Warning: Ancient Intellectual at Work

The word ‘warning’ has two meanings here. Firstly it refers to a series of warning signs which had been developed by the middle of the fifth century BC at the latest by painters and sculptors to alert their viewers to the fact that the figure before them, as a statue or in a relief or vase painting, was meant to be read as an ‘intellectual.’ The word ‘intellectual’ is meant in the broader European sense, to include not only philosophers and sophists and the like but also other creative writers, in epic, lyric and drama. In the classical period, as we know, all of these people believed in the formative and educative purpose of their creations. That belief was also endorsed by the majority of their contemporaries. The second meaning of ‘warning’ is that when we find that iconography of the ‘intellectual,’ which had been developed by and for the visual arts, being taken over into another art like drama and used by a writer like Aristophanes in a comic context, then that should be a warning to us not to interpret such passages solely in literary terms.

The representation of intellectual and creative work has always been a problem. We can watch an artist, or sculptor, or sometimes even a composer at work and see the work itself in the process of gestation. But how can we see and thus represent other types of intellectual effort, which by their very nature are invisible? In the modern media, both print and visual, we find the development of a bank of familiar icons to externalise symbolically such internal processes. Everyone is familiar with images of this sort. They appear daily in newspapers and magazines and their moving counterparts on TV present extensions of the same visual conventions. For example, a writer is shown surrounded by rows of books, from which s/he will perhaps take an example, maybe even one of their own; the economics expert is shown backed by a flickering computer screen; medical researchers peer down microscopes; the academic may be captured in an outdoor shot, flanked by sandstone pillars or ivy-covered walls.
All these images clearly depend upon a sort of visual shorthand whose aim is to represent in a simple and easily understood form the working of the mind, something which we cannot see but which we hope is nonetheless present and fully operational. These images are the symbolic designation of a process which is internal, invisible and totally beyond human measurement. Unlike the visual arts, with the intellectual process the best we can do is to put our trust in certain facial expressions or gestures which we believe may reveal that the process is underway. In the final resort, however, the process can be revealed only in the finished product.

It is not surprising therefore that we have to use an image of the product itself, either alone or in conjunction with one or more other external attributes of the intellectual worker and/or their environment, to symbolise the process and the person who is performing it. What is surprising is how ancient this iconography of the ‘intellectual’ is, and how stable it appears to be. In fact, like much else in our civilisation, our reliance upon such images appears to have its origins in classical antiquity.

In this paper I begin by considering the use by classical sculptors and vase painters of some of these images denoting the ‘intellectual’ and the creative process. I then hope to demonstrate how they can be related to Aristophanes’ dramatic representations of the ‘intellectual’ in three comic type-scenes from his plays in which the comic hero pays a visit to an ‘intellectual’—the visit of Dikaeopolis to the house of Euripides (Acharnians 393-479); Strepsiades’ visit to Socrates’ phrontisterion (Clouds 126-239); and the visit of Euripides and Mnesilochus to the house of the tragedian Agathon (Thesmophoriazusae 29-265).

Papyrus Roll

The papyrus roll, in its rolled or unrolled form, can be recognised from an early period as the most commonly used symbol to designate the ‘intellectual’ and/or the creative process, being held by epic, lyric, and dramatic poets alike, as well as by philosophers of every type.¹

¹ T. Birt, Die Buchrolle in der Kunst. Archaeologisch-antiquarische Untersuchungen zum antiken Buchwesen (Leipzig, 1907), remains the standard
As I noted above, the ‘open book = intellectual’ equation is still in use today. Its origins can be traced back via renaissance and medieval images of the evangelists with their gospels to the portrait, for example, of Menander on the walls of the Casa del Menandro in Pompeii, and beyond. The earliest extant example of the use of this convention may be on a Red Figure vase, showing Sappho holding an open papyrus roll inscribed with her poems. This is not of course intended as a reliable portrait of Sappho herself. She had passed away over a century before this vase was made. It is rather a portrait of the idea of Sappho, an imaginative and idealised representation of the poet as creative artist.

