

THE PARODY OF THE *KATÁBASIS*-MOTIF IN ARISTOPHANES' *FROGS* *

1. The *Frogs* and the literary accounts of *katábasis*

The Athenian audience of the *Frogs*, staged in the Lenaeon festival of 405 BCE, was acquainted with many literary (and no doubt also oral) accounts of descents to Hades by mythical figures such as the heroes Heracles, Odysseus, Theseus and Pirithous, Orpheus, and also the god Dionysus, who was believed to have visited the Underworld to retrieve his mother Semele and bring her to Olympus as a goddess¹. They could thus appreciate that the *katábasis* of Dionysus to return the newly deceased Euripides to Athens followed the typical structure and alluded to many of the difficulties, places and characters described in the poetic stories of descents to Hades². In this contribution, I intend to show that a considerable

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1. On the *katábasis* of the heroes, see R. J. CLARK (1979) and J. L. CALVO MARTÍNEZ (2000); on Dionysus' *katábasis*, which seems to date back to the late sixth century BCE, see M. A. SANTAMARÍA ÁLVAREZ (2014). The comedian probably knew it and borrowed the motif of Dionysus' descent, but, as K. J. DOVER (1993, p. 40) remarks, “any reference to that would spoil much of the central importance to the comedy, especially the god's disguised as Herakles and his complete ignorance of the underworld”. Aristophanes had also used the theme of the *katábasis* in *Geryiades*, staged in 408, in which a delegation of poets was sent to Hades. It is a doubtful issue whether Eupolis' *Demoi* (performed between 417 and 411) followed the scheme of a *katábasis* or of a necromancy, through which Solon, Aristides, Miltiades and Pericles come back to the city. Pherecrates' *Hell's Pennies* (Κραπάταλοι, probably earlier than the *Frogs*) may have featured a *katábasis*, since in fr. 85 K.-A. someone is instructed as to how to get to Hades and fr. 100 K.-A. is spoken by Aeschylus, which indicates it was set in Hades.

2. Many authors have interpreted Dionysus' *katábasis* in the *Frogs* as an initiation or rite of passage in which the god acquires a new, more serious, identity: Ch. SEGAL (1961); D. KONSTAN (1986); R. F. MOORTON JR. (1989); A. M. BOWIE (1993) and especially Ismene LADA-RICHARDS (1999). R. G. EDMONDS III (2003, p. 183-189; 2004, p. 113-117) has convincingly showed that these approaches project modern conceptions onto an ancient text and their attempts to adjust many details of the play to a rigid pattern are sometimes strained. In my view, the presence of a number of allusions to rituals

part of the play's humour derives from the parody and distortion of well-known features of this kind of tales. While in the epic *katábasis*, the realm of the dead (the Other World *par excellence*) is presented as a disturbing and chilling place (with occasional blissful settings), in contrast with the visible reality, Aristophanes introduces numerous everyday and even coarse details in his staging of Hades, which is thus demystified and serves as a mirror of the contemporary *polis*.

2. Bravery

The main prerequisite for entering, alive, the land of dead is bravery, given that it was the most terrifying place imaginable for a Greek. Its aspect and inhabitants (gods, dead, monsters) are usually qualified as terrible (δεινοί)³. Three archaic poems containing a *katábasis*, the *Odyssey*, the *Nostoi* and the *Minyas*, are said by Pausanias to have mentioned the terrors of Hades (δείματα, X, 28, 7). According to Ovid, Orpheus calls the Underworld *haec loca plena timoris*, “these fearsome places” (*Met.*, X, 29) in his conversation with Persephone⁴. In classical times many people suffered from the “terrors of Hades”⁵, which is all but an expression of the instinctive fear of death. Naturally, dread is an inherent element of a *katábasis*: when Circe informs Odysseus that he has to travel to Hades, he nearly suffers a heart attack (*Od.*, X, 496) and the same happens to his companions (566-567). Since for a living person the *katábasis* is the most dangerous journey possible, because coming back from the Underworld is almost impossible, outstanding bravery and strength are needed. For good reason, it is the last and most difficult of Heracles' labours, as the hero himself acknowledges to Odysseus: “he (Eurystheus) could devise for me no other task mightier (κρατερότερον ἄεθλον) than this” (*Od.*, XI, 623-624)⁶. In the *Nékyia*, Achilles' ghost asks Odysseus with surprise how he has dared descend to Hades (πῶς ἔτλης Ἄιδόσδε κατελθέμεν ..., *Od.*, XI, 475). Diodorus

and mysteries in Dionysus' journey is undeniable, but it is not likely that a deep theological message is to be found in a comedy, whose main ingredients are humour, entertainment and literary inventiveness.

3. Γοργεῖν κεφαλὴν δεινοῖο πελώρου, *Od.*, XI, 634; Cerberus: δεινὸς δὲ κύων, Hes., *Th.*, 769; Αἰδεῶ γάρ ἐστι δεινὸς / μυχός, Anacr., fr. 50.9-10 *PMG*. Plutarch (fr. 178 Sandbach) mentions “all the terrors” (τὰ δεινὰ πάντα) that soul feels when it enters the realm of dead.

4. When Aeneas sees the monsters that populate the Avernus, he becomes *subita trepidus formidine* (Verg., *Aen.*, VI, 290).

5. Pl., *Resp.*, 330d, about men in the proximity of death. PDerv., col. V 6: ἐξ (Ferrari; ἐν Tsantsanoglou) Ἄιδου δεινά. On the terrors of Hades, see M. HERRERO DE JÁUREGUI (2011), p. 50-53.

6. For the *Odyssey*, I quote the translation of A. T. MURRAY (1945).

(IV, 25, 4) says that Orpheus showed incredible courage (*παραδόξως ἐτόλμησε*) in his decision to go to Hades to fetch his wife.

In the *Frogs*, from the very beginning of the play, Dionysus' appearance on stage is a visual oxymoron (v. 46-47): he is wearing feminine clothes, a saffron-coloured robe and buskins, and is disguised in a lion skin and handling a club, the typical attributes of Heracles. The softest and most sexually ambiguous of male gods tries to imitate the appearance of the strongest and most masculine of heroes and, what is more, to re-enact his descent to the Netherworld to bring back one of its inhabitants, namely Euripides. This concurrence of contradictory clothes and characters offers an immediate occasion of hilarity and the most obvious resource to parody the *katábasis*-motif. Heracles himself cannot contain his laughter, mirroring the attitude of the spectators. Dionysus is probably the least suitable god to face such an endeavour, and this incongruity is used by Aristophanes to turn an epic story of bravery into a comic story of cowardice. Despite the self-confidence (or rather, foolishness) of Dionysus, the very mention of the monsters of Hades, such as the Empusa or the punishers, will terrify him on several occasions, much to the audience's delight. He represents, therefore, a variation of what would later become the *miles gloriosus* type⁷, the boastful soldier who becomes frightened at the slightest danger.

