

The Athenian Theater as the Stage for Political Factions: A Political Dispute in the Comedy *The Frogs* by Aristophanes (405 BC) / *O teatro ateniense como cenário para as facções políticas: uma disputa de poder na comédia As rãs de Aristófanes (405 a.C.)*

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to analyze the late 5th century BC in Athens through the lens of an Aristophanic comedy. We shed light on the role of political factions (the *hetaireia*), which were not limited to public assemblies: by funding stage plays, they constituted a form of political persuasion over the citizens who would vote on matters discussed in the assemblies. For this purpose, we examined the choregic system as a form of domination, analyzed Andocides' speeches from 415 BC about political disputes (both in theater and, more subtly, in opposition groups), and investigated the topic through a discourse analysis of the comedy *The Frogs* by Aristophanes (*Bátrakhoi*, 405 BC).

KEYWORDS: Athenian theater; Political factions; Choregia; Comedy *The Frogs*

RESUMO

O objetivo desse artigo é fundamentar uma avaliação sobre o final do século V a.C. em Atenas pelas lentes de uma comédia aristofânica. Atenta-se para a atuação das facções políticas (ou hetaireias), que não se restringiam apenas ao espaço das assembleias públicas, mas consolidavam, pelo financiamento das obras dramáticas, uma forma de atingir o público politicamente de maneira persuasiva: os cidadãos que poderiam votar nas ideias debatidas dentro das assembleias. Para tanto, propõem-se uma reflexão acerca do sistema da choregía como forma de dominação, uma análise acerca das orações de Andócides de 415 a.C. sobre as disputas pelo espaço político – seja atuando no teatro, seja de forma oculta, pela ação de grupos de sublevação de poder – e, por fim, uma investigação do tema no exame discursivo da comédia As rãs de Aristófanes (Bátrachoi – 405 a.C.).

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Teatro ateniense; Facções políticas; Choregía; Comédia As rãs

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Introduction

Art must be thought of as more than mere entertainment. Even if an art piece conveys little or no political engagement, it still reflects a point of view, so it is inherently political. Ancient Greek theater must be analyzed under this premise, for its stories also reflect political positions.

When put into a historical perspective—the Peloponnesian War, the Athenian crisis, and the oligarchic coups in 411 BC—, these political stances become evident in art productions. The persuasive nature of theater constitutes an important tool for thinking of theater as the precursor of socio-political and economic intentions. In this regard, theater manifests the need to persuade the public, because it is composed of the citizens who will later participate in public assemblies. However, this does not imply that throughout the 5th century BC the people involved with theater were not concerned about this poetical and political rivalry. In fact, this study is grounded on this very idea: the Ancient Greek theater was the stage for political struggles between social groups, even if it was under aesthetic control; it was primarily a place with a strong political appeal.

Therefore, the Athenian *polis* of the late 5th century BC is analyzed under the construction and crystallization of identities grounded on the meanings that were elaborated in social, political, and religious spaces. These meanings were invented and reinvented by playwrights of the Classical period, who, when writing plays, had the civic duty of thinking about the city of Athens with careful consideration of political interests and positions. That is why the documents referring to Ancient theater—among them, the Aristophanic comedy *The Frogs* (*Bátrakhoi*),¹ which is analyzed in this study—are deemed as tools of political power and perpetuation of the ideas of certain political factions (*hetaireia*).² As a result, these documents are legitimate political records of

¹ The term *bátrakhoi*, which means “The Frogs” in Ancient Greek, is an imitation of the sound these animals make. In the title of his comedy, Aristophanes satirizes the sound Greek people make when they speak. The comic playwright thought it was similar to the sound frogs make.

² “The term *hetaireia* derives from *hetairiké*—“comradeship among warriors.”. During the Archaic period, this type of friendship transitioned from the context of war into politics and then started to include ideas of solidarity and collective actions to advocate for particular positions of political power. A *hetaireia* can range from a simple political group to a *synomosía*, that is, a group of discontent people that conspires against the regime of their polis” (Lima, 2001, pp.22-23). In Portuguese: “O termo *hetaireía* deriva de *hetairiké* – “camaradagem guerreira.” Durante o período arcaico, esse tipo de amizade passará do âmbito guerreiro para o político, assumindo assim as ideias de solidariedade e de ações combinadas com o intuito

certain groups, even those who were indirectly involved with theater production, such as the people who paid for the so-called theater *liturgiai* (liturgies).³

1 Theater as a Political Space: The *Liturgiai* and the *Choregia*

Although Athenian citizens were familiar with the several myths that were disseminated in the cultural life of Ancient Greece, they attended the performances at theatrical festivals to not just know which version of this religiosity would be performed, but also to be aware of the socio-political views that would be expressed in these performances. The audience not only contemplated mythological perspectives and religiosity in itself, but also observed the cultural and, most importantly, political uses of these myths in the theater, according to particular interests and strategies.

Within academic research, it is necessary to critically analyze the historiographical perspectives that have become traditional in the analyses about the Classical theater (mainly, the Athenian theater). Therefore, we refer to studies conducted by authors such as Jean-Pierre Vernant, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Claude Mossé, and Jacqueline de Romilly,⁴ who, due to academic practices and discussions in their own context, have proposed philosophical and general ideas about Greek theater and “the Greek man,” who has lost their complex characteristics as a historical subject. The idea of the emergence of a tragic conscience and a tragic man (Vernant; Vidal-Naquet, 1977, p.9) and the role of theater in purely mythological analyses have led to the perception of a *polis* based on social cohesion and political and democratic unity.

For this reason, this study proposes an alternative perspective on both theater studies and the structured perception of the political space in Ancient Greece, which is simplistic when contrasted with social practices. Taking into account the dynamism of the Athenian society, which must be examined from its diverse perspectives (mainly, institutional perspectives), we understand the multiplicity of political approaches through citizens’ ideas and actions. These ideas and actions result from various strategies: the

de defender posições particulares de poder. Uma *hetaireía* pode passar de um simples grupo político a uma *synomosía*, ou seja, a um grupo de descontentes que confabula contra o regime vigente em sua *pólis*.”

³ Theatrical liturgies were called *choregia*.

⁴ Some notable studies are *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (Vernant; Vidal-Naquet, 1977), *Citizen in Ancient Greece* (Mossé, 1993), and *A tragédia grega* (Romilly, 1998).

accomplishment of their activities in public service, the gaps in their persuasive interests—as indicated by discourse—, and the existence of groups with mutual interests that compete for political power.

Regarding *liturgiai* (liturgies), Claude Mossé affirmed that “Certain roles were designated to the wealthiest citizens, who would put their fortunes at the service of their community. (...) Being nominated by the city to provide a liturgy was an honor in which the chosen ones would take great pride, especially before the court (...)”⁵ (Mossé, 2004, p.192).⁶ Essentially, wealth was directly related to the official perspective disseminated by the State, in which the social, political, and cultural merit of serving the Athenian community was grounded on the donation of a portion of one’s fortune. These donations, in the form of liturgies, were given to certain institutions headed by the eponymous archon. Among them, there were the *trierarchy* (liturgy to fund warfare) and the *choregia*, which funded theatrical productions, mainly to cover the costs of chorus formation.

