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Cultured Animals and Wild Humans? Talking with the Animals in Aristophanes' *Wasps*

Abstract: This article focuses on animal characters and choruses as both companions and opponents to human action in Aristophanes' *Wasps* (422 B.C.). In the world of Aristophanic comedies that contain animal choruses, a unique situation emerges: humans and animals are seen to coexist together in a society where animals can employ human speech and humans may take on animal attributes. This paper explores these points using Aristophanes' *Wasps* as its focus because (1) *Wasps* contains the largest array of animals in extant comedy, (2) *Wasps* has been noted for its very strong Aesopic elements, and (3) *Wasps* has received less attention than *Birds* in the study of animals in comedy. The article explores the variety of ways in which humans and animals are seen to interact within just one comic drama: from Philocleon introduced as a "monstrous creature" (*Wasps* 4: κνώδαλον) and first appearing on-stage disguised under a donkey, to the waspish chorus, the satirical dog-trial and finally the crab-dance which ends the play. No other extant comedy contains such a variety of animal characters and animal-inspired jokes, many of which are orchestrated by the protagonist Philocleon, who appears to possess shapeshifting qualities that see him straddle the thin boundary between human and animal worlds. The article explores how the confrontation between animal and human is played out through the character of Philocleon alongside the use of slapstick, contemporary satire and musical contests in which the human wins out but at the cost of part of their anthropic identity.

1 Introduction

Humans love to anthropomorphise animals, where anthropomorphism means attributing human characteristics to non-human things.¹ It is one of the many ways that we form bonds with animals, who are often viewed as a distinct category from humans and yet recognisably familiar. However, this marked tension between distinction and familiarity highlights a concern in Animal Studies about the efficacy of the term anthropomorphism for understanding human-animal relations, with attempts to move beyond the human/animal binary that

¹ See e.g. Guthrie (1997: 51) on this common definition of anthropomorphism in social science.

underwrites anthropomorphism.² Kay Milton's proposal of egomorphism over anthropomorphism is particularly instructive on this point, arguing "that personal experience, rather than human-ness, is the basis for understanding others, and that understanding is achieved by *perceiving* characteristics in things rather than, as anthropomorphism implies, *attributing* characteristics to things."³ The individual relationships that humans form with animals are shaped and perceived through their engagement with the world around them. However, cultures create boundaries between human and animal, delimiting one from the other. And it is exactly these kinds of boundaries that various forms of comedy enjoy identifying in order to trample all over them, distorting the familiar and introducing incongruities into our understanding of human and animal. Such a comic distortion can be seen in a recent story in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (1 June 2015) of a Dutch hedgehog which consumed the remains of a bottle of advocaat.⁴ Particularly remarkable was the way that the story played up the humour of a hedgehog drunk on alcohol by using a number of anthropomorphising phrases. The title of the article was "Eierlikör-Exzess: Ein Igel mit Kater" ('Advocaat-excess: Hedgehog with a Hangover'), while the opening idiom of the article "Voll wie eine Haubitze" is comparable to the English 'drunk as a skunk' since these expressions are used to describe inebriated humans. The article detailed how the hedgehog was found lying in the middle of the road; he was so drunk that he could no longer curl up into a ball and he was now 'sleeping off his inebriation' at an animal sanctuary. The piece is filled with the same clichés that are used in reporting drunken human behaviour. The humour comes in part from embellishing this small animal with human characteristics, human culture and human behaviour. This creates the illusion that the little hedgehog is *just like us*, but at the same time we recognise

² See Alger & Alger (1999: 203): "anthropomorphism is best understood as a distancing concept intended to obscure the real intersubjectivity that exists between human and non-human animals." See also Knight (2005: 12): "In short, human-animal dualism is problematic not just because it obscures *human-animal commonality*, but also because it obscures *differences between other animals*." Further Varsava (2014: 521): "The 'human' and 'animal' are mutually constituting concepts: the superiority and entitlement of the first depends upon the inferiority and subordination of the second."

³ See Milton (2005: 260). Other recent studies have considered how humans make meaning and shape their self-conception through animals: see e.g. Gross & Valley (2012) and Payne (2010).

⁴ See <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/gesellschaft/tiere/eierlikoer-exzess-ein-igel-mit-kater-13623618.html> (last on-line access: 14 September 2015).

that since he is a hedgehog, he must be wholly *unlike* us.⁵ By drawing attention to these incongruities the article plays the story for laughs based on the transgressions of human-animal boundaries in twenty-first-century mainstream culture. When one comes to look at comedy in another, ancient, Greek culture, it is important to consider how Greek views of animals and humans, and the boundaries between the two, are reflected in contemporary comic drama. Indeed, Greek drama of the late fifth century B.C. both humanises animals and animalises humans in equal measure to create humour and entertainment for its ancient audiences, as we shall explore in connection with Aristophanes' *Wasps* (Σφήκες) of 422 B.C.

It is a striking feature of Aristophanes' comedies of the fifth century B.C. that the comic adventures are always set in an Athens contemporary with that of its audience, and yet within that very familiar space the most fantastical and incredible events take place, such as flying to heaven on a dung-beetle in *Peace* (Εἰρήνη) to rescue the goddess Peace, or in *Wealth* (Πλοῦτος) restoring sight to old blind Wealth, or in *Birds* (ὄρνιθες) fleeing Athens to construct a city in the sky in the company of the birds. This article, however, focuses on just one aspect of the incredible in Aristophanic comedy: the way in which Aristophanes exploits contemporary understanding of human-animal relationships in order to create the fantastical comedy *Wasps*. This is a play whose narrative focus is on the attempts of Bdelycleon to free his father, Philocleon, from his unhealthy addiction to jury-service. However, it is also a play in which the lines between human and animal are constantly blurred. This is a point noted by scholarship, as seen in Rothwell's remark on *Wasps*: "One might say that instead of an 'anthropomorphizing' tendency in this comedy, there is the reverse: a 'theriomorphizing' tendency, in which obviously human characters take on the features of animals."⁶ However, the significance of such observations for interpreting *Wasps* has not been fully examined, and in particular why Aristophanes chose to create such an animal-focused comedy. As we shall discuss below, this blurring of human-animal identity is extensive throughout the comedy, and it becomes most intense at the point when the political satire is at its most biting. There is an animal backbone to this Aristophanic comedy that has been under-explored, and, as we shall see, it provides comic scenes, endless jokes, repeated references to Aesop and his fables, and the irrepressible character of Philocleon,

⁵ See Milton's (2005) egomorphic model cited above.

⁶ Rothwell (2007: 108–109). See also Pütz (2008: 219–222) and Pütz (2014: 62–64). Lenz (2014: 49 n. 173) lists some of the animal imagery and references in *Wasps*.

who takes on multiple animal identities in the play. This information is recorded in the appendix at the end of this paper. This last point concerning the unique identity of Philocleon is something partly noted by scholars such as Whitman (1964: 163–165), Bowie (1993: 79–82) and Rothwell (2007: 116), but it is only when placed among these other animal elements that occur throughout *Wasps*, including references to Aesop, that its full significance emerges, both for the humour and the contemporary satire of this comic drama.

In the plot of *Wasps*, despite the best efforts of Philocleon's son Bdelycleon to civilise his father, Philocleon is an animal that cannot be tamed. Philocleon's animalistic identities allow him a freedom of self-expression which jars against the necessary requirements of living in Athenian society. As such, the comedy does not just explore political satire and inter-generational conflict, but it uses animals to highlight, distort and caricature social and political traits in human nature. As Taillardat (1965: 28) long ago noted: "ce qui intéresse Aristophane c'est essentiellement l'homme: la nature humaine d'une part, de l'autre l'activité de l'homme en société, surtout dans ses manifestations politiques et artistiques." Aristophanic comedy makes a habit of viewing humanity through distorted mirrors, and it seems that animals provided the perfect distortion with which to reflect on human nature and behaviour in the Athens of 422 B.C. All of Aristophanes' audience was capable of identifying human associations with animals in terms of their behaviour, characteristics, appearance and nature because animals formed an ever present part of ancient Greek life. Therefore, Aristophanes' comedy was constructed purposefully to be accessible to the widest possible audience, something we shall note again in our discussion of Aesop. In *Wasps* Aristophanes harnesses this awareness of animals and animal stories and pushes it to its extreme in creating his animal-based comedy which is brimming with contemporary political and social satire.

