others use a different approach. As to rational approaches Plato and Aristotle mention some of them. In Plato’s *Phaedrus*, which I discuss below, Socrates gives some examples of rationalizing a myth. His criteria include making a myth more plausible or probable. According to Aristotle in his *Metaphysics*, discussed below, early thinkers questioned the traditional myths and gods. They set forth rational explanations for them. The rational approach is one technique used by writers who criticize myth and offer alternative versions of the myth based on some rational criteria. Before mythography as a genre, we see these approaches used by historiographers, philosophers, and poets. Ancient Greek comic writers applied these same rational approaches to myth in their dramas. At times they even made

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1 See Cameron 2004.x-xi and 27-32 for the difficulty in defining the genre.
parodies of writers who applied these approaches. I now turn to the ancient origins of these approaches.

1. Early Criticism of Myth in Hesiod and Pindar

The poems of Hesiod (8th-7th c. BC) do not exhibit any level of myth rationalization or myth criticism, but they supply the material, i.e. myths, which others criticize. Hesiod’s works also provide some of the basic approaches to myth which writers would later employ, for instance etymology, aitiology, theogony, and genealogy. His subjects represent the mythological past, a past which historians would use as a bridge to their own times and events. At times this bridge needed modification or rationalization.

His *Theogony*, containing the birth of the gods and the universe (cosmogony, cosmology), and *Catalogue of Women* (genealogy) provide the material and the approach which philosophers and historiographers would later use in their analysis. Early historiographers give their own versions of theogony and genealogy, while philosophers would explain the birth of the cosmos using rational criteria. For the philosopher Empedocles the beginning of the cosmos contains elements of nature which might be thought of as gods. The historiographer Akousilaos of Argos writes his own versions of theogony and genealogy which break away from Hesiod’s. The historiographer Herodorus gave his own versions of Prometheus; Hecataeus wrote his own versions of Cerberus. Euhemerus and Prodicus would tackle the topics of the gods, while mythographers like Heraclitus and Palaephatus would rationalize other Hesiodic characters, for instance Pandora and Medusa.

There are some particular techniques Hesiod employs which are picked up later by historiographers, philosophers, mythographers, and even comic poets. In the *Theogony* etymology is often employed as an approach to myth content. The Cyclopes (Κύκλωπες) are explained by an analysis of their name

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3 See Stern 2006.60 for a discussion about this shared approach.
meaning circle-eyed (lines 144-145 - κυκλοτετερής ὀφθαλμός). The name of the goddess Aphrodite (Ἀφροδίτη) comes from the circumstances of her birth, since she was born and nourished from the foam (lines 195-196 - ἄφρογενέα τε θεάν καὶ ἀφρῷ θρέφθη). The Titans (Τιτῆνες) are named because they are strained tight in wickedness (line 209 - τιταίνοντας ἀτασθαλίῃ). Pegasus (Πῆγασος) and Chrysaor (Χρυσάωρ) receive their names because one was born near the spring of Oceanos (lines 282-283 - Ὠκεανοῦ περὶ πηγὰς), while the other holds a golden blade in his hands (line 283 - ἄορ χρύσειον). In his Works and Days Pandora (Πανδώρα) is named because all the Olympian gods and goddesses gave her a gift (lines 81-82 - πάντες Ὀλύμπια δώματ᾽ ἔδωρησαν ἐδώρησαν).

Another technique which Hesiod employs is aetiology. Aetiology gives the cause (αἴτιος) or origin of certain phenomena and cultural practices. It also includes the idea of first inventions of certain things, for instance women, men, and illnesses. In the Theogony Hesiod narrates the institution of sacrifice, the invention of fire, the invention of women, and the institution of marriage (lines 529-628). In the Works and Days he narrates the invention of farming, the invention of women, institution of marriage, and the invention of suffering for humans (lines 29-134). Hesiod’s Catalogue of Women gave early historiographers another approach, namely genealogy.

We find an instance of myth criticism in Pindar’s Olympian Ode 1 (5th c. BC). Pindar boasts that his narration of the eating of Pelops by the gods will be contrary to earlier versions (line 36 - ἀντία προτέρων). He explains that the gods did not eat Pelops, but, when Pelops did not return home after Poseidon abduced him, people spread rumors that he was eaten by them. Pindar modifies the myth

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4 Right before this story (lines 28-32), Pindar sings that there are many wonders (θαυματά πολλά), but when mortals speak beyond the true account (τὸν ἀλαθῆ λόγον) the stories (μῦθοι) becomes deceptive (ἐξαπατῶντι) with many falsehoods (ψεύδειοι), but the goddess Grace contrives to make the unbelievable believable (ἄπιστον ἐμήσατο πιστὸν ἔμμεναι). I am paraphrasing the passage.
because it would be improper (ἀπόρα line 52) to call the gods gluttons or imply that they ate human flesh. Instead the gods send Pelops back to the mortals as punishment for the deeds of his father Tantalos, although they ultimately help him win Hippodameia in marriage. Pindar modifies the accepted version of the myth so that he does not offend the gods and portray them in an impious way.

Variations on Hesiod and Pindar’s techniques appear in the writings of historiographers, philosophers, and mythographers. These later traditions criticize and rationalize myths under various assumptions and criteria. They employ rationalized aetiologies, etymologies, and first inventions. Comic poets not only parody Hesiod’s poems and approaches, but they also parody the rational attempts of criticizing myths.

In Aristophanes’ Birds, which I will analyze in CH02 Aristophanes and Remythology, the poet parodies both Hesiod’s Theogony and Prodicus’ attempt at myth rationalization of the gods. He accomplishes these two parodies at the same time in the same scene. There will be examples throughout the canon of ancient Greek comedy where comic poets employ their own comic etymologies, aetiologies, first inventions, theogonies, cosmologies, and genealogies. Comic criticisms of myth, for instance of Eros in CH05, will appear as well.

2. Myth Rationalization in Ancient Greek Historiography

Early Greek historiographers began to apply certain rationalizing criteria to mythological material. Writers such as Akousilaus, Hecataeus, Hellanicus, Herodorus, Pherecydes, Herodotus, and Thucydides all exhibit some level of rationalization and mythography in approaching their materials. 5 According to Saïd (2008.80) “Historiography was born out of myth.” The early Greek historiographers sanitized the mythic poems of the archaic age. They collected and presented the material in a different way.

According to Fowler (2014.xvii) “It took boldness to banish the Muse, silence the song, prune the poetic

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ornament and write bare factual narrative of history.” Strabo (1st c. BC), who wrote the Geography, made a similar point about historiography and philosophy picking up their beginnings from myth. He writes (1.2.8): καὶ οἱ πρῶτοι δὲ ιστορικοὶ καὶ φυσικοὶ μυθογράφοι (The first historians and natural philosophers were also mythographers).

New techniques employed by historiographers included writing their own theogonies, genealogies, looking for the probable (τὸ εἰκός), and the true account (etymology = ἔτυμος λόγος). The works of Herodotus and Thucydides were the ultimate refined expressions of the earlier attempts at historiography. The comic poets picked up, parodied, and employed these techniques.

Hecataeus (6th c. BC) wrote a mythographic piece entitled Genealogiae where he calls the Greek stories ridiculous and aims to turn the myths into something plausible. Pausanias (2nd c. AD, Description of Greece, 8.25.5) cites the early Greek historiographer for a rationalization of the myth of Cerberus or the dog of Hades. He describes a cave where Heracles was supposed to have brought the dog of Hades from the underworld, but he claims that the tale from the poets is unbelievable (οὔτε … πεισθῆναι).

According to Pausanias Hecataeus gives the plausible account (λόγον εὗρεν εἰκότα) of the myth.

Hawes (2014.8) clarifies the rationalizing technique: “‘Hound of Hades’ becomes a metaphorical epithet

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6 See Said 2008.80 for this discussion.

7 Strabo criticizes the historians for this tendency in sections 11.6.2-3 and 8.3.9. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

8 See Fowler 2014 (introduction) for further discussion of these approaches.

9 See Said 2008.82, Hawes 2014.7-8, and Dowden 2011.57 for a discussion about this fragment. Also Fowler 2014.xvi. See Stern 1996.11 for this example and following examples.
rather than an actual description of the monster Heracles is sent to retrieve." Hecataeus does not employ this approach in all instances of his writings. It is just one of many tools the early historiographers had available.  

Herodorus (5th c. BC) provides another example of myth rationalization in early Greek historiography. This fragment originates from a scholion on Apollonius Rhodes (2.1248) where he comments that Herodorus had a “strange” rendering of the myth about Prometheus and the eagle sent by Zeus which ate at his liver every day. Heracles ultimately freed Prometheus by defeating the eagle.

εἶναι γὰρ αὐτὸν Σκυθῶν βασιλέα φησὶ, καὶ μὴ δυνάμενον παρέχειν τοῖς ὑπηκόοις τὰ ἐπιτήδεια, διὰ τὸ τὸν καλούμενον Αετὸν ποταμὸν ἐπικλύζειν τὰ πεδία, δεθῆναι υπὸ τῶν Σκυθῶν· ἐπιφανέντα δὲ Ἡρακλέα, τὸν μὲν ποταμὸν ἀποστρέψαι εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν· καὶ διὰ τοῦτο μεμυθεῦσαι ἀνῃρηκέναι τὸν Ἀετὸν Ἡρακλέα· τὸν δὲ Προμηθέα λύσαι τῶν δεσμῶν.

Prometheus was king of the Scythians. He was unable to provide his subjects with what they needed to live because a river named ‘Eagle’ flooded the plains, and so the Scythians chained him up. But Heracles arrived and diverted the river into the sea. For this reason, the story was told that Heracles had defeated the eagle and released Prometheus from his chains.

(tr. Hawes 2014.11-12, fr. 30 Fowler)

In this rationalization Prometheus is not a god, but a king of the Scythians. Euhemerus, whom I cover below, was known for rationalizing the gods as kings. Herodorus further explains that the eagle was not actually an eagle, but the name of a river. Heracles did not kill any eagle, but rather diverted the river. The myth arises from this misunderstanding of the name. Palaephatus would use a similar approach by analyzing myths as arising from the misunderstanding of names. Hawes (2014.12) cites another fragment from Herodorus where the foundation of Troy by Poseidon and Apollo is rationalized. In the excerpt (fr. 28 Fowler) Laomedon, the founder of Troy, uses money which had been dedicated to the two gods to establish the city.  

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10 See Fowler 2014.305-306 and 658-669 for analysis of the fragment and Hecataeus. For his discussion of Hecataeus and myth rationalization see 2014.198, 276, and 299-300.

Plutarch brings up Hellanicus (5th c. BC) in a passage (Theseus 31) about Theseus and Peirithous, their abduction of Helen, and their journey to Hades to abduct Persephone. Plutarch gives the most likely account (τὰ εἰκότα). He writes (31.4):

αὐτὸς δὲ Πειρίθῳ τὴν ὑπουργίαν ἀποδιδούς, εἰς Ἡπείρον συναπεδήμησεν ἐπὶ τὴν Ἁιδώνεως θυγατέρα τοῦ Μολοσσῶν βασιλέως, ὃς τῇ γυναικὶ Φερσεφόνην ὄνομα θέμενος, Κόρην δὲ τῇ θυγατρί, τῷ δὲ κυνὶ Κέρβερον, ...

And Theseus, in order to return the favor to Peirithous, traveled with him to Epirus for the sake of the daughter of Aidoneus the king of the Molossians, who gave the name Persephone to his wife, the name Core to his daughter, and Cerberus to his dog...

(Fr. 168a Fowler, FGrH 323a F18)

Fowler and other scholars believe this part of the passage still uses Hellanicus as a source. The approach in the passage relies on a misunderstanding of the names. The likely account is not that Theseus and Peirithous travel to Hades where Peirithous is devoured by Cerberus, but that they travel to Epirus where he is killed by a dog named Cerberus. Aidoneus is the god of Hades, but here he is just a king named Aidoneus. The assumption behind the analysis is that the myth arises from the misunderstanding.

At times Herodotus (5th c. BC) applies the same approach. In CH02 Aristophanes and Remythology I will cover his rationalizing of the abduction of Io, Europa, Medea, and Helen. The following is an example of how he rationalizes the story about the founding of the oracle of Dodona which was said to be founded by the order of a talking bird (2.57.1-2).

πελειάδες δὲ μοι δοκέουσι κληθῆναι πρὸς Δαδαναίων ἐπὶ τοῦδε αἰ γυναῖκες, διότι βαρβαροὶ ἦσαν, ἐδόκεον δὲ σφὶ ὁμοίως ὄρνισι φθέγγεσθαι: μετὰ δὲ χρόνον τὴν πελειάδα ἀνθρωπηίῃ φωνῇ αὐδάξασθαι λέγουσι, ἐπεὶ συνετά σφι ἢ νύι ἢ γυνή- ἔως δὲ ἐβαρβαρίζει, ὄρνιθος τρόπων ἐδόκεε σφὶ φθέγγεσθαι, ἐπεὶ τέῳ ἀν τρόπῳ πελειᾶς γε ἀνθρωπηίῃ φωνῇ φθέγξατο; μέλαινα δὲ λέγοντες εἶναι τὴν πελειάδα σημαίνουσι ὅτι Αἰγυπτίη ἢ γυνή ἢν. 

I imagine that the women were called ‘doves’ by the people of Dodona because they were foreign and seemed to them to twitter like birds. They say that after a while the dove spoke with a human voice since the woman said things intelligible to them. But as long as she spoke in her native tongue, they thought she twittered like a bird; for how could a dove speak with a human voice? The fact that they say the dove was black indicates that the woman was Egyptian. (tr. Hawes 2014.8)

Herodotus believes that the Greek account came from a misunderstanding of the original event. The idea that doves speak with a human voice is interpreted as being metaphoric, that the native tongue of the woman sounded like doves. Speaking doves is a metaphor for foreign chatter. From this misunderstanding the myth appeared.

Early Greek historiographers did not apply myth rationalization to all myths. They used a myriad of approaches in their analysis. Akousilaus of Argos (6th c. BC) wrote a genealogy which began with a theogony and ended with the epic cycle. Pherecydes of Syros (5th c. BC) also wrote a theogony and genealogy. These writers were applying different rational criteria to mythological material and perfecting their own genres. It aimed to bring the material of Hesiod and others into some form of “correctness,” i.e. rational or plausible. The new style seems to begin at the end of the 6th c. BC about the same time comic poetry was becoming a competitive sport at the festivals. The comic poets employed comic versions of the same techniques.

3. Myth Rationalization in Ancient Greek Philosophy

As Strabo explained above, philosophers had their start in mythological material. Just as Herodotus and Thucydides refined the technique, in some ways rejecting it, so Plato and Aristotle refined rationalism and rejected the previous approaches. Early philosophers openly questioned and criticized myth. They gave their own explanation for natural phenomena while relying on the more probable and

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14 See Hawes 2014.8-10 for a discussion.
15 See Dowden 2011.55-56 for a discussion. See Fowler 2014.623-629 for details about Akousilaus. Section 1 covers the entire spectrum beginning with theogony and continuing with genealogy over all the early Greek historiographers.
16 See Fowler 2014.705 for commentary about the life and writings of Pherecydes.
17 See Dowden 2011.55-66 for a discussion about this approach in early historians.
likely causes. Myth rationalization represents the transition between mythology and rational philosophy.\(^{18}\)

Hesiod aimed to explain the cosmos within the tradition of the Olympian Gods. Philosophy broke away from this tradition and explained the same things using a different standard. This standard can be seen in Xenophanes - what is not fitting needs more explaining. Beliefs are evaluated based on their plausibility and possibility.

Xenophanes of Colophon (6\(^{\text{th}}\) c. BC) represents an early philosophical attempt at rationalizing myths and the gods. Athenaeus (462d-463a) quotes an excerpt from his symposium poetry where he praises the man who aspires to virtue and excellence when drinking and avoids the following behavior:

οὔτι μάχας διέπειν Τιτήνων οὐδὲ Γιγάντων
οὐδὲ <τί> Κενταύρων, πλάσματα τῶν προτέρων,
ἡ στάσιας σφεδανάς, τοῖς οὐδὲν χρηστὸν ἐνεστι,

But they ought not to spend their time describing battles fought by Titans, or Giants, or centaurs, stories our ancestors made up, or their violent quarrels; topics of this sort are worthless. (tr. Olson 2006.v5.221)

These stories from myth are fictions (πλάσματα) and worthless (οὐδὲν χρηστὸν). In other fragments Xenophanes (21B32) rationalizes the goddess Iris (the rainbow) as coming from natural phenomena. In another fragment (21B34) he claims that people simply cannot know the truth (τὸ σαφὲς) about the gods. One fragment (21B26) contains a criticism about how a god is described and understood. He writes that it is not fitting (οὐδὲ … ἐπιπρέπει) that a god moves about or is in different places at different times. “Not fitting” represents an analytic standard to apply to mythological narrative.

Heraclitus of Ephesus (6\(^{\text{th}}\) c. BC) was critical of the rationalizing method. Although he makes his own rationalizations about the cosmos, saying (22B30) no gods or humans made it, he criticized (22B40) Hecataeus and Xenophanes for their different approaches. In the introduction to a discussion about how

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\(^{18}\) See Osmum (1956.131-132) for his point.
the Black Sea fills with silt, Polybius (4.40.2-4) quotes Heraclitus where he shows particular disdain for mythography:

τοῦτο γὰρ ἴδιόν ἔστι τῶν νῦν καιρῶν, ἐν οἷς πάντων πλωτῶν καὶ πορευτῶν
gεγονότων οὐκ ἂν ἔτι πρέπον εἴη ποιηταίς καὶ μυθογράφοις χρῆσθαι μάρτυς περὶ
tῶν ἄγνουμενῶν, ὅπερ οἱ πρὸ ἡμῶν πεποιήκασι περὶ τῶν πλείστων, ἀπίστους
ἀμφισβητουμένων παρεχόμενοι βεβαιωτὰς κατὰ τὸν Ἡράκλειτον, πειρατέον δὲ δι’
αὐτῆς τῆς ἱστορίας ἱκανὴ παριστάναι πίστιν τοῖς ἀκούοντι.

Truly it is a peculiarity of the current age, in which, since all things have become navigable and passable, it is no longer suitable for poets and mythographers to act as witnesses about the things that are unknown, as those before us have done about many matters, who supply “unbelievable authorities about disputed matters” according to Heraclitus, I must try throughout my history to supply sufficient believability to the hearers.

Polybius cites Heraclitus in an attempt to criticize mythographers and poets. The previous accounts are unbelievable (ἀπίστους) and Polybius aims to make his narrative believable (πίστιν). He specifically mentions mythographers (μυθογράφοις) and that Heraclitus disliked their trade. Believability is a theme of rationalization, but even those who rejected it still relied on some rational model for explaining the world, its elements, and creation.

Empedocles of Acragas (5th c. BC) employed his own rationalizing approach to the cosmos and the gods. He first identified the four basic elements which make up the world - fire, air, earth, water. He labeled two forces which manipulated the elements - love and strife. In this fragment (31B128) he rejects the traditional gods.

οὐδὲ τὶς ἦν κείνωσιν Ἀρής θεὸς οὐδὲ Κυδομός
οὐδὲ Ζεὺς βασιλεὺς οὐδὲ Κρόνος οὐδὲ Ποσειδῶν,
ἀλλὰ Κύπρις βασίλεια.

Nor was there any god Ares among them nor Kudoimos nor King Zeus, nor Kronos nor Poseidon, but there was Queen Cypris... (tr. McKirahan 2010.230)

He rejects the literal existence of the traditional gods and gives praise to the one force, Cypris, i.e. attraction, which moves the basic elements. In this fragment (31B6) he calls the four roots the names of gods, which represents a metaphorical or perhaps an allegorical approach.
Hear first the four roots of all things: shining Zeus and life-bringing Hera and Aidoneus and Nestis, who with her tears gives moisture to the source of mortals. (tr. McKirahan 2010.235)

Empedocles names the roots after gods which he feels personify their properties. The correspondence of roots and gods follows - Zeus - fire, Hera - air, Aidoneus - earth, and Nestis - water. He wrote in a poetic format and constantly invokes the same deities whom he presents as representations of natural phenomena.

Empedocles thought that there were gods, but they were humans turned into deities because of their famous deeds. In one fragment (31B112) he claims that he is a god. In another fragment (31B146) he explains the phenomena.

In the end they are prophets and bards and physicians and chiefs among men on earth, and from there they arise as gods mightiest in honors. (tr. McKirahan 2010.234)

Empedocles’ style is reminiscent of Prodicus and Euhemerus. Prodicus thought the gods represented basic helpful elements of nature and Euhemerus thought the gods were merely famous kings who invented helpful skills for their people and were worshipped as deities.

Plato was openly critical of myth rationalization. Hawes (2014.15) explains “Rationalization had no distinct name in antiquity, but by labeling it succinctly as ‘bringing stories into accordance with likelihood’ Plato comes close to providing it with one.” She refers to the following passage from Plato’s Phaedrus (229c-230a).

{ΦΑΙ.} Εἰπέ μοι, ὦ Σώκρατες, οὐκ ἐνθένδε μέντοι ποθὲν ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἰλισοῦ λέγεται ὁ Βορέας τὴν Ὠρείθυιαν ἁρπάσαι; {ΣΩ.} Λέγεται γάρ.

19 The goddess Nestis is unattested until the Late Empire. We assume she represents water because Empedocles says her tears moisten mortals.
Phaedrus: Tell me, o Socrates, was it not from here where Boreas is said to have snatched away Oreithyia next to the river Ilissus?

Socrates: Indeed, so they say.

Phaedrus: Was it then from this very spot? The water seems pleasing enough both clear and open. It is fit for maidens to play near.

Socrates: No, but farther down about two or three stades, where you cross over to the deme of Agra. Somewhere at that place there is an alter to Boreas.

Phaedrus: I did not know about it at all, but tell me by Zeus, o Socrates, do you believe this myth (μυθολόγημα) to be true?

Socrates: But if I should disbelieve, just as the wise men, then I would not be out of place. Rather, while being clever about the issue, I might say that the wind of the Boreas struck her down from the rocks nearby when she was playing with Pharmacea, and thus, since she died, it is said that she was carried off by the Boreas. Or it was from the Areopagus, since this account too is said that she was taken from there and not here. But I, o Phaedrus, consider such explanations pleasing in a different way since they require a man who is terribly clever, laborious, and not very lucky; for no other reason except that it is necessary for him after this to straighten the form of the Hippocenturs, and in return the form of the Chimera. Then a whole multitude of Pegasus and Gorgons will follow along with an abundance of other impossibilities and oddities of certain natures of which marvels are told. If someone distrusting these stories will try to fit each according to its probability, while using a certain rustic wisdom, then he will need much leisure. In no way do I have enough leisure for these explanations and the cause of this, my friend, is the following: I am not yet able according the inscription at Delphi to know myself. Indeed it seems laughable to me that someone still not knowing this would examine other things. Therefore, while allowing these things to be and being persuaded by the one who considers these explanations, which I was just talking about, I do not consider these but rather myself, whether I happen to be some wild beast more twisted and furious (ἐπιτύφομαι) than Typhon, or a gentle and simple natured animal, who has a share of the divine and is without arrogance.

Phaedrus gives a rationalized version of Boreas and Oreithyia. He makes an etymological and allegorical analysis on the monster Typhon (i.e. one who is twisted). Boreas is just a mythological figure representing the North wind which made the maiden fall to her death. He describes the process of myth rationalization as “straightening the form” (εἶδος ἐπανορθοῦσθαι) of mythological creatures. Marvels
are told about these impossible (ἀμηχάνων) and odd (ἀτοπίαι) creatures. Someone disbelieves the tales (ἀπιστῶν) and tries to make them more plausible or probable (προσβιβᾷ κατὰ τὸ εἰκός). The passage ends with Socrates interpreting myth as allegory. The Titan monster Typhon is reduced via etymology to mean someone who is twisted (ἐπιτύφομαι) within themselves. In Plato’s rejection we can see that the approach was becoming more common and popular. Palaephatus, a mythographer, later rationalized the same myths featured in this passage. Besides this criticism Plato does not employ the method and rather made up his own myths to highlight certain philosophical insight.

Aristotle does not employ myth rationalization, but he makes mention of it in one passage worth noting. In a discussion about why the philosopher Thales (6th c. BC) professed water as the basic substance of nature, Aristotle writes (Metaphysics 1.3 983b27-33):

εἰσὶ δὲ τινες οἳ καὶ τοὺς παμπαλαίους καὶ πολὺ πρὸ τῆς νῦν γενέσεως καὶ πρώτους θεολογήσαντας οὕτως οἴονται περὶ τῆς φύσεως ὑπολαβεῖν· Ὡκεανόν τε γὰρ καὶ Τηθὺν ἐποίησαν τῆς γενέσεως πατέρας, καὶ τὸν ὄρκον τῶν θεῶν ὕδωρ, τὴν καλουμένην ὑπ’ αὐτῶν Στύγα [τῶν ποιητῶν]· τιμιώτατον μὲν γὰρ τὸ πρεσβύτατον, ὀρκος δὲ τὸ τιμιώτατον ἔστιν.

Some believe that the people of remote antiquity, long before the present generation, who were the first to speculate about the gods, has this idea about nature too. For they made Ocean and Tethys parents of coming to be and made water, which the poets called Styx, the oath by which the gods swore. For the most ancient is the most honored, and the most honored thing is what is used to swear by. (tr. McKirahan 2010.28)

Aristotle’s analysis contains the rationalistic assumption that people and poets “speculated about the gods” by making the gods representations of natural phenomena. He uses a special verb to describe such a pondering - θεολογήσαντας - to write about or make (rational) accounts of the gods. Homer’s treatment of Ocean and Tethys at Iliad 14.201 and 14.246 may be in his mind here. Aristotle includes an aetiological explanation of why people swear to the goddesses Styx – what is oldest and most primary is best (and possibly the origin of all other things). Although Palaephatus does not use any of the approaches exhibited in this passage, it is interesting to note that he was a student of Aristotle and that
different rational explanations of myth narratives were circulating. Aristotle and Palaephatus both assume in their narratives that myth arises from some speculation about a natural or common place event. Aristotle implies that people saw the importance of water, made myths about it, and personified it. Thales did none of these things, but Aristotle cites these approaches in comparison in order to explain why someone might choose water as the most primary substance. A similar passage in Plato’s *Theaetetus* (152e), where *Iliad* 14.201 is mentioned, contains a reference to the phenomena of gods representing cosmological generation. Socrates analyzes the passage in Homer as if it referred to elements and how they behave.

The rationalizing approach of Prodicus (5th c. BC) will be covered again in CH02 Aristophanes and Remythology. Two or three different theories about the origin of religion and the gods have been ascribed to him. One comes from Sextus Empiricus (*Contra Math.* 9.18) which provides an example of his rationalizing approach.

Πρόδικος δὲ ὁ Κεῖος “ἥλιον” φησι “καὶ σελήνην καὶ ποταμοὺς καὶ κρήνας καὶ καθόλου πάντα τὰ ὑφελοῦντα τὸν βίον ἠμῶν οἱ παλαιοὶ θεοὺς ἐνόμισαν διὰ τὴν ἀπ’ αὐτῶν ὑφέλειαν, καθάπερ Αἰγύπτιοι τὸν Νείλον”· καὶ διὰ τοῦτο τὸν μὲν ἄρτον Δημητραν νομισθῆναι, τὸ δὲ οἶνον Διόνυσον, τὸ δὲ ὕδωρ Ποσειδῶνα, τὸ δὲ πῦρ Ἡφαιστόν καὶ ἠδὴ τῶν εὐχρηστοῦντων ἑκατον.

And Prodicus of Ceos says: “Sun and moon and river and springs and generally everything that benefits our life the ancients considered gods because of the benefit from them, just as the Egyptians considered the Nile.” And because of this bread is considered Demeter, and wine Dionysus, and water Poseidon, and fire Hephaestus, and so on for each of the things are useful. (tr. Mayhew 2011.47)

Another rationalizing theory from Prodicus comes from the fragments of Philodemus (*De Pietate* 9) who quotes the stoic philosopher Persaeus (4th c. BC). Persaeus ascribed his view to Prodicus that people who provided important discoveries like bread and wine were considered gods. In this version the gods are mortals who are deified and worshipped for their discoveries. A third theory is cited by Epiphanius (*Panarion or Adversus haereses*, Vol. 3, pg. 507).

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20 See Henrichs 1975 for a discussion.
Πρόδικος τὰ τέσσαρα στοιχεῖα θεοὺς καλεῖ, εἶτα ἥλιον καὶ σελήνην· ἐκ γὰρ τούτων πάσι τὸ ζωτικὸν ἔλεγεν ὑπάρχειν.

Prodicus calls the fours elements gods, and the sun and moon; for he said what is conducive to life belongs to everything because of these. (tr. Mayhew 2011.51)

Little remains from Prodicus, but all three theories exhibit the rationalizing approach applied to the gods. Either they are representations of useful elements from nature or representations of the most basic building blocks of nature, or represent mortals who invented useful items which come from nature. His approach would be picked up by Euhemerus whom I cover below.

4. Myth Rationalization in Ancient Greek Mythography

According to Fowler (2000, xxvii) in the 5th c. BC mythography was not a recognized genre, but its different approaches and topics were becoming popular in historiography and philosophy. We find loose references to its method in Aristotle (Metaphysics 1.3 983b27-33), Plato (Phaedrus 229c-230a), and Heraclitus (Polybius 4.40.2-4) and we’ve seen many instances of it. Some mythography, for instance from Palaephatus, Dionysus Scytobrachion, Euhemerus, and Heraclitus the Paradoxographer, focused on myth rationalization, while other writers focused on simply writing compilation of myth, aitiological narratives, city foundations, for instance Eratosthenes, Parthenius, Apollodorus, and Conon.

Mythography as a genre covered a vast range of topics and approaches.

There are some early references to the broader subject matter of mythography before it was considered a genre. Fowler (2000, xxviii) points out that Herodotus (test. 4-6) called Hecataeus a logopoios - writer of stories - and that Ktesias (FGrHist 699 T 8) called Herodotus the same term. These references indicate an early version of the word mythographer. Here the word may have a pejorative meaning.

In Plato we find references to these types of writers. Hippias, Solon, and Ion of Chios all practiced some early form of mythography. I will cover Ion of Chios, an early historiographer, in CH02.
Aristophanes and Remythology. This reference to the genre comes from Plato *Hippias Maior* 285d. Here Socrates asks Hippias the topics on which he speaks. Hippias answers:

> Περὶ τῶν γενῶν, ὦ Σώκρατε, τῶν τε ἡρώων καὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, καὶ τῶν κατουκίσεων, ὡς τό ἄρχαιον ἐκτίσθησαν αἱ πόλεις, καὶ συλλήβδην πάσης τῆς ἀρχαιολογίας ἥδιστα ἀκροάωνται…

They like to hear stories concerning the races, o Socrates, of heroes and of humans, and concerning the foundation of cities, especially the cities founded long ago, and in short anything about ancient lore.

Fowler (2000.xxxii) calls the material in this list “a rather good description of mythography as a classical genre…” It includes the genealogy of heroes and the foundation of cities. Ancient legends and folklore (ἀρχαιολογίας) are also present. These topics appear again in the Greek historians who employed early types of myth rationalization; they give their own genealogies of heroes and their own stories about city foundation (*ktisis*).

This other reference to the genre comes from Plato *Timaeus* 22ab. Solon visits Egypt and entertains the wise men by telling them Greek myths.

> καί ποτε προαγαγεῖν βουληθεὶς αὐτοὺς περὶ τῶν ἀρχαίων εἰς λόγους, τῶν τῇδε τὰ ἀρχαιότατα λέγειν ἐπιχειρεῖν, περὶ Φορωνέως τε τοῦ πρώτου λεχθέντος καὶ Νιόβης, καὶ μετὰ τὸν κατακλυσμὸν αὖ περὶ Δευκαλίωνος καὶ Πύρρας ὡς διεγένοντο μυθολογεῖν, καὶ τοὺς ἐξ αὐτῶν γενεαλογεῖν,…

And at one time he (i.e. Solon) wished to lead them in discourse concerning ancient matters, of these he attempted to tell the most ancient material, he mythologized about Phoroneus who was said to be the first human, and Niobe, and in turn concerning Deucalion and Pyrrha after the flood, how they survived, and he genealogized the ones who came from them,…

Solon is portrayed as speaking myths and genealogies of the oldest lore. His actions are highlighted in two verbs *mythologein* (μυθολογεῖν) and *genealogein* (γενεαλογεῖν). Examples of these styles appear in the early Greek historians. We assume that poets, like Solon, reworked mythological and genealogical narratives for their own pieces.

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Mythography, dating back as a genre to at least the 4th c. BC, covers those authors who write about, compile, and correct mythological narratives; this category may include those who identify as mythographers and those who lean more towards history or other genres (biography, geography, philosophy). According to Graf (1993.193) the earliest known collection of mythography comes from Asclepiades of Tragilus (4th c. BC) - Subjects of Tragedy - which offered variations on myth narratives. Myth criticism ties together the genre of mythography whether the author openly questions myth or simply puts forth an alternate version of a myth. Hawes (2014.22) writes, “Several strands of ancient myth criticism are frequently distinguished in modern scholarship, the most prominent being rationalistic interpretation, Euhemerism and allegoresis.” I leave allegory for the next section.

By the late Roman Empire myth rationalization had become so standard that it played a role in rhetorical exercises. Stern (2003.63) mentions these exercises where:

The myth is to be analyzed and “deconstructed” by the student according to specific categories: It might be ἄδύνατον (impossible); ἀπίθανον (unbelievable); ψευδές (false); ἀσαφές (unclear); ἀπρεπές (improper), and so forth.

Many of these criteria have already been seen above in our discussion of rationalization in historiography and philosophy. Rusten (1982.93-94), in his works on Dionysius Scytobrachion, defines the approach of mythological rationalization,

“Rationalistic” interpreters attempted to explain the fabulous stories connected with the heroes as misunderstandings of perfectly ordinary events, by putting forward a version which preserved τὸ εἰκός, i.e. something which could actually have happened, but was later “mythologized” into an improbable fantasy.

Stern (1996.7) cites this definition in his discussion of the methods employed by Palaephatus and also applied it in his discussion of Heraclitus the Paradoxographer. Before turning to these two mythographers, I briefly analyze Euhemerus.

Euhemerus (4th c. BC) receives his own category of myth rationalization because he deals solely with rationalizing the gods. Palaephatus does not rationalize the gods, although Heraclitus the
Paradoxographer and Dionysius Scytobrachion do in a few instances. The rationalizing approach of Euhemerus is very similar to the ones of Prodicus and Persaeus. Hawes (2014.25) examines the approach of Euhemerus, whose work only survives in fragments.22 His now-fragmentary Sacred History described a golden pillar in the sanctuary of Zeus Triphylius on Panchaeon on which were recorded the deeds of three early kings, Ouranus, Cronus and Zeus, as well as other figures whose names are familiar to us from the theogonic myths. The pillar itself was set up by Zeus on one of his far-ranging journeys undertaken to establish cult worship of himself, his ancestors, and his local hosts.

Euhemerus indicates that the gods here are mere mortal kings who were worshipped for their innovations. Sextus Empiricus (9.17), who one section earlier covered Prodicus, quotes Euhemerus:

Εὐήμερος δὲ ὁ ἐπικληθεὶς ἄθεός φησιν· “ὅτ’ ἦν ἄτακτος ἀνθρώπων βίος, οἱ περιγενόμενοι τῶν ἄλλων ἰσχύι τε καὶ συνέσει ὡστε πρὸς τὰ υπ’αὐτῶν κελευόμενα πάντας βιούν, σπουδάζοντες μείζονος θαυμασμοῦ καὶ σεμνότητος τυχεῖν, ἀνέπλασαν περὶ αὐτοὺς υπερβάλλουσαν τινα καὶ θείαν δύναμιν, ἐνθὲν καὶ τοῖς πολλοῖς ἐνομίσθησαν θεοί”.

Euhemerus who was called an atheist said, “when the life of men was uncivilized, those who surpassed others in force and intelligence to the point that they gained their sustenance by ordering others, while hastening to attain more wonderment and special status, they portrayed themselves as having a certain extraordinary and divine power, for which reason they were considered gods by many people.

The gods are merely kings from the mythological past who were deified by their people. Besides the fragments from him, we have sections of Diodorus Siculus which exhibit the approach. Here is an excerpt (5.71) on Zeus as a mortal king which contains the approach of Euhemerus, often called Euhemerism.

Διενέγκαι δὲ τὸν θεὸν τοῦτον ἁπάντων ἀνδρείᾳ καὶ συνέσει καὶ δικαιοσύνη καὶ ταῖς ἄλλαις ἀπάσαις ἁρεταις· διὸ καὶ παραλαβόντα τὴν βασιλείαν παρὰ τοῦ Κρόνου πλείοντα καὶ μέγιστα τὸν ἀνθρώπινον βίον εὑρεγετήσαι. πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ ἀπάντων καταδείξαι περὶ τῶν ἀδικημάτων τὸ δίκαιον ἀλλήλοις διδόναι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ τοῦ βία τι πράττειν ἀποστῆσαι, κρίσει δὲ καὶ δικαστηρίῳ τὰς ἀμφισβητήσεις διαλύειν. καθόλου δὲ τὰ περὶ τῆς εὐνομίας καὶ τῆς εἰρήνης ἀποσαναπληρώσαι,

22 See Brown 1946 for a full discussion of Euhemerus and how he was influenced by early Greek historiographers such as Hecataeus. See Stern 2003.56-57 for a short discussion. See Winiarczyk 2013 for the most recent discussion of the life and works of Euhemerus.
τοὺς μὲν ἀγαθοὺς πείθοντα, τοὺς δὲ φαύλους τῇ τιμωρίᾳ καὶ τῷ φόβῳ καταπληττόμενον.

This god excelled everyone in courage, intelligence, justice, and every other virtue. For this reason he succeeded to the kingdom after Cronos and provided the greatest and most numerous benefits for human life. He was the very first one to teach people to deal justly with one another where injustice is concerned, to shrink from committing violent acts, and to settle their disputes by trial and courtroom. Basically, he provided a full system concerning lawfulness and peace by persuading the good people and cowing the bad into submission with punishment and fear. (tr. Trzaskoma, Smith, and Brunet 2004.100)

Zeus provided benefits for the human race. He was a first inventor of certain cultural practices: teaching justice, settling disputes by law courts, and setting up laws. He succeeded Ouranus who was the first to study the heavens and to teach people to perform sacrifice. Ouranus was named “Heavenly” because of his knowledge of the heavens. 23 It is characteristic of myth rationalization to analyze a myth as arising from a first invention. Diodorus Siculus (5.66-5.73) rationalizes all the gods in this way including Gaia, Cronos, Hyperion, Iapetos, Rhea, Themis, Mnemosyne, Phoebe, Tethys, Prometheus, Hesita, Demeter, Hades, Apollo, and Poseidon. I will cover comic Euhemerism in CH03 Old Comedy and Myth Humanization and CH05 New Comedy and Mythographic Parody.

Palaephatus (4th c. BC) represents a different type of myth rationalization in his book entitled Peri Apiston (On Unbelievable Tales). 24 He was a student of Aristotle and mentions in his preface the works of the philosophers Melissus and Lamiscus of Samos. According to his preface, if monstrous shapes described in myth really existed, they would still be around today. People are gullible and take these stories at face-value. He proceeds to rationalize forty-five myths based on certain rational criteria. Included in his criteria are the observations that myths are mythic, false, not likely, unbelievable, impossible, and laughable. 25 His approach focuses on the misunderstood metaphor - a name, first invention, or saying was misunderstood in the mythological past. The misunderstanding of such items

23 See Hawes 2014.26 for a discussion.
25 See Stern 1996.17-24 for these terms and analysis of Palaephatus’ different rationalizing approaches.
led to the myths about them. At times he explains the etymology of a name as an interpretation of the myth.

When Palaephatus declares a myth impossible and attempts to explain the misunderstanding, his argument typically surrounds a misunderstood name or phrase. Palaephatus (1) declares that the existence of Centaurs, half horse half humans, is impossible. He explains the horses and humans do not eat the same thing and, if they had existed, they would still be present today. The Centaur was said to be born from the union between Ixion and a cloud (nephele) in the form of Hera. According to Palaephatus Ixion was the king of Thessaly and in his day there was a herd of bulls terrorizing the mountain range (Mt. Pelion). Ixion asked for help to destroy the beasts and some people from a village called Nephele who had learned how to ride on horseback came and destroyed the bulls. They were called Centaurs (Κένταυροι) because they “stuck the bulls” (τοὺς ταύρους κατέκεντάννυσαν). Since they invented horseback riding and no one had seen it before, they were described as half-horse half-humans from the view of them riding off where only their human heads and trunks were visible and the horse’s body was visible from below. From the misunderstanding the myth was made.