Although it was one of the costliest liturgies (Csapo; Slater, 2001, p.139) and one of the greatest contributions, the *choregia* had political support and power in a space that favored dedication and (financial) commitment to one of the greatest institutions of Ancient Greece—the theater—due to the visibility and socio-political importance it held. In dramatic competitions, the honor of participants relied on conquering the crown and having their names immortalized in *choregoi* recordings—as attested by the epigraph inscription coded *IG II² 2318* (Millis; Olson, 2012, pp.5-58).⁷

⁵ In Portuguese: “Assim eram designadas certas funções a cargo dos cidadãos mais ricos, que colocavam suas fortunas a serviço da comunidade. (...) Ser designado pela cidade para exercer uma liturgia era uma honra de que se vangloriavam os escolhidos, sobretudo perante os tribunais (...)”

⁶ Once a year, the city-state would nominate citizens for public positions in charge of funding the city’s main activities by paying *liturgiai*, i.e., liturgies. These liturgies were provided to the theater (the choregic system, the origin of the word “chorus,” a fundamental element of Greek theater, and thus the contributor was called *choregos*—or *choregoi*, in the plural form), warfare (the *trierarchia*, the origin of the word “trireme,” the ships sailed by the Greek in the Ancient period), and sports (the *gymnasiarchia*, the origin of the word “gymnasium”).

⁷ This epigraph inscription, also named *fasti*, was so called for translating the chronological records of external participants (the eponymous archons who organized the festivals of each period) and internal participants of each year’s victorious productions in the Great Dionysia festival. It consisted of eleven items, which were arranged, since the early 5th century, as follows: “(Item 1) the eponymous archon’s name; (Item 2) the name of the tribe that took the prize in the boys’ dithyramb; (Item 3) the name of the victorious *choregos* in the boys’ dithyramb; (Item 4) the name of the tribe that took the prize in the men’s dithyramb; (Item 5) the name of the victorious *choregos* in the men’s dithyramb; (Item 6) the notice ΚΩΜΩΙΑΔΩΝ (“of the comic poets”); (Item 7) the name of the victorious comic *choregos*; (Item 8) the name of the victorious comic didaskalos (poet); (Item 9) the notice ΤΡΑΓΩΔΙΑΩΝ (“of the tragic poets”); (Item 10) the name of the victorious tragic *choregos*; and (Item 11) the name of the victorious tragic didaskalos (poet)” (Millis; Olson, 2012, p.6).

In this regard, the significance of the *choregia* was twofold. On the one hand, it revealed the State's ideals grounded on aristocratic discourse, characterized by the honor of providing for artistic endeavors of great social relevance. On the other hand, it revealed an individual aspiration for the perpetuation of political power. According to David Wiles, the individual ambitions of the traditional aristocracy from the 6th and the early 5th century BC were confined to the development of political practices that aimed at what gradually became the practices of the Athenian democracy (Wiles, 2000, p.51). For that reason, these ambitions should strive for an ideal of providing for and managing the *polis* as a whole, not just family groups (2000, p.51). Over time, as oligarchies established by wealthy merchants became eligible to act as *choregos*, this system started to be structured with a strong appeal for political power struggles. However, the symbology of a democratic ideal through the practice of *choregia* constituted and defined its representativeness in the social life of Classical Athens.

As stated by Marcel Mauss, the sole economic contributions of societies—which he describes as “primitive,” “archaic,” or precedent for ours—provide the basis for a multitude of institutions. This happens through the union of religious, legal, and—most importantly—moral perspectives of political and family or group life, which define what the author calls “total social phenomena”⁸ (Mauss, 2003, p.187). This definition of intrinsic social relations helps us understand the meaning of voluntary tax payments, such as liturgies in Athens. These payments were perceived as gifts in a system that was not based on the market system, as it is currently known, but on the expectation of retribution (Mauss, 2003, p.188). In this regard, the public *charis*, which symbolizes the “community’s sense of obligation or gratitude towards individual contributors” (Makres, 2014, p.72), is the general and abstract result expected by the *choregoi* after these payments.

Mauss aids the analyses about the *choregia* as he broadens the scope of the most widespread economic liberal and functionalist perspective. In this context, the individual who provides the payment and the ones who are benefited from it have, as in a gift-exchange system, the “obligation to give” and, consequently, the “obligation to receive” in an involuntary reciprocity system within the social contract (Mauss, 2003, p.200).

⁸ In Portuguese: “fenômenos sociais totais.”

However, the obligation to receive is not restricted to the play's audience or to those who attend the public assemblies (who automatically owe gratitude to the *choregoi*). It includes mainly poets whose artistic works reveal their commitment to their financial supporters. As a result, the messages of stage plays showed signs of the domination of the *choregoi* and the social groups to which they belonged.

The political power given to the *choregoi* was not limited to the systematic role of training and organizing their chorus's activities. "Prestige, honor, and victory" were essential pieces of this game—the so-called "prestige economy," as noted by Peter Wilson (2000, p.71)—, which raised their socio-political status. In this regard, Wilson draws attention to the volunteers who requested the inclusion of their names in the next *choregiai*, including poorer citizens who could borrow financial resources to fulfill their duties (Wilson, 2000, p.53).

The choregoi's influence over theater production was so pervasive that, during most of the 5th century BC, play directors were poets themselves (which is why *didaskaloi* means both),⁹ but, throughout the 4th century BC, others would be appointed as directors (Pickard-Cambridge, 1953, p.91), and the *choregoi* were directly responsible for hiring these individuals, who probably had to work under the instructions of their financial supporters.¹⁰ In general, *philotimia* (desire for public honor) and *philonikia* (desire for winning competitions)¹¹ justified both the extravagance of the *choregoi* (Wilson, 2000, pp.145-146) and the establishment of an *agones*¹² spirit among social groups in the poetic and political-economic domains.

Greek drama was developed during the transition from an aristocratic rural society into a democratic urban society, whose traditional members were gradually encouraged to compete for power under a novel civic ideology. As urban development advanced during the Classical period (starting in the 5th century BC), many merchants and

⁹ In fact, the term *didaskalos* means "master," "the one who shares knowledge." It could be applied to teachers, poets—who shared knowledge through their works—, and theater directors—who were responsible for supervising the people involved in theatrical productions.

¹⁰ Peter Wilson claimed that the *choregoi* were solely responsible for appointing a "direction assistant" (*hypodidaskalos*) (Wilson, 2000, p.83). However, Demosthenes' speech titled *Against Meidias* suggests that it was possible to hire directors. His speech mentions an individual named Sannio, who was hired as a *didaskalos* by a "powerful" *choregos* named Theozotides (Demosthenes, XXI, 58-59).

¹¹ Both *philotimia* and *philonikia* have the radical *philo*, which means "love" or "desire." *Philotimia* means "love for honor" (*time*, in Ancient Greek), and *philonikia* means "love for competing and conquering victory" (where *nike* is victory).

¹² *Agones*, the plural form of *agon*, means "dispute," "conflict," or "competition."

foreigners turned into a wealthy elite and started to compete for political and socio-cultural power, using theater as an open field for these competitions. Among the most well-known aristocrats, Pericles was a great statesman who funded the tragedy *The Persians* by Aeschylus (*Persai*, 472 BC) as a *choregos*. It justified the Athenian grandiosity in the Greco-Persian Wars—the intentions of the statesman in joint work with the playwright.

During the battles against the Persians, the Athenian authority evoked discontent from the Greek people in other regions, sparking the Peloponnesian War in the Peloponnese, which joined Sparta against the Athenian military power. This new war lasted from 431 BC until 404 BC, when Athens was defeated. It intensified the political struggles, mainly in the Athenian region, which was already weakened by the end of this period, marked by oligarchic coups associated with Sparta (in 411 and 404 BC). The comedy *The Frogs* by Aristophanes, written in 405 BC, is characterized by the events resulting from these coups and all the conflicts between aristocrats and new oligarchs in pursuit of political power. Furthermore, the play describes the period when the most renowned Greek playwrights had already passed away.