Past research into animals in Greek comedy has focused on animal choruses, and their connections with the origins of comic drama, both its cultic roots (see Sifakis 1971), and the recent suggestion that the animal choruses had aristocratic origins in the *symposia*.⁷ Other scholars have interpreted the strong presence of animals in some Aristophanic comedies through the associations between Aesop and Aristophanes, but this has not been used for a full interpretation of *Wasps* (see Schirru 2009 and Hall 2013). In his study of *Wasps* Bowie considers that the old man Philocleon undergoes a 'reverse *ephebeia*' in the

⁷ See Rothwell (2007: 149–150). For reservations about this position, see Rosen's review (2008: 194–195).

play, gaining status as a young man which, as Bowie (1993: 81) puts it, is “richly characterised by such symbols of chaos and marginality as the sea and animals”. Bowie’s insightful observations on animals focus on this reverse *ephebeia*, whereas this article contextualises the role played by animals throughout *Wasps*. More recently Corbel-Morana’s survey of the use of animals in Aristophanic comedy has emphasised the human-animal hybridity of the chorus in *Wasps*, but *Birds* plays a dominant role in the book (Corbel-Morana 2012: 154–167). Pütz (2008) has considered human-animal boundary transgression through an interesting comparison of *Wasps* and *Birds*, but only selected scenes are analysed from each play, and it is hard to follow Pütz’s conclusion that animals help to break the comic illusion in these comedies when it is questionable whether there is any comic illusion to be broken.⁸ Interest in *Wasps* will no doubt be re-ignited by the commentary of Biles and Olson (2015), although their extensive introduction has little to say on animals, and so this article hopes to contribute by raising the profile of animals in this lively comedy. Moreover, the following discussion seeks to demonstrate the distinctive qualities of the use of animals in *Wasps*, which is exceptional in extant Aristophanic comedy, and to examine the way in which Aristophanes exploits animals so as to observe humans more closely.

2 Wasps: a distinctive animal chorus

Let us start by contrasting *Wasps* with Aristophanes’ other extant animal-chorus comedies, *Birds* and *Frogs*, in order to appreciate the distinctive qualities of each chorus and to understand how unusual *Wasps* is in its employment of an animal chorus.⁹ Firstly, Aristophanes’ *Birds* (414 B.C.) involves a whole-scale metamorphosis into birds by the two human characters who open the play, Peisetaerus and Euelpides. This occurs under the watch of Tereus, the hoopoe, himself a former human who had already undergone an avian transformation along with his wife Procne who became a nightingale. The bird-presence in this comedy begins in the opening scene as Peisetaerus and Euelpides enter the stage with a crow and jackdaw as their guides (*Birds* 5–8: κορώνη ... κολοιός).

⁸ See also Ruffell (2011: 215–238, 312) for a careful discussion of metadrama in comic drama.

⁹ See Imperio (2015: 60) who argues that the chorus of *Wealth* is not animal-based, but in the *parabasis* the old Attic farmers “regress to an animal state”.

Next the audience and our comic actors meet with a bird-servant (*Birds* 61), then Tereus (92) and Procne (222), and finally the bird-chorus enters (268–305). Therefore, as the play progresses, the visual space becomes filled with increasing numbers of birds and bird noises. There is much use of bird-noises in the speech and song of *Birds*, so that visual and acoustic stimuli in the play have a distinctly avian flavour. The birds in this comedy set the scene, the tone, the sound and the environment for the ensuing comic action.

By comparison, in Aristophanes' *Frogs* (405 B.C.) the frog-chorus occupy only a single scene of this comedy. The frogs appear as soon as Dionysus starts to row across "a large, entirely bottomless lake" (*Frogs* 137–138: λίμνην μεγάλην ... πάνυ ἄβυσσον) on board Charon's ferry-boat bound for the palace of Pluto in Hades. It is during this ferry-crossing that the frogs emerge, and Dionysus engages with them in a contest of animal noise as they cry βρεκεκεκεξ κοᾶξ κοᾶξ. Dionysus is able to overcome the frogs in this croaking competition only by playing the frogs at their own game. Dionysus is forced to mimic the frogs via their distinct (and quite unique) form of metrical croaking, and the contest ends when Dionysus gives a resounding βρεκεκεκεξ κοᾶξ κοᾶξ (*Frogs* 267) and receives no response from the frogs. This is a musical contest based around animal noise and rhythmic rowing, but Dionysus overcomes his amphibian adversaries by taking on their animal attributes. This scene is also important because it offers a primitive prefiguring of the contest between Aeschylus and Euripides in which each poet imitates the tragic sound of the speech and lyrics of the other in order to try and overcome his adversary. Beyond *Frogs* Dionysus is a god associated with taking on animal characteristics and animalistic form in myth. For example, at Euripides' *Bacchae* 616–621 and 920–922, Dionysus is described as assuming the form of a bull, whereas at line 100 he is ταυρόκερων θεὸν ("bull-horned god"), and at lines 1017–1020 the chorus call on Dionysus to appear in the form of a bull, a snake, a lion and a wild beast. In the *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus* (v. 44) Dionysus takes the form of a lion, and he also conjures a bear and turns the sailors into dolphins.¹⁰ However, in Aristophanes' world of comic frogs, Dionysus must take on the animalistic characteristics of these musical frogs in order to rival and beat them. Dionysus shows his mastery of his adversary by taking on their characteristic animal features and behaviour of leaping rhythms and croaking sounds. Dionysus surpasses the frogs at their own game only by imitating them.

10 See Aston (2011: 277) on Dionysus' connection with metamorphosis and mixanthropy.

Overall, in both *Birds* and *Frogs* animal noises and costumed animal choruses take pride of place as soon as these animals appear on-stage.¹¹ However, in the case of the earlier play *Wasps*, we find neither of these two features when the wasps first appear: there are no buzzing noises from the chorus to match the bird-calls and croaking of *Birds* and *Frogs*, and neither are the chorus-members represented straightforwardly as wasps in their appearance and costume. Instead, our chorus first appears as a group of citizen-jurors dressed in cloaks. Prior to their entrance they are described as *waspish*. According to Bdelycleon, they are old men possessing wasp-like qualities without being identified as actual wasps (*Wasps* 223–227; all translations, here and below, are my own):

ἀλλ', ὦ πόνηρε, τὸ γένος ἦν τις ὀργίσῃ
τὸ τῶν γερόντων, **ἔσθ' ὄμοιον σφηκιᾶ.**
ἔχουσι γὰρ καὶ κέντρον ἐκ τῆς ὀσφύος
ὀξύτατον, ᾧ κεντούσι, καὶ κεκραγότες
πηδῶσι καὶ βάλλουσιν ὡσπερ φέψαλοι.

“Look, you idiot, if ever someone angers that tribe of old men, **it’s like a wasps’ nest!** They’ve got a sting coming out of their backside, a very sharp one, which they use to sting, and with a shriek they leap and they strike at you like burning embers.”

At line 224 the chorus behave “like a wasps’ nest”, but the simile is then developed so that the chorus actually possess a sting in their backsides. Their wasp-like qualities begin to move from the metaphorical to the actual. But are they wasps or not? It is unclear at this point. Rather than making the identity of his chorus apparent, as in *Birds* and *Frogs*, here we find Aristophanes purposefully obfuscating. Only later in the play do the chorus remove their cloaks and reveal their wasp costume (*Wasps* 408, 420, 423–425). At this point the slave Xanthias observes that *now* we can see the stings in the tail of these wasps (420), and much later in the *parabasis* the chorus themselves make reference to their stings and thin wasp-waists (1071–1121). These two characteristic features in the chorus’ costume help the audience to identify the changing form of this chorus, but it is most notable that Aristophanes chose to put in these two directorial comments from the slave and chorus which help to draw the audience’s attention to the costume of the wasp-jurors and its changing function in the comedy. In comparison to the animal-choruses of *Birds* and *Frogs* we can see already that *Wasps* is no ordinary animal-chorus drama.

