# Aristophanic Structures in *Sweeney Agonistes*, "The Hollow Men," and *Murder in the Cathedral*

*Josh Richards*

T. S. Eliot subtitled *Sweeney Agonistes*, his first foray into drama, as "Fragments of an Aristophanic Melodrama." The nature of this descriptor has been occasionally explored, although more often with reference to Eliot's five-page outline of the projected play (referred to as "The Superior Landlord" manuscript) than in relation to the technical material that may have informed his composition.[1] For instance, examining the extant text of *Sweeney Agonistes* in light of Attic Old Comedy suggests that Doris, and not Sweeney, is the protagonist of the fragmentary play.

Yet, Eliot's deep interest in Aristophanic structures has implications for works other than *Sweeney Agonistes*. Two fragments, "Eyes that I last saw in tears" and "The wind sprang up," were published together with what became "The Hollow Men" III under the collective title "Doris's Dream Songs" in 1924.[2] Even at this late stage, *Sweeney Agonistes* and "The Hollow Men" may not have been wholly distinct, and Aristophanic elements, such as *antichoria* (the division of the chorus into halves, performing antiphonally), seem to

remain in "The Hollow Men" as a residue of the two works' unified origin.[3]

Additionally, by his own admission, Eliot was a tentative dramatist when he began his first complete play, *Murder in the Cathedral*.[4] He returned to a ritual structure, that of Aristophanes, when he composed the play. E. Martin Browne, commenting on an early draft of *Murder in the Cathedral*, states that "[i]t will be noticed that there appear two historical characters, Herbert of Bosham and John, Dean of Salisbury. . . . They clearly have been sacrificed to the formal pattern."[5] What this formal pattern constituted Browne does not state. I hypothesize that it is the ritual structure of the Aristophanic play adapted to the religious pageant play. This ritual structure may not only explain some of the play's more elusive features such as the sermon or the knight's defense but also reveal hidden thematic resonances.

Eliot was deeply engaged with Attic Old Comedy at the time when he wrote *Sweeney Agonistes* and "The Hollow Men."[6] One of the first apparent references to *Sweeney Agonistes* is in a 1923 letter to Ezra Pound, wherein Eliot comments cryptically, "Have mapt out Aristophanic comedy, but must devote study to phallic songs, also agons."[7] There are two matters of note here: The first is that Eliot conceived the play initially as a "comedy." The second is that Eliot studied the Aristophanic form—the designation is not flippant. In an aside in his 1919 essay "Ben Jonson," Eliot singles out Aristophanic drama for its prescribed form:

> [T]he classification of tragedy and comedy, while it may be sufficient to mark the distinction in a dramatic literature of more rigid form and treatment—it may distinguish Aristophanes from Euripides—is not adequate to a drama of such variations as the Elizabethans.[8]

Even before writing *Sweeney Agonistes*, Eliot considered structure a defining characteristic of Aristophanes's work. Buttram argues that Eliot was suspicious of the binary between comedy and tragedy. The

comment in "Ben Jonson" supports her claim with the caveat of Aristophanes, which complicates the application to *Sweeney Agonistes*. In other words, Eliot considered "rigid form and treatment" to be an intrinsic part of the plays of Aristophanes, and so it follows that they would feature in his own Aristophanic play.[9]