Some other brief examples will help understand his approach. In Palaephatus 4 the riddle of the Sphinx is rationalized to be a misunderstanding of the word for ambush (ἐνέδρας, ambush means αἴνιγμα, riddle) and the Sphinx is just the name of Cadmus’ wife. In Palaephatus 6 the myth that Actaeon was eaten by his dogs is rationalized to be a misunderstood metaphor – that hunting and taking care of his hunting dogs metaphorically ate away his livelihood and money. In Palaephatus 15 the myth of Europa’s abduction by Zeus is rationalized into a man named Taurus (bull) abducting Europa and several other women from Tyre. In Palaephatus 34 Pandora was not fashioned out of earth, but the inventor of women’s cosmetics made out of earth. In Palaephatus 42 Io is not turned into a cow and

For this myth see Pindar, Pythian 2.21-48, Diodorus Siculus 4.69.4-5, and Apollodorus Epitome 1.20. For commentary on Palaephatus’ rationalization see Stern 1996.31.
pursued by Zeus, but she was said to flee like a cow and was fleeing because she became pregnant out of wedlock. Palaephatus usually claims that because of some misunderstanding with a metaphor (a saying, what people said) or some name the myth was invented. More examples from Palaephatus will appear throughout my work. In CH05 New Comedy and Mythographic Parody there will be two examples were comic poets directly parody Palaephatus and his approach.

Heraclitus the Paradoxographer (1st or 2nd c. AD) also represents the tradition of myth rationalization. Hawes (2014.94) writes “Heraclitus’ *Peri Apiston* is most likely a handbook used in teaching myth interpretation.” His text consists of thirty-nine rationalizations. His approach includes myth rationalization, euhemerism, allegory, etymology, and first inventions. His approach is similar to Palaephatus’ criteria - impossible, laughable, irrational, and untrue. He rationalized many of the same myths as Palaephatus.

According to Heraclitus (4) it is impossible that the god Atlas holds the heavens on his shoulders, rather he was the first person to discover astronomy and to foretell the weather. Palaephatus (17) makes a similar rationalization of Aeolus who instead of a god of the winds was actually an astronomer who advised Odysseus. In Heraclitus (7) it is laughable that Pasiphae fell in love with a bull and subsequently gave birth to a minotaur - half-bull half-human, rather she fell in love with a man named Bull and her child was call the son of Minos (her husband) and looked like the man named Bull, thus being called Minotaur. In Heraclitus (33) Cerberus is not a hell-hound with three heads, but a normal dog always accompanied by two of his puppies and only appeared to have three heads. I will cover comic myth rationalizations in the style of Heraclitus in CH03 Old Comedy and Myth Humanization and CH04 Middle Comedy and Myth Rationalization.

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Dionysius Scytobrachion (3rd c. BC) represents another mythographer who employed myth rationalization. We receive his work from scholia, Diodorus Siculus, and papyrus fragments. He rationalized the stories of the Argonauts and the gods amongst other myths. Besides making myths more plausible and giving different versions, he also employed Euhemerism and Prodicean rationalism at times in his *Atlantioi* and *Libyan Stories*. One example of his approach will suffice. According to a scholion on Apollonius Rhodes, *Argonautika* 1.256, Dionysius Scytobrachion rationalized the Golden Fleece. Ram was actually the name of the tutor of Phrixus who sailed with him to Colchis. The rest of the rationalization comes from Diodorus Siculus (4.47) whom we presume uses Dionysius as a source. Phrixus and his tutor Ram were subsequently captured and Ram was skinned as a sacrifice to the gods. An oracle warned Aeëtes that he would die whenever strangers from another land came to steal the human skin, so he built a temple around it, stationed a guard named Draco (Dragon), and gilded the skin to make it seem more valuable.

Myth rationalization found in ancient Greek mythography gave the comic poets different approaches and parodies to mythological material. The particular approaches used by comic poets can be compared to the analysis of these known mythographers who systematized and perfected the different methods. The mythographers found many myths laughable and so did the comic poets.

5. Allegory

As Hawes (2014.15) points out, allegory consists of “a more complex tradition” than myth rationalization. There remains an abundance of texts and different strains of allegory from the ancient world. Although mythographers like Heraclitus the Paradoxographer at times employed the approach, other authors interpreted myths in a purely allegorical manner. Hawes summarizes the diversity of texts.

A relatively large number of ‘allegorical’ texts survive from antiquity. These texts share an interest in uncovering the philosophical and scientific principles hidden within literary texts; nonetheless, they differ greatly amongst themselves. The ‘tradition’ (as we understand it) spans

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28 See Rusten 1982 for a discussion of his dates, works, and analytic approaches. See especially pages 93-112 for coverage and scope of his works.
early interpretations of Homer attributed to the sixth-century critic Theagenes of Rhegium, the
mystical speculations of the *Derveni Papyrus*, Imperial textbooks such as Heraclitus’ *Homeric
Problems* and Ps-Plutarch’s *Life of Homer*, the etymological handbook of Cornutus, and Neo-
Platonic literary interpretation, of which Porphyry’s Cave of the Nymphs remains our most
impressive survival.

Allegorical texts attempt to find philosophical truths in the mythological narratives of Homer and
Hesiod. In a similar but different approach, myth rationalization looks for the plausible account in the
same myths. Both traditions contain a criticism of myth, rejecting the literal approach and offering up a
different interpretation. Both methods employ etymology in their analysis.

Writers who use allegory attempt to find the hidden meaning of the myth. Stern (2003.57) explains
the ancient etymological interpretation of the method of allegory as finding the “under-meaning” or
“other-speaking” of myth. He writes that allegory was considered an approach anytime an
interpretation of myth was employed which did not take the myth at face-value. Stern gives two basic
motivations in ancient allegory. One is to find the hidden philosophical truth behind the myth. The other
is to find the hidden ethical truth behind the myth. The second approach requires some explanation.

Ancient philosophers like Plato and Xenophanes claimed that Homer portrayed the gods as acting
immorally. The allegorists try to analyze the meaning behind the so called immoral actions.

The early Greek historiographers employed allegory at times. A fragment from Herodorus contains
such an instance concerning Heracles. It comes from Clement of Alexandria *Stromata* (1.73.2)

> Ἡρόδωρος δὲ τὸν Ἑρακλέα μάντιν καὶ φυσικὸν γενόμενον ἱστορεῖ παρὰ Ἀτλαντος
toῦ βαρβάρου τοῦ Φρυγὸς διαδέχεσθαι τοὺς τοῦ κόσμου κίονας, αἰνιττομένου τοῦ
μύθου τὴν τῶν οὐρανίων ἐπιστήμην μαθήσει διαδέχεσθαι.

Herodorus records that Heracles, after becoming a seer and a natural philosopher, received
from the barbarian Atlas the Phrygian the pillars of the cosmos—the meaning of the story is that
he received the knowledge of heavenly phenomena through instruction.
(tr. Trzaskoma, Smith, and Brunet 2004.121; Fowler fr. 13)

In this fragment Heracles is a philosopher and Atlas, instead of a god, is a teacher of astronomy. The
hidden meaning (αἰνιττομένου τοῦ μύθου) of the myth is that Atlas taught Heracles astronomy.
Herodorus has other narratives where Heracles is portrayed as a philosopher (Folwer fr. 14). Herodorus is not questioning the myth of Heracles’ deception of Atlas, although Folwer (2014.297) notes the Euhemerization of Atlas in the passage.

Cornutus (1st c. AD) was a stoic philosopher who wrote an allegory of all of the gods. Many of them he reduces to basic elements of nature in a similar manner to Empedocles and perhaps Prodicus. His work which covers the gods is entitled *Theologiae Graecae compendium* and the following is a short excerpt on the goddess Hera.

Γυνὴ δὲ καὶ ἀδελφὴ αὐτοῦ παραδέδοται ἡ Ἥρα, ἥτις ἐστὶν ὁ ἀήρ. συνήπται γὰρ εὐθὺς αὐτῷ καὶ κεκόλληται αἰρομένη ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς ἐκείνου αὐτὴ ἐπιβεβηκότος· καὶ γεγόνασιν ἐκ τῆς εἰς τὰ αὐτά ρύσεως, ρυεῖσα γὰρ εἰς λεπτότητα ἡ οὐσία τὸ τε πῦρ καὶ τὸν ἀέρα ύφιστησιν. ἐφ᾽ ᾧ καὶ Ἐρέαν τὴν μητέρα αὐτῶν ἐμύθευσαν εἶναι...

[3] His wife and sister is traditionally Hera, who is in fact air (aer). For she is connected and united with him, rising up from the earth as he has settled over her. And they arise from the flow (rheo) in the same direction, for as substance flows toward fineness it gives rise to fire and air. For this reason in the myths their mother is said to be Rhea.

(Tr. Trzaskoma, Smith, and Brunet 2004.89)

Cornutus uses etymology to make his analysis. Hera is air because of an interpretation of her name. Her intercourse with Zeus who is soul and fire further proves his point. Her position in intercourse mimics the relationship between air and aether with aether being on top. Rhea as her mother is also interpreted since Rhea flows in the same direction giving rise to fire and air. I will cover a comic allegory similar to Cornutus in CH05 New Comedy and Mythographic Parody.

6. Types of Comic Criticisms of Myths

Ancient Greek comedy had a unique perspective on mythological content. It could portray myth in comic way and practice what scholars call comic myth-making. Moulton (1996.220) cites the following fragment (K-A 189, *Poesis*) from Antiphanes (Middle Comedy) in her discussion about Aristophanes’

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approach to comic myth-making. It comes from Athenaeus (6.222c) in a discussion about poets inventing stories.

Tragedy’s a cushy art altogether, since first of all the spectators know the plots already, before anyone speaks - all the poet has to do is remind them. All I need to do is say “Oedipus” and they know the rest - his father Laius, his mother Jocasta, his daughters, sons, what will happen to him, what he’s done. Or again if someone says “Alcmeon,” in the same breath he’s included all the children, how he went off his rocker and killed his mother, and how Adrastus will enter and leave again… And when the poets can’t come up with anything and have said absolutely everything in their plays they lift the crane just like a finger and the spectators get their money’s worth. That’s not the way with us comic poets - we have to invent everything: new names, setup, action, second act curtain, opening. If a Chremes or a Pheidon leaves out any of this, he’s hissed off the stage, but Peleus and Teucer can do what they please.

(tr. Slater in Rusten 2011.506-7)

The speaker in the fragment compares the art of tragedy to comedy. Tragedy worked in the confines of established mythological narrative, but comedy was allowed to do as it pleased with mythological

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30 See Handley 1989.411-14 for a different discussion of the same fragment in relation to Middle Comedy.
material. They could invent (εὑρεῖν) mythical names and plots. Because of this tendency comedy was able to present innovative and bizarre versions of myth. It was also able to freely criticize and “correct” myth. The content of ancient Greek comedy represents a large data set to find instances of comic criticisms of myth which use similar approaches to those mentioned earlier.

The following short discussion covers the different comic approaches or categories which I designate throughout my work. Scholia and mythographers also observed that comics could produce legitimate variants of myth narrative. Accordingly I have gathered instances where a mythographer or scholion cites a comic poet for an alternative version of a myth. Just as mythographers and other writers could criticize myth, I have accumulated many instances were comic poets openly criticize a myth and at times attempt to correct it (comic criticisms of myth). Some comic poets rationalize myths and then retell them or re-mythologize them. I have gathered examples of comic poets retelling myths (comic remythology). Comic poets favored portraying myths in domestic setting. Scholars call this approach myth burlesque and travesty. In my analysis I show how domesticating myths represents rationalizing myths and I give the approach its own name (comic myth humanization). Comic poets also used the same tools as historiographers, philosophers, and mythographers. I have a few different designations for these approaches. Some comic poets rationalized myths (comic myth rationalization), others made allegories (comic myth allegory), and some set out their own Euhemerizations (comic myth Euhemerization). In a few instances comic poets made parodies of known mythographers and their approaches. I’ve noted these examples as well (comic mythographic parody or parody of mythographic writing). The same tools seen above for analyzing myths were also employed by comic poets including - comic divine first inventions, comic aitiology, comic divine etymology, comic theogony, comic genealogy, and comic cosmology / cosmogony.

It is my aim to take the current spectrum of scholarly analysis on comic approaches to myth and give it more categories, depth, and analysis. It is important to keep in mind that the audience at a comic
performance would have to be familiar with these approaches and parodies of mythic material in order to understand, i.e. laugh at, the jokes. Since myth critics found some myths laughable, I believe that comic poets also found myths laughable and set out to make people laugh at their analysis of myth.

Below is a chart which contains all of the comic approaches which I analyze.

1. **Comic Criticism of Myth** - a comic approach which questions a myth and may offer an alternative version of the myth.

2. **Comic Parody of Mythographic Literature** - a comic approach which makes a parody of a known writer in the genre of mythography.

3. **Comic Myth Rationalization** - a comic approach which employs any of the rationalizing approaches used in the genre mythography. These include myth as metaphor, first inventions, Euhemerism, genealogies, etc.

4. **Comic Myth Humanization** - a comic approach which puts the gods in human situations. These narratives usually highlight unexplainable elements of the myth. It contains a rationalizing approach.

5. **Comic Remythology** - a comic approach which supplants an alternative version of a known myth. The new version keeps the structure of the original myth, but changes the particular elements. For instance the gods are replaced with birds in Aristophanes’ remythology of Hesiod’s *Theogony*. Another version of remythology is an approach where one god is made more powerful than another god based on different criteria. The more powerful god or thing is more worthy of respect and reverence.

6. **Comic Euhemerism or Prodicean rationalization** - a comic approach which humanizes the gods in relation to their realm of power. It is reminiscent of the approach used by Euhemerus or the different ones used by Prodicus.

7. **Comic Myth Allegory** - a comic approach which interprets myth as allegory.

8. **Comic Parody of Hesiod** - a particular scene in comedy which parodies Hesiod.

9. **Comic Parody of Palaephatus** - a particular scene in comedy which parodies Palaephatus.

10. **Scholion or mythographer quotes a comic version of a myth** - a version of a myth is supported by the scholion or mythographer citing a comic poet as the myth’s origin.

11. **How Tragedy Works** - a comic approach where the inter-working of tragedy are described. The scene usually sheds light on how comedy viewed itself. This approach usually has a rationalization of comedy and tragedy.

12. **Comic Etymology** - a comic approach which makes a play on a mythological name.

13. **Comic Aitiology** - a comic approach which explains the origin or invention of some custom or innovation.

14. **Comic Myth as Metaphor** - myth is used as a metaphor for something else. Some examples follow Palaephatus’ approach of myth as misunderstood first invention or saying or name.
15. **Comic Theogony, Cosmology, Cosmogony** - a comic version of the births of gods, the universe, and its ordering. The comic parodies look towards poetry, philosophy, and historiography.

16. **Comic Parody of Herodotus** - a particular scene in comedy which parodies Herodotus.

17. **Comic Parody of Prodicus** - a particular scene in comedy which parodies Prodicus.

18. **Comic Parody of Ion of Chios** - a particular scene in comedy which parodies Ion of Chios.

7. **Origins of Comedy**

Rusten (2006, 2011.16-18, 2014) has most recently summarized the different theories about the origins of ancient Greek comedy. Its first appearance at the City Dionysia in 487/486 BC has been well established by the victory lists (*didascaliai*) recorded by the Greeks themselves. The question turns to proto comedy and what comic productions came before the festivals were established. The evidence for proto comedy comes from a myriad of ancient sources and theories including Aristotle *Poetics*, scenes from ancient comic pottery, the Parian Marble, and other ancient and modern writers on comedy.

There is no single candidate for its origins. Rusten (2006.55, 2011.18) has made a graphical representations of proto comedy which lists visual evidence and literary evidence. The visual evidence contains depictions on pottery of satyrs, comic riders, phallus-bearers, and komasts. The literary evidence consists of Dorian comedy (comedy from Sicily, Megara and Sparta), Phallica (songs from the phallic processional), iambic poetry, Susarion (listed as the inventor of comedy on the Parian Marble), Epicharmus (Sicilian comic poet, also Megarian), and satyr plays. While considering the literary evidence, it is important for my work to consider what proto forms contain mythological material. Bowie (2010.144) writes, “... it would not be surprising if mythological comedy featured from the beginning.” It is my theory and observation that mythological criticism and narratives including gods, heroes, and hybrid creatures and monsters have been a part of ancient Greek comedy from its inception.

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I will briefly look at the literary evidence for proto comedy and consider genres which included mythological content of any kind. Phallic processions typically had songs to gods like Dionysius (see Herodotus 2.48) and were sung at religious occasions thus having some mythological context. One example of such a song occurs in Aristophanes Acharnians (236-279) where the speaker invokes Phales, a personification for the phallus. According to Athenaeus (14.622BD) phallic processions typically invoked Bacchus in song. These songs do not contain myth criticism or any abundance of mythological content. The phallic processions also abused people with obscenities.

Poetry in the iambic meter contains a similar approach in that it abuses people with insults. Aristotle felt it was another precursor to comic poetry. Such iambic poetry differs from comedy in that it does not contain any type of formed plot and only has one speaker. The two extant iambic poets, Archilochus (7th c. BC) and Hipponax (6th c. BC), do not contain any obvious myth criticism or abuse of the gods, but merely invocation to the gods. Sometimes the invocation may be read as abuse. This fragment from Hipponax (fr. 38) shows such an example: Ὄ Ζεῦ, πάτερ Ζεῦ, θεῶν Ὀλυμπίων πάλμυ, τί μ’οὐκ ἐδώκας χρυσόν... (Zeus, father Zeus, sultan of the Olympian gods, why have you not given me gold...? [tr. Gerber 1999.385]). The end of Aristophanes Birds contains a scene influenced by iambic poetry where Peisetaerus abuses the goddess Iris (lines 1202-1261). Otherwise the abuse of people in comedy, especially politicians, is commonplace.

The Dorian Greeks provide another source for comedy according to Aristotle. Locations include the Megara, Sparta, and parts of Sicily. The evidence consists of jokes about Megarian comedy found in Attic comedy, for instance Aristophanes (Wasps 57) and Eupolis (K-A 261). Other evidence of Megarian

33 See Aristotle Poetics 1449a2–14 for his discussion of Phallic processions as proto comedy.
34 See Rusten 2011.46-47 and following for these examples and analysis.
35 See Aristotle Poetics 1449a2–6 and 1451b11–15 for iambic poetry.
36 See Aristotle Poetics 1448a28-b2 for Megarian comedy as an early form, 1448a30 for Epicharmus from Sicily, and 5,1449b5–9 for Sicilian comic poets as the first people to add plots to comedy.
37 See Rusten 2011.49-50 for these examples and more, including Ecphantides K-A 3.
comedy includes Spartan mimes (Plutarch *Lycurgus* 28 and Athenaeus 14.621D) and Sicilian mimes\(^{38}\), and the extant fragments of Epicharmus. There is no extant comedy from Megara with the exception of Epicharmus from Sicily, a Megarian colony.

Epicharmus was active between 500 and 470 BC. A large amount of fragments and titles from Epicharmus are extant (forty-seven titles and 239 fragments) and much of his material contains mythological references and burlesque of myth (over half of his play titles are mythological).\(^{39}\) His contemporaries, Phormus or Dinolochus, also wrote comedy with mythological themes. I cover some fragments from Epicharmus in CH03 Old Comedy and Myth Humanization. His extant material contains instances of myth criticism including an interesting etymology of the naming of people, an etymology of Pallas Athena, and an instance of humanizing the god Poseidon as a fish dealer. In CH06 Menander there is a fragment showing Epicharmus rationalizing the gods into elements of nature with Menander making the same rationalization of them into comical elements of life. With respect to the extant literary evidence Epicharmus is the best candidate for myth criticism and rationalization in proto comedy.

Almost no other Doric comedy survives. The mime tradition of Sparta mentioned by Plutarch and Athenaeus (quoting the historian Sosibius of Sparta) has nothing extant. The mimes of Sophron of Syracuse, Herodas, and Theocritus all appear after comedy was well established. An often overlooked article from Murphey (1972) looks at ancient Greek comedy for remnants of early mime and farce. I will now summarize those of his examples which contain mythological material.

Murphey (1972.173) brings up the trope of the hungry Heracles. It is found in Aristophanes *Wasps* (line 60) where in the prologue Xanthias explains the comedy will be devoid of the jokes typical of Megarian comedy, such as the introducing Heracles when he has been cheated of his dinner (οὔθ’ Ἡρακλῆς τὸ δεῖπνον ἐξαπατώμενος). The theme appears again in *Birds* (lines 1565-1693) and

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38 See Rusten 2011.50-51 and Olson 2007.2-6, 11-12 for discussions about Doric mimes.
Peace (line 741, the parabasis). Epicharmus (K-A 18 Bousiris) has a description of Heracles eating. Alexis (K-A 140 Linos) has a scene where Linos tutors Heracles and, when asked to choose a book from the shelf for study, he decides to learn about cooking. Hercules was still lampooned on the comic stage in the late Roman Empire.

Murphey (1972.172) writes that the vulgar dance (kordax) mentioned in Attic comedy may go back to Spartan mime. Reference to it is found in Aristophanes Clouds (lines 556) in the parabasis where the chorus leader pokes fun at Phrynichus (an Old Comedy poet) for making a farce about Andromeda and the sea monster which included a vulgar dance (kordax). Murphey (1972.175-176) draws attention to a certain scene in Xenophon Symposium (2.1) where a Syracusan shows up with some actors in order to provide entertainment for the evening. The Syracusan later presents a mime of Dionysus and Ariadne where two young actors (a boy and girl) act out a scene, including vulgar dancing and kissing, to flute music.

Later versions of Greek mime (Sophron, Herodas, Theocritus) do not show much mythological burlesque, but some contain a mythological context, i.e. the religious festival. Fragments of Sophron’s Women Viewing the Isthmian Festival are too few to get a feel for the production. Herodas Mime 4 Women Dedicating and Sacrificing to Asclepius depicts women visiting the temple and seeing works of art. Theocritus Idyll 15 Women at the Adonis has much the same theme as Herodas and does not contain any mythological burlesque or criticism. Theocritus Idyll 2 is erotic and mythological, since it invokes love magic, but also is devoid of burlesque. Only fragments remain of Epicharmus Temple Visitors. Aristophanes Women at the Thesmophoria may be a comic approach to the shared tradition. It contains the theme of men dressing up as women and attending a festival sacred to the goddesses.

Murphey (1972.174) mentions a type of Spartan farce called bryllistai (βρυλλιχισταϊ) where men dressed up as women and worshipped perhaps Artemis. Hesychius (1245) describes it as men wearing shameful masks of women and singing hymns.
Scholars have analyzed comedy’s parody of the satyr play. Some suggest that it provided comedy with some of its mythological tendencies.\textsuperscript{40} Tragedians produced satyr plays at the City Dionysia and the plays featured the burlesque of myth. Comic poets, for instance Ecphantides, Callias, Cratinus, and Phrynichus, parodied the genre. There is not enough material in comedy to see how the satyr plays were parodied. Only fragments of satyr plays remain with the exception of Euripides Cyclops which is complete. It is impossible to know whether the tragic or comic versions of satyr plays included myth rationalization or criticism.

In conclusion the different versions of proto comedy contain a lot of mythological material, but not a great amount of myth rationalization or criticism. Epicharmus contains a few direct references to mythology and has some comic rationalizing approaches. In CH03 Old Comedy and Myth Humanization I analyze burlesque of myth and travesty as being essential rationalizing approaches. In this sense proto comedy was not immune since it contains instances of burlesque of myth.

8. \textbf{Periodization of Comedy} (Old, Middle, New)

Scholars (ancient and modern) break up Athenian comedy into three periods - Old, Middle, and New.\textsuperscript{41} The dates containing each period are rough estimates and changes between periods are difficult to establish. Completed works only remain of Aristophanes (Old Comedy) and Menander (New Comedy). Otherwise fragments make up the bulk of material for all three periods. Old Comedy begins typically with its inclusion in the City Dionysia around 486 or 487 BC and ends with the death of Aristophanes around 386 BC. Middle Comedy begins in the 370s BC or earlier and ends sometime before the 320s BC. New Comedy comes after the 320s BC and ends around 279 or 280 BC when a monument

\textsuperscript{40} For instance see Bakola 2005, 2010.81-117, Rusten 2011.18, and Hanink 2014.267-269.
\textsuperscript{41} One ancient theorist is Platonius \textit{On Distinctions among Comedies}; an excerpt may be found in Rusten 2011.83. See Rusten 2011.28-34 for one discussion about time periods. See Nesselrath 2014, 2000, 1990, and Sidwell 2000 for discussions about the periodization of comedy. The terms are well established by the time of Athenaeus.
was erected on the Acropolis showing the productions and victors of the Dionysia and Lenaea festivals. Comic poets producing in the second and first century BC are still considered New Comedy because of the similarity in their subject matter and approach. Alexandrian scholars codified the distinctions of each period and they have been used thereafter. The categories do not break up into neat divisions and are distinguished by particular poets’ production dates, content, and the form of their comedies.

Olson (2007.23) has succinctly described the common differences between each period:

‘Old Comedy’ is generally taken to be characterized by overt and pointed discussion of contemporary social and political issues; bitter abuse of prominent individuals, including politicians, poets, and intellectuals; unrestrained obscenity; and a chorus that is directly involved in the action, especially in the first half of the play, but that also delivers a parabasis.

‘Middle Comedy’ is generally taken to be characterized by a fondness for mythological parody; a substantial decrease in the amount of political commentary and personal invective; the emergence of standard character types, such as the parasite, the outspoken slave, the garrulous cook, and the courtesan; and the disappearance of the parabasis and a gradual withdrawal of the chorus from the action. …

‘New Comedy’ is generally taken to be characterized by a superficially apolitical attitude; a cast of characters made up of average men and women taking very typical parts and concerned with quotidian domestic affairs such as love, marriage, and money; an absence of scurrility and obscenity; and an atavistic chorus that merely provides musical interludes between scenes involving the characters.

In unison with Olson’s analysis, most scholars see mythological parody as being predominate in Middle Comedy. Nesselrath (1995.1-8), Bowie (2000.317-31, 2011.143-158), and Rusten (2011.27) produce partial surveys of mythological comedies based on the titles of the comedies. Beyond the titles and a few fragments, little else is typically known about a particular comedy. I argue that mythological parody and comic criticisms of myth play a role in all three periods.

Bowie (2000, 2010) has summarized with more detail the mythological content for each time period. He calculates the number of mythological titles of comedies in Old, Middle, and New Comedy. It is impossible to distinguish on the basis of the title whether the play was mythological, tragic parody, or

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42 See Rusten 2011.16, 30, 33, 37 for a discussion about these dates and demarcations.
not mythological. The following quotation (2010.145-147) reproduces his numbers: (please note the first
x/x indicates overall percentage of mythological comedies from the time period in the form of a fraction,
the next series of x/x represent how many mythological comedies out of total number of comedies)

**Old Comedy** 1/4 - 1/3 are mythological comedies based on the titles of the comedies
Cratinus 11/29, Crates 1/11, Telecleides 1/9, Pherecrates 4/19, Hermippus 5/10,
Phrynichus 3/10, Eupolis 1/17, Aristophanes 13/45, Plato 10/31, Philylus 7/10,
Theopompus 8/20, Nicophon 4/6, Polyzelus 5/5, Strattis 10/19, Nicochares 7/9, Alcaeus 5/8

**Middle Comedy** 1/3 - 1/2 are mythological
Eubulus 30/58, Anaxandrides 14/41, Anaxilas 7/22, Antiphanes 28/138, Alexis 14/136

**New Comedy** (a lack of titles makes the overall number difficult to estimate.)
Diphilus 7/61, Menander 3/97, Philemon 3/61, Apollodorus Carystius 1/12, Euphro 1/9,
Posidippus 2/18

Bowie (2010.147-157) next turns to the subject matter and treatment of each time period. Ancient
Greek comedy has covered almost every god, goddess, mythological character, and narrative known to
Greece. Although the study of mythological comedy is robust, the study of myth rationalization and myth
criticism in comedy has not been fully covered by scholars. Recently only two sources mention myth
rationalization and ancient comedy on the same page. In discussing the dates of Palaephatus Stern
(1996.2-3) cites an Athenion (New Comedy) fragment (K-A 1, **Samothracians**) which makes a parody of
the mythographers’ approach and name. The fragment features a narrative about the first invention of
fine cooking and it imagines a distant time before the innovation of cookery. I cover this fragment in
CH05 New Comedy and Mythographic Parody.

In a survey and analysis of Middle Comedy Nesselrath (1990.217 and 231) mentions the same
connection between Athenion and Palaephatus in a footnote, while analyzing a comic papyrus fragment.
He adds particular mythographers, Euhemerus and Hecataeus, whom Middle Comedy parodied. The
fragment (K-A 1062) makes a parody of the myth of Kronos eating his children. In the piece Kronos
actually sells his children for profit. This example shows a typical comic myth rationalization - a myth

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44 Konstantantakos 2014 is the most recent author to mention it.
represented as a metaphor. Eating one’s children is akin to selling them for profit. Olson (2010) and others analyze the Kronos excerpt as a comically rationalized myth. A broad category of comic myth rationalization and myth criticism has not been defined by any scholar. I will discuss the papyrus fragment in CH03 Old Comedy and Myth Humanization.

Rothwell (2007.155-156 and 167) analyzes the scene in Aristophanes’ *Birds* where an obvious Hesiodic parody occurs and an alternative theogony is given for the birds. At line 692 the chorus makes mention of the ancient sophist Prodicus who thought that the gods “were simply the imaginative creation of human beings who supposed that a higher source was responsible for blessings such as agriculture (Rothwell 2007.156).” Prodicus’ approach is no different than those of Euhemerus and Hecataeus, i.e. a rationalistic approach. I cover Aristophanes *Birds* in CH02 Aristophanes and Remythology. Other small references to the comic mythographic approach in articles and footnotes exist, but the theme has not been dealt with in total.

Nesselrath (1990, 1995) limits the appearance of mythological rationalization to Middle and New Comedy. Other scholars like Bowie (2000, 2010) and Konstantakos (2014) follow suit. Bowie (2010.153) writes that Middle Comedy “tended to reduce and rationalize the fantastic, fairy-tale aspects of myths, replacing these with elements from everyday life.” It is my observation that all three time periods had this tendency towards mythological content.

Nesselrath and others like Storey (2010) and Arnott (2010) attempt to frame comic approaches to mythology - birth of the gods parody, myth burlesque and travesty, myth parody, and tragic parody. Examples of these categories range from simple titles of plays accompanied with scholarly speculation up to fragments and scenes that provide enough material for analysis.

Regardless of the lack of material the categorization of plays is a common approach to analysis. Scholars on mythological comedy like Storey (2010), Arnott (2010), Casolari (2002), and Handley (1985) focus on tragic parody, mythological burlesque, and other parodies as features of Old and Middle
Comedy. The same goes for mythological analysis on Aristophanes by Bowie (1993) and Hoffman (1976). Meinke (1839-1857) was the first scholar to make a survey of the themes in the collection. One point that all scholars emphasize is that ancient comedy contained a lot of mythological scenes and themes.

After reading different points of analysis on approaches to mythological comic material, I can produce a list of types of mythological approaches: tragic parody, epic/Homeric parody, Hesiodic parody, divine birth parody, and mythological travesty / burlesque. My work adds additional approaches. My research does not rely on titles of comedies or whether the comedy was mythological as a whole. I isolate any reference to mythological material and attempt to analyze the poet’s approach to the material.

Although Bowie looks for mythological comedy as a whole plot or theme in a comedy, I find many references to myth content regardless of the play titles. When I state that ancient Greek comedy contains many references to mythological material, I mean it regardless of the overall plot of the comedy. In each chapter I will give more details about particular approaches to mythological material per time period.

9. Old Comedy

I now turn to dates and mythological tendencies of particular comic poets mentioned in CH02 Aristophanes and Remythology and 03 Old Comedy and Myth Humanization. Epicharmus has been discussed above; he is not really part of Old Comedy but rather Sicilian Comedy. The poets of Old Comedy whose fragments and plays are analyzed include Callias, Pherocrates, Hermippus, Cratinus, Eupolis, Aristophanes, Platon, Nicophon and Apollophanes. I also cover some Old Comedy adespota, i.e. fragments unattributed to any author. Mythological titles are abundant in this time period.

Callias was active sometime between 446 BC and 431 BC.\(^4\) He won the City Dionysia at least once in 446 BC. Forty fragments and eight titles survive of his work. Of the surviving titles a few imply

mythological themes - *Atalanta*, *Cyclopes*, and *Satyrs*. I analyze a fragment attributed to him which exhibits a metaphorical play on the mythological Sphinxes.

Pherecrates was active beginning in 437 BC and had one comedy produced as late as 415 BC. 46 Eighteen titles and 228 fragments are attributed to him. He won the City Dionysia at least once and the Lenaea twice. His mythological titles are as follows: *The Human Heracles*, *The Fake Heracles*, *Ant-Men*, and *Cheiron*. It is possible that the two Heracles plays are the same with two different titles. I will analyze a fragment from his *Ant-men* where the myth of Deucalion and Pyrrha is humanized. The title of the comedy may refer to a myth from a lost poem of Hesiod.

Hermippus was active from the 430s BC until the 410s BC. 47 He won the City Dionysia in 435 BC and won the Lenaea four times beginning in the 430s BC. Ten of his titles and 94 fragments survive. Many of his titles imply mythological content: *Agamemnon*, *Birth of Athena*, *Europa*, *Gods*, *Cercops*, and *Fates*. Nesselrath (1995) analyzes Hermippus as employing parodies of the birth of the gods. His approach looks back to epic literature such as the *Homeric Hymns* which feature narratives about divine births. I analyze a fragment from Hermippus’ *Basket-Bearers* where Dionysus is humanized and euhemerized into a famous sea trader. I bring up another fragment unattributed to a play title which shows a remythology of time personified as a god.

Ancient scholars considered Cratinus one of the three masters of Old Comedy alongside Aristophanes and Eupolis. 48 He had nine victories - six at the City Dionysia and three at the Lenaea. His active dates are as early as 453 BC and as late as 423 BC. Twenty-nine titles and 514 fragments of his survive. His titles with obvious mythological topics include: *Dionysalexandros*, *Dionysuses*, *Eumenides*, *Nemesis*, *Odysseuses*, *Trophonius*, *Gods of Wealth*, *Satyrs*, *Cheirons*, and *Seasons*. Besides mythological parody he was also known for political satire in his comedy. I cover fragments from five of his comedies:

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Dionysalexandros (myth in comedy), Nemesis (myth humanization), Chirons (genealogical approach), All-Seers (metaphorical approach), and Thracian Women (myth rationalization of Daedalus and the source of my title).

Eupolis, another master of Old Comedy, won the City Dionysia four times and the Lenaea three times. His career began in 429 BC and lasted at least until 421 BC, although he likely produced more comedies later than 421 BC.\textsuperscript{49} Seventeen titles and 494 fragments survive. None of his titles contain overt mythological references. His Baptai had a context of a religious festival. He was known for his comic attacks on politicians and prominent Athenians. I analyze a fragment from his Spongers where parasites, who play the chorus, are re-mythologized as gods and one fragment unassigned to a play title where the old guard of Athens is characterized as gods.

Aristophanes, the most famous of the Old Comedy masters, was active between 427 BC and 387 / 386 BC.\textsuperscript{50} His death (380 BC) is used to mark the end of Old Comedy. He won the City Dionysia at least once and the Lenaea at least three times. Eleven complete comedies survive; thirty-four titles and 976 fragments remain. His subject matter included political attack / satire, tragic parody, myth burlesque, and other parodies, for instance philosophical. A lot of his extant comedies and titles imply mythological content. I will cover his extant works and fragments in CH02, 03, and 04. In particular I analyze scenes from his Birds (remythology, parody of Prodicus, myth rationalization), Clouds (remythology, parody of Prodicus), Acharnians (myth rationalization, parody of Herodotus), Peace (parody of Ion of Chios), Wealth (remythology), and Frogs (myth humanization, myth rationalization). I also will consider fragments from the following lost comedies: Fry Cooks (remythology, parody of Prodicus), Proagon (myth humanization), Lemnian Women (etymology).\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{49} See Olson 2007.410-411 and Rusten 2011.221-222 for his dates and analysis.

\textsuperscript{50} See Olson 2007.406 and Rusten 2011.273 for a discussion about his dates.

\textsuperscript{51} The analytic notes in parenthesis represent my analysis in the chapter about a particular scene or fragment. They do not represent analysis of the comedy as a whole.
Platon was active sometime between 427 BC and the 410s BC. He has at least one victory at the City Dionysia. Thirty-one titles and about 292 fragments survive. He wrote comedies covering a large range of subjects including myth, politics, poetry, women, and fantasy. Some of his mythological titles include *Adonis, Griffins, Daedalus, Europa, Zeus Abused, Io, Laius, and Menelaus.* I will analyze an unassigned fragment from him where a statue of Daedalus, portrayed walking and talking, is humanized.

Nicophon was active between the late 410s BC and 388 BC. He won the City Dionysia at least once. Six titles and thirty fragments from him remain. His mythological titles include *Adonis, The Birth of Aphrodite, Pandora,* and *Sirens.* I will analyze a fragment from him unassigned to a play title which exhibits comic genealogy.

Apollophonnes was active in the 410s BC. Hardly any fragments or titles remain for him. Mythological titles from him include *Danae* and *Centaurus.* I analyze an excerpt from Aelian which mentions him as the source for an etiological myth. I will use him as an example of a mythographer citing a comic poet for the source of a myth.

10. **Middle Comedy**

I cover Middle Comedy in CH04 Middle Comedy and Myth Rationalization. The following comic poets are analyzed: Antiphanes, Eubulus, Anaxandrides, Alexis, Aristophon, Timocles, and Anaxilas. There is an abundance of mythological titles and subjects during this period.

Antiphanes was active from 388 BC and as late as the 350s BC. He won the Lenaea eight times and the City Dionysia five times. He has 138 titles and 327 fragments remaining. His mythological titles include *Adonis, Aeolus, Andromeda, Birth of the Gods, Asclepius, Birth of Aphrodite, Bacchants,* *Ganymede, Glaucus, Deucalion, Cyclops, Medea, Minos, Orpheus, Sleep, Phaon, Philoctetes,* and *Chrysis.*

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52 See Olson 2007.415 and Rusten 2011.333-334 for discussions about his dates and life.
54 See Rusten 2011.380 for his date and subject matter.
I will analyze fragments from his Women from Boeotia (metaphoric interpretations of the Golden Apples) and Boys (myth rationalization, metaphoric interpretation of the Gorgons).

Eubulus was active sometime between the 370s BC and 330s BC. He won the Lenaea six times beginning in the 370s BC or 360s BC. Fifty-eight titles and 150 fragments of his remain. Many of his titles contain mythological content including Anchises, Amalthea, Antiope, Bellerophon, Ganymede, Glaucus, Daedalus, Danae, Deucalion, Dionysius, Europa, Echo, Glaucus, Ixion, Cercopes, Leda, Nausicaa, Odysseus, Oedipus, Pelops, Procris, Semele, Cycnus, Titans, Phoenix, and The Graces. I will analyze excerpts from his Campylion (myth criticism on Eros, myth rationalization) and Chrysilla (myth humanization comparing mythological women to real women). I will also speculate on a plot reconstruction of his Amalthea (myth rationalization).

Anaxandrides was active as early as 376 BC and as late as the 340s BC. He won the Lenaea three times and seven times at the City Dionysia. Forty-one titles and eighty-two fragments remain from him. His mythological titles include Anchises, Achilleus, Birth of Dionysus, Helen, Erechtheus, Heracles, Theseus, Io, Nereus, Nereids, Odysseus, and Tereus. I will analyze fragments from the following titles: Anchises (myth criticism), Odysseus (metaphoric interpretation of characters from myth), Tereus (myth rationalization, metaphoric interpretation of Tereus), Nereus (Euhemerization of Nereus, humanization of Nereus as a fish dealer).

Alexis was active as early as 347 BC and as late as 306 BC. He won the City Dionysia at least once and the Lenaea at least twice. There remain 137 titles and 342 fragments from him. His career spanned Middle and the early part of New Comedy. His mythological titles include Atalanta, Galateia, The Abduction of Helen, The Suitors of Helen, Seven Against Thebes, Hesione, Linus, Meropis, Minos, Odysseus Being Bathed, Odysseus Weaving, Orestes, Tyndareus, Sleep, and Phaedrus. I will analyze

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fragments from four of his comedies: *Cratia* or *Pharmacist* (Euhemerization of Nereus), *Cut Off* (myth rationalization and metaphoric interpretation of Eros), *Phaedrus* (philosophical and allegorical interpretation of Eros), *Greek Woman* (metaphoric interpretation of sea monsters).

Aristophon was active sometime in the 350s BC and won the Lenaea at least once. 59 Eight titles and fifteen fragments remain from him. I will analyze one fragment from his *The Pythagorean* (myth criticism, aitiological approach to Eros and Nike).

Timocles was active sometime between the 340s BC and 317 BC. 60 He won the Lenaea at least once. Twenty-seven titles and forty-two fragments remain. Two of his mythological titles are *Dionysus* and *Centaur*. I will analyze a fragment from his *Women at the Dionysia* (how tragedy works and the invention of myth).

There are no ancient attestations for the dates of Anaxilas. 61 Scholars put him in Middle Comedy. About twenty titles and forty-three fragments remain from him. His mythological titles include *Calypso, Circe, Nereus, Graces*, and *Seasons*. I will analyze a fragment from his *Chick* (metaphoric myth rationalization of female monsters as prostitutes).

