INTRODUCTION

Oscar Wilde said of his prison warden, "He had the eyes of a ferret, the body of an ape, and the soul of a rat."[1] Projecting animal qualities onto a human being, as Wilde did, and human qualities onto an animal, are near-universal customs. After all, animals furnish us with ready-made symbols of every aspect of human life. What is notable about the ancient Greeks, however, is that they elevated this familiar practice into a sophisticated literary form, the genre of Old Comedy, which flourished in Athens in the fifth century B.C. Rarely have symbolic projections come to life as vividly as they did on the Greek stage.

An "animal chorus" is a chorus in comedy whose dancers were costumed as animals and assumed many animal characteristics, including animal voices and behavior. If we apply strict criteria we can name only a few: Aristophanes' *Birds* and *Frogs* (although it is possible that the frogs only sang off stage); it also seems certain from fragments that Crates' *Beasts*, Eupolis' *Nanny-Goats*, and Archippus' *Fishes* had animal choruses. Moreover, vase-paintings such as those in London, Berlin, and Malibu representing men costumed as birds probably show animal choruses; each of these three vase-paintings includes an *aulos*-player, which is a clear sign that a performance is depicted.

If we use broader criteria, however, there are other plays and vase-paintings that come into consideration. Aristophanes' *Wasps*, for example, has a chorus of Athenian citizens who though human have distinctly vespine traits. A number of vase-paintings depict men riding dolphins, horses, and ostriches; presumably the riders were the members of the chorus, yet it is by their various mounts that they are

remembered – Aristophanes' *Knights* is an example – and these mounts may have been other dancers acting the part of animals. Whether or not such animals speak and sing, they need to be considered. I have not limited my inquiry to choruses. Even a terracotta statuette of an actor dressed as an animal can shed light on ancient costuming conventions. This book, then, offers a study of the literary fragments, complete comedies, and vase-paintings that pertain to animal choruses in Greek Comedy.

An invaluable guide has been the chapters on animal choruses in G. M. Sifakis's *Parabasis and Animal Choruses* (London, 1971), which lucidly sets forth the essential evidence, yet the approach taken here is to set the tradition in a wider social, religious, and intellectual context. A central theme developed in this book can be stated as follows: animals were important not because they represented forces of nature but because they made contributions to human culture. Their position as "natural" creatures has been overstated.

This may seem counterintuitive. After all, at the risk of making an "essentialist" statement about transcultural significances of animals, it is usually assumed that people have often dressed and danced as animals out of a desire to draw on the powers of nature. Animals represent the forces of fertility and procreation in the world around us, and for that reason were associated with gods such as Dionysus, Artemis, and Poseidon. We should bear in mind, of course, that "nature" is a deeply problematic and paradoxical concept, meaning different things at different times. For some the "state of nature" refers to the complete absence of any redeeming or civilizing force. The sharp division between the two realms – the natural world of animals and the cultured world of human beings – is the premise of a much-quoted anecdote about Thales: "Hermippus in his *Lives* refers to Thales the story told by some about Socrates, namely, that he used to say there were three blessings for which he was grateful to Fortune: 'First, that I was born a human being and not one of the animals; next, that I was born a man and not a woman; thirdly, a Greek and not a barbarian'" (DK 1 A11).

Nevertheless, although the distinction between "self" and "other" is fundamental to this study, matters rarely fit into this binary framework in a tidy way, for the "self" frequently contains seeds of the "other" (and *vice versa*). The gulf between nature and culture, and

between animals and human beings, can be bridged and even obliterated. In fact, Aristophanes and other comic playwrights could so tame and anthropomorphize non-human creatures that it is misleading to peg animals in comedy as representatives of an unsettling "other." One could argue that comedy's cavalier sense of control masks what is actually a profound sense of unease with the animal world, but evidence for this unease is scant in comedy. Far from being unsettling, animals can serve as the basis for society, in which case "nature" simply means "pre-civilized."

Therefore, although we conventionally think of animals as representatives of the state of nature, what may be more significant is that we find precisely the opposite tendency at work: animals can leave nature behind and contribute to human civilization. This, too, will work in paradoxical ways: either nature is superseded and left behind, or nature becomes the basis for civilization. One recurrent motif studied here is the role that animals play in the foundation of cities and other cultural accomplishments. Comedy in this respect offers parallels with the Native American mythological tradition of the animal as culture hero, a feature not especially prominent elsewhere in the Greek tradition. Apollo, a quintessential god of civilization, was associated with dolphins in such undertakings. Moreover, animals can be "discovered" to be social creatures. What this reflects, of course, is a human desire to project ourselves onto animals.