Some notable individuals from this historical period were Alcibiades, of the Alcmaeonidae family, a traditional aristocratic family from Athens, who had a volatile presence in the political field; Cleophon, an aristocrat who took a stance against the oligarchs; Taureas, a new rich; Thrasylbulus, an Athenian general during the Peloponnesian War and a trierarch (ship commander) in Samos, who was politically aligned with Alcibiades; Phrynichus, an Athenian general who had a prominent role in the oligarchic coup and thus was considered a traitor. Furthermore, certain citizens were in some way connected to the choregic institution during this frantic historical period. Others were cited either positively or negatively in stage plays, notably in comedies such as *The Frogs*. Many of these citizens were associated with political factions, i.e., groups that sought political power.

Regarding these issues, as an example from the late 5th century BC, it is possible to analyze Andocides'¹³ oration in his speech *Against Alcibiades*, delivered in a public

¹³ Andocides was a speech writer, not a professional orator. He “(...) participated during the Peloponnesian conflicts in the mutilation of the *hérmai* on the eve of the departure of the Athenian expedition against Sicily in 415 BC. Although he saved his life by becoming an informant, he was sentenced to a partial loss of civil rights and forced to leave Athens. (...) he became involved in commercial activities and returned to Athens under the general amnesty that followed the restoration of democracy (403 BC), even filling some

assembly in 415 BC. His speech suggests that Alcibiades had more prestige than Taureas, his rival in *choregia*, under the dispute for honor. Among assembly representatives, there were the history of great liturgy contributions of rivals in *choregia*, their generosity with the city, their ancestry, the quality of their oratory, and their experience with warfare matters (Wilson, 2000, p.148). All of these characteristics might have been associated with Alcibiades:

Then again, remember Taureas who competed against Alcibiades as Choregus of a chorus of boys. The law allows the ejection of any member whatsoever of a competing chorus who is not of Athenian birth, and it is forbidden to resist any attempt at such ejection. Yet in your presence, in the presence of the other Greeks who were looking on, and before all the magistrates in Athens, Alcibiades drove off Taureas with his fists. The spectators showed their sympathy with Taureas and their hatred of Alcibiades by applauding the one chorus and refusing to listen to the other at all. Yet Taureas was none the better off for that. Partly from fear, partly from subservience, the judges pronounced Alcibiades the victor, treating him as more important than their oath. And it seems to me only natural that the judges should thus seek favour with Alcibiades, when they could see that Taureas, who had spent so vast a sum, was being subjected to insults, while his rival, who showed such contempt for the law, was all-powerful. The blame lies with you. You refuse to punish insolence (...) (Andocides, IV, 20-21).

Andocides's complaints reveal that, due to the representation of political power, what is instituted can be infringed by socio-political hierarchy impositions, even though they stem from the official status of *choregia* in Athenian theater festivals. In his speech, Andocides denounced the exorbitant prestige of certain *choregoi* to the detriment of the law. In other instances, even when there is compliance with the law, this prestige can be noted in the determination of interests in the political dispute.

In this regard, it is necessary to emphasize the role of the State, under the rule of the eponymous archon, in the selection of those responsible for liturgies, i.e., funding to accomplish determinations and duties. During this process, due to the great costs of the *choregia*, the chosen candidate could request an *antidosis*.¹⁴ Through an antidosis, the candidate could switch roles with a wealthier individual or, if preferred, the candidate

important posts. In 391 BC, he was one of the ambassadors sent to Sparta to discuss peace terms, but the negotiations failed. Oligarchic in his sympathies, he offended his own group and generated distrust among Democrats" (Weiss, 2012, p.5).

¹⁴ *Antidosis* means "exchange" in Ancient Greek. To pay a liturgy, one could either exchange property with a wealthier citizen or ask them to bear the financial costs.

could exchange their property with another individual and use it to pay for the liturgy. To do so, the candidate could defend their stance by highlighting their exhaustive contributions in previous liturgies or their previous exchanges with other individuals.¹⁵ However, although the *antidosis* was a standard procedure, the representatives of the *choregia* frequently requested it as a strategy to overcome their political enemies, turning this arrangement into a tool of political dispute.

Furthermore, in the theater, political alliances were created and recreated on the stage. Theatrical performances had the active participation of spectators who praised (or not) the plays and those involved according to their own interests and values. This directly influenced debate results in assemblies after the festivals. According to Josiah Ober, in assemblies, the jury allowed, for example, fictional reenactments of what litigants were experiencing for direct use of theater as a tool for court decisions (Ober, 1989, pp.153-154).

Such strategies were particularly noticeable in the *hetaireia* (political factions), even though these groups did not openly reveal their existence or their interests. According to Ober, orators tried to present themselves as belonging “(...) to various elite status groups but never as belonging to an organized group of politicians that advocated special interests.” (Ober, 1989, p.123). Besides differing from factions in their insubordination to any given political regime, as stated by Loraux (2006, p.24), the *hetaireia* had even more characteristics that ensured their confidentiality. It was part of the persuasion game to hide their interests in their discourse, including in theatrical productions.

2 The Political Factions in the Historical Context

In his speech *On the Mysteries* (I, 13-18), from 415 BC, Andocides mentions certain political group associations. While exposing a list of names, he denounced the

¹⁵ According to Aristotle: “[The *archon*] deals with their claims for substitution by exchange of property [*antidosis*], and brings forward their claims to exemption on the ground of having performed that public service before, or of being exempt because of having performed another service and the period of exemption not having expired, or of not being of the right age (for a man serving as chorus-leader for the boys must be over forty)” ARISTOTLE. Athenian Constitution. *Perseus Digital Library*. Tufts University: Medford, 2022. Available at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0046>. Accessed on 29 ago. 2022. Original reference in Portuguese: (Aristóteles, *Constituição de Atenas*, 56. 3). More on this topic: (Pickard-Cambridge, 1953, p.87); (Csapo; Slater, 2001, p.140); (Mossé, 2004, p.192).

existence of three of them, each with distinct political interests. Andocides, then, acted as a *sycophant*,¹⁶ exposing the people responsible for the mutilation of the herms (the *hermai*). This transgression happened in 415 BC, beyond the parody of the Eleusinian Mysteries—an initiation rite in service of the goddesses Demeter and Persephone in Attica. The mutilation of the herms resulted from a vow made by the factions (a *synomosia*) to attest to the fidelity of their members.

One of them was Alcibiades' group (Andocides, I, 13; 17-18). It was a political association that comprised multiple interests since it was formed by both aristocrats from traditional families and metics. Initially, this group aimed to build alliances with Persia to bargain for political power in Athens during the Peloponnesian War against the Spartans, which preceded the development of an oligarchic regime.

In 411 BC, democracy was suppressed by a coup led by the oligarchs known as the Four Hundred. According to Thucydides, this coup had the support of the *hetaireia*. The historian describes the extent of the conspiracy against Athens, whose members were part of political groups (VIII, 48. 2-4). Although it all had started with a scheme developed by Alcibiades, it was led by the Four Hundred, excluding citizens of Athens, including Alcibiades, who organized meetings with Persia.