11. **New Comedy**

I cover New Comedy in two chapters: CH05 New Comedy and Mythography and CH05 Menander. I cover the following comic poets: Menander, Philemon, Diphilus, Diodorus, Hegesippus, Nicolaus, and Athenion. There are fewer mythological titles for New Comedy; the popular subjects of this time period turn to domestic comedy. Regardless of this tendency there are plenty of examples of myth criticism and myth rationalization throughout.

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59 See Olson 2007.407 for information about his date and titles.
61 See Olson 2007.404 for his information.
Menander was active between 321 BC and 290 BC. It is estimated that he won the Lenaea between one and four times and the City Dionysia between four and seven times. Ancient testimonia claim that he was a student of Theophrastus and trained by Alexis. Menander is the only other comic poet besides Aristophanes from whom complete or nearly complete comedies survive. Twenty comedies are extant with a substantial amount of remnants. He has 100 titles and more than 900 fragments which survive. There are only two titles which directly imply mythological content: Nemesis and The Fake Heracles. I will analyze excerpts and fragments from eleven comedies: Dyskolos or the Misanthrope (myth humanization, myth rationalization, metaphoric interpretation), Samia or Girl from Samos (metaphor, myth humanization, Euhemerism), Epitrepontes or The Arbitration (myth humanization), Dis Expaton or Twice a Swindler (myth as allegory), Hypobolimaios or Spurious Child (remythology and myth rationalization), Women Lunching Together (criticism of Eros), Treasure (criticism of Eros), Carian Dirge (criticism / rationalization of Shamelessness), Chariooteer (Euhemerism of divinity), Captains (rationalization of Tantalus), and an unattributed fragment (myth rationalization about the gods).

Philemon was active around 328 BC until at least 306 BC. He won at the City Dionysia at least once and three times at the Lenaea. He has sixty-one to sixty-three titles and 198 fragments remaining. Two of his titles imply mythological content: Myrmidons and Pyrrhus. I analyze a fragment from his Shirt Flaps which contains a metaphoric play on the horn of Amalthea and three fragments unattributed to a play title: one with a metaphoric play on the Sphinx, another with an allegorical interpretation of Zeus, and another with a mythological rationalization of the rock of Niobe in the mode of Palaephatus. The last example is an example of mythographic parody, i.e. the comic parody of mythographic writings.

Diphilus was active sometime between 318 BC and 258 BC. He was considered one of the best comic poets next to Menander and Philemon. He won the Lenaea at least three times. He has 59 titles.

See Olson 2007.412-413 ad Rusten 2011.626-627 for his dates and titles.


and 137 fragments extant. He has a few mythological titles including Danaids, Hecate, Heracles, Theseus, Lemnian Women, and Pyrrha. I will analyze a fragment from his comedy Merchant which contains a humanization of Poseidon and a Homeric parody.

Diodorus was active in the 280s BC. Very little is known about him. Only two titles and three fragments remain from him. He was supposedly the brother of the comic poet Diphilus. I will analyze a fragment from his Flute Girl where some mythographic approaches are exhibited, including Euhemerism.

Scholars speculate that Hegesippus was active in the third century BC. Two titles and three fragments remain from him. I will analyze a fragment from his Brothers which makes a metaphorical play on the Sirens.

Almost nothing is known about Nicolaus. Kassel and Austin (1983.v7.51) put him in the second century BC. He was victorious as the City Dionysia in 157 BC. He has three surviving fragments and no associated titles. I analyze the longest fragment from him as a rationalization of Tantalos who is portrayed as the inventor of the art of the parasite. There are only a few mentions of him in the Greek canon, one being from Photius (α 781).

There is no information about the active dates of Athenion. He may have been producing in the first century BC. Only one fragment and title remain from him. I will analyze the fragment from his Samothracians. It is the only direct reference in the comic Greek canon to Palaephatus and contains a parody of the mythographer.

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65 See Olson and Millis 2012.110 for his dates.
66 See Olson2007.411 for a short discussion.
67 See Rusten 2011.703 for speculation on his date.
Chapter 02 Aristophanes and Remythology

Ἑκαταῖος Μιλήσιος ὧδε μυθεῖται· τάδε γράφω, ὡς μοι δοκεῖ ἀληθέα εἶναι· οἱ γὰρ Ἑλλήνων λόγοι πολλοί τε καὶ γελοῖοι, ὡς ἐμοὶ φαίνονται, εἰσίν.

Hecataeus of Miletus tells this: I write these things, as they seem true to me; for the many stories of the Greeks are laughable, as they appear to me.\textsuperscript{68}

The large number of extant comedies from Aristophanes allows the opportunity to find comic rationalistic approaches and parodies. Scholars have focused on Aristophanes’ parodying of different genres and writers in any given comedy.\textsuperscript{69} New parodies are discovered all the time. Ancient commentators (scholia) on Aristophanes began the hunt for parodies. A particular scene can parody multiple genres and poets. This tendency gives scholars a lot of different and at times conflicting analyses of Aristophanes’ comedies.\textsuperscript{70} Few scholars have designated rationalistic parody in Aristophanes’ comedies. While analyzing the \textit{Birds}, Rothwell (2007) and Mayhew (2011) make detailed analysis of Aristophanes’ parody of the 5\textsuperscript{th} c. BC sophist Prodicus. Recently Rusten (2013) has noted rationalistic parody in his analysis of ethnography in the \textit{Birds}.

The \textit{Birds} is one of Aristophanes’ comedies most analyzed for its handling of mythology.\textsuperscript{71} The plot itself, that two humans form a pact and a new city with the race of birds, is itself mythological and fantastical. Interpretations of the \textit{Birds} range from political analysis, to mythological parody, to analysis of utopia and fantasy, to mythology as political allegory.\textsuperscript{72} One theme appearing often is Aristophanes’ tendency to borrow, reformulate, and rewrite myth narrative to fit his comic purpose; such a technique

\textsuperscript{68} All translations are my own unless otherwise cited.

\textsuperscript{69} See Schlesinger (1936, 1937) for interesting lists of parodies in Aristophanes. See Tsitsiridis (2010) for a more recent and pedantic approach to his parody.

\textsuperscript{70} Rosen (2010) points out the myriad of scholarly opinions on Aristophanes’ approach to comedy; Bowie (1993) covers different scholarly ideas about Aristophanes’ approach to mythology; Dobrov (1997.96) mentions the debates surrounding the interpretations of the \textit{Birds}.

\textsuperscript{71} Hofmann (1976), Moulton (1996), and Bowie (1993, 2007) cover Aristophanes’ approach to mythological content.

has been called “comic myth-making.” Romer (1997.57) uses the word “remythology” in his analysis of Peisetaerus’ speech in the *Birds*. There Peisetaerus tells the birds that they were the original deities of the world and that they are older than the gods. He convinces the birds that they are the original kings and founders of everything beneficial to the human race. I wish to take Romer’s term, not necessarily his exact analysis, and apply it as a type of comic approach featuring myth rationalization found in Aristophanes and other comic poets. Before turning to particular scenes in Aristophanes that feature remythology, let’s review the comic rationalistic types used in my analysis and see how remythology fits.

In a scene that features rationalistic approaches the comic poet rationalizes a myth in a comic way – the myth may concern the gods, heroes, or any mythical character, creature, or place. The best examples have the poet openly questioning the myth and trying to make it plausible or possible or feasible.

We expect to see parody of myth rationalization in Aristophanes because of the rise and predominance of rationalism in Athens during the 5th century BC. This trend may be seen in the works of poets, philosophers, sophists, historiographers, and tragedians. The rationalistic approaches most important for my analysis are those also found in the later genre mythography. These approaches include aitiological, etymological, metaphoric, allegorical, Euhemeristic, and myth rationalization.

Remythology, then, is a sub type under rationalistic approach or parody, except here the poet makes a new and more bizarre myth from the original version (whatever it may be). In my examples the poet openly questions and pokes fun at some version of the myth and mentions the author in the same scene. The poet then offers a comic version. Remythology may be found in all periods of ancient Greek comedy. The comic poet has the freedom to retell aspects of the myth in any way comical.

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73 See Moulton (1996.220), Handley (1985.371, 373, 385), and Hofmann (1975.177-96) for more analysis of this term.
74 I would like to thank Joel Lidov for his application of this term “remythology.”
Bowie (2007.192) writes that Old Comedy “seized upon” any “ludicrous aspect” of a myth. Ludicrous can mean unreasonable, so unreasonable that something is funny or ridiculous. The genre of mythography and early myth rationalization seized upon the impossible and improbable aspects of myth narrative. In this way the approach of Old Comedy to myth narrative is similar to the mythographic and rationalistic traditions. They are similar enough that the two traditions overlap and comedy at times directly parodies authors known for myth rationalization and even mythography.

In remythology, as found in the *Birds*, the ludicrous and unexplainable parts of myth will be used to justify the foundation of a new city and to poke fun at the burgeoning trend of rationalistic thought; the comedy mentions Prodicus directly. In addition to the examples in the *Birds*, other scenes will be analyzed including another parody of Prodicus in the *Clouds*, a parody of the historiographer and poet Ion of Chios in *Peace*, and a parody of Herodotus in the *Acharnians*.

There is one caveat in searching out parody in Aristophanes. Arrowsmith (1973) and Moulton (1996.223) write that the *parabasis* of the *Birds* makes parodies of several different genres at once, even within the same passage. The *parabasis* contains multiple parodies in one scene with most playing on Hesiod and tragedy. Bowie (2007.196) warns, “The difficulty here is that it is not always clear whether Aristophanes is producing a parodic version of a myth or a parody of a particular tragic version of that myth.” Since any scene may contain multiple parodies, we are safe in designating rationalistic ones or showing rationalistic approaches. Our examples will step on the toes of sophistic and philosophic comic approaches. If the tragedy that is being parodied contains a rationalizing approach, as in Euripides *Bacchae*, it is possible that a comedy is playing on both themes.\(^7\)

Aristophanes’ *Birds* won 2nd place at the City Dionysia in 414 BC and concerns two Athenians, Euelpides and Peisetaerus, who are fleeing Athens due to their debts and dissatisfaction with the city.

\(^7\) Consider these lines spoken by Euripides in Aristophanes’ *Frogs* (lines 971-2, tr. Henderson 1998.157): “That’s how I encouraged these people to think, by putting rationality and critical thinking into my art, so that now they grasp and really understand everything,...”
They set out to find a new city where they can live carefree. The two characters make a treaty with the birds to establish “Cloudcuckooland” and successfully displace the Olympian gods as rulers of the cosmos. Evidently the birds are the original rulers of the world and the time has come to demand back their domain. With the two Athenian men in charge the birds join the conspiracy in a ruse to defeat the Gods - they shut down all the air space above Athens and do not let any sacrificial smoke or Gods pass through.\(^76\) Their utopia is established in the end and the audience is left comprehending the reality of this new cosmos and city, perhaps even a new, yet absurd, (rationalized) myth. Aristophanes’ *Peace* and *Wealth* have similar endings - the will of the Olympian Gods, namely Zeus, is subverted and a new order is established.

The comedy features the subversion of the natural order of things - gods, humans, birds, landscapes, and cosmology. Bowie (1993.151-166) sees the comedy as featuring elements and distortions of traditional foundation myths, i.e. myths concerning the foundations of cities. He (1993.152 footnote) cites Plato’s *Hippias Maior* (285d) as evidence that foundation mythology was popular in the 5\(^{th}\) c. BC.

For Aristophanes’ to successfully make a parody of something, the audience must be familiar with the thing being parodied or at least the general notion of it. A scene may require the audience to know a popular rationalization of a certain myth in order to laugh at the joke. If the *Birds* is a parody of foundation myth, it fits my definition of comic rationalistic approach, because it offers an alternative foundation narrative, here the foundation of the cosmos differing from the Hesiodic, Homeric, and possibly Orphic versions.

Other mythological topics which Bowie (1993.166-8) analyzes in the *Birds* are transformation and metamorphosis. When Euplides and Peisetaerus find the race of birds, they speak with the current king, Tereus, and his wife, Procne. The scene begins around line 58. These two were the material of

\(^76\) See Rusten 2013.314 for a discussion of this phenomenon.
myth and both were transformed from humans to birds.77 The story of Tereus and Procne in *Birds*
focuses more on their transformation, rather than their original crimes or whatever caused the
transformation. At line 71 Tereus’ servant admits that he too was once a human until Tereus prayed that
he become a bird. The scene sets up the notion that any person may be turned into a bird. At line 95
there is a hint to the pre-story of Tereus and Procne. Euelpides remarks “The twelve Gods seem to have
made a mess of you (tr. Henderson 2000.27).” At line 100 Tereus mentions Sophocles’ treatment of him
in his tragedies.

Gantz (1993.240) writes that Sophocles’ *Tereus* (mostly lost) is the first extant source to mention
Procne as his wife. The theme of Tereus and his son being turned into a bird appears earlier in Aeschylus
(*Hicetides & Agamemnon*) according to Gantz. He also cites some vase paintings from the same time
which depict the Tereus and Procne myth. There are slight variations on this myth in different authors
(Roman and Greek) and time periods. Aristophanes minimizes the gruesome details of their tragedy and
rather focuses on the fact that they were transformed into birds.

The theme of Tereus and Procne becoming birds allows a more ludicrous question - why can’t the
rest of the humans transform? This approach is rationalizing; in the new city people have the
opportunity to become birds, i.e. to grow wings. Peisetaerus not only becomes a bird, but by the end of
the comedy he becomes a king and a god. The ability of humans to transform into birds is one of the
main features of the bird utopia.

The parody of Prodicus begins at line 462. Peisetaerus has concocted a speech that will convince the
birds to make a treaty. His overall approach is very sophistic, in that it aims to persuade the birds.

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77 In the mythography of Conan, a mythographer from the Late Empire, the bizarre details of Tereus and Procne
are called a myth.
Mythology is used by the speaker to make a convincing point. In this scene myth is retold in the flavor of Prodicus, i.e. rationalized, in order to make the birds feel superior.  

The first scene runs from lines 460 to 538; the following excerpt ends at line 523, although the same joke continues with the chorus’ response and a subsequent planning of action to form a new city.

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79 All ancient Greek texts reproduced in this paper come from the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae. When available, the ancient Greek has been checked with the editions used by the translators. All comic fragments have been checked with Kassal-Austin’s collection.
ἀναπηδῶσιν πάντες ἐπ' ἔργον, χαλκῆς, κεραμῆς, σκυλοδέψαι, (490)
σκυτῆς, βαλανῆς, ἀλφιταμοιβοί, τορνευτολυρασπιδοπηγοί·
οἱ δὲ βαδίζουσ' ὑποδησάμενοι νύκτωρ.
Ευ. ἐμὶ τοῦτὸ γ' ἐρώτα.
χαλάζον γὰρ ἀπάλεσ' ὁ μόχθηρος Φρυγίων ἔριων διὰ τοῦτον. (493)
εἰς δεκάτην τοὺς πεζοὺς καθῆκεν ὑπέπινον ἐν ἄστει,
κἄρτι καθηῦδον, καὶ πρὶν δειπνεῖν τοὺς ἄλλους οὗτος ἀρ' ἦσεν· (495)
κἀγὼ νομίσας ὄρθρον ἔχωρον Ἁλιμουντάδε, κἄρτι προκύπτω
ἔξω τείχους καὶ λωποδύτης παίει ῥοπάλῳ με τὸ νῶτον·
κἀγὼ πίπτω μέλλω τε βοᾶν, ὁ δ' ἀπέβλισε θοἰμάτιόν μου.
Πε. ἢτοι οὗτοι τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἠρέσατέν τούτῳ καβαστίλευεν.
Χο. τῶν Ἑλλήνων; (500)
Πε. καὶ κατάδειξέν γ' όποις πρῶτος βασιλεύον
προκολλυνέσηθαί τοῖς ἑτίνοις. (501)
Ευ. η' τὸν Διόνυσον, ἐγὼ γὰρ ἀπώλεσ' ὁ μόχθηρος Φρυγίων ἐρίων
dιὰ τοῦτον. (502)
οὗτος τῶν σκήπτρων ἐκάθητ' ὅτι δωροδοκοίη. (505)
toῖς πυροῖς ἀκατάκαθεν καὶ κατὰ καρδίαν ἐν τοῖς πεζοῖς ἐθέριζον.
Ευ. τοῦτ' ἢτοι μ' ἐλάμβανε θαῦμα,
ὁπότ' ἐξέλθοι Πρίαμός τις ἔχων ὄρνιν ἐν τοῖσι τραγῳδοῖς,
ὁ δ' ἀρ' εἱστήκει τὸν Λυσικράτη τηρῶν ὅ τι δωροδοκοίη.
Πε. Αἰγύπτου δ' αὖ καὶ Φοινίκης πάσης κόκκυξ βασιλεὺς ἦν·
χὠπόθ' ὁ κόκκυξ εἴποι κόκκυ,
tότ' ἂν οἱ Φοίνικες ἅπαντες (505)
tοὺς πυροὺς ἂν καὶ τὰς κριθὰς ἐν τοῖς πεδίοις ἐθέριζον.
Ευ. τοῦτ' ἄρ' ἦσεν τοὔπος ἀληθῶς· κόκκυ, ψωλοὶ πεδίονδε.
Πε. ἦρχον δ' σφόδρα τὴν ἀρχήν, ὥστ' εἴ τις καὶ βασιλεῦοι
eν τὰς πύλας τῶν Ἑλλήνων Ἀγαμέμνων ἤ Μενέλαος,
ἐπὶ τῶν κηρῶν ἐκάθητον ἔξω τείχους καὶ λωποδύτης παίει ῥοπάλῳ με τὸ νῶτον·
κἀγὼ πίπτω μέλλω τε βοᾶν, ὁ δ' ἀπέβλισε θοἰμάτιόν μου.
Πε. ἢτοι οὗτοι τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἠρέσατέν τούτῳ καβαστίλευεν.
Χο. τῶν Ἑλλήνων; (500)
Πε. καὶ κατάδειξέν γ' όποις πρῶτος βασιλεύον
προκολλυνέσηθαί τοῖς ἑτίνοις. (501)
Ευ. η' τὸν Διόνυσον, ἐγὼ γὰρ ἀπώλεσ' ὁ μόχθηρος Φρυγίων ἐρίων
dιὰ τοῦτον. (502)
οὗτος τῶν σκήπτρων ἐκάθητ' ὅτι δωροδοκοίη. (505)
toῖς πυροῖς ἀκατάκαθεν καὶ κατὰ καρδίαν ἐν τοῖς πεζοῖς ἐθέριζον.
Ευ. τοῦτ' ἢτοι μ' ἐλάμβανε θαῦμα,
ὁπότ' ἐξέλθοι Πρίαμός τις ἔχων ὄρνιν ἐν τοῖσι τραγῳδοῖς,
ὁ δ' ἀρ' εἱστήκει τὸν Λυσικράτη τηρῶν ὅ τι δωροδοκοίη.
Peisetaerus: I swear by Apollo.

Chorus Leader: I certainly never heard that.

Peisetaerus: That’s because you’re naturally ignorant and uninquisitive, and you haven’t thumbed your Aesop. He says in his fable that the Lark was the first of all birds to be born, before Earth; and then her father died of a disease, but there being no earth, he’d lain out for four days and she was at a loss what to do, until in desperation she buried her father in her own head.

Euelpides: So that’s why to this day the Lark’s father lies dead in the Head.

Peisetaerus: So if they were born before Earth and before the gods, doesn’t it follow that the kingship is rightfully theirs by primogeniture?

Chorus Leader: I swear by Apollo.

Euelpides: Then from now on you should make a point of growing a beak - Zeus won’t be quick to return his scepter to his woodpecker!

Peisetaerus: Now then, in the olden days it wasn’t gods who ruled mankind and were kings, but birds, and I can prove this with arguments galore. For example, I’ll start by showing you that the cock first ruled and reigned over the Persians, before all those Dariuses and Megabazuses, and that’s why he’s still called the Persian Bird, in memory of that reign.

Euelpides: So that’s why to this day he struts about like the Great King, the only bird who gets to wear his hat cocked!

Peisetaerus: Such was his authority, so great and mighty was he then, that even to this day, as a result of that long-ago power, he has only to sing reveille and everyone jumps up to work, smiths, potters, coppers, cobblers, bathmen, grain traders, the whole carpentering, lyre-pegging, shield-fastening lot. In the dark men put on their shoes and set forth-

Euelpides: I’ll vouch for that! I, poor bastard, lost a cloak of Phrygian wool, thanks to him. I’d been invited to the city for a child’s naming day, and had a bit to drink, and had just fallen asleep when right before dinner that bird up and crowed. I thought it was morning and set off for Halimus. And no sooner do I pop outside the city walls than a mugger clouts me from behind with a club. I fall down, and I’m getting ready to shout for help, but he’s already extracted my coat!

Peisetaerus: To resume: back then the kite was the ruler and king over the Greeks.

Euelpides: Over the Greeks?

Peisetaerus: That’s right, and as king he instituted the custom of rolling on the ground before kites.

Euelpides: So help me Dionysus, I rolled when I saw a kite, and when I was on my back with my mouth open I swallowed an obol, so I had to lug my sack home empty.

Peisetaerus: And furthermore, the cuckoo was king of all Egypt and Phoenicia; and whenever the cuckoo said “cuckoo,” all the Phoenicians would start reaping the wheat and barley in their fields.

Euelpides: So that’s the real meaning of the saying, “Cuckoo! Knobs out and up country!”

Peisetaerus: And so dominant was their dominion that in the Greek cities if some Agamemnon or Menelaus ever was king, a bird would be perched on his scepter, getting a share of any presents he received.

Euelpides: You know, that’s something I never realized. I was always bewildered when in the tragedies someone like Priam came on with a bird, but of course it was perched there to take note of whatever presents Lysicrates pocketed.

Peisetaerus: But the most impressive proof of all is that Zeus, the current king, stands there with an eagle on his head as an emblem of his royalty, as does his daughter with an owl, and Apollo, being a servant, with a hawk.
Eupelides: By Demeter, that’s right - but why have they got them?

Peisetaerus: So that when someone makes a sacrifice and puts the innards into the god’s hand, as the custom goes, the birds themselves can grab the innards before Zeus can! And in those days not a soul would swear by a god; they all swore by birds. Even today Lampon swears “by Goose” when he’s up to something crooked. That’s how high and holy everyone deemed you then; but now you’re mere knaves, simpletons, tomfools. ... (tr. Henderson 2000.81-93)

The key terms in this passage are the adjectives first (πρῶτος - 5x) and more first (πρότερος - 8x). The argument maintains that the birds were the first born creatures, even before the gods. They first set up certain customs, were the first kings, and the first providers of beneficial things to humankind. The birds then are more primary, more important, than the Olympian gods and the current cosmic order.

Aristophanes has taken the mythological narrative, applied a rationalistic analysis to it, and then remythologized it by making the birds the new gods. The theme of the first inventor, founder, or innovator is a common theme in ancient Greek literature and culture.

Throughout the passage there is interplay between the words for bird (ὄρνις) and straight or correct (ὀρθός). The joke invokes the theory of “correctness” which was associated with Prodicus. The joke is emphasized at line 487 τῶν ὀρνίθων μόνος ὀρθήν - the message seems to be “the birds alone are correct.” The passage stresses these two ideas about the race of birds - they are primary (first) in the cosmos and they are correct.

There are some rationalistic themes in the passage. First is a theory about the gods accredited to Prodicus, who is later mentioned at line 692. Sommerstein (1987.241) writes about his appearance,

He seems to be mentioned here because of his radical opinions on ‘the origins of the gods’; he is reported to have regarded religion as an invention of the human mind, arising from the worship of the gifts of nature (bread, wine, water, fire, etc.) and/or the deification of men who had advanced human culture.

Prodicus is part of a larger trend of rationalistic analysis seen in the pre-Socratic philosophers who questioned the traditional explanations (Hesiodic, Homeric, Orphic) of the cosmos and the gods. In his view the gods were invented by people to account for the things in life that brought great benefits and to remember the people who discovered them. The theories of Prodicus had an impact on Athens, since
he was known to give lectures there for money and was often mentioned by Plato. Henrichs (1975.109) writes about him:

Prodicus is perhaps best remembered for his interest in semantic differentiation, moral typology and the evolution of culture. Within that latter context, it is undoubtedly his rationalistic explanation of the origin of polytheism which, once properly interpreted, must rank as his most sophisticated and, in its impact on contemporary intellectuals like Euripides and subsequent rationalists like Euhemerus and Persaeus, his most influential contribution to ancient intellectual history.

Unlike Prodicus, Aristophanes’ parody maintains that neither the gods nor the humans were gods and benefactors, but the birds. It’s a complete subversion and comic parody of the rationalistic mode. Although the tale of the origin of the hoopoe is attributed to Aesop, there is no extant version. Sommerstein (1987.227) suggests a similar version told by Aelian (NA 16.5) and writes that it is “clearly derived from a variant version of this legend, with some modifications to suit his argument.” He adds that “the tale in its original form will have served to ‘explain’ how the bird came to have its crest.” The story of the lark serves an aitiological purpose - to explain the origin of the birds and the lark in particular.

To each of Peisetaerus’ statements, Euelpides makes aitiological responses, another rationalistic theme in the passage. The Lark was the first bird to be born and because there was no earth, there was no place to bury her father, so he was buried in her head. Euelpides’ response indicates that this myth gives the reason why the Athenian deme “Head” has a cemetery in it. The joke requires the understanding that there is an Athenian neighborhood named “Head” and that it has a cemetery in it. Euelpides rationalizes Peisetaerus statement.

In addition to the race of birds being born before the gods, they were the original kings. The cock ruled over the Persians and thus receives the name “Persian Bird.” The kite was the king of the Greeks and “instituted the custom of rolling on the ground before kites.” The cuckoo was the king of Egypt and so forth. The joke features the remythology of the gods into birds and comic aitiological narratives about.

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80 There is also the themes of the birth of gods (here birds) and first inventions.
customs. The superiority of the birds over the gods and humans is seen in their presence on scepters, diadems, and at sacrifices (to eat the offerings first).

The parody of Prodicus continues in the parabasis (lines 676-800). The following is an excerpt.

*Birds* lines 685-708

ἄγε δή, φύσιν ἄνδρες ἀμαυρόβιοι, φύλλων γενεὰ προσόμοιοι, (685)
ολιγοδρανέες, πλάσματα πηλοῦ, σκιοειδέα φῦλ' ἀμενηνά,
ἅπτηνες ἐφημέριοι, ταλαοὶ βροτοί, ἀνέρες εἰκελόνειροι,
προσέχετε τὸν νοῦν τοῖς ἀθανάτοις ἡμῖν, τοῖς αἰέν ἐούσιν,
τοῖς αἰθερίοις, τοῖς ἀγήρωσι, τοῖς ἀφθιτα μηδομένοισιν,
 ἵν' ἀκούσαντες πάντα παρ' ἡμῖν ὁράσεις περὶ τῶν μετεώρων, (690)
φύσιν οἰωνῶν γένεσίν τε θεῶν ποταμῶν τ' Ἐρέβους τε Χάους τε
εἰδότες ὀρθῶς, Προδίκῳ παρ' ἐμοῦ κλάειν εἴπητε τὸ λοιπὸν.
Χάος ἦν καὶ Νὺξ Ἔρεβός τε μέλαν πρῶτον καὶ Τάρταρος εὐφύς,
γῇ δ' οὐδ' οὐδ' οὐρανός ἦν· Ἐρέβους δ' ἐν ἀπείροις κόλποις
τίκτει πρώτων ὑπηνέμιον Νὺξ ἡ μελανόπτερος φόν., (695)
εξ οὗ περιτελλομένας ὥραις ἔβλαστεν Ἐρως ὁ ποθεινός,
στίλβων νῶτον πτερύγοιν χρυσαῖν, εἰκὼς ἀνεμώκεσι δίναις.
οὔτος δὲ Ἀρταί πετρεοῦτε μιγει ἦν οὐρανός κατά Τάρταρον εὐφύς
ένεωτευσεν γένος ἡμέτερον, καὶ πρῶτον ἀνήγαγεν εἰς φῶς,
πρὸτερον δ' οὐκ ἦν γένος ἀθανάτων, πρὶν Ερως ξυνέμειξεν ἅπαντα· (700)
ζυμμειγνυμένων δ' ἐτέρων ἑτέροις γένετ' Οὐρανός Ὀκεανός τε
καὶ Γῆ πάντων τε θεῶν μακάρων γένος ἀφθιτον. ὁδ' ἐνέμειν
πολυ πρωτότατοι πάντων μακάρων ημεῖς, ἡδ' ἐσμὲν Ἐρως
πολλοος ὑδηλον· πετόμεσθαν ἐναίδεις τις ἡμεῖς σύμμειμεν,
πολλοίς δὲ καλοῖς παῖδας πρὸς τέρμασιν ὥρας (705)
διὰ τὴν ἰσχὺν τὴν ἡμετέραν διεμήρισαν ἁμαρτανταὶ,
ο μοῦ ὄρτυγα δοὺς, ὁ δὲ πορφυρίων', ὁ δὲ χῆν', ὁ δὲ Περσικὸν όρνιν.
πάντα δὲ θνητοίς ἐστίν ἂφ' ἡμῖν τῶν ὀρνίθων τὰ μέγιστα.

**Chorus Leader:** Now then, ye men by nature just faintly alive, like to the race of leaves, do-littles, artefacts of clay, tribes shadowy and feeble, wingless ephemerals, suffering mortals, dreamlike people: pay attention to us, the immortals, the everlasting, the ethereal, the ageless, whose counsels are imperishable; once you hear from us an accurate account of all celestial phenomena, and know correctly the nature of birds and the genesis of gods, rivers, Erebus, and Chaos, thenceforth you’ll be able to tell Prodicus from me to go to hell!!

In the beginning were Chaos and Night and black Erebus and broad Tartarus, and no Earth, Air, or Sky. And in the boundless bosom of Erebus did black-winged Night at the very start bring forth a wind egg, from which as the seasons revolved came forth Eros the seductive, like to swift whirlwinds, his back aglitter with wings of gold. And mating by night with winged Chaos in broad Tartarus, he hatched our own race and first brought it up to daylight. There was no race of immortal gods before Eros commingled everything; then as this commingled with that, Sky came to be, and Ocean and Earth, and the whole imperishable race of blessed gods. Thus we’re far
older than all the blessed gods, and it’s abundantly clear that we’re the offspring of Eros: we fly, and we keep company with lovers. Many are the fair boys who swore they wouldn’t, and almost made it to the end of their bloom, but thanks to our power, men in love did get between their thighs, one with a gift of quail, another with a porphyreon, a goose, or a Persian bird. And mortals get all their greatest blessings from us birds. ... (tr. Henderson, 2000.115-119)

The chorus leader learned well from the Peisetaerus. He gives a “correct” account (690 ὀρθῶς) about the genealogy (691 γένεσίν) of the gods and the world. He accounts for all the firsts, most firsts, and more firsts (693 πρῶτον, 695 πρῶτιστον, 700 πρότερον). The chorus leader establishes the birds as the most primary beings and gives Eros the credit for setting everything in motion. The birds are the true benefactors of the human race.

Instead of questioning a myth, the chorus leader questions Prodicus’ “correctness” by giving his own unique accurate account of celestial phenomena. Rothwell (2007.155-6) comments, “In giving their version the chorus is also evidently rejecting Prodicus’ account of the origins of the cosmos.”\(^{81}\) This theme about Prodicus’ correctness comes up again at line 719. The correctness (ὀρθῶς) of Prodicus is similar to other key words in rationalistic and mythographic writings like Xenophanes (fitting ἐπιπρέπω\(^{82}\), Hecataeus (laughable γελοῖοι)), and Palaephatus (impossible ἀδύνατον).

The chorus offers a unique theogony and cosmogony; it parodies Hesiod’s *Theogony* lines 108-110 and 116-123. The passage also takes into account the philosophy of Empedocles and the Orphic tradition.\(^{83}\) Empedocles thought that love (eros) and strife were the two moving causes of the cosmos. The Orphic element of the cosmology and theogony is the presence of the wind egg.\(^{84}\)

Dunbar (1995.300) dismisses the egg as necessarily being Orphic and brings up another text of interest. She brings up the falsely attributed writings under the name Epimenides as an interesting

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82 See McKirahan (2011.62) for a discussion of Xenophanes’ rationalizing approach. Fragments remain of Xenophanes which contain rationalizations of the goddess Iris (DK21B32) and the Dioscuri (DK21A39)
84 See Pollard (1948.373-5) for a comparison between Hesiod and the Birds and commentary on the wind egg and orphic tradition.
source of a wind egg. Epimenides of Crete is not the author of the writings, mostly found in Diordorus Siculus. It is interesting to note that pseudo-Epidmenides is credited with very long rationalizing narratives of the gods. Fowler (2000.79) calls them mythographic.

Dunbar (Ibid.) says that Aristophanes did not need Orphic cosmology to come up with a wind egg. Eros should naturally be born from an egg since he has wings and the theme fits with the cosmological parody. It is a wind egg because Eros is born from nothing and creates all other things.

Mayhew (2011.172) analyzes the parody:

There was a traditional view of the cosmos and the gods which the audience would be very familiar with (this can be described as Hesiodic and Orphic); Prodicus rejected this cosmology, and especially any role in it played by Olympian gods, and offered instead some kind of radical alternative based on a natural explanation of the world, including the notion that the gods are a human invention - or to speak in a manner of Aristophanes’ chorus of birds, that humans are in fact older than the gods.

With the race of birds portrayed as the oldest creations, original kings, and benefactors, it is clear that these scenes represent a comic parody of Prodicus. Since the humans have mythologized their own deities, the birds have every reason to mythologize their own position in the world. The ongoing joke makes fun of the human act of singing and writing cosmologies and theogonies. Just as the Muses make fun of Hesiod’s character in the Theogony, noting that he can never know the truth about the world, so Aristophanes makes a mockery of telling the truth about the origin of the world and its ordering of deities.

The parabasis continues with the same joke.

lines 709-736

πρῶτα μὲν ὧρας φαίνομεν ἠμείς ἦρος, χειμῶνος, ὀπώρας· σπείρειν μὲν, ὅταν γέρανος κρώζουσ’ εἰς τὴν Λιβύην μεταχωρῇ — (710)
καὶ πηδάλιον τότε ναυκλήρῳ φράζει κρεμάσαντι καθεύδειν—
εἶτα δ’ Ὀρέστῃ χλαίναιν ύσαινειν, ἵνα μὴ ἄγων ἀποδύῃ.
ικτίνος δ’ αὖ μετὰ ταῦτα φανείς εἴεραν ὧραν ἀποφαίνει,
ἡνίκαι πεκτεῖν ὧρα προβόταιν πόκον ἡρινόν· εἶτα χελιδών,
ὅτε χοι χλαίναιν πωλείν ἡδη καὶ ληδάριον τι πρίασθαι. (715)
ἐσμὲν δ’ ὑμῖν Ἀμμών, Δελφοί, Δωδώνη, Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων.
ἐλθόντες γὰρ πρῶτον ἐπ’ ὄρνις οὕτω πρός ἀπαντα τρέπεσθε,
πρὸς τ’ ἐμπορίαν, καὶ πρὸς βιότου κτῆσιν, καὶ πρὸς γάμον ἀνδρός. ὅρνιν τε νομίζετε πάνθ’ ὅσαπερ περὶ μαντείας διακρίνει· φήμη γ’ ὑμίν ὅρνις εστί, πταρμόν τ’ ὄρνιθα καλεῖτε, (720) ἐξήμβλολον ὅρνιν, φωνὴν ὅρνιν, θεράποντ’ ὅρνιν, ὅνον ὅρνιν. ἄρ’ οὐ φανερώς ημεῖς ὑμῖν ἔσμεν μαντεῖος Ἀπόλλων; ἢν οὖν ἡμᾶς νομίσητε θεούς, ἔξετε χρήσθαι μάντεσι Μοῦσαις πάσαις ὥραις, χειμῶνι, θέρει (725) μετρίῳ, πνίγει· κοὐκ ἀποδράντες καθεδούμεθ’ ἄνω σεμνυνόμενοι παρὰ ταῖς νεφέλαις χω Ζεύς· ἀλλὰ παρόντες δώσομεν υμῖν αὐτοῖς, παισίν, παιδών παισίν, (730) πλουθυγίειαν, βίον, εἰρήνην, νεότητα, γέλωτα, χοροὺς, θαλίας, γάλα τ’ ὀρνίθων. ὥστε παρέσται (733-734) κοπιᾶν ὑμῖν ὑπὸ τῶν ἀγαθῶν· (735) οὕτω πλουτήσετε πάντες.

**Chorus Leader** cont.: To start with, we reveal the seasons of spring, winter, and autumn. It’s time to sow when the crane whoops off to Africa; that’s when it tells the ship owner to hand up his rudder and go to sleep, and Orestes to weave a cloak so he won’t be cold when he’s out mugging people. And then it’s the kite’s turn to appear and reveal another season, when it’s time to shear the sheep’s spring wool. And then there’s the swallow when you should be selling your coat and buying a jacket. And we’re your Ammon, your Delphi, your Dodona, your Phoebus Apollo, for you don’t embark on any course without first consulting the birds - about business, about acquiring a livelihood, about a man’s getting married. Whatever’s decisive in prophecy you deem a bird: to you, an ominous utterance is a bird, a sneeze you call a bird, a chance meeting’s a bird, a sound’s a bird, a good luck servant’s a bird, a braying donkey’s a bird. So aren’t we obviously your prophetic Apollo? Well then, if you treat us as gods you’ll have the benefit of prophets, muses, breezes, seasons - winter, mild summer, stifling heat. And we won’t run off and sit up there preening among the clouds, like Zeus, but ever at hand we’ll bestow on you, your children and your children’s children healthy wealthiness, happiness, prosperity, peace, youth, hilarity, dances, festivities, and birds’ milk. Why, you’re liable to knock yourself out from good living, that’s how rich you’ll all be! (tr. Henderson 2000.119)

The benefits of the birds are accounted for and earlier (lines 592-626) continuing the joke with the birds as innovators and benefactors of the human race. The passage begins with the key term first (πρῶτα).

The scene makes fun of Prodicus’ correctness (ὀρθῶς) by calling items “bird” which having nothing to do with the name bird, but rather with things taken as an omen. This approach has a slight reminisce of metaphoric myth rationalization, where it is assumed that the myth emerges from a misunderstanding.
of a name in the narrative. As a remythogized version, the names do not match up and the comparison makes no sense. The joke originates with a play on the word for bird (ὀρνις) which can mean omen and the word for omen (οἰωνός), which can mean bird.

Rothwell (2007.167-168) analyzes the scene, “Certainly the way the birds are predicated with gods and the way divine omens are predicated with birds seem rationalistic and calls attention to the arbitrariness of language in a way that is reminiscent of Prodicus." Mayhew (2011.173-4) thinks that the play on the birds’ names indicates a critique of Prodicus doctrine of words, that they should only have one meaning. The parody on Prodicus and early myth rationalization indicates the popularity and commonplaceness of rationalization in Athens at this time. The audience would have to understand myth rationalization in order to understand the comedy in the scene.

The parabasis and earlier scenes in the Birds represent comic myth rationalization and a parody of Prodicus. The comic approaches include myth rationalization, genealogical criticism, foundation mythology (theogony and cosmology), aitiaology, and etymology. Since Prodicus is mentioned directly and his “correctness” interrogated, the whole joke is a rationalistic parody on his lectures and writings.

Another section in Aristophanes’ Birds contains a parody of myth rationalization; the theme continues throughout the comedy. Rusten (2013.312-313) analyzes lines 1694–1705 as ethnographic parody. This choral interlude occurs right before Peisetaerus’ marriage scene.

Χο. ἐστι δ’ ἐν Φάναισι πρός τῇ [ἀντ.]
Κλεψύδρα πανούργον Ἐγ- (1695)
γλωττογαστόρων γένος,
οἳ θερίζουσιν τε καὶ σπεί-
ρουσι καὶ τρυγῶσι ταῖς γλώ-
ταισι συκάζουσί τε·
βάσβαροι δ’ εἰσίν γένος, (1700)
Γοργίαι τε καὶ Φίλιπποι.
κἀπὸ τῶν Ἐγγλωττογαστό-
ρων ἐκείνων τῶν φιλίππων

85 This theme begins back at line 561.
πανταχοῦ τῆς Ἀττικῆς ἡ γλῶττα χωρὶς τέμνεται. (1705)

Chorus: In Phanai near Klepsydra, there lives a villainous race of *Englottogastores* (‘tongue bellies’), who reap and sow and gather fruit and pluck figs with their tongues. They are of barbarian stock, the Gorgiai and the Philippoi. And on account of these tongue-bellied horse-lovers, everywhere in Attica the tongue (of a sacrificial animal) is cut off separately. (tr. Rusten 2013.312)

In this scene there is a parody of a 5th c. rationalization which Rusten speculates was covered by Hecataeus, concerning the mythical race of “tongue bellies”. The scene contains an aitiological explanation for cutting out the tongue of sacrificial animals. He (2013.313) comments that the *Xeirogastores* (hand-bellies) were a mythical tribe

...who were originally viewed as creatures with hands directly attached to their stomachs but had by the fifth century been rationalistically explained as ‘those who fill their bellies with their hands’, that is, men who lived from manual labour.