The first two chapters, which analyze the evidence on vase-paintings of pre-comic performances from the sixth and early fifth centuries, take up the question of the possible ritual origins of animal choruses. It may be possible to argue that tragedy bears no relation to ritual practices at Athens, but these vase-paintings imply that ritual masquerades contributed to comedy in a significant way. I will suggest, however, that the contribution of ritual was at best an indirect one; we simply do not have sufficient evidence to identify with confidence any ritual costumed performance that would have been transformed into comedy. Instead of stressing the religious aspects of the *komoi* ("revels") in which comedy probably originated, we will look at the social dimension. As I will explain in Chapter 2, the cocks, cavalrymen, and dolphin-riders that we see on vases make best sense if seen as the products of the symposium culture of the archaic aristocracy.

It will emerge that some animals in the comic tradition occupy "liminal" positions in Greek thought (dolphins, for example, stand on the taxonomical line between fish and mammal). There are, moreover, hints that the animals here studied were associated with rites of passage. The choruses may reflect, or may have grown out of, rituals of initiation that raise questions of personal identity and growth. Moreover, the animals of the chorus were not always shown as ordinary animals; frequently some blurring of categories is found, such as of animals and satyrs, or of animals and human beings. In this regard the god Hermes is perhaps present.

The plays themselves – Aristophanes' *Birds*, *Wasps*, *Frogs*, *Knights*, and the fragments – are discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. I correlate these not only with patterns in myth and ritual but with other types of evidence as well (laid out in Chapter 3), such as satyr-plays and fifth-century speculation concerning nature and culture. Greek folklore and zoological writing also yield clues about the animals we encounter. We will see, for example, that the concept of the "social animal" emerged at an opportune time. Appendix A provides the essential textual evidence for the fragments.

My methodology is somewhat eclectic – necessarily, given the different types of evidence I am marshalling – but I am in general attempting to reconstruct different volumes of the "cultural encyclopedia of the viewer."[2] Evidence for this encyclopedia, which is unfortunately largely lost to us, is contradictory and ambiguous (as evidence often is), though I have suggested some ways in which sense can be made of the material at hand. In a few instances cross-cultural comparison offers some possible solutions. In other matters, such as descriptions of animal behavior, we must use sources such as Aristotle, Pliny, and Aelian as evidence for much earlier periods. This is reasonable where we can assume that there was some continuity of attitudes and practices in the ancient world, and where no evolution can be shown to have occurred.

The evidence for animal choruses in vase-painting poses its own methodological problems. Vase-paintings are an important source of evidence for performances in Greece, yet they must be used with caution. Painters were almost certainly selective in choosing what performances and what aspects of performances to illustrate. Writes

Sparkes,"We are not being presented with a direct copy of reality: these images are not actual tracings of life, not photographic documents, they are social statements, constructs, symbols; a conscious choice of figures and compositions has been made by the artist."[3] The number of vases is modest. We still have only a dozen or so paintings of animal choruses; by contrast, a recent study of animal sacrifice in Greece could survey a corpus of evidence that included 674 reliefs and vase-paintings, students of satyrs can examine at least 3,000 depictions of them from archaic and classical times, and by one count Dionysus appears 4,343 times on vases.[4] For some of the choruses studied here, such as the "Knights" and ostrich-riders, we do not have a single exact parallel and are unable to establish any secure iconographical tradition. Even when we have a group of related images, such as the dolphin-riders, we cannot be sure that we understand their significance. In no case are we able to point conclusively to a specific story or myth that is illustrated in these vase paintings.

Fortunately, we can identify in these images some familiar conventions in depictions of *komoi* and choruses, such as the presence of an *aulos*-player and dancers in regimented order, and we will examine these in Chapter 1. Students of comedy at least have an advantage over students of tragedy in that painters of scenes from tragedy tended to create an illusion of reality by omitting clues of a theatrical performance, so that we are unable to distinguish depictions of myth from depictions of performances of myth. By contrast painters of comic scenes, at least in the fifth century, did not attempt to be illusionistic and were willing to show masks, the *aulos*-player, and other theatrical paraphernalia; thus comedy is more likely to be shown as theater.[5] A further advantage is that the uses of the vases themselves are surely relevant to what is depicted on them. As we will see, this is most striking in the case of the psykter, a special type of cooler that had a short life span in Greek history and functioned specifically in the context of the symposium.