3. The instructions

When a hero prepares to descend into Hades, he is usually helped by someone who knows the way and will accompany him or give indications as to how to get there. This guide can be a god or goddess: Heracles tells Odysseus in *Odyssey*, XI, 626 that Hermes and Athena led him in his endeavour to take Cerberus out of Hades⁸. In *Aeneis* VI the Sibylla is Aeneas' guide through the Avernus⁹, and Thespesius is taken on a tour of the other world by his relative in the myth of Plutarch's *De sera numinis uindicta* (563C-568A). In other accounts of *katábasis*, like that of Orpheus and, specially, that of Pirithous, who makes an illegitimate descent, there is no mention of any guide. Regarding Dionysus, there are some testimonies that before going to Hades to rescue Semele, he is taught by a mysterious person

7. Ch. SEGAL (1961, p. 209). In v. 48-51 he boasts of having participated in a naval battle where he sank twelve or thirteen enemy ships.

8. In *Il.*, VIII, 366-369, Athena remembers when she helped Heracles to escape from the Styx.

9. *Aen.*, VI, 109 (Aeneas to the Sibylla): *doceas iter et sacra ostia pandas*; 262-263: *Tantum effata furens antro se immisit aperto; / ille ducem haud timidis uadentem passibus aequat.*

called Prosymnus (or Polymnus)¹⁰. In Aristophanes' *Frogs*, Dionysus visits his half-brother Heracles, who had descended to Hades and knows the way. It is a novelty in the tradition of *katábasis* that the character who is going to descend consults a hero that has previously descended and tries to imitate him, as the god himself acknowledges (108-109: τήνδε τὴν σκευὴν ἔχων / ἤλθον κατὰ σὴν μίμησιν, "I've come wearing this get-up in imitation of you"¹¹). This innovation is contrived by Aristophanes to bring together the true Heracles and his grotesque imitation, to create a hilarious contrast between opposite figures¹².

But Dionysus' attempt to imitate Heracles may have a literary implication, since Aristophanes is probably suggesting that the main model for the god's descent is Heracles' previous voyage. In the mythical tradition, Heracles' *katábasis* is the oldest (it is mentioned in *Il.*, VIII, 366-369 and *Od.*, XI, 623-626) and can be considered paradigmatic, since he is the most powerful of heroes. It was no doubt narrated in epic poems, first in oral versions and later in written works about Heracles' deeds, such as Pisander's *Heraclea* (sixth century) and Panyassis' homonymous poem (fifth century)¹³. Given the presence of many Eleusinian elements in the play, especially a chorus of initiates, several authors have postulated as the main source for Aristophanes a poem composed in an Eleusinian milieu in the sixth century BCE in which the hero was initiated in Eleusis by Eumolpus before his descent¹⁴. This last influence is likely, but it is problematic to assess since we do not have any fragment of this poem and it can only be reconstructed from its traces in other authors, especially Apollodorus' summary of Heracles' *katábasis* (*Il.*, 5, 12). In the version known to Homer, Heracles did not need any instructions, because he was accompanied by Hermes and Athena. In the Eleusinian version, he was guided by Hermes (*Apoll.*, II, 5, 12), but in the mysteries he was probably told about what he was going to see in the Netherworld. For the instructions Heracles gives to

10. Prosymnus: Clem. Al., *Protr.*, II, 34, 2-5; Polymnus: Paus., II, 37, 5; Hyg., *Astr.*, II, 5, 2 Viré; Sch. Lyc., 212 Scheer. See M. A. SANTAMARÍA ÁLVAREZ (2014).

11. I quote the translation of A. H. SOMMERSTEIN (1996), unless otherwise noted.

12. We can compare this scene with the encounter between the real and the feigned Amphitruo in Plautus' homonymous play (4, 3, v. 1034m-v).

13. According to the *Suda* (s.v. Πείσανδρος), Pisander's poem described Heracles' labors. Panyassis mentioned the thrones to which Theseus and Pirithous were fettered in fr. 14 Bernabé (= Paus., X, 29, 9).

14. For H. LLOYD-JONES (1967, p. 227 = 1990, p. 187) this poem may have circulated under Musaeus' name. It must have been a source for Bacch., *Ep.*, V; Pind., fr. dub. 346 M. and Verg., *Aen.*, VI. He is followed by J. N. BREMMER (2009), p. 194-195. F. GRAF (1974, p. 145-146) presumes that it was an Orphic-Eleusinian poem; N. ROBERTSON (1980) proposes that this poem was the *Aegimius*, assigned to Hesiod or Cercops of Miletus.

Dionysus, Aristophanes seems to be following this poem, along with the *Odyssey*. At the end of Book 10, Circe tells Odysseus he has to go to Hades and he asks her for a guide (ὦ Κίρκη, τίς γὰρ ταύτην ὁδὸν ἡγεμονεύσει; “O Circe, who will guide us on this journey?”, 501), but she explains that Boreas will navigate the ship across the Oceanus and gives some topographical indications: he has to moor it by Persephone’s shore and groves and make some libations and sacrifices there (504-540).

In the *Frogs*, Dionysus asks Heracles to tell him of his hosts, and the harbours, bakeries, brothels, resting places, crossroads, fountains, highways, cities and residences (the ones with fewest bugs) he encountered on his descent (108-115). In contrast to Odysseus’ fear, the god presents himself as confident and carefree, rashly imagining his route to Hades like any other journey. The traditional concern of how to find an entrance to the Netherworld and surpass its perils has been transformed into interest in the most comfortable places to rest and satiate hunger, thirst and other bodily necessities. The solemn instructions to enter the realm of dead, mysterious and reserved for a few privileged, here become practical touristic tips and recommendations to enjoy the journey. Heracles wonders at his flippancy and asks if he truly will dare to go there: ὦ σκέτλιε, τολμήσεις γὰρ ἰέναι καὶ σὺ γε; “You daredevil! You mean *you* too are going to venture to go there?” (116). These words recall Achilles’ surprise when he sees Odysseus alive in Hades:

Σ χ έ τ λ ι ε , τί π τ ’ ἔ τ ι μ ε ἴ ζ ο ν ἐ ν ἰ φ ρ ε σ ἰ μ ῆ σ ε α ἰ ἔ ρ γ ο ν ;
Π ὦ ς ἔ τ λ η ς Ἄ ἰ δ ὄ σ δ ε κ α τ ε λ θ έ μ ε ν , ἔ ν θ α τ ε ν ε κ ρ ο ἰ ...
(*Od.*, XI, 474-475.)

Rash man, what deed yet greater than this wilt you devise in thy heart?
How didst you dare to come down to Hades, where the dead ...

