

ATHENIAN COMEDY IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Edited by C.W. Marshall and Tom Hawkins



H O L O T O M S B U R Y

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Dio Chrysostom and the Naked Parabasis

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Compared to the rollicking fun of Lucianic satire or the broad literary sweep of Athenaeus, Dio Chrysostom (c. 40–c. 110 CE) might seem to be an improbable player in the story of Athenian comedy’s imperial afterlife. At one point he has the young Alexander tell his dad Philip that of all the poets, only Homer has the nobility and grandeur befitting a king, and the prince includes Archilochus and the comic poets as examples of verse that is only useful ‘for laughter or mockery’ (*Or.* 2.4–6: γέλωτος ἔνεκεν ἢ λοιδορίας). In the *Euboean Discourse* Dio asserts that the poor should be kept from serving as tragic or comic actors, since such activities are unbecoming of self-respecting and free individuals (*Or.* 7.119–20).¹ And in outlining a course of study for a patron interested in dabbling in the life of a public speaker, Dio praises Menander’s elegant style and dismisses Old Comedy completely (*Or.* 18.6–7: ἡ ἀρχαία κωμωδία).² Yet even this praise for Menander seems to be poorly supported in Dio’s own writings. Aside from this passage, he mentions Menander by name only in a glancing reference to a statue of the playwright in Rhodes (31.116) and quotes a single pair of securely attested lines of his poetry (fr. 298.6–7 K-A at Dio 32.16).³ By contrast, Dio quotes or alludes to Euripides scores of times, and he rarely goes more than a few paragraphs without engaging somehow or other with his beloved Homer.

Yet in two public orations, Dio draws more overtly on comic material, and he leans heavily upon this comic influence in articulating a persona through which he can harangue his audience to good effect. This divergence from his usual habits has been noted before but never deeply analyzed.⁴ I suggest, therefore, that in his *Alexandrian* and *First Tarsian* orations (*Orations* 32 and 33) Dio turns to comic poetry specifically in order to replicate the admonitory and advisory role of the comic poet found in most Aristophanic parabases. The outrageous plots and costuming of Old Comedy hold no interest for Dio, but in these speeches in which he upbraids his listeners with the stated goal of helping them improve

themselves, the parabolic voice offers an apt and effective model. With the other trappings of Old Comedy cut away, these speeches take on the feel of extended and isolated parabases.

I pursue this idea that Dio has composed two naked parabases in three steps: first, I discuss the parabasis itself both in its classical instantiation and in a few apposite comments from Dio's era; second, I devote the bulk of the paper to analyzing Dio's two speeches in terms of the influence of Old Comedy; and finally, I conclude by suggesting a few ways in which Dio's parabolic maneuver can be understood as stretching and updating the classical function of the parabasis.

Parabases in Old Comedy and beyond

After singing a quick *kommation* (510–17) the chorus of our extant version of *Clouds* addresses the audience in the first person singular: O spectators, I will speak (κατερῶ) truthfully to you . . . (518).⁵ On this line the scholiast comments that 'the parabasis seems to be spoken by the chorus, but the playwright introduces his own persona.' This fits with Pollux's succinct definition of the parabasis: 'whenever the chorus comes forward and says whatever the poet wants to say to the theater' (4.111). Although this was not always the way parabases worked, the shift from plural to singular at *Clouds* 518 and the need for later ancient explanation of that shift highlight the striking theatrical effect of an Old Comic parabasis.⁶ The parabasis interrupts the plot and frequently disrupts the characterization of the chorus, who speak directly to the audience in stylized and standardized ways (both in terms of meter and content). Through the parabolic voice, the poet praises and justifies himself, derides rivals, flatters and teases the audience and offers seemingly serious advice on political issues of the day.⁷ This last theme is nowhere as prominent in our evidence as in the case of *Frogs*. Because of the advice he gave in that parabasis, Aristophanes was given an olive crown and an official commendation, and the play itself was granted the unusual honor of being re-staged.⁸

It is useful to recognize, however, that the word parabasis is not itself part of the vocabulary of old comic poets but only of later ancient critics and commentators. Aristophanes refers to 'the anapests' or speaks of 'turning aside' (*sc.* to the audience) by means of the verb *parabainein*. Particularly interesting in this regard is the scenario in the first two lines of the parabasis-proper in *Peace*, where the chorus claims that 'the bailiffs ought to thrash any poet who, coming

forward during the anapests (παραβὰς ἐν τοῖς ἀναπαιστοῖς), praises himself before the theater' (734–5). As this passage makes clear, the self-conscious language about the parabasis was couched in terms of an intersection of a metrical context and a physical movement. Yet although it may seem that matters of content and propriety are at stake in the apparent contradiction of a poet chastising other poets who praise themselves at a point in the play seemingly designed for self-praise (compare similar sentiments at *Ach.* 628–9 and *Knights* 507–9), such comments may also serve to highlight the disruptiveness of the parabasis. Certainly the parabasis is something of a grand and standardized aside, but the verb *parabainein* means not only 'to step aside' but also 'to transgress', a definition we can find both prior to Aristophanes and in non-parabatic portions of Aristophanic plays.⁹ As Biles has shown, whatever the exact history of the development of the Old Comic form, the parabasis was conceptualized not just as an aside but as a creative act of transgression (against rivals or theatrical traditions) that asserts the playwright's own authority and artistic vision.¹⁰

Biles' argument about the parabasis as a locus of creative transgression suggests that highly formalized approaches to Old Comedy may overlook innovations in the name of imposing order. It is with this in mind that I suggest we can find parabolic language outside the formal boundaries of parabases.¹¹ For one thing, our knowledge of the parabasis relies so heavily on Aristophanes, that it is at least possible that the Aristophanic parabasis was not the norm. Eupolis fr. 192 K-A, for example, comes from the parodos of *Marikas*, yet both Storey and Bakola have recognized the parabolic tenor of these lines, and Bakola has argued that here Eupolis vaunts himself as a teacher of the *polis* in direct contrast to Aristophanes' bid to be its healer.¹² This long fragment preserves parts of an ancient commentary on the play and thus includes both bits of text and fragmentary explanatory comments. From this we can recognize that Eupolis' chorus undermines the claims of Aristophanes-the-healer by stating that 'the diseases return' (7 πάλιν . . . νοσήματα ὑποτροπάζει); then that the audience, like students, 'have been let out of school for a long time' (13 πολὺν πολλοῦ χρόνον καὶ τὸν δ' ἀφείσθε), a comment explained as coming from the language of school teachers (14–15 ἡ δὲ μεταφορὰ ἀπὸ τῶν γραμματοδιδασκάλων); and finally the speaker tells the audience to 'wipe it clean' (18 ἐξαλείφετε), which is glossed as 'ready your writing tablets' (19 λέαινε τὰ δέλτους), showing that Eupolis-the-teacher is ready to succeed where Aristophanes-the-healer had failed. Parabolic moments can appear in other parts of a comic play.