I

KOMOS, SYMPOSIUM, AND PERFORMANCE

A survey of Attic Old Comedy reminds one of a visit to a zoo: these creatures delight, instruct, and live together in contrived harmony, yet are of different species and trace their origins to disparate places. Key features of comedy were said to have been invented by Megarians, Sicilians, and Athenians; plots revolved around myth, fantasy, and political satire; and the comedies had choruses of every imaginable type: peasants, foreigners, women, cities, islands, personified abstractions, satyrs, and animals.

This diversity was not simply the product of imaginative fifth-century playwrights: the heterogeneity of fifth-century comedy, certainly the types of choruses, was anticipated by costumed performances in the sixth century.[1] This chapter reviews the various venues of performance in archaic Greece, including symposia, *komoi*, ritual masquerade, and formal choruses; also presented here is the evidence for pre-comic choruses, including padded dancers, phallic dancers, satyrs, men wearing animal ears, and foreigners. An examination of these non-animal performers establishes a context for the archaic animal choruses studied in the next chapter. It will emerge that they share several features with one another: an interest in the vigor of the world of nature (unlike the more easily tamed aspects of nature in fifth-century comedy), possible connections with the cults of specific gods, and a lack of clear distinction between human and non-human beings. In fact, a recurrent issue is the extent to which these choruses were composed of "outsiders."

KOMOS, SYMPOSIUM, AND PERFORMANCE IN ARCHAIC GREECE

Aristotle derived the word "comedy" from the word *komos*, and the *komos* is a reasonable point of departure for any inquiry into the origins of comedy and animal choruses.[2] After all, the sixth-century vase-paintings of animal choruses can, with good justification, be seen as representations of *komoi*.

The Komos

The *komos*, or "revel," was a ritualistic, drunken procession.[3] The participants, komasts, were frequently on their way to or from a symposium, and hence vase-paintings showed them carrying drinking cups. That music and dance were significant parts of the *komos* is suggested by literary evidence and by vase-paintings that show komasts dancing and carrying musical instruments.[4] Torches were also carried, as a *komos* could take place at night.[5] A *komos* was not an occasion for quiet, disciplined behavior; in the *Acharnians* "War " is described as an unwelcome, drunken komast "who has committed every kind of outrage."[6] Costumes or masks could be part of a *komos*: in the fourth century, Demosthenes criticized Kyrebion, the brother-in-law of Demosthenes' enemy Aeschines, for not wearing his mask at a *komos* at the Dionysia, thus transgressing ritual practice.[7]

Although *komoi* were frequently associated with symposia, there was in fact no single occasion for them. The earliest instances of the word refer to private gatherings, such as a wedding (Hesiod, *Shield* 281), or to general opportunities for song and dance (*Homeric Hymn to Hermes* 481). Other *komoi* were public activities, independent of private symposia, that had established roles in city festivals and were performed with the care accorded to a sacred cult. They were held in honor of various deities, including Apollo,[8] Zeus,[9] Artemis,[10] and Heracles.[11] *Komoi* thus need not have been exclusively or intrinsically Dionysiac. Nevertheless, it was with Dionysus that the *komos* was most frequently associated. He was, after all, the god of wine, and drinking was a virtual premise for the *komos*. His own Great Dionysia had some sort of scheduled *komos*, perhaps performed on the evening of the first day.[12]

The *komos* can be distinguished from a chorus and a *pompe*. A chorus (χορός) entailed highly coordinated dancing and singing. Here music was a *sine qua non* and drunkenness only optional. Members of a chorus behaved less spontaneously than komasts, were more rehearsed, probably followed a leader (ἐξάρχων, to borrow Aristotle's term), and even sang from a composed script. The chorus performed more for the enjoyment of an audience than for their own pleasure. Poets such as Alcman had been writing lyrics for choruses since the seventh century B.C. Nevertheless the *komos* and chorus are not immediately distinguishable on vase-painting and the choice between the two is often a subjective one. The *pompe*, like the *komos*, entailed a procession but was more formal and dignified.[13] For example, the *pompe* on the first day of the City Dionysia consisted of a procession that escorted victims, traditionally bulls, to the sacrifices in the sacred precinct of Dionysus. Various ritual participants, such as *choregoi*, would parade in colored robes and evidently *phalloi* were carried in honor of the god.[14] A *komos*, by contrast, was raucous and disorderly; moreover, whereas the *pompe* was directed toward a specific goal (the sacrifice), participants in a *komos* were either lost in the enjoyment of the moment or at most moving on to another symposium (as illustrated in Plato, *Symposium* 212c–d and 223b).