Then, according to Andocides' accusation from 415 BC, Alcibiades' political faction started to be divided into two groups: the traditional aristocracy on one side and

¹⁶ “The sycophants were almost professional accusers. The Athenian justice actively ignored the public prosecution, which, in the name of the city-state, prosecuted those who threatened the State's security. As a result, the public interest defence was left in the hands of citizens, who had the right to prosecute whoever they believed could potentially threaten the city's interests.(...) in Athens, some individuals supposedly turned this form of accusation into an occupation, in the hope of profiting from it, either from receiving part of the fine the accused was condemned to pay, (...) from receiving a bribe from the accused to withdraw the accusation, or from serving the interests of an influential politician in exchange for a salary. (...) The sycophants were certainly one of the black marks of Athenian democracy. Therefore, the city adopted measures to limit the effects of this practice derived from its judicial system. So, the accusers who withdrew their accusations without reason could be fined, as well as those who did not receive more than a fifth of affirmative votes during a prosecution” (Mossé, 2004, pp.256-257). In Portuguese: “Os sicofantas eram acusadores quase profissionais. A justiça ateniense, com efeito, ignorava o ministério público, que, em nome da cidade-estado, moveria processos contra os que atentassem à segurança do Estado. Sendo assim, a defesa dos interesses públicos era deixada a qualquer cidadão e todos tinham o direito de mover uma ação contra quem julgassem atentar contra os interesses da cidade. (...) em Atenas, alguns indivíduos teriam feito desse tipo de acusação uma especialidade, esperando lucrar com isso, seja ao receber parte da multa que o acusado fosse condenado a pagar, (...) seja fazendo-se comprar pelo acusado para retirar a queixa, seja ainda servindo aos interesses de um político influente ao agir por sua conta em troca de um salário. (...) Os sicofantas eram seguramente um dos pontos negros da democracia ateniense. Assim, a cidade previra disposições próprias para limitar os efeitos de uma prática ligada à própria organização judiciária. O acusador que renunciasse sem razão a sua ação, portanto, podia ser multado, assim como quem não obtivesse um quinto de votos favoráveis por ocasião de um processo.”

the new rich and the metics on the other. The Four Hundred preferred to proceed with the alliance with Sparta instead of following Alcibiades' plans to form an alliance with Persia (Thucydides, VIII, 71). Alongside Alcibiades were citizens such as Thrasybulus, who aided his return to Athens and opposed the Four Hundred (VIII, 76).

By the end of 405 BC, Sparta blocked Piraeus (the port of Athens), which caused a period of starvation in the Athenian polis (Chamoux, 2003, p.91). Then, the Thirty Tyrants were installed in Athens from 404 to 403 BC, which marked the end of the Peloponnesian War. In this context, although Alcibiades was favorable to negotiating with Persia, he had the advantage of adopting a democratic discourse. Being an aristocrat in defense of Athens and holding on to his values were appropriate when opposition to the oligarchic coups was preferred—even though he seemed interested in participating in them before.

In light of these events, what can we think of the actions of the political factions in the Athenian theater of that period? What meanings are present in the Aristophanic comedy of 405 BC considering its historical context?

3 An Analysis of the Comedy *The Frogs*

We adopted discourse analysis as the methodological tool to conduct an in-depth analysis of the play *The Frogs*. The concepts and procedures of discourse analysis proposed by Eni Orlandi are used as the basis of the analysis of the play,¹⁷ including its subtexts, which reveal the influence of socio-political groups in its production. As Orlandi states, “the imaginary is necessarily part of the functions of language. It is effective. It does not emerge from nothing: it is installed in the way social relations are inscribed in history and ruled (...) by power relations”¹⁸ (Orlandi, 2001, p.42).

In this dramatic work, the *narrator subject* is Aristophanes from Athens. He lived sometime between 445 and 385 BC. He came from a wealthy family and was probably acquainted with the rural area on the island of Aegina. Aristophanes was considered one of the main representatives of what is called the “Old Comedy” and the main playwright

¹⁷ The concepts of Eni Orlandi analyzed here are written in italics.

¹⁸ In Portuguese: “O imaginário faz necessariamente parte do funcionamento da linguagem. Ele é eficaz. Ele não ‘brota’ do nada: assenta-se no modo como as relações sociais se inscrevem na história e são regidas (...) por relações de poder.”

of the Ancient history. His plays are still well known by modern audiences. He was popular in Athens, and *The Frogs* won the festival of 405 BC.

The *textuality* of the play revolves around Athens and the political dispute between two political positions between the poets Aeschylus and Euripides. Thus, we are introduced to two different social segments: the traditional aristocracy and the values of a new oligarchy. The comedy denounced the end of Athenian prestige and hegemony after the Peloponnesian War in the late 5th century BC.

As its *discourse object*, the play evokes a comic, jesting, and satirical motif. Aristophanes introduces us to the god Dionysus, who is discontent with the Athenian artistic scene in 405 BC and the death of three of the main tragic playwrights of the city (Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides). He decides to go to Hades and bring one of them back. There, Aeschylus and Euripides fight each other for the throne: a sit beside Pluto (the god of death), in homage to the greatest tragic playwright who had ever lived. Dionysus becomes the judge of the dispute and takes it as an opportunity to choose who deserved to be brought back to life. To do so, he asks them questions about politics in Athens at that time. Contrary to his initial ideas, which seemed to favor Euripides, Dionysus decides to take Aeschylus with him.

As the *starting elements* of the play, we see the final years of the 5th century BC, the transformations caused by the Peloponnesian War, and the oligarchy's ascension to power. This context reflects the dispute between political factions and the debate around the advantages and disadvantages of continuing the war. Moreover, for Aristophanes, the dead tragic playwrights represented the pride and power of Athens in the plays they wrote at the beginning of the Classical period. Aristophanes used this play to show the audience his appreciation for these poets and to find answers to the crisis that had fallen upon his polis at the time.

It is possible to observe the *interdiscourse* between Aristophanes' play and Thucydides' remarks about the *History of the Peloponnesian War* (Thucydides, VIII). According to Eni Orlandi, although they belong to different genres (literary and historical), this interdiscourse is indirectly present in the deductive progression of both texts. The political and historical discussions in Thucydides' work provide continuity to Aristophanes' play in terms of discourse. Therefore, for Orlandi, Thucydides' remarks give a certain level of coherence to Aristophanes' comedy. The meanings of words stem

from a greater meaning that was socially built, which substantiates the notion of aristocratic Athenian pride.¹⁹ This does not change the nature of *The Frogs* as a comedy, whose basic intention is to make people laugh. However, it presented a political discourse to the theater's audience in 405 BC. Orlandi states that interdiscourse precedes "(...) the spoken word, elsewhere, independently. It is what we call discursive memory: the discursive knowledge that enables any speech and returns, pre-constructed, what was already spoken, which is speakable and bases each floor-taking"²⁰ (Orlandi, 2001, p.31).

Thus, the *History of the Peloponnesian War* (Thucydides, VIII) supports the political discussions that Aristophanes evokes in *The Frogs*. The historiographical work validates the debate surrounding the process and the historical figures that Aristophanes analyzes through Dionysus, the coryphaeus, and the chorus' lines. As a *discursive memory*, the comedy includes the coryphaeus' lines, such as "brightest of its citizens" (v. 719-720), "noble and virtuous" (v. 727), and "you dimwits, change your ways" (v. 734). These lines are surrounded by solemn discourses of aristocratic tradition, which denounces the Athenian crisis concerning the political leadership at the time of *The Frogs*. The so-called "noble and virtuous" were the main reference in the classical documents about the aristocracy. All this symbology was used in the discourse of Aristophanes' play.