Unfettered by formal constraints, parabolic speech can be found even further afield. Pollux, in the same passage cited above, mentions the seemingly nonsensical idea of tragic parabases (4.111):

τῶν δὲ χορικῶν ἁσμάτων τῶν κωμικῶν ἐν τι καὶ ἡ παράβασις, ὅταν ἂ ὁ ποιητῆς πρὸς τὸ θέατρον βούλεται λέγειν, ὁ χορὸς παρελθὼν λέγει. ἐπικεικῶς δ' αὐτὸ ποιοῦσιν οἱ κωμωδοποιηταί, τραγικὸν δ' οὐκ ἔστιν· ἀλλ' Εὐριπίδης αὐτὸ πεποίηκεν ἐν πολλοῖς δράμασιν. ἐν μὲν γε τῇ Δανάῃ τὸν χορὸν τὰς γυναικάς ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ τι ποιήσας παράδειν, ἐκλαθόμενος ὡς ἄνδρας λέγειν ἐποίησε τῷ σχήματι, τῆς λέξεως τὰς γυναικάς. καὶ Σοφοκλῆς δ' αὐτὸ ἐκ τῆς πρὸς ἐκεῖνον ἀμίλλης ποιεῖ σπανιάκις, ὥσπερ ἐν Ἰππόνῳ.

The parabasis is another one of the choral songs in comedies, when the chorus comes forward and says whatever the playwright wants to say to the theater. Comic playwrights generally do this, but it is not tragic. Yet Euripides has inserted them into many plays. In *Danae* he made the chorus of women say something on his own behalf, and completely forgetting their womanly voice he made them speak as men in their bearing. And Sophocles does this out of rivalry with him on a few occasions, as in *Hipponous*.

Cairns argues that Pollux's reference to tragic parabases most probably points not toward any formal structure, such as we find in so many Aristophanic plays, but, rather, to moments in Euripidean and Sophoclean tragedy when he sensed an intrusion of the poet's own voice and thoughts.¹³ In the case of Sophocles' *Hipponous* we know too little about the play to evaluate Pollux's claim, but imperial recollections of Euripides' *Danae* are more tantalizing. Seneca quotes (in Latin) part of Ixion's speech about his lust for gold (fr. 7 Karamanou = 324 Kannicht) and claims that the audience was so outraged at Ixion's statements that they interrupted the show until Euripides himself came on stage to beg them to withhold judgment (*Letter* 115.15).¹⁴ Plutarch preserves a rebuttal to such reactions in which Euripides claims that he 'didn't let Ixion leave the stage until he was bound to the wheel [*sc.* on which he would be punished forever in Hades]' (*Mor.* 19e).¹⁵ The combination of Pollux's comment about a tragic parabasis in *Danae*, Seneca's account of Euripides coming on stage in the middle of the play to defend his narrative, and Plutarch's version of just such a Euripidean defense is a striking coincidence, and it could be that all three pieces of evidence allude to a single shared cultural memory about this play. Although I agree with Cairns that the idea of an actual Euripidean parabasis modeled on what we know from Aristophanic comedy is highly improbable, Seneca's anecdote amounts to a fantasized staging of such a moment that is motivated by an ethical expectation imputed to tragic audiences.

Shaw has shown that in the fourth century, satyr drama could also adopt recognizably parabolic language. Although the evidence is extremely limited, he finds such parabolic moments in a fragment of Astydamas *Heracles* (TrGF 4), described by Athenaeus as a satyr drama (496e), and in an unattributed satyric fragment, datable on metrical grounds to the Hellenistic era (TrGF 646a).¹⁶

Non-dramatic examples of parabolic speech can be adduced as well. On different occasions Kahn has compared the myth at the end of Plato's *Gorgias* and the central digression of *Euthydemus* to Aristophanic parabases, and various scholars have found similar parabolic moments in other Platonic texts.¹⁷ Whereas the idea of a Platonic parabasis depends heavily on a reader's willingness to find such a thing, since Plato offers no overt clues of parabolic influence, we find clearer philological markers for a prose parabasis in two comments by Aelius Aristides in his response to an unnamed person who has accused him of inappropriately inserting words of self-praise into a speech in honor of Athena. Far from denying the basic point, Aristides admits that he had praised himself extemporaneously and asserts that such flourishes are both perfectly acceptable and as old as Hesiod (28.21 Keil = 49.360 Dindorf):

ὁ μὲν μεταξύ τὸν ὕμνον ποιῶν ταῖς θεαῖς τοῦτο ἐντέθεικε τὸ ἔπος, ἐγκώμιον ὡς εἰπεῖν ἑαυτοῦ· ἡμεῖς δὲ τοὺς εἰς τὴν θεὸν λόγους καθαρὸς καθαρῶς ἐξεργασάμενοι μικρὸν τι περὶ ἡμῶν αὐτῶν ἄγραφον παρεφθεγάμεθα.

While composing a hymn to the goddesses, [Hesiod] inserted this line [=Theog. 22] as an encomium, as it were, to himself. But having piously finished my pious speech to the goddess, I said a little unscripted something about myself.