11 There is general consensus now that the frog-chorus did appear to the audience, a point concisely argued by Dover (1993: 56–57).

In the world of Aristophanes' comedies, a unique situation emerges: humans and animals coexist in a comically distorted society where animals use human speech and humans can take on animal attributes. And frequently it is not possible to distinguish clearly the human from the animal. As we are already beginning to see, in *Wasps* Aristophanes is purposefully blurring the line between metaphor and metamorphosis in his use of animals. Nowhere is this clearer than in the paradoxical comment from the wasp-chorus itself at *Wasps* 1090, which comes emphatically at the end of the *epirrhema* (i.e. just before the start of the lyrics of the *anteode*):

μηδὲν Ἀττικοῦ καλεῖσθαι σφηκὸς ἀνδρικώτερον.

“Nothing is manlier when compared to an Attic wasp!”

The juxtaposition of the substantive σφήξ (“wasp”) and the adjective ἀνδρικός (“manly”, with its root in the noun ἀνὴρ) draws out a confusing situation in which an insect, a wasp, is described as more like a man than anything else. The juxtaposition emphasises the human-animal contrast while at the same time syntactically blurring the distinction between the two (think back to our intoxicated Dutch hedgehog). Note also that the surprise use of this comparative adjective ἀνδρικώτερον is left to the final word in the line. Elsewhere Aristophanes employs this common comic technique of delaying the punch-line, or in this case punch-word, of his joke, and it always indicates where the power of surprise lies in the line.¹² But *Wasps* 1090 is not just an example of the irreverent humour and incongruous joking of which comedy is so beloved. Rather, this contradictory comment that “nothing is manlier than an Attic wasp” reflects the interconnected nature of human and animal that Aristophanes explores and exploits to the full for its comic potential throughout his play *Wasps*. This is a fact that can only be appreciated by reading the animal antics of the play as a whole.

Before we move on from this quotation, it is important to note that this line is spoken by the chorus of wasp-jurors as they praise their own natures. This forms part of the *parabasis* in which the chorus of Attic jurors take time to ex-

¹² E.g. Aristophanes, *Thesm.* 130 where the relative starts his praise of Agathon's servant's song: ὡς ἡδὺ τὸ μέλος ᾧ πότνια Γενετυλλίδες. See also Eupolis, *Maricas fr.* 207 (Schol. Aesch. *Pers.* 65): πεπέρακεν μὲν ὁ περσέπτολις ἤδη Μαρικᾶς in which Eupolis quotes Aeschylus, *Pers.* 65, but alters the final word. In both examples the last word which completes the metrical line provides the comic surprise.

plain to the audience their wasp-natures and their wasp-like costume.¹³ It is notable that Aristophanes devotes space in his comedy to explain the dual citizen/wasp nature of his comic chorus. This is a distinctive animal chorus. In fact, the relationship between human and animal throughout this comedy is anything but clear-cut, and this is something to which the comic action frequently draws attention. With these observations on the chorus in mind, we must now turn to the full animal delights of *Wasps*.

3 Aesop, Philocleon κνώδαλον and a carnival of animals

It is common to summarise Aristophanes' *Wasps* as a play of searing satirical wit against Athens' law-court system, which is matched in its brilliance only by the comic attacks on the political figure Cleon for his manipulation of those same law-courts. The fictional setting focuses on our protagonist, Philocleon, an old man with a severe addiction to jury-service, who is weaned off this uncouth habit by his own son Bdelycleon. The satirical vein runs deep in this comedy, but it has not been sufficiently acknowledged that prior to, during and after the satire of Cleon and law-courts there is a constant stream of jokes, puns, references and comparisons between human and animal identities. This occurs throughout the whole play, as can be seen in the appendix. There is an animal undercurrent to this most cultured of comedies, and this is matched by the on-stage presence of the wasp-juror chorus, the animalistic protagonist Philocleon, a trial in which the prosecution is led by a talking dog, and finally a tragic dance-contest of Philocleon vs. the crablike sons of Carcinus (whose name Καρκίνοϛ means "crab"). Aristophanes has designed a comedy, built around animals, that plays out on-stage various metaphorical links between human and animal.

We shall explore each of these animal episodes in *Wasps* below, but first it is important to note that amid this animal mayhem we also find that references to Aesop and his fables recur throughout *Wasps*. Vaio long ago noted that references to Aesop link the *symposium* scene to the earlier scenes, and the significance of Aesop and the fable tradition in *Wasps* has received recent interest

¹³ *Wasps* 1090 occurs in the *parabasis* and it emphatically forms the last line of a section of spoken trochaic tetrameters, before the chorus revert to sung trochees.

from various scholars.¹⁴ Schirru (2009: 56) describes *Wasps* as “‘commedia esopica’, caratterizzata, cioè, dalla presenza costante di riferimenti alle diverse declinazioni della σοφία tradizionalmente associata alla figura di Esopo”, while Hall (2013: 289) declares that “(i)n *Wasps* is to be found the most extended Aristophanic engagement with Aesop”. Indeed, *Wasps* contains the highest number of references to Aesop and Aesop-style stories in all Aristophanic comedy, many – but not all – of which involve animals. Notably references to Aesop occur throughout Aristophanic comedy when a comic character is trying to talk their way out of trouble or persuade another character of their argument. In each case the character uses an Aesopic joke, story or a story involving Aesop to support or illustrate his/her point.¹⁵

In his wide-ranging study of the Greek fable tradition, van Dijk (1997: 113) summarises fable as “a fictitious, metaphorical narrative”. Certainly the Aesopic stories which involve animal characters present a situation analogous to that of humans. This enables the stories to gain meaning within a human context. However, in *Wasps* Philocleon twice tries to tell an Aesopic tale and twice fails

14 See Vaio (1971: 342), Rothwell (1995), van Dijk (1997: 188–229), Schirru (2009), and Hall (2013).

15 Aristophanes, *Wasps* 566: Philocleon explains the various strategies which speakers use in order to sway the jurors: οἱ δὲ λέγουσιν μύθους ἡμῖν, οἱ δ’ Αἰσώπου τι γέλοιοι (“some tell us stories, others tell us a joke from Aesop”). Cf. *Wasps* 1259: Bdelycleon explains that Philocleon can escape prosecution by telling “an urbane Aesopic or Sybaritic joke” (ἢ λόγον ἔλεξας αὐτὸς ἀστείον τινα, / Αἰσωπικὸν γέλοιοι ἢ Συβαριτικόν). See further *Wasps* 1182: During the scene in which Bdelycleon teaches Philocleon about the *symposium*, Philocleon begins a story about a mouse and a weasel, and Bdelycleon cuts him off; the οὕτω in v. 1182 clearly introduces a fable, which may well be Aesopic. *Wasps* 1401–1405: Philocleon insults the bread-seller by telling a story of Aesop meeting a dog on his way home from dinner. *Wasps* 1446–1449: As Philocleon is manhandled offstage, he tells the story of how Aesop narrated the fable of a dung-beetle when he was accused by the Delphians of stealing a *phiale*. Cf. *Peace* 129–130: Trygaeus’ daughter questions her father about why he is using a dung-beetle, and Trygaeus replies that according to the stories of Aesop only dung-beetles can reach the gods. His daughter rejects the truth of this tale outright, but Trygaeus insists. *Birds* 466–475: Peisetaerus attempts to persuade the birds to challenge the gods for power, and he tries to convince them that their power pre-dates Cronus, the Titans and Earth. When the birds express disbelief, Peisetaerus counters: “Well, you were born ignorant and not restless, nor have you pored over Aesop” (*Birds* 471: ἀμαθής γὰρ ἔφυς κού πολυπράγμων, οὐδ’ Αἰσώπον πεπότηκας), and then Peisetaerus recounts a story involving a lark and the origins of Earth. *Birds* 651–653: Peisetaerus refers to a tale involving a fox and eagle to illustrate his concerns, which he says is by Aesop. *Lysistrata* 694–695: The women use the story of the eagle and dung-beetle as a word of warning to men (elsewhere the story is ascribed to Aesop). Schirru (2009) provides analysis of these and other Aristophanic passages.

to connect his animal tale suitably to the human context. Instead, Philocleon recounts stories of animals that are irrelevant and unhelpful to the given situation, and their inappropriateness is what creates humour (*Wasps* 1182, 1446–1449). Our information on the actual Aesop and his work is notoriously tricky to interpret, as we are reliant on later sources, but some details appear in fifth- and fourth-century B.C. authors.¹⁶ Most significantly Herodotus calls Aesop λογοποιός (“story-writer”), and the Aesop of Aristophanes is certainly represented as a creator of tales.¹⁷ The fable tradition associated with Aesop is understood by scholars to be popular and accessible, so that these stories (and stories in this style) would be known to a wide audience.¹⁸ Therefore, this provides the perfect comic vehicle for Aristophanes to create a social satire while also focusing his attack on Cleon and other contemporary figures (e.g. Cleonymus) in which the humour would reach the largest possible target audience. The accessibility of *Wasps* to its audience is something of which Xanthias reassures his audience at the very start of the comedy (*Wasps* 64–66):

ἀλλ' ἔστιν ἡμῖν λογίδιον γνώμην ἔχον,
 ὑμῶν μὲν ἀντῶν οὐχὶ δεξιώτερον,
 κωμωδίας δὲ φορτικῆς σοφώτερον.