In *The Frogs*, Aristophanes shares socio-political and cultural ideas with Aeschylus. He establishes an *intertextuality* with his works, most notably *The Persians* (472 BC), which covers the defeat of Xerxes I army against the Greek at the Battle of Salamis. Aeschylus emphasizes the Persians' imprudence under Xerxes command in contrast with the organization and prudence of the Greek—especially the Athenians. Such acclaim is present in Aristophanes' comedy as well. He dignifies the Athenian aristocracy in opposition to the new political leaders, many of whom represented the foreign command over Athenian politics.

In addition to the discursive repetition in favor of the traditional aristocracy (as in Thucydides), in this relationship between Aeschylus' and Aristophanes' works, it is

¹⁹ Thucydides describes the meaning of the conflicts of the Peloponnesian War from the political point of view of an Athenian soldier (*hoplita*) and what he believed to be the historical meaning of it. In the episodes, he describes Athens' grandiosity praising the Athenian side of the war and disregards other perspectives such as Homer's and Herodotus' (Vargas, 2017, pp.61-89).

²⁰ In Portuguese: "(...) fala antes, em outro lugar, independentemente. Ou seja, é o que chamamos memória discursiva: o saber discursivo que torna possível todo dizer e que retorna, sob a forma do pré-construído, o já dito, que está na base do dizível, sustentando cada tomada da palavra."

possible to observe its *paraphrase*. Or, as defined by Orlandi, its “(...) meaning matrix, because there is no meaning without repetition, without support from discursive knowledge”²¹ (Orlandi, 2009, p.38). As a paraphrase, it is possible to note that Aristophanes repeatedly praises the honesty of citizenship. He criticizes those who use it for their own benefit, causing a crisis in Athens.

Through the use of metatheater, Aristophanes urged the audience to think about the structure of a comedy. He did so by criticizing the common methods comic playwrights used to cause laughter. In this manner, he proposed a dialog between different political stances through the aesthetic discourse of tragic poets within the play’s plot. The *polysemy* of *The Frogs*—or, in other words, its innovation—is based on the comic aesthetic construction of a tragic poetic *agon*. It was constructed not by the Greek tragic plays, but by the speeches of the deceased tragic playwrights as characters of the play.

In addition to this comic aspect, Aristophanes adds a humorous tone to the god Dionysus. The representation of Dionysus in *The Frogs* translates, through ridicule, the chaos that Athens was facing in 405 BC. The return of Dionysus to Hades, by the end of the play, reflects this re-emergence of order that should not have ended. The feminine attire that Dionysus wears, associated with the satirical language, pervades his comic characterization, mainly at the beginning of the play. This emphasizes Dionysus’ search for his identity amid the character’s conflicts. This is most noticeable during the contentious dialogs with the slave Xanthias. Throughout the play, Aristophanes presents the coryphaeus’ lines—the one responsible for transmitting the events of the play to the audience. He introduces Hades and the chorus, comprised of those initiated in the Eleusinian Mysteries, who welcome the deceased into the underworld:

CORYPHEUS

It is right and just for our sacred chorus to advise and teach what’s good for the city. So first it seems best to us to equalize the citizens and take away their fears. And if anyone went astray, tripped by the wrestling moves of Phrynichus, I say it should be possible for those who slipped up then to plead their cause and erase their previous mistakes. Because it’s disgraceful that those who fought just once at sea should suddenly be Plataeans and masters instead of slaves. (...) But letting up on your anger, you who are wisest in nature, let’s gladly make everyone our kinsman and full-fledged citizens too, who’s ever fought for us at sea.

²¹ In Portuguese: “(...) matriz de sentido, pois não há sentido sem repetição, sem sustentação no saber discursivo.”

But if we swell up with pride at this, and give the city airs, especially since we're in the grasp of the waves, in time to come again well get a reputation for stupidity (Aristophanes, *Bátrachoi*, v. 686-705).²²

Here Aristophanes states the basis of the chorus, which is as serious as the coryphaeus: it expresses what should be known and done in the city. Phrynichus, one of the leaders of the oligarchic movement from 411 BC, is condemned as a deceiver to the population. In regard to Phrynichus, Thucydides would define him as the main opponent of Alcibiades' ideas in 415 BC, when he tried to return to Athens after the Eleusinian parodies of which he was accused (Thucydides, VIII, 48). In addition to this perspective about Phrynichus, Aristophanes associates the idea of citizenship and equal rights directly with the participants of the Peloponnesian War. He connects them with political values about war (a prominent perspective in the Classical period), associating it with honesty and moral humility.

CORYPHEUS

Many times it seems to us the city has done the same thing with the best and the brightest of its citizens as with the old coinage and the new gold currency. For these, not counterfeit at all, but the finest it seems of all coins, and the only ones of the proper stamp, of resounding metal amongst Greeks and foreigners everywhere, we never use, but the inferior bronze ones instead, minted just yesterday or the day before with the basest stamp. So too the citizens whom we know to be noble and virtuous, and righteous and true men of quality and trained in the palaestra and dancing and music, these we despise, but the brazen foreigners and redheads worthless sons of worthless fathers, these we use for everything, these latest parvenus, whom the city before this wouldn't have lightly used even for random scapegoats. But now, you dimwits, change your ways, and employ the good ones again. And if you succeed, it's praiseworthy. But if you stumble, at least you'll hang from a respectable tree — So wise men will think, if anything happens to you (Aristophanes, *Bátrachoi*, v. 718-737).

The coryphaeus' lines clearly show Aristophanes' defense of the aristocrats in power. It is a strong indication that a group of aristocrats funded the production of *The Frogs*:

²² In the Portuguese version of this article, all citations of *The Frogs* come from the translation by Américo da Costa Ramalho. In the English version, they all come from the translation by Matthew Dillon. ARISTOPHANES. *The Frogs*. *Perseus Digital Library*. Tufts University: Medford, 2022. Available at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0032>. Accessed on 29 Aug. 2022.

XANTHIAS

(...) What's all this noise inside and shouting and abuse?

AEACUS

That's Euripides and Aeschylus. (...) Big, big trouble's stirring among the dead, and nasty civil war. (...) There is a custom established here, in all the great and noble arts that the best man in his own field of talent gets his meals in the Town Hall, and the seat next to Pluto... (Aristophanes, *Bátrachoi*, v. 756-764).

Pluto's servant is the character that represents the link between Euripides and Aeschylus' dispute—for the poetic honor of sitting beside the ruler of the underworld—and a presumed revolution. It indicates that Euripides was revolutionary since the seat belonged to Aeschylus. It is possible to note a parallel with the development of the oligarchic movement since 411 BC. Furthermore, the Aristophanic underworld has characteristics of the Athenian bureaucratic conduct, such as the establishment of the prytaneion, where certain citizens were fed and named honorary citizens. Then, the play progresses to the poetic dispute between Euripides and Aeschylus.

Aristophanes portrays Euripides' poetic position by criticizing Aeschylus' traditional views: first, when he refers to Homeric characters, hiding their faces and making them silent midway through the play; then, when he exalts the chorus and uses an overly erudite language to address the public (Aristophanes, *Bátrachoi*, v. 908-915 / 924-927). The author recognizes Aeschylus as a figure that was part of a period of appreciation of courage, luxury, and connection between citizenship and war. These moral issues are traditional in Classical Athens.