Although Aristides does not clearly mention a parabasis here, Sifakis has shown that his use of *paraphthengesthai* in these lines closely parallels his use of *parabainein* in a subsequent passage that overtly deals with comic and tragic practices (28.97 Keil = 49.387–8 Dindorf)¹⁸:

καὶ κωμφοῖς μὲν καὶ τραγωδοῖς καὶ τοῖς ἀναγκαίοις τούτοις ἀγωνισταῖς ἴδοι τις ἂν καὶ τοὺς ἀγωνοθέτας καὶ τοὺς θεατὰς ἐπιχωροῦντας μικρὸν τι περὶ αὐτῶν παραβῆναι, καὶ πολλάκις ἀφελόντες τὸ προσωπεῖον μεταξύ τῆς Μούσης ἦν ὑποκρίνονται δημηγοροῦσι σεμνῶς·

You could see the judges and spectators granting the comic and tragic playwrights as well as their actors the chance to step aside and say something about themselves, and often they remove their mask in the middle of the play they are acting and speak openly.

Thus, it seems that Aristides here equates parabolic speech with insertions of self-praise in any genre. Although such a claim may seem to be an oversimplification in terms of our analysis of Old Comedy, for my purposes it shows both that the parabasis continued to be a topic of more than antiquarian debate into the imperial era (even a full generation after Dio) and that it could be conceived of in terms of a plasticity that transcends literary form.

Aristides' claim that parabolic speech involves stepping out of character to speak openly parallels another comment about Old Comic parabases from Plutarch, an exact contemporary of Dio. In a discussion of the best music for sympotic entertainment, Diogenianus rejects Old Comedy and goes on to praise Menander effusively (*Mor.* 711f–712a = *Table Talk* 7.8.3):

τῶν δὲ κωμῳδιῶν ἢ μὲν ἀρχαία διὰ τὴν ἀνωμαλίαν ἀνάρμοστος ἀνθρώποις πίνουσιν· ἢ τε γὰρ ἐν ταῖς λεγομέναις παραβάσεσιν αὐτῶν σπουδὴ καὶ παρρησία λίαν ἄκρατός ἐστι καὶ σύντονος, ἢ τε πρὸς τὰ σκώμματα καὶ βωμολοχίας εὐχέρεια δεινῶς κατάκορος καὶ ἀναπεπταμένη καὶ γέμουσα ῥημάτων ἀκόσμων καὶ ἀκολάστων ὀνομάτων.

Of comedies, the old form is ill-suited to men in their cups on account of its disjointedness. Because their vehemence and excessive frankness in the recited parabases are stark and intense, and the indifference to raillery and foolishness is dreadfully immoderate and crass and replete with unsuitable words and lewd expressions.

Diogenianus' rather effete rejection of Old Comic grit offers an extreme take on parabolic license, yet it fits broadly with Aristides' description of parabases as featuring the blunt words of the *koryphaios* himself, rather than the scripted comments of a character in-role.

The evidence here surveyed from the imperial era suggests that parabolic speech could be understood as transcending generic limitations and that it typically featured some combination of self-praise and blunt but licensed critique. If such an intersection proved too intense for Plutarch's Diogenianus as he lounged among his friends, for Dio, it offered an ideal gambit for haranguing the people of Alexandria and Tarsus.

Dio's naked parabases

Dio's *Orations* 32 and 33 were delivered to large audiences in Alexandria and Tarsus, respectively.¹⁹ The *Alexandrian* (*Or.* 32) is clearly delivered in the city's

theater, and there is good reason to believe that the *First Tarsian* (*Or.* 33) was similarly presented at the main urban theater.²⁰ Moreover, in both speeches Dio chastises the citizenry so forcefully that one might wonder how an audience would sit through such gruff treatment. In the *Alexandrian*, Dio harangues the people's preference in and comportment at public entertainments (particularly athletic and musical performances) in the aftermath of a riot that had gotten so out of hand that the military intervened (32.70–4); he also accuses them of licentiously throwing themselves into frivolous matters while altogether ignoring anything of actual importance. In the *First Tarsian* he has a go at the people of the Cilician capital for making some particularly unpleasant nasal sound (ρέγγειν) that Dio associates with a catastrophic slide into the dissolution of gender norms and which, he claims, singles Tarsus out for abuse (λοιδορία) from its regional rivals, who call the Tarsians a bunch of Cercopes (33.38).²¹ Dio concludes the speech with a sarcastic claim that the men of Tarsus are virtually 'complete and, in accord with nature, androgynes' (64 ὀλόκληροι . . . καὶ κατὰ φύσιν ἀνδρόγυνοι), language that clearly alludes to Aristophanes' speech in Plato's *Symposium* where our ancient *physis* is described as being 'complete' only during the existence of the 'hermaphroditic gender' (189e ὅλος . . . ἀνδρόγυνος).

The theatrical setting and low-register subject matter bring both these speeches into the very general neighborhood of Old Comedy, but to bolster my claim that Dio constructs a specifically parabolic voice for himself I will show that in these two speeches Dio draws himself into an updated but still recognizable version of the playwright, who uses the parabasis, in part, to give useful advice and instruction to the citizen audience.

Dio refers to comic material more often in the *Alexandrian*, but it is early in the *First Tarsian* that he offers his most programmatic account of his relationship to comedy. He begins the speech by wondering what the people might possibly expect him to say (33.1–5). He fears that they want to hear themselves and their city eulogized and claims that he has nothing to add to what many have said before him. Furthermore, he warns that such flattery leads to self-satisfaction rather than critical reflection. He then contrasts medical performances that aim to dazzle an audience with the often unseemly work of practicing physicians, whose aim is to heal the sick rather than impress spectators (6–7).²² Next he warns that philosophers, unlike eulogists and medical showmen, are best left alone, lest they deliver a performance that the people would not want to hear. At this point he offers a history of comedy (9–10):