It can be no surprise that, for Heracles, Aristophanes has chosen similar words to those of Achilles, the hero that most closely resembles him in valour and fame. Dionysus also demands Heracles tell him the quickest way to Hades, and one that is neither too hot nor too cold (117-119). On noticing Dionysus’ foolishness, Heracles offers him several quick ways to Hades: he can hang himself, drink hemlock or jumping from the highest tower in the Ceramicus. Heracles is obviously joking with the polysemy of the expression “going to Hades”, that was usually employed as an allusion to the metaphoric journey of the soul towards the Underworld. This joke may be inspired by Elpenor’s episode in the *Odyssey* (X, 553). When Circe announces to Odysseus that he and his companions have to go to Hades, he is

shocked, because he appears to understand that they have to die¹⁵. Afterwards, just before Odysseus informs his companions of their new destiny, Elpenor sets on an individual “journey”: he is suddenly awakened by the noise, springs up and falls headfirst from the roof of Circe’s palace, under the influence of a severe hangover (a very Dionysian death)¹⁶. He breaks his neck and his soul quickly reaches the entrance of Hades (X, 552-560), before Odysseus’ ship (XI, 57-58). Therefore, Circe’s appeal to travel to the Underworld is realized in the literal sense by Odysseus and his men, and in the metaphorical sense by the unfortunate Elpenor. These two ways to get to the realm of dead are exploited by Aristophanes in v. 117-135, in which Dionysus is trying to literally reach Hades and Heracles suggests three methods to die, the third (and quickest) of which parallels the route taken by Elpenor.

4. A dual Hades: reward and punishment

Alcmena’s son then grows serious and instructs his half-brother: he will find a huge and bottomless lake and the old boatman Charon, who will take him over for a fare of two obols, which Theseus brought to Hades (137-140), in an allusion to his *katábasis* together with Pirithous¹⁷. After that they will see “innumerable serpents and other terrifying beasts” (μετὰ ταῦτ’ ὄφεις καὶ θηρί’ ὄψει μυρία / δεινότατα, 143-144)¹⁸, which the god considers a means to frighten and dissuade him (145). Heracles then distinguishes two parts: the mud for criminals and the bright groves of the blessed ones. This twofold distinction of fates in the Netherworld for impious and initiates was

15. *Od.*, X, 490-491: ἀλλ’ ἄλλην χρῆ πρῶτον ὁδὸν τελέσαι καὶ ἰκέσθαι / εἰς Αἴδαο δόμοις.

16. *Od.*, X, 550: κατελέξατο οἰνοβαρείων; XI, 61: ἄσέ με δαίμονος αἴσα κακῆ καὶ ἀθέσφατος οἴνος.

17. The story no doubt circulated orally in Athens. A papyrus contains a fragment of an archaic epic poem on this subject, probably from the *Minyas* (fr. 7 Bernabé, on which see M. A. SANTAMARÍA ÁLVAREZ [forthcoming]). Heracles’ encounter with Theseus and Pirithous in Hades made up the plot of Critias’ *Pirithous* (*TrGF* I, 43 F 1-14), a tragedy also attributed to Euripides. M. PADILLA (1992, p. 362-363) thinks that Aristophanes parodies this play, and A. H. SOMMERSTEIN (1996, p. 10) suggests that Aristophanes may have borrowed from it the role of Aeacus as Hades’ doorkeeper (605-673) and the chorus of Eleusinian initiates, but sees no trace of parody of it in the *Frogs*. For K. J. DOVER (1994, p. 55), it is more likely that the *Pirithous* was either not produced at all or produced at the Lenaea of 403, during the regime of the Thirty Tyrants, which seems very plausible.

18. According to Apoll., *Epit.*, I, 24, Theseus and Pirithous were fettered to their seat with coils of snakes (σπείραις δρακόντων). In Critias’ *Pirithous* (*TrGF* 43, Arg.), this hero was custodied by snakes with open jaws (δρακόντων ἐφρουρείτο χάσμασιν). In Ps.-Pl., *Ax.*, 372a, the wicked are licked by beasts (θηρσὶν περιλιχμώμενοι).

introduced by the mystery cults, especially Eleusis and Orphism¹⁹. The first testimony is at the end of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, where the goddess promises the initiates a different (happier) fate in the Netherworld in contrast to the rest (480-482).

In the *Frogs*, Heracles lists among the punished in the mud those guilty of faults traditionally considered very grave: individuals who have mistreated a guest, physically abused their father or mother or committed perjury²⁰, but for the sake of humour, he includes a minor sin of obscene nature, surreptitiously stealing back the money paid to a rent boy while being with him (146-150). Among them, he also lists people guilty of vulgar aesthetic taste, such as those having learned the war dance of Cinesias (151), and Dionysus adds that those having copied out a speech of the tragic poet Morsimus should be punished too (152-153). Similarly, in modern parlance, it may be said that an overly innovative restoration of an historic building is “a crime” or that the director of a poor film should be “shot”. This is, of course, a very effective kind of hyperbole offering lashing literary criticism while simultaneously making the audience laugh.

Heracles then describes the opposite place they will find: the abodes of the initiates (154-157). In these verses, we find several parallels with testimonies of mystery cults, especially with Orphic gold tablets, which tell the initiates what they will find in their Underworld journey and which paths they have to take in order to succeed and reach the place of the blessed²¹:

(a) The verb in future in the second person in singular:

HP. Εὐθὺς γὰρ ἐπὶ λίμνην μεγάλην ἦ ξ ε ι ζ πάνυ / ἄβυσσον. (137-138)

Her.: Right away you'll come to an enormous, bottomless lake.

HP. Μετὰ ταῦτ' ὄφεις καὶ θηρί' ὄ ψ ε ι μυρία / δεινότατα. (143-144)

Her.: After that you will see innumerable serpents and other terrifying beasts.

19. W. BURKERT (1987), p. 21-24; on the eschatology of Eleusis and Orphism, see L. ALBINUS (2000), p. 117-152 and 188-199; about the Orphic Netherworld, see A. BERNABÉ (2009, especially p. 102-111) for punishments and prizes. For the torments of the uninitiated, see Doralice FABIANO (2010). This dual Hades is clearly described in Pl., *Phd.*, 69c; *Resp.*, 363ce; *Ps.-Pl., Ax.*, 371c-372a and *Plut.*, fr. 178 Sandbach.

20. Since this triad of “unwritten laws” is found only in the Eleusinian poet Aeschylus (*Supp.*, 701-709; *Eum.*, 269-272 and 538-548), A. H. SOMMERSTEIN (1996, p. 169) suggests they are connected to Eleusis.

21. The most important part in the instructions of the tablets is the words the initiate has to utter to demonstrate that he or she is indeed an initiate. These *λεγόμενα* are absent in Circe's and Heracles' instructions.

HP. Ἐντεῦθεν αὐλῶν τίς σε περιεῖσιν πνοή,
ὄψει τε φῶς κάλλιστον ὥσπερ ἐνθάδε,
καὶ μυρρινῶνας καὶ θιάσους εὐδαίμονας. (154-156)

Her.: Then the music of the pipes will waft around you,
and you will see glorious light just like we have up here,
and groves of myrtle, and happy companies of men and women.

Εὐρήσεις Αἴδαο δόμοις ἐνδέξια κρήνην,
παρ δ' αὐτῆι λευκῆν ἑστηκυῖαν κυπάρισσον
πρόσσω δ' εὐρήσεις τὸ Μνημοσύνης ἀπὸ λίμνης ...
(Pharsalus, *OF* 477.1-2; 4²².)