In contrast, through Aeschylus' lines, Euripides is portrayed as a bad example for Athenian citizens. He was not a good reference regarding the taxes on warships and obedience to the social hierarchy (an important factor for aristocratic values). Besides, Euripides might have incited deceivers into the city (*Bátrachoi*, v. 1053-1054 / 1059-1067 / 1071-1086). Based on the perspective of both poets, Dionysus presents, then, his questions and his objective in Hades:

DIONYSUS

I came down here for a poet. (...) So that the city might be saved to stage its choruses. So whichever of you will give the state some useful advice, that's the one I think I'll take. Now first, concerning Alcibiades, what opinion does each of you have? For the city is in heavy labor (Aristophanes, *Bátrachoi*, v. 1418-1423).

With Dionysus' lines, Aristophanes ties the poetic position with a political position in a definitive way. This connection defines the play's progression. Then, the inquired poets give their answers:

EURIPIDES

I hate that citizen, who, to help his fatherland, seems slow, but swift to do great harm, of profit to himself, but useless to the state.

(...)

AESCHYLUS

You should not rear a lion cub in the city, [best not to rear a lion in the city,] but if one is brought up, accommodate its ways.

(...)

EURIPIDES

If we distrusted those citizens in whom we now place confidence, and employed those we don't use now, we would be saved. If we now are suffering under the present circumstances, why wouldn't we be saved by doing the opposite?

(...)

AESCHYLUS

As to the state, now tell me, first, what people does she employ? The good ones, perhaps?

DIONYSUS

Where'd you get that idea? She hates them worst of all—

AESCHYLUS

But loves the scoundrels?

DIONYSUS

No, she really doesn't. She uses them perforce.

AESCHYLUS

How could anyone save such a city, that likes neither finespun wool nor scratchy goatskin? (...) When they consider the land of the enemy to be their own, and their own the enemy's, their ships a revenue, and their revenue a loss (Aristophanes, *Bátrachoi*, v. 1427-1431b / 1447-1450 / 1453-1465).

Alcibiades is positioned as the aristocratic figure to whom Aristophanes poses a question. Despite his noble origin and the strength of his political leadership, he dealt with issues according to his own interests when he allied with Persia before the end of the Peloponnesian War. The presence of a chorus in Hades—composed of the *mystai*, those initiated in the Eleusinian Mysteries of the goddess Demeter (Ramalho, 2008, pp.13; 26)—expresses this general distrust by means of Alcibiades, as he participated in the sacrilegious parodies of mutilation of the herms in 415 BC. Furthermore, Aristophanes' question refers to the fact that Alcibiades was condemned to exile for not collecting the soldiers' bodies after the Battle of Arginusae in 406 BC.

So, in *The Frogs*, Euripides is posed against Alcibiades, while Aeschylus, despite the disadvantages, is favorable to him in the political arena. Despite his inquiries, through Dionysus' questions, Aristophanes proposes an alternative perspective about Alcibiades. His intent becomes clear when Dionysus decides to revive Aeschylus:

PLUTO

(*Returning with Dionysus and Aeschylus*) Well then, farewell, Aeschylus, go and save our city with noble sentiments, and educate the dunces. There's plenty of them. And take this sword and give it to Cleophon, and this rope to the tax collectors. (...) And tell them to come to me here quickly and not to delay. And if they don't come quickly, by Apollo I'll brand and hobble them and with Adeimantus son of Leucolophus I'll send them quickly under the ground.

(...)

CORYPHEUS

(...) But let Cleophon and anyone else who wants to, fight in their ancestral fields (Aristophanes, *Bátrachoi*, v. 1500-1513).

Pluto's line illustrates Dionysus' return with Aeschylus to the living world. Aristophanes appoints him as the advisor and the responsible person for charging the politicians considered enemies of peace with Sparta (such as Cleophon) and those considered future traitors of Athens. He emphasizes the importance of liturgies and states that their absence is inexcusable. The essence of Aristophanes' play seems to be the union of the old allies of Athens on the leadership of the city State. This is evident considering the crisis caused by the Peloponnesian War and the dangers of the Persian rule.

Aeschylus' answer to Dionysus' question is, then, decisive to understanding that Alcibiades, albeit distrusted, was favored by Aristophanes during the events of the late 5th century BC in Athens. Although Alcibiades had attempted an alliance with the Persians in 415 BC, he changed his political position, mainly because of the crises that happened during the conflicts. Therefore, *The Frogs* suggests that, in a political dispute, he adopted a position that was favorable to the Athenian traditional aristocracy in 405 BC.

In general, Aristophanes explores the disputes between poets not only in terms of their aesthetic positions, but also political. This reveals the *hetaireia* of the tragic playwrights, because, according to Eric Csapo, "(...) the power and the repercussion of this debate, at least for the Athenian audience, surpassed merely dramatic values.

Aeschylus and Euripides represented positions, not poets”²³ (Csapo, 2008, p.150). About the role of the poets within the comedy, Csapo stated that “Aeschylus represented the tradition and values of a heroic past. Euripides represented modern values (...)”²⁴ (Csapo, 2008, p.151). According to Foivos Karachalios, “many scholars have argued that he [Euripides] is presented as related to the new politicians mentioned in the parabasis of *The Frogs*”²⁵ (Karachalios, 2010, p.10).²⁶

To understand Aeschylus’ and Euripides’ positions in the Aristophanic play, it is necessary to analyze them with the playwright’s own methods of discursive representation. During that historical moment marked by oligarchic coups, the “values of a glorious past,” incited by Aeschylus’ lines and later confirmed by Dionysus’ and Pluto’s lines, must be based on and imposed by the speaker to the audience, without *reversibility* in the interlocution dynamics between the tragic playwrights. Therefore, Aeschylus’ character represents an *authoritarian discourse*. In contrast, the perspective of modern values and new politicians in Euripides’ lines represents a *controversial discourse*—as per Eni Orlandi’s analytical approach—since it represents values that are strange to Athens. According to Orlandi:

Controversial discourse is that in which reversibility occurs under certain conditions and the discourse object is present. It is constrained by participants’ perspectives, who take it in a particular direction, given that polysemy is controlled. Exaggeration is represented by insult. The *authoritarian discourse* is that in which reversibility tends to zero and the discourse object is hidden. There is an exclusive discourse agent, and polysemy is restrained. Exaggeration is represented by order in a military sense, that is, the subordination to command (Orlandi, 1987, p.154).²⁷

²³ In Portuguese: “(...) o poder e a repercussão desse debate, pelo menos para a plateia ateniense, foram bem além de valores meramente dramáticos. Ésquilo e Eurípides representavam posições, e não poetas.”

²⁴ In Portuguese: “Ésquilo representava a tradição e os valores de um passado heroico. Eurípides representava a modernidade dos valores (...)”

²⁵ The parabasis is the moment when the chorus interrupts the play and addresses the audience directly to discuss social and political topics.

²⁶ Some scholars mentioned by Karachalios are Hubbard (1991, pp.209-210), Padilla (1992, p.378), and Slater (2002, p.193).

²⁷ In Portuguese: “*Discurso polêmico*: é aquele em que a reversibilidade se dá sob certas condições e em que o objeto do discurso está presente, mas sob perspectivas particularizantes dadas pelos participantes que procuram lhe dar uma direção, sendo que a polissemia é controlada. O exagero é a injúria. *Discurso autoritário*: é aquele em que a reversibilidade tende a zero, estando o objeto do discurso oculto pelo dizer, havendo um agente exclusivo do discurso e a polissemia contida. O exagero é a ordem no sentido militar, isto é, o assujeitamento ao comando.”