σκοπεῖτε δὲ τὸ πρᾶγμα οἷόν ἐστιν. Ἀθηναῖοι γὰρ εἰωθότες ἀκούειν κακῶς, καὶ νῆ Δία ἐπ' αὐτὸ τοῦτο συνιόντες εἰς τὸ θέατρον ὡς λοιδορηθησόμενοι, καὶ προτεθεικότες ἀγῶνα καὶ νίκην τοῖς ἄμεινον αὐτὸ πράττουσιν, οὐκ αὐτοὶ τοῦτο εὐρόντες, ἀλλὰ τοῦ θεοῦ συμβουλευσάντος, Ἀριστοφάνους μὲν ἤκουον καὶ Κρατίνου καὶ Πλάτωνος, καὶ τούτους οὐδὲν κακὸν ἐποίησαν. ἐπεὶ δὲ Σωκράτης ἄνευ σκηνῆς καὶ ἰκρίων ἐποίει τὸ τοῦ θεοῦ πρόσταγμα, οὐ κορδακίζων οὐδὲ τερετίζων, οὐχ ὑπέμειναν. ἐκεῖνοι μὲν γὰρ ὑφορώμενοι καὶ δεδιότες τὸν δῆμον ὡς δεσπότην ἐθώπευον, ἡρέμα δάκνοντες καὶ μετὰ γέλωτος, ὥσπερ αἱ τίτθαι τοῖς παιδίοις, ὅταν δέη τι τῶν ἀηδεστέρων πιεῖν αὐτά, προσφέρουσι μέλιτι χρίσασαι τὴν κύλικα. τοιγαροῦν ἔβλαπτον οὐχ ἥττον ἢπερ ὠφέλουν, ἀγερωχίας καὶ σκωμμάτων καὶ βωμολοχίας ἀναπιμπλάντες τὴν πόλιν. ὁ δὲ φιλόσοφος ἤλεγχε καὶ ἐνουθέτει.

Consider this example. The Athenians were used to hearing obloquies about themselves, and, by Zeus, they crowded into the theater with the express purpose of being abused. Having set up a contest with a prize for those who were best at it – they did not come up with this idea on their own but acted on the advice of the god – they used to listen to Aristophanes, Cratinus and Plato [Comicus] and did not punish them at all. But when Socrates, with neither set nor stage followed the instructions of his god, without any vulgar dances or prattling, they couldn't take it. Those comic poets being distrustful and fearing the populace began to flatter it as if it were a tyrant, nibbling on easy targets with a laugh, just as nurses, whenever they have to give their wards something unpleasant to drink, smear the cup with honey before they hold it out to the children. So the comic poets did no less harm than good, by enflaming the city with effrontery and jokes and foolishness. But the philosopher censured and rebuked.²³

Here we see both an explanation for Dio's disdain for comedy, since it eventually slouched into sycophantic praise, and a historical through-line of the benefits of well-considered civic chastisement (λοιδορία) that passed from comedy to Socratic philosophy. Dio, of course, has positioned himself as the heir to that tradition of ethical abuse.²⁴ The reduction of Old Comedy to nothing more than its abuse of the audience represents a willful oversimplification that only someone who disliked the genre could imagine, yet this also helps us to see what Dio found valuable (at least in its early instantiation) in it. Since the parabasis, and in particular the syzygy, was the Old Comic structure best suited for extended civic critique (as opposed to the myriad passing quips), it seems most probable that Dio has here charted a genealogy of parabolic speech that moved from comedy to philosophy and which he now makes use of in the theater at Tarsus.²⁵

Although the rest of the *First Tarsian* contains less overtly comic material than does the *Alexandrian* (though in 33.64 he does quote Aristophanes fr. 587 K-A just before calling the Tarsians a bunch of androgynes), I have suggested elsewhere that Dio may have structured the entire speech upon the model of Cratinus' *Archilochoi*, and I will briefly summarize that argument here.²⁶ Beyond the mention of Cratinus at 33.9 as part of the early generation of comic poets who offered substantive abuse of Athenian audiences, Dio has constructed his critique of the Tarsians around the poles of Archilochean abuse and Homeric praise, an opposition found in various sources but which seems to have appeared most explicitly in Cratinus' play. Furthermore, Cratinus was remembered by later antiquity as someone who vaunted the ethical value of *loidoria*, much as Dio does in the *First Tarsian*.²⁷ Among the few fragments that we have of Cratinus' play, we find a reference to the Cercopes (fr. 12 K-A), who also make an appearance in Dio's speech at 33.38.²⁸ In the *First Tarsian*, then, Dio speaks from an ethical position that must have paralleled the voice of Cratinus' chorus, which spoke on behalf of Archilochean poetics, and his admonitory tone of civic chastisement is most closely paralleled in our extant sources by Aristophanic parabases. In dispensing with the frippery of Old Comic costuming and the outlandishness of its plots, Dio preserves the ethical *loidoria* of the comic parabasis, which Socrates took over from comedy and which Dio, in turn, claims to have inherited from the philosopher. Whereas the early comic poets had sought to improve Athens with licensed abuse and Socrates had attempted something similar with his unprepossessing conversations, Dio now applies his parabolic speech for the betterment of Tarsus, lest their louche ways end up undermining the city's prominent status in the organization of the eastern part of the empire.

With Dio's use of Old Comedy in the *First Tarsian* now clarified, we are in a better position to assess what he does in the *Alexandrian*, and I will examine the first thirteen sections of this speech in greatest detail, since it is in them that he constructs his parabolic voice before moving into the heart of his message to the Alexandrians. He begins with something of a parabolic opening, as he tries to get the citizens' attention (32.1):

Ἄρα γε βούλοισθ' ἄν, ὦ ἄνδρες, σπουδάσαι χρόνον μικρὸν καὶ προσέχειν; ἐπειδὴ παίζοντες αἰεὶ διατελεῖτε καὶ οὐ προσέχοντες καὶ παιδιᾶς μὲν καὶ ἡδονῆς καὶ γέλωτος, ὡς εἰπεῖν, οὐδέποτε ἀπορεῖτε· καὶ γὰρ αὐτοὶ γελοιοὶ ἔστε καὶ ἡδεῖς καὶ διακόνους πολλοὺς τούτων ἔχετε· σπουδῆς δὲ ὑμῖν τὴν πᾶσαν ἔνδειαν ὀρῶ οὖσαν.

Could you be serious for a moment and give me your attention? Since you're constantly playing around and not paying attention and you never get enough, so to speak, of joking and merriment and laughter. For you yourselves are mirthful and merry, and you have many ministers of such things. But I see in you a total lack of seriousness.

Dio here brings his own seriousness to the Alexandrians' natural blitheness in a way that suggests the creation of a comical *spoudogeloion* meeting of the minds.