You will find in the mansion of Hades, on the right, a fountain
and next to it, a white cypress erect.
Further on you will find, from the lake of Mnemosyne ...

Both the comedy and the tablets coincide regarding the kind of things that will be found in Hades: a mass of water (λίμνην μεγάλην; κρήνην, Μνημοσύνης ἀπὸ λίμνης), vegetation (μυρρινῶνας, κυπάρισσον) and brilliance (φῶς, λευκῆν).

(b) The mud. According to the doctrine of the mystery cults, the uninitiated were condemned to lie in mud in the Netherworld, which was an image of their impurity for not having been initiated²³. Aristophanes mentions this punishment, but adds a scatological element to provoke hilarity: beside the mud, there is dung (σκῶρ, v. 146), qualified with a solemn epithet, ἀείων, 'ever-flowing', typical of springs or rivers²⁴. In one of the Cretan gold tablets it is applied to the spring in which the initiates have to calm their thirst:

Ἀλλὰ π<ι>εῦ μο<ι> / κράνας αἰεῖνάω ἐπὶ δ<ε>ξιά.

Give me, then, to drink from the fountain of eternal flow²⁵.

22. *OF* refers to the edition of Orphic fragments by A. BERNABÉ (2004-2005). For the tablets, I follow the translation of A. BERNABÉ, Ana Isabel JIMÉNEZ SAN CRISTÓBAL (2008).

23. Ὅς ἂν ἀμύητος καὶ ἀτέλεστος εἰς Ἄιδου ἀφίκηται ἐν βορβόρῳ κείσεται (Pl., *Phd.*, 69c = *OF* 434 III, 576 I); τοὺς δὲ ἀνοσίους αὐ καὶ ἀδίκους εἰς πηλὸν τινα κατορύπτουσιν [*sc.* Μουσαῖος καὶ ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ] ἐν Ἄιδου (*Resp.*, 363d = *OF* 434 I). Plato attributes this punishment to the poets, among which he cites Musaeus (connected with Orpheus) and his son, probably Eumolpus (Paus., X, 5, 6; X, 13, 11; Ap. Rhod., I, 310), the purported ancestor of the hierophants of Eleusis, the Eumolpidae. Cf. Plut., fr. 178 Sandbach; Iulian, *Or.*, VII, 25 (II, 1, 88 Rocherfort = *OF* 435 I); Diog. Laert., VI, 39 (*OF* 435 II); Ael. Arist., XXII, 10. See M. AUBINEAU (1959) and Doralice FABIANO (2010), p. 150-152.

24. Κρήνη: Hes., *Op.*, 595; λίμνη: Hdt., I, 93; ποταμός: Hdt., I, 145; Aesch., *Supp.*, 553; Eur., *Ion*, 1083. Theocritus (XV, 102) applies it to the Acheron.

25. Eleutherna, *OF* 483.1-2. In the other Cretan tablets we have the synonym αἰερόω (*OF* 478-482.2; 484-484a.2). The parallel is noted by A. BERNABÉ (2008),

To this mud darkness is added, as Xanthias later informs us (σκότος καὶ βόρβορος, 273). It is conceivable that this expression, with the sonorous repetition of *-o-* in the substantives, was a stereotyped formula in the mysteries²⁶ and that Aristophanes makes an ἀπροσδόκητον joke in changing σκότος for a similar sounding but coarse term: βόρβορον πολὺν / καὶ σκῶρ²⁷.

(c) The light and the myrtle groves. The initiates are rewarded with a delightful existence forming revelling groups and enjoying light as that of the sun (cf. 454), opposed to the darkness of the damned, and vegetation. In the choral song they repeatedly mention the meadows (λειμῶνες) they tread on (326, 374, 449; cf. 351-352, 442). Similarly, in an Orphic golden tablet from Thurii, the deceased is invited to “take the path to the right / towards the sacred meadows (λειμῶνες) and groves of Persephone” (*OF* 487.5-6)²⁸.

(d) The dialogue with inhabitants of Hades. Heracles announces that the initiate will offer Dionysus whatever explanations are needed, using an expression very similar to a passage in the lamella from Hipponion allusive to the guardians' conversation with the soul:

HP. Οἶ σοι φράσουσ' ἀπαξάπανθ' ὧν ἄν δέη. (161)

Her.: Who will tell you absolutely everything you need to know.

Τοὶ δέ σε εἰρήσονταὶ ἐν φρασί πευκαλίμασι / ὄτ' ἔξερεις ...
(*OF* 474.8-9)

They will ask you, with sagacious discernment, why you are investigating...

All these parallels point to a common source of the *Frogs* and the Orphic tablets. It seems plausible that Aristophanes knew an Orphic poem, probably a *katábasis* narrated by Orpheus in the first person, which described what the souls would find in the Netherworld²⁹. Some verses of this

p. 1225, n. 43. In a fragment of *Gerytades* (156.13 K.-A.) there is a similar transformation of an Underworld river into a “River of Diarrhoea”.

26. Cf. Ael. Arist., XXII, 10: οὐκ ἐν σκότῳ τε καὶ βορβόρῳ κεισομένουσ, ἃ δὴ τοῦσ ἀμῆτηουσ ἀναμένειν; Plut., fr. 178 Sandbach: ἐν βορβόρῳ πολλῶ καὶ ὀμίγλῃ (but previously: διὰ σκότους); Plot., I, 8, 13: εἰς βόρβορον σκοτεινὸν ἔσται πεσών.

27. In v. 85 Aristophanes says that Agathon has gone “to the feast of the blessed” (ἐς μακάρων εὐωχίαν), where an allusion to his presence among the Macedonians (Μακεδόνες) is expected (K. J. DOVER [1994], p. 201; A. H. SOMMERSTEIN [1996], p. 164).

28. Cf. a tablet from Pherae (*OF* 493): “Enter into the sacred meadow (λειμῶν), since the initiate is free from punishment”. On the meadows in the tablets, see A. BERNABÉ, Ana Isabel JIMÉNEZ SAN CRISTÓBAL (2008), p. 174-177.

29. The testimonies on Orpheus' *Descent to Hades*, probably dating from the middle of the fifth century BCE, are gathered in *OF* 707-711. See also J. N. BREMMER (2009), p. 195-196. For the use of the first person, see: *Orph. Arg.*, 40-42.

poem were probably extracted and reworked to be engraved in the gold tablets, together with ritual formulae, and served as instructions to the initiates in their last voyage. It is also likely that the comedian used the Eleusinian poem about Heracles' *katábasis* as a source, in which the hero is taught on the Netherworld in his initiation (just as the Orphic initiates in theirs). In the *Frogs*, Heracles provides information to Dionysus, so the former acts as a hierophant and the latter as an initiate. Consequently, it is Dionysus' interview with his half-brother, and not his descent, which should count as his initiation, in which the hero reveals to the god what he will see in the Underworld.