If a discursive object is acknowledged as the political interests of social agents in Athens in the late 5th century BC, Euripides positions his discursive object in the subtexts and particularities of his lines, which validate new values that differ from tradition. However, Aeschylus' discourse seems to hide aristocratic political interests. He conveys them under a democratic veil, even though they are imperative in Aristophanes' play. Aristophanes adopts an *authoritarian discourse*, represented by the choice of Aeschylus as the best poet in Hades, who is revived at the end of the play. The comic playwright assumes a political position that favors the aristocracy, when Dionysus questions the poets about their opinion on the aristocrat Alcibiades' role in Athenian politics. According to Keith Sidwell,

(...) *The Frogs* which vindicated Aristophanes' democratic stance—especially in the face of tyranny [as a means to the coup of 411 AEC]—could hardly have been given a reperformance before the re-establishment of the democracy after the defeat of the Thirty in 403. It was at that time, and not before, that the demos would have been able to recall that Aristophanes' particular service in *The Frogs* had been to attack with his inimitable ironic and metacomical satire the whole idea that non-democrats deserved to be re-enfranchised and to reassure the demos that their present policies would work, if pursued with more diligence and the right military leadership. (...) Sommerstein²⁸ [a researcher of Aristophanes' comedies] has argued, to concentration of Athenian resources on the fleet, and mounting of attacks on enemy territory while regarding enemy control of Attica as understood and not challenging it. Since this pretty much represented current demos policy, Sommerstein concludes, "Aeschylus" message is . . . (a) that the current Athenian strategy is essentially right, (b) that it must, however, be pursued with more singlemindedness, and, above all, (c) that the way to save Athens is by fighting, not by talking. "(...) this is (...) the strategy advocated by Pericles in the early years of the war (Thuc. 1.141–3). (...) Not only are both pieces of advice given by Aeschylus plausible as strategic policy, but they are also plausible as Aristophanic advice. It is not, then, absurd to read this final scene as simultaneously suggesting that Aeschylus' true political position when he returns from the dead will be to stand side by side with his former choregos, Pericles. It is worth reflecting too that Xenophon will not have been the only person to have known that Alcibiades' advice might have saved the Athenians from disaster at Aegospotamoi in the summer of 405 (...), so that the Periclean view articulated by Aeschylus might have stood the test of that defeat (...). If Sommerstein is correct (...) in assigning lines 1445–7 to Euripides, the purpose (...) can only have been to emphasise the losing tragedian's agreement with the parabasis and its anti-democratic agenda" (Sidwell, 2009, p.43).

²⁸ Sommerstein (1996, pp.291-292).

In his *Hellenistic* work, Xenophon suggests that Alcibiades had advised Athens' soldiers in the Battle of Aegospotami, the last battle of the Peloponnesian War. If the enemies were found at a port, Athenians should anchor themselves to the port of Sestos, an ancient Greek city at the coast of the Hellespont in Thrace. Thus, they would conquer the port and the city and would be able to acquire everything they needed and fight whenever they wanted (Xenophon, II. 1. 25-26). About Xenophon, Sidwell noted that Alcibiades was the savior of Athens because of his advice, which might have impacted the battle's outcome.

Aristophanes writes an interesting line for Euripides: "If we distrusted those citizens in whom we now place confidence, and employed those we don't use now, we would be saved" (Aristophanes, *Bátrachoi*, v. 1445-1447). For Sidwell, this line is the pinnacle of the play. It symbolizes the "tragic agreement" that Dionysus was after, so he could choose the best tragic poet and help Athens. Following the coryphaeus and the chorus' parabasis, Dionysus did not choose Euripides. The citizens that supported Euripides were considered antidemocratic, because he favored new politicians who agreed with the oligarchic coups.

Sidwell's words illustrate the political relations between Aeschylus and his precursor, the *choregos* Pericles, who represented Athens' "glorious past," in reference to the group of great political figures to which they belonged. In light of this, based on a discourse analysis of the play, it is possible to note the connection between Aeschylus and Pericles. Likewise, it is possible to observe a connection between Aristophanes and Alcibiades, his presumed *choregos*, and/or the members of his political faction in 405 BC. In other words, for Aristophanes, Alcibiades represented the hope to reclaim the power Athens held before the crisis caused by the Peloponnesian War. As noted by Sidwell, Aristophanes' "democratic stance"—which was praised after the *demoi*'s democratic return in 403 BC²⁹—was a result of the political interests of those who funded *The Frogs* in 405 BC.

In 411 BC, Thrasybulus achieved the return of Alcibiades to Athens (Thucydides, VIII, 76). The relationship with the general led him to victory in later Athenian military campaigns. Upon returning to the city-state during the dissolution of the Four Hundred,

²⁹ *Demoi*, the plural form of *demes*, are the subdivisions of Attica, surrounding the region of Athens.

Alcibiades supported the *demokratia*.³⁰ He opposed his previous ideal of an oligarchic rule over Athens, while he was exiled seeking to form alliances with Persia. Thereafter, Alcibiades continued his pursuit of political power, even after being accused of neglecting soldiers' bodies in the Battle of Arginusae in 406 BC (Aristotle, 34, 1-3).

After the dissolution of the Four Hundred (Thucydides, VIII, 89), his political discourse shifted from the defense of social cohesion to the reinforcement of the traditional Athenian socio-political system. To strengthen his legitimacy, Alcibiades started to build new faction networks and political spaces that supported his interests. To do so, he sought alliances with politicians such as Thrasybulus and gathered support from popular factions, including the lower social strata of Athens.

Works such as *The Frogs* were also used to strengthen his legitimacy in the *hetaireia*, which benefited Alcibiades. Other politicians allied with Thrasybulus were interested in producing such a play. They aimed to regain the trust of the citizens of Athens and the entire Attica, including those with whom the city-state established relations, mainly political ones. Therefore, *The Frogs* represents an attempt to re-establish and maintain order after the crisis of the Peloponnesian War. This context broadens the scope of analyses about theatrical plays beyond the authors that wrote them. Other groups were interested in transmitting certain messages to the audience and thus provided financial support to these plays, which would later influence the debate surrounding their socio-political consequences in assemblies and disputes among orators and other citizens.

Final Considerations

In general, this study alludes to the theoretical perspective of the historian Roger Chartier, as it acknowledges the intrinsic relationship between discourse and social practice (Chartier, 2002). In our analysis, we shed light on the influence of the socio-

³⁰ *Demokratia* could simply be translated as “democracy” and interpreted as a democratic collective system in which *demos* means “people” and *kratos* means “power.” However, according to Josiah Ober (2007, pp.1-7), regarding the Athenian reality, the notion of *kratos* does not imply a collective control of political power, as this term would indicate active participation in politics. Therefore, *kratos* is different from *arche*, for example. The latter refers to actual leadership and political power, which Alcibiades pursued. If society was not in control of political power, only the elite, this eliminates the idea of a homogeneous, traditional, harmonious democracy that is often associated with Athens. Political control is different from political participation. By deconstructing this idealized notion about Ancient Greeks, it is possible to see them as agents under political and social disputes.

political interests of certain groups in Athens. In public assemblies and theater festivals, they expressed their views through artistic discourses. So, from this perspective, art expresses cultural and political positions. On this matter, Eni Orlandi also alludes to Chartier's perspective. In her discourse analysis, she seeks to examine the authors' "place of position" (Orlandi, 2001, p.49): a place connected with authority speeches in a given historical moment, reinforcing ideologies and social ideas.