This vase has been dated to c. 440 BC and the visual convention of the open papyrus roll to symbolise the work of the intellect was apparently already in use by that time. Yet it is also apparent that the meaning of this convention had changed or been extended at some time during the preceding half-century. The earlier Red Figure cup by Duris (active c. 500–460 BC) of a school scene also shows us an open papyrus roll, inscribed with an epic verse. But here the open roll held by the didaskalos represents the stored knowledge of the rhapsode rather than the


2 G.M.A. Richter, The Portraits of the Greeks (London, 1965: 3 vols), II fig. 1515, Menander 7. As far as possible I cite works which are well known and illustrated in books which are likely to be widely accessible.

3 Richter, Portraits (as in n.2), I fig. 262, Sappho 3 = Karl Schefold, Die Bildnisse der antiken Dichter, Redner und Denker, verfasst und neubearbeitet (Basel, 1997), Abb. 45.

4 M. Bieber, The History of the Greek and Roman Theater (Princeton, 1961) (hereafter Bieber, Theater), figs. 10-11 = John Boardman, Athenian Red Figure Vases. The Archaic Period (London, 1975), fig. 289 = Schefold, Bildnisse (as in n.3), Abb. 8 = J.D. Beazley, Attic Red-Figure Vase-Painters (Oxford, 1963), 431, 48.
intellectual process of the creative writer. A similar message is conveyed by a contemporary Red Figure hydria\(^5\) by the Niobid Painter (c. 460 BC). This shows a scene from the women’s quarters where two women with lyres look on as a third unrolls a book roll, presumably of poetry and/or music, which she has taken from an open chest.

To return to the Sappho portrait, the ‘papyrus roll = intellectual’ convention used there seems also to be in the process of displacing the icon which had previously been used by vase painters to designate the creativity of the lyric poet, which was the lyre itself. This vase also shows us three other generic young women (pupils perhaps in Sappho’s ‘school’?) and it is one of them who holds the lyre which Sappho herself usually holds in other representations of her.\(^6\)

In time too the ‘papyrus roll = intellectual’ convention would become powerful enough to challenge if not to displace other attributes traditionally associated with certain creative figures. The tradition of Homer’s blindness was particularly strong. Consequently most portrait types of Homer try to suggest this feature. But one fragmentary relief in Berlin\(^7\) shows Homer actually reading an open book roll rather than simply holding it as in other representations of him which employ this convention.

We know too that the papyrus roll would also be used later to symbolise the life of the writer contrasted to the life of the warrior. Pausanias (II 20.8) tells us that near the theatre of Corinth there was a relief of the poetess Telesilla, who is said to have fought against

\(^5\) Illustrated and discussed by E.D. Reeder (ed.), *Pandora. Women in Classical Greece* (Baltimore/Princeton, 1995), 208-10.

\(^6\) Immerwahr, ‘Book rolls’ (as in n. 1), 36, sees ‘a development ... beginning with the use of books as school texts, continuing with the literary pursuits first of youths, then of women and culminating in the pairing of roll and lyre as symbols of Apollonic (sic) poetry.’

\(^7\) Richter, *Portraits* (as in n.2), I fig. 119, Homer (\(m\)) = Schefold, *Bildnisse* (as in n.3), Abb. 194.
Kleomenes in defence of Argos (c. 510 BC). He reports that the sculpture showed her book rolls lying thrown on the ground at her feet while she herself held and contemplated a helmet which she was about to place on her head.8

**Dramatic Mask**

The second most commonly found symbol used to designate the ‘intellectual’ and/or the creative process is the dramatic mask. The mask is used first to identify the person associated with it as an actor, then more specifically to symbolise the creative act of the performer whose craft will give life to the dramatist’s creation. The figure of the actor holding, or contemplating, the mask of the character which he is about to play is one of the most common dramatic monuments extant. Beginning in the first half of the fifth century BC, examples range from the sublime to the banal.

Once again, it may be possible to trace a process of development for this visual convention. In an early Attic Red Figure vase fragment,9 dated to c. 470 BC, it is a boy attendant who holds the actor’s mask for him. On a slightly later krater,10 dated to c. 460/50 BC, a young actor rehearsing with a second actor in the costume of a maenad holds his own mask. On both these vases therefore the mask serves to identify the figure as an actor, but it does not as yet make any statement about the creative nature of acting. That situation seems to have changed by the time we get to the splendidly busy Pronomos vase11 of the late fifth century BC. This shows the cast of a satyr play assembled in the sanctuary of Dionysus and it also

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8 Richter, *Portraits* (as in n.2), I p. 75.