5. Charon

After bidding farewell to Heracles, Dionysus and Xanthias start their journey to Hades and they recognize the lake of Charon mentioned by Heracles (137)³⁰. It is the boundary of the Underworld, and must be the Acherusian Lake, since in Euripides' *Alcestis*, 439-444, Charon is related with the λίμνη Ἀχεροντία. When the old man approaches the shore, he asks the waiting souls their destination, as if they were the stations of a city bus. The terrible boatman of the dead is reduced to a grouchy everyday ferryman³¹:

XA. Τίς εἰς ἀναπαύλας ἐκ κακῶν καὶ πραγμάτων;
 Τίς εἰς τὸ Λήθηος πεδίον, ἢ ᾗς Ὀκνου πλοκάς³²,
 ἢ ᾗς Κερβερίους, ἢ ᾗς κόρακας, ἢ ᾗς ταίναρον; (185-187)

R. G. EDMONDS III (in this volume) is sceptical as to the existence of this poem. For this poem as a source of the Orphic gold tablets, see A. BERNABÉ, Ana Isabel JIMÉNEZ SAN CRISTÓBAL (2008), p. 227-233.

30. ΞΑ. Λίμνη νῆ Δία / αὐτῆ ᾗσιν ἦν ἔφραζε (181-182). They also identify other parts of Heracles' description: those who strike their fathers and the perjurers (ΔΙ. Κατεῖδες οὖν που τοὺς πατραλοίας αὐτόθι / καὶ τοὺς ἐπίορκους, οὗς ἔλεγεν ἡμίον; 274-275), the beasts (ΞΑ. [...] οὗτος ὁ τόπος ἐστὶν οὗ τὰ θηρία / τὰ δεινὰ ἔφασκε ἕκαστος, 278-279), and the initiates (ΞΑ. Τοῦτ' ἔστ' ἐκεῖν', ὃ δέσποθ' οἱ μεμνημένοι / ἐνταῦθά που παίζουσιν, οὗς ἔφραζε νῶν, 318-319). These expressions may be echoing the passage of *Odyssey* in which Odysseus, after crossing the Ocean, identifies the place that Circe had indicated to him to make the sacrifices: [...] ἐς χῶρον ἀφικόμεθ', ὃν φράσε Κίρκη (XI, 21).

31. R. G. EDMONDS III (2004), p. 127: "Charon, in the *Frogs*, is a gruff old man who responds mechanically to Dionysos' greeting with a list of the ferry's destinations, just like any bored modern-day bus driver or train conductor who has gone over the same route endlessly for years and years."

32. The reading of the manuscripts is Ὀνουποκάς, "Donkey shearing", adopted by K. J. DOVER (1993), p. 214-215. Ὀκνου πλοκάς is defended by A. H. SOMMERSTEIN (1996, p. 173), who indicates that Aristarchus connected the line with a fragment of Cratinus (fr. 367 K.-A.) about a man plaiting a rope which is immediately eaten by a donkey. He is followed by N. G. WILSON (2007), p. 143, and Nikoletta KANAVOU (2011), p. 160.

Char.: Who's for a rest from all toil and trouble?
 Who's for the Plain of Oblivion, or for Ocnus' rope factory,
 or for the land of the Cerberians, or for Damnation, or for Taenarum?

The Plain of Oblivion is also mentioned by Theognis and Platon³³, who seem to be drawing from the same source as Aristophanes (a popular image? a *katábasis*?). In the Orphic tradition this motif has been transformed into the Spring of Oblivion, implied in the gold lamellae³⁴. Ocnos with a rope devoured by his donkey was the embodiment of hesitation, whose works are fruitless³⁵, like the labors of Sisyphus (*Od.*, XI, 593-600) and of the Danaids in Hades (Ps.-Pl., *Ax.*, 371e; Ov., *Met.*, IV, 462-463). His presence in Polygnotus' painting of the Underworld in the Cnidian *lesche* in Delphi³⁶, datable to the 460s, together with many other figures such as Charon, indicates that he was probably a popular character featured in a poetic *katábasis*, perhaps the *Minyas*, which was one of the sources of the painter, as Pausanias affirms regarding Charon³⁷. The Cerberians seem to be a mixture of Cerberus (an element of Heracles' *katábasis*, but not only that) and the Cimmerians³⁸, a mythical people mentioned by Odysseus at the beginning of the *Nékylia* (XI, 13-15) that lived across the Ocean and were covered by a perennial mist. The Taenaron points to the entrance of Hades used by Heracles and, according to some, also by Orpheus³⁹. The whole scene seems to be inspired by the *Minyas*, in which Theseus and Pirithous are carried by Charon in his boat (cf. fr. 1 Bernabé). In summary, the diverse origins of these motifs are indicative of the variety of sources that Aristophanes is using in his picture of the Netherworld.

Since Charon only accepts Dionysus in his boat to cross the lake Acherusia, Xanthias has to go around it on foot⁴⁰. Charon asks the slave to

33. Thgn., 1216-1217; Pl., *Resp.*, 621a.

34. It is alluded to, but not mentioned by name: κρήνα, ταύτας τᾶς κρίνας (*OF* 474.1; 5; see also *OF* 475.4, 7; 476.1; 3; 477.1; 3). We deduce it for its opposition to the Spring and Lake of Memory (f. ex. πρόσθεν δὲ εὐρήσεις τᾶς Μνημοσύνας ἀπὸ λίμνας / ψυχρὸν ὕδωρ προρέον, *OF* 474.6-7).

35. Paus., X, 29, 2. On Ocnos see Doralice FABIANO (2008).

36. Paus., X, 29, 1-2.

37. Paus., X, 28, 2. *Min.*, fr. 1 Bernabé.

38. Cf. R. J. CLARK (1979), p. 76, and Nikoletta KANAVOU (2011), p. 161 and n. 719. Κερβέριοι was Crates' reading for *Od.*, XI, 14, but it seems to be based on Aristophanes' passage. Κερβέριοι is used in Soph., fr. 1060 Radt, so it is likely that it was he who invented the term.

39. Heracles: Hecat. Mil., *FGrH* 1 F 27; Eur., *HF*, 23; Apoll., II, 5, 12. Orpheus: Orph., *Arg.*, 40-42; Verg., *Georg.*, IV, 467.

40. When Charon and Dionysus get to the shore, Xanthias has already arrived (271). R. J. CLARK (1979, p. 75) has sharply observed that this scene echoes the passage of the *Nékylia* in which Odysseus meets Elpenor after crossing the Oceanus and says: "Thou coming on foot hast outstripped me in my black ship" (*Od.*, XI, 58).

wait *παρὰ τὸν Αὐαίνου λίθον / ἐπὶ ταῖς ἀναπαύλαις*, “at the resting-place by Withering Heights”⁴¹ (194-195). The invented name seems to be coined after the adjective *αὔος “dry” and αὐαίνομαι “wither away”, in reference to the fading and decline typical of the afterworld⁴². It may be reminiscent of the “thirst of the dead”, the terrible penalty suffered by Tantalus (στεῦτο δὲ διψῶν, *Od.*, XI, 584), along with hunger, and a sensation expressed by the souls in the Orphic gold tablets when they reach the Spring of Memory (δίψαι δ’ εἰμ’ αὔος καὶ ἀπόλλυμαι, “I am dry with thirst and dying”⁴³).