He next introduces the idea of a chorus (32.2) with the initially surprising contrast between the virtue of a chorus working in perfect unison and the virtue of an audience being united in perfect silence. Yet this comparison to a chorus, spoken in the theater by a single performer, serves to cast Dio's speech in a more dramatic light – something that he will build upon in the next several sentences.²⁹ Although he does not specify what sort of chorus he has in mind (and on the surface his point is more about the logistics of choral performance in general than any particular genre), he nevertheless gives a hint that he is thinking specifically of a comic chorus. For after a few more comments about the Alexandrians' devotion to jokes and horse-play, he gives an amazing four-line send-up of Homer (4). He slightly misquotes each line, adapting it to his context, and, more impressively, he jumbles together lines culled in sequential order from different books! He takes line 261 from *Il.* 24 and line 262 from *Il.* 16 and inserts between them lines 263–4 from *Od.* 18 (deviations from Homer underlined):

μῦμοί τ' ὄρχησται τε χοροῖτυπήσιν ἄριστοι,	(– <i>Il.</i> 24.261)
ἵππων τ' ὠκυπόδων ἐπιβήτορες, οἳ τε τάχιστα	(– <i>Od.</i> 18.263)
ἤγειραν μέγα νεῖκος ἀπαιδέυτοισι θεαταῖς,	(– <i>Od.</i> 18.264)
νηπιάχοις, ξυνὸν δὲ κακὸν πολέεσσι φέρουσιν.	(– <i>Il.</i> 16.262)

The best mimes and dancers move in time,
and riders on swift horses, who most quickly
rouse a great uproar among the illiterate audience,
the fools!, and bring common ruin to the many.

This manipulation of Homer is typical of Dio's close engagement with those beloved poems, but the specifics of retooling Homeric lines into a playfully configured passage of pseudo-Homeric poetry owes a debt to Old Comic treatments of hexametric material (he later presents a thirty-six-line Homeric *cento* that produces a similar effect at 32.82–5). Platter devoted a chapter to the carnivalesque reworkings of Homer in Aristophanic plays, and he concludes that 'resisters of epic-oracular authority turn hexameter poetry into a lingua franca

that increases its base while reducing its rhetorical effectiveness.³⁰ I would turn that comment around in this case and suggest that Dio here increases the rhetorical effectiveness of Homer's words by shifting their tone to fit the tenor of his speech.³¹ That is to say that he comically distorts Homeric material in order to cast his oration as a comic presentation, since (he claims) his audience only understands tomfoolery and monkey-business. Dio Portrays himself as an oratorical master of comically distorted Homeric poetry.

After more commentary on the Alexandrians' misdirected attention to unproductive entertainments, Dio makes his most explicit connection between his words and Old Comedy, by contextualizing his own *parrhēsia* in terms of this commendable (classical) Athenian custom: 'that they let their poets put to shame not only individuals but even the city as a whole, if they were behaving at all badly' (32.6 ὅτι τοῖς ποιηταῖς ἐπέτρεπον μὴ μόνον τοὺς κατ' ἄνδρα ἐλέγχειν, ἀλλὰ καὶ κοινῇ τὴν πόλιν, εἴ τι μὴ καλῶς ἔπραττον). This discussion of Old Comic license parallels comments by Horace (S. 1.4.1–5), and Dio ensures the generic specificity of his reference by quoting overtly political bits of Aristophanes (*Knights* 42–3) and Eupolis (fr. 234 K-A), while saying that these passages were merely two among many that could be found 'among the comedies'.

The problem here in Alexandria, Dio says, is that 'for you there is neither any such chorus, nor poet nor anyone else, who will reproach you in a spirit of goodwill and lay bare the failings of the city' (32.7 ὑμῖν δὲ οὔτε χορός ἐστι τοιοῦτος οὔτε ποιητῆς οὔτε ἄλλος οὐδεὶς, ὃς ὑμῖν ὀνειδιεῖ μετ' εὐνοίας καὶ φανερὰ ποιήσει τὰ τῆς πόλεως ἀρρωστήματα). Dio presents himself as the person to fill this need for a comic poet or chorus, and in the next sentence he even suggests that the city should sponsor a festival in honor of such a person's arrival. This comment, akin to Aristides' parabolic insertion of self-praise (28.21 Deil = 49.360 Dindorf, quoted and discussed above), makes a rhetorical bid to have his audience understand his words as deserving of the same classical-era Athenian license enjoyed by the Old Comic poets, particularly in their blunt civic critiques found in the parabasis.

Keeping in mind what he says about the connection between comedy and philosophy in the *First Tarsian* it comes as little surprise that immediately after positioning himself as fulfilling Alexandria's need for a comic poet or chorus, Dio suggests that this need may have arisen from the collective failure of the city's philosophers. Even the local Cynics, who ought to be able to cow people into better behavior, have actually made the situation worse, because their constant and ineffectual bawling on street corners has made them something of a laughing-stock (32.9). And generally speaking, those few who have used frank

speech (παρρησία) have done so too rarely, too briefly and with a goal of upbraiding rather than instructing (11 λοιδορήσαντες μάλλον ἢ διδάξαντες), i.e. with *loidoria* that is not ethically directed. These statements cut in several directions at once. Dio seems to suggest that even in Alexandria both comedy and philosophy have the potential to effect positive change, though each can also fall short, as Old Comedy eventually did in classical Athens and philosophy has now done in Alexandria. On this reading, we might be able to detect a cross-generic issue of public comportment that is critical to one's ability to benefit the city. In the *First Tarsian*, Dio points to a slide among the comic poets from harsh abuse toward flattery; in the *Alexandrian* he calls out philosophers for refusing to engage the public at all, for doing so by 'stringing together jokes, lots of gossip and those down-market calls' (32.9 σκώμματα καὶ πολλὴν σπερμολογίαν συνείροντες καὶ τὰς ἀγοραίους ταύτας ἀποκρίσεις); or for offering epideictic oratory or their own doggerel instead of anything of philosophical substance. Perhaps, then, any city would benefit if both the comic poets and philosophers did what they were supposed to do. On the other hand, this highly normative position (as if there were clear and universally-accepted job descriptions for comic playwrights and philosophers) also smacks of the sort of commentary we hear from Aristophanes about his rivals. If we were to trust Aristophanes' witness, we'd be forced to conclude that rival poets, such as Cratinus, were simply bad, rather than understanding Aristophanes' badinage as part of the process of creating an authorial persona in aggressive dialogue with others.³² Thus, Dio the philosopher masquerading as comic poet may overplay the casting of blame in order to set himself up more dramatically as the savior of the city.