10 Webster, *Monuments illustrating Tragedy* (as in n.9), AV 10, pl. 1a = Simon, *Ancient Theatre* (as in n.9), pl. 6.1.

11 Bieber, *Theater* (as in n.4), figs. 31-3 = Webster, *Monuments illustrating Tragedy* (as in n.9), AV 25.
provides our earliest example of illustrations of actors contemplating their masks. Some of the standing actors hold their masks by the headband, so that here too the mask, hanging down by the actor's leg, does little more than mark the figure as an actor. But others, both seated and standing, hold up their masks and gaze intently at them as if they are drawing their creative inspiration from them. The painter has also shown the seated figure of the dramatist, who holds a rolled-up book roll in his left hand. Another roll rests propped up against his stool.

Some Attic Red Figure vase fragments from Tarentum, dated to c. 400 BC, continue to show tragic actors in costume holding their masks, and it is only when we get down into the fourth century BC that the icon of the actor looking for inspiration through contemplation of the mask becomes well established. A Gnathian fragment from Tarentum, dated to c. 350 BC, shows a costumed and booted actor full face, giving a worried sidelong glance at the mask which he holds up in his right hand. Perhaps he is seeking inspiration for his part before he goes onstage, or perhaps he is trying to remember his lines.

From the fourth century BC onwards the convention of the actor and the mask was extended to include also the dramatist himself. The earliest example of 'the poet and the mask' type, as Webster called these objects, is the so-called Lyme Park relief. This Attic grave relief, which was originally thought to be a portrait of Aristophanes himself but is now dated no earlier than c. 350 BC, shows a seated comic poet holding a

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12 Bieber, Theater (as in n.4), figs 34a-b, 35 = Webster, Monuments illustrating Tragedy (as in n.9), AV 27.

13 Bieber, Theater (as in n.4), figs. 306a-b = Simon, Ancient Theatre (as in n.9), pl. 4.3 = Webster, Monuments illustrating Tragedy (as in n.9), GV 3.


15 Bieber, Theater (as in n.4), fig. 201 = Schefold, Bildnisse (as in n.3), Abb. 50 = T.B.L. Webster, Monuments illustrating Old and Middle Comedy, revised by J.R. Green (London, 1978), AS 1.
papyrus roll in his left hand and gazing at a mask held in his right. Later there is the Istanbul relief of Euripides handing a mask of Herakles to the allegorical figure of Skene,\(^{17}\) who contemplates it. The relief is Hadrianic but it is thought that it may derive from a statue of c. 330 BC erected at Euripides’ tomb.\(^{18}\) Significantly the honorific bronzes of the tragic poets (extant now only in later copies\(^ {19}\)) which were set up in the Theatre of Dionysus when it was rebuilt by Lycurgus, c. 330 BC, presented the writers as model Athenian citizens rather than as ‘intellectuals,’\(^ {20}\) although the statue of Aeschylus may well have had the mask and papyrus roll conventions.\(^ {21}\) There are also several sculptures of Menander\(^ {22}\) portrayed holding or contemplating masks. Often there are other masks too, for other characters in the play, on a table or resting on the ground before the figure.

Other Products and Attributes

Other intellectual products which are used to symbolise the intellectual process are usually more specific to the figure, usually a philosopher, with whom they are associated. In this category we may include the

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\(^{16}\) For the date see Webster, *Monuments illustrating Old Comedy* (as in n.15), AS 1, p.117. It is no longer believed that the Lyme Park relief is a monument of Aristophanes himself, as Webster, ‘Poet’ (as in n.14), 6, and A.D. Trendall and T.B.L. Webster, *Illustrations of Greek Drama* (London, 1971), 120-1, once argued.

\(^{17}\) Richter, *Portraits* (as in n.2), I fig. 767 = Bieber, *Theater* (as in n.4), fig. 109 = Schefold, *Bildnisse* (as in n.3), Abb. 216.

\(^{18}\) On its date see Webster, *Monuments illustrating Tragedy* (as in n.9), AS 10, p. 35.