Rocks are often mentioned in the descriptions of the nether regions, such as the rock (πέτρῃ) at the confluence of the Underworld rivers in *Od.*, X, 515 or the Leukas rock (Λευκάδα πέτρην), part of the itinerary of the souls led to Hades by Hermes in *Od.*, XXIV, 11. Aristophanes may be imitating typical expressions allusive to the stone that some wrongdoers are condemned to hold for all eternity, such as Ταντάλου λίθος (Arch., fr. 91.14 W.; Pind., *Isth.*, VIII, 10), Σισύφου λίθος (Ps.-Pl., 371d; Greg. Naz., *Epigr.*, VIII, 110, 4) or λίθος Ἀσκαλάφοιο (Euphor., fr. 9.13 Powell).

6. The Empusa

After descending from Charon’s boat, Dionysus again meets Xanthias and has him walk in front to explore the unknown territory. Xanthias informs his master that he sees the darkness and the mud and also the parricides and the perjurers, probably pointing to the spectators⁴⁴ (273-276), thus blurring the worlds of the living and the dead. He makes no mention of the snakes and beasts foretold by Heracles. Should we deduce that they are none others than the frogs and that the lake that marks the boundary of Hades is no more terrible than a mundane pond only populated by annoying but harmless frogs?

Having arrived at the location where the beasts were supposed to be found, the god reaffirms his boldness: he claims that the conceited Heracles tried to frighten him and to discourage him from his endeavour, knowing of the god’s combativeness and fearing being eclipsed by him. But he is determined to obtain a triumph worthy of this difficult path (279-284). These

41. Translation by W. B. STANFORD (1968²), p. 90.

42. K. J. DOVER (1993), p. 217; A. H. SOMMERSTEIN (1996), p. 174-175.

43. *OF* 474.11-12. See also: *OF* 475.13-14; 476.8-9; 477.9; 478-484a.1-2. On these passages and the thirst of the dead, see A. BERNABÉ, Ana Isabel JIMÉNEZ SAN CRISTÓBAL (2008), p. 29-35. J. D. DENNISTON *ap.* W. B. STANFORD (1968², p. 90), K. J. DOVER (1993, p. 217), A. H. SOMMERSTEIN (1996, p. 174) and R. G. EDMONDS III (2004, p. 135 n. 65) have noted the parallel with the tablets.

44. W. B. STANFORD (1968²), p. 97; K. J. DOVER (1994), p. 228; A. H. SOMMERSTEIN (1996), p. 179; R. G. EDMONDS III (2004), p. 137. In v. 420 the chorus refers to the Athenians as οἱ ἄνω νεκροί.

vainglorious words are soon belied by the facts. Xanthias pretends to hear something and is sent further to find out who is there (285-287). In order to mock Dionysus, the slave feigns seeing a terrible monster, who adopts the form of several animals: a cow, a mule, an attractive woman and a dog: it is the Empusa, a popular female ghost (288-295)⁴⁵. This description has the immediate effect of terrifying the god, who does not know where to flee, and finally begs for protection from his own priest, who would sit in the most honourable place in the theatre (295-297).

Regarding the tradition of *katábasis*, the Empusa can be interpreted as a comic version of the Gorgon⁴⁶. The latter is among the spirits seen by Heracles in Hades, whom he tries to scare off with his sword, until Hermes informs him that she is only a vain specter (κενὸν εἶδωλον, Apoll., II, 5, 12). Likewise, at the end of the *Nékyia*, Odysseus is frightened, not at the sight of a soul, monster or god, but simply imagining that Persephone should send him the head of the Gorgon, which does not happen in the end (XI, 633-635). In the *Frogs*, Empusa does not appear on stage either, probably because she is only a product of the imagination of Xanthias to frighten his master. The slave assures him that she has gone, but Dionysus is so afraid that he has to swear it no fewer than three times. The Empusa was probably conceived as a ghost, as later sources affirm⁴⁷, which allows Xanthias to pretend that she swiftly appears and disappears. The scene ends with these verses:

ΔΙ. Οἴμοι τάλας, ὡς ὠχρίασ' αὐτὴν ἰδών.

ΞΑ. Ὅδι δὲ δείσας ὑπερρυπρίασέ σου.

Di.: Dear me, how pale I went when I saw her !

Xa.: Well, *this* was so frightened for you that it turned *brown*. (307-308)

The god admits having become pale, like Odysseus on his journey (ἐμὲ δὲ χλωρὸν δέος ἦρει, XI, 43 and 633, where he is afraid of the Gorgon), and the slave adds that someone or something very near to them (ὄδι), probably Dionysus' tunic (κροκωτός), has taken on another colour, brown, through the effect of fear, denouncing the god's lack of control of his own physiology⁴⁸.

45. On this figure and her frightening function in the mysteries, see Ch. G. BROWN (1991).

46. H. LLOYD-JONES (1967, p. 218 = 1990, p. 179) insightfully suggested that the Empusa episode is inspired by Heracles' encounter with the Gorgon.

47. Sch. Ap. Rhod., III, 861 (p. 242 Wendel): φάσματα [...] τὰ καλούμενα Ἐκαταῖα; sch. Aesch., *Vita* 2 Dindorf: νυκτερινὸν φάντασμα; Suda s.v. Ἐμπουσα: φάντασμα δαιμονιώδες ὑπὸ τῆς Ἐκάτης ἐπιτεμπόμενον.

48. Πυρρός as the colour of excrement: *Eccl.*, 329-330. See A. H. SOMMERSTEIN (1996), p. 182.

7. More monsters at the entrance to Hades

Next, Dionysus and Xanthias encounter the revelling initiates and hear their music and songs⁴⁹ (316-430). The god asks them where to find Pluto's palace, and they inform him that he is right outside the door (431-435). He knocks and attempts to have the janitor (identified in the manuscripts as Aeacus) take him for Heracles thanks to his grotesque disguise and thus overcome all the perils of Hades (460-464). But this fraudulent impersonation turns against him when, after crossing the gates of Pluto's palace, the doorkeeper, mistaking him for Heracles, curses and insults him for having stolen Cerberus (465-469) and threatens him with terrible tortures by several Underworld monsters (a true *sparagmós*, cf. διασπαράξει, διασπάσσονται), the mere mention of which makes the god "empty his bowel" (again):

ΑΙ. Τοία Στυγός σε μελανοκάρδιος πέτρα
 Άχερόντιός τε σκόπελος αίματοσταγής
 φρουροῦσι, Κωκυτοῦ τε περιδρομοὶ κύνες,
 ἔχιδνά θ' ἑκατοκέφαλος, ἢ τὰ σπλάγχνα σου
 διασπαράξει· πλευμόνων τ' ἀνθάπεται
 Ταρτησσία μύραινα, τῷ νεφρῷ δέ σου
 αὐτοῖσιν ἐντέροισιν ἡματομένω
 διασπάσσονται Γοργόνες Τειθράσαι,
 ἐφ' ἃς ἐγὼ δρομαῖον ὀρμήσω πόδα.
 ΞΑ. Οὗτος, τί δέδρακας;
 ΔΙ. Ἐγκέχοδα· κάλει θεόν.