Therefore, Chartier proposes a break from the classical opposition between "individual subjectivity" and "collective determinations" (Chartier, 2002, p.7). Thoughts and actions originate from the establishment of objective social properties and their subsequent assimilation. In the Athenian theater, this conjunction constitutes the analysis of the individual ideas of a comic playwright in Ancient Greece, who reflects on his society and strategically ties it to specific cultural and political positions. Moreover, Aristophanes' work reflects the influence of political groups over collective social practices. They actively promoted their interests in theatrical productions by funding choruses and performances. They were citizens interested in providing financial resources (*misthos*) to city-states in order to raise their status in festivals and acquire decisive victories in public assemblies. In conclusion, the theater was a necessary place for leaders' political strategies and was, thus, an important institution in Ancient Greece.

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Reviews

Due to the commitment assumed by *Bakhtiniana*. Revista de Estudos do Discurso [Bakhtiniana. Journal of Discourse Studies] to Open Science, this journal only publishes reviews that have been authorized by all involved.

Review I

The article “The Athenian Theater as the Stage for Political Factions: A Political Dispute in the Comedy *The Frogs* by Aristophanes (405 BC),” submitted for evaluation to the *Bakhtiniana*, presents a discussion centered on the productive relationship between the work of Aristophanes and its historical context, marked by political disputes that go profoundly and decisively alter Greek society.

The work fits the proposed theme. However, it is important to understand that, although justified in the field of linguistic-discursive analysis in two paragraphs arguments around Orlandi and Chartier’s theory, the text hardly undertakes a truly linguistic analysis, except in a very broad sense of the term.

The objective of the work is satisfactorily accomplished, if the understanding is the relevance and political positioning of the comedy “The frogs” in its context of representation. However, in the abstract, the author states that the objective is “to analyze the late 5th century BC in Athens through the lens of an Aristophanic comedy.” If this is in fact the objective, there is a lack of a broader look at the Greek theater, which encompasses at least the tragedies of the three great tragedians. But the text is fine-tuned in around a “minor” objective, in the sense of being narrower, which, therefore, demands the adjustment of the summary to the reality of the text.

The author relates well to the bibliography surveyed, pondering and questioning a thought crystallized by scholars of a previous generation, without, however, starting from them and their strengths. It performs, therefore, the updating of scientific knowledge, which is, in the end, the aim of all research.

However, the almost intuitive perception of language studies demonstrated in the article makes that contribution to discursive studies not as forceful as could. I say this because it is possible to perceive, between the lines of the analyses, a possibility of deepening that does not actually materialize. It is, therefore, a good work in the field of classical studies, but which does not reach primacy in the language studies.

My insistence on this is mainly due to the scope of the journal – more than the internal coherence of the text. By proposing to publish in a “journal of discourse studies,” some alterations and additions must be made in the text, so that it achieves the presumed reader of that publication. In general, what needs to be revised is the interlocution with the reader – in the text, it is assumed that a more specialized reader in classical studies, who may hold another set of knowledge that does not transit so easily out of the area.

Among the possibilities of alterations to contemplate this reader, I suggest the addition of a more schematic paragraph (or overview) about the diachrony of events that will be analyzed in the text: representation of the play, oligarchic coup, spartan blockade, death of the poets, and other things. All this information is scattered throughout the text, but a reader less familiar with this Greek historical period will have difficulty in following the author’s reasoning, which demands a temporal relationship between the events/discourses analyzed.

Also to adapt to the environment in which you intend to publish, the Greek concepts need to be explained – if not in the body of the text, so as not to lose the flow of the thought, at least in footnotes. For example, it is not explained the adequate semantic use of the term “choregia,” which is part of the title of the article. Attention, because I am not talking about an epistemological explanation for a group of readers super-specialized, but for belletrists in general, interested in classical studies, but not belonging to them.

From the same perspective, I also suggest replacing the term “system of choregia” as an alternative that communicates better with the reader of the *Bakhtiniana* in general. Something like “power struggle in comedy...” or some expression that actually communicates. And of course, the suppression of the Latin name of the piece, unnecessary in the environment of this journal and superfluous for the analysis undertaken in the article. In this regard, it can be argued that there are super specific terms in the titles of some articles, to which I reply that some of these terms are specific to language studies (and therefore acceptable), but that there are also some that may have “gone by,” and for that reason they end up harming the reception of the article and the journal number (which we do not want for the article, which is good!).

The review that must be done to contemplate the presumed reader of the scientific journal, however, it is not limited to the three proposed amendments/additions presented above. A reading “thinking outside your research box” is necessary to adjust the speech. In the end, this is an excellent technical-rhetorical exercise, which super-specialists end up having to do it almost every time they go to speak in public.

I made some notes in the file, which I am sending as an attachment to this evaluation, but they do not totally entangle the changes that must be made on the attempt for clarity and language adequacy.

Finally, I believe that this work is an important contribution to the classic studies and that its point of contact with language studies, although could be in-depth, gives tips to researchers in the field on relevant issues of the Antiquity studies through the discursive view. APPROVED WITH RESTRICTIONS

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Review III

Regarding the content, I believe that the text has gained a lot in terms of fluidity and accessibility to from the adjustments promoted by the author. She took into account my greatest concern, which was the dialogue with the presumed reader of the journal.

There is, however, a question that could be called stylistic, if it didn't intervene in the understanding of the text, which are the grammatical structures used. I speak mainly, but not exclusively, about the use of commas and regency. Unfortunately, I couldn't do more precise notes in the text because of an illness that affected me in the last two weeks, but the text needs proofreading. The use of commas needs extra attention, especially in adjective clauses. What I notice most is an underutilization of the resource, with a lack of commas where they should be, but also because sometimes the comma seems to replace what should be a period or semicolon. In the case of regency, the crasis use needs to be reviewed in several situations, but the issues are not limited to the crasis: the prepositions use, in some cases, is also inappropriate.

In this sense, I believe that the text still needs to undergo a review by the author before publishing, as such interferences generate ambiguities that are not easily reversible by a journal reviewer. My suggestion, by the way, would be that the author asks someone else to read the text, because sometimes we are so used to what we write that we no longer see these issues.

Also, the use of the play's Greek name does not seem to be suitable for the text's body or for direct citation references. I suggest replacing all occurrences by the name in Portuguese of the play "The frogs." Bearing in mind, of course, that the journal's rules ask that only the first letter of the title and proper nouns should be capitalized.

There is also the use, either in footnote indications, or in the body of the text, of the translators of certain texts - not just Greek and Latin texts, but as well as modern texts. I do not see the relevance of the presence of such information, which rigorously do not alter the meaning of what is being argued. It is enough that the indication of the translators is being in the References.

Finally, in addition to the grammar review, the author must pay attention to the formatting rules of the journal, which are not strictly followed by the text, either in the references to direct quotes, use of punctuation in relation to both quotation marks and these references, either in the spacing before and after quotes or subheadings.

As can be seen, all my indications are now just structural, because I believe that, except for the occasional ambiguities promoted by the use of punctuation, the content and its exposure are appropriate to the scope of the journal and, therefore, to its publication.

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Research Data and Other Materials Availability

The contents underlying the research text are included in the manuscript.