\(^{19}\) See Richter, *Portraits* (as in n.2), I p.121 and passim.


\(^{21}\) Richter, *Portraits* (as in n.2), I fig. 607, Aiskhylos, and p. 124.

\(^{22}\) Richter, *Portraits* (as in n.2), II figs. 1514, 1524, 1526, 1527, 1531-2.
representations on mosaics of Anaximander’s sundial and the Samian coins which attempt to represent Pythagoras’ numerical theory by means of an image of the philosopher pointing (sometimes with a pair of compasses) to a globe. The image is thought by Richter to derive from a statue or relief which had been set up to commemorate Pythagoras in his native city.

Other symbols which we can recognise in later portraits of the hellenistic period are more in the nature of attributes drawn from the intellectual’s particular environment or they represent characteristic aspects of his writing. For example, a suggested portrait of Hesiod presents him holding a rustic staff and flanked by a sheep. But note also the presence of the papyrus rolls and their container in the foreground below his left arm. Later still, a suggested portrait of Theocritus on a silver plate shows the poet sitting in the woods with his dog beside him and his goats browsing round about. Most notable however are the portraits of Diogenes, who is shown either standing with a beggar’s staff and bowl or peering out of his pithos. As a Cynic he customarily has a dog with him while the papyrus roll convention is also much in

23 Richter, Portraits (as in n.2), I fig. 301 = Schefold, Bildnisse (as in n.3), Abb. 250.
24 Richter, Portraits (as in n.2), I figs. 302-4 = Schefold, Bildnisse (as in n.3), Abb. 290-1.
25 Richter, Portraits (as in n.2), I fig. 130.
26 Richter, Portraits (as in n.2), II fig. 1663 = Schefold, Bildnisse (as in n.3), Abb. 189.
27 Richter, Portraits (as in n.2), II figs. 1057-60.
28 Richter, Portraits (as in n.2), II figs. 1061-70, Diogenes a-h (pl. b wrongly labelled 3).
29 Richter, Portraits (as in n.2), II figs. 1057, 1058-9, 1061, 1067, 1068.
evidence. Sometimes it is Diogenes who reads to a disciple, sometimes the disciple reads to him.

**Pose and Gesture**

As the Parthenon frieze, for example, shows quite clearly, fifth century artists had an extensive repertory of pose and gesture at their command by the time that Aristophanes was writing. But there is scant evidence from this period of a particular pose or gesture being used to characterise a contemporary 'intellectual.' It is only later in the fourth century and the hellenistic period that we seem to find an extensive use of pose or gesture for this purpose. While portraits of philosophers often incorporate the papyrus roll convention, it is more usual to find the iconography of the philosopher centred primarily upon the figure's facial features or gestures. Any one of the portraits of Anaximander, Pittakos, Aristippos, Kleanthes, Epicurus, or Metrodoros could have served as the

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30 Richter, *Portraits* (as in n.2), II figs. 1063, 1068, 1069.

31 Richter, *Portraits* (as in n.2), II fig. 1070. Incidentally it seems likely that the figure in the Villa Albani relief (Richter, II fig. 1067) should be restored as a pupil of Diogenes rather than as Alexander the Great.

32 Zanker, *Mask* (as in n.20), 33, cites only the 'Aesop' on a Red Figure cup of c. 440 BC (Richter, *Portraits* [as in n.2], I fig. 264) and the caricature on a Red Figure askos of the same date of a swollen-headed sophist leaning on a staff.

33 Richter, *Portraits* (as in n.2), I figs. 299-300.

34 Richter, *Portraits* (as in n.2), I figs. 364-5.

35 Richter, *Portraits* (as in n.2), II fig. 1018.

36 Richter, *Portraits* (as in n.2), II figs. 1106-7.

37 Richter, *Portraits* (as in n.2), II figs. 1216-7.

38 Richter, *Portraits* (as in n.2), II figs. 1261-2, 1265, Metrodoros 2; also holding a papyrus roll.
archetype for the best known modern expression of the concept of philosophical thought—Rodin’s Thinker. And it may not have been too long before the chin-in-hand pose of the philosopher was grafted onto the ‘poet and the mask’ type, if a wallpainting in Naples, showing a seated tragic poet with his chin in his hand contemplating a mask held up by a servant, was derived from a hellenistic original as has been suggested.