Aristophanes remythologizes the hands as tongues. It’s another clever joke which requires the audience to understand myth rationalization and assumes that theories of myth rationalization were popular at this time.\(^{86}\)

The comedy ends rather quickly after this scene with the chorus singing the wedding hymn. The hymn contains praises to many of the Olympian gods. Regardless of the newly established order of birds, the old order still survives in cultural tradition. The last scene of the wedding re-orders the world to its previous narrative. The poet shows awareness of his art of remythology by resetting the original order.

The *Clouds*, taking 3rd place in 423 BC at the City Dionysia, is a philosophical and sophistic parody. We only have the incomplete revised version. In the comedy Strepsiades is in heavy debt because his son, Phidippides, spends so much money on equestrian activities, i.e. riding, racing, and caring for horses. Strepsiades decides to send his son to Socrates’ Thinkery, so he can learn how to beat their debts in court by making the weaker argument into the stronger. His son refuses, so Strepsiades takes himself to

\(^{86}\) Compare the findings of Katz and Volk (2000) where the term “belly-talkers” is analyzed as divinely inspired poets. In that case this scene might refer to the removal of the tongue as a sacrifice to prophets.
Socrates and learns the art of persuasion on his own. Socrates initiates him into the mysteries of his Thinkery.

Strepsiades learns that all the stuff he knows about the world and especially the Olympian gods is wrong. He has the opportunity to meet the “real” gods, rather goddesses - the chorus of Clouds. Unfortunately he is not smart enough to pick up the skills of oratory and, after Socrates becomes very frustrated with his idiocy, Strepsiades convinces his son to go in his place. His son successfully learns the art of persuasion after watching two personified characters fight it out - the Better and the Worse Argument. The Worse Argument wins in the end and the father and son go home to win their battles.

The father has some luck with his son telling off the debtors, but soon things go wrong as the boy beats his father because of an argument. The father asked him to sing Simonides and Aeschylus, but the boy calls them old fashioned noise and instead sings a piece by Euripides. At the end it is revealed that the Clouds are punishing Strepsiades and Socrates. Since the comedy deals with the direct debunking of the Olympian gods and an alternative explanation of natural phenomena, it is suitable for finding rationalistic parody.

Socrates is portrayed in the comedy as embodying different sophistic and philosophical ideas of the time. Dover (1968.xxxv) writes,

Socrates holds a mixed collection of physical, cosmological, and meteorological doctrines (95 ff., 227 ff., 376 ff., 404 ff.) and in particular he rejects the gods of cult and myth (247 f., 366 ff.), putting in their place sometimes the operation of physical laws (e.g. 379 f.), at other times his own deities - the Clouds alone (365) or a trio, Chaos, Clouds, and Tongue (423 f.).

Scholars analyze the different philosophical references throughout the comedy. Ancient thinkers referenced include: Thales (6th c. BC), Anaximander (6th c. BC), Anaximenes (6th c. BC), Heraclitus (6th c. BC), Anaxagoras (5th c. BC), Empedocles (5th c. BC), Leucippus and Democritus (5th c. BC), Diongenes of Apollonia (5th c. BC), Hippias of Elis (5th c. BC), and Prodicus (5th c. BC).

Socrates attempts to reeducate Strepsiades on his views of the world. Lines 247-426 are filled with this theme. Before line 247 Strepsiades swears by the gods that he will pay Socrates to learn the
argument that will help him beat his debts in court. Socrates begins reeducating him by debunking his mythological beliefs. Lines 247-254 follow:

Σω. ποίους θεοὺς ὀμεῖ σύ; πρῶτον γὰρ θεοὶ ήμῖν νόμισμ' οὐκ ἔστι.
Στ. τῷ γὰρ ὄμνυτ'; ἣ (248)
σιδαρέοισιν, ἀπερέ ἐν Βυζαντίῳ; (249)
Σω. βούλει τὰ θεία πράγματ' εἰδέναι σαφῶς (250)
ἀττ' ἐστιν ορθώς;
Στ. νὴ Δί', εἶπερ ἐστι γε. (251)
Σω. καὶ συγγενέσθαι ταῖς Νεφέλαισιν εἰς λόγους, (252)
ταῖς ἡμετέραισι δαίμοσιν;
Στ. μάλιστά γε. (253)
Σω. κάθιζε τοίνυν ἐπὶ τὸν ἱερὸν σκίμποδα. (254)

Socrates: What do you mean, you’ll swear by the gods? First of all, gods aren’t legal tender here.
Strepsiades: So, what do you swear by? Iron coins, as in Byzantium?

250 Socrates: Would you like to know the truth about matters divine, what they really are?
Strepsiades: I certainly would, if it’s actually possible.
Socrates: And to have converse with Clouds, our own deities?
Strepsiades: Yes, very much.
Socrates: Then sit down upon the sacred sofa. (tr. Henderson 1998.41-43)

The scene marks the beginning of a series of rationalistic remythologies. Socrates’ truth about divine matters will be in actuality more bizarre myths about the way things work. The Olympian deities are not the custom (νόμισμα) in this joke, but some other deities, Clouds, are mythologized as the true deities.

At line 250 Socrates offers to give the “correct” (ὀρθῶς) version concerning divine matters.

At lines 264-266 Socrates says a prayer:

ὦ δέσποιν' ἀναξ, ἀμέτρητ' Ἀήρ, ὃς ἔχεις τὴν γῆν μετέωρον,
λαμπρός τ' Ἀἰθήρ, σεμναί τε θεαὶ Νεφέλαι βροντησικέραυνοι, (265)
ἀρθητε, φάνητ', ὃ δέσποιναι, τῷ φροντιστῇ μετέωροι.

O Lord and Master, measureless Air, who hold the earth aloft, and you shining Empyrean, and ye Clouds, awesome goddesses of thunder and lightning, rise, appear aloft, o Mistresses, to the thinker! (tr. Henderson 1998.45)

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87 Henderson (1998.43), Sommerstein (1982.173), Bowie (1993.107), and Dover (1968.130-131) analyze the scene as a parody of initiation rites.
The prayer contains deities not usually worshipped as deities. Socrates introduces a new cosmological order to his student. The scene makes a joke about rationalized theories of the cosmos. Air was Anaximenes’ explanation (DK13A5, DK13A7) for the most basic stuff of the Cosmos, even making up the material of the gods.

Anaximenes of Miletus (6th c. BC) writes that air was a god (DK13A10). His philosophy includes an alternative rationalized cosmology with air bringing the heavenly bodies into existence (DK13A7). The earth rests as a flat disk hovering over the air (DK13A6, DK13A20). He had rationalizing theories about the stars (DK13A7, DK13A14), the clouds (DK13A17), weather (DK13A17), and earthquakes (DK13A21). At line 314 Strepsiades has heard the Cloud’s song and he wants to know what or who these Clouds are. He finally gets to see them as they descend from Mount Parnes. This excerpt picks up a line 329:

Σω. ταύτας μέντοι σὺ θεάς οὔσας οὐκ ἦδεις οὐδ’ ἐνόμιζες;
Στ. μὰ Δί’, ἀλλ’ ὁμίχλην καὶ δρόσον αὐτὰς ἔγειρεν καὶ καπνὸν εἶναι. (330)
Σω. οὐ γὰρ μὰ Δί’ οἶσθ’ ὅτι πλεῖστοις αὐτὰς βόσκουσι σοφιστάς,
Θουριομάντεις, ἱερέσις ὀνείφας, μετεωροφεύτης,
κυκλῖων τε χορῶν κινοῦσας, ἄνδρας μετεωροφεύτης,
οὐδὲν δρῶντας βόσκουσ’ ἀργούς, ὅτι ταύτας μουσοποιοῦσιν.

Socrates: And you didn’t realize that they’re goddesses, or believe it?

330 Strepsiades: God no; I thought they were mist and dew and smoke.

Socrates: You didn’t because you’re unaware that they nourish a great many sophists, diviners from Thurii, medical experts, long-haired idlers with onyx signet rings, and tune bending composers of dithyrambic choruses, men of highflew pretention, whom they maintain as do-nothings, because they compose music about these Clouds. (tr. Henderson 1998.53-54)

Strepsiades offers the rationalized version - that the Clouds are actually non-divine meteorological phenomena, i.e. mist, dew, and smoke. Socrates responds with a remythologized narrative - that the Clouds are the inspiration, like the Muses, to certain people. Since no one recognizes the Clouds as the true deities, the people inspired by the Clouds also get no recognition. It’s partially a joke on patrons

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88 For these fragments collected, translated, and analyzed, see McKirahan (2011.48-57).
and poets. The nature of clouds provides an interesting rationalistic theme. They represent nature personified and remythologized.

This next excerpt picks up at line 340.

Στ. λέξον δή μοι, τί παθούσαι, (340) εἶτερ νεφέλαι γ' εἰσίν ἀληθῶς, θνηταῖς εἴξασι γυναιξίν; (341) οὐ γάρ ἐκεῖναι γ' εἰσί τοιαύται.
Σω. φέρε, ποίαι γάρ τινές εἰσίν; (342) Στ. οὐκ οἶδα σαφῶς· εἴξασιν δ' οὖν εἰρίοισι πεπταμένοισιν, (343) κοὐχὶ γυναιξίν, μὰ Δί', οὐδ' ὁτιοῦν· αὐταί δὲ ὅνας ἔχουσιν.
Σω. ἀπόκριναι νῦν ἄττ' ἄν ἔρωμαι. (345)
Στ. λέγε νυν ταχέως ὅτι βούλει. (345)
Σω. ἣδη ποτ' ἀναβλέψας εἶδες νεφέλην κενταύρῳ ὁμοίαν (346) ἢ παρδάλει ἢ λύκῳ ἢ ταῦρῳ;
Στ. νὴ Δί' ἐγγυ'. εἶτα τί τοῦτο; (347)
Σω. γίγνονται πάνθ' ὅτι βούλονται· κἀτ' ἣν μὲν ἴδωσι κομήτην (348) ἄγριόν τινα τῶν λασίων τούτων, οἰόντερ τὸν Ξενοφάντου, σκώπτουσα τὴν μανίαν αὐτοῦ κενταύροις ἠκασαν αὐτάς. (350)

Strepsiades: So tell me, if these really are Clouds, how is it they look like mortal women? Because those clouds aren’t like that.

340 Socrates: Well, what do they look like?
Strepsiades: I don’t know exactly, but they look like fleeces spread out, not like women, no, surely not in any way. And these Clouds have noses!
Socrates: Now answer some questions for me.

345 Strepsiades: Ask away, whatever you like.
Socrates: Have you ever looked up and seen a cloud resembling a centaur, or a leopard, or a wolf, or a bull?
Strepsiades: Certainly I have. So what?
Socrates: Clouds turn into anything they want. Thus, if they see a savage with long hair, one of these furry types, like the son of Xenophantus, they mock his obsession by making themselves look like centaurs.

350

The Clouds can be used to explain all mythological impossibilities, since they can change form. They account for a system of justice because they mock people by turning into mythological creatures. It’s a bizarre rationalization of mythological creatures. Hubbard (1991.89) comments on their changing form:

“...the Clouds can assume any shape which mirrors the follies of human imagination...”

89 Bowie (1993.127-130) describes a myriad of cloud mythologies that are possibly at play.
The centaur was a popular topic of rationalization for mythographers. Aristophanes also makes a joke about the Clouds’ changing form. Heraclitus the Paradoxographer (29) rationalized the god Proteus and his ability to change into many different forms into a myth that arose from Proteus’ temperament - that he treated the wicked one way and the good another way. The passage above contains a rationalized explanation for mythological creatures; they are just imagination and clouds, but yet also divine.

In the next scene Prodicus is directly mentioned and remythology is in play; it begins at line 358.

Chorus Leader: Hail, oldster born long ago, stalker of erudite arguments, and you too, priest of subtlest hogwash, tell us what you desire; for we would pay no attention to any other contemporary sophist of celestial studies except for Prodicus, for his wisdom and intelligence, and you, because you strut like a popinjay through the streets and cast your eyes sideways and, unshod, endure many woes and wear a haughty expression for our sake.

Strepsiades: Mother Earth, what a voice! How holy and august and marvelous!

Socrates: That’s because they are the only true goddesses; all the rest are rubbish.

Strepsiades: Come now, by Earth, doesn’t Olympian Zeus count as a god with you people?

Socrates: What do you mean, Zeus? Do stop driveling. Zeus doesn’t even exist!

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90 Sommerstein (1982.179) and Dover (1968.147) analyze the appearance of Centaurs at 350 as referring to Xenophantus’ pederasty.

91 29. Proteus: It is said that at one moment Proteus became water, at another fire. Clearly, he was like water to the good, but vengeful to the wicked according to their deserts. And so people spread this story about him. (tr. Stern 2003.86)
Strepsiades: What are you talking about? Then who makes it rain? Answer me that one, first of all.

Socrates: These do, of course! And I’ll teach you how, with grand proofs. Now then: where have you ever yet seen rain without Clouds? Though according to you, Zeus should make rain himself on a clear day, when the Clouds are out of town.

Socrates explains that the Clouds are the only true goddesses. The rest of the Olympian gods are nonsense / silly talk (φλύαρος). In this passage the Clouds are the cause of rain and the only true goddesses. Zeus is said to not exist at all. This theme - that the current god is not the “real” god, but some other deity, force, or natural phenomena, which has more direct influence in our lives, is the “real” god - appears again in Aristophanes (i.e. Peace) and throughout all periods of comedy. The joke typically has allegorical force. Some aspect of nature has so much influence that it either is a god or it ought to be one.

Unlike the Birds Prodicus is embraced here for his theories of the cosmos. Zeus is directly debunked as the producer of rain and the Clouds are half-rationalized as the cause of rain. They are half rationalized because they are still deities, but they also contain the natural explanation for the rain production.

The theme continues at line 379.

Στ. ὁ δ’ ἀναγκάζων ἐστί τίς αὐτάς—οὐχ ὁ Ζεὺς; —ὡστε φέρεσθαι;
Σω. ἥκιστ’, ἀλλ’ αἰθέριος Δῖνος. (380)
Στ. Δῖνος; τουτί μ’ ἐλελήθει,
ὁ Ζεὺς οὐκ ἃν, ἀλλ’ ἀντ’ αὐτοῦ Δῖνος νυνὶ βασιλεύων. (381)
ἀτὰρ οὐδὲν πω περὶ τοῦ πατάγου καὶ τῆς βροντῆς μ’ ἐδίδαξας.

Strepsiades: But who is it that forces them to drift? Doesn’t Zeus?
Socrates: Not at all; it’s cosmic whirl.

Strepsiades: Whirl? That’s a new one on me, that Zeus is gone and Whirl now rules in his place. But you still haven’t taught me anything about thunder’s clash.
Socrates: Didn’t you hear me? I repeat: when the clouds are full of water and run into one another, they crash because their density.
The reference to whirl as a god is another remythology. Whirl was part of the cosmogony of Democritus (e.g. DK67A1). Socrates here rationalizes the workings of thunder. In the scene Zeus is said to be replaced by Whirl, rather than him not existing at all. Even though new divinities appear, rational theories of rain are put forward. Whether the old gods actualy exist or not is unclear and paradoxical.

Mayhew (2011.169) explains that a parody of Prodicus appears around line 394 with an etymological play.

Socrates: Now then consider what farts you let off from such a little tummy; isn’t natural that this sky, being limitless, should thunder mightily?

Strepsiades: So that’s why the words are similar, bronte “thunder” and porde “fart!” But now explain this: where does the lightning bold come from, blazing with fire that incinerates us on contact and badly burns the survivors? It’s quite obvious that Zeus hurls it against perjurers.

(tr. Henderson 1998.64-67)

Socrates explains how thunder works as opposed to being caused by Zeus. He relates the explanation to eating too much food and farting. The etymological play is on the word for thunder (βροντή) and fart (πορδή). The whole series of scenes is a parody of Prodicus and his rationalistic approaches. The passage contradicts Prodicus’ theory of “correctness” – the two words – thunder and fart - should not be conflated. The same theme occurs at line 404.

Beginning at line 423, the transformation is complete and Strepsiades no longer believes in the traditional gods.


Mayhew (2012.169) also sees a parody of Prodicus at lines 658-694 where Socrates teaches Strepsiades the system of gender in using the words chicken and rooster. Bowie (1993.110) and Papageorgiou (2004) analyze the Agon between the Better and Worse Argument as a parody of Prodicus. Bowie sees the theme throughout the comedy. Mayhew (2011.194) also covers this parody and the scholia on Aristophanes which makes reference to it.
Sω. ἄλλο τι δὴ τ’ οὐ νομεῖς ἢδη θεόν οὐδένα πλην ἄπερ Ἦμεις, (423)
tὸ Χάος τούτι καὶ τὰς Νεφέλας καὶ τὴν γλώτταν, τρία ταῦτα;
Στ. οὐδ’ ἀν διαλεχθεῖν γ’ ἀτεχνῶς τοῖς ἄλλοις οὐδ’ ἀν ἅπερ ἂν ἄπαντων. (425)
οὐδ’ ἀν θύσαμι’ οὐδ’ ἀν σπεῖσαμι’, οὐδ’ ἐπιθεῖν λιβανωτόν.

Socrates: Than I take it you will now believe in no god but those we believe in: this Void, and the Clouds, and the Tongue, and only these three?

Strepsiades: I wouldn’t speak a word to the other gods even if I met them in the street; and I won’t sacrifice to them, or pour them libations, or offer them incense.

(tr. Henderson 1998.71)

The succession of gods obscures the matter further - is there one set of gods or all the gods, but only certain ones have power? Does Zeus actually exist, if he is to be overthrown? There is little consistency in what Socrates teaches about the gods and the natural phenomena. The chorus of Clouds does not stay consistent in their version either. These inconsistencies indicate that the poet used several different models and approaches. It is near impossible to separate and analyze each in full. The parody is still maintained at lines 825-828 when Strepsiades admonishes his son for swearing by Zeus instead of Whirl who has “kicked out Zeus.”

The Clouds portray themselves as benefactors to the people beginning at line 575:

ὦ σοφώτατοι θεαταί, δεῦρο τὸν νοῦν προσέχετε. (575)
ηδικημέναι γὰρ ύμῖν μεμφόμεσθ’ ἐναντίον·
πλεῖστα γὰρ θεον ἅπαντων ἁφελούσαις τὴν πόλιν,
δαιμόνων ἡμῖν μόναις οὐ θύετ’ οὐδὲ σπένδετε,
αἵτινες τηροῦμεν ὑμᾶς. ἢν γὰρ ᾖ τινς ἔξοδος
μηδενὶ ξὺν νῷ, τότ’ ἢ βροντῶμεν ἢ ψακάζομεν. (580)

Most sage spectators, give us your attention, for we are going to reproach you with the wrong you have done us. Of all the gods we do the most good for your city, but we are the only deities to whom you make no offerings or libations, the very ones who watch over you!

(tr. Henderson 1998.87)

They provide seasons and rain. The scene continues the idea of the gods being worshipped for their benefits of nature and the Clouds as the true deities. Aristophanes plays with the rationalization theme
which becomes obvious as more inconsistencies appear.\textsuperscript{94} He mythologizes some phenomena and rationalizes others. These Clouds, which were not worshipped before, are now considered divine and need to be worshiped. On the other hand Zeus, who before is divine and worshipped, is merely a meteorological phenomenon and not divine at all. Comic myth rationalization promises comic outcomes that do not have to make logical sense. In the fashion of Prodicus the remythologized gods are the providers of everything important to the human race.

Aristophanes \textit{Peace}, wining 2\textsuperscript{nd} place at the City Dionysia in 421 BC, combines political parody with a fantastical plot line. Athens was worn out by the Peloponnesian War and the upcoming peace treaty of Niceas was promising for peace and reprieve from the war conditions (even though the treaty was short lived). The main character, Trygaeus, rides a magical life-sized dung beetle into the heavens to confront Zeus over destroying and dividing Greece with war. Trygaeus is just a normal citizen who wants to end the war any way he can.

When he arrives in the heavens, he learns that the gods have abandoned the place and humankind. The god War has imprisoned the goddess Peace. War goes out looking for a pestle to continue the grinding war. Trygaeus and other characters from different Greek nationalities appear and help pull Peace out from under the rubble; each one’s efforts are described with respect to their political position in the Peloponnesian War. When they finally pull the statue/goddess out of the rubble, all the different nationalities suddenly get along. Hermes appears and explains that pro war politicians had originally been the cause of Peace’s exile.

Once peace is established again, the old of way life of farming and wine making is embraced. The war profiteers are mocked as they have become useless. Trygaeus brings back the goddesses Harvest and Festival. He marries Harvest, representing the return to normal farming life, and gives Festival to the archon, who typically oversaw the Athenian festivals. Since the comedy is overtly political, myth

\textsuperscript{94} Every scholar who analyzes this comedy has commented on the inconsistencies, for instance see Dover (1968), Sommerstein (1982), Hubbard (1991), Bowie (1993), and Segal (1996).
rationalization does not seem to be a major theme. The gods play a serious role, but their world is
turned upside down by a mortal; it is not debunked, retold, or reformulated. Mythological jokes still
abound in certain scenes. One scene makes a parody on an early Greek historiographer, called a
mythographer by some scholars.

In this scene (lines 827-841) Trygaeus has just returned from heaven, supposedly on foot instead of
on a dung beetle, and his slave greets him. The following short lived joke occurs:

Slave: Did you see anyone else wandering through the air, other than yourself?
Trygaeus: No, unless you include the two or three souls of dithyrambic composers.
Slave: What were they doing?
Trygaeus: Winging about, collecting overtures of the aerial breeze-cruising sort.
Slave: That also means the legend isn’t true, that when we die we turn into stars in the sky.
Trygaeus: Oh yes it is!
Slave: So who’s a star there now?
Trygaeus: Ion of Chios, who some years ago on earth composed The Dawn Star. When he
arrived up there, everybody dubbed him Dawn Star right away!
Slave: And who are the shooting stars that blaze on their course?
Trygaeus: They’re some of the rich stars walking home from dinner with lanterns in hand, and
fire in the lanterns. (tr. Henderson 1998.529-531)
The *Suda* and scholia on Aristophanes have entries for Ion of Chios (5th c. BC). *Suda (iota 487)* calls him a tragic / lyric poet and a philosopher. It adds that he also wrote works on meteorology (μετεώρων)

95, and compiled myths (συνθέτους λόγους). It cites Aristophanes and indicates his parody of Ion. A scholium on Aristophanes calls him a dithyrambic, tragic, and lyric poet. It cites a fragment of his dithyrambic poem which Aristophanes parodies. He says that Ion writes comedy, epigrams, paens, hymns, scholia (drinking songs), odes, elegy, and narratives of embassies. His titles include the *Foundation of Chios, Cosmologicos,* and *Hypomnemata*. These titles all imply rationalistic themes like *ktisis*, genealogy, myth compilation, and myth correction. We have no fragments of Ion that give insight into his approach. Fowler (2000.262) comments about his surviving prose fragments, “*mythographica utique nulla inter ea inventiuntur.*” What remains of his prose work as a forerunner of mythographic writing consists of fragments of his *Foundation (ktisis) of Chios*.96 Recently Olding (2007) calls him a mythographer.

The parody covers an explanation for the phenomena of shooting stars and the stars themselves - that they are actually humans. It questions whether the myth is true and then makes fun of Ion of Chios. We expect the myth to be false and a reason given which explains the actual phenomena, but Aristophanes remythologizes it for comic purposes - stars are people who have indeed died. It’s impossible to know what Ion of Chios’ theory was, if anything. The image of the Dithyrambic poets with wings in the clouds composing dithyrambs appeared in *Birds* 1372-1409 and *Clouds* 333-339.97

Scholars have analyzed the scene differently. Sommerstein (2005.173) analyzes lines 832-3 - “this popular belief (not otherwise attested at so early a date) seems to combine two ideas well known in other literature.” One is that stars were “originally men, women or animals to whom the gods had

95 In ancient Greek meteorology is the study of things in the air, typically astronomical phenomena. It can include anything in the sky including weather.

96 These are the fragments which Fowler selected. There are more. He discusses this in the introduction (xxix). At the same time Fowler excluded fragments of Hippias of Elis (xxxii-xxxiii).

granted immortality…” And the other is that the soul after death reunited with the “aether”. As to humans being turned into stars and constellations, Sommerstein cites Pherecydes (FGrH 3F90) and Hellanicus (FGrH 4F19) as fifth century examples (Pleiades and Hyades). Olson (1998.231) analyzes the scene as a joke about the afterlife and (1998.232) writes that the theory of common people becoming stars is not attested elsewhere (he cites Plato Timaeus 41d-42b). People turning into stars is the main theme of the the mythographic writings of pseudo-Eratosthenes (Katasterismoi).

It seems that Ion of Chios had some theory about stars and that Aristophanes used a theory of the afterlife to remythologize his account. The scene contains a reference to him as a dithyrambic poet and to a poem he wrote entitled Dawn Star. The scholia quotes a line, but not enough of the poem is present to know its topic or approach. Scholars see the parody of his poem and do not mention his rationalizing prose as part of the parody. Regardless of this disconnect, I see a rationalistic parody and remythology in this scene. The rationalized version of stars as humans is stars as natural phenomena. Aristophanes presents the mythical version. Ion of Chios likely wrote both styles. It is not uncommon for someone to write rationalizing prose and mythological lyric poetry - Parmenides, Empedocles, and Xenophanes come to mind.

The last scene which contains a mythographic and rationalistic parody appears in Aristophanes’ Acharnians, which won 1st place at the Lenaea in 425 BC. Dikaeopolis makes a private peace treaty with Sparta which results in the benefit of an open market with the enemies and he is finally able to return to his farm. The peace is short lived since the pro war faction of Acharnia shows up to make trouble for Dikaeopolis. He performs a tragic parody in an attempt to convince his detractors that peace is necessary. After winning the contest, he sets up his market. He trades with the Megarians, Boeotians, and Peloponnesians with whom he sympathizes, while blaming the Athenians as the propagators of the war. The comedy ends with a festival and a drinking contest where Dicaeopolis wins over an Athenian general.
This excerpt occurs within Dicaeopolis’ speech about opposing the war. As Sommerstein (1980.179) explains, the speech is a parody of and modeled upon Euripides’ Telephus, in particular Telephus’ speech to the Greeks. In these lines (522-529) he gives a cause for the war.

καὶ ταῦτα μὲν δὴ σμικρὰ κἀπιχώρια, 
πόρνην δὲ Σιμαίθαν ἰόντες Μεγαράδε 
νεανίαι ἵκκλεπτουσι μεθυσοκότταβοι: (525) 
κἀθ’ οἱ Μεγαρῆς ὀδύναις πεφυσιγγωμένοι
ἀντεξέκλεψαν Ασπασίας πόρνα δύο·
κάντεύθεν ἄρχη τοῦ πολέμου κατερράγη
Ἐλλην πάσιν ἕκ τοιῶν λαυκαστριῶν.

Dicaeopolis: But then some tipsy, cottabus playing youths went to Megara and kidnapped the whore Simaetha. And then the Megarians, garlic-stung by their distress, in retaliation stole a couple of Aspasia’s whores98, and from that the onset of war broke forth upon all the Greeks: from three sluts! (tr. Henderson 1998.121)

The scene represents a parody on the cause of the Peloponnesian War, but also a parody on Herodotus’ myth rationalization of the cause of the Trojan War along with Helen. Hornblower (2006.307) writes, “...the account later in the play of the causes of the Peloponnesian War in terms of abduction of women (525ff.) does seem to me to presuppose Herodotus’ opening four chapters ..., and this is not refuted by the simultaneous likelihood that Euripides’ Telephus is being parodied.” In his explanation of the Trojan War, Herodotus rationalizes the myths of Europa, Helen, Io, and Medea. Instead of mythological women with fantastical stories, he casts them as regular women who were abducted by foreigners and the wars being caused by vengeance between the nations over the stolen women. The comic connection between Helen and Aspasia and Paris Alexander and Pericles is found in other Old Comedy poets.99

Unlike the first three examples, Aristophanes makes no reference to Herodotus here nor is any myth openly questioned. The focus of the excerpt is on the stealing of women as the cause of war which

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98 Henderson (1998.121) comments on Aspasia, “Popular gossip held that Aspasia, an immigrant citizen of Miletus who lives with Pericles as his unmarried wife, procured free-born women for him, or even trained prostitutes.”
99 Compare the plot summary of Cratinus Dionysalexandros, also Cratinus K-A 258, 259 (Chirons), Eupolis K-A 267 (Prospaltians), and Callias K-A 21 (Men-in-Chains). None of these fragmentary plays contain enough material to reconstruct the parody of Aspasia / Pericles and Helen / Paris. Dionysalexandros contains the most material in its plot summary and the discussion surrounding it. Aristophanes’ approach seems unique.
echoes Herodotus’ analysis of the cause of the Trojan War. Hornblower (2007.310) explains that many Greek writers were influenced by or parodied Herodotus, but few mention him by name. After his death, in the next generation of writers, he is mentioned more often. The scene in the *Acharnians* represents a rationalistic parody. It is not so much a remythology as it is a re-use of rationalized myth with the names changed to fit the comedy.
Chapter 03 Old Comedy and Myth Humanization

In this chapter I survey the collection of Old Comedy fragments for examples of remythology and myth rationalization. I establish a theory of myth humanization as a comic approach. I analyze some examples of comic myth rationalization and related themes like genealogy, etymology, and aitiology. I conclude that remythology and myth rationalization were popular approaches in Old Comedy.

Some brief examples of remythology in Aristophanes will help move my analysis into the collection of Old Comedy fragments. The remythology of wealth is an ongoing theme in Aristophanes’ Wealth, produced in 388 BC. No record of its rank or festival survives. In the comedy Chremylus, a poor farmer, takes his son to the oracle at Delphi to ask whether he should teach his son to be a criminal. The oracle gives out a typical response - to take home the first person he meets when leaving the oracle - and the blind god Wealth appears as the first person encountered. The god explains that Zeus blinded him and that is why he is unable to help those who need it most. The comic cure comes with a visit to the Temple of Asclepius and the restoration of Wealth’s vision. The event turns the world order upside down as the poor become rich and there is no longer need of money. By the end of the comedy the remythology is complete as humans sacrifice to Wealth instead of Zeus. The comedy, just like the Birds, has a utopic and at the same time dystopic theme.

A few scenes focus on the remythology of wealth. At lines 127-129 Chremylus begins to convince Wealth that Wealth is more powerful than Zeus. At lines 130-200 he and his son, Cario, explain to Wealth that everything is done for Wealth’s sake and how he brings great benefits upon everyone. Towards the middle of the comedy, the agon, which begins at line 489, has Chremylus convincing Poverty that Wealth is better than she is. Poverty describes herself as the cause and main benefactor of all things.

The comedy interrogates popular belief, rather than rationalizing any particular myth or parodying a rationalistic author. In the myriad of scenes describing Wealth’s inner workings or Poverty’s, we see a
rationalistic schema applied to traditional ideas and practices about rewards and punishments. It tries to make comic sense of success and failure in life. It assigns to one or other deity the cause of all things in the cosmos.

The following fragment provides an example of remythology and highlights the main problem in analyzing Old Comedy outside of the complete comedies of Aristophanes. We can only speculate the intention and approach of this remythology of wealth. The following comedy from Aristophanes is not extant and has no surviving plot summary. One of its fragments features Pluto and another makes a reference to Prodicus. The comedy was entitled *Fry-Cooks* and fragment K-A 504 comes from Stobaeus (4.53.18 “the comparison of life and death”):

καὶ μὴν πόθεν Πλούτων γ’ ἂν ὄνομάξετο, εἰ μὴ τὰ βέλτιστ' ἔλαχεν; ἐν δὲ σοι φράσω, ὡς τὰ κάτω κρείττω’ στίν ἀν ὁ Ζεὺς ἐχει· ὅταν γὰρ ἱστῇς, τὸ ταλάντου τὸ ῥέπον κάτω βαδίζει, τὸ δὲ κενὸν πρὸς τὸν Δία. (5) ...

dia ταύτα γάρ τοι καὶ καλούνται μακάριοι· πᾶς γὰρ λέγει τίς ὁ μακαρίτης σίχεται, (10) κατέδαρθεν· εὐδαίμων, ὅσ’ οὐκ ἀνιάσεται.’ καὶ θύομέν <γ’> αὐτοῖς τάναγίσματα ὃσπερ θεοίς, καὶ χοάς γε χεόμενοι αἰτούμεθ’ αὐτοὺς δεῦρ’ ἀνεῖναι τάγαθα.

and how would he ever have gotten the name Pluto if he hadn’t the best of everything? I’ll note one fact that shows the underworld is better than Zeus’ realm. When you use scales, the pan that’s full goes down, but the one that’s empty rises toward Zeus. [5 lines omitted due to textual corruption] That must, you see, be why they’re called the Blest. For don’t we all say, “he’s gone to his reward, he rests in peace, he’s happy and free of care?” And we make them sacrificial offerings just as we do the gods, and when pouring libations we beg them to send their blessings up to us... (tr. Henderson in Rusten 2011.319)

The comic approach here interrogates popular beliefs about Zeus and Pluto (life and death) and it questions myth. It gives aitiological explanations for why things about death are referred to in certain terms. The passage asks the question why a god of the underworld, whose name means wealth, doesn’t
deserve more attention than Zeus. The excerpt closes with the idea that the dead are the same as gods, at least in reverence. The joke relies on an all too literal interpretation of funeral practices.

Consider another fragment (K-A 506) from the comedy found in a scholion on Aristophanes Clouds 361a which cites an example of Aristophanes mentioning Prodicus:

τοῦτον τὸν ἄνδρ’ ἢ βιβλίον διέφθορεν
ῃ Πρόδικος ἢ τῶν ἀδολεσχῶν εἰς γέ τις.

Either a book has been the ruin of this man here or else Prodicus or one of those idle chatterers. (tr. Henderson in Rusten 2011.320)

The speaker criticizes some character, perhaps the one who said the previous fragment. Fragment 504 may represent this character’s views as he rationalized and remythologized some understanding of Zeus and Pluto. Perhaps a Prodicean rationalization was at play. The comedy would be reminiscent of the Birds and Clouds. It is impossible to tell whether the remythology of Pluto continued throughout the comedy or was isolated to this scene.

This example of remythology comes from Eupolis in his comedy entitled The Spongers which won 1st place in 421 BC at the City Dionysia. Sponger (Κόλαξ) is another term for a parasite or someone who invites himself to dinner or the party. The comedy concerned an attack on the Athenian Kallias, who squandered his inheritance by paying sophists. Protagoras played a role in the comedy and the spongers made up the chorus. The plot may have involved the rich Kallias being overrun by spongers. The spongers are portrayed as being divine and powerful in the following fragment which comes from Hephaestion (41.5, On Metre). As the example exhibits paeanic meter, the chorus must be speaking.

Φημὶ δὲ βροτοῖσι πολὺ πλείστα παρέχειν ἐγὼ
καὶ πολὺ μέγιστ’ ἀγαθὰ. ταῦτα δ’ ἀποδείξομεν.

K-A 173: I say that we provide for mortals by far the greatest and most numerous benefits, and we shall prove this. (tr. Storey 2011.v2.145)

100 See Storey 2003.180 for details and background on the comedy.
The scene may be compared to Aristophanes’ *Clouds* line 577 and *Birds* line 708, where the Clouds and Birds are described respectively as benefactors to the human race. Remythology is at play here since the chorus boasts of being the true benefactors versus some other group or deity.

The word mortals (βροτοῖσι) implies that the chorus is being portrayed as divine. Another fragment (K-A 187) from the comedy consists of one word - “Stomach-god” (κοιλιοδαίμων). It may indicate that the chorus had a role helping people acquire and eat food. Plato, Xenophon, and Aischines reference that Kallias in real life was “addicted” to paying and using the services of sophists, in particular Prodicus. It is possible that the comedy had rationalistic themes in the flavor of Prodicus, but not enough material is present to make a determination. The parasite (sponger) as divine appears in a fragment of Diodorus (K-A 2) which will be analyzed later in chapter 05.

Consider this fragment from Hermippus (K-A 73) which features a remythology. No title or plot summary survives of this comedy. The fragment comes from Stobaeus (1.8.36) and appears in a section covering ancient explanations of the cause (αἴτιος) of time.

Ἐκεῖνός ἐστιν στρογγύλος τὴν ὄψιν, ὦ πονηρέ, ἐντὸς δὲ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ ἡμᾶς δὲ τίκτει περιτρέχων τὴν γῆν ἁπαξάπασαν. Ὀνομάζεται δὲ ἐνιαυτός, ὅπως ἐν περίφερης τελευτήν (5) οὐδεμίαν οὐδὲ ἀρχὴν <ἔχει> κυκλών δὲ ἀεὶ τὸ σῶμα οὐ παύεται δὲ ἥμερας ὅσημέρας τροχάζων.

You wretched man, he is spherical in appearance, and having everything inside himself he runs round in a circle. As he races over the whole earth he gives birth to us. He is called “The Year,” and being round he has no beginning nor end, and as he is ever circular in form will never stop going round, all day every day. (tr. Storey 2011.v2.313)

There is no questioning of any myth. The speaker seems to be rebuking or criticizing another speaker’s comment about the topic in his address (ὦ πονηρέ). The excerpt maintains that the god Year gave birth to humans and controls all things. The sentiment is very different from the idea that Zeus or the Fates

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101 See Storey 2003.191 for this comparison.
102 The fragment comes from Athenaeus 3.56.
103 See Storey 2003.193 for these examples.
control all things or that Prometheus formed humans out of clay. It is another instance of the equation where some natural phenomenon is the cause of everything in the cosmos. The passage makes an etymological interpretation of the name Year (ἐνιαυτός). Everything (τὰ πάντ᾽) is inside it (ἐν αὐτῷ).

These four examples highlight the problem in analyzing Old Comedy. Beyond eleven surviving comedies by Aristophanes, no other comedies from the period are intact. With some comedies we have a title, a plot summary, and a few fragments; with other comedies we have no plot summary and only fragments; some are lacking titles and others have reconstructed plots. Storey (2011.xxi) points out that the extant plays of Aristophanes cannot serve as archetypes for the rest of Old Comedy. This leaves a wide field of speculation and analysis on the rest of Old Comedy and its approaches.

Scholars analyze a given comedy based on the overall plot - whether it tends towards the mythical, the political, or domestic. The term mythological comedy can be applied when mythic themes dominate the comedy. Bowie (2000.322) calls the term mythological comedy problematic because of the variety of plays and scenes that the term may cover. He writes about the different approaches of mythological comedy,

it might treat in a comic fashion a mythological tale without using a particular model or having any further purpose beyond the comic treatment of myth; it might parody a particular tragic or epic version of the myth; or it might use a mythical story, based or not on an earlier model, for purposes of political satire. For the most part, it is not possible to categorize plays with such precision.

Handley (1985.373) says that it is difficult to categorize comedies as mythological versus simply tragic parodies for the same reasons. Regardless of this ambiguity such a categorization of plays is a common approach to analysis.

Scholars speculate on what makes a mythological comedy. They agree that a myth as it is known is reworked for comic outcome. In Cratinus’ Dionysalexandros the myths of the beauty contest between

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104 See West 1974.176 for this analysis. He comments on fr. 2 of Scythinus and compares it to Hermippus.
the three goddesses (Aphrodite, Hera, and Athena), the winning of Helen as a prize for the judge (Paris Alexander), and the event as a precursor to the Trojan War (see Cypria fr. 1) are all reworked in some way.\textsuperscript{105} Mythological themes show up in all comedies regardless of their overall plot. My approach is different from previous scholars. While isolating scenes with mythological content, I try to define the comic’s approach in a particular scene. This method changes the focus from the overall plot, to the particular rendering in the fragment.

The only direct discussion about myth rationalization in Old Comedy surrounds a comic papyrus fragment (K-A 1062) which will be analyzed last in this chapter. Nesselrath (1990, 1995) and Bowie (2000, 2007, 2010) write that mythological rationalization did not appear in comedy until Middle and New Comedy. Its appearance in Old Comedy is up for speculation. Bowie (2007.190) writes,

As is generally the case in later Greek comedy, the gods are very much brought down to the level of mortals in terms of character and concerns, and come across as more rascally than the poor deluded mortals; their power to do whatever they wish makes for a good deal of the comedy. How far this later ‘embourgeoisement’ of the gods was a feature of Old Comedy is not possible to tell.\textsuperscript{106}

Yet the birth of comedy and the birth of rationalism occur simultaneously in the 6\textsuperscript{th} - 5\textsuperscript{th} c. BC. I expect to see the two things overlap. Storey (2010.211) comments, “Old Comedy was not a uniform genre...” It had a broad scope and many different approaches in any given play or scene. Aristotle (Poet. 1451b) writes that comedy had the freedom to adapt its plots to the “probable” (διὰ τῶν εἰκότων). The term used is important to the later mythographic tradition. Comedy, so it seems, had as its goal a rationalizing outlook. This tendency explains why the humanizing approach taken by comic poets has a rationalizing component. It substitutes human motivation and action for divine. Myth rationalization plays a larger role in Old Comedy than previously acknowledged by scholars.