Finally, Dio contrasts this image of the failed philosophers of Alexandria with his own unimpeachable intentions, since he plays the part of Socrates by claiming that he has been inspired to speak this way to the people of Alexandria by a *daimonion* (32.12), that term that is often translated as the 'genius' of Socrates (e.g. *Pl. Ap.* 40a; *X. Mem.* 1.1.2), and Dio connects his personal experience of this *daimonion* with the religious landscape of Alexandria by essentially conflating his divine inner voice with Serapis, whose most famous cult center was in the city. In light of the comic atmosphere of this part of the speech, this combination of a Socratic *daimonion* and a reference to traditional Alexandrian cult can even be understood as replaying a basic tension in Aristophanes' *Clouds* in a more positive and productive register.³³ This clear (if syncretized) allusion to the divine inspiration for Socrates' career completes the picture of Dio as someone who has stepped forward to fill the valuable social role of the comic poet

presenting a salutary parabasis while also having the wisdom and daring of the Socratic parrhesiast.

These first thirteen sections form something of a complete exordium (though the introductory remarks actually continue through 32.32), as can be sensed in Dio's strong transition when he takes up a new topic: 'first of all . . .' (14 πρῶτόν γε πάντων).³⁴ In this opening part of the speech, which makes up slightly less than ten percent of the entire oration, Dio establishes his authorial persona, which consists of the parabolic voice of Old Comedy with an infusion of Socratic inspiration. From here, the intensity of comic engagement recedes, and Dio moves into broader discussions of the Alexandrian's reactions to musical and athletic spectacles. Yet he continues to use more comic imagery than is his usual wont. This comic material can be quickly summarized: At 32.16, he quotes Menander fr. 298 K-A. At section 21, he includes a line that has, at times, been understood as a comic fragment.³⁵ In section 29, there may be an allusion to *Knights* 396. At 31, he presents the opinion of some unnamed person that the Alexandrians care only for 'lots of bread and seats at the races' (πολὺς ἄρτος καὶ θέα ἵππων), which so closely parallels Juvenal's *panem et circensis* that one might wonder if Dio is drawing upon a stock satirical quip.³⁶ Section 71 contains a clear allusion to *Acharnians* 616–17. Sections 84–5 include the long Homeric mash-up mentioned above.³⁷ At 86, Dio claims to be quoting a comic line when he recites a slightly adapted version of Euripides' *Hecuba* 607 (= *adesp.* 153 K-A): ἀκόλαστος ὄχλος ναυτική τ' ἀταξία, 'unrestrained mob and naval disorder', where the last word in the Euripidean line is ἀναρχία. Von Arnim (1898, *ad loc.*) bracketed the entirety of Dio's comic reference here, on the assumption that he had mistaken Euripidean tragedy for comedy and then misquoted it, yet I think it more probable that Dio refers to a comic send-up of the Euripidean line or is himself providing a comic twist (something made slightly more probable because of his attribution of the line to 'one of the comic poets' rather than giving a specific source). As he builds toward the conclusion of his long speech, Dio references the humor of seeing a drunk Heracles on the comic stage, which allows him to connect the Alexandrians to this image through Alexander's claim to be, like Heracles, a son of Zeus (though Dio goes further by suggesting that the locals more closely resemble drunk Centaurs or Cyclopes, 94–5). And finally, within a few breaths of the end, Dio draws loosely upon *Peace* 1–18 to compare the Alexandrians to Attic dung-beetles, who, though they are surrounded by the sweetest honey in the world, prefer their coprophagic fare (98).

This list of comic allusions, some less secure than others and scattered over a very long speech, testifies to the sustained importance of Dio's comic

self-construction in the *Alexandrian*. And in both this speech and the *First Tarsian* he makes it patently clear that the most valuable part of Old Comedy derives from the productive chastisement that is delivered for the benefit (ὠφέλεια) of the city (cf. *Frogs* 1054–5). Both of these speeches therefore appropriate the parabolic voice independent of the larger comic context, as Dio focuses his invective on the moral correction of his theatre audience.

Dio's parabolic strategy

Why does Dio adopt such an unusual strategy of self-presentation in these two orations? If we were dealing with Lucian, such parabolic speech would hardly need an explanation, but Dio is a very different figure, whose tastes typically veered away from Aristophanic comedy. I suggest that we can explain the striking emphasis on comic material in the *Alexandrian* and *First Tarsian* in terms of a network of issues relating to antiquarianism, the role of local performance in the 'global' Roman world, and tensions between Roman hegemony and the power of the lone sage.

The issue of antiquarianism is predictable enough for someone writing in Dio's era, and his ambivalent discussions of Old Comedy reveal the basic framework of this dynamic. Classical Athens was the bygone era of record in which we can see such laudable and now regrettably defunct traditions as the comic license to abuse individuals and the city as a whole; yet Dio shows us that prior to the dereliction of Old Comedy the playwrights had already betrayed the original spirit of their duties. This deployment of comic material is in line with Whitmarsh's discussion of literary mimesis as an active and creative process of identity formation that simultaneously asserts a historical continuity while drawing attention to points of discontinuity.³⁸ This tension allows Dio's allusions to the classical past to serve as protreptic fodder in Alexandria and Tarsus without having them devolve into cultural nostalgia.