“Instead, we have a sensible little tale;
 it’s not more intelligent than you lot,
 but it is cleverer than a vulgar comedy.”

The phrase λογίδιον γνώμην is noteworthy both because Herodotus calls Aesop λογοποιός, and because of the focus on Aesop and story-telling amid the political satire in *Wasps*. This combination of satire and Aesop is observable in a fourth-century B.C. anecdote about Aesop with a decidedly political flavour, and this too appears to reflect a side of Aesop which correlates with the animal-

¹⁶ For a recent summary discussion and a useful list of sources, see Lefkowitz (2014).

¹⁷ Herodotus (*Hist.* 2.134) offers a story of Aesop as a slave of Iadmon where he mentions that the Delphians were commanded by an oracle to ask anyone to claim compensation for the death of Aesop, and Iadmon’s grandson came forward. Aesop is said to be a fellow-slave with the courtesan Rhodopis. Socrates while in prison says that he tried to put Aesop into verse (Plato, *Phaedo* 61b). Demetrius of Phalerum in the late fourth century B.C. is said to have created a collection of Aesop’s Fables (Diogenes Laertius 5.80). The mid-late fourth-century B.C. comic dramatist Alexis wrote an *Aesop* (see especially *fr.* 9), indicating Aesop’s continued presence in popular, public discourse.

¹⁸ The popularity of the fable tradition is discussed further by Adrados (1999: 245–247), and the important contributions of Adrados are helpfully summarised by van Dijk (1997: 11–13).

political satire of Aristophanes. The anecdote is found in Aristotle (*Rhet.* 1393b–1394a) and later in Plutarch (*Mor.* 790c–d), and it tells of how Aesop defended a demagogue who was put on trial by the Samians by telling the story of a fox, a hedgehog and blood-sucking ticks, the last of which provides an unflattering analogy for demagogues.¹⁹ Again it is Aesop the story-teller who plays a key role in this anecdote, just as the characters in *Wasps* are seen to employ their own style of Aesopic story-telling, or to refer to Aesop as story-teller. In just the same way Aristophanes uses his own animal tales of Attic wasp-jurors, thieving dog-politicians and dancing human-crabs to create his own Aesopic style story through the medium of Attic comic drama. Here Aristophanes can take full advantage of the visual and musical opportunities offered by live-action performance drama in presenting the mix of human and animal.

Certainly narratives about animals litter *Wasps*. Pütz and Hall note how the scenes at the start of the play in which two slaves interpret each other's animal-based dreams help prepare the audience for the style of humour of the play.²⁰ This scene indicates how to interpret the constant animal metaphors in a political light. For example, at *Wasps* 17 the slave Xanthias dreams that an eagle accidentally drops an ἄσπις (“snake”), but the Greek word can also mean “shield”. This double meaning is used to spring a surprise joke on the audience about a familiar figure: Cleonymus, the infamous shield-dropper who is so often the butt of jokes in Aristophanic comedy (see Sommerstein 1996: 344). Animal stories which carry a hidden meaning are a feature of many stories associated with Aesop, and Aristophanes uses them to provide part of the comic warm-up in this double-act of the two slaves which opens *Wasps*, and these tales continue to feature throughout the comedy.

Whilst scholars have noted the individual features about the blurred identity of the wasp-chorus, as well as Philocleon's connection to animals and the attention to Aesop, no one has linked together the pieces to indicate how Aristophanes' *Wasps* presents the most animal-packed comedy, which he uses to question the very nature of humans and to squeeze as many puns, jokes, set-pieces and one-liners as possible out of the topic (see appendix). Aristophanic

¹⁹ Aesop tells the story of a fox who had fallen down a ravine, but she refused the help of a passing hedgehog, who had offered to pick off the fleas that were sucking her blood. The fox explained that other blood-suckers would come if these ticks were removed. Aesop therefore urges the Samians not to put to death the demagogue, because others would only emerge to replace him.

²⁰ See Pütz (2008: 221–222) and Hall (2013: 278), the latter of whom compares Artemidorus and the oneirocritical tradition involving animals and using slaves to interpret dreams.

comedy rarely works on one level of interpretation at once; the jokes are always multivalent and the animals are more than an amusing decoration. They reflect the core interest of the play in human behaviour, human nature and human culture. Aristophanes uses the familiar medium of Aesop's fables to relay much of the humour and political satire of *Wasps*. No Aristophanic comedy deserves more attention than his play *Wasps* for the way that it creates a comedy out of the constant blurring of human-animal identities. This is used to achieve a vast range of comic effects, to deliver the slapstick and the satire, while also helping to delineate our main comic protagonist Philocleon as a shapeshifting monster whose animalistic nature cannot (and will not) be tamed.

Philocleon is introduced to the audience not as a man, but as a “monstrous creature” (*Wasps* 4: κνώδαλον), who is being held captive using nets. The imagery already suggests the containment of an animal, but the aim of the nets, it emerges, is to prevent Philocleon carrying out the very human activity of jury-service (*Wasps* 113, 131–132). The stage-building representing Philocleon's house covered in nets is the first visual impression that the audience receive of Philocleon. This more than justifies the use of κνώδαλον, especially when Philocleon then tries to break out of the house, and is prevented by the slaves and Bdelycleon. Later, at *Wasps* 368, the chorus even encourage Philocleon to gnaw through the nets, again suggesting that he has animal traits. In the opening scene we see Philocleon is a monster that can barely be contained. In these opening lines Philocleon is compared to a jackdaw, mouse, and donkey-foal, in his attempts to escape (*Wasps* 129, 140, 189; see appendix for discussion of puns and word-play). Our first introduction to Philocleon prior to his appearance on-stage conjures up an array of animal images, suggesting a shapeshifting monster, and indeed this depiction will continue to develop in the course of the play. When Philocleon first appears on-stage, he is disguised under a donkey, as he fails to mimic Odysseus' escape from the Cyclops (*Wasps* 179–196). In fitting with the character of Philocleon established in the opening lines of the play, the audience's view of him is obscured by an animal, in this case a donkey. Philocleon then resorts to further escape methods, and he is now directly called a roof-mouse and sparrow (*Wasps* 206–207), whereas before he was only compared to animals. If we recall our earlier discussion of the build-up to the entrance of the wasp-chorus, we can see that the nature and identity of Philocleon is also made unclear to the audience before he steps before them. This is but an introduction to the many animal attributes of Philocleon, and throughout the comedy Philocleon is compared to, and connected with, a vast range of animals (see appendix).

Early on in the action of *Wasps* Philocleon receives help from his waspish juror friends who, as we have already noted, appear as humans in cloaks only to

reveal that their costume included real wasp-stings and pinched wasp-waists. Most significantly, it is, in fact, Philocleon who first addresses the chorus as wasp-jurors and who orders them to behave like wasps (*Wasps* 430–432):

εἶά νυν ὦ ξυνδικασταὶ σφῆκες ὄξυκάρδιοι,
οἱ μὲν εἰς τὸν πρωκτὸν αὐτῶν εἰσπέτεσθ' ὠργισμένοι,
οἱ δὲ τῶφθαλμῶ κύκλῳ κεντεῖτε καὶ τοὺς δακτύλους.