Burlesque of myth is the most common analysis on Old Comedy and its treatment of mythological topics. In burlesque of myth the poet puts the gods or mythical heroes in hilarious situations. They make

\textsuperscript{105} See Bowie 2007.191-192 for a discussion.
\textsuperscript{106} Bowie cites Nesselrath 1990.188-241.
comic sense of some myth narrative by reinterpreting it for their comedy. When the comic approach makes base or low humor about the gods or mythical heroes, it typically receives the designation myth travesty or farce. It is difficult to separate burlesque of myth from myth travesty.

To say it a different way - comedy treats myth topics differently, more base, than other genres like tragedy, epic, and lyric, which treat myth in a grandiose, “high,” fashion. Aristotle (Poet. 1448a) observes that comedy represents its characters in a “worse” light than the way tragedy represents its characters. He (Poet. 1449a) also explains that comedy treated its subjects in a “base” manner.

An example of burlesque of myth and travesty may be found in Aristophanes (K-A 477, 478, Proagon) where Thyestes is portrayed eating sausage made out of his own children. The proagon was a ceremony that previewed plays produced for the upcoming Greater Dionysia. No plot summary survives for this comedy nor is there any plot reconstruction. The play was performed at the Lenaea in 422 BC. The scene is typically analyzed as both a burlesque of myth and a tragic parody. The eating of Thyestes’ children appears as a theme at the end of Aeschylus’ Agamemnon (lines 1191-1193, 1219-1222, 1583-1611). The following fragments invite the audience to consider the gross and gritty details of the event. The first fragment comes from Pollux (20.44) and the second from Athenaeus (3.95D) on “pig’s snout.”

οἴμοι τάλας, τί μου στρέφει τὴν γαστέρα; 
βάλλ’ ἐς κόρακας. πόθεν ἂν λάσανα γένοιτό μοι;

477 Alas, poor me! What’s making my stomach turn? Go off to blazes! Where do I find a potty? (tr. Henderson 2007.339)

ἐγευσάμην χορδῆς ὁ δύστηνος τέκνων·
πῶς ἐσίδω ῥύγχος περικεκαυμένον;


These scenes depict Thyestes after he has eaten his own children. The poet strips him of any heroic or tragic quality and turns him into a glutton. Farce, travesty, and burlesque of myth concern how the poet renders the mythical details in a comic way - he may take the narrative from a tragedy or from somewhere else. Most describe this comic approach as setting the myth narrative, gods and heroes, in an everyday mundane setting. The poets also render mundane details in the myth narrative. They manipulate certain details to fit the possible. How much Thyestes or his children played a role in the overall plot of the comedy is unknown.

The next few excerpts show instances of myth burlesque. I will analyze them differently than other scholars and call this approach myth humanization. It seems to be the common treatment of myth by all time periods (Old, Middle, New). The comic poet takes the myth narrative and gives it a humanized spin. This approach considers such details as how it was possible, what did it look-like, how did it work. These are details that typically do not appear in other treatments of the myth. These are the same kind of details that worried the rationalist thinkers. Both writers ask how was it possible, how did it actually work out or happen.

Comic portrayals of gods and myth narratives feature a humanizing aspect of the fantastical for comic purposes. In doing so a burlesque scene “seizes upon” the “ludicrous” by trying to make comic sense of the impossible aspects of the myth. Any burlesque scene is therefore somewhat rationalizing in its approach in so far as it tries to figure out the myth. The humanization of myth was a theme throughout Old Comedy.

Nesselrath (1990.204-235) sees a difference between how Old Comedy treated mythical content and how Middle Comedy did. He (1995.17) reiterates the point in a footnote covering Old Comedy and its approach to mythological topics.

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109 Nesselrath 1995.17 uses the same term in his analysis of Old Comedy, but I am making a different point.
110 See Bowie 2007.192 for a discussion, although my analysis differs from his.
Thus Old Comedy presents the myth as being literally true, albeit absurd, whereas Middle Comedy rationalizes the fabulous parts of the myth. I agree with Nesselrath’s analysis, in that each fragment I cite below renders the myth in a literal and absurd fashion, but my analysis looks at how they render the myth in such a way, i.e. by humanizing and highlighting certain “impossible” or absurd details in the myth. Old Comedy also had a fascination with the impossible aspects of myth, as already seen in Aristophanes. My examples will show that Old Comedy had a tendency to rationalize and humanize myths. The differences in approach to mythology between Old and Middle and New are not as clear cut as Nesselrath describes it.

Consider this scene from Aristophanes Frogs (lines 108-115) where Dionysus disguised as Heracles addresses Heracles before his decent to the underworld.

\[\text{Dionysus:} \] Well, the reason I’ve come wearing this outfit in imitation of you is so you’ll tell me about those friends of yours who put you up when you went after Cerberus, in case I need them. Tell me about them, about the harbors, bakeries, whorehouses, rest areas, directions, springs, roads, cities, places to stay, the landladies with the fewest bedbugs. (tr. Henderson 1998.v4.33)
The *Frogs*, a burlesque rendering of Dionysius, won 1st place at the Lenaea in 405 BC. It features Dionysus’ *katabasis*, i.e. a hero’s decent to Hades, where he hopes to save his favorite tragic poet from the underworld.

In the scene above he asks Heracles for directions to the underworld and general advice for his travels. The question mirrors travel concerns in the real world and has been superimposed into the mythical. Myth humanization is the approach here - these details represent a humanized approach to the typical myths about one’s decent to Hades. It focuses on details not mentioned in other similar narratives. It may apply another understanding of the descent to Hades, i.e. a harsh journey in general.

A mythographer, Heraclitus the Paradoxographer, rationalized the idea that heroes descended and returned from Hades. He writes that the myth narrative refers to surviving a hard and hellish journey, in a similar manner as Aristophanes’ approach.

(21.) Περὶ τῶν ἐν Ἅιδου.
Λέγεται ὡς Ἡρακλῆς κατελθὼν εἰς Ἅιδου ἀνῆλθεν ἀνάγων τὸν Κέρβερον, καὶ Ὀρφεὺς ἐσώσας Εὐρυδίκην τὴν γυναῖκα. τὸ δ’ ἀληθές, ὅτι ὅπῃνικα τις ἐκ μακρὰς ἀποδημίας καὶ ἐπικινδύνου διαντλήσας ἐσώθη, ἔφασκον ἐξ Ἅιδου αὐτὸν διασεσῶσθαι. ὅθεν ἐτι καὶ νῦν τοὺς μακροὺς πόνους καὶ παραβόλους ὁδοὺς καὶ ἐπισφαλεῖς νόσους ἐξ Ἅιδου σεσῶσθαι.

It is said that Heracles descended [into Hades] and that he came back up bringing Cerberus with him,... (one line omitted) But the truth is that whenever a person endured a long and dangerous journey and came through it unharmed, people said that he had been delivered from Hell. Even today we say that people who survive great hardships or hazardous voyages or dangerous illnesses have been rescued from Hell. (tr. Stern 2003.82)

Hercules’ descent into Hades to bring back the hell hound Cerberus is rationalized by different writers in antiquity. Paleaphatus, Heraclitus, and Plutarch have their versions. Hecataeus (1F27) is the first extant rationalization of Cerberus. Aristophanes’ makes fun of the idea that a descent to Hades is more like a horrible travel experience. The scene exhibits a rationalistic and humanizing approach, but it does not parody any specific writer or genre.
The second half of the comedy contains the *agon*, a rhetorical poetic face-off between Euripides and Aeschylus with Dionysus standing as judge. The winner receives the opportunity to return to the living. In one scene Euripides prays to different gods in a joke reminiscent of *the Clouds* (lines 825-828). In the following scene (lines 891-894) Euripides prays to some interesting gods.

Δι. ίθι δὴ προσεύχου τοῖσιν ἰδιώταις θεοῖς. (891)
Ευ. αἰθὴρ ἐμὸν βόσκημα, καὶ γλώττης στρόφιγξ, καὶ ξύνεσι καὶ μυκτῆρες ὀσφραντήριοι, ὀρθῶς μ’ ἐλέγχειν ὑν ἀν ἄπτωμαι λόγων.

**Dionysus:** Then go ahead and pray to these unofficial gods.

**Euripides:** Sky, my nourisher, and Pivot of Tongue, and Smarts, and Keen Nostrils, may I correctly refute any arguments I get hold of! (tr. Henderson 1998.v4.146)

Euripides says he will “correctly” (ὀρθῶς) present his arguments. Aristophanes’ parodies of Prodicus used the same term. The character Euripides represents the rationalistic approach in the *agon*. The appearance of remythology here is not unexpected. Just as in the *Clouds*, new innovative (ἱδιώταις) gods require more attention than the traditional ones.

At lines 971-976 Aristophanes has Euripides expound on the rationalist approach.

Ευ. τοιαῦτα μέντοὐγὼ φρονεῖν
toίτοισιν εἰσηγησάμην,
λογισμὸν ἐνθεὶ τῇ τέχνῃ
cαι σκέψιν, ἠστ’ ἤδη νοεῖν
ἀπαντα καὶ διειδέναι (975)
tά τ’ ἄλλα...

**Euripides:** That’s how I encouraged these people to think, by putting rationality and critical thinking into my art, so that now they grasp and really understand everything,... (tr. Henderson 1998.v4.157)

If Aristophanes interpreted or parodied Euripides as being rationalistic (λογισμὸν), then likely tragedy was playing with the approach as well. This tendency may explain why tragic parodies contain rational approaches. Hawes (2014.13) writes the following about the Euripides and myth rationalization:

...by the Classical period at least, rationalistic interpretation was so recognizable that its use could be subjected to critical analysis, or indeed satirized.
She is referring to Plato (critical) and Euripides (satirical) respectively. She continues by analyzing myth rationalization in Euripides *Bacchae* (lines 286-297) where Teiresias rationalizes Dionysius being sewn in Zeus’ thigh (μηρός) to be a play on Zeus keeping him hostage (ὅμηρος).111

Myth humanization may be seen in other Old Comedy fragments. Scholars speculate that Cratinus’ *Nemesis* was produced in 431 BC.112 The comedy contained some mixture of myth burlesque and political satire.113 It covered the myth narrative of Zeus’ abduction of Nemesis and the birth of Helen via Leda who acted as a surrogate mother. The version of the myth with Nemesis may be found earliest in the *Cypria* fr. 8, although there Nemesis turns into a swan. Scholars can only speculate on the plot summary of this comedy. The remaining fragments indicate a direct rendering of the myth without any remythology or myth rationalization. If anything, on its face, the comedy represents the opposite of the rational approach. Here is one fragment which comes from Athenaeus 9.373E in a discussion about the male and female usage of “cock” here “chick”:

> Λήδα, σὸν ἔργον· δεῖ σ’ ὅπως εὐσχήμονος ἀλεκτρυόνος μηδὲν διοίσεις τοὺς τρόπους, ἐπὶ τῷδ’ ἐπῄσε, ὡς ἂν ἐκλέψῃς καλὸν ἡμῖν τι καὶ θαυμαστὸν ἐκ τοῦδ’ ὄρνεον.

**K-A 115** Here is your task, Leda. You must behave just like a proper hen and brood over this egg, from which you may hatch for us a beautiful and wonderful chick.

(tr. Storey 2011.v1.327)

The humanization is seen in the rendering of the details. It’s an example of a mythological heroine being put in a “ridiculous” situation. The poet had to imagine the human-like details of this myth. There is a 4th c. vase which shows this very scene, indicating that other ancient artists wondered about the

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111 The prologue of the tragedy reveals that Dionysus is angry because Thebes holds that he is not divine and rather believe in a rationalized version of his myth - that Semele had a child out of wedlock.
112 See Storey 2011.v1.323 and Henderson in Rusten 2011.190 for details about the comedy. Add recent Henderson chapter on this plot line.
“ridiculous” details of this story.\textsuperscript{114} The poet leaves the myth un-rationalized and renders its bizarre
details on the stage in a mundane setting. He takes a humanized approach which makes the details
comically “possible.”

Pherecrates’ Ant-men was a myth burlesque combining some aspects of Deucalion and Pyrrha and of
the Ant-men.\textsuperscript{115} So little remains of the comedy, a plot reconstruction proves difficult. We have no date
of production or festival. The following fragment renders absurd details of the typical myth - where
Deucalion and Pyrrha survive the flooding of the world and repopulate the world by throwing rocks
behind their heads. This fragment comes from Athenaeus (8.335A) in a discussion about fish.

\begin{verbatim}
μηδέποτ’ ἰχθύν, ὦ Δευκαλίων, μηδ’ ἢν αἰτῶ παραθῆς μοι.
\end{verbatim}
\textbf{K-A 125} Do not ever serve me any fish, Deucalion, not even if I ask for some.
(tr. Storey 2011.v2.479)

The joke in the scene maintains that, after the flood and having to eat fish on the ship, Pyrrha never
again wants to be reminding of what would obviously seem to be a terrible journey. She, just as
Thyestes above, is seen humanized as a regretful glutton. The humanization here consists in imaging the
gritty details which would typically not be included in an epic or tragic rendering of the same myth
narrative. It’s similar to humanized details which we see in the Frogs concerning traveling to hell.

This fragment from the comic poet Platon is unassigned to any of his comedies. Nothing is known of
its context or performance. It comes from a scholion on Euripides Hecuba (In 838). Rosen (in Rusten
2011.353) translates the scholia, “If body parts could speak ‘through the skill of Daedalus’” and then the
scholion quotes Platon.

\begin{verbatim}
A. οὗτος, τίς εί; λέγε ταχύ· τί σιγᾷς; οὐκ ἐρεῖς;
B. Ἑρμῆς ἔγωγε Δαιδάλου φωνὴν ἔχων
ξύλινος βαδίζων αὐτόματος ἐλήλυθα.
\end{verbatim}
\textbf{K-A 204}

\textsuperscript{114} See Rusten 2011.190-191 for image and analysis. See Taplin 1993.82-83 for another discussion.
Hey you, who are you? Speak quickly. Why are you silent? Aren’t you going to say anything?

I am a wooden Hermes by Daedalus. I can talk and I have come here walking on my own. (Storey 2011.v3.187)

Daedalus is known for his skills at sculpture. The comic poet humanizes the myth that he makes statues so real that they seem to walk and talk, here they actually do. It is a literal and humanized rendering of the myth. Very few ancient poets rendered the statues of Daedalus walking and talking. We will return to comic portrayal of Daedalus at the end of the chapter.

Since comic poets aimed to mix myths up, rationalize certain parts, make literal others, while giving the whole thing a human element, it is difficult to make a list of approaches or to maintain that one scene only contains one approach. An unassigned fragment of Old Comedy (Comic Adespota K-A 473) boasts:

οἱ τῆς ἀρχαίας κωμῳδίας ποιηταὶ ἀνεγράψαντο· Προῖτος ἔγημε Βελλεροφόντην, ὁ δὲ Πήγασος ἦν ἐξ Ἀρκαδίας ἐπίκουρος.


The excerpt is from Origines Contra Celsum (6.49.34). In it Origines rejects Celsus’ view of Moses’ cosmology which evidently Celsus called silly (εὐηθική). According to Origines, Celsus thought Moses’ cosmology was in the same vein as comic poets’ treatment of mythological topics, i.e. with the aim of laughter (γελωτοποιεῖν). Celsus found the religious myths of his day laughable.

Bowie (2007.192) often quotes Aristotle to better explain the comic mythological approach.

Aristotle has a salutary passage in which he says that ‘in comedy, those who are the bitterest enemies in the story, such as Orestes and Aegisthus, become the best of friends by the end, and nobody is killed by anybody’ (Poet. 1453a.36–9). It looks as though comedy could take considerable liberties with mythology if the relationships between two implacable enemies such as Orestes and Aegisthus could end, not in Orestes’ murder of Aegisthus for the seduction of his mother and murder of his father, but in friendship.

116 Compare Pindar (Olym. 7.50-53) where Athena gives the Telechines the power to make statues that are life-like, which are similar to moving and living creatures. See Gantz 1993.149 for their various appearances. Hephaestus (Iliad 18.429) has golden handmaidens helping him out in his workshop. Pindar (Nem. 4.59) has the sword of Daedalus which is used there as an epithet for Hephaestus - see Gantz 1993.226 and note. Sophocles and other tragedians wrote plays about Daedalus, but none are extant.
Comic poets could change up a myth in so many different ways. The parody can be the whole comedy or just one scene or even one line. Although comic poets parodied and manipulated myth material, their versions of myth were considered legitimate by other ancient writers - namely later scholia and mythographers. Comic poets can criticize myth and give their own versions.

I have collected a few excerpts of ancient scholia or mythographers citing comic poets for their version of a myth narrative. A scholion on Apollonius of Rhodes (2.98-100a) writes:

Ἀπολλώνιος μὲν ἐμφαίνει ὡς ἀνῃρημένον τὸν Ἀμυκον· Ἐπίχαρμος δὲ καὶ Πείσανδρός φασιν, ὅτι ἔδησεν αὐτὸν ὁ Πολυδεύκης.

K-A 7 Apollonius implies that Amycus was killed, but Epicharmus and Peisander say that Polydeuces tied him up. (tr. Rusten 2011.62)

He refers to a no longer extant comedy from Epicharmus (K-A 7) and some other lost work from the Hellenistic mythographer Peisander. Amycus was a son of Poseidon who was a famous boxer and lost a boxing match against Polydeuces. Epicharmus’ version seems to be taken seriously by the scholion.

Another example cites Epicharmus’ *Prometheus* (or *Pyrrha*) and comes from a scholion on Pindar (Olympian 9.70).

κοινά τὰ περὶ Δευκαλίωνα καὶ Πύρραν. καὶ ὅτι τοὺς λίθους κατόπιν ὑπότοντες ἀνθρώπους ἐποίουσιν, μαρτυρεῖ Ακουσίλαος; Ἐπίχαρμος ἀπὸ τῶν λάων τῶν λίθων ὑνομάσθαι λαοὺς φησιν.

K-A 120: The story of Deucalion and Pyrrha is common. That they made men by throwing rocks behind them, Acusilaus [*FGrHist* 2 F 35] attests; Epicharmus says that the peoples [*laoi*] were named after the rocks, the *laes*. (tr. Rusten, 2011, 72)

Epicharmus’ explanation consists of an etiological narrative about the origin of people and why they are named such. He uses an etymological approach which links the words for people (*λαούς*) and rocks (*λάων*). We might assume some rationalistic approach, one that aims to explain the reasoning behind a myth. In both Epicharmus fragments the scholion pairs the comic poet with a mythographer or historiographer.
Here are two instances where mythographers cite a comic poet. The first one is from Aelian (3rd c. AD) who mentions Apollophanes. Aelian (Nature of Animals 6.51.26) tells a myth about a certain snake, who receives the remedy to old age from an ass, and at the end of the passage he writes,

τί οὖν; ἐγὼ τοῦ μύθου ποιητής; ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἂν εἴποιμι, ἐπεὶ καὶ πρὸ ἐμοῦ Σοφοκλῆς ὁ τῆς τραγῳδίας ποιητής καὶ Δεινόλοχος ὁ ἀνταγωνιστής Ἐπιχάρμου καὶ Ἴβυκος ὁ Ρηγῖνος καὶ Ἀριστίας καὶ Απολλοφάνης ποιηταὶ κωμῳδίας ἄδουσιν αὐτόν.

K-A 9 ...Well then, am I the author of that story? I would deny it, since before me Sophocles the tragic poet, and Dinolochus the rival of Epicharmus, and Ibycus of Rhegium, and Aristias and Apollophanes the comic poets have all related it. (tr. Storey 2011.v1.89-91)

Aelian’s narrative is aitiological because it tries to account for the idea that a snake has the thirst of an ass and seems to explain why a snake sheds its skin (because he was granted a remedy to old age). How Apollophanes’ comedy parodied the myth or how this narrative played a role is not known.

Eratosthenes (Kat. 25) mentions the comic poet Cratinus in the following narrative:

Κύκνου. Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ καλούμενος μέγας, ὃν κύκνῳ εἰκάζουσιν· λέγεται δὲ τὸν Δία ὁμοιωθέντα τῷ ζῷῳ τούτῳ Νεμέσεως ἐρασθῆναι, ἐπεὶ αὐτὴ πᾶσαν ἤμειβε μορφήν, ἵνα τὴν παρθενίαν φυλάξῃ, καὶ τότε κύκνος γέγονεν· οὕτω καὶ αὐτὸν ὁμοιωθέντα τῷ ὀρνέῳ τούτῳ καταπτῆναι εἰς Ῥαμνοῦντα τῆς Ἀττικῆς, κἀκεῖ τὴν Νέμεσιν φθείραι· τὴν δὲ τεκεῖν ᾠόν, ἐξ οὗ ἐκκολαφθῆναι καὶ γενέσθαι τὴν Ἑλένην, ὡς φησι Κρατῖνος ὁ ποιητής.

The Swan: this is called the Great <Bird>, whom they identify with a swan. The story is told that Zeus turned himself into this creature and made love to Nemesis, since she was changing herself into every form to protect her virginity, and had become a swan. So he took the form of this bird and flew to Rhamnus in Attica, and there he ravished Nemesis. She laid an egg, which hatched and so Helen was born, as Cratinus the poet says. (tr. Storey 2011.v1.323-325)

Eratosthenes gives Cratinus’ version of the myth as his source. These examples show that a comic poet’s version of a myth could be accepted, considered authoritative, and be different from other versions.

The next set of fragments show some level of myth rationalization. Middle and New Comedy contain the most examples of this approach, but it is expected that Old Comedy would contain some form of it. Storey (2010.217) writes, “The so-called Enlightenment of the fifth century was not something abstruse and restricted to serious thinkers but could become the stuff of comedy.”
The first example makes a play on the “gods as human benefactors” theme. Stobaeus (4.1.9 On Government) cites this fragment from Eupolis which is not attributed to any title:

Kαί μήν ἐγὼ πολλῶν παρόντων οὐκ ἔχω τί λέξω. οὗτος οὖν τὴν πολιτείαν ὁμόν παρ’ ἡμῖν. ημείς γὰρ οὐχ οὔτε τέως ὕψουσιν οἱ γέροντες, ἀλλ’ ἦσαν ήμῖν πᾶσαι πρῶτοι πολέμων μὲν οἱ στρατηγοῖ (5) ἐκ τῶν μεγίστων οἰκίων, πλοῦτῳ γένει τε πρῶτοι, οῖς ὡσπερεὶ θεοῖσιν ηὐχόμεσθα· καὶ γὰρ ἦσαν· ὅστ’ ἀφαλώς ἐπράττομεν· νυνὶ δ’, ὅταν τύχωμεν, στρατευόμεσθ’ αἰρούμενοι καθάρματα στρατηγοῦς.

K-A 384: Yes, though there’s plenty one could say, I really don’t know where to begin. That’s why it really pains me to see how our government works these days. We old men, for one thing, never used to run a city like this in the old days. First of all, we chose our generals for the city from only the best families - they were rich and well-bred - and we treated them as if they were gods - well, they were gods, after all - and we were safe and sound for all that. But now we elect whatever scum’s available to be our generals and take us to war.
(tr. Rusten 2011.270-271)

Olson (2007.198-199) analyzes this fragment as political commentary against “the radical Athenian democracy of the late fifth century...” There is no apparent rationalization narrative or any description of direct benefits conferred, except peace. The great generals are compared to gods. They may have even been gods (καὶ γὰρ ἦσαν). The comic poet uses the mythographic approach where the gods are in actuality famous and powerful people from the past. It has a similar narrative to Prodicus and Euhemerus.

This fragment represents myth humanization, although it makes a play on the idea of the gods as benefactors to people. Gods as potential benefactors is the normal belief among the ancient Greeks and its appearance here is not unusual. In Middle and New Comedy the same theme will appear in a more rationalized way. What is interesting about this example (and the following one) is how the comic poet humanizes the god as benefactor theme. In this fragment from Epicharmus Hebe’s Wedding, Poseidon is portrayed as a fish dealer. The fragment comes from Athenaeus (7.320C) on “sea bream.”

αὐτὸς ὁ Ποτιδᾶν ἂγων γαύλοιοιν ἐν Φοινικικῷ
The comedy contained Hebe, goddess of youth, daughter of Zeus and Hera, and her marriage to Heracles, a reward for his completion of the labors. The scene may be a god describing the arrival of Poseidon to the wedding. Phoenician merchantmen were a type of sea-vessel which casts Poseidon as the captain of the ship and a fish dealer. Olson notes that the fish-dealing trade was part of the joke in the fragment. The humanization of Poseidon here has a certain rationalizing approach (a sea god is akin to a sea captain), although there is no rationalizing narrative. In Euhemerus Poseidon is presented as a notorious innovator of sea travel.

The next example portrays Dionysus as a sea merchant and comes from Hermippus Basket-Bearers or Porters. The comedy was produced in 424 BC. It is another myth humanization and has a similar approach as the last fragment. This excerpt comes from Athenaeus (27DE) concerning the “specialties of each city.”

See Rusten 2011.64 for analysis.
See Olson 2007.42-43 for this idea.
Tell now for me, Muses who have your home on Olympus, all the good things that Dionysus brought for people here, ever since he sailed as a trader over the wine-dark sea in his black ship. From Cyrene stalks of silphium and ox hides, from the Hellespont mackerel and salted fish of all sorts, from Italy [Thessaly?] grain and sides of beef. From Sitalces, mange for the Spartans; from Perdiccas many ship full of lies. Syracuse exports port and cheese, and may Poseidon destroy the people of Corcyra with their hollow ships, because their hearts are divided. That’s from those places. From Egypt hanging gear, sails, and papyrus cables, from Syria frankincense. The beautiful land of Crete exports cypress wood for the gods’ statues, Libya much ivory for sale, and Rhodes raisins and figs that give good dreams. Then from Euboea pears and plump apples, slaves from Phrygia, mercenaries from Arcadia. Pagasae exports slaves and branded men, the Paphlagonians hazel nuts and shiny almonds, the crowning touches to a feast. Phoenicia <exports> dates of the palm tree and hard wheat, Carthage rugs and multicoloured cushions. (tr. Storey 2011.v2.307-309)

Olson (2007.158) describes the passage, “A Homeric-style catalogue, in epic metre, of the extraordinary variety of goods imported into Athens by sea, with several topical political jokes thrown in.” The scene presents a Homeric parody. Part of the comic approach is the absurd number of goods that Dionysus provides. The porters were the people who carried these types of goods from the ship into the port. The word used to designate Dionysus as a sea-trader - ναυκληρεῖ - refers to the ship owner and captain of the ship. The theme plays on the idea of the god as first inventor and benefactor, but the comic humanization turns him into a famous sea trader of all sorts of foreign imported goods.

Epicharmus employed an aitiological narrative above in his comic explanation of the naming of people. Another fragment from Epicharmus has the same approach. It concerns the naming of Pallas Athena.

ἐκ τάς τοῦ Διὸς
φαντὶ κεφαλᾶς | ἀπολέσαι πράτιες πάντων | ἐμ μάχαι
K-A 135: The very first thing that happened in the battle that took place against Cronus, they say, was that Pallas perished (at the hands of the goddess born) from the head of Zeus. And in order to be frightening, she immediately threw his skin around herself; which is why everyone then referred to her as ‘Pallas’. (tr. Olson 2007.420-421)

The fragment makes word-play on an epithet of Athena.\textsuperscript{119} Epicharmus conflated two different mythic characters named Pallas and offers his own unique version of the myth. There is nothing rationalized in this narrative, although the aitiological approach is seen in early Greek historiography and mythography.

This fragment provides an alternate explanations and version of myth.

Earlier in Epicharmus there was the etymological approach in his explanation for the naming of people. The etymological approach applied to myth narrative may be seen in this fragment from Aristophanes \textit{Lemnian Women}. It comes from Ammonius (480 τύραννον).

\[ ἐνταῦθα δ’ ἐτυράννευεν Ὑψιπύλης πατὴρ Θόας, βραδύτατος ὢν ἐν ἀνθρώποις δραμεῖν. \]

K-A 373: here reigned as king the sire of Hypsipyle, Thoas, the slowest runner of all mankind. (tr. Henderson 2007.287)

The fragment is partially a parody of Euripides \textit{Iphigenia of Taurus} where the tragedian makes an etymological play on the ancient king’s name. Olson (2007.94) translates the lines from Euripides (lns. 30-33):

\[ ...Ταύρων χθόνα, (30) οὐ γῆς ἀνάσσει βαρβάρους βάρβαρος Θόας, ὡς ἤκλη τῶν τιθὺς ἱσον πτεροῖς ἐς τούνομ’ ἠλθε τὸ τε χάριν. \]

the land of the Taurians, over which country rules, as a barbarian over barbarians, Thoas, whose foot is as fast as wings, and who got his name on account of his swiftfootedness

\textsuperscript{119} See Olson 2007.54-55 for analysis.
Here the comic poet parodies the tragic poet who has taken the etymological approach and made an aetiological analysis about the meaning behind the king’s name. Olson continues:

As the passage of Euripides parodied here makes clear, the personal name Θόας can be punningly connected with θοός (‘quick’), hence the humour in claiming that he is not swift-footed but, in fact, the slowest runner there is.

Aristophanes “ridicules” Euripides etymological explanation by supplanting his own comic version. By giving his name the opposite meaning, the comic poet gives an alternate and bizarre rendering of the myth.

The fragment conflates two different mythical Thoas. Taking the title of the comedy and the genealogy mentioned in the fragment, Thoas, the father of Hypsipyle, was the only male not murdered by the Lemnian women. He is a different person from Thoas king of the Taurians. There is no evidence that Thoas king of the Taurians played a role in the comedy. Aristophanes takes Euripides etymological explanation and applies it to the Lemnian Thoas.

Another rationalistic theme found in Old Comedy is that of genealogy. Early historiographers and later mythographers supplanted their own versions of family lines. Comic poets had the freedom to make up their own bizarre family lines and narratives. The first two examples come from Cratinus Chirons. The comic plot likely played with the idea of looking to the past for better days and critiquing the current state of affairs. The comedy was half political, Solon is a character, and half mythological, Chiron the centaur and a group of centaurs made up the chorus. Pericles and Aspasia were parodied either overtly or covertly. This fragment has a genealogical approach and comes from Plutarch (Pericles 3.4).

Στάσις δὲ καὶ πρεσβυγενῆς Κρόνος ἀλλήλοις μιγέντε μέγιστον τίκτετον τύραννον, ὃν δὴ κεφαληγεῖται θεοὶ καλέουσιν.

120 See Storey 2011.v1.386-387 for this theme.
**K-A 258:** Political Strife and ancient-born Time [Cronus?] came together and produces the great ruler, whom the gods in fact call “the Head-Gatherer.” (tr. Storey 2011.v1.391)

Scholars speculate whether the scene refers to Time or to Cronos the son of Ouranos. Henderson (in Rusten 2011.212) writes, “The diction of this fragment and the next mimic the genealogy of the gods in Hesiod’s *Theogony.*” Olson (2007.207) analyzes the passage, “A fragment of a mock theogony culminating in the birth of the ‘greatest tyrant’ - who is not Zeus but Pericles.” The excerpt may be compared to Aristophanes’ *Birds* lines 685-702, the parody of Prodicus and Hesiod. Part of the joke is the substitution of “Head-Gatherer” for Zeus’ epithet “Cloud-Gatherer.” The joke concerns Pericles’ odd shaped head.¹²¹

This next fragment comes from Plutarch *Pericles* (24.9) concerning the different references to Aspasia. Scholars assign it to Cratinus’ *Chirons*; it is likely from the same scene.

**Hērān tē oĩ Ἀσπασίαν τίκτει Καταπυγοσύνη παλλακὴν κυνώπιδα.**

*K-A 259:* And the goddess of the well-reamed ass bore Hera, Aspasia, a bitch-faced whore. (tr. Rusten in Harrison and Liapis 2013.288)

The mock theogony offers up its own comic genealogy. Although the two fragments contain Homeric and Hesiodic parody, early historiographers and mythographers wrote their own alternate genealogies. This fragment containing a comic genealogy comes from Nicophon. It is unassigned and comes from Pollux (3.18.10).

**.veli δὲ Κρόνου καὶ Τιθωνοῦ παππεπιπαππος γενόμισται.**

**K-A 23:** Now he is considered the great-great grandfather of Cronus and Tithonus. (tr. Storey 2011.v2.409)

Technically Cronos did not have a great-great grandfather. The comic poet must have been giving his own version of some mythical genealogy. Did the comedy look into the mythical past like some of the others already cited? Cronos and Tithonus have no relations in any other myth narrative.

¹²¹ For analysis of this fragment and the next see Rusten in Harrison and Liapis 2013.279-290.
The next set of fragments contains the comic rationalistic approach. They deal with myth as metaphor. The mythographer Palaephatus serves as an example of how it works. When Palaephatus declares a myth impossible and attempts to explain the misunderstanding, his argument typically surrounds a misunderstood name or phrase, which he indicates was used metaphorically.

In the comic fragments the surrounding narrative (rationalizing or not) is almost never present. Without any rationalizing narrative, we cannot know if the metaphor was truly understood or misunderstood. In comic outcome it seems possible that they would render something understood metaphorically in a literal fashion.

Nothing is known about this fragment of Callias (K-A 28) given by Hesychius (mu 486) or the comedy from which it came:

Μεγαρικαὶ σφίγγες· Καλλίας πόρνας τινὰς οὐτως εἰρήκεν

“Megarian Sphinxes“: Callias called some prostitutes this. (tr. Rusten 2011.143)

The use of Sphinxes is metaphorical. The monster stands for some other meaning, here prostitutes. Heraclitus the Paradoxographer rationalized mythical female monsters into prostitutes - the list includes Medusa, Scylla, the Harpies, the Sirens, and Circe. The theme will come up again in Middle and New Comedy.

This fragment (K-A 461) comes from the collection of Comic Adespota. It is from Lucian (Prom. Es 2) where different metaphoric interpretations of the god’s name are given. Someone called the speaker a “Prometheus” and he tries to figure out the intention (good or bad) of being called such a thing.

Κλέων Προμηθεύς ἐστι μετὰ τὰ πράγματα.

Cleon’s a Prometheus - after the fact. (tr. Olsen 2007.442)

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122 Olsen 2007.442 dates the piece around 421-422 BC.
The speaker wonders if the person who called him a “Prometheus” meant it in a bad way just as the comic poet once wrote. Olson (2007. 211) comments, “(Prometheus): i.e. ‘a genius’. But the joke depends on ‘Prometheus’ being understood to mean ‘He who plans in advance’, as already in Hesiod.” The joke makes fun of Cleon, indicating that he had all his foresight “after the fact” (μετὰ τὰ πρᾶγματα), i.e. when it was too late. It is a metaphorical play and etymological interpretation on the God’s name. There will be more examples of gods, heroes, and myth monsters having comic metaphoric interpretations in Middle and New Comedy.

This next example requires some plot reconstruction. Cratinus’ All-Seers (Panoptai) contains a parody on the philosopher Hippon (K-A 167). The comedy, just like the Clouds, may have had rationalistic themes. Storey (2011.v1.341) says the title of the comedy combined with the following fragment “suggests” the mythic monster Argos who was killed by Hermes. But he speculates why the play title would be in the plural. The fragment comes from Hephaestion (1.9):

κρανία δισσὰ φορεῖν, ὀφθαλμοὶ δ’ οὐκ ἀριθμητοί.

K-A 161: they have two heads and their eyes are uncountable.

If Argos is invoked and the plural title refers to a chorus of watchers, then the approach relies on a metaphoric interpretation. Heraclitus the Paradoxographer (37) rationalizes Panoptes as metaphoric for a busy-body.

Τοῦτον πάντα βουλόμενον ἄκουειν καὶ ὄραν ἐν παντὶ τῷ σώματι ὀφθαλμοὺς ἐχειν ἐπλάσαντο. ὅθεν ἐτὶ καὶ νῦν τοὺς τοιούτους πανόπτας καλοῦμεν.

Because he wished to hear and to see everything, people imagined Panoptes with eyes all over his body. That is why still today we call such people “panoptic.” (tr. Stern 2003.90)

Stern (2003.94 footnote 102) writes,

Presumably overly-inquisitive busy-bodies, who well might be said to wish to see and hear everything. But note that πανόπτης is also an epithet of Zeus and Helios (LSJ s.v.).
The play’s title could indicate its chorus and major theme - the *Busy-Bodies*. The fragment represents a play on the metaphoric interpretation. The busy-bodies are called mythic monsters, like Argos, with two heads and eyes everywhere. Just to be sure, the plural title of Cratinus’ comedy is of the masculine gender, so my hypothesis could work grammatically. The chorus may have been regular “nosey” men and someone in the comedy calls them *Argoi* or *Panoptai*. I assume some myth rationalization could be at play when considering the title and the fragment.

The last two examples of myth as metaphor indicate that myth rationalization was at play in Old Comedy. Cratinus *Thracian Women* offers an interesting mythological rationalization. The comedy was likely produced sometime in the 430s BC. It comes from a scholion on Euripides (*Hecuba* 838) which contains the fragment (K-A 75):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Α. περὶ τῶν Δαίδαλου ἔργων ὅτι ἐκινεῖτο καὶ προΐει φωνὴ... καὶ Κρατῖνος ἐν Θρᾴτταις} \\
\text{(B.) τότερα χαλκοῦν ἢ ξύλινον; (ἡ) καὶ (τι) χρύσεον προσῆν;} \\
\text{(A.) οὐδάμως ξύλινος ἐκεῖνος * * *} \\
\text{άλλα χαλκοὺς ὄν ἀπέδρα. (B.) τότερα Δαίδαλειος ἢν} \\
\text{ἡ τις ἡξέκλεψεν αὐτὸν;}
\end{align*}
\]

that the productions of Daedalus moved and spoke... Cratinus too says in *Thracian Women*:

(A) I’ve come looking for a statue of Pan.
(B) A Bronze or a wooden one? Or with a little gold?
(A) That one wasn’t wood at all [corrupt] It was a solid brass one that got away.
(B) Do you mean it was made by Daedalus? Or did someone just steal it?
(tr. Henderson in Rusten 2011.187)

There is no narration concerning the myth or its misunderstanding, but the dialogue suggests that something or someone was misunderstood. Instead of the Daedaleian statue walking away, it was stolen. Daedalus’ statues were said to be so real that they actually walked and talked. Here they are so valuable that people steal them and are thus mythologized to walk and talk. The speaker implies that the statue “got away” (ἀπέδρα). The word has been applied to runaway slaves and its definition

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124 The translation of the first line (A) comes from various readings of the corruption - either Πανίσκον <Ἦκον> or Πάν’ ἵκανον. See K-A 1983.v4.160-161 for different suggestions.
contains the idea of agency on the part of the one who flees. The fragment describes the statue as having its own will. The last line presents the myth first as real and then as rationalized.

Daedalus was a popular topic for comedy and mythography. Palaephatus (21) wrote a rationalization of Daedalus’ walking statues where he says that it comes from a misunderstood phrase and that he actually invented the first statues stepping forward with un-fused feet causing people to say his statues walked. Diodorus Siculus (4.76.2-3) had a similar rationalization where he innovated statues so that they had open eyes and feet apart, thus being real and walking. Even though a narrative offering criticism of the myth is not present, the joke between the two speakers reveals the rationalizing approach.

The fragment, my last example, contains a comic mythological rationalization using a metaphoric approach. It presents the rationalized version without any explanation of the original. It comes from papyrus dated to the first-century A.D. and scholars debate under which period of comedy it occurs.

‘τί οὖν ἐμοὶ τῶν σ[ῶν μέ]λεις, φαίη τις ἄν ύμων. ἔγω δὲ ἐρῶ [τ]ὸ Σοφοκλέους ἔπος·
’πέπονθα δεινά.’ πάντα μοι γέρων Κρ[όνος
tά παιδι’ ἐκπινεῖ te kai κατεσθίει,
ἐμοὶ δὲ τούτων προσδίδωσιν οὐδὲ ἕν, (5)
άλλ’ αὐτός ἐρεῖ χειρί καὶ Μεγαφάδ’ ἄγων
ό τι ἂν τέκω ’γω τοῦτο πωλὸν ἐσθίει.
δέδουκε γὰρ τὸν χρησμὸν ὄσπερ καυν[
ἐχρησε γάρ Κρόνοι ποθ’ Ἀπόλλων δραχ[μήν,
κάτ’ οὐκ ἀπέλαβε. ταύτα δὴ θυμὸν πνέ[i][n (10)
έτέραν ἐκπεσε[ν οὐκέτι] δρα[χ][μώ]ν ά]ξ[ίαν,
ο’ σκευάσια, μὰ τὸν Δί’, οὐδὲ χρήματα,
ἐκ τῆς βασιλείας δ’ ἐκπεσεῖν ύπὸ π[αιδίου.
τού]’ οὖν δεδοικὼς πάντα καταπί[νει τέκνα.

Comic Papyri K-A 1062 (CGFP 215)
(Rhea) “Why should I care about your problems?”, one of you might ask. I’ll quote the Sophoclean line: “I have suffered terrible things.” For old Cronus gulps down and gobbles up all my children, and he doesn’t let me have one single part of them. But gives me the finger, goes straight off to Megara, sells the child that I have borne, and gobbles up the money. He’s afraid you see, of the prophecy, as <a hare fears> a dog (?), for Apollo once loaned (ἐχρησε) Cronus a drachma and didn’t get it back. He was seething angry about this and no longer loaned him anything valuable, or any household items, by Zeus, or any money. Instead, he prophesized
(ἕχοντεν) that Cronus would be expelled from his kingship by a child. So since he’s afraid of this, he swallows down all his children.