Such nostalgia for classical Athens might have had a place among some of the literati of this period, but many of the people who crowded the massive theaters of Alexandria and Tarsus must have had a strong sense of their own civic identity that did not fit well into sweeping analyses of Hellenism and Romanization across the empire. Thus the visiting speaker had to find a way to treat the civic population on its own terms, rather than merely as a manifestation of a Greco-Roman template. This must have been a particularly tricky issue in speeches such as these, since they reject the easy option of lavishing praise upon the city

and its people and instead upbraid the habits and behavior of the citizenry. Here the recourse to a parabolic voice offered a twofold advantage. First, it allowed Dio, who was from Prusa in Bithynia (modern Bursa in northwestern Turkey), to speak to the people of Alexandria and Tarsus as if he were their fellow-citizen; and second, Dio's abuse becomes more tolerable to the local population inasmuch as it suggests a patina of festival license and an intention to benefit rather than simply deride. Dio's parabolic performances foster a sense of local intimacy in a world in which elite performers regularly crisscrossed the empire.³⁹

Finally, Dio's parabolic voice suggests a role for himself as an influential speaker who can stand somewhat aside from the hierarchical relationship between these major provincial cities and imperial authority. It has long been suspected that in both speeches Dio is serving as an emissary of the emperor (whether Vespasian or Trajan), but even if such an idea could be confirmed, his personal intervention in civic affairs should not be wholly subsumed into the duties of an imperial delegation.⁴⁰ In both speeches Dio constructs a persona that expects nothing in return from the city but which is bold enough to risk giving offense by speaking abuse intended to help the audience. Such assistance may mimic imperial interests in civic orderliness, but it fits more closely with the constructive and educational aims of Aristophanes' *Frogs*. By resuscitating the persona of an Old Comic *koryphaios* delivering a parabasis, Dio creates a theatrical space in which to offer his harsh critiques. Conjuring a scenario in which a playwright is licensed to abuse his fellow citizens in classical Athens, Dio asserts a pedagogical agenda and persona through which he hopes to improve the behavior of the people of Alexandria and Tarsus. The Roman emperor may have enjoyed a virtual monopoly on most official mechanisms of control, but Dio's self-presentation at Tarsus and Alexandria makes the claim that cities enduring a crisis of values still needed to find a wise and persuasive individual who was willing and able to stand up and speak the truth as the Old Comic poets had once done in classical Athens.

Notes

* I would like to thank C.W. Marshall and David Smith for their valuable input on early drafts of this chapter.

1 The poor are also to be kept from participating in mimes or working as dancers (*orkhēstai*), choristers (*khoreutai*) except in the sacred chorus, kitharists or auletes. This list provides a useful synopsis of contemporary modes of dramatic performance.

- 2 The entirety of Dio's advice on this topic is: καὶ μηδεὶς τῶν σοφωτέρων αἰτιάσεται με ὡς προκρίναντα τῆς ἀρχαίας κωμωδίας τὴν Μενάνδρου ἢ τῶν ἀρχαίων τραγωδῶν Εὐριπίδην· οὐδὲ γὰρ οἱ ἰατροὶ τὰς πολυτελεστάτας τροφὰς συντάττουσι τοῖς θεραπειὰς δεομένοις, ἀλλὰ τὰς ὠφελίμους, πολὺ δ' ἂν ἔργον εἴη τὸ λέγειν ὅσα ἀπὸ τούτων χρήσιμα· ἢ τε γὰρ τοῦ Μενάνδρου μίμησις ἅπαντος ἤθους καὶ χάριτος πᾶσαν ὑπερβέβληκε τὴν δεινότητα τῶν παλαιῶν κωμικῶν . . . 'And let none of the intellectuals chide me for preferring Menander to Old Comedy or Euripides to the old tragedies. For doctors do not prescribe the most expensive remedies to their patients but, rather, the best. It would be a mighty labor to enumerate all the benefits of these authors. For Menander's portrayal of every character and pleasure altogether surpasses the cleverest of the Old Comic playwrights . . .' Note that Dio seems to contrast the singular (τῆς ἀρχαίας κωμωδίας) with the plural (τῶν ἀρχαίων τραγωδῶν) to distinguish between the genre of Old Comedy and the era of the 'earlier' tragedians. Since by this era Menander and Euripides are the predictable choices to represent their respective dramatic modes, Dio's *sophōteroi* must amount to a pedantic few. For a similar preference for Menander, see Paus. 1.21.1 and Marshall's discussion of Plutarch in chapter 7 of this volume.
- 3 Or. 7.143 may contain an allusion to Menander's *Samia* 387. It should also be kept in mind that some of Dio's unidentified comic quotations could be by Menander.
- 4 For example, Nervegna 2013: 51: 'Getting ready to lecture the Alexandrians on morality, [Dio] presents himself in the role of an Old Comedy poet and praises the Athenians for allowing comic poets to expose both individual citizens and the entire city'. Hunter 2014: 384–6 pairs Dio's *Alexandrian* and *First Tarsian* in terms of their use of Old Comic tropes and structures.
- 5 The *kommotion* is the sung introduction to the parabasis and is one of the seven constituent parts identified by Pollux (4.112): *kommotion*, *parabasis* (the section which seems to have given its name to the entire parabasis), *pnigos/makron*, *ode*, *epirrhema*, *antode*, *antepirrhema*.
- 6 Hubbard 1991: 220–5 shows that after 420 the author's persona intrudes less overtly into parabases.
- 7 Sifakis 1971: 37–51 maps out the various messages that could be conveyed in each section of the parabasis.
- 8 *Testimonia* 1.35–9 K-A; Hyp. 1.c Ar. *Frogs*. Dover 1993: 73 dismisses 'Weil's lamentable emendation' of parabasis to *katabasis* ('journey to the underworld').
- 9 For example: A. Ag. 789: δίκην παραβάντες, 'having transgressed justice'; *Birds* 331–2: παρέβη μὲν θεσμούς ἀρχαίους / παρέβη δ' ὄρκους ὀρνίθων, 'he transgressed the ancient laws / he transgressed the avian oaths'.
- 10 Biles 2011: 12–55.
- 11 I recognize that this statement risks circularity, but an approach to parabolic speech modelled on Rotstein's cognitive methodology in her work on iambic poetry (2010: 3–60) would, I think, support my suggestion here.