As for pose there are the representations of Demosthenes with his hands interlaced in front of him. This must have been a characteristic stance for the orator for all the extant copies are derived from the bronze portrait statue of Demosthenes by Polyeuktos which was set up in Athens in 280 BC on the instigation of Demosthenes’ nephew Demochares. Confirmation that the bronze original showed the orator in this pose is provided by an anecdote recorded by Plutarch: a soldier who had put some gold coins into the statue’s interlaced hands for safekeeping was happily surprised to find them still there when he returned some time later.

For gesture, there are most notably the portrait statues of Chrysippos, who is regularly shown gesticulating with his right hand. Whether this is intended to represent a philosophical or an arithmetical gesture is unfortunately unclear.

Dress

The use of a particular type of dress to designate the ‘intellectual’ was not nearly as well developed in the ancient world as it is today, when of

39 Bieber, Theater (as in n.4), fig. 300a = Webster, Monuments illustrating Tragedy (as in n.9), NP 36, p. 91. The figure’s dress shows that he is a poet rather than an actor.

40 Richter, Portraits (as in n.2), II figs. 1397, 1398-1400 = Schefold, Bildnisse (as in n.3), Abb. 101.

41 Richter, Portraits (as in n.2), II figs. 1144, 1148.

42 Richter, Portraits (as in n.2), II pp. 190-191.
course there are many more styles of dress to choose from. There is therefore no exact ancient equivalent to the all over black worn by some present day 'intellectuals' to signal their self-appointed status. This convention, which derives from the Beat Generation of the immediate postwar period, is now being appropriated by other groups, such as Goths, whose stance is non-intellectual if not explicitly anti-intellectual.

Although it is not confined to them, the most easily recognisable dress convention used in classical art to denote creative writers is the ubiquitous taenia, the fillet or ribbon bound around the poet's head and often used to symbolise the poet's divine inspiration. The fillet is seen most clearly in a vase by the Brygos painter with imaginative portraits of Sappho and Alcaeus, but the convention is found also in the representations of writers of other types of poetry in addition to lyric. Representations of Anacreon also occasionally show him wreathed to indicate the komastic nature of his verse. But beyond that it is very difficult to identify any particular convention of dress at this early stage.

 Actors are the exception. They are usually designated by representing them in costume as well as holding or contemplating the mask of the character which they are to play. In these cases it is the mask which is the primary symbol, while the costume is always secondary. So far as I know, we are not expected to recognise an actor's profession from his costume alone, without the clue of the mask.

The Aristophanes Type-Scenes

Papyrus, rolled or unrolled; dramatic masks; other products or attributes of the intellectual process; pose and gesture; dress. These various conventional ways of signalling to the viewer that a statue or a portrait on a vase painting was to be understood as the representation of an 'intellectual' of a certain type—a poet, a playwright, a sophist or a

43 Richter, Portraits (as in n.2), I fig. 252 = Bieber, Theater (as in n.4), figs. 6,7 = Schefold, Bildnisse (as in n.3), Abb. 19.

44 Richter, Portraits (as in n.2), I figs. 292-3 = Schefold, Bildnisse (as in n.3), Abb. 13, 14.
philosopher—had already been developed by the time of Aristophanes’ first comedy, the lost Banqueters of 427 BC. We can see that clearly from the use of these conventions by artists of the preceding generation.

Given that both the writer and his audience were already familiar with these conventions in the visual arts, it seems very likely that Aristophanes may have drawn upon this iconography of the ‘intellectual’ in presenting the comic intellectuals in his plays. I therefore turn now to consider the props and other visual elements which the text of the plays tells us must have been used in the original staging of the three examples of the comic type-scene which I would call ‘comic hero visits house of intellectual.’ In each case the scene’s initial impact depends upon its presentation in a tableau form on the ekkyklema, a highly visual method of presentation as we know from the use of the device in tragedy.