The Symposium

Komasts, therefore, were frequently symposiasts who had moved into the street in a drunken carousal.[15] In other words, the *komos* could be a continuation of, or extension of, the social event that began with the symposium. I propose, therefore, that any inquiry into *komoi* and costumed dancers should take into account the social and cultural milieu of the archaic symposium. It was this context that produced *komoi*, themselves a source for animal choruses. In fact entertainments at the symposium itself may have been a venue for animal costumes, and Chapter 2 will explain how the specific animal masquerades depicted on vase-painting make sense as an expression of symposium culture.

The symposium was a central institution of the archaic aristocracy.[16] Although Homer's elite warriors ate and drank together, it was not until the end of the seventh century, when the Greeks adopted dining

practices from the Near East, such as reclining on couches, that these gatherings became a social ritual in the lives of aristocratic men.[17] Through the symposium the Athenian elite shaped their group identity and social values. "The symposion became in many respects a place apart from the normal rules of society, with its own strict code of honor in the *pistis* [mutual trust] there created, and its own willingness to establish conventions fundamentally opposed to those within the polis as a whole . . . It became a 'spettacolo a se stesso'."[18] Consequently the symposium became an occasion for educating and initiating youths into the world of adult, male society. Elegies in the tradition of military sympotic poetry by Archilochus, Mimnermus, Callinus, and Solon would inculcate in individual youths patriotism and a sense of duty.[19] Narrative poems on the achievements of the community were evidently recited at symposia; these might have included a work by Ion of Chios concerning the *ktisis* (foundation) of Chios, Mimnermus on the colonization of Smyrna, and Xenophanes' poem on the *ktisis* of Colophon and colonization of Elea in Italy.[20] This transmission of traditional military and social values made sense in an institution that originated in a warrior group.[21] Furthermore, some sympotic poetry was explicitly addressed to boys, and vase-paintings seem to show that the symposium had become a locus of pederastic activity.[22] The drinking cups and mixing jugs were themselves decorated with scenes showing the refined interests of this social class, such as symposia with participants who are reclining on couches, drinking, listening to recitals, and enjoying their conviviality. Painters also produced vases with scenes reflecting wider cultural interests of the elite, such as horse-riding, hunting, and athletics.

The symposium had its own protocols and table manners. After finishing a meal, participants would wear garlands, sing *skolia* (drinking songs), play a game of *kottabos*, in which wine lees were tossed at a target, and mix their wine.[23] A presiding *symposiarchos* determined the proper measure of wine. Different types of drinking vessels were developed for specific needs. In fact proper behavior at a symposium was felt to distinguish a civilized Greek from a barbarian or monster.[24] That said, one of the fashions at the symposium, especially from ca. 510–480 B.C., was to wear the dress of a foreigner: vases show symposiasts wearing a floppy oriental hat known as the *kidaris*, a vogue that

1.1. Attic black-figure skyphos attributed to the White Heron Group, showing symposiasts with headgear. Ca. 500 B.C. Athenian Agora, P 32413. Photograph courtesy of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens: Agora Excavation.

reflected Athenian interest in luxury goods from the East and served as an "effective statement of elitism."[25] Thracian garb was also popular among well-born Athenians.[26] In this way Athenians liberated by wine could experiment with *altérité* and seek a new temporary identity.[27] Perhaps the costumed figures anticipate the clique of young men in classical Athens who, flouting conventional behavior, dubbed themselves "Triballoi" after the savage Thracian tribe of that name.[28] An outlandish or even barbarian outfit may therefore have been a popular affectation in the sophisticated milieu of the symposium.

An enigmatic recent find illustrates this practice. A black-figured, Heron-class skyphos of ca. 500 B.C., found in the Athenian Agora in 1995 (Figure 1.1), is described as follows:

> Side A: A group of two banqueters with a flute player between them share a single large mattress. The banqueters wear unusual headdresses. The one on the right is clearer, with two elongated animal ears between curving horns. The figure on the left has three large projections off the front of his headdress, with an elongated bulge at the back.
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> Side B: A similar scene, less well preserved, with a female lyre player as the central musician. Framing the main scenes and clustered under the handles are numerous large, plump, long-necked birds, in pairs or threesomes. Several stand on stumps, the landscape element perhaps suggesting an outdoor banquet, as does the single bird in flight on side B. There are thirteen birds in