“Right then, **my fellow juror wasps**, sharp in spirit,
You lot, fly at their bottoms in your rage,
The rest: sting them on both eyes and their fingers too!”

By comparison, later in the play (*Wasps* 1087) the members of the wasp-chorus say that during the Persian wars they had stung the Persians in the jaws and eyebrows, which again presents the chorus as employing animal behaviour in their human tasks of warfare. Precisely this style of swarm-behaviour is depicted on an Attic black-figure *amphora* where it can clearly be seen that a swarm of stinging insects are depicted as attacking a large part of the human anatomy: head, breast, shoulder, arm, backside, penis, leg, and foot (see Figure 1). The status of a swarm of insects as pest and relentless attacker is precisely what the chorus invoke at *Wasps* 430–432 and 1087. In addition, the connection between wasps and warfare recurs in visual and literary arts. The image of the wasp in Greek literature is of fierce fighters and stalwart defenders of their home and family. It is used in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* 471–477 to depict the women's ferocious loyalty to Athens, and it also occurs several times in Homer's *Iliad* (12.167–170, 16.259–265, 22.66–76). There are also images on pottery which depict a wasp-form emblazoned on a shield, another sign of the martial significance of the wasp to the human warrior.²¹

²¹ E.g. Attic red-figure *lekythos* found in the Athenian *agora* (Athens, Agora Museum, P24061); see Davies & Kathirithamby (1986: title page and 75). Further, Attic red-figure cup fragment (Athens, Agora Museum, P6567, 525–475 B.C.; see Moore 1997: Plate 152, 1616), Attic hydria fragment (Athens, Agora Museum P26544, 575–525 B.C.), and Panathenaic amphora fragment (National Museum, Acropolis Collection 1.1045).



Figure 1: A swarm attacks men.

Attic black-figure *amphora* B, 550-500 B.C., BM B177, Vulci, Italy
 © The Trustees of the British Museum

Wasps 430–432 indicate clearly that Philocleon orchestrates the chorus into becoming more of an animal chorus in their behaviour. In *Wasps* we have moved from simile, to metaphor, to metamorphosis concerning the identity, behaviour and characterisation of our chorus. This transformation started just before their entrance at *Wasps* 223–227. Philocleon is in charge of overseeing the visual metamorphosis of the chorus into wasp-jurors, just as he himself has already undergone numerous animal comparisons, while employing animal jokes and later telling Aesopic stories. Philocleon continues to behave in this animal-centred manner through the dog trial, and right up until the end of the play when he wins the dancing contest with the crab-like sons of Carcinus. In *Wasps* Philocleon is at the centre of all human-animal crossovers. At *Wasps* 430–432 Philocleon is in charge of the transition of a chorus of old men into Attic wasps, and it is just after the old men have thrown off their cloaks to reveal their stings and their truly waspish form that Philocleon first addresses them as wasps. Therefore, their physical transformation is both one of costume and stage behaviour, but it only reaches completion once the wasps receive confirmation of their identity by Philocleon who does not use simile, but rather he employs the word σφήκες (“wasps”) to address them directly. Philocleon also employs the epithet ὄξυκάρδιοι (“sharp in spirit”), which is found elsewhere only at Aeschylus, *Seven Against Thebes* 907 in choral lyrics that describe the twin-sons of

Oedipus who have just killed one another.²² The martial connotations of ὄξυκάρδιοι are clear; Philocleon’s use of this high-style epithet helps to evoke the battle-hardened character of the chorus with their warrior-wasp natures.

It is at precisely this point, when the chorus are about to obey Philocleon’s order to attack Bdelycleon and the slaves, that Philocleon makes his appeal to Cecrops (*Wasps* 438): ὦ Κέκροψ ἥρωσ ἄναξ τὰ πρὸς ποδῶν Δρακοντίδῃ (“Cecrops, lord and master, from the waist down you’re like Dracontides”). Cecrops, ancestral first King of Athens was depicted as a snake below the waist, but instead of δρακοντώδης (“snake-like”) Philocleon says Δρακοντίδῃ, referring to an individual called Dracontides. Therefore, phonetically the word changes from its expected shape to provide another animal-inspired joke, but also this is in connection with the hybrid hero Cecrops, whose mixanthropic identity is a representation of human-animal hybridity, as recently discussed by Aston (2011: 120–126).²³ This half-animal, half-anthropoid Attic hero is a very appropriate hero for Philocleon to pray to, given his own mixed human-animal identity in *Wasps*. Moreover, this follows directly from Philocleon’s first address to the chorus in the form of a human-animal mix (*Wasps* 430: ὦ ξυνδικασταί, σφῆκες ὄξυκάρδιοι). Philocleon’s connection with the divide between human-animal worlds is made explicit in this scene.

The idea of Philocleon as an actual shapeshifter is not entertained by scholars, but Bowie (1993: 82 n. 13) comes closest in his observations that Philocleon’s behaviour and condition show some correlation with the shapeshifting disease of lycanthropy, especially in the early representation of Philocleon as diseased and whose treatment has failed (*Wasps* 114–124). Indeed Philocleon is never compared directly to a wolf in *Wasps*, but twice at key moments in the drama Philocleon calls upon the hero Lycus (*Wasps* 389, 819). The explanation for this in the commentaries of MacDowell (1971: 184–185, 241), Sommerstein (1983: 180, 207) and Biles & Olson (2015: 211–212) is simply that shrines of Lycus stood near the law-courts, but this does not allow for the significance of the moments when each mention of Lycus occurs. As Bowie (1993: 91–92) notes, Lycus is a figure whose own Greek name (“wolf”) is reflected in later myths and cult aetiologies involving change between human and wolf-form. Philocleon twice calls upon Lycus at key plot-moments in the narrative of *Wasps*: firstly,

22 Cf. the frequent occurrence of ὄξύθυμος in fifth-century drama: Aeschylus, *Eum.* 705; Euripides, *Med.* 319; Euripides, *Or.* 1198; Aristophanes, *Kn.* 706; Aristophanes, *Wasps* 455 and 1105.

23 Our understanding of visual representations of Cecrops is limited; see Aston (2008: 492 n. 50). Pan and Acheloius are other Attic hybrid gods, and cf. satyrs and *silenoi*.

when he plucks up the courage to escape the nets which cover his house and symbolically leads the animal-chorus of wasps; secondly, Philocleon demands that the shrine of Lycus be brought out just before the pivotal dog-trial begins. Only once the shrine is in place (alongside the pig-pen of Hestia) does Bdelycleon start to recount the case of canine misdemeanours. It is in this dog-trial scene that we have the greatest variety of animals alongside humans, and the animals take on the most human characteristics. Again Philocleon is the orchestrator of action which involves the greatest human-animal crossover, as at *Wasps* 420.

Now that we have explored the animalising tendencies of Philocleon, we can move on to the heart of this comic play where we encounter the most surreal scene in Aristophanes: the satirical dog-trial. The trial features a dog Kuon, which is a pun on the name Cleon and κύων, the Greek word for “dog”. Kuon speaks for the prosecution in a domestic trial against the dog Labes (itself a pun on the name Laches and the verb λαμβάνω, “I take, seize”) for stealing Sicilian cheese.²⁴ We also watch as a cheese-grater is interviewed as a witness for the defence. Here Aristophanes invents and stages his own Aesop-inspired tale. Philocleon plays the arbiter of this carnivalesque court, at one point addressing a cock and asking it for its opinion on proceedings (*Wasps* 933–934). The cock does not reply. However, the dog Kuon’s first words on-stage are the animal cry αὖ αὖ (*Wasps* 903: ‘bow wow’), and yet he then conducts the prosecution in the eloquent manner of an orator who is more Cleon than Kuon. On-stage Aristophanes places the widest array of animals: the dogs Kuon and Labes, the puppies, a cock, the pig-pen of Hestia, the shrine of Lycus and Philocleon as a fitting arbiter for this animal-court. As such this trial forms the most surreal of animal-human interactions in *Wasps*, and it is the point at which the play makes its most prolonged attack at an on-stage Cleon (in dog’s clothing) and his influence over the law-courts. The array of animals on-stage and the unreality of a dog-defence lawyer provide the necessary cover for Aristophanes to strike home with a direct hit on Cleon.²⁵ The preceding *agon* between Philocleon and Bdelycleon had already prepared the way for the focus on Cleon in the dog-trial scene, and as Aristophanes builds to the surreal climax in this animal-packed

²⁴ Xenophon (*Cyn.* 7.5) offers a list of names for hounds to huntsmen. Two-syllable names are appropriate for calling your dog; see also Calder (in this volume, p. ■■■ n. 1). The dog names in *Wasps* fit this pattern.

