Abstract: It has been argued that fragment 205 K–A from Eupolis’ Maricas buttress the claim that comedies were performed in the afternoons after tragedies. However, the sources give no reason to believe that the concept of λῆρος is intrinsically tragic, in fact, the opposite seems to be the case: the semantics of λῆρος fit far better into the discourse on comedy. Thus Eupolis is engaging in an intertextual battle against his rivals at the Lenaea of 421 BC.

Ian Storey has recently argued for a reduction of the number of competing comedies during the Peloponnesian War adding a new piece of evidence, which, he states, has “interesting ramifications for the production of comedy”, since he believes that λῆρος and its cognates here alludes to tragedy and thus the fragment must have been performed after a tragic tetralogy. The text he adduces is a passage from Eupolis’ Maricas (205 K–A) and it runs as follows:

\[ \alpha \phi \upsilon \nu \iota \xi \varepsilon \theta \alpha \iota \gamma < > \chi \rho \eta \ \pi \acute{\alpha} \tau \alpha \ \theta \varepsilon \acute{\alpha} \iota \gamma \nu \\alpha \pi \omicron \mu \acute{\epsilon} \nu \beta \lambda \varepsilon \phi \acute{\alpha} \rho \omega \alpha \beta \upsilon \theta \acute{\iota} \mu \epsilon \rho \iota \alpha \nu \lambda \alpha \nu \theta \nu \alpha \tau \omicron \alpha . \]

Now every spectator must wake up and wipe away from their eyes this day’s nonsense from the poets.

Whereas Ian Storey finds that ποιητῶν λῆρον must refer to tragic performances, I will here try to elucidate the meaning of this “nonsense” exploring the semantics of the word λῆρος and its cognates to see whether Storey is right insisting that λῆρος “refers to something

2 For different readings, cf. K–A (420). If the reading αἰσθημερικῶν ποιητῶν is adopted the focus is transferred from the poets works to the poets themselves (cf. Ar. Ran. 92-95), see footnote 8 below. It is unclear whether the fragment (in anapaestic tetrameter verse) is from the beginning of the play, thus Aristeides; Storey (2003: 350); Bakola (2010: 34), or from the parabasis, thus Biles (2011: 34. n. 88); Rusten (2011: 253. n. 40). It is nonetheless “parabatic” in nature.
that pretends to grandeur and takes itself (far) too seriously, i.e., tragedy and philosophy). His examples are all, however, taken from *Frogs* (tragedy) and *Clouds* (philosophy) even though λῆρος and ληρεῖν are found in all the plays of Aristophanes except *Acharnians* and *Peace*.

My main sources for this short investigation are the comedies of Aristophanes, but the evidence beyond the confines of this small corpus of texts points to the same conclusion; that there is nothing intrinsically tragic or philosophic about λῆρος as maintained by Storey. “Nonsense” can be applied to any kind of utterance, but it is of course fun to mock the intellectuals, whether poets and philosophers, who themselves at least think that they are exempt from it. The verbal use of λῆρος is often confined to discussions, where characters reproach each other.

As the fragment stands, a general attack on poets (tragic, comic, epic etc.) seems out of the question due to the emphasis on “this day’s” nonsense. The fragment must be directed at either tragic or comic playwrights; the genre of poet(s) alluded to in Aristophanes, if not attributed immediately, is often clear from the context, and similarly αὐθημερινῶν clearly qualifies these poets. Thus, Storey is basically correct when he finds the fragment interesting with a view to the structure of the Dionysian festivals during the Peloponnesian War. However, to see an explicit reference to tragic playwrights in this fragment seems to me as an unwarranted interpretation and the tendency to argue for a traditional comic critique.
against Tragedy with a reference to Birds 787\textsuperscript{10} is dubious at best.\textsuperscript{11} There are two problems with Storey’s arguments.

Firstly, if the comic production of this play was performed after a tragic tetralogy, this day’s nonsense can only apply to one poet, namely the one who has written and produced the three tragedies and the satyr play (which it is very hard to see could pretend “to grandeur”); the reference to poets in the plural becomes unintelligible. This is, as I see it, the major fault of Storey’s point here.