The first two lines reveal a parody on Sophocles. Storey (2011.v3.395) writes that it may parody Oedipus at Colonus 892 and, if so, the date of the comedy would be after 401 BC. Oedipus speaks the passage to Theseus in Sophocles.

Οἰδίπους: ὦ φίλτατ᾽, ἔγνων γὰρ τὸ προσφώνημά σου, πέπονθα δεινὰ τούδ᾽ ὑπ᾽ ἀνδρὸς ἀρτίως.

O friend, for I know your voice, I’ve suffered terrible things at the hands of that man just now.

Storey (2011.v3.395) sets the context of the fragment:

But it is very much in the Old Comic manner that Rhea can swear “by Zeus” (l. 12) and mention a prophecy by Apollo (ll. 9-13) when neither has yet been born. This will have come from the prologue, when Rhea informs the spectators of the play’s subject.125

Scholars analyze the fragment as a myth rationalization.126 Olson (2007.125-6) writes,

A rationalization of the myth presented in a more traditional form...Cronos does not swallow the children themselves, as Hesiod would have it, but sells them and uses the money to buy food, which he eats.

Nesselrath (1995.23-24) analyzes this scene as a rationalistic parody of child-eating in Hesiod:

...an almost depressingly rationalistic, but nevertheless ingenious reinterpretation of Cronos’ disgusting τεκνοφαγία.

Kassel and Austin (1983.v8.355) also concur:

similem mythorum ex metaphora κατεσθίειν explicationem ap. Palaeph. 6 et 7...

Cronos eats up the profits from selling his children which follows a Palaephatean-like rationalization – a misunderstood phraseology in the narration. Here are the parallels in Palaephatus.

Φασίν Ἀκταίωνα ὑπὸ τῶν ἰδίων κυνῶν καταβρωθῆναι. τούτῳ δὲ ψευδές· κύων γὰρ δεσπότην καὶ τροφέα μάλιστα φιλεῖ, ἄλλως τε καὶ αἱ θηρευτικαὶ πάντας ἀνθρώπους σαίνουσιν. ἔνιοι δὲ φασίν ὡς Άρτεμις μὲν <εἰς ἐλαφον μετέβαλεν> αὐτὸν, ἐλαφον δὲ

125 He continues “Phrynichus wrote a Cronos and Philiscus a Birth of Zeus, the latter of which Austin (CGFP 215) and others have suggested as the source of the fragment.”

126 See Konstantakos 2014.168-167 for a recent discussion.
They say that Actaeon was devoured by his own dogs. But the story is false, for a dog is most affectionate towards its master and provider, and hunting dogs in particular fawn on everyone. … [lines omitted]

The truth is as follows. Actaeon was an Arcadian who was especially fond of hunting. He always kept a large pack of dogs and hunted with them in the mountains, disregarding his own affairs. Now all the people of those days were dependent on their own labor. They had no servant to do their work and whoever was the most industrious became the wealthiest. But in the case of Actaeon, his preference for hunting and his lack of attention to his own circumstances caused his livelihood to waste away. When he no longer had anything left, people said: “Alas for Actaeon, who has been devoured by his own hunting dogs.” So even today, if a man is unlucky enough to waste his fortune on prostitutes, we are in the habit of saying that he has been “devoured by whores.” And this is what happened in the case of Actaeon. (tr. Stern 1996.38)

Another example in Palaephatus follows:

They say that Diomedes’ horses ate men. Ridiculous! Horses enjoy barley and oats rather than human flesh.

Here is the truth: men of long ago made their living with their own hands, and it was by tilling the ground that they acquired food and abundant resources. But a certain Diomedes became preoccupied with the breeding of horses. His delight in them reached the point that he lost his property: he sold everything he had and squandered it on the raising of horses. So his friends called the horses “man-eaters” - and that is how the myth began. (tr. Stern 1996.39)
Stern (Ibid.) writes that Euripides Acestis 495 has Heracles making the same “objection” to man-eating horses. Palaephatus (25) applies the same analysis to Glaucus (son of Sisyphus) who was said to be devoured by his own horses but actually wasted away his livelihood on breeding horses.

The comic fragment is both rationalized and un-rationalized. The gods and their behaviors are presented in a literal sense (taken at face value), but the traditional stories about them are interpreted metaphorically. In a rational mode “eating one’s children” means selling them for profit. There is no myth rationalization narrative, i.e. someone questioning the original myth, but parts of it are presented in a rational mode.

Other rationalistic themes are at play. There is a word play on ἔχρησε from χράω in line 9 and 11, where it means to borrow money and to give a prophecy. It indicates another misunderstood phrase and exhibits the etymological approach. In Hesiod’s Theogony Cronos receives a prophecy about his children overthrowing his rule, but the poet never explains who gave the prophecy. In the comic fragment the prophecy is mentioned and rationalized into borrowing money. Since the Greek verb is used twice and it holds both meanings, the poet implies that the prophecy was a misunderstanding of the loan and part of Apollo’s payback for not getting back his money. The fragment also presents the myth in a humanized manner, showing the gods doing mundane everyday human behaviors.

As with the mock theogony in Aristophanes Birds, mythological timeline is distorted in this fragment. Remember the Lark was born before the earth. Nesselrath (1995.24-25) notes this tendency

...Rhea’s description of the whole deplorable situation produces outrageously absurd distortions of mythical “chronology” and genealogy (e.g. Cronus getting his prophecy from his grandson, Apollo, whose father Zeus is either not yet born or only a baby himself, and it makes all the gods involved - including the speaker Rhea herself - look petty and mean.)

He (1995.25) compares the innovative approach in the fragment to “the art of Aristophanes.”

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Chapter 04 Middle Comedy and Myth Rationalization

My analysis turns to comic myth rationalization in Middle Comedy. It features the comic poet as myth critic, the questioning of the plausibility of myth, comic metaphoric rationalizations of myth, and comic Euhemerism. The genre of mythography was well established by this time and myth rationalization was a commonly accepted approach. The comic poets extend this tradition with their own comic variations.

We begin with the comic poet as myth critic. In the last chapter we saw how scholia and mythographers could take a comic poet’s version of a myth as a legitimate variant. These next four examples show comic poets criticizing and correcting myth. Each one criticizes the portrayal of Eros by artists and poets. Each example criticizes an artists’ interpretation of the myth and attempts to make it conform to some supposed accurate depiction.

This fragment (K-A 40) comes from Eubulus, Campylion. Nothing else is known about the comedy. The Eros theme is a variation on ancient rhetoric exercises and is here a tragic parody. The fragment originates in Athenaeus 13.562d in a long discussion about Eros.

Who in the world first drew a picture or made a wax mold of Eros that was winged? He must have known only how to paint swallows, and been totally ignorant of this god’s ways. He’s neither light nor easy to throw off, if you carry his disease, but extremely heavy. How could such a thing wear wings? Nonsense, even if it is said… (tr. Rusten 2011.473)

The poet calls the painter’s portrayal of Eros nonsense (λήρος). Mythographers often call myths nonsense and unbelievable. The speaker gives his criterion for correcting the myth. It is not rational because “such a thing” could not wear wings and because the artist was “ignorant” (ἀπειρος). The

passage contains the first inventor (protos euretes) theme. The idea of first discoveries and inventions is common in mythographic literature.

These two fragments come from Alexis. The first, K-A 20, Cut Off or Apokoptomenos, contains a sophistic approach and is an example of tragic parody. It originates in Athenaeus 13.562d in the same section as the above fragment.

There’s a saying of the sophists: “the god of love doesn’t fly, but lovers do,” and that he’s falsely accused: it’s just ignorant artists paint him having wings. (tr. Slater in Rusten 2011.533)

The poet corrects the painters’ depiction of the god and blames it on the misunderstanding that lovers have wings instead. It’s an example of myth rationalization. He criticizes the artists’ depiction of the myth as ignorance (ηγυνωκότας). Although the result is absurd, the truth seems to be that lovers fly. There is a metaphor equating love with flight or having wings.

The second fragment comes from Alexis (K-A 247), Phaedrus. It consists of philosophical and tragic parody. The passage originates in Athenaeus 13.562b in the same section as above.

129 See Arnott 1996.109 for a discussion.
καὶ ταῦτ’ ἐγώ, μὰ τὴν Αθηνᾶν καὶ θεοὺς,
οὐκ οἶδ’ ὅ τι ἐστίν, ἀλλ’ ὅμως ἔχει γέ τι (15)
tοιοῦτον, ἐγγὺς τ’ εἰμὶ τούνόματος.

As I was coming from the Piraeus, it occurred to me to philosophize about my troubles and confusion. They seem ignorant to me, in short, these artists of Eros, when they make images of this god. It’s neither female nor male, nor again god or human, neither stupid nor wise, but put together from everywhere, supporting many forms in one shape. It has the courage of a man, but a woman’s timidity, the confusion of madness, but the logic of sense, a beast’s violence, but the endurance of steel, and a divine pride. And these things - by Athena and the gods! I don’t know exactly what - it is, but nonetheless it’s something like this, and I’m close to naming it.
(tr. Slater in Rusten 2011.553)

It is a variation on the same theme about lovers and Eros and whether either one has wings. The speaker calls the artists ignorant (ἀγνοεῖν). The speaker is at an impasse (ἀπορίας) and turns to philosophy. He describes Eros as something allegorical and not as a god. Love is turned into a philosophical force of nature with no true name. We see the allegorical approach in mythography and other myth rationalization. The fragment represents a mythological depiction being questioned and rationalized. The inability to correctly name the phenomena gives rise to the myth. All three examples may be compared to Plato Symposium (202d) where Diotima asks Socrates how Eros may be considered a god since they agree he is not beautiful or good.

This play and variation on rationalizing Eros comes from Aristophon (K-A 11) in The Pythagorean, a philosophical parody. It comes from Athenaeus 13.563b in the same section as above.

εἶτ’ οὖ δικαίως ἐστ’ ἀπεψηφισμένος
ὑπὸ τῶν θεῶν τῶν δώδεκ’ εἰκότως <τ’> Ἐρως;
έταραττε κάκεινος γὰρ ἐμβάλλων στάσεις,
ὅτ’ ἦν μετ’ αὐτῶν· ὡς δὲ λίαν ἦν θραύς
καὶ σοβαρός, ἀποκόψαντες αὐτοῦ τὰ πτερά, (5)
ἵνα μὴ πέτηται πρὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν πάλιν,
δεῦρ’ αὐτὸν ἐφυγάδευσαν ὡς ἡμᾶς κάτω,
τὰς δὲ πτέρυγας ἃς εἶχε τῇ Νίκῃ φορεῖν
ἔδοσαν, περιφανὲς σκῦλον ἀπὸ τῶν πολεμίων.

So isn’t it right and reasonable that Eros was banished by the 12 gods? He used to cause them trouble by starting arguments, when he was with them; and since he was too bold and impetuous, they chopped off his wings, to keep him from flying back to heaven, and sent him
into exile down below here with us. And they gave the wings he’d had to Victory to wear, as a bit of conspicuous plunder taken from their enemies. (tr. Olsen 2006.v6.265)

This fragment gives an aitiological account of where the goddess Victory received her wings and why Eros dwells amongst the mortals. This particular detail of Nikes’ wings is not found in any other narrative. Nike has been depicted with wings and without. Pausanias (3.15.7) explains that her wings were missing on statues so that she would not fly away and leave the city. A similar explanation is applied in this fragment, namely that Eros is without wings so he cannot fly to heaven, although the intentions are different.

Besides criticizing artistic portrayals of myths, Middle Comedy poets outright question myth and re-interpret it. A speaker in Anaxandrides (K-A 4), Anchises, comments on the mythic city of slaves. The fragment originates in Athenaeus 6.263c in a discussion about slaves.

οὐκ ἔστι δούλων, ὦγάθ’, οὐδαμοῦ πόλις,
τύχη δὲ πάντα μεταφέρει τὰ σώματα.
πολλοὶ δὲ νῦν μέν εἰσιν οὐκ ἐλεύθεροι,
 eius αὐριον δὲ Σουνιεῖς, εἰτ’ εἰς τρίτην
άγορα κέχρηται· τὸν γὰρ γιὰκα στρέφει (5)
δαίμων ἑκάστῳ.

My good sir, there is no city for slaves. Fortune tosses all individuals around. And many who are now not free tomorrow will be citizens of Sounion. Then the day after they employ the marketplace. For each of us a god is at the helm. (tr. Rusten 2011.463-464)

The myth is that all slaves come from a certain city. Cratinus and Eupolis also play with this theme. In questioning the existence of the mythical city, the speaker puts forth a counter explanation about the cause of misfortune. The rationalization maintains that a god decides each person’s fate. The speaker denies the myth.

The next three fragments confuse the boundary between myth and reality in different ways. The first comes from Anaxilas (K-A 22) in Chick or Neottis, and originates from Athenaeus 13.558a in a discussion about women.

See Rusten 2011.463 footnote about the city of slaves.
If any man has ever loved a prostitute, who couldn’t fail to name a more lawless form of life?

What fire-breathing Chimaera, or Charybdis, or three-headed Scylla, dog of the sea, Hydra, lioness, viper, winged race of Harpies, or plain old dragoness, has ever topped this detestable species? It’s inadmissible. These women surpass all evils. We can start our review with Plangon first, who sets foreigners alight like Chimaera. Only a single horseman robbed her of her life, who left after tearing all her furnishings out of her house. And those who keep company with Sinope, aren’t they with a present-day Hydra? She is a hag, and Gnathaena is close by, so that those who escape the one face a second danger. Or Nannion, how is she any different from Scylla? After choking the life out of two companions, isn’t she on the trail of the third? But the passage with a pine oar failed and Phryne, doesn’t she act close to Charybdis, seizing the sea captain and drowning him boat and all? And isn’t Theano like a plucked Siren? The voice and
face of a woman, the legs of a crow. And you could call all these whores Theban Sphinxes, since they never say anything straight but talk of lovemaking and kissing and sex in sort of riddles. (last 7 lines omitted) (tr. Slater in Rusten.2011.561)

The comic fragment compares prostitutes to mythological creatures. The main point of the passage comes in its last line “In sum, of all the beasts there is none more deadly than a prostitute.”

Heraclitus the Paradoxographer rationalized the same mythical monsters - Scylla, the Harpies, the Sirens, and Circe - as all being prostitutes. Here are the relevant passages in Heraclitus. Each example shows the myth coming from a metaphoric interpretation of some real situation.

(2.) Περὶ Σκύλλης.
Λέγεται περὶ ταύτης ὅτι κατήσθιε τοὺς παραπλέοντας. ἦν δὲ αὕτη νησιῶτις καλὴ ἑταίρα καὶ εἶχε παρασίτους λαμιοὺς τε καὶ κυνώδεις, μεθ’ ὧν τοὺς ξένους κατήσθιεν, ἐν οἷς καὶ τοὺς Οὐδυσσέως ἑταίρους. ἀυτὸν δὲ ἂς φθόνιμον οὐκ ἤδυνήθη.

2. Scylla - They say that Scylla devoured passing sailors. But Scylla was a beautiful prostitute who lived on an island with her gluttonous and cur-like hangers-on. Together with these she would devour her clients— and among them Odysseus’ companions. But with Odysseus himself she failed: he was too sensible. (tr. Stern 2003.74)

(8.) Περὶ Ἁρπυιῶν.
Ταύτας ὁ μῦθος παραδέδωκε γυναῖκας ὑποπτέρους τὸ τοῦ Φινέως δείπνον ἀρπαξόμενας. ὑπολάβοι δ’ ἄν τις ταύτας ἑταίρας καταφαγούσας τὴν τοῦ Φινέως οἰκίαν εἶναι, καὶ καταλιπούσας αὐτὸν καὶ τῆς ἀναγκαίας τροφῆς ἐνδεῆ κεχωρίσθαι ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ, αἰεὶ δὲ ὅσα ἀνακτήσας παραγινομένας ἔσθιειν καὶ αὖθις χωρίζεσθαι, ὃ σύνηθες ποιεῖν ταῖς ἑταίραις.

8. The Harpies - The myth has been handed down that the Harpies were winged women who used to snatch away Phineus’ dinner. One may suppose that they were prostitutes who devoured Phineus’ estate and then went off and left him without even the bare minimum of food. But if he ever got anything else, they always returned and devoured it, and then they departed again—which is typical of prostitutes. (tr. Stern 2003.77)

(14.) Περὶ Σειρήνων.
Ταύτας δεύτερας μυθολογοῦσι τὰ μὲν σκέλη ὀρνίθων, τὸ δὲ <λοιπὸν> σῶμα γυναικῶν ἐχοῦσας, ἀπολλύειν δὲ τοὺς παραπλέοντας. ἦσαν δὲ ταχέως ἐκπρεπεῖς τῇ τε δὲ ὀργάνῳ μούσῃ καὶ γλυκωνίᾳ, κάλλισται, αἰεὶ οἱ προσερχόμενοι κατησθίοντο τὰς οὐσίας. ὀρνίθων δὲ σκέλη ἐλέγοντο ἐχεῖν, ὅτι ταχέως ἀπό τῶν ἀποβαλλόντων τὰς οὐσίας ἐχωρίζοντο.

14. The Sirens - The myth is that the Sirens were of double form—with the legs of birds, but [for the rest] the bodies of women—and that they destroyed those who sailed past them.
But the Sirens were prostitutes, remarkable for their playing of musical instruments and for their sweet voices. They were also most beautiful, and any man who visited them soon found his wealth eaten away. They were said to have the legs of birds because they departed speedily from those who thus cast away their own property. (tr. Stern 2003.79)

(16.) Περὶ Κίρκης.
Ταύτην ὁ μῦθος παράδεδωκε ποτῷ μεταμορφοῦσαν ἀνθρώπους. ἦν δὲ ἑταίρα, καὶ κατακηλοῦσα τοὺς ἐξένους τὸ πρῶτον ἀφεσκεία παντοδαπῆ ἐπεσπάτο πρὸς εὔνοιαν, γενομένους δὲ ἐν προσπαθείᾳ κατείχε ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις ἀλογίστως φερομένους πρὸς τὰς ἡδονάς. ἔτησε δὲ καὶ ταύτην Οδυσσεὺς.

16. Circe - The myth has been handed down that Circe transformed men with a potion. Circe, however, was a prostitute who bewitched her clients at first with every sort of willingness to please and led them on to be well-disposed toward her. But when their passion for her grew, she controlled them through their lust, as they were mindlessly carried along in their pleasures. Odysseus got the better of her also. (tr. Stern 2003.80)

Anaxilas makes the prostitutes act in the same way metaphorically as the mythological monsters. The known stories about the monsters become metaphors for how the prostitutes treat their customers.

Anaxilas’ approach is the opposite of Heraclitus. Heraclitus rationalizes each monster; he explains in each passage that the prostitute became mythical because of her actions. In the comic fragment the speaker relies on the audiences’ familiarity with these rationalizations in order to understand the scene.

Plangon the prostitute breaths fire, here meaning passion, just as Chimaera, and the prostitute is killed by a man on a horse which is meant to invoke Bellerophon and Pegasus. A prostitute is compared to Scylla since they both take in and devour sailors. And the part about the Sphinx implies a metaphoric understanding - speaking in riddles as a reference to their erotic speech. Mythical monsters were common subjects for comic poets and mythographers alike.131

This fragment comes from Timocles (K-A 6), Women at the Dionysia, and consists of tragic parody. It contains a topos found in other comic fragments which I call “how tragedy works.”132 It originates from Athenaeus 6.223b in a discussion about inventing (εὑρίσκειν) stories. The speaker answers to the

131 Palaephatus rationalized many of the same myths, although differently. In particular he covered the Sphinx (4) (a misunderstood phrase), Scylla (20) (name of a boat), Bellerophon (28) (a man in a ship named Pegasus who burns down a mountain named Chimaera), Hydra (38) (the name of a fort).
132 See Olson 2007.169 for the theme.
hypothesis that the dinner guests of Athenaeus’ *Deipnosophistai* might be making up stories. He responds that the tragic and comic poets tell the stories to make us feel better. The speaker first cites Antiphanes (K-A 189) which was covered in the introduction, and then a few sections later he cites Timocles:

{o’ tâv, âkousos ën tì soi ðokâ lêgein.ânthrâpòs êstì ëwon épîpovn fûse, kai pollà lusîh’ ë bíos ën êautâ fêre. parapsuxâs ouvn froutiðou aûeûfeto taûta: ò gár noûs tûn idûwûn lêthên labêwûn (5) prûs allotòw te psuaxaûghêthêis pâthêi, mev’ èðounh’ ápîlthe piaûthêis ëma. toûs gár tâgûðhûs prôtôn, ëi bûlêi, skôpêi, ës ëfêlûðûs pàntas. ò mên ñûn gár pénhûs ptaûxótêrûn auûtu kàtauamabhûn tûn Tîlêfûn (10) geûmënûn ëhî tûn pêniaûn ëbûn fêre. ò vrouaûn ti mànikûn Alkâmêwn’ êskêîpato. ëfthâlûmûa tìs, eîsî Fînuêdai tuvûlo. têðnêke tì pâìs, ët Nîôbû kekoûfikên. xalûs tìs êstî, tôn Phîlouctêthn òrh. (15) gêwûn tìs âtûchêi, katêmûthên tônu Oînêa. âpantà gâr tê meûûvûn’ ët pêpouðû tìs âtûxhêmâtû ‘llâlos geûvônûn’ ënnuouûmênûs tûs auûtu sùmûrûs ëttûn stêne.

Listen, good sire, and see if I speak the truth. Man is by nature a creature born to suffer, and his life must endure many sorrows. And so, he has discovered these comforting distractions from his anxieties. For the mind, forgetting its own cares and entertained at someone else’s suffering, ends up pleased, and learning something to boot. Now, consider first, if you will, how tragic poets benefit everyone. For someone who’s poor, once he’s learned that Telephus was a greater beggar than himself can they endure his own poverty more easily. Someone who’s sick looks at Alcmeon stark-raving mad. Let’s say you’ve got eye disease - well, Phineus was blind! Someone’s child has died? Niobe can console him, if someone’s a cripple, he can look at Philoctetes. If an old man falls on hard times, he learns of Oineus. The person, then, who understands that all the misfortunes that seems so monumental to him also happened to others will then groan less under the weight of his own calamities. (tr. Rosen in Rusten 2011.518-519)

The speaker encourages the audience to compare their own suffering to those of mythological characters. He claims that humans discovered (âneûfeto) that these stories make them feel better about their own misfortunes. The passage represents a humanized approach. Credit is given to the
tragic poets for sharing these myths. The audience is asked to realize that their misfortunes are less troublesome. The mythological characters are reduced to their known defect. The narratives surrounding them are less important. The line between the real and mythological worlds is blurred.

A similar blurred line between mythological characters and real life appears in this fragment from Eubulus (K-A 115), *Chrysilla*. It comes from Athenaeus 13.559b from the same discussion about women in Athenaeus 13.559b from which the fragment of Anaxilas (K-A 22) originated.

Damn the bastard, whoever he was, who was the second to marry. I won’t say anything bad about the first one; because he had no experience, I think, of this trouble. But the second fellow had heard what sort of trouble a woman is ... Oh much honoured Zeus! Then am I ever going to say anything bad about women? By Zeus, may I die if I do; they’re the best possessions there are. If Medea was a bad woman, Penelope was something great. Someone will say Clytemnestra was bad; I counter her with the good Alcestis. Perhaps someone will speak badly of Phaedra; but, by Zeus, there’s the good - Who was there? Who? Alas, miserable me - I quickly ran out of good women, whereas I still have many bad ones to mention. (tr. Olson 2007, 459)

The first inventor of marriage was ignorant (ἀπειρος) of women and began the institution of marriage.

The comic version of the *protos euretes* theme typically has the speaker blaming the first inventor, here the second one. The fragment contains a list of mythological women exempla and the speaker compares...
them to each other as an analogy to real women and their behaviors. The fragment shows myth
humanization, since it asks the audience to imagine the everyday realities of these mythological women.

The next set of fragments contains metaphoric approaches. The myth is interpreted metaphorically
by the speaker. The first one comes from Anaxandrides (K-A 35) *Odysseus*. It is found in Athenaeus
6.242d in a section discussing nicknames which Athenians used to mock each other.

> ὑφείλετ' ἄρνα ποιμένος παῖζων, Ἀτρεὺς ἐκλήθη·
> ἐὰν δὲ κριόν, Φρίξος, ἂν δὲ κωδάριον, Ἰάσων.

First 9 lines omitted

As a joke, he steals a shepherd’s lamb; he’s called Atreus.
If it’s a ram, he’s Phrixus; if a fleece, he’s Jason. (tr. Rusten 2011.465)

These are nicknames for a thief. The joke calls a person who steals a lamb an Atreus. It’s a metaphoric
interpretation of the event or at least one which simplifies the myth to one specific detail in the
narrative. It requires the audience to understand the background story of the lamb stealing. The myth
concerns the struggle for kingship over Mycenae between two sons of Pelops, Atreus and Thyestes. In
Euripides *Orestes* the lamb is golden fleeced and sent by the gods (lines 812-813, 887-1000) to ensure
that Atreus became king. The brother who possessed the lamb would become the king, but Thyestes
stole the lamb and is the actual thief of the story.133 It may be part of the joke to call the thief by the
wrong brother’s name or it may imply a variant of the myth.

The second line calls someone a Phrixus if he steals a ram. In the extant stories Phrixus typically
escapes on a ram with a golden fleece with his brother Helle, but he does not steal a ram.134 It is the
same Golden Fleece which Jason stole from Aeetes in Colchis, which is the third mythological reference

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133 Fragments from Euripides (fr. 681) and Sophocles (fr. 738) show a rationalizing of the myth where Atreus is an
inventor of astronomy. Besides the lamb the gods sent a portent in the form of a reversal of the sun and stars. The
two fragments give credit to Atreus as discovering the reversal. See Gantz 1993.545-548 for a discussion. See Olson
134 See Gantz 1993.176-180, 193-184 for all the variants. Sources for the myth include Hesiod (*Ehoiai* fr. 66),
Pherecydes (3F99), Pindar (Py. 4.159-162), lost tragedies (e.g. Sophocles *Athamas & Phrixos*), and Eratosthenes
(*Kata*. 19).
in the comic fragment. Phrixus and Helle fly to Colchis where Phrixus sacrifices the ram and hands over
the golden fleece. Jason stole it with Medea’s help.¹³⁵

In the Suda lexicon (delta 250) the Golden Fleece is rationalized as a book written on animal skin
which explains how to get gold from alchemy. In Palaephatus (30) ram is the name of Phrixus’ servant
and Fleece was the name of the gold statue which Phrixus and Helle took with them when they escaped
their evil step-mother. Dionysius Scytobrachion rationalized the ram to be the name of Phrixus’ servant
who was sacrificed. The Golden Fleece becomes the servant’s flayed skin which was hung in a temple
and made golden to make it seem more valuable. The joke in the comic fragment relies on a common
myth rationalization that the stealing of the golden lamb, ram, or fleece refers to the stealing of gold.

This fragment comes from Antiphanes (K-A 59), Women from Boeotia. It originates in Athenaeus
3.84a in a discussion about the citron, a citrus fruit.

{A.} καὶ περὶ μὲν ὄψου γ’ ἠλίθιον τὸ καὶ λέγειν ὡσπερ πρὸς ἀπλήστους. ἀλλὰ ταυτὶ λάμβανε,
παρθένε, τὰ μῆλα. {B.} καλὰ γε. {A.} καλὰ δῆτ’, ὦ θεοὶ νεωστὶ γὰρ τὸ σπέρμα τοῦτ’ ἀφιγμένον
εἰς τὰς Ἀθήνας ἐστὶ παρὰ τοῦ βασιλέως. (5)
{B.} παρ’ Ἑσπερίδων, ὡμὴν γε. {A.} νὴ τὴν Φωσφόρον,
φησὶ τὰ χρυσὰ μῆλα ταῦτ’ εἶναι. {B.} τοία
μόνον ἔστιν. {A.} ὀλίγον ἐστὶ τὸ καλὸν πανταχοῦ
και τίμιον.

(A) It’s absurd even to discuss food to those who seem insatiable; but here, young lady, take this
fruit.
(B) It’s beautiful.
(A) Indeed it is, by god; this variety just arrived at Athens from the Persian king.
(B) I’d thought it came from the Hesperides!
(A) (to himself) By the goddess of light, she says these are the golden apples!
(B) There are only three of them.
(A) A thing of beauty is always rare and expensive.
(tr. Rusten 2011.493-494)

¹³⁵ See Gantz 1993.358–361 for different versions. Apollonius Rhodes Argonautica has the most extensive
treatment of the story.
A metaphoric interpretation here equates the golden apples of the Hesperides with nice fruit which the speaker offers to the young lady. Between the two speakers the metaphor is misunderstood. Speaker A thinks that the young lady complements the quality of his fruit, but she calls them the golden apples to indicate that there are only three.136 The joke in the fragment concerns this misunderstanding. Instead of complimenting him, she is showing disappointment, although both speakers refer to the same myth.

In the rationalization of the myth by Palaephatus (18) the original event is also misunderstood. The Hesperides are the daughters of Hesperus and the golden apples refer to two misunderstandings. The word for sheep and apple are the same (μῆλα) and the sheep are called golden apples by the townspeople. Palaephatus says that calling them golden indicates their value as being like gold.

Traditionally the myth has Heracles stealing the golden apples, but Palaephatus writes that he was actually stealing the sheep.137

This fragment comes from Alexis (K-A 76) in Greek Woman. It originates in Athenaeus 6.224c in a long discussion about Athenian fishmongers. The section cites eighteen fragments total on the topic. Here the speaker complains about the high price of fish.138

ἀεὶ δὲ καὶ ζῶντ’ ἐστὶ καὶ τεθνηκότα
tάν τῇ θαλάττῃ πολέμι’ ἕμιν θηρία.
ἄν ἀνατραπῇ γὰρ πλοῖον, εἰδ’, ὡς γίνεται,
ληφθῇ νέων τις, καταπεπώκασ’ εὐθέως.
αὐτοὶ τ’ ἔπαν ληφθόσιν ὑπὸ τῶν ἁλίεων, (5)
tεθνεῶτες ἐπιτρίβουσι τοὺς ὄνομιμένους,
τῆς οὐσίας γάρ εἰσιν ἠμῶν ἀνώνιοι,
ὁ πριάμενός τε πτωχὸς εὐθὺς ἀποτρέχει.

It’s always the case that, alive and dead, the creatures of the sea are enemies to us. For if a ship capsizes, then - as happens - one of the swimmers is caught: they slurp him down quick. But when they themselves are caught by the fishermen, even in death they do in their buyers. For they cost us a fortune, and the buyer of one exits bankrupt. (tr. Slater in Rusten 2011.537)

136 See Rusten 2011.494 footnote for analysis.
137 The myth has been rationalized by the historiographer Herodorus (31F14) as allegory; Diodorus Siculus (4.26.2–4.27.2) and Heraclitus the Paradoxographer (20) both offer rationalizations.
It is a joke on why sea creatures are dreaded. The idea that the dead fish at the market destroy the buyers financially exhibits a rationalistic approach, where devouring someone is equated to breaking them financially. Palaephatus rationalizes Monster from the Sea (37) as a play on a pirate’s name (Munster) who used to collect tribute from the coastal regions of Asia Minor. In ruining them financially and taking their young girls the pirate was metaphorically devouring them.\(^\text{139}\)

The next fragment contains the same theme of high priced fish. Antiphanes (K-A 164), Boys or Neaniskoi, comes from Athenaeus 6.224c in the same section as the above fragment.

> ἐγὼ τέως μὲν ωόμην τὰς Γοργόνας
eῖναι τι λογοποίημα, πρὸς ἀγορὰν δ' ὅταν
ἔλθω, πεπίστευκ'· ἐμβλέπων γὰρ αὐτὸθι
tοῖς ἰχθυοπώλαις, λίθινος εὐθὺς γίνομαι,
θερμὴν παρέθηκε κάμηλον.

I used to think the Gorgons were a fiction, but now, whenever I go to the market, I’m a believer; when I look at the fish sellers there, I turn right to stone! With averted eyes; if my eyes behold the smallness of the fish, and the hugeness of the price, I grow quite stiff.

(tr. Rusten 2011.503)

It is interesting that the poet indicates whether the myth was true or not. Once he admits it, he proceeds to interpret and rationalize the myth. The myth of the Gorgons was made-up (λογοποίημα), but then the speaker understands the myth as a metaphor. The Gorgons destroy their victims by ruining them financially at the fish market. The joke concerns the idea that he used to disbelieve the myth, but now believes it, although only in its metaphoric interpretation. Gorgons are not sea monsters or fish, but they are a metaphor for the fish dealers. Heraclitus the Paradoxographer (1) rationalized Medusa, a Gorgon, as a prostitute who metaphorically turned people to stone who looked at her. Perseus did not

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\(^{139}\) See Stern 1996.68 footnote 1 for analysis. The name Munster is a translation on an untranslatable pun. Κήτος means sea monster and comes from a word that means fish and Κήτων is a proper name, although it has the same root. According to its entry in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* the name refers to a mythical king from whom whales receive their name.
literally cut off her head, rather Medusa went broke trying to win him over, thus being financially ruined. In Palaephatus (31) the Gorgon is actually a golden statue which Perseus steals.

The comic metaphoric approach has unexpected outcomes and bizarre misunderstandings. This example comes from Anaxandrides (K-A 46) Tereus. It can be found in Athenaeus 3.166d in a discussion about spendthrifts and those who squander their fortunes. This fragment concerns the latter.

{A.} ὄρνις κεκλήσει. {B.} διὰ τί, πρὸς τῆς Ἑστίας; πότερον καταφαγὼν τὴν πατρῴαν οὐσίαν ὡσπερ Πολύευκτος ὁ καλὸς; {A.} οὐ δῆτ', ἀλλ' ὅτι ἄρρην ὑπὸ θηλειῶν κατεκόπης.

(A) You’ll be called “Bird.”
(B) Why by Hestia? Because I gobbled up the property I inherited from my father, like the noble Polyeuctus?
(A) Not at all, but because you’re a male who’s been reduced to mincemeat by females.
(tr. Olson 2006.v2.301)

Speaker A calls speaker B a bird as a metaphor. Speaker B tries to understand how he means it. He interprets the name “bird” as meaning that he devoured his inheritance. Speaker A corrects him and shares his interpretation that he meant “bird” as a metaphor for him being defeated by a female.

Speaker B could be Tereus and a rationalization is at play. Instead of turning into a bird, Tereus was called a bird for some reason and the joke plays on that reason. In the myth two sisters Philomela and Procrine (his wife) get the better of Tereus, thus him being defeated by females. Speaker B also implies that he devoured his inheritance and not his son Itys. Speaker A implies that Tereus was cut up or “reduced to mincemeat.” In the myth his son Itys was cut up and served as dinner. Nesselrath (1990.216-218) and Millis (2001.228) analyze this fragment as a myth rationalization with a metaphoric approach.

140 See Stern 2003.73 for analysis.
141 Nesselrath thinks the title Tereus refers to an ordinary Athenian man and not the Thracian king of the myth. See Konstantakos 2014.196 for a recent discussion.
Eubulus wrote a comedy entitled *Amalthea* and only two fragments survive (K-A 6, 7). Scholars speculate on the plot line of the comedy and assume that a common myth rationalization was at play.\(^{142}\)

Different myths exist about Amalthea’s horn or the cornucopia. Artistic representations of Heracles typically show him with the horn of plenty.

The horn has undergone different interpretations by poets Greek and Roman. It was given to Heracles by Amalthea, a daughter of Ocean, or it was the name of the goat that raised Zeus on Crete, or it was the name of the owner of the goat. The horn of Amalthea according to Anacreon (*PMG* 361) was a valuable item and according to Pherecydes (3F42) it provided an abundance of food.\(^{143}\) Rusten (2011.470) offers one rationalization of the myth as a plot summary for Eubulus’ comedy:

“Amalthea’s horn” was proverbial for the horn of plenty (Philemon fr. 68), which one proverb collection (*Proverbia Coisliniana* 23) explains as “from a woman food seller named Amalthea, who kept all her wares in a horn; Heracles went to her for drink and stole her horn, which is why they say that Heracles’ life is fine and flourishing.”

Palaephatus (45) has a similar rationalization of Amalthea’s horn and it is possible that he used the comic version to inform his narrative.

They say that Heracles carries the so-called Horn of Amalthea everywhere and that he obtained by prayer whatever he wanted from it.

Here is the truth. When Heracles was travelling in Boeotia with his nephew Iolaus he stayed at a certain inn in Thespiae. The inn-keeper happened to be a very beautiful young woman called Amalthea. Heracles took a liking to her and accepted her hospitality for rather a long

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\(^{142}\) See Hunter 1983.89-90 who speculates that Palaephatus used the comedy in his rationalization.

\(^{143}\) See Gantz 1993.28, 41-42 for details.
time. But Iolaus was distressed at the situation and decided to steal the money which Amalthea had earned at her trade and which she kept in a horn. From this money Iolaus bought whatever he wanted for himself and Heracles.

So their fellow travelers said: “Heracles got the horn of Amalthea and bought whatever he wanted from it.” From this the myth was created, and artists who paint Heracles paint the Horn of Amalthea beside him. (tr. Stern 1996.77)

Hunter (1983. 90) compares Eubulus’ and Paleaphatus’ versions to a scene in Aristophanes Frogs (lines 549-568) where it seems a rationalized version of the myth is played out in a humanized comic fashion.

In this scene Dionysus, dressed up as Heracles, is blamed for doing the innkeeper wrong on a previous visit.

ΠΑΝΔΟΚΕΥΤΡΙΑ Πλαθάνη, Πλαθάνη, δεῦρ’ ἔλθ’, ὁ πανοῦργος οὕτωσι, ὡς εἰς τὸ πανδοκεῖον εἰσελθὼν ποτε (550)
ἐκκαίδεκ’ αρτοὺς κατέφαγ’ ἡμῶν—
ΠΛΑΘΑΝΗ νὴ Δία,
ἐκείνος αὐτὸς δήτα. (552)
Ξα. κακὸν ήκει τινι.
Πα. καὶ κρέα γε πρὸς τούτοισιν ἀνάβραστε’ εἰκοσιν (553)
ἀν’ ἡμωβελιαία—
Ξα. δώσει τις δίκην.
Πα. καὶ τὰ σκόροδα τὰ πολλά. (555)
Δι. λήρείς, ὦ γυναί, κούκ οἴσθ’ ὦ τι λέγεις. (556)
Πα. οὐ μὲν οὖν με προσεδόκας, ὅτι κοσθόρνους εἰχές, ἀναγνώναι σ’ ἐτι; (557) τι δαι; τὸ πολὺ τάριχος οὐκ εἰρήκα πω.
ΠΛ. μὰ Δί’ οὐδὲ τὸν τυρόν γε τὸν χλωρόν, τάλαν, ὁν οὔτος αὐτοῖς τοῖς ταλάροις κατήσθιε. (560)
Πα. καπειτ’ ἑπείδη τάργυσον ἐπιρρήμην, ἐβλεφέν εἰς με δριμύ κάμυκατο γε—
Ξα. τοῦτο τάριχον τούργον— οὕτος ὁ τρόπος πανταχοῦ.
Πα. καὶ τὸ ξίφος γ’ ἐσπάτο, μαίνεσθαι δοκῶ.
Πλ. νὴ Δία, τάλαινα. (565)
Πα. νῦ δε δεισάσα γε πῶς ἐπι τὴν κατήληψ’ εὐθὺς ἀνεπιδήσαμεν; (566) ὁ δ’ ὀχέτ’ ἐξάξας γε τὰς ψιάθους λαβῶν.
Ξα. καὶ τοῦτο τοῦτον τούργον.
Πα. ἀλλ’ ἔχρην τι δράν.

Innkeeper: Plathane! Plathane, come here! Here’s that hooligan, the one who came to the inn and gobbled sixteen loaves of bread!
**Plathane:** By god, it is him!
**Xanthias:** Somebody’s in for it.
**Innkeeper:** And on top of that, twenty half-obol orders of stew at one go!
**Xanthias:** Somebody’s gonna catch it.
**Innkeeper:** And all that garlic!
**Dionysis:** Nonsense, madam; you don’t know what you’re talking about.
**Innkeeper:** Hah! You didn’t think I’d recognize you again with those buskins on. Well? I haven’t even mentioned all that fish yet.
**Plathane:** Right, dearie, or the fresh cheese that he ate up, baskets and all.
**Innkeeper:** And when I presented the bill, he gave me a nasty look and started bellowing.
**Xanthias:** That’s his style exactly; he acts that way everywhere.
**Innkeeper:** And he drew his sword like a lunatic.
**Plathane:** Amen, my poor dear.
**Innkeeper:** And we were so scared I guess we jumped right up to the loft, while he sashed out and got away, taking our mattresses with him.
**Xanthias:** That’s his style, too.
**Innkeeper:** Well, we should do something about it


Aristophanes’ audience would be familiar with this version of Amalthea and Heracles. Palaephatus and Aristophanes presentations are similar; both contain Heracles ripping off an inn keeper. The Innkeeper would represent Amalthea.