References to Aristophanes effloresce in Eliot's critical prose and correspondence around the writing of *Sweeney Agonistes*; none seem to exist in his letters or prose before 1919, and there is only one reference to Aristophanes in the published letters after 1925: a response to a question about *Sweeney Agonistes*.[10] Evidence of Eliot's interest in Aristophanes, synonymous with Attic Old Comedy, appears first in references in both the aforementioned essay on Ben Jonson and in his influential essay "Philip Massinger."[11] Additionally, a letter dated 1920 from his mother lists Aristophanes's *Birds* among his books, and Eliot attempted to attend a performance of the play in the original Greek in 1924.[12] However, references to Aristophanes in Eliot's writings appear most commonly in the context of his study of F. M. Cornford's *The Origin of Attic Comedy* (1914). In fact, one of the very first contributors he sought for *The Criterion* was Cornford, of whom he asked "a contribution . . . on some subject which would be of interest to readers of your *Origin of Attic Comedy*."[13] Eliot had glowingly praised the book in his essay "Euripides and Professor Murray," noting that "[f]ew books are more fascinating than those of Miss Harrison, Mr. Cornford, or Mr. Cooke, when they burrow in the origins of Greek myths and rites."[14] Later in 1924, Eliot aligns Cornford with Jessie Weston, whom he credits in the notes to *The Waste Land* for providing "[n]ot only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem."[15] However meretricious this homage to Weston may be, he similarly implied that he relied on Cornford as an organizational frame at the time of *Sweeney Agonistes* and "The Hollow Men" in a 1933 letter addressed to Hallie Flanagan, the director of a production of *Sweeney* at Vassar College. After providing some additional stage directions (such as "Sweeney in the middle with a chafing dish scrambling eggs"), Eliot directed Flanagan to Cornford's *Origins of Attic*

*Comedy*, remarking that it "is important to read before you do the play."[16] Eliot's comment aligns with the critical consensus: the structure of *Sweeney Agonistes* is based on Cornford's book.[17] However, Eliot's enthusiasm for this obscure work means that useful applications are to be found in the details of Cornford's text, not merely the broad outlines previously considered by scholars.

To recapitulate Cornford's theory: all plays by Aristophanes, and presumptively all of Attic Old Comedy, follow a "canonical plot-formula," which "preserves the stereotyped action of a ritual or folk drama."[18] The first half of the play contains three parts: a *Prologue*, which consists of "exposition scenes"; the *Parodos* (*πάροδος*), which is the entrance of the chorus and their initial song; and then the *Agon* (*ἀγών*), "a fierce 'contest' between the representatives of two parties or principles, which are in effect the hero and villain of the whole piece."[19] After the *Agon* comes the *Parabasis* (*παράβᾰσις*), an idiosyncratic feature of Old Comedy, wherein the Chorus bids "farewell to the actors, who leave the stage clear till it is over, and then return to carry on the business of the piece to the end."[20] During the *Parabasis*, the Chorus comes forward "to address the audience directly."[21] After the return of the actors, there are scenes of "Sacrifice and a Feast" interrupted "by a series of unwelcome intruders," generally stock characters labeled by Cornford collectively as Impostors, "who are successively put to derision by the protagonist and driven away with blows."[22] A second *Parabasis* may then be included, primarily in Aristophanes's earliest plays. The play concludes with "a festal procession" called a *Kômos* (*κῶμος*) wherein the victorious party is celebrated in a scene that often resembles, distantly, a wedding; the chorus exits in a procession called an *Exodos* (*ἔξοδος*).[23]

In the case of *Sweeney Agonistes*, only two parts are extant: the *Prologue* and the *Agon*. Cornford's plot-formula is not sufficiently rigid to extrapolate the whole from these remaining parts. Yet, an analysis of Cornford does allow us to identify Doris as the protagonist of the play. The tacit assumption by most readers that *Sweeney* is the protagonist seems based on his recurrence in Eliot's other poetry and on

the inclusion of his name in the play's title. However, Sweeney is not included in the *Prologue*, and all of Aristophanes's extant plays open with their protagonist. Moreover, that Doris may be the protagonist of *Sweeney Agonistes* is corroborated by the play's incomplete second section, "Fragment of an Agon." According to Cornford, the *Agon* is to be understood as "a dramatized debate . . . in which the persons represent opposing principles."[24] Yet, it is also a tightly structured debate; regarding the *Agon*'s form, Cornford asserts:

> The structure of the regular *Agon* is antiphonal, in two balanced halves. First comes the *Ode*, in which half the Chorus, according as their sympathies incline, encourage one or both the adversaries to do their utmost. Then the Leader, in the *Katakeleusmos*, calls on the Antagonist to speak first. The party who will ultimately be defeated always begins. He opens his case in the *Epirrheme*, usually interrupted by objections and questions from the [protagonist]. The passage ends in a *Pnigos*. The second part is parallel in form and contents. . . . Finally, in the *Sphragis*, the leader of the Chorus pronounces a verdict in favor of the [protagonist].[25]

In other words, after an initial choral ode, the chorus leader invites the Antagonist to speak with interjections from the protagonist, building to a wild, shouting climax in the *Pnigos* (*πνῖγος*). There is another ode, and then the protagonist gives his or her own speech (also ending in a *Pnigos*). Finally, the chorus-leader declares victory for the protagonist. While the structure of the *Agon* can vary slightly in some instances it is consistent enough to determine, largely, what is missing from "Fragment of an Agon."[26] We have neither the initial *Ode*, nor the *Katakeleusmos* (*κατακελευσμός*), nor the *Sphragis* (*σφρᾱγίς*) of the *Agon* in *Sweeney Agonistes*.[27] Sweeney's final long speech (lines 131–53) may be the *Pnigos*, though this is far from certain as Doris receives an interjection and Sweeney speaks again. Thus, the only portion that we possess appears to be all (or most)

of Sweeney's *Epirrheme*, interrupted by choral odes/songs, which Cornford allows in the genre, citing the example of the *Thesmophoriazusae*.[28] Returning to the issue at hand, Cornford is unequivocal that "[t]he party who will ultimately be defeated always begins."[29] Thus, unless what remains is only the second half of the *Agon* (where this would be the rebuttal), Doris is the protagonist. However, Sweeney's speeches are unlikely to have been conceived as the rebuttal given that rebuttals are invariably and significantly shorter—usually only forty lines; the lengths of the *Epirrheme* quoted in Cornford's footnotes, by contrast, are between seventy and eighty lines.[30] Finally, there is an established tradition of female protagonists in Aristophanes, a tradition that would be continued by Eliot's taking Doris as his protagonist.

Identifying Doris as *Sweeney*'s protagonist helps to account for one of the more puzzling passages in the "Fragment of an *Agon*": Sweeney's extended threat to cook Doris "[i]nto a stew." This is not merely the normal assortment of threats and invective that accompany an *Agon*, nor is it a bizarre non sequitur to the discussion of the murder in the second portion of the *Agon*. One of the core aspects of Cornford's thesis is the connection of the *Agon* to "ritual contests between the representatives of Summer and Winter, Life and Death."[31] Cornford goes on to connect this to the Mummer's Plays and the myth of St. George, the forms of folk-drama with which his readers would have been familiar, with a distinct emphasis on the resurrection of the protagonist.[32] An aside in "The Beating of a Drum" (1923), written around the same time as he began *Sweeney Agonistes* and "The Hollow Men," confirms Eliot's attention to this very passage:

> The prototype of the true Fool, according to my conjecture, is a character in that English version of the Perseus legend, the Mummers' Play of St. George and the Dragon. The Doctor who restores St. George to life is, I understand, usually presented as a comic character. As Mr. Cornford suggests, in *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, this Doctor may be identical with the Doctor

> who is called in to assist Punch after he has been thrown from his horse.[33]

Eliot concurs with Cornford, connecting Punch to the core action of the folk-dramas that underlie the Aristophanic play: "the hero's simulated death and revival by the Doctor, and a fierce *Agon* with an adversary."[34] This theme was even more pronounced in "The Superior Landlord," where Sweeney actually shoots Mrs. Porter, though she is later revived.[35] It is not necessary to assume that such an event would have actually occurred in *Sweeney Agonistes*, though. Cornford states that in the *Agon* "a dramatic death and resurrection of either adversary would be either too serious or too silly."[36] Thus, Sweeney's threat to cook Doris in a stew would have been sufficient, particularly in light of Cornford's explicit connection between the figure of the cook in the *Knights* (who boils and restores the aged Demos to youth) with the resurrecting Doctor.