Aeacus: Such is the sable-hearted rock of Styx
 And the blood-dripping crag of Acheron
 That ward thee, such Cocytus' roaming hounds
 And the Echidna hundred-headed, who
 Will rend apart thine offals, while thy lungs
 Are gripped by the Tartessian murry-eel,
 And while thy bloodied kidneys, guts and all,
 The Gorgons out of Teithras tear asunder,
 Whom I with swift-foot haste will now go seek.

Xan.: Hey, what's happened to you?

Dio.: "The *bowel* is empty: call upon the god!" (470-479)

The mention of three of the Underworld rivers and the stone of Styx unmistakably points to Circe's instructions to Odysseus⁵⁰: "into the Acheron flow Pyriphlegethon and Cocytus, which is a branch of the water of the Styx, and there is a rock" (πέτρῃ, X, 512-515). The "Cocytus' roaming hounds" are probably an allusion to the canine aspect of the Erinyes, who in

49. H. LLOYD-JONES (1967, p. 219 = 1990, p. 179) suggests that in the Heracles' *katábasis* used by Aristophanes, the blessed seen by the hero were initiates, or at least a part of them.

50. K. J. DOVER (1994), p. 254; A. H. SOMMERSTEIN (1996), p. 199.

tragedy are frequently described as hounds pursuing a prey⁵¹. Echidna, half-girl and half-snake, is the mother of Cerberus and other monsters (Hes., *Th.*, 295-332)⁵² and her torture recalls the one that Tityus suffers in the *Nékyia*, whose liver is torn by two vultures (ἦπαρ ἔκειρον, *Od.*, XI, 578-579⁵³). The Tartessian murry-eel is an ἀπροσδόκητον element that interrupts the series of monsters with an exotic fish (and a culinary delicacy). It was considered very aggressive and its denomination seems to be a deformation of the adjective Ταρτάρειος (cf. Eur., *HF*, 907)⁵⁴. The Gorgon is a typical monster of Hades whom Heracles encountered and Odysseus feared to see⁵⁵. Here Aristophanes has comically distorted her into terrible women from the Attic *demos* of Teithras, who perhaps were famous for their ugliness or bad temper⁵⁶. Finally, a ritual expression for the libation in honor of Dionysus in the Lenaia (ἐκκέχυται· κάλει τὸν θεόν, quoted by the scholia) is transformed by the god himself into an irreverent declaration of another, more corporal, kind of spilling (ἐγκέχοδα· κάλει τὸν θεόν).

The god switches his costume with Xanthias to avoid the violence (494-502), but then wants to recover it, when a handmaid of Persephone invites him to a delicious dinner that the goddess is preparing and that includes a roasted ox (503-533). That is probably an echo of the ox sacrificed by Heracles on his visit to the Netherworld to give blood to the ghosts and that later was roasted⁵⁷. The favorable reception by Persephone's handmaid implies that of the goddess herself and probably reflects the telling of Heracles' *katábasis* in which he is welcomed by the queen of the dead thanks to his previous initiation in Eleusis⁵⁸. This is the benign attitude that the bearers of some gold tablets expect from her in the Netherworld⁵⁹. The

51. Aesch., *Cho.*, 1054; *Eum.*, 246-247; Eur., *El.*, 1342-1343. A. H. SOMMERSTEIN (1996), p. 199.

52. The hundred heads are an attribute of Echidna's mate Typhoeus (*Th.*, 306 and 825) and in some texts of her son Cerberus (Pind., *Dith.*, II, fr. 249b M.).

53. Cf. Ps.-Pl., 371e: Τιτυοῦ σπλάγχνα αἰωνίως ἐσθιόμενα καὶ γεννώμενα.

54. W. B. STANFORD (1968²), p. 115; K. J. DOVER (1994), p. 254; A. H. SOMMERSTEIN (1996), p. 200; Nikoleta ΚΑΝΑΒΟΥ (2011), p. 163, who suggests also a possible pun on Τιταρήσιος, river associated with the Underworld, as *Il.*, II, 751-755 mentions it as a part of the Styx.

55. Heracles: *Apoll.*, II, 5, 12; Odysseus: *Od.*, XI, 633-635.

56. A. H. SOMMERSTEIN (1996, p. 200), who also assumes a phonetic echo between Ταρτησσία and Τειθράσια.

57. *Ra.*, 506: βοῦν ἀπηνθράκιζ' ὄλον; *Apoll.*, II, 5, 12: μίαν τῶν Ἄιδου βοῶν ἀπέσφαξεν. H. LLOYD-JONES (1967), p. 219-220 (= 1990, p. 180); R. G. EDMONDS III (2003), p. 189; ID. (2004), p. 151.

58. H. LLOYD-JONES (1967), p. 224 (= 1990, p. 183) on *Apoll.*, II, 5, 12; R. G. EDMONDS III (2003), p. 188; ID., (2004), p. 149-150.

59. *OF* 490-491.6-7 (Thurii): νῦν δ' ἰκέτις ἦκω παραι ἄγνην Φερσεφόνειαν, / ὧς με πρόφρων πέμψηι ἔδρας ἐς εὐαγέων. Compare v. 503, ὦ φίλαθ' ἦκεις Ἡράκλεις; Δεῦρ'

banquet that Persephone prepares for Dionysus (confused with Heracles) also recalls the eternal banquet promised to the participants in the mysteries⁶⁰.

Facing further threats, the god swaps his clothes once again with his slave to avoid being taken for Heracles (549-589). The whipping subsequently inflicted on them both in order to discover which is the god emerges as fruitless, as they avoid manifesting their pain (605-667). The doorkeeper decides to leave Hades and Persephone, as they are gods, the task of recognizing the divinity of Dionysus (671-672). This resembles the Hipponion gold tablet, in which the guardians, having heard the pass-words that prove that the deceased is an initiate, consult with the god (that is, Hades, or Persephone) to confirm his identity⁶¹:

Καὶ δὴ τοὶ ἐρέουσιν {1} ὑποχθονίῳ βασιλῆϊ (βασιλεί(αι) West) (OF 474.13)

And to be sure, they will consult with the subterranean king (queen).

Moreover, in some Thuri tablets, the initiate declares his pride for being of the same race as the Underworld gods⁶², in order that they should recognize the divinity of his soul (as it happens in OF 488.9: θεὸς δ' ἔσσι ἀντί βροτοῖο) and consequently reward him.