From the two remaining fragments from Eubulus’ play it is impossible to know what interpretation he used. Hercules is a speaker in one fragment (K-A 6) which concerns foods he doesn’t want to eat and others which he does eat. The other fragment supplies nothing for understanding the plot. The current assumption by scholars is that comic poets treated the myth in similar ways, so Eubulus’ Amalthea should take the same interpretation as Aristophanes. Philemon (K-A 68) rationalizes the same myth as a metaphor for money which is not far off from the other interpretations. His fragment will be covered in the next chapter.

The last two fragments mention the sea god Nereus. The first is from Alexis (K-A 115), Crateia or Pharmacist, and originates from Athenaeus 3.107a in a discussion about wrapped liver.

πρῶτον μὲν οὖν ὀστρεία παρὰ Νηρεί τινα
ἰδὼν γέροντι φῦκος ἠμφιεσμένα
ἔλαβον ἔχινους τ’· ἔστι γὰρ προοίμιον

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δείπνου χαριέντως ταύτα πεπρυτανευμένου.

So first I spotted oysters wrapped in seaweed at the shop of some old Nereus, and sea urchins, which I bought; these were the appetizers for a delightfully managed dinner. ...
(tr. Slater in Rusten 2011.541)

The fragment continues with a list of fish which the speaker bought for dinner. Part of the joke is conflating a fish seller with the sea god Nereus.\(^{144}\) Nereus is typically the Old Man in the Sea (Hesiod *Theogony* 234 γέροντα, Homer *Il.* 18.141 γέρονθ’ ἄλιον, *Od.* 24.58 ἄλιοιο γέροντος).\(^{145}\) In *Od.* 4.365 the same epithet is applied to Proteus. The speaker in the comic fragment refers to the fish seller Nereus with the same adjective “old” (γέροντι). Nereus is meant as a metaphor for a fish seller. The Euhemeristic approach may also play a role since the fragment links a god of the sea with selling fish.

This fragment comes from Anaxandrides (K-A 31) in *Nereus* and can be found in Athenaeus 295a in a discussion about the fish called *glaukos*.

> ὁ πρῶτος εὑρὼν πολυτελὲς τμητὸν μέγα
glaúkos-head, and a body of faultless
tuna, and the other food that comes from the wet
salt sea, inhabits this entire region. (tr. Olson 2006.v3.368-371)

The poet portrays the god Nereus as the inventor of expensive sea food delicacies which may be compared to Euhemeristic narration of Poseidon (Diodorus Siculus 5.69) who invents sea travel and other sea-related skills. It also contains the theme of the first inventor. Nereus here is a cook instead of a fish dealer.\(^{146}\) The sea god and a mortal are meant to be confused. The humor in both fragments relies on a rationalization which turns the god into an ordinary person, a humanized portrayal.

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\(^{144}\) See Arnott 1996.316-317 and Olson 2006.v2.4 footnote 3 for details.

\(^{145}\) Arnott (Ibid.) cites Menander K-A 696 which contains another fisherman of the sea - ἀλιεὺς γέρον.

\(^{146}\) See Olson 2006.v3.369 footnote 141 and Millis 2001.120 who analyze the scene as representing a god and a mortal character.
It is interesting that the section in Athenaeus covers the *glaukos* fish. There was a myth about an ordinary fisherman named Glaucos who turned into a prophetic sea god. Some rationalizations exist about him including Palaephatus 27 where he is nicknamed Glaucos of the Sea due to his swimming ability and his store of fish year-round and Heraclitus 10 where he is a wise man who warns passing boats of danger, a play on the first inventor theme. Sea gods are often rationalized as fishermen, fishmongers, and even fish cooks.
Chapter 05 New Comedy and Mythographic Parody

This chapter covers myth rationalization in New Comedy. The same approaches found in the previous chapters appear in New Comedy. We’ll see the first invention theme, etymology, allegory, and metaphoric interpretations. By this time period mythography as a genre is so well established that comedy can parody its authors by name. I analyze two examples of mythographic parody.

This fragment makes Tantalos a first inventor of a habit worthy of blame. It comes from Nicolaus (K-A 1) and originates in Stobaeus (3.14.7) in a section on flattery (κολακεία). The emphasis in the section maintains that parasites flatter their hosts in lieu of contributing anything else.

\[\begin{align*}
\text{τὸ τῶν παρασίτων, ἀνδρεῖς, ἐξηύρεν γένος Διὸς περφυκός, ὡς λέγουσι, Τάνταλος.} \\
\text{où δυνάμενος δὲ τῇ τέχνῃ χρῆσθαι καλώς ἀκόλαστον ἐσχή γλώσσαν, εἰτ' ἀκουσίω} \\
\text{διόρθω περιπέτειαν δυναμένω λιμόν ποιεῖν (5)} \\
\text{ἀπὸ τῆς τραπέζης ἐξηύρεσις ἀπεστάφη·} \\
\text{άφνω δὲ πληγεὶς εἰς μέσην τὴν γαστέρα ἐσχάλατεν αὐτῷ γεγονότα μάλα κάτω,} \\
\text{Σίπυλόν τε τὸν τρόπον ἀνατετράφθαι τὸν τρόπον· καὶ μάλα δικαίως· Φρύξ γὰρ ὁ παρασίτης} \\
\text{ηὔξηκας; εἶπον· ἄξιον γὰρ εἰδέναι·} \\
\text{τίνος μαθητὴς γέγονας; αἵρεσιν τίνα} \\
\text{ζηλοῖς; ἀπὸ τίνων δογμάτων ὁρμώμενος τολμᾷς παρασιτεῖν;} \\
\text{ἄφιξαν τὸν τρέφοντος ἐν τῷ ἄνελθαν} \\
\text{ἡμέρας; εἶπον· ἄξιον γὰρ εἰδέναι·} \\
\text{τίνος μαθητής γέγονας; αἵρεσιν τίνα} \\
\text{ζηλοῖς; ἀπὸ τίνων δογμάτων ὁρμώμενος τολμάς παρασιτεῖν;} \\
\text{ἄφιξαν τὸν τρέφοντος ἐν τῷ ἄνελθαν} \\
\text{ἡμέρας; εἶπον· ἄξιον γὰρ εἰδέναι·} \\
\text{τίνος μαθητής γέγονας; αἵρεσιν τίνα}
\end{align*}\]

See Athenaeus 6.237c-e - Alexis K-A 121 and Timocles K-A 8 for the parasite as flatterer.
The speaker begins with the punishment of Tantalos and portrays him as the first inventor of the race of parasites. Tantalos is not usually depicted as a parasite, but typically as a guest of the gods’ dinner table and as a rich king. The speaker interrogates Tantalos about his motives for being a parasite. The art (τέχνης) of the parasite is put forth and rationalized. The mythological Tantalos is turned into a pupil of
a school or of some doctrine of parasites having its source with the gods (τι γὰρ μαθών...πρὸς τῶν δαμόνων | ἀπὸ τίνων δογμάτων ὀρμώμενος). Because Tantalos was raised by Zeus, he had the benefit of frankness (παρρησίαν), here implying flattery, in the myth implying something else, perhaps the secrets of immortality.148

Tantalos is typically portrayed in poetry as having dined with the gods and then sharing their secrets with mortals. The prologue of Euripides Orestes (In. 1-15) portrays Tantalos sharing secrets of the gods and being punished for it. Euripides portrays him as both mortal and a son of Zeus just as in the comic passage. A few lines in Nicolaus’ fragment (In. 2 and 10) are parallel to some parts of the prologue in Euripides Orestes (In. 5 and 10), implying the passage is making a tragic parody.

The speaker links the name parasite (παρασίτων) to the word for frankness (παρρησίαν), making an etymological play.149 The passage has a Euhemeristic theme since Tantalos is thought to be a king and an inventor of something beneficial or in the comic fashion something blamable. In the omitted section of the passage the speaker brings up Ganymedes as another mortal dinner guest of the gods. At the end of the passage Tantalos’ riches are mentioned. It’s odd that the rich Tantalos should be a parasite. He is a parasite to the gods and a model for parasites to follow on earth.

The next two fragments portray the gods as first inventors of items associated with their worship or realm of power. Euhemerus made a similar approach except his writings maintain that these divine first inventors were really just famous men who were remembered as gods since their inventions were so detrimental. Here is a Euhemeristic interpretation from Diodorus Siculus 5.69.4

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148 See Diodorus Siculus 4.74.1-2 where παρρησίαν is also used to describe Tantalos and his attitude around the gods at dinner. In his version and others Tantalos is punished while still alive and after death in the underworld. The comic fragment shows his punishment while still alive on top of Mt. Sipylus.

149 παρρησίαν is typically the word used to mean free-speech and it is often employed by the comic poets because they benefited from it. The etymology is some kind of joke since “free speech” and “flattery” are necessarily opposites. Tantalos was a failed parasite because “he held an unbridled tongue”—i.e. he used parrhesia, not flattery.
φασίν οἱ Κρῆτες Ποσειδῶνα μὲν πρῶτον χρήσασθαι ταῖς κατὰ θάλατταν ἐργασίαις καὶ στόλους συστήσασθαι, παραδόντος αὐτῷ τὴν ἡγεμονίαν ταύτην τοῦ Κρόνου· διὸ καὶ παραδίδοσθαι τοῖς ἐπιγινομένοις τοῦτον κύριον ἑπιστήμην καταδείξαι τὴν περὶ τὴν ἱππικήν, ἀφ’ ἢς ἰππιόν αὐτὸν.

[5.69.4] The Cretans say that Poseidon was the first to involve himself in the work of seafaring and the construction of fleets because Cronos granted him authority over these things. So it has been passed down to later generations that he is the master of what happens on the sea and he is honored by sailors with sacrifices. They also give him credit for being the first to tame horses {hippoi} and teach the knowledge of horsemanship, from which he is called Hippios.

(tr. Trzaskoma, Smith, and Brunet 2004.99)

The comic approach is not the exact same as the Euhemeristic one, but there are some interesting similarities. Both approaches assign inventions associated with the god’s realm of power and both humanize the gods into ordinary people or dealing with ordinary things, here shipbuilding.

This example comes from Diphilus (K-A 32) in Merchant and originates in Athenaeus 6.226e in a discussion about the high price of fish.

οὐ πώποτ’ ἰχθῦς οἶδα τιμιωτέρους ἰδών. Πόσειδον, εἰ δεκάτην ἐλάμβανες αὐτῶν ἀπὸ τῆς τιμῆς ἑκάστης ἡμέρας, πολὺ τῶν θεῶν ἂν ἦσθα πλουσιώτατος. όμως δὲ τούτων εἴ με προσγελάσειέ τις, (5) ἐδίδουν στενάξας ὁπόσον αἰτήσειέ με. γόγγρον μέν, ὡσπερ ο Πρίαμος τὸν Ἕκτορα, ὡσον εἶλασαν, τοσοῦτο καταθεὶς ἐπριάμην.

I don’t know that I’ve ever seen fish more expensive. Poseidon, if you took ten percent on their price each day, you’d be the richest of the gods by far. Still, even if one of them might laugh at me, I groaned and kept on giving whatever he’d demand. Why, I bought an eel and put down its weight [in gold] just the way Priam did for Hector. (tr. Konstan in Rusten 2011.665-666)

The speaker addresses the sea god Poseidon. His realm of power here includes the fish at the market and the fish sellers. Since he is a god of the sea, he should collect profits from the fish sales at the market. Setting up the gods as caring about money is part of the humanized theme in the passage. In Iliad book 24 Priam pays Achilles ten talents of gold for Hector’s body. The mood of book 24 is very dark.
and emotional as Priam retrieves his dead son’s body from Achilles who is equally grieving the loss of Patroclus. The comic reference is funny because Priam had no intention of eating Hector’s body or of buying an eel.

The fragment takes the humanized approach. It rationalizes Poseidon into the god of the fish market and brings the Priam and Hector episode down to the ridiculous level of paying for and eating expensive eel. Mortals have little control in how the gods treat them and the joke here is that the same tradition applies to the fish market. The speaker hopes that the gods make a profit with their unfair ways. In Middle Comedy we saw the poets make the sea god Nereus a fish merchant and a fish cook. In Old Comedy the papyrus fragment portrayed the gods Apollo and Chronus having a dispute over money. This fragment has a similar approach of bringing the gods down to human levels and concerns.

Diodorus (K-A 2) in Flute Girl makes Zeus the inventor of the parasite. It comes from Athenaeus 6.239b in a discussion about parasites.

I want to show beyond a doubt that his is a well established and even an elegant practice, an invention of the gods - no other art was invented by any god, but merely wise mortals. It was the greatest of them, Zeus god of friendship, who is universally known to have invented being a parasite: he visits houses, making no distinction.
between poverty and wealth; wherever he sees a well-decked couch, and a table nearby with all the necessities, there he reclines, lunches modestly, has his drinks and desserts, then goes on home - without paying his share of the bill.

[rest omitted]
(tr. Konstan in Rusten 2011.681)

The comic poet claims that mortals invented everything else beneficial except the parasite. The fragment has a reference to Euhemeristic rationalization, since it maintains that wise men invented all other important items (τὰς δ’ ἄλλας τέχνας οὐδεὶς θεῶν κατέδειξεν, ἀλλ’ ἄνδρες σοφοί). It continues with a description of Zeus’ behavior. Through his role as the god of friendship the poet describes him as acting parasitic. In the omitted section the speaker gives an aitiology about the sacred cult of parasites who oversee certain sacrifices. The speaker offers a unique and rationalized interpretation of Zeus’ behavior and interesting commentary on things not invented by the gods. As with the other New Comedy fragments, this one has a more mythographic appeal, since it offers different types of narrations, here Euhemerism, first invention, and aitiology.

Philemon (K-A 114) makes a comic interpretation of the Sphinx. It comes from Athenaeus 14.659b in a section about cooks appearing on the stage in comic masks and being mocked.

Σφίγγ’ ἄρρεν’, οὐ μάγειρον εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν εἴληφ’· ἁπλῶς γὰρ οὐδὲ ἐν, μά τοὺς θεούς, ἄντερ λέγει συνίημι· καινὰ ρήματα πεπορισμένος γὰρ ἐστι.

... It’s a male sphinx, not a cook I’ve brought into the house. For by the gods, I understand absolutely nothing of what he says: he comes equipped with new words.
(tr. Konstan in Rusten 2011.618-619)

The fragment continues at Athenaeus 9.382b, where it is incorrectly attributed to Strato. In Athenaeus the discussion concerns a cook with a “high and mighty” attitude about his art (ὡκυλλετο ἐπὶ τῆ
In the omitted part of the fragment (26 lines) the cook and the speaker cannot communicate about the dinner party. The cook is a foreigner and speaks in obscure words, ones typically found in the “works of Philitas” as the passage states. The cook’s dialect is Homeric at times, at least epic in nature, and misunderstood by the other speaker, who is his master. His last statement at the cook asks whether he was raised by a rhapsode and exposed to the words of Homer.

The fragment interprets the monster Sphinx and her riddle as a metaphor for a difficult-to-understand language, that a Sphinx is one who speaks in cooking riddles, here Homeric ones. In Middle Comedy we saw the Sphinx rationalized into love talk amongst prostitutes. Palaephatus (4) makes her a misunderstanding of the foreign name for an ambush. In Palaephatus’ version and other rationalized versions the Sphinx is Amazonian and a foreigner. The same theme applies in the comic fragment. The cook is difficult to understand because he is a foreigner, but the question - “from what country?” - maintains the punch line. He comes from a place where they speak obscure Homeric Greek, which is either Ionia or no place at all, since Homeric dialect contains a mixture of other dialects and was only used in epic poetry. The rationalization of the art of cooking makes cooking as difficult to understand as Homeric Greek.

This fragment from Philemon (K-A 68) in Shirt Flaps contains a metaphoric interpretation of Amaltheas’ horn. A shirt flap (pteryx) refers to a piece of fabric which serves as a pocket. It comes from Stobaeus (4.31a.13) in a list of excerpts which praise wealth.

See Konstan in Rusten 2011.609 for the attribution of the fragment.


See Stern 1996.35 for examples.

See Konstan in Rusten 2011.609 for an explanation.
Do you think that the horn of Amalthea is such as artists draw, the horn of a cow? It’s money: if you have this say … what you want, you’ll have everything, friends, helpers, witnesses, tenements. (tr. Konstan in Rusten 2011.609)

In Middle Comedy we saw the theme of criticizing an artists’ depiction of some myth. Here the speaker disagrees with the artists’ depiction of the horn of Amalthea. The speaker rationalizes the horn to be a metaphor for money. In Palaephatous (45) the horn of plenty is rationalized as an ordinary horn used to store money. Palaephatous and the comic fragment contain the same interpretation, that the horn is metaphorical for an endless amount of money.

Hegesippus (K-A 1) in Brothers makes a metaphorical play on the Sirens. It comes from Athenaeus 7.290b in a discussion about cooks acting eccentric. He cites the end of Philemon K-A 82 where the cook boasts that he discovered immortality with his ability to cook and then this fragment follows.

[A.] τὰ πάρεργά μου ταῦτ’ ἐστιν· ἂν δὲ δὴ λάβω τὰ δέοντα, καὶ τοῦτόνιον ἀρμόσωμ' ἄπαξ, ὅπερ ἐτί τῶν ἐμπροσθήκην Ἐσθρήνων, Σύρε, (20) ἐγένετο, καὶ νῦν ταῦτά τ’ ὄψει πάλιν· ὑπὸ τῆς γὰρ ὀσμῆς οὐδὲ εἰς δυνήσεται ἀπλῶς διελθεῖν τὸν στενωπὸν τοῦτον· ὁ δὲ παριὼν πάς εὐθέως πρὸς τὴν θύραν ἐστήξετ’ ἄχανής, προσεπατταλευμένος, (25) ἀφανος, ἀχρὶ ἂν τῶν φίλων βεβυσμένος τὴν ὄν’ ἐτερός τις προσδραμὼν ἀποσπάσῃ.

(17 lines omitted)

(A) That’s just my warmup. Once I get what I need, and set out the chef’s kitchen you’ll see it like it was in the old days of the Sirens. Its aroma allows absolutely no one to walk down the lane; every single passerby stands open-mouthed at the door, transfixed, speechless, until someone else with his nose plugged up runs in to drag him away.

(3 lines omitted) (tr. Konstan in Rusten 2011.702)

In the omitted lines speaker A, the cook, describes himself as an innovator of the art of cooking. He is so good at the art that his cooking powers have mythological and magical powers. Just as the Sirens are powerful, so his cooking can put people under a spell. The myth of the Sirens is used metaphorically to
mean the chef stunned his audience. In Homer’s *Odyssey* 12.167 Odysseus’ crew plugs up their ears with wax to avoid the sound of the Sirens and his crew ignores Odysseus’ commands to untie him, since he hears the song without the wax. In the comic fragment the dinner guest must plug up their nose to avoid the mythological effect of his cooking. The servants with noses plugged must rush in and rescue the dinner guest exposed to the magical food. Instead of the Sirens ensnaring passing-by sailors, the cook enchants people passing by his kitchen.

The next fragment presents an allegorical approach comparable to the tradition of the stoic mythographer Cornutus. In his writings Zeus represents the world-soul (3.1-14) and Hera, the *aer* (3.15-20). Philemon K-A 95 writes about that nature of Zeus in this fragment which comes from Stobaeus (1.32) in a section on winds.

> ὃν οὐδὲ εἰς λέξηθεν οὐδὲ ἐν ποιών,  
> οὐδ’ αὐ ποιήσων, οὐδὲ πεποιηκώς πάλαι,  
> οὔτε θεός οὔτε ἄνθρωπος, οὔτὸς εἰμ’ ἐγώ,  
> Ἀήρ, ὅν ἄν τις ὄνομάσει καὶ Δία.  
> ἐγώ δ’, ὁ θεόν’ στιν ἔργον, εἰμὶ πανταχοῦ, (5)  
> ἐνταῦθ’ ἐν Αθήναις, ἐν Πάτραις, ἐν Σικελίᾳ,  
> ἐν ταῖς πόλεσι πᾶσαισιν, ἐν ταῖς οἰκίαις  
> πάσαις, ἐν ύμῖν πᾶσιν· οὐκ ἔστιν τόπος,  
> οὐ μὴ στιν Αἴρῃ· ὁ δὲ παρὼν ἁπανταχοῦ  
> πάντε’ ἐξ ἀνάγκης οἶδε πανταχοῦ παρὼν.

The one nobody evades whatever he does,  
whether evil or good - that’s me,  
Air: one could also call me Zeus.  
I - and this is a god’s job - am everywhere,  
here in Athens, in Patrae, in Sicily,  
in all cities, in all homes,  
in all of you. There is no place  
where Air is not. One who is present everywhere  
necessarily knows everything [since everywhere he’s present].

(tr. Konstan in Rusten 2011.614)

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154 See Stern 2003.57-8 for a discussion of allegory as a rationalizing approach.
Zeus is really the air everyone breathes and thus the most powerful of deities. The fragment poses air as the god, since only air can be everywhere at all times. The speaker equates air to a god, although he does not mention whether air is a god. This fragment represents a Stoic parody and a rationalization of the god. The Cornutus excerpt follows:

Ὡσπερ δὲ ἡμεῖς ὑπὸ ψυχῆς διοικούμεθα, οὕτω καὶ οὗ κόσμου ψυχήν ἔχει τὴν συνέχουσαν αὐτόν, καὶ αὐτὴ καλεῖται Ζεὺς, πρῶτος καὶ διὰ παντὸς ζώσα καὶ αἰτία οὖσα τοῖς ζωσὶ τοῦ ζήν· διὰ τούτο δὲ καὶ βασιλεύειν ὁ Ζεὺς λέγεται τῶν ὅλων, ώς ἄν καὶ ἐν ἡμῖν η ὕψη καὶ η φύσις ήμῶν βασιλεύειν ὑπάρχει. Καὶ διὰ αὐτὸν καλοῦμεν ὅτι δι’ αὐτὸν γίνεται καὶ σώζεται πάντα. Παρὰ δὲ τοῖς καὶ Δεὺς λέγεται, τάχα ἀπὸ τοῦ δεύειν τὴν γῆν ἢ μεταδίδοναι τοῖς ζωσὶ ζωτικῆς ἰκμάδος· καὶ ἡ γενική πτῶσις ἀπ’ αὐτῆς ἐστὶ Δεός, παρακειμένη πως τῇ Διός]. οἰκεῖ δὲ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ λέγεται, ἐπεί κεκόλληται αἰρομένη ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς εὑρημένη· καὶ γεγονασὶν ἐκ τῆς εἰς τὰ αὐτὰ ῥύσεως, ῥυεῖσα γὰρ εἰς λεπτότητα ἡ οὐσία τὸ πῦρ καὶ τὸν ἀέρα ὑφίσταται. Ἐφ’ ὧν καὶ Ῥέαν τὴν μητέρα αὐτῶν ἐμύθευσαν εἶναι,…

3.1-20 Just as we are governed by a soul, so too the cosmos has a soul that holds it together, and it is called Zeus. Being alive from the very beginning and for all time, it is the reason that everything that lives is alive {zen}. And so Zeus is also said to rule everything, just as the soul and nature within us might be said to rule us. We call him Dia because it is through {dia} him that everything is born and kept alive. He is called Deus by some, perhaps from the fact that he moistens {deuein} the earth or shares the moisture that gives life with what is alive. He is said to dwell in heaven because the supreme portion of the cosmos’ soul is there; for our souls are fire. His wife and sister is traditionally Hera, who is in fact air {aer}. For she is connected and united with him, rising up from the earth as he has settled over her. And they arise from the flow {rheo} in the same direction, for as substance flows toward fineness it gives rise to fire and air. For this reason in the myths their mother is said to be Rhea. (tr. Trzaskoma, Smith, and Brunet 2004.89)

Cornutus makes a similar analysis, except Zeus is soul instead of air. The soul is inside people and so is air. Air and the idea of the soul both allow for life to exist. The comic fragment presents air as a philosophical concept, just as this excerpt. Cornutus makes several etymological plays on Zeus and Hera’s names. Cornutus is writing at a later time than New Comedy. I quote him as a remaining example
of stoic allegory which interprets Zeus. Allegorical analysis, especially of Homer’s epics, goes back at
least to the 6th c. BC.  

This next example echoes the Palaephatean mode. Philemon writes about Niobe (K-A 102) in this
fragment which comes from a Scholion (bT) on Homer Iliad 24.617.

ἐγὼ λίθον μὲν τὴν Νιόβην, μὰ τοὺς θεοὺς,
oùdέποτ’ ἐπείσθην, οὐδὲ νῦν πεισθῆσομαι
ὡς τοῦτ’ ἐγένετ’ ἄνθρωπος· ὑπὸ δὲ τῶν κακῶν
[tῶν συμπεσόντων τοῦ τε συμβάντος πάθους]
οὐδὲν λαλῆσαι δυναμένη πρὸς οὐδένα, (5)
προσηγορεύθη διὰ τὸ μὴ φωνεῖν λίθος.

That Niobe was a stone, by the gods,
I never believed, nor will I now believe
that a human being turned into that: but under the troubles
that befell and the catastrophe that occurred
she was unable to say anything to anyone and
for not speaking she was called a stone.
(tr. Konstan in Rusten 2011.616)

The speaker is not convinced (οὐδὲν λαλῆσαι δυναμένη, οὐδὲ νῦν πεισθῆσομαι) of the myth that Niobe
was turned to stone because people cannot be turned to stone. That people thought she was turned
into stone was a misunderstanding of her merely being called “stone.” This fragment represents a near
perfect fit to the comic myth rationalization approach and as an example of mythographic parody. The
fragment follows Palaephatus (8), although it is not possible to establish which writer came first or
wrote such a rationalization first. Paleaphatus’ (8) follows:

Περὶ Νιόβης.
Φασὶν ὡς Νιόβη γυνὴ ἴσωσα λίθος ἐγένετο ἐπὶ τῷ τύμβῳ τῶν παίδων· ὅστις δὲ
πείθεται ἐξ ἀνθρώπου λίθον γενέσθαι ἢ ἐκ λίθου ἄνθρωπον, εὐθῆς ἐστὶ, τὸ
δὲ ἀληθὲς ἔχει ὁδε. Νιόβης ἀποθάνοντας τῶν παίδων, ποιήσας τις εἰκόνα λιθίνην
ἐστησεν ἐπὶ τῷ τύμβῳ. ἔλεγον οὖν οἱ παριόντες “Νιόβη λιθίνη
ἐστηκεν ἐπὶ τῷ τύμβῳ· οὐδὲ γινθήνη”, ὡσπερ καὶ νῦν λέγεται „παρὰ τὸν
χαλκοῦν Ἡρακλέα ἐκαθήμην“ καὶ „παρὰ τὸν Πάριον Ἑρμῆν ὤν“. τοιοῦτον
نسخاء.  

155 For instance Theagenes of Rhegion the Homeric allegorist.
They say that Niobe, a living woman, turned into stone on the tomb of her children. Anyone who believes that a human being turned into a stone or a stone into a human being is a fool. The truth is as follows:

When Niobe’s children died, someone made a statue of Niobe out of stone and set it on the tomb. Passersby would say: “A stone Niobe is standing on the tomb. We saw her ourselves.” Similarly, one might say nowadays: “I was sitting by the bronze Heracles;” or “I was at the marble Herm.” That is how it was, but Niobe herself did not turn into stone.

(tr. Stern 1996.40)

Palaephatus comes to the conclusion that people in the past have misunderstood the story and that Niobe being turned to stone was misconstrued from a statue of Niobe which people visited. The Philemon passage states that the myth is impossible, but with a different conclusion. The comic poet also makes the myth based on a misunderstanding - one where Niobe refuses to speak and people say she’s been turned into a stone. It’s similar to the comic rationalizations already seen of the Sirens and Gorgons. Nesselrath (1990.217, 231) notes that Philemon wrote myth rationalization (der Mythenrationalisierung) in his comic poetry and that it was a popular device of ancient comedy, especially New Comedy. He cites Euhemerus and Hecataeus whose approach comic poets also parodied.

Athenion (K-A 1) in Samo-thracians makes a Palaephatean parody. It comes from Athenaeus 14.660e in a discussion about the importance of cooks. According to the speaker this example highlights a cook speaking about natural phenomena (φυσιολογούντα). The cook is boasting about his art to a slave who belittles him. It represents a myth rationalization of the art of cooking.

οὐκ οἶσθ’ ὅτι πάντων ἡ μαγειρικὴ τέχνη
πρὸς εὐσέβειαν πλείστα προενήνεχθ’ ὅλως;
τὸν θημιώδους καὶ παρασπόνδου βίον
ήμας γὰρ ἀπολύσασα καὶ τῆς δυσχεροῦς (5)
ἀληλοφαγίας, ἤγαγ’ εἰς τάξιν τινά,
καὶ τοιοῦτον περιήψεν ὄν νυν βίον
ἀληλοφαγίας καὶ κακῶν ὄντων συχνῶν,
γενόμενος ἄνθρωπός τις οὐκ ἀβέλτερος  (10)
θύσας ἱερεῖον πρῶτος ὀψήπτθεν κρέας.
ὡς δ’ ἦν τὸ κρέας ἥδιον ἀνθρώπου κρεῶν,
αὐτοῖς μὲν οὐκ ἐμασῶντο, τὰ δὲ βοσκήματα
θύοντες ὤπτων. ὡς δ’ ἅπαξ τῆς ἡδονῆς
ἐμπειρίαν τιν’ ἔλαβον, ἀρχής γενομένης, (15)
ἐπὶ πλεῖον οὐδὲν τὴν μαγειρικὴν τέχνην.
όθεν ἔτι καὶ νῦν τῶν πρότερον μεμνημένων
tὰ σπλάγχνα τοῖς θεοῖσιν ὅπτωσιν φλογὶ
ἀλας οὐ προσάγοντες· οὐ γὰρ ἦσαν οὐδέπω
εἰς τὴν τοιαύτην χρῆσιν ἐξηυρημένοι. (20)
ὡς δ’ ἤφεσ’ αὐτοῖς ὤπτον, καὶ τοὺς ἅλας
προσάγοντας ἡδη τῶν ἱερῶν γεγραμμένων
τὰ πάτωμα διατηροῦντες, ἀπερ ἦμιν μόνα
ἄπασιν ἀρχή γέγονε τῆς σωτηρίας,
tὸ προσφιλοτεχνεῖν διὰ τε τῶν ἡδυσμάτων (25)
ἐπὶ πλεῖον οὐδὲν τὴν μαγειρικὴν τέχνην.
[B.] καίνος πάρεστιν οὗτοι Παλαίφατος.
[A.] μετὰ ταῦτα γαστρικήν τις ἀνθρώπων
προϊόντος ἐμπειρημένην ‘ἡδη τοῦ χρόνου’
ἐφέσατ' ἐπικέφασε, τυμπώ τε ἐλάβεν (30)
περικομμάτων, διεγένησάν-ὑποκροῦσας γλυκεῖ,
ἰχθυν παρεσκευάκησαν οὐδ’ ὀρφιμένοιν,
λάχανον, τάριχας, πουλύμποδας, χόνδρον, μέλι.
ὡς πολύ δὲ διὰ τάς ἡδυσμάτως ἀς νῦν λέγω
ἀπείχ’ ἐκατόσον τοῦ φαγεῖν ἀν ἔτι νεκροῦ,
(35)
αὐτοῖς ἄπαντες ἔπεισαν συζῆν, ὁχλος
ἡθοῦζετ’, ἐγένθονθ’ αἱ πόλεις, οἰκούμεναι
διὰ τήν τέχνην, ὅπερ εἶτα, τῇ μαγειρικήν.
[B.] ἀνθρωπος, χαῖρε· περὶ πόδ’ ἐν τῇ ἐστιτή.
[A.] καταρχόμεθ’ ἡμεῖς οἱ μάγειροι, θύομεν, (40)
στονδας ποιούμεν, τῷ ἡμῖν ἐντούλητος,
ἡμῖν ὑπακούειν διὰ τὸ ταῦθ’ εὑρηκέναι
τᾷ μάλιστα συντείνοντα πρὸς τὸ ζῆν καλῶς.
[B.] ὕπερ εὐσεβείας σὺν ἄφεσι παύσαι λέγων,
ἡμαρτον· ἀλλὰ δεῦρο σὺ’ εὐνεισθι (45)
ἐμοί, τὰ τ’ ἐνδον ἐντρεπτῇ ποἴει λαβῶν.

(A) Don’t you know that it is to religion that the art of cooking
has made the very greatest contribution of all?
(B) Is that so?  (A) Absolutely, my foreign friend.
It liberated us from the savage and lawless life
and horrible cannibalism, and led us to order
and bestowed on us the life we live today.
(B) How?  (A) Listen and I’ll tell you.
In the days of cannibalism and a host of evils,
there came a man who was not so uncouth,  
the first to offer a sacrificial victim - and roast the meat.  
Since the meat was tastier than human flesh,  
they stopped chewing on each other, and fattened up animals  
to sacrifice and cook. Once they experienced  
this pleasure and made a start of it,  
they greatly expanded the art of cooking.  
(That’s why to this day, to commemorate the past,  
when they roast innards over an open fire to the gods  
they add no salt - you see, they hadn’t discovered yet  
they could use it this way. Because they grew fond of it later,  
they now add salt, keeping the old ways only for sacrifices.)  
The only things that were the key  
to the survival of the human race  
were constant innovation and the constant growth,  
sauce by sauce, of the art of cooking.  
(B) This man’s a regular Palaephatus!  
(A) Next, as time went on, someone introduced  
stuffing a gut for sausage, boiling a kid  
till it melted in the mouth; he set the intervals  
for stewed meats, with an accompanying wine to set the tempo,  
then brought in a fish smothered in sauces,  
greens, high-priced salt fish, porridge, honey.  
Because of the delights I’ve mentioned,  
everyone abstained from eating dead bodies.  
They decided to get along with each other,  
formed into groups, and so there were populated cities;  
all, as I’ve said, because of the art of cooking.  
(B) Good day, Sir! My master will be glad to see you!  
(A) It is we cooks who do the opening honors,  
who perform libations, because the gods listen to us most  
since we invented the things that contribute most  
to the food life. (B) Enough! Stop talking about religion!  
I was wrong, I admit it. Quick now, come with me  
and lend a hand getting things ready inside.  
(tr. Konstan in Rusten 2011.703-4)

The speaker describes the first (πρῶτος) invention of cooking animal meat for the sacrifice and the discovery of salt. In the mythological past people are eating each other’s flesh. A lawless society becomes more civilized with each new cooking innovation. He gives an aitiaology for the lack of salt at religious sacrifices. Speaker B calls speaker A a Palaephatus. Speaker A’s narrative does not parallel any known Palaephatus passage, but the fragment exhibits multiple mythographic approaches - first

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inventions, human innovations, a distant mythological past, the rationalization of an art, and some use of a mythographer’s name. Palaephatus usually assumes that the myth arose from some misunderstanding in the past which surrounds a first invention. In Palaephatus 1 Centaurs are explained as a group of people who invented riding on horseback. Since people had never seen the behavior before, they thought they were a mythological creature - a mixture between a man and a horse.

The comic approach in this fragment is mythographic parody. Speaker B calls speaker A a Palaephatus because his attempt at making a rationalization of cooking is comparable to the mythographer’s work. The slave, who has belittled his art, is placating the speaker by calling him such a name. The cook continues to defend his beneficial art. It led to the establishment of peace on earth and the people living in cities. It modernized and improved life for mortals. The cook and his art are elevated to the status of divinity. Cooks perform libations because the gods recognize them, because cooks invented (εὑρηκέναι) the best benefit for mankind. In rationalizing the art of cooking the cook elevates his importance as slightly less than the gods. Speaker B, the slave, apologizes for belittling the cook’s art. He relates the subject of the speech to “religion” (εὐσεβείας - reverence towards the gods) and demands that they put the topic down.
Chapter 06 Menander

The extant works of Menander allows for the introduction of plot synopsis on some of his comedies which provides better analysis of his treatment of mythological content. For comedies with no plot summary we are still in the same conundrum of only having a few lines to analyze and nothing more. The approaches which I highlight in Menander are consistent with my analysis in previous chapters. I will focus on the following approaches in Menander: myth humanization, the taking of tragedy and mythology at face value, remythology, comic criticism of myth, allegory, metaphoric interpretations of myth, and myth rationalization.

The *Dyskolos* is the most complete of Menander’s works. It was first performed in 316 BC where it won 1st prize at the Lenaea. The comedy concerns Knemon a disgruntled hermit who lives with his daughter and Sostratus who wants to marry Knemon’s daughter. The disgruntled man is divorced and his wife’s son, Gorgias, lives next door. Gorgias helps Sostratus win over Knemon and his daughter. Knemon is unwilling to let his daughter marry and is hateful to everyone in the comedy.

Pan makes an appearance. His sanctuary, which lies between the two houses, is the setting for a festival and ultimately the marriage. Pan admits in the prologue that he is the cause of the attraction between Sostratus and Knemon’s daughter. Pan punishes Knemon because he does not recognize the god’s power and presence. In the comedy Knemon complains about the revelers, i.e. Sostratus’ family, who come to worship at the shrine next door.

There are a few examples in the comedy where myth is used as a metaphor. The following passage (lines 153-159) contains the first words spoken by the misanthrope Knemon. He has just been bothered by Pyrrhias whom Sostratus sent to inquire about Knemon’s daughter. Before Knemon speaks, Sostratus describes him as walking by himself yelling. Sostratus says that Knemon does not seem to be acting sane (οὐχ ὑγιαίνειν μοι δοκεῖ).

[KN] εἶτ’ ὦ μακάριος ἤν ὁ Περσεὺς κατὰ δύο (153)
τρόπους ἐκείνου, ὅτι πετηνὸς ἐγένετο
cούδενι συνήντα τῶν βαδιζόντων χαμαί, (155)
eἰθ’ ὅτι τοιοῦτο κτήμ’ ἐκέκτηθ’ ἐν διδόσα
ἀπαντας ἐπόει τοὺς ἐνοχλοῦντας; ὅπερ ἐμοὶ
νυνὶ γένοιτ’· οὐδὲν γὰρ ἀφθονώτερον
λιθίνων γένοιτ’ <ἂν> ἀνδριάντων πανταχοῦ.

Knemon: Well, wasn’t that Perseus such a lucky fellow, on two accounts? He had some wings, and so didn’t meet any pedestrians on the ground. And then he owned a sort of instrument with which he petrified all who annoyed him! I wish I had one now! Then nothing would be commoner all over than stone statues! (tr. Arnott 1979.v.1.207)

In comparing his own situation to the mythological narrative of Perseus, he rationalizes the head of Medusa as “a sort of instrument” (τοιοῦτο κτήμ’literally some possession). Typically Perseus cuts off the head of Medusa which has the lasting ability to turn things to stone. Knemon reminisces that Perseus could avoid strangers on the street by flying and turn annoying people into stone by using the instrument. The comparison takes a humanizing approach to the Perseus myth. Replacing Medusa’s head with some vague instrument is an interesting adaptation of the known narrative. Authors who use myth rationalization commonly rationalize only certain elements of the narrative. In the above passage Menander emphasizes the outcome of the Perseus narrative and deemphasizes the item used to accomplish it. Heraclitus the Paradoxographer (9) rationalized Perseus’ winged feet as a metaphor for being an excellent runner.

Later in the comedy Knemon falls in a well. Gorgias and Sostratus try to pull him out. In this scene (lines 666-690) Sostratus narrates the rescue effort. He is more interested in Knemon’s daughter than in saving Knemon. He drops the rope a few times nearly killing Knemon, meanwhile Gorgias actually saves Knemon. This excerpt (lines 683-685) contains an interesting mythological reference.

... ἀλλ’ ὁ Γοργίας Άτλας
ην οὐχ ὁ τυχὼν· ἀντεῖχε καὶ μόλις ποτὲ
ἀνενήνοι’ αὐτόν. ...

157 For instance see Plutarch’s rationalization of Bellerophon (Moria “Virtues of Women” 247F-248D).
Gomme and Sandbach (1973.238 note 683) analyze this scene as the only place in Menander where a person is identified metaphorically with a mythological character. The Titan god, son of Iapetus, is meant who is tasked with holding up the earth on his shoulders. Atlas is used to indicate a person who has extraordinary strength, but the comparison is exaggerated. Sostratos gives Gorgias mythological credit because Sostratos is too busy starring at Knemon’s daughter and puts in minimal effort to pull Knemon out.

Menander’s Samia is partially incomplete, but enough survives to understand the plot line. Its production date is unknown. Demeas, a rich Athenian, lives next door to Nikeratos, a poor Athenian. Demeas has an adopted son, Moschion, who loves Nikeratos’ daughter, Plangon. Demeas loves a Samian hetaira named Chrysis who lives in his house. While Demeas and Nikeratos are away journeying to Pontos, Moschion and Plangon sleep together. She becomes pregnant, but in fear of the consequences, i.e. having a child out of wedlock, the baby is given to Chrysis to nurse. The household maintains that the baby was born from Chrysis and Demeas. When Demas returns, a wedding is planned between Moschion and Plangon, but Demeas becomes suspicious of the baby. He thinks that his adopted son Mochion slept with his beloved Chrysis. A handful of mythological references are used by the characters to describe the situation.

In a speech (lines 325-356) to the audience Demeas speculates that his son has slept with his beloved Chrysis. At lines 333-338 Demeas believes that he has figured everything out.