> A Cook [Cornford writes] who can perform such miraculous operations is manifestly a magician, and his profession coalesces with that of the Doctor in the primitive functions of the medicine-man—a figure who . . . stands out in the dim past behind the Doctor who revives the slain in the folk-plays.[37]

Finally, as noted by Robert Crawford, Sweeney's assertion that "Life is death" seems to be, at least partially, an allusion to Aristophanes, centered on the death and resurrection theme.[38] Yet, this is an even deeper allusion than Crawford suggests. At the end of the *Agon* in *Frogs*, as Cornford summarizes,

> Euripides complains that he is "left for dead" in the underworld. . . . Dionysus replies to this appeal with a quotation from a play of Euripides' own, the *Polyidos*, which itself turned on a death and resurrection motive:
>
> "Who knows if to be living be not death?"[39]

The Greek text reveals that the relevant portion of the original line—"*τὸ ζῆν μέν ἐστι κατθανεῖν*"—is far closer to the simplicity of Eliot's own version than Cornford's rendering.[40] Eliot appears not only to follow the basic plot Conford prescribes for an *Agon* but also appropriates thematic elements from Cornford into his "Fragment."

The identification of Doris as the protagonist may also demystify one of the play's most perplexing aspects: the epigraph from St. John of the Cross. Buttram asserts that "Sweeney is the only one to whom the epigraphs might even begin to apply unironically."[41] Yet, Sweeney's speech seems only to support a brute, materialist existence driven by impulses to violence. The structure of the *Agon* is an argument between principles rather than people, so Sweeney as the antagonist is the representative of what the play is arguing *against*. Since the fragment does not include the *Antepirrheme*, we do not have a clear statement of what principle opposes and conquers Sweeney's nihilism. With all of its world-denying implication, the epigraph from St. John of the Cross may well have been added to suggest what this principle would have been had Eliot completed the fragment. While Buttram's arguments about Doris's base nature are compelling, the Aristophanic structure is centered on the rejuvenation of the protagonist's malaise, often in a very literal sense as in the aforementioned restoration of Demos by cooking.[42] However, we do not know how Eliot may have intended Doris to divest herself of the love of created things or how this rejuvenation would have played out.[43] Obviously, had it been accomplished, it would have rendered the play more religious than previously understood but probably not out of line with "The Hollow Men."

Given how deeply the Aristophanic structure runs in *Sweeney Agonistes*, it may well have seeped into "The Hollow Men." The extant copy of *Sweeney Agonistes* contains a large portion of the first segment of an Aristophanic play, the prologue, and an early part of the third segment, the *Agon*. So what happened to the second section, the *Parados*? Eliot may have repurposed some of the *Parados* in "The Hollow Men," combining it with the related fragments "Eyes that I Last Saw in Tears" and "The Wind Sprang Up at Four O'Clock." The *Parodos*

would have featured the entrance of the chorus and the earliest of the choral songs, and its absence from *Sweeney Agonistes* is definitive; as Cornford states, "It is in the first half of the play, or wherever the *Agon* occurs, that the Chorus is wanted."[44] While only one poem from "Doris's Dream Songs" was retained in the final version of "The Hollow Men" (Section III), its inclusion points once again to Aristophanic structure as outlined by Cornford:

> *Antichoria*—the division of the Chorus into two halves performing antiphonally—is, as Zielinski says, "the soul of epirrhematic composition." In other words, the whole structure of the most important part of the play implies this opposition between two half-Choruses. The division explains the fact that the comic Chorus is twice the size of the tragic. It has twenty-four members, including its two Leaders.[45]