8. Conclusions

In the *Frogs*, the first source of comicalness is Dionysus' character. He shows himself as a true anti-hero, a boastful, self-indulgent and fickle figure lacking the decisive quality to enter the Underworld: bravery. Even though he claims to be combative (μάχιμος, v. 281) and tries to overcome the perils of the journey by disguising himself as Heracles, he is terrified at the mere mention of monsters, such as the Empusa, the Erinyes or the Gorgons. The terrors of Hades are thus exploited by Aristophanes not to frighten the spectators (which is suitable for epic or tragedy), but to frighten Dionysus and make the spectators laugh at his cowardice. Finally, although he behaves as the perfect inversion of the hero capable of descending to the realm of dead, he will succeed in his endeavour of bringing back to Athens the best tragic

εἴσθι (v. 507, 512: Ἀλλ' εἴσθι), with ὄλβιε καὶ μακαριστέ (OF 488.9, Thuri) and εἴσθ<ι> ἱερὸν λειμῶνα (OF 493, Phrae).

60. Plato calls it "the symposion of the holy men" (συμπόσιον τῶν ὁσίων, *Resp.*, 363d) and mocks it as "a perpetual drunkenness" (μέθην αἰώνιον, 363e), also mentioned by Plut., *Comp. Cimon. et Luc.*, I, 2. Cf. Ar., fr. 504.6-7 K.-A.; Ps.-Pl., *Ax.*, 371d: συμπόσιά τε εὐμελῆ καὶ εὐλαπίνα αὐτοχορήγητοι. On this banquet see F. GRAF (1974), p. 98-103, and on its parody in comedy, A. BERNABÉ (2008), p. 1225-1258.

61. The identity test is typical at the gates of Hades, as the gold tablets show. Cf. R. G. EDMONDS III (2003), p. 189; ID. (2004), p. 149.

62. OF 488.3: καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼν ὑμῶν γένος ὄλβιον εὐχομαι εἶμεν, and OF 489-490.3.

poet, because, after all, he is a god and he has the crucial mission to save tragedy for the social and moral benefit of the *polis*.

Regarding the previous poetic tradition, Aristophanes has selected a number of motifs and scenes characteristic of the accounts of *katábasis* (Heracles' descent, *Nékyia*, *Minyas*, Orpheus' *katábasis*), and has seasoned them with unexpected or trivial elements to create a funny story and produce hilarity, such as scatological allusions (for example the ever-flowing dung in which the damned souls lie or the physiological effects of dread) and abundant elements of every-day life, such as Dionysus' conception of the *katábasis* as an ordinary journey, the Acherusian lake as a pond infested by frogs, the admirers of poetasters punished in the mud, the parts of Hades as the stops of Charon's boat, the house of Hades as a mansion whose gate is guarded by a hound and a janitor and with servants, a murry-eel among the infernal monsters, or the Gorgons as ugly and unpleasant women from a coarse Attic *demos*. On the verbal level, some traditional names are combined (Κιμμέριοι + Κέρβερος = Κερβέριοι) or substituted by similar sounding forms (Ταρταρεία ~ Ταρτησσία), and new ones are coined (ὁ Αὐαῖνου λίθος, from *αὔος). These ingredients serve to create a familiar Netherworld, whose horrific image is counteracted through humour.

What does Dionysus' *katábasis* owe to those of his forerunners? Like Orpheus in the search of his newly deceased wife, Dionysus confesses that he wishes to descend to Hades driven by his longing for Euripides (πόθος, 53, 55; ἕμερος, 59, feelings with erotic connotations)⁶³. However, immediately afterwards he declares needing a dexterous poet (δεξιός, 71), and in the poetic *agon* his journey more closely resembles that of Odysseus, who went to the Underworld in search of the wisdom of an extraordinary man who could assure his salvation from all the dangers of the sea (*Od.*, X, 538-539). Likewise, Dionysus chooses to bring the wise Aeschylus back to life because, at that moment in history, the moral lessons and encouragement of his tragedies would be of utmost benefit to the demoralized Athens trapped in an ill-fated naval war. Despite showing himself as the antithesis of Heracles for his flagrant lack of courage, Dionysus succeeds in his enterprise thanks to his divinity. Just as Pluto allowed the hero to return with Cerberus, he now allows Dionysus to return the tragedian of his choice to earth⁶⁴, thus his *katábasis* can be viewed as a reedition of that of Heracles.

63. Also Pirithous has erotic intentions when he descends to kidnap Persephone, and Heracles finds love in Hades, since Meleager encourages him to marry his sister Deianira (Pind., fr. 249a M.; Bacch., *Ep.*, V, 165-175). R. G. EDMONDS III (2003, p. 188) and (2004, p. 123) mentions the parallels of Dionysus' *katábasis* with those of Orpheus, Odysseus and Pirithous.

64. H. LLOYD-JONES (1967), p. 220 (= 1990, p. 180).

This would *prima facie* identify Aeschylus and Cerberus⁶⁵, but the tragedian probably resembles more Theseus, who is not the aim of Heracles' journey, but is liberated as an unexpected consequence of it⁶⁶. Likewise, Dionysus' first intention is to fetch Euripides, but it is Aeschylus whom he brings back to the upper world⁶⁷. Therefore, for Athens, this tragedian would represent a new Theseus, able to defend it against its merciless enemies and provide for its eventual victory over them.

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65. As M. PADILLA (1992, p. 381) suggests: "Although there is irony in this equation of Aeschylus with Cerberus, the animal-like fierceness of his poet is looked to, now, to restore the depleted energies in the theatrical and social spheres".

66. This liberation was probably told in the Eleusinian poem on Heracles' *katá-basis*, as J. N. BREMMER (2009, p. 197) argues. It is mentioned in Eur., *Her.*, 1169-1170; D. S., IV, 61, 4; Apoll., II, 5, 12; *Epit.*, I, 24; sch. Ap. Rhod., I, 101.

67. If Aeschylus represents Theseus, Euripides would be Pirithous. His eternal punishment is due to his impiety, a charge Aristophanes often imputes to Euripides (889-894, 936; *Thesm.*, 451). It is perhaps too audacious to affirm that Euripides would match Cerberus, who, after being brought to Eurystheus, has to be returned to Hades, where it belongs. It is noteworthy that Aristophanes identifies his arch-enemy Cleon with Cerberus in *Knights*, where he calls him *ιερόν κύνα κερχαρόδοντα ... δεινὰ κεκραγῶς* (1017-1018) and *κύνα Κέρβερον ἀνδραποδιστήν* (1030), and in *Peace*: *ἐκείνον τὸν κάτωθεν Κέρβερον ... παφλάζων καὶ κεκραγῶς* (313-314). Although in the *Frogs* Aeschylus is more similar to Cerberus, as he is described as brave and loud-mouthed (*δεινὸν ἐριβρεμέτας χόλον ἔνδοθεν ἔξει*, 814), Euripides "sharpens his teeth" like a boar (*θήγοντος ὀδόντα*, 815) and is "ready to bite or be bitten first" (*ἔτοιμος εἶμ' ἔγωγε ... δάκνειν, δάκνεσθαι πρότερος*, 860-861), which likens him to the Hell dog.

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