(Δη) ... νυνὶ δέ μοι ἀπολελόγηται τὸν φανέντ’ αὐτώι γάμον ἀσμενὸς ἀκούσας. οὐκ ἐρων γάρ, ὡς ἐγὼ (335) τότ’ ὡς ἔσπευδεν, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἑβενίαν ἔνδοθέν ποτε· αὕτη γάρ ἐστιν αἴτια τοῦ γεγονότος·
Demeas: ... As it is, he's cleared himself before me by agreeing gladly to the marriage planned for him (i.e. Mochion). It wasn't love that prompted him, as I then fancied, but a wish to break loose finally from my own Helen! She's (i.e. Chrysis) the cause of what has happened.

(tr. Arnott 2000.85)

Demeas invokes Helen as a metaphor for an unfaithful wife and the cause of strife. Gomme and Sandbach (1973.578) comment that Phaedra would make a better exemplum, since she was accused of sleeping with her stepson Hippolytus. Demeas assumes that she slept with his adopted son and wishes to throw her out. Nikeratos takes Chrysis into his own house until Demeas returns to his senses.

In this scene (lines 492-500) Nikeratos and Demeas call out Moschion for hiding Chrysis' baby from them. Nikeratos cites a few mythological exempli which seem to fit the situation.

(Νι) ὦ κάκιστ' ἀνδρῶν ἁπάντων· ὑπονοεῖν γὰρ ἄρχομαι τὴν τύχην καὶ τἀσέβημα τὸ γεγονὸς μόλις ποτέ. (Μο) τέλος ἔχω τοίνυν ἐγώ. (Δη) νῦν αἰσθάνει, Νικήρατε; (494)
(Νι) οὐ γὰρ; ὢ πάνδεινον ἔργον· ὢ τὰ Τηρέως λέχη (495) Οἰδίπου τε καὶ Θυέστου καὶ τὰ τῶν ἄλλων, ὅσα γεγονόθ' ἠμῖν ἔστ' ἀκούσαι, μικρὰ ποιήσας— (Μο) ἐγώ; (497)
(Νι) τοῦτ' ἐτόλμησας σὺ πρᾶξαι, τοῦτ' ἔτλης; Ἀμύντορος νῦν ἐχρῆν ὀργὴν λαβεῖν σε, Δημέα, καὶ τουτονὶ ἐκτυφλῶσαι. (500)

Nikeratos: You vilest of mankind! I've just begun now to fathom this misfortune and the sinful act done here.
Moschion: That's me finished!
Demeas: Well, Nikeratos, do you now understand?
Nikeratos: Don't I then! O deed most dreadful! You have made the sexual crimes of Thyestes, Oidipus and Tereus, all those crimes we've heard were committed by the rest - you've made them all look trivial!
Moschion: I have?
Nikeratos: Did you dare to act thus and hazard it? Demeas, you should have adopted now Amyntor's wrath, and blinded him.
(tr. Arnott 2000.123-125)

The examples hardly fit the misunderstood situation. Thyestes has an affair with Atreus' wife, i.e. his brother-in-law's wife, and an affair with his daughter, Pelopia. Oedipus slept with his mother and Tereus assaulted his wife's sister. The joke in the scene consists in understanding the severe difference
between what Moschion actually did and what the mythological characters did in their respective narratives. Each example is invoked metaphorically or at least in such a way as to understand only one dimension of the character, i.e. each one’s improper love affair.

Gomme and Sandbach (1973.598-599) assume that Nikeratos invokes these characters as if they were real people from history, yet these stories were commonly known through the production of tragedy. The audience would understand them as mythological examples of improper love. Their back stories and context are omitted. With one word, a metaphorical approach, the audience understands the message. The marvelous elements of the myths are excluded and each one simply implies sexual misconduct.

The reference to Amyntor, Phoinix’s father, comes from *Iliad* 10.447, where Phoinix maintains that his mother convinced him to sleep with his father’s beloved. A lost tragedy by Euripides has Amyntor blinding Phoinix for the ill-deed, even though he is innocent. The example is fit for Moschion, since in the tragedy Phoinix is a victim of his father’s concubine’s lies and thus innocent. 158

Beginning at line 525 Moschion explains to his father the truth about the baby, namely that Chrysis was caring for it in order to hide another truth. He admits that the baby was actually born from an affair between himself and Plangon. After learning the truth Demeas denies it. At the same time Chrysis decides to keep the baby and not give it back to Plangon. Nikeratos becomes enraged at his daughter for having a baby out of wedlock. Demeas tries to calm him down. In the following scene (lines 588-610) Demeas tries to de-escalate the situation by asking Nikeratos to consider another myth as it appears in tragedy.

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Demeas: Yes, and you must get a grip on yourself! Nikeratos, just tell me, haven’t you listened to our tragedians, who tell us how once Zeus turned into gold- dropping through a roof he ravished a young girl locked in a room.

Nikeratos: What of that, then?

Demeas: We should be prepared for anything, perhaps - think - is any part of your roof leaking?

Nikeratos: Most of it - but what’s that’s to do with what you said?

Demeas: Zeus sometimes comes transformed to gold, sometimes, though, to rain - you follow?

This is all his doing! How quickly now we’ve found the answer!

Nikeratos: You are making fun of me!

Demeas: No, I’m not! You’re every bit as noble as Acrisius, certainly. If Danae deserved him, then your girl- 

Nikeratos: Oh dear! Moschion has diddled me!

Demeas: He’ll wed her, have no fear of that. What has happened is the work of higher powers, be quite, quite sure! I can name for you so many sons of gods who walk around in our streets, and yet you think that our misfortune is bizarre! First there’s Chaerephon, who never pays his bill for what he eats - don’t you think that he’s divine?

Nikeratos: I think so - oh, what can I do? There’s no point in fighting you there!

Demeas: You show sense, Nikeratos. Androcles has lived a long time now. He runs, jumps, makes his pile, walks about with hair so dark - he’d never die with it turned grey, no, not even if
you cut his throat! So isn’t he divine? - You must pray, though, that this business turns out well. Let incense burn. ... Soon my son will come to take his bride away!
(tr. Arnott 2000.v.3.153-157)

Arnott (2000.7, 611) describes this scene as taking a serious situation and turning it into mythological “farce.” It’s an example of myth humanization and analogy. Demeas compares Nikeratos to Acrisius, the father of Danae, whom Zeus impregnates through the “golden shower” and who in turn gives birth to the hero Perseus. By speculating the baby’s father as Zeus, Demeas tries to make Nieratos feel better. Just as in the Perseus example, in the Dyskalos the magical elements of the myth are present and conveyed to the situation - her pregnancy is divine will. At the same time the “golden shower” is meant metaphorically, namely that the pregnancy occurred out-of-wedlock.¹⁵⁹

The joke continues with a comparison of certain exceptional Athenians to the race of heroes, i.e. the sons of gods, or actually as gods. He calls Chaerephon a god (θεός) because he lives a parasitic life which allows him not to pay for things. The passage turns to Euhemerism as gods and sons of gods are explained as exceptional people. Androcles is a god (θεός) because his hair never turns grey and he lives a long time. Demeas casts him as immortal. Gomme and Sandbach (1973.614) have noted the switch between claiming that there are sons of gods among us into they are actually gods.

Meanander’s Epitrepontes, the Arbitration, has no production date and no surviving hypothesis. The following plot construction contains enough information for analyzing the fragments. Charisios is recently married to Pamphile. Unknown to her husband she is pregnant and gives birth five months after their marriage when Charisios was away. She gives the child to her nurse Sophrone who exposed the newborn in the forest. The baby was rescued by Daos, a shepherd, who ultimately gave the baby to a charcoal burner, Syros. When Charisios returns, his slave tells him about the baby and its exposure. He leaves his wife and lives somewhere else. The arbitration concerns a disagreement between Daos and Syros which is settled by Smikrines who is the father of Pamphile and the grandfather of the newborn.

¹⁵⁹ There is a similar rationalization at play in Euripides Bacchae. Semele’s family thought the Zeus story was a cover for her pregnancy out-of-wedlock.
although he does not know it when he acts as judge. The disagreement concerns the trinkets left with the newborn. Daos wants to keep them, but Syros wants them, since they may identify the child’s real identity when it grows older. In the following passage (lines 320-337) Syros makes his case for receiving the trinkets from Daos.

Syros: ... A further point, sir - just suppose this child’s above our class. Brought up with working folk, he may despise that, veer to his true nature, steel himself for high endeavor - big game hunting, bearing arms, Olympic running! You have seen the plays, I’m sure, and know all that - those heroes like Neleus and Pelias, discovered by an aged goatherd with a jerkin just like mine now. When he noticed that they were his betters, he revealed their story, how he’d found and picked them up. He handed them a pouch of keepsakes, and from that these boys, then goatherds, truly learnt their history in full, and so turned into kings. If Daos, though, had taken out those tokens, selling them to gain twelve drachmas for himself, men of such splendid birth would have remained unknown. (tr. Arnott 1979.v1.421)

Just as the passages excerpted above, the character invokes the tragic stage as a source and as inspiration for conveying the particular situation. Myth humanization is the approach. The mythological characters Neleus and Pelias are meant as points of comparison to the comic situation. If Daos throws away the trinkets, the exposed infant may never achieve his fated place in high society, perhaps even becoming a king.
Only remnants of the Neleus and Pelias birth stories are extant. They are children of Poseidon. Only in this excerpt from Menander are they raised by goatherds.\textsuperscript{160} The myth analogy hardly fits the situation in the comedy because the child is not born of royalty and the father wants the child to return to the household, since Phamphile exposed it without his permission. It’s another example of taking myth narrative as relevant and real history.

The first three comedies hardly exhibit any myth rationalization with the exception of Perseus and Medusa’s severed head. The approach in each example is myth humanization and simple analogy. Each mythological example was comically ill-fitted for the actual situation. Many of the myth were treated as if they were real, i.e. historical and not mythological. The calling of characters Atlas or Helen provides interesting examples of myth used as metaphor. The next set of examples exhibit some level of mythological rationalization including allegory and remythology.

Blame (2001.205) speculates whether the following fragment (2) from Dis Expaton or Twice a Swindler has been wrongly attributed to the comedy. It comes from Fulgentius Mitologiae 3.1 in a series of mythological rationalizations of Bellerophon. It is an example of a mythographer citing a comic poet.

\begin{quote}
\textbf{βουληφόρως <τὴν> ἡμετέραν, <ὦ> Δημέα, προκατέλαβες ὅρασιν.}
\end{quote}

They have interpreted Bellerophon to mean \textit{βουληφορῶν} (= Counselling) - for Menander also in his comedy Dis Exapaton speaks similarly, thus: Counsel-wise, you have anticipated, Demeas, our own impression. (tr. Arnott 1979.v1.166-167)

Fulgentius uses the allegorical and etymological approach in this section. He cites Homer in the \textit{iliad} as taking a similar approach with the same adjective. Not enough of the context of the Menander fragment survives to know whether he interprets Bellerophon allegorically. We are forced to trust the interpretation of Fulgentius (5\textsuperscript{th}-6\textsuperscript{th} c. AD) who uses the allegorical approach throughout the entire passage. He applies it to Bellerophon, Pegasus, and Chimera. If Menander meant the adjective in this way, then it is an example of the comic allegorical approach.

\textsuperscript{160} See Gantz 1993.172-173 for this version and alternate ones.
The next example comes from Menander Hypobolimaios or Spurious Child (K-A 872). It originates from Stobaeus 1.6.1 “on chance.”

παύσασθε νοῦν ἔχοντες· οὐδὲν γὰρ πλέον ἀνθρώπινος νοῦς ἐστιν, ἀλλ' ὁ τῆς Τύχης, εἰτ' ἐστὶ τοῦτο πνεῦμα θείον εἰτε † νοῦς. τούτ' ἐστι τὸ κυβερνῶν <ἄπαντα> καὶ στρέφον καὶ σώζειν, ἡ πρόνοια δ' ἡ θνητὴ καπνός (5) καὶ φλήναφος. πείσθητε, κοὐ μέμψεσθέ με. πάνθ' ὅσα νοοῦμεν ἢ λέγομεν ἢ πράττομεν, τύχη 'στιν, ἡμείς δ' ἐσμὲν ἐπιγεγραμμένοι.

Stop reasoning; for human reason adds nothing to Luck, whether Luck is divine spirit or not. It’s this that steers all things and turns them upside down and puts them right, while mortal forethought is just smoke and crap. Believe me; don’t criticize my words. All that we think or say or do is luck; we only write our signatures below. (tr. Blame 2001.274)

The fragment is a remythology of the goddess Luck (Τύχη). It is a philosophical question of which divine force is most powerful. The speaker questions whether she is a divinity (πνεῦμα θείον) or not. She is the pilot (κυβερνῶν) of all things in life, the good and the bad. Human beings have no power in comparison. The sentiment exhibits a rationalizing approach about the forces of life and whether they are divine. The force with the most influence in human life must be the true and most important deity.

The next fragment has a similar approach. It (K-A 838) comes from Stobaeus 4.31.30 in a discussion about the praise of wealth.

ὁ μὲν Ἐπίχαρμος τοὺς θεοὺς εἶναι λέγει ἀνέμους ὕδωρ γῆν ἥλιον πῦρ ἀστέρας, εἴγω δ' ὑπέλαβον χρησίμους εἶναι θεοὺς τάργυπιον ἡμῖν καὶ τὸ χρυσίον <⏑–> ἱδρυσάμενος τούτους γὰρ εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν, (5) εὖξαι τί βούλει· πάντα σοι γενήσεται, ἀγρός, οἰκίαι, θεράποντες, ἀργυρώματα, φίλου, δικασταί, μάρτυρες. μόνον δίδου· αὐτοὺς γὰρ ἔχεις τοὺς θεοὺς ὑπηρέτας.

Epicharmus says that the gods are winds, water, earth, sun, fire, and stars. But I’ve decided that gold and silver are the gods that help us... Once you’ve set up a shrine to them in your house

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161 See Gomme and Sandbach (1973.711-712) for a discussion.
pray for anything you like; you’ll get it all: farmland, houses, servants, silver plate, friends, jurors, witnesses. Just hand it out; you’ll have the gods themselves working for you.

(tr. Rusten 2011.658)

The speaker first credits the comic poet Epicharmus with a straight forward rationalization of the gods (τοὺς θεούς). In the flavor of Prodicus the gods are not real, but they are elements of nature - winds, water, earth, sun, fire, and stars (ἀνέμους ὕδωρ γῆν ἥλιον πῦρ ἀστέρας). Then the speaker remythologizes Epicharmus’ myth rationalization. Rather than elements of nature, the real gods (θεούς) are the things most helpful (χρησίμους) in life - gold and silver (τἀργύριον and τὸ χρυσίον). Epicharmus’ sentiment is that the gods are not real.¹⁶² The speaker’s remythology maintains they are real and that we should worship gold and silver. By the end of the fragment the remythology is complete - worship the new gods and receive their benefits. Gomme and Sandbach (1973.716) interpret the fragment as making a joke about bribery, in particular that gods can be bribed. They compare it to the fragment of Philemon (K-A 65) where horn of Amalthea is metaphoric for money buys anything one wants.

The next three examples argue that one god is more powerful than the rest. The first two appoint Eros as the most important and the third Shamelessness. The first, Menander Women Lunching Together (K-A 339), comes from Stobaeus 4.20.15 concerning Aphrodite.

Ἔρως δὲ τῶν θεῶν ἰσχύν ἐχον πλείστην ἐπί τούτου δείκνυται· διὰ τούτου ἐπιορκοῦσι τοὺς ἄλλους θεούς.

Among the gods Love has the greatest power. It’s shown by this: because of him, oaths sworn by all the other gods are false! (Arnott 2000.v3.349)

The next one, Menander Treasure K-A 176, comes from from Stobaeus 4.20.14 concerning Aphrodite.

εἰτ’ οὐ μέγιστος ἐστι τῶν θεῶν Ἔρως καὶ τιμιώτατός γε τῶν πάντων πολὺ;
οὐδεὶς γὰρ οὕτως ἐστι φειδώλος σφόδρα ἄνθρωπος οὐδ’ οὕτως ἀκριβῆς τοὺς τρόπους,
ὡς οὐχί τούτῳ μερίδα τῷ θεῷ νέμει (5)
τῆς οὐσίας· ὅσοις μὲν οὖν οὐν πράως ἔχει,

νέοις ἔτ' οὖσι τούτῳ προστάττει ποιεῖν·
oi δὲ εἰς τὸ γῆρας ἄναβολὰς ποιούμενοι,
οὗτοι προσαποτίνουσι τοῦ χρόνου τόκους.

and so isn’t Eros the greatest of the gods,
and the most honored of them all by far?
For no man is quite so stingy
or so tight-fisted in his temperament
that he doesn’t grant this god a share
in his fortune. If the God is kind to you,
he commands you to pay up while you are young;
but those who get a postponement until old age
pay additional interest for the extra time.
(tr. Rusten 2011.641)

And the third, Menander Carian Dirge (K-A 291), comes from Stobaeus 3.32.11 in a discussion about shamelessness.

Ὦ μεγίστη τῶν θεῶν
νῦν οὖσ' ἀναίδει', εἰ θεὸν καλεῖν σε δεῖ.
δεῖ δέ· τὸ κρατοῦν γὰρ νῦν νομίζεται θεός.
ἐφ' ὅσον βαδίζεις, ἐφ' ὅσον ἥξειν μοι δοκεῖς.

Oh greatest of the gods that now exist, Shamelessness, if it is right to call you a God; and it is - for everything that dominates is considered divine. Wherever you want to go, I think that you’ll get there. (tr. Rusten 2011.642)

All three fragments exhibit some level of remythology as the approach. The idea behind each is that whichever god is most powerful, most influential, most honored, and dominates in life, must be the most important god. The first example maintains that only oaths sworn in the name of Eros hold true and the rest are false (ἐπιορκοῦσι τοὺς ἄλλους θεούς). The second example asserts that Eros is the greatest (μεγίστος) of the gods and most honored (τιμιώτατος). Every person young and old must pay this god honor, i.e. fall in love or find a mate. The third example sets Shamelessness (ἀναίδει') as the most powerful of the gods (μεγίστη τῶν θεῶν). The fragment questions whether it is right or allowed (δεῖ) to call him a god. Then the speaker reveals the theory behind this remythology, that what dominates in life is divine or is actually a god (τὸ κρατοῦν γὰρ νῦν νομίζεται θεός). It maintains a
philosophical allegory in that the gods are actually powerful forces in life and must be worshipped according to their influence.

This next example, Menander Chariste (K-A 156), makes an interesting play on a similar question - what is a god. It comes from Justin Martyr On Monarchy 5. Its context is given in the excerpt.

Περὶ δὲ τῶν δοκούντων παρά τισι μετέχειν τοῦ ἁγίου καὶ τελείου όνόματος, … , Μένανδρος ἐν Ἡνιόχῳ λέγει:

οὐδεὶς μ’ ἀφέσκει περιπατῶν ἐξω θεός μετὰ γραός, οὐδ’ εἰς οἰκίαν παρεισιὼν ἐπὶ τοῦ σανιδίου. τὸν δίκαιον δεῖ θεόν οἴκοι μένειν σῴζοντα τοὺς ἱδρυμένους.

About those who seem to some people to partake in the name of the holy and perfect ... Menander says ...

I don’t like a God who roams around outdoors keeping an old lady company, nor one who enters the house riding a plank. A proper God ought to stay at home and protect the people who set him up. (tr. Rusten 2011.640)

Justin Martyr quotes the fragment from Menander as an example of what constitutes a truly divine person compared to a person who only seems divine. The fragment questions how a true god should act. It treats a god (θεός) as if he were a real person. Justin seems to take the usage of the word in this way. The approach is Euhemeristic here linking a god to an outstanding person. The god seems to be a head of a household, one who should not be out accompanying ladies, but one who stays at home and protects the family. The passage uses the word for god (θεός) twice, once as to what is not a proper god (οὐδεὶς μ’ ἀφέσκει) and then second as to what is an appropriate (δίκαιον) god. It conflates a real human being with the idea of a god which gives it a rationalizing flavor. Perhaps Menander uses god to be metaphorical for the head of the household, like the ancient Greek word “lord” (κύριος).

This example, Menander Captains (K-A 218), comes from Stobaeus 4.51.8 on death. It is a rationalization of immortality and the myth of Tantalus.

τάργυριον εἶναι, μειράκιον, σοι φαίνεται οὐ τῶν ἀναγκαίων καθ’ ἡμέραν μόνον
Does money seem to you, lad, to be able
To provide not only a price of daily necessary items
of cakes, barley, vinegar, olive oil, but of something else greater.
But there is no price of immortality, not even if you collect
Those stories about the talents of Tantalos,
Rather you will die and leave these things to another.
(tr. Rusten 2011.643)

The fragment is a rejection of the notion of immortality (αθανασίας). The stories (λεγόμενα) about Tantalus will not help one achieve it and money will not help either. Menander depicts Tantalos as someone who is weighed down by his money and by his need for necessities. The character tells the lad to stay away from similar pursuits as the mythological Tantalus. Although the poet mentions nothing directly about the Tantalos myth, it is interesting how the dialogue switches from dinner goods to divine matters, thus mirroring the Tantalus story.

The talents of Tantalus require further explanation. A scholion on Homer (Odyssey λ 582) explains that the myth concerns him dining with the gods. Tantalus is punished while alive and for stealing the ambrosia from the gods at their banquet. His supposed crime is attaining a potion for immortality and sharing it with his friends. This version may be found in Pindar’s Olympian Odes (1.54-63), Apollodorus (Libraries 2.1), and Diodorus Siculus (4.74.1-2). In each version Tantalus’ crime consists of stealing either ambrosia or the secret of immortality from the gods and being punished for it. Typically Zeus hangs a rock over his head, but the comic version takes the rock metaphorically to mean he is weighed down by his money.¹⁶³

¹⁶³ See Comica Adespota K-A 602 - τά Ταντάλου τάλαντα τανταλίζεται - for the full idiom.
The idiom (τὰ Ταντάλου τάλαντ’) is a play on the supposed origins of Tantalus’ name.\(^{164}\) The etymology connects his name to the Greek talent (talon) – a form of money – which comes from τάλαντον – a balance (scales), any weight, a weight of money. The idea behind it is that Tantalus was a rich king and tried to buy immortality or at least his way to dinner with the gods with his money. It also contains the idea that his riches were responsible for his downfall. The comic fragment invokes the myth of Tantalus as both false and as a metaphor for the evils of money.

\(^{164}\) See Pausanias Αττικῶν ὄνομάτων συναγωγή (Fr. 10), Hesychius (141), and LSJ 1755 for more explanations of the idiom.
Chapter 07 Conclusion and Epilogue

Having surveyed mythological approaches in ancient comedy, I make some observations which differ from previous scholars. The terms burlesque of myth and travesty are overused to describe the treatment of mythological material in comedy. Middle Comedy was said to have a tendency to rationalize myth, while Old Comedy to domesticate myth. The tendency for comic poetry to rationalize myth has never been called an approach or completely studied. Scholars on mythography and myth rationalization have not designated a category of myth rationalization in comedy, nor have scholars of comedy. My research aimed to correct these shortcomings in scholarship.

I take a different approach to mythology in ancient comedy. Instead of worrying about the entire plot of any given comedy, I isolated any fragment with mythological material and looked at the specific approach to myth in the fragment. Comic poets had a variety of tools with which to interpret and present myth to the audience. They used an entire range of interpretations. My research shows that mythographic comedy goes back to the beginning of comedy, so that Middle Comedy is building on a mode of comic writing that was already well-established in Old Comedy. A category of comic myth rationalization and comic mythography must be added to the current list of comic approaches to mythology.

Ancient mythographers, historiographers, philosophers, comic poets, and any writer using myth rationalization share a similar reduction of mythic material. They look for the unexplainable and unbelievable in myth narrative. They seize upon what is laughable and ridiculous in myth and spin the narrative to their liking. They give the “correct” versions whether metaphoric, Euhemeristic, or allegorical.

The comic poets parodied writers who rationalized myth. They employed their own comic versions of rationalized myth. We see the comic rationalizing approach in the fragmentary remnants of the canon,
as well as in completed comedies. It makes appearances in all three time periods of ancient Greek comedy.

Later mythographers and scholiasts took the parodic and mythographic versions of early comedy as legitimate variants, which themselves could become the object of mythographic commentary. A burlesque of a Hesiodic theogonic motif becomes the equivalent of its Hesiodic original. There is a sense of an on-going tradition or practice in the telling of myth, one that has no particular beginning. Myth was surely an oral form to begin with, and to the best of our knowledge myths existed in great variety. In the 8th c. BC Hesiod’s contemporaries must have thought he was a great rationalizer, even humanizer, when they compared his versions to some of the poetry that was in circulation. Comic mythography, then, is just one segment of the larger, longer tradition, and one that has as much claim as any other tradition to being central to it.

In chapter 01 I covered the history of myth rationalization and mythography. After establishing the variety of rational approaches to myth, I set forth a series of comic approaches to myth. I also look at the origin of comedy. It seems to have been infused with mythology and myth criticism since its inception. I covered the different period of comedy and the comic poets covered in the chapters.

In chapter 02 I gave examples of the rationalistic approach and parody in Aristophanes. The parody of Prodicus in the Birds and Clouds contains the most extensive treatment. Besides the writer being mentioned and myths being questioned and recast, other rationalistic themes appear: aitiology, etymology, and foundation mythology. The approach of remythology was found in the first three parodies - Birds, Clouds, and Peace. It is a comic approach shared by other poets in all periods of comedy.

In chapter 03 I observed some approaches toward mythological content in Old Comedy. Just as in Aristophanes, Old Comedy had a tendency to remythologize myth narrative for comic outcomes. It was shown that Old Comedy employed the myth burlesque approach and that it featured humanizing and
rationalizing narratives. Old Comedy could criticize and give its own version of a myth. Scholia and mythographers could take these versions seriously. The last set of examples show rationalizing themes that are shared by early Greek historiographers and later mythographers. The approaches mentioned include - humanized god as benefactor theme, aitiological narratives, genealogical narrative, etymological narratives, and metaphoric narratives. The comic rationalization of Cronos eating his children shows that mythographic humor was alive in Old Comedy. The example from Cratinus with the stolen statues of Daedalus also shows a mythographic approach.

In chapter 04 I explored myth rationalization in Middle Comedy. It covered comic fragments where myth was questioned on the basis that it was irrational and comic interpretations were offered. Examples contained metaphoric, allegorical, and Euhemeristic interpretations of myth. The Anaxilas fragment about prostitutes contained the metaphoric approach and was compared to the mythographer Heraclitus. The fragment from Antiphanes about the Golden Apples contained a misunderstood metaphor. The fragment from Antiphanes about Gorgons the one from Alexis about sea monsters both rationalized myth as metaphor. We saw a few instances of myth rationalization from Anaxandrides. The comic rationalizing approach was well established and often used in Middle Comedy.

In chapter 05 I put forth examples of comic myth rationalization from New Comedy. The fragment from Nicolaus had a rationalization of the art of being a parasite and the Athenion fragment contained a rationalization of the art of cooking. The Athenion fragment also made a parody of Palaephatus and stands as the most firm example of mythographic parody. With the New Comedy poet Philemon we saw two interesting instances of myth as metaphor. The riddle of the Sphinx was rationalized to mean difficult language and vocabulary. Philemon made a mythographic parody in his rationalization of weeping Niobe. Heggesipus made a metaphoric rationalization of the Sirens. It is safe to say that comic myth rationalization and comic mythography were still popular and common approaches in New Comedy.
In chapter 06 I found examples of comic myth rationalization in Menander. His near complete comedies show myth used as metaphor in several instances. His fragments revealed even more examples. Menander used the same comic approaches to mythology as his contemporaries, including myth humanization, the taking of tragedy and mythology at face value, remythology, comic criticism of myth, allegory, and metaphoric interpretations of myth. His fragment which rationalized Epicharmus’ treatment of the elements of nature hits the mark of mythographic parody.

Now that I have set forth new categories of comic myth criticism, I end with some speculation on further needed research. There are more instances of comic myth rationalization and mythographic parody. Below I briefly survey Lucian for instances of comic rationalization. There are more comic fragments in need of analysis and more examples from Aristophanes can be found. The corpus of the Roman comic Plautus needs the same sort of analysis applied to his comedies. A survey should be completed of all surviving comedy in the Roman Empire. Besides comedy, the theme of myth rationalizations needs to be explored in ancient Greek tragedy.

**Epilogue: Lucian and Comic Mythography**

The employment of myth rationalization with a comic approach appears often in Lucian (late 2nd c. AD). He was a satirist and philosopher who wrote in a variety of genres. His works are not comedies in the sense of having three to five acts with a storyline, but comedy occurs throughout his writings. His works reveal many instances of questioning the absurd stories of myth and at times rationalizing myths. Often his satires contain humorous settings and comic themes. His instances of myth rationalization quickly become comic myth rationalization. Many scenes featuring the gods may be considered comic myth humanization. Just as in ancient comedy, he makes parodies of Homer and Hesiod, tragedies, historians, philosophers, and orators.
The gods and goddesses appear as main characters in many of his works. In his *Tragic Zeus*, Zeus calls an assembly of the gods and goddesses because two philosophers are arguing whether the gods exist. Zeus is afraid that the gods are no longer relevant.

In his *Zeus Catechized*, a cynic philosopher, Cyniscus, asks Zeus who really controls fate - the Fates, Destiny, Fortune, or Zeus. Zeus skirts around the answer, saying mortals are not permitting to know the inner-workings of the gods. Cyniscus presses on with inconsistencies found in myths about the gods and about the underworld.

In his *Prometheus* a mock trial occurs between Hermes, Hephaestus, and Prometheus concerning the offenses of serving a bad portion of meat to Zeus, stealing fire, and inventing the human race. Myth humanization is at play and myth as metaphor is used at times. This satire cites an example of myth as metaphor from Old Comedy which I analyzed in CH03 - “Cleon’s a Prometheus - after the fact.”

*Dialogues of the Dead* feature comical dialogues between the cynic philosopher Menippus and characters associated with the underworld like Charon, Cerebrus, Hermes, and Tantalus. Comic myth humanization and the criticism of myth feature throughout the dialogues. In dialogue 7 comic myth parody abounds as Menippus asks Tantalus how he can be thirsty, if he is dead, and whether he fears of dying again, if he goes without drink. Perhaps Tantalus is just suffering from madness, Menippus ponders.

In dialogue 9 Menippus asks Tiresias about being two different genders, whether he liked being a male better or a female, and the details about his transformation. Menippus tells Tiresias that he doesn’t believe (ἀπιστεῖν) the myth and he isn’t sure whether the myth is possible (εἴτε δυνατά ἐστιν εἴτε καὶ μή). At the end of the dialogue Menippus accuses Tiresias of telling falsehoods (τῶν ψευδών).
The questioning of myth appears in many of Lucian’s writings. In a dialogue entitled *Lovers of Lies* or *The Skeptic*, two characters, Tychiades and Philocles, discuss their skepticism of magic and superstition.

Tychiades tells Philocles that he disbelieves some well-known myths. In section 2 he says:

εμοὶ γοῦν πολλάκις αἰδεῖσθαι υπὲρ αὐτῶν ἐπεισιν, ὁπόταν Οὐρανοῦ τομὴν καὶ Προμηθέως δεσμὰ δηγώνται καὶ Γιγάντων ἐπανάστασιν καὶ τὴν ἐν Ἅιδου πᾶσαν τραγῳδίαν, καὶ ὡς δὴ ἔρωτα ὁ Ζεὺς ταύρος ἢ κύκνος ἐγένετο καὶ ὡς ἐκ γυναικός τις εἰς ὄρνεον ἢ εἰς ἄρκτον μετέπεσεν, ἐτὶ δὲ Πηγάσους καὶ Χιμαιρὰς καὶ Γοργόνας καὶ Κύκλωπας καὶ ὅσα τοιαῦτα, πάνυ ἀλλόκοτα καὶ τεράστια μυθίδια παιδῶν ψυχὰς κηλεῖν δυνάμενα ἔτι τὴν Μορμὼ καὶ τὴν Λάμιαν δεδιότων.

As for me, I often feel ashamed for them when they describe the castration of Uranus, and the shackling of Prometheus, and the rebellion of the Giants, and the whole grim performance in Hades; and how Zeus turned into a bull or a swan to gratify a passion, and how some woman was transformed into a bird or a bear; and also when they describe Pegasuses and Chimaeras and Gorgons and Cyclopes and so on, utterly uncouth and monstrous fictions, fit to beguile the minds of children who are still afraid of Mormo and Lamia. (tr. Costa 2005.163)

He refers to the ancient historians and poets who tell lies (τῷ ψεύσματι). Their fictions (τὸ ψεῦδος) have been passed down from generation to generation. He continues by saying that the stories are ridiculous (καταγέλαστα - laughable), untrue (μὴ...ἀληθῆ), and do not pass the scrutiny of common sense (ἐμφρόνως ἐξετάζων).

The focus of the dialogue concerns a story which Tychiades tells to Philocles where he visits a sick friend who is hosting three philosophers and a doctor. The group tries to convince Tychiades that the supernatural is real. Lucian’s point in the narrative, as with his other writings, is that learned people (doctors and philosophers) still believe in superstition, magic, the supernatural, and myth. In section 21 the doctor Antigonus tells Tychiades that his bronze statue of Hippocrates comes alive at night and wanders around his house. At the end of the dialogue Tychiades stands firm in his disbelief, although his friend Philocles, while listening to the stories, has wavered in his disbelief.

The *Dance* is an encomium on dance, in particular pantomime. It features a dialogue where a character named Lycinus rebuttals a cynic philosopher named Crato for his criticism of pantomime.
Written sometime around 162-165 AD, the dialogue has a comic tone boarding on the absurd. In Crato’s criticism of pantomime (section 2) we learn that they presented short tragedies and comedies to music complete with dancers. By watching the pantomimes Crato accuses Lycinus of not being a serious philosopher. Lycinus defends pantomime as good for the soul and spends most of the comical dialogue defending its usefulness.

In the same way Aristophanes’ *Birds* describes a novel cosmogony, cosmology, and theogony, Lycinus begins at the beginning of the cosmos with his defense of dance. In section 7 Dance personified comes into existence with Eros and is primordial in nature. As with other instances of comic remythology and comic theogony, Dance is important because she is first in the cosmos. Lycinus readjusts ancient myths to include the goddess Dance as playing an important role. Next he covers the Trojan War and how the heroes were all good at dancing. In section 10 Troy loses the war because the Greeks were better dancers, in particular Achilles. The Spartans learned to dance from Pollux and Castor. Battles are accompanied by music because they are merely dances. Dancing becomes an important part of all mythology and religious festivals. In section 15 Orpheus and Musaeus are interpreted as really skillful dancers of their time. He uses remythology in all of these scenes.

In section 19 Lycinus gives a comic myth rationalization about the god Proteus. The myth was that he could turn into and take on many different forms.

For it seems to me that the ancient myth about Proteus the Egyptian means nothing else than that he was a dancer, an imitative fellow, able to shape himself and change himself into...
anything, so that he could imitate even the liquidity of water and the sharpness of fire in the liveliness of his movement; yes, the fierceness of a lion, the rage of a leopard, the quivering of a tree, and in a word whatever he wished. Mythology, however, on taking it over, described his nature in terms more paradoxical, as if he became what he imitated. Now just that thing is characteristic of the dancers today, who certainly may be seen changing swiftly at the cue and imitating Proteus himself. And we must suppose that in Empusa, who changes into countless forms, some such person has been handed down by mythology. (tr. Harmon.1937.v5.231-233)

In this excerpt Empusa is rationalized in the same way as Proteus. She is a murky goddess of the underworld associated with Hecate who frightened people. She was mentioned by Aristophanes in two places (Frogs 294 and Women at the Assembly 1094) and was thought to have the power to change shapes. Proteus takes the main stage in the excerpt. The myth that he could change forms is rationalized here. He is actually a professional dancer who could imitate many different items from nature through his dancing. The approach is metaphoric and implies that he danced so well that people said he changed forms. The author says the myth arose by people describing his dancing as literally turning into the things he imitated. The rationalization of Proteus is comical and absurd. It does not appear anywhere else in Greek literature. Lucian makes him a dancer to fit the agenda of his satire.

Later in the piece Lycinus (section 36-61) lists a catalogue of Greek and Roman myths, covering almost every known myth, and implies that a dancer must know all of them to perform the art. The dancer is no different in task from philosophers, historians, and orators. At the end of the dialogue Crato is convinced and decides to join Lycinus next time he attends the theater to watch pantomime.

Lucian’s Concerning Astrology consists of a long praise and history of the subject. At times, like the Dance, it has comic elements. Just as the Dance, he asks that people take the topic more seriously and traces it back to its distant ancient traditions. In this essay, instead of every Greek myth referring to dance, it refers to astrology. In section 10 Orpheus appears, but here he is a teacher of astrology.

Lucian rationalizes a series of myths starting at section 11. Hawes (2014.17) writes that this piece “lampoons” myth rationalization. To me it follows in the tradition of comic rationalizing approaches.

In section 11 Tiresias, the fabled prophet, is rationalized. Lucian writes:
And they say that Tiresias was a Boeotian man; great praise came about concerning his prophetic fame; this Tiresias said to the Greeks that, of the wandering stars, some were female and the others male and they do not accomplish the same ends. For which reason they mythologize that he had two natures and two lives, one female and the other male.

Tiresias was actually a teacher of astrology and the myth about him comes from his particular astrological teaching. He taught that the stars are broken into male and female and that they were used to make prophecies. From his fame myths about him appeared. The myth of Tiresias maintains that he was turned into the opposite gender and then back to his original gender. Here it is rationalized.

Lucian proceeds to rationalize a series of myths which suddenly pertain to astrology in their rationalized version. In section 12 the disagreement between Thyestes and Atreus over the kingship of Argos becomes a contest in the knowledge of astrology. Whoever knows more about the subject receives the throne. Thyestes shows the constellation Ram, thus the myth about him having a golden lamb. Atreus wins the contest by explaining the movements of the Sun.

In section 13 Bellerophon, while riding Pegasus, did not kill the Chimera. The narrator does not believe the myth (οὐ μάλα πείθομαι). Rather Bellerophon flew to heaven by communing with the stars and by using his intellect. He reached heaven in a different sense - by understanding the heavens.

In section 14 Phrixus, who flew through the air on a ram and ultimately provided the Golden Fleece, is portrayed in a similar manner as Bellerophon. He flew through the air by his knowledge of astrology.

In section 15 Daedalus and his son Icarus are both passionate about astrology. Icarus failed to achieve mental flight and fell into the ocean of abysmal despair (ἀβύσσων πρηγμάτων). There is a play on ocean and abysmal. He did not fall into the ocean, but into the abyss of failing to commune with the stars. According to the passage, the Greeks made up the myth as the aiton for naming their ocean.
Icarian. In section 16 Pasiphae fell in love with astrology and not literally a bull. Daedalus showed her the constellation Bull. The story that he helped her mate with the bull was a myth.

In sections 17-19 another interesting rationalization appears, a type of Euhemerism applied to astrology. Anyone who made innovative discoveries about astrology was later mythologized for their deeds. The narrator gives the example of Phaethon, son of the Sun (Helius), a boy who falls in the ocean when driving his father’s steeds. The myth is unbelievable (οὐδαμὰ πιστῶν) and impious (οὐδὲ ὅσιον), writes Lucian. Phaethon figured out the course of the sun, but his theory was incomplete when he died.

In section 20 heroes and kings are not born literally from gods as in myth, but in the astrological house of the god or goddess.

And the Greeks also tell many other myths, which I do not believe at all. For how is it pious to believe that Aeneas was the son of Aphrodite, Minos the son of Zeus, Ascalaphos the son of Ares, and Autolycos the son of Hermes? But these men, each of them, were divinely favored and at their birth Aphrodite looked upon one, Zeus another, and Ares another. For as much their planets (i.e. of the gods or goddesses) predominate at the time of the men’s birth, so these “parents” make them resembling themselves in every way, in complexion, in form, in deeds, and in disposition. Minos became king with Zeus leading, Aeneas was made beautiful by the will of Aphrodite, and Autolycos a thief, upon whom the thievery art came via Hermes.

The narrator does not believe (οὐ μάλα τι πείθομαι) that the gods and goddesses give birth to heroes or mythical kings. It is impious to believe it. Astrology provides the key to rationalizing the myth. Gods and goddesses are planets associated with birth date. When someone is born, they are born in the “house” of this or that planet represented by a god. People said to be of divine birth were born when that god’s or goddesses’ planet dominated the sky. Famous kings and heroes are given fortune
according to astrological principles. They have traits which reflect the different “houses” of the gods. The idea that they are born from divine parents is meant metaphorically, so the passage implies.

In section 21 he rationalizes the Hesiodic myths about Zeus chaining Cronos in Tartarus. They actually refer to the planets and their motions. Cronos (Saturn) is sluggish in its orbit, so people said he was chained. Tartarus, as it is used here, is another word for deep space. In section 22 the narrator turns to Hesiod and Homer. Homer was actually writing about astrology in his epics. This section represents comic allegory. Odysseus visits Tiresias in the underworld to gain knowledge about astrology and won’t feed his dead mother the blood of the slaughtered sheep until he gets the knowledge. This passage from the *Odyssey* shows the importance of astrology.
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