My second point concerns the alleged use of λήρος as something intrinsically tragic or philosophic. Before approaching this problem, however, I will investigate the semantics of the “nonsense”.

The core of the meaning of λήρος is something trivial or of no quality,\textsuperscript{12} but it came to take on a more aggressive tone\textsuperscript{13} to mean something stupid or even crazy.\textsuperscript{14} Perhaps this development was colloquial and therefore apt for the comedies in which this mocking tone of λήρος prevails. λήρος is twice in Aristophanes connected with proverbial stupidity\textsuperscript{15} and we find it connected with φλυαρία\textsuperscript{16} and φλιαρός which occur as synonymous.\textsuperscript{17} Though late, Plutarch sums

\textsuperscript{10} Storey (2003) 212; e.g. Dover (1993) 318 ad 1004; Slater (2002) 19.
\textsuperscript{11} Lech (2008). Birds 786-9 is in fact a strange passage, which ultimately implies that the performance sequence of the festival was: comedy – tragedy – comedy. On the αὐτές αὐτικο, see Dunbar (1996) 481 ad 786-9. This of course was never the case.
\textsuperscript{12} Ar. Lys. 860; Ran. 809; 452 K–A; Xen. An. 7. 7. 41; Pl. Ph. 72.\textsuperscript{a}
\textsuperscript{13} Ar. Eq. 89-90. Here the one slave is talking nonsense (κραυνουχτροληκτόν) and this is understood by the other slave as a reproach (λαδορείν); similarly, Pl. Lach. 195\textsuperscript{b} {[A.A.]} Οἱ μὲν των μὲ Δια ταῦτα τοὺς καὶ ψιλοχιδα. {[ΣΩ.]} Οὐκ ὤλλα διδασκόμεν αὑτῶν ὡδηγεῖν μη λαδορείουν.\textsuperscript{b}
\textsuperscript{14} e.g. Ran. 1377; Plut. 508; Pl. Lys. 205; Isoc. 15. 90. 4-5; S. Tr. 434-5. This meaning is enforced by adding παρά to the verb, e.g. Ar. Eq. 531; Ran. 594; Arist. Rh. 1356\textsuperscript{c}. 35; Isoc. 12. 23; Pl. Thr. 169\textsuperscript{c}.
\textsuperscript{15} Nub. 1272, Vesp. 1370, with Macdowell (1971) ad loc.
\textsuperscript{16} Ar. 63 K–A; λήρος καὶ φλυαρία in Pl. Hr. Ma. 304\textsuperscript{d} as a hendiadys, silly nonsense; compare Plut. Mor. 716\textsuperscript{e}, 1065\textsuperscript{e}.
\textsuperscript{17} e.g. Lys. 159, Ran. 202. ληρίες ἐχων (e.g. Vesp. 1370; Lys. 945); Cratinus 208 K–A is interchangeable with φλυαρίες ἐχων (Ran. 202. 524, φλιαρίες ἐχων is attested in Pl. Gor. 490\textsuperscript{f}) and the same applies for the expression λήρος ἐστι τάλλα (Lys. 860; Ran. 809 ~ Nub. 365). Halliwell (2008 116, n. 41) has recently shown how φλυαρία is connected with mockery in symposiac contexts, but he did not take λήρος into consideration. They are, however, synonymous not only in Aristophanes but in Plato as well (λήροι τε καὶ παιδίων, Pri. 347). The connection of λήρον and παιδίων is equivalent to παιδία καὶ φλυαρία in Crito (46\textsuperscript{f}) and is found in Frogs (523-4) too.
up the definition of λῆρος very clearly when he states (Plut. Mor. 716):

τὴν γοῦν μὲθην οἱ λοιδοροῦντες φιλόσοφοι λῆρον πάροικον ἀποκαλοῦσιν τὸ δὲ ληρεῖν οὐδὲν ἐστιν ἀλλ’ ἦ λόγῳ κενῷ χρῆσθαι καὶ φλυαρῶδει λαλιᾶς δ’ ἀτάκτον καὶ φλυαρίας εἰς ἀκρατον ἐμπεσοῦση ἡβρις καὶ παροινία τέλος ἀμωσσάτων καὶ ἀχαριστῶν.