Dikaeopolis visits Euripides (Acharnians 393-479)

With no time to spare for visitors (lines 407, 409), it is only under pressure that Euripides reluctantly consents to be wheeled out on the ekkyklema (line 409). Dikaeopolis finds him there already composing (line 410) and in an unusual pose, anabaden (line 410), with his feet up on a couch, not standing up (katabaden, line 411) to write, as he had most likely expected.\(^45\) This ‘intellectual’ must therefore already have with him his papyrus sheets or rolls, on which he is scribbling away, possessed by the creative urge. His unusual pose is to be explained as part of the mimetic process, as is his dress. Euripides is writing the part of someone who is lame and so he must naturally keep his feet up, and since his character is that of a beggar he must also be costumed accordingly. Dikaeopolis has come for a beggar’s costume to plead his case before the chorus of Acharnians but he cannot remember which costume it is he wants. Euripides suggests several which he might have had in mind—Oeneus, Phoenix, Philoctetes, or Bellerophon (lines 418-27). The use of

\(^{45}\) Standing up or seated with the papyrus roll resting on the knees were the preferred writing positions in the ancient world: see Jocelyn Penny Small, \textit{Wax Tablets of the Mind. Cognitive Studies of Memory and Literacy in Classical Antiquity} (London and New York, 1997), 150-5, on the absence of ‘desks’ or writing tables.
the demonstratives in lines 418 and 427 shows that, as he did so, Euripides must have pointed to the character’s costume or mask, as Triclinius suggested in the scholia, hanging or lying nearby.

Dikaeopolis at last remembers the name of the character whose costume it is he wants. It is Telephus. Euripides instructs his servant where to find it (‘above the Thyestean rags, between them and Ino’s’: lines 432-4) and the servant proceeds to get it out. Once he has Telephus’ beggar’s rags, Dikaeopolis gradually contrives over the following lines (lines 439-69) to wheedle the rest of the character’s costume and props out of Euripides—his Mysian felt cap, his beggar’s staff and basket, a broken jar, and finally some dried leaves to put in his beggar’s basket (line 469). This final prop is generally taken to be dried lettuce leaves, but they could just as well be the sheets of papyrus on which Euripides has been scribbling. Hence his exclamation in the next line: ‘You’ll be the death of me. My plays are gone’ (line 470). Dikaeopolis has finally succeeded in taking not only the creative ideas of Euripides’ tragedy, symbolised by Telephus’ beggar’s costume and props. He has also taken the very papyrus on which Euripides had been writing the tragedy. We have therefore come full circle, returning to the product as symbol of the intellectual process.

Strepsiades visits Socrates (Clouds 126-239)

Unlike the scenes in Acharnians and Thesmophoriazusae, which are both introduced by the verb ekkyklein, the text of Clouds never explicitly indicates that this scene was presented on the ekkyklema. But the probability that it was must be very high. After his preliminary conversation with the student who answers the door at line 133, Strepsiades demands to see the inside of the phrontisterion and calls on him to open the door. Such a demand frequently signals the use of the ekkyklema and one of the scholiasts and the writer of one of the hypotheses to the play both imply that the ekkyklema was used here.46

When the door is opened, Strepsiades is amazed to see a number of students arranged in bizarre poses. As his guide explains before shooing them back inside, they are engaged in subterranean research while their backsides are learning astronomy (lines 188-99). Their departure inside reveals several strange objects hung on the back wall of the platform. Although these objects are not described in the text, the demonstratives (lines 200, 201, 206) used in referring to them clearly show that like Meton’s aerial measuring rods at *Birds* 999 ff. and the tragic beam balance of *Frogs* 1379 these must be real objects. Like Anaximander’s sundial or Pythagoras’ globe and compasses, these props are the external attributes of different aspects of the sophistical skills taught at the school, i.e. astronomy, mensuration, and the making of maps. Before Strepsiades can express his alarm and anger at seeing Sparta so close to Athens on the map, he sees Socrates himself dangling from the *mechane* where he is conducting his meteorological researches. Once again here it is the character’s unusual pose which symbolises the nature of Socrates’s intellectual effort.

**Euripides and Mnesilochus visit Agatho (Thesmophoria-zusae 29-265)**

Written some 14 years later than *Acharnians*, this scene from *Thesmophoriazusae* is a reprise rather than an exact parallel of the Dikaeopolis/Euripides scene. The household slave who answers the door informs Euripides and Mnesilochus that Agathon will soon be coming out of his house because at this time of the year he has to warm his strophes in the sun before he can begin to work them (line 67). Presently Agathon is wheeled out on the *ekkyklema* (line 96). He is dressed in women’s clothes and surrounded by female paraphernalia. Again the dress and the props are part of the mimetic process since he is writing a female role. Mnesilochus’s extravagant reaction to him suggests that Agathon’s pose and gestures may also have been overtly effeminate.