²⁵ See *Knights* 1017–1034 which also compares Cleon to a dog and to Cerberus, and *Peace* 313–315 to Cerberus. See Corbel-Morana (2012: 118–136) for more discussion of dogs and political figures in Aristophanic comedy.

comedy, the extended critique of contemporary Athens, its law-courts and Cleon becomes most clear to observe. The animals provide a shield behind which Aristophanes can hide, as he makes his most direct attack on the stage-figure of Cleon/Kuon. We can compare Aristophanes' extensive engagement with Euripides' *Telephus* in his *Acharnians* in which Dicaeopolis delivers his Telephus-style defence speech wearing the rags in which Euripides clothed his Telephus, and Dicaeopolis then speaks as the comic poet and discusses the causes of the Peloponnesian war while dressed in a tragic costume in a comic play. Again we see the many layers used by Aristophanes when touching on controversial, contemporary issues.²⁶

The impact of this dog-trial scene in the immediate context of 422 B.C. is evident from Aristophanes' *Peace* which was performed at the City Dionysia, the year directly following the performance of *Wasps* at the Lenaea. At *Peace* 41–49 the two slaves who provide the introduction and warm-up act for *Peace* are explaining to the audience about the enormous dung beetle. They suddenly go off-track to imagine what a member of the audience would make of this ridiculously sized insect. The slave imagines the audience asking: τὸ δὲ πρᾶγμα τί; / ὁ κάνθαρος δὲ πρὸς τί; (*Peace* 44–45: “What is this? What does the dung-beetle mean?”). And then an Ionian man would reply: δοκέω μὲν, ἐξ Κλέωνα τοῦτ' αἰνίσσεται (*Peace* 47: “I think it's a riddle about Cleon”). Of course, the dung-beetle in *Peace* is mainly there to perform a role in the extended satire of Euripides' *Bellerophon* and its use of Pegasus, but Aristophanes uses the animal metaphor to take another pop at Cleon. This brief sketch in *Peace* about the significance of an over-sized dung-beetle recalls Aesop's story about a dung-beetle (*Wasps* 1446–1449), the extensive animal symbolism in *Wasps* and the representation of Cleon as an actual dog during the trial-scene in *Wasps* of the preceding year.²⁷ It appears Aristophanes was proud of his play *Wasps*, and he chose to remind his audience of it at the start of his next play *Peace*. The animals of *Wasps* served Aristophanes very well.

In the *symposium* scene, which follows the dog-trial, the animal analogies continue, and Philocleon deploys an Aesopic story inappropriately within the *symposium* context (*Wasps* 1181).²⁸ Bdelycleon changes Philocleon's costume on-stage to suit the *symposium* rather than the law-court, but the old man's

²⁶ See the very influential discussion of *Acharnians* and *Telephus* by Foley (1988).

²⁷ *Wasps* 1446–1449: Bdelycleon carries Philocleon offstage as he tells an Aesopic tale with a dung-beetle.

²⁸ Aesop clearly held a place within the *symposium*, as *Wasps* 1258–1260 indicates, but it seems that certain stories were deemed inappropriate.

animal tendencies are not beaten. Philocleon still fails to fit into the cultured world of humans, as becomes clear when Xanthias describes Philocleon's indecorous behaviour at the *symposium*, noting that "he leapt up, pranced about, farted, mocked just like a little donkey enjoying himself with roasted barley" (*Wasps* 1305–1306: ἀνήλατ', ἐσκίρτα, 'πεπόρδει, κατεγέλα, / ὥσπερ καχρῶν ὀνίδιον ἠύωχημένον). Then Philocleon is compared to "a donkey who runs off to the bran heap" in his greed and excitement (*Wasps* 1310: κλητῆρί τ' εἰς ἀχυρὸν ἀποδεδρακότι). It is clear that the animalising tendencies in Philocleon have not been dampened despite his costume change and Bdelycleon's *symposium* training-session. This point is underlined by the fact that Philocleon has been repeatedly compared to a donkey throughout *Wasps* (see appendix). The old man's animal heart remains despite its urbane, human clothing. This is something which Silk (2000: 252) too has observed in Philocleon's move from law-courts to *symposia*: "This huge transformation is rather like a switch from human perversity to an unleashing of animal spirits – and *animal* spirits (the *mot juste*, one can fairly say) constitute a very significant element of *Wasps* as a whole and a crucial element in Philocleon's own recreative make-up."²⁹ Again we see that the multifaceted human-animal identity of Philocleon attracts scholarly attention. Philocleon is depicted in this scene as being constant in his animal nature just as the chorus were presented as wasps in their unflinching loyalty to Athens and a burning desire to defend it to the death. Bdelycleon achieves his aim of uncoupling this fierce loyalty from association with Cleon, but it will be difficult to strike out entirely the animal heart that burns so brightly in his father. Indeed, the chorus make this observation as it watches Bdelycleon carry the disruptive Philocleon kicking and screaming offstage: "Well, it's tough for someone to move away from the nature he's always had" (*Wasps* 1457–1458: τὸ γὰρ ἀποστῆναι χαλεπὸν / φύσεως, ἦν ἔχοι τις ἀεί). It is when the use of animals and animal imagery from the *symposium* scene is placed in connection with the satire of Cleon and the law-courts at the centre of this comedy that we can understand its role more fully.

However, *Wasps* does not end on this note, and there is one final animal extravaganza involving Philocleon which visually demonstrates that his animal heart is still alive. In the final scene of *Wasps*, Philocleon has transferred his energy from law-court service and loyalty to Cleon to hard-drinking, prostitutes and committing common assault, but he is still being compared to animals, notably a donkey, as we have just seen. So much for Bdelycleon's 're-education' of

29 See also Whitman (1964: 163–165) and Bowie (1993: 79–82).

his father. Following this description, our protagonist Philocleon re-emerges on-stage dancing like a maniac (*Wasps* 1486, 1489, 1496), and there is one final scene involving human-animal crossover. For Philocleon challenges any tragic dancer to a contest, and it is the sons of Carcinus, who take up the gauntlet. Carcinus' name means "crab" in Greek, and Carcinus was a renowned naval general. Aristophanes uses these points to create marine-based humour in this closing scene. Philocleon views the sons as crabs which he intends to eat, and he makes various jokes on this theme (*Wasps* 1506–1534; see appendix). Just as earlier Philocleon had addressed the chorus directly as wasps, here again he is seen to orchestrate the animal-based scene, and the chorus develop the crab-imagery in their final choral ode that closes the play. The scene starts as a contest of tragic dancing, but ends with the crablike sons of Carcinus dancing off-stage with the comic chorus. The text does not make it clear if the sons of Carcinus were dressed as crabs or danced like crabs, which would add a suitably surreal touch to the end of this animalistic comedy. However, this is suggested by the fact that Philocleon mistakes the sons for crabs. The focus on animal-based humour throughout *Wasps* strongly suggests that this scene devolved in to a crab-dance which comically distorted tragic dancing so that again animal and human behaviour is merged, as occurs in the contest of Dionysus and the frogs. Certainly Philocleon, Xanthias and the chorus treat the sons as more than human, as they project an array of other animal imagery onto them, calling them crabs, a flock of birds, brothers of shrimp, buzzards and several other animals (*Wasps* 1507, 1509, 1513, 1522, 1534), before they all dance offstage.³⁰ It is with these final human-animal metaphors played out on stage that our comic action comes to its jubilant end.