At any rate, those philosophers who wish to give indulgence in wine a bad name define it as “vinous babbling” and babbling means precisely, engaging in empty and frivolous conversation. The outcome of undisciplined chatter and frivolity, when it reaches the extreme of intemperance, is violence and drunken behaviour – an outcome wholly inconsistent with culture and refinement.

This description recalls the behaviour of Philocleon at the symposium in Wasps (e.g. 1319-23.), a behaviour which Plutarch also applies to Philip II of Macedon, “who talked a lot of nonsense (πολλὰ ληρὼν) due to his drunkenness and made a fool of himself” (Plut. Mor. 715). The usage of λῆρος is seemingly more linked with mockery and laughter, good or ill natured, symposiac or not, than to the (far too) elevated nature of tragic poetry or other intellectual pursuits.

Λῆρος implies not the nature of tragedy, but that of reproach. Even if this is not necessarily the comic genre per se, the mode of reproach in a theatrical frame points in that direction. In addition, since λῆρος and φλυαρία are so close in nature, it might be a matter of some importance that Socrates recalls that his alter ego in the comedy Clouds πολλὴν φλυαρίαν φλυαροῦστα “talked a lot of silly stuff”.18

The main usage of λῆρος and its cognates in the plays of Aristophanes is as a reaction of one character to the stupid or nonsensical utterance of another. There seems furthermore to be a touch of intellectual superiority of the character uttering the τι ληρεῖς, “you’re

18 Pl. Ap. 19c; λῆρος connected with comedy, Plut. Lys. 13. 5: ὁ κωμικὸς Θεόπομπος έοικε λήρεις. All this concur with the entry Σ 1219 of the etymology of Hesychius Lexicogr., Lexicon (Π – Ω) which runs as follows σκόπτει· γελοιάζει, παίζει, ληρεῖ.
speaking like a fool," whether an imagined superiority as in the case of Philocleon or real as that of the chorus of clouds towards Socrates. Even the Scythian archer in Thesmophoriazusae is in some way superior to Echo, alias Euripides, who of course repeats the ληρεῖς to him, revealing the real hierarchy and the stupidity of the Scythian (1080, 1112). Clouds, in particular, testifies to this hierarchy: Clouds to Socrates (359), Socrates to Strepsiades (367, 500), Pheidippides to Strepsiades (829), and finally Strepsiades to the one he owes money (in an imagined state of superiority 1273, compare it with Philocleon in Vesp. 1370). This last effort to get the upper hand, however, misfires, leaving him the butt of the joke as in nearly all the other instances found in Clouds. Though Socrates is mocked as speaking nonsense in Clouds it seems rash to conclude that philosophy is λῆρος. Nonsense is clearly the hallmark of the boorish Strepsiades.

Turning to Frogs, I cannot find any piece of evidence that λῆρος should be intrinsically tragic, but 1005 is clearly interesting. In the new OCT, the editor Nigel Wilson reads κλῆρον instead of the transmitted λῆρον. This reading, noticed but dismissed by Kenneth J. Dover, does not affect my point, but the cluster τραγικῶν λῆρον itself suggests that λῆρος was clearly not thought of as something tragic in itself when needing an adjective limiting its meaning. This is tragic nonsense as opposed to multitudes of nonsense meanings, genres, utterances etc.

That line 1497 of Frogs should refer to the tragic style of Euripides seems out of the question or at least not the only point, since the passage clearly depicts the chattering of Socrates and his friends, one of whom Euripides is thought to be. It is not tragic nonsense as such, but intellectual trifling on a par with the use in Clouds.