- 12 Storey 2003: 206; Bakola 2008: 22–3. And compare Bakola 2010: 29–59 on ‘quasi-parabatic’ comments in Cratinus. I print slightly simplified versions of the text in *PCG*.
- 13 Cairns 2005.
- 14 Karamanou 2006 *ad loc.* explains that Seneca mistakenly attributes these lines to Belerophon.
- 15 Hunter and Russell 2011, *ad* 18d and 19e believe that Plutarch is referring to Ixion’s role in Euripides’ *Ixion*, though the matter is not certain. Ixion is a problematic character wherever he might appear, but it would be surprising nonetheless to find separate anecdotes about objections to Euripides’ treatment of him in different plays. It is more probable that both Plutarch and Seneca are referring to Ixion’s role in Euripides’ *Danae*.
- 16 Shaw 2014: 133–6, who confronts the various claims that each of these fragments derives from fifth-century Old Comedies.
- 17 Kahn 1983: 104 and 1998: 325; Fendt 2014: 126 compares *Republic* to an extended and particularly complex parabasis; Arieti and Barrus 2010: 11–12 claim that *Protagoras* includes a central parabatic scene (from Socrates’ threat to abandon the conversation until the entrance of Alcibiades), though I am skeptical of this assertion, since they seem to conceive of the parabasis too narrowly as a temporary interruption of the main narrative. Platter 2006: 94–8 offers insightful comments about the parabasis in general and a useful comparison of the relationship between author and spokesperson in Old Comic parabases and Platonic dialogues; he does not, however, suggest that any Platonic text specifically includes parabatic speech. In chapter 8 of this volume, Rosen suggests that Lucian’s *The Dead Come to Life* draws upon recognizable conceits of an Old Comic parabasis.
- 18 Sifakis 1971: 64–6.
- 19 Both of these texts have received careful scrutiny in recent years, and debate continues as to whether these speeches were composed under Vespasian or Trajan. In line with the most recent assessments, I accept a Vespasianic date for both, though my arguments here do not hinge on this point. For overview, updated arguments and bibliographies relating to the *Alexandrian*, see Kasprzyk and Vendries 2012; and for the *First Tarsian*, see Bost-Pouderon 2006: 7–40 and 141–79. *Or.* 32 and 33 are so similar in tone and style that one might imagine that they were composed by Dio as a pair (though Jones 1978: 41 in noting their similarity rejects the idea that this implies that they were written in the same period.)
- 20 *Or.* 32 references the theatrical setting several times; for the setting of *Or.* 33, see Bost-Pouderon 2006: 7–40. Lemarchand 1926: 125–6 suggests that *Or.* 33 is a humorous Cynic diatribe that was never presented in Tarsus at all; this point has not been taken up by more recent scholars.
- 21 What exactly Dio means with the word ῥέγγειν has been a matter of frequent debate. Kokkinia 2007 surveys the state of this issue and lobbies for the idea that Dio is speaking of flatulence. ‘Cercopes’ is the universally accepted emendation of κερκίδας, ‘rods’ in Dio’s text.

- 22 For Dio's self-presentation as a doctor in the *Alexandrian*, see Kasprzyk and Vendries 2012: 158–61.
- 23 This is Dio's only reference to Plato Comicus by name; Aristophanes appears again only at *Or.* 52.17; and Cratinus at *Or.* 56.2.
- 24 Brancacci 2000 assesses Dio's Socratic self-presentation. It is also clear that Dio sees Archilochean *iambos* as the precursor to Athenian comedy, a topic I have discussed at length in Hawkins 2014: 186–215, and which Dio makes explicit (*Or.* 2.5). At 33.11 Dio contrasts Homer and Archilochus as the originators of ethical *loidoria* and empty flattery, respectively.
- 25 The sequence of parabolic songs consisting of the ode, *epirrhēma*, antode, and *antepirrhēma* is called the epirrhematic syzygy (σὺζυγία refers to any group of things that have been 'yoked' together). For the audience's expectations relating to this portion of the parabasis, see Marshall 2014: 132–3.
- 26 Hawkins 2014: 203–5.
- 27 Cratinus, *test.* 17 and 19 K-A preserve the later memory of Cratinus' ethical *loidoria*, and these passages are discussed by Rosen 1988: 40–1 and Bakola 2010: 75–8, who connects this motif with Dio 33.12.
- 28 Although these imps who tried to pull one over on Heracles are not exclusively comic figures, they seem to have been most at home there. Hermippus (frs 36–41 K-A), Plato Comicus (frs 52–3 K-A) and Eubulus (frs 95–7 K-A) all produced plays called *Cercoptes*. Archilochus too seems to allude to their story in fr. 178.
- 29 Kasprzyk and Vendries 2012: 131–2 discusses the implications of delivering a speech about theatrical matters in a theater, and they acknowledge that Dio's citation of Aristophanes' *Knights* imbues the oration with a comic tone, yet their analysis of his manipulation of tropes of praise and blame never touches upon the parabolic dimension of his words.
- 30 Platter 2006: 142.
- 31 Kasprzyk and Vendries 2012: 144 claim that Dio here turns himself into an 'anti-Homère', but his manipulation of his Homeric model is not simply a negation but, rather, a positive and creative adaptation (if intentionally hackneyed) in the style of an Aristophanes.
- 32 See Biles 2011.
- 33 On the role of *Clouds* in imperial literature, see Barbiero, chapter 13 in this volume.
- 34 Although the exordium proper seems to end at 24, Kasprzyk and Vendries 2012: 115 rightly speak of 'une sorte de second exorde (25–32)'.
 35 Kock included the line in his edition of comic fragments (*adesp.* 1324), but Kassel and Austin did not include it in theirs and in their *comparatio numerorum* list it as *adesp. iamb.* 29 Diehl.
- 36 In theory, one author could be drawing directly on the other. Chronology suggests that it is somewhat more probable that Juvenal would be drawing upon Dio, and

Latin authors tend to be more open to admitting a debt to Greek sources than the other way round. For the possibility of Greek borrowings from Latin, Courtney 1980: 624–9 offers a useful model for sorting the atmospheric or commonplace from specific allusions. Dio's comment may be a stock element of elite criticism of spectacles more generally. Such a wider view contextualizes Dio's comments within the long history of such aristocratic disdain for spectators' passionate engagement (cp. Dio's own similar comment at *Or.* 66.26).

- 37 Dio attributes this cento to 'one of your meager [σαρποί] poets' (81), and Kasprzyk and Vendries 2012: 143 note that *sapros* is a strikingly Aristophanic term of abuse.
- 38 Whitmarsh 2001: 47.
- 39 Kasprzyk and Vendries 2012: 123–6 discuss Dio's use of Aristophanes' *Knights* as a basic template for addressing the theater audience as if it were equivalent to the politically empowered *demos*.
- 40 For the debate over dating these speeches, see n. 17 above.