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47 For objects hung on the walls of a classroom compare also the Red Figure cup by Duris: see n. 4.
Agathon then begins to sing the alternating parts of a chorus of Trojan women and their leader (lines 101-29). It is interesting to speculate how this song may have been delivered. Was it from memory or from a written text? In view of the reference in line 67 to Agathon putting his strophes out in the sun to make them more malleable, I believe that what we have here is yet again a series of written texts, perhaps on wax tablets if not sheets of papyrus, and that Agathon picked them up one by one and sang each successive strophe from them. Although he had assumed a female costume to help him write these parts, there is no particular reason to think that as the dramatist he himself would also have had to commit these parts to memory. Here too therefore we may well have another variant of the ‘papyrus = intellectual’ convention.

Conclusion

In each of the three examples of this comic type-scene in Aristophanes we seem to find the comic writer using the same set of visual conventions to characterise the ‘intellectual’ as sculptors and vase painters had already been using for at least a generation before these plays were written. When he sets up the tableau which represents the house or workshop of the ‘intellectual’, Aristophanes organises the scene in accordance with a number of preconceptions which he can be certain that his spectators all share. One of these preconceptions rested on his audience’s knowledge of the use made of the ekkyklema by tragedy. All of the spectators knew about that because they had seen it in use in the same Theatre of Dionysus, perhaps only a few hours earlier during the period when Aristophanes was writing and a comedy followed the tragedies on the same day. Other preconceptions governed their ideas about the mysterious processes involved in thinking about the world, the

48 For Agathon’s transvestism see F. Muecke, ‘A portrait of the artist as a young woman,’ CQ n.s. 32 (1982) 41-55.

49 It is generally believed on the evidence of Aristophanes, Birds 786-9, that the dramatic programme was shortened to three days during the Peloponnesian War, with three tragedies, a satyr play, and a comedy performed on each day: see A. Pickard-Cambridge, The Dramatic Festivals of Athens, rev. by J. Gould and D.M. Lewis (Oxford 1968), 65-6.
circumstances in which such an act takes place, and the sort of people who could undertake something as strange and intangible as the creation of what we now call ‘intellectual property.’

Most people in the audience would have had little direct experience of such processes. In real life they had never had the chance to visit the home of Euripides. Indeed many of his Athenian contemporaries apparently thought that Euripides lived in a cave on Salamis. They did not have the time for long discussions with Socrates, even supposing that he had found them interesting enough to talk to. They certainly could never have afforded the exorbitant fees which we know the sophists and rhetoricians charged their pupils. Consequently their ideas about ‘intellectuals’ and what they did would mainly have been derived indirectly from other sources, primarily visual ones, of the type which I have suggested.

We should therefore not be surprised to find Aristophanes using the same set of icons to introduce his audience to what he wanted to show them about the invisible life of the mind. But when we find that iconography, which had been created by sculptors and vase painters for use in a visual context, being taken over by a comic dramatist for use in a different and more complex art form, then we need to be careful how we interpret such scenes. We are less likely to take the Socrates of Clouds at face value. We have the Socratic dialogues of Plato and Xenophon to act as a control (although those dialogues themselves are of course fictional constructs) and we can therefore see that Aristophanes’ Socrates is something of a comic caricature. But with the Euripides of Acharnians or the Agathon of Thesmophoriazusae there is a great temptation to believe that we can interpret these passages solely in literary terms and maybe read them literally to discover the ‘real’ Euripides or Agathon beneath the comedy. Yet we need to remind ourselves constantly that for all their

comic idiosyncrasies, these characters are not intended to be read as representations of real individuals. They are primarily stereotypes of the ancient 'intellectual', early examples from a long and continuing tradition of using certain stock images and symbols in an attempt to externalise and present in an easily understandable way the mysterious inner workings of the creative mind.  

John Whitehorne  
University of Queensland

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