19 In Clouds, see below, e.g Av. 341, 572; Thesm. 595, 622, (1081²), 1112.
20 Vesp. 767, 1370.
21 Nub. 359, and they show awareness of his character in 362-4. Notice that Socrates does not know the nature of the clouds in 365, which of course intensifies the humour of this passage.
22 Three of the eleven instances of the word are found before the agon in a very colloquial setting. Verse 809 is also uttered by a slave. This of course may colour the use of the word later on in the play.
Euripides’ claim (923ff) that he has exposed the nonsense of Aeschylus is the closest we get to tragic λῆρος as such. He simply tries to showcase his own intellectual superiority (945: οὐκ ἐλήρουν ὅ τι πῦχομι’), while his examples of Aeschylean λῆρος are in fact just pure nonsense (927: σαφὲς δ’ ἀν εἰπεν οὐδὲ ἐν), as the response of Dionysus shows (930-2, see also 926: ἀγνώστα τοῖς θεωμένοις). The outcome, however, shows that his superiority was imagined (1136: Aeschylus to Euripides: ὀρᾶς ὅτε ληρεῖς,) which on the other hand does not redeem Aeschylus’ poetry either.

What Aeschylus and Euripides wrote could possibly be called nonsense at times – the agon in Frogs suggests so – and thus it seems likely that though one could call a given tragedy nonsense, this could (or would) not be applied to Tragedy as a genre (or τέχνη).

The same applies to Thesmophoriazusae 880, where the woman calls the “tragic performance” of Euripides and the Relative λῆρος, but this is not because of the acting she sees, but because, as E. Hall has noticed, she simply does not understand what the two men are doing; she lacks the ability to understand a play in performance.26 Another point of this is of course that this play within the play is extremely comic though (or because) of its paratragic nature.

With this in mind, there is no reason to understand the nonsense of the poets as a jibe against tragedy. Rather, it is very likely that Eupolis engages in an extradramatical agon against his rivals at the competition (probably the Lenaea of 421 BC27). As have been shown,28 some comic playwrights, Aristophanes, Eupolis and Cratinus at least – others may have done similarly – created personae which were involved in an inter-theatrical/textual battle during these years, and if the nonsense of the poets refers to the other comedians at the competition, Eupolis is reproaching his rivals through his chorus.

It is even possible that in Maricas, Eupolis deliberately29 continues to employ the word and concept λῆρος which Aristophanes

26 Hall (1997) 95-6.
29 λῆρον is surely a pun on the word ληφυρ, meaning ‘sleep’, which is used figuratively in Greek for impediments to seeing reality or truth (e.g. Clouds 327) and so the punning meaning very much feeds in to the persona we find our comic poets adopting vis à vis their rivals: as purveyors of truths as opposed to the meaningless clichés of their rivals. I owe this acute comment to one of the CJ referees.
brought into play in the parabasis of *Knights*. Here Aristophanes attacked Cratinus for being “mindless (531: παραληροῦντ’)” and pretending (ironically) benevolence he wanted the spectators to feel pity with the old playwright, making him stop speaking nonsense (536: μη ληρεῖν) and turning him into a spectator himself.\(^{30}\) Aristophanes on the other hand raises himself above the reproach acting wisely (545: σωφρονικῶς) while not having uttered any such nonsense like an imbecile (ἀνοήτως ... ἐφλυάρει). In the following year, Cratinus echoed these charges in his *Pytine* (208 K-A),\(^{31}\) and it seems that Eupolis did likewise with his *Maricas*, a play that apparently responded to Aristophanes’ *Knights* on many levels beyond the pure linguistic.\(^{32}\) These are however not the scope of this note.\(^{33}\)

In consequence of the matters discussed above, Ian Storey was surely right to view this fragment as an important piece of evidence regarding the overall structure of the Dionysian competitions. However, the fragment points at the comic competition, and thus the sequence of comic performances at Lenaea 421 BC. seems to have been five comedies on one day, rather than the three comedies following the tragic tetralogies in the afternoons.

**MARCEL LYSGAARD LECH**

*University of Copenhagen, marcelll@hum.ku.dk*

**WORKS CITED**


---

\(^{30}\) Biles (2011) 106.  
\(^{32}\) Eup. 208 K-A echoes Ar. Eq. 198.  