4 Conclusion

From this brief exploration of *Wasps* it is possible to see how the confrontation between animal and human is dramatised through these scenes of slapstick, contemporary satire and musical contests in which the human wins out, but at the cost of part of their anthropic identity. This is bound up in connections to Aesop and Aesopic stories, which are referenced throughout the play, and which aid the audience in setting up the style of human-animal based humour

³⁰ The translation of the animals mentioned in *Wasps* 1509 is disputed. See appendix.

which dominates the play. In *Wasps* no humans turn into animals (as we noted earlier happened in *Birds*), but rather in the course of *Wasps* the underlying animal nature of human characters is comically revealed, realised and explored: in the world of this comic drama we find that the waspish, angry Athenian jurors really *are* humanoid-wasps; we see that Cleon *actually* is no more than a low-down dog serving the table of his master (i.e. the Athenian people); and we are told that Cleon is swindling that master in the process (cf. *Knights* where Cleon is represented as a Paphlagonian slave cheating his master *Demos*). On the dangers of a dog in the home, we can recall Priam's fears in the *Iliad* that his corpse will be mutilated by his own loyal table-dogs (Homer, *Il.* 22.66–76).³¹ In addition to wasps and dogs, we also meet the sons of Carcinus, and their father's name inspires jokes about crabs and sea-life. In *Wasps* these sons are actually assimilated to crabs and most probably even danced like crabs. Lastly, and most importantly, amid all this animal-human action, we follow the journey of Philocleon, with his addiction to jury-service, which his son Bdelycleon succeeds in treating, but Philocleon is still associated with countless animals, just as he was first introduced to us as a κνώδαλον. Therefore, we learn that Philocleon really is a bit of an animal for all Bdelycleon's attempt to inject some higher culture and more civilised behaviour into his father. The indomitable human-animal spirit of Philocleon is as strong as that of the Attic wasp-jurors, who are, paradoxically, the manliest of Attica's inhabitants, and its most staunch defenders.

It is also important to observe that all the animals in *Wasps* are localised, Atticised and some are even politicised; there are no lions or exotic animals, but rather we find animals used in everyday life alongside common pests and local wildlife of Attica (see appendix). At the centre of this is the constant presence of Philocleon, a character whose endless energy we can admire, but whose animal attributes constantly change throughout the play. He orchestrates the opening scenes of mayhem around his house and the attack of the wasps, he oversees the dog-trial and he initiates the dance with the three tragic dancing sons of Carcinus, who are repeatedly compared to crabs. This is a character who has a wild animal spirit that cannot be subdued, and that is infectious in many of the characters with whom he interacts. Philocleon represents the many creatures of Attica, both human and animal, in all their variety. And for all the threat that this concoction of human and animal poses in the world of Aristophanes'

31 Priam fears that once a Greek soldier kills him his own dogs reared in his halls, who feed at his tables and act as guard-dogs, will tear him apart, drink his blood, disfiguring his grey hair, his beard and his genitals.

Wasps, as embodied in the irascible chorus of Attic wasps, Athens could not be the great city that it was without them.³²

In the case of the human characters of *Wasps*, the comic action highlights a connection to an animal element in their nature. This is taken as a comic reflection of the actual human nature of that individual, and moreover it is represented as *immutable*: Philocleon will remain a monstrous creature to the end, the wasp-jurors will maintain their fighting spirit, and, by association, Cleon will continue to be a servile dog in Athens' political life, picking at scraps and remaining a latent danger to Athens. That is the power of portraying animals in the vibrant world of Aristophanic comedy.

Appendix: Animal-related jokes and references in Aristophanes' *Wasps*

Underlined examples concern Philocleon as either the subject or object of the joke.

- κνώδαλον (4): Xanthias refers to a κνώδαλον (“monstrous creature”), which turns out to be Philocleon.
- αἰετὸν ... ἀσπίδα (15–17): Xanthias relates his dream of an αἰετός (“eagle”) and ἀσπίς (“snake/shield”).
- πρόβατα (32): Sosias recounts his dream of πρόβατα (“sheep”) sitting in the *ecclesia*.
- φάλλαινα ... ὕος (35–36): Sosias describes a φάλλαινα (“whale”) with the voice of a sow aflame with anger (i.e. Cleon).
- κόρακος (43): Sosias describes Theorus with the head of a κόραξ (“crow”) which sets up a pun with κόλαξ (“flatterer”) and a joke about Alcibiades' lisp.
- ἐς κόρακος (51): the punch-line to the crow joke is word-play on the phrase “to hell with you!” (lit. “to the crows!”). See also v. 835.
- ἀλεκτρούνα (100): Xanthias says Philocleon accused an ἀλεκτρούων (“cock”) of being bribed to wake him early.
- ὡσπερ λεπάς (105): Xanthias says Philocleon clings to the pillar outside the law-court like a λεπάς (“limpet”).
- ὡσπερ μέλιττ' ἢ βομβυλιός (107): Xanthias says Philocleon enters his house like a μέλιττα (“bee”) or βομβυλιός (“bumble-bee”) with wax under his nails.
- μοχλοῖσιν ἐγκλήσαντες (113): Xanthias explains that Philocleon is kept locked up (i.e. like a dangerous animal).
- ὡσπερ εἰ κολοῖός (129): Xanthias explains that Philocleon knocks holes in the wall like a κολοῖός (“jackdaw”).
- μισπολεῖ (140): Bdelycleon describes Philocleon as running around like a mouse.

32 On the range of fauna in Attica to this day see Goette (2001: 105–106).

- ὀμοιότατος κλητῆρος εἶναι πωλίω (189): Bdelycleon describes his father as “most like the foal of a donkey”, and he finds a suitable pun on the meaning of κλητῆρ (“donkey” and “a witness summoned to court”).
- περὶ ὄνου σκιᾶς (191): Philocleon wittily remarks that he and Bdelycleon will fight about a donkey’s shadow (i.e. nothing). The two donkey-jokes in these lines take advantage of the fact that Philocleon is on-stage under a donkey.
- παράβολος (192): Bdelycleon calls Philocleon “a horse past its foal teeth”, i.e. “you’re no spring chicken!”.
- μῦς (204–206): Bdelycleon sees a mouse on the roof, which he describes as ἡλιαστῆς ὀροφίας (“a roof-dwelling juror”), i.e. Philocleon.
- στροῦθος ἀνὴρ γίνεταί (207): Bdelycleon says of Philocleon that “the man’s become a sparrow!”. He calls for nets and they then shoo Philocleon like a bird (209: σοῦ σοῦ, πάλιν σοῦ).
- ὄμοιον σφηκιᾶ (224): the chorus is first mentioned as “like a wasp’s nest”.
- πολλῶν δικαστῶν σφηκιᾶν (229): the chorus is called “a wasp’s nest of many jurors”.
- σίμβλον ... χρημάτων (241): The chorus refers to Laches as having “a beehive of money”.
- ὡσπερ ἄτταγᾶς (257): The boys threaten to leave the chorus walking in the dark “like a francolin” (a partridge).
- κάτω κύπτω (279): Philocleon is described as lowering his head at a defendant like a bull.
- ὡσπερ με γαλήν κρέα κλέψασαν (363): Philocleon says he is being guarded “like a meat-stealing ferret”.
- ὦ μελιττιον (366): The chorus addresses Philocleon affectionately with the diminutive “o little honey-bee”.
- διατέρωκεται τοῦτό γ’ (371): Philocleon, urged on by the chorus, gnaws through the net.
- ὦ Λύκε δέσποτα (389): Philocleon appeals to the hero Lycus (“wolf”) as he begins to escape from the nets (see also v. 821).
- τὴν σφηκιᾶν ... κέντρον ... κέντρ’ ... κέντρον ... σμῆνος ... ἐγκεντρίδας (404–427): The chorus has the anger of a wasps’ nest (τὴν σφηκιᾶν), possessing real stings (κέντρ’ and ἐγκεντρίδας) and acting as a swarm (σμῆνος).
- τὰς χελώνας μακαριεῖν σε τοῦ δέρματος (429): Xanthias threatens to beat the chorus by saying that it will soon be calling tortoises lucky to have shells (see also v. 1292).
- ὦ ξυνδικασταὶ σφήκες ὄξυκάρδιοι (430): Philocleon is the first to address the chorus as wasps, or more fully as “fellow-juror-wasps quick to anger”, and he then instructs them to act as wasps.
- ὦ Κέκροψ ἦρωσ ἄναξ τὰ πρὸς ποδῶν Δρακοντίδη (438): Philocleon calls on Cecrops, ancestral first King of Athens, and hero, for help. Cecrops was depicted as a snake below the waste, but instead of δρακοντώδης (“snake-like”), Philocleon says Δρακοντίδη, referring to an individual named Dracontides.
- ὦ κάκιστον θηρίον (448): Philocleon calls one of the slaves “nastiest of creatures”, as he tries to escape.
- 463–487: The wasp-chorus plays out its metaphorical links to wasps: relentless, angry, impossible to reason with.
- ὀρνιθῶν γάλα (508): Philocleon explains to Bdelycleon that he does not want to change his way of life, not even if Philocleon could have some “bird’s milk” (i.e. something very rare).
- ζῶον (551): Philocleon describes the fortunate life of a juror, calling him a “creature, living entity”.

- Αίσώπου τι γέλοιον (566): Philocleon notes that some defendants tell something funny from Aesop.
- ἄμα βληχᾶται (570): The defendant’s children “bleat together”, and in v. 572 there follows a pun on ἀρήν (“sheep”) and ἄρρην (“man”).
- τοῖς χοιριδίοις (573): This is a recurrence of a common pun in Greek comedy on piglets and female genitalia.
- ὁ κεκραξιδάμας (596): Cleon is portrayed as an epic monster. He is called a “screech-conqueror”.
- τὸν ὄνον τόνδ’ (616): Philocleon describes how his “donkey” or “wine-flask/cup” gapes, brays and farts.
- ἀλεκτρονόος μ’ ἔφασκε κοιλίαν ἔχειν (794): Lysistratus said that Philocleon had the stomach of a chicken because he accidentally put fish scales in his mouth.
- τὸν ὄρνιν (815): Bdelycleon brings on-stage a cock to wake Philocleon if he falls asleep during the trial.
- θήρῳον εἶ πως ἐκκομίσεις τὸ τοῦ Λύκου (819): Philocleon requests the shrine of Lycus, who is represented with part animal-form (see also v. 329). Note that the *crasis* of θήρῳον (τὸ ἡρῳον) allows for a pun on θηρίον.
- κύνα (835): This is the first mention of the dog Labes who is about to be put on trial and prosecuted by the dog Kuon.
- χοιροκομεῖον Ἔστιας (844): Philocleon asks that Hestia’s sacred pig-pen be brought out, and the phrase sets up a joke in v. 845 on the metaphorical meaning of ἀφ’ Ἐστίας ἀρχόμενος (“to begin at the beginning”).
- κύων Κυδαθηναεὺς (895): Kuon is the canine representation of Cleon, who was from the deme of Cydatheneaeus. Kuon’s first utterance is αὖ αὖ (903: “bow wow”), but he uses human language for the rest of his speech.
- θάνατος ... κύνειος (898): Philocleon explains that the punishment for a guilty verdict is “a dog’s death”, which indicates a very unpleasant one. The joke plays with the fact that the two participants in the trial are, of course, dogs.
- οὐ καὶ σοὶ δοκεῖ, ὠλεκτροῶν (933–934): Philocleon asks the court cock if it agrees that Kuon is a good dog.
- ποῦ τὰ παιδία; (976): Bdelycleon calls for the puppies (“the children”) to be brought on to aid the defence (see also v. 570).
- Parabasis (1029–1035): Aristophanes takes on Cleon in the manner of Heracles slaying monsters.
- Parabasis (1064): The chorus says that it is κύκνου τε πολιώτεραι (“more white-haired than a swan”).
- Parabasis (1071–1121): The chorus draw attention to their wasp costumes and characteristics.
- Parabasis (1111): Jurors pack the law-courts like grubs in honeycomb (ὥσπερ οἱ σκώληκες ἐν τοῖς κυττάροις κινούμενοι).
- Parabasis (1114): some jurors are κηφῆνες (“drones”) with no sting, no military service, deserving no pay.
- οὐτῶ ποτ’ ἦν μῦς καὶ γαλῆ (1182): Philocleon tries to tell an Aesopic story of a mouse and a pole-cat.
- οὐκ ἔστιν ἀλωπεκίζειν (1241–1242): Philocleon sings an example of a *symposium* song to Bdelycleon (“it is not possible to play the fox ...”).
- Αἰσωπικὸν γέλοιον ἢ Συβαριτικόν (1259): Bdelycleon tells Philocleon he can escape prosecution by telling an Aesopic or Sybaritic joke.

- ἰὼ χελῶναι μακάριαι τοῦ δέρματος (1292): Xanthias praises tortoises for their shells, which protect one from attack, whereas Xanthias has received a beating from Philocleon (see also v. 429).
- ὥσπερ καυχρῶν ὀνίδιον εὐωγημένον (1306): Xanthias explains that Philocleon parties hard (leaping about, dancing, farting and mocking), just like a little donkey enjoying roasted barley.
- κλητήρι τ' εἰς ἀχυρὸν ἀποδεδρακότη (1310): Xanthias quotes Lysistratus as he compares Philocleon to a uncouth who runs off to the bran heap, which (like v. 1306) comments on Philocleon's uncouth behaviour.
- πάρνοπι τὰ θρῖα τοῦ τριβωνος ἀποβεβληκότη (1311–1312): Philocleon returns the insults to Lysistratus in this game of comparisons by likening him to a locust without wings.
- χρυσομηλολόνηθιον (1341) and ῶ χοιρίον (1353): Philocleon addresses his girl as “golden mini-beetle” and “piglet”.
- θρασεῖα καὶ μεθύση τις ὑλάκει κύων (1402): Philocleon makes up a story of Aesop addressing a woman as a “rude, drunken dog” (where referring to a woman as a dog would imply she was a prostitute).
- ὡς ὁ κἀνθαρός ποτε (1448): Bdelycleon carries Philocleon offstage while the old man attempts to tell an Aesopic tale about a dung-beetle.
- πτήσσει Φρύνιχος ὡς τις ἀλέκτωρ (1490): Philocleon says that Phrynichus the tragedian cowers for fear like a cock. This is also an adaptation of a line from an unidentified tragedy, and ἀλέκτωρ is poetic vocabulary.
- ὠψώνηκ' (1506): Philocleon remarks “I have bought fish” when Carcinus' second son emerges on-stage.
- καρκίνους (1507): Philocleon draws out the pun on καρκίνος (“crab”) and ‘Carcinus’ the naval general, whose sons Philocleon here calls “crabs”.
- ὄξις, ἢ φάλαγξ or ῶτος ἢ σφάλαις (1509): The text here is uncertain, but it is clear that Philocleon is having trouble identifying Carcinus' youngest son, Xenocles the tragedian, and so he asks whether Xenocles is “a crayfish or tarantula” (Sommerstein 1983: 247; Wilson 2007: 273; Biles & Olson 2015: 508–509) or “an owl or mole” (MacDowell 1971: 247). Borthwick (1968) first proposed ῶτος ἢ σφάλαις.
- ὀπινοτήρης (1510): Philocleon calls Xenocles “mini-crab”.
- τὸ πλῆθος ... τῶν ὀρχίλων (1513): Philocleon then describes Carcinus' sons as “a flock of birds” which enables a pun on ὀρχέομαι (“I dance”). See also v. 1534 below.
- ἄλμην κύκα τούτοιαιν (1515): Philocleon calls on Xanthias to stir the salt water for cooking these crabs.
- καρίδων ἀδελφοί (1522): Philocleon calls Carcinus' sons “brothers of shrimps”.
- παισὶ τοῖς τριόρχοις (1534): The chorus describes the three sons of Carcinus as “buzzards”, but the word allows for one final pun: “three dancers” (τρεῖς: “three” + ὀρχέομαι: “I dance”). v. 1537 (ὀρχούμενος ὅστις ἀπήλλαξεν χορὸν τρυγωδῶν) is the final line of the play. Therefore, the animal jokes, puns and references continue to the very end of the play.

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