Two Aristophanic elements described in this passage may have found their way into "The Hollow Men": a residual echo of a chorus leader and the division of choruses. Eliot was interested in both of these, as is clear in the aforementioned letter to Pound in which he indicates the need for further "study to phallic songs, also Agons."[46] While nothing resembling phallic songs appears in "The Hollow Men," Cornford's chapter on phallic songs heavily discusses both chorus leaders and divided choruses. Citing the example of Dikaiopolis in Aristophanes's *Acharnians*, a play with marked *antichoria* and featuring the most notable extant example of a phallic song, Cornford states that "[s]ince [Dikaiopolis] is both priest and congregation, he has not only to perform the part of 'Leader' of this Phallic Song, but also to act as his own Chorus."[47] Thus, the presence of at least one specific leader is a key part of the phallic songs that Eliot studied. Additionally, the interaction between leaders and the chorus is highlighted as one of the "essential features" of the genre.[48]

Personally, I have always understood the singular speakers in Sections II and III of "The Hollow Men" to be representatives of the

collective chorus of hollow men who voice the rest of the poem, and Eliot's study of Aristophanic structure lend credibility to this reading. The singular speakers are retained chorus leaders from when the poem was a choral ode as part of *Sweeney Agonistes*. Perhaps more contentious is the existence or form of *antichoria* in the poem, of which there seem to be two probable instances: between the poem's sections (suggesting the poem is polyphonic instead of a disconnected monody) and the right-justification and italicization of lines in Section V of "The Hollow Men," indicating the presence of a separate voice than the primary speaker who cannot, in the end, pronounce "For thine is the Kingdom." *Antichoria* in "The Hollow Men" presents fascinating interpretive possibilities for the poem's typography. For instance, the opening "Here we go round the prickly pear" and the final "This is the way the world ends" are italicized but left-justified. Are these two voices speaking in unison? Do left-justified lines in the middle part of Section V indicate one voice and the right-justified, italicized lines another?

Finally, within the limits of its subject matter, *Murder in the Cathedral* likewise follows an Aristophanic structure.[49] Cornford's *The Origin of Attic Comedy* was rereleased in a second edition in the early 1930s, which may have prompted Eliot's return to an Aristophanic structure. Indeed, during this period, Aristophanic drama features regularly in Eliot's correspondence. To name one instance, Eliot dismissed the idea of a church pageant based on one of Aristophanes's plays, *Peace*, to the Dean of Chichester.[50] Eliot's prose reflections from this period on his own drama also demonstrate a return to the concerns of Greek drama: "[T]he vocabulary and style could not be exactly those of modern conversation—as in some modern French plays using the plot and personages of Greek drama."[51] Here Eliot might suggest that not just the personages, that is the chorus, but also the *plot* of *Murder in the Cathedral* stemmed from Greek drama.

E. Martin Browne, in his account of his time as the producer for Eliot's plays, also associates Greek drama with the genesis of *Murder in the Cathedral*. Unlike in the later plays, Browne was not privy to

Eliot's earliest conceptions but concludes from the first draft that on the requirement of a chorus, "the play is to be cast in a formal mould like that of Greek tragedy."[52] Browne—no scholar—may be half-right: Eliot, a tentative dramatist by his own admission, returned to the same structure that he had attempted earlier in *Sweeney Agonistes*.[53] The structure of *Murder in the Cathedral* is closely aligned with the Aristophanic structure established by Cornford and used previously by Eliot himself in the outline of "The Superior Landlord." This structure may also explain some of the more curious aspects of the play, which have hitherto eluded explanation. *Murder in the Cathedral* follows the expected order of the Aristophanic play: *Prologue*, *Parodos*, *Agon*, *Parabasis* Sacrifice/Feast, a second *Parabasis*, the *Kômos*, and the *Exodos*. *Murder in the Cathedral* maps rather cleanly onto the plot-formula outlined by Cornford in his analysis of the plays of Aristophanes.

| Aristophanic Element | Summary of Element | Presence in *Murder in the Cathedral* |
|---|---|---|
| *Prologue* and *Parodos* | Opening scenes and choral odes | Opening scenes and Thomas's entrance |
| *Agon* | Dramatized Debate | The Tempters |
| *Parabasis* | Direct address to audience at the play's halfway point | The Sermon |
| Sacrifice/Feast | Interrupted attempts to sacrifice to the gods | Death of Thomas |
| *Parabasis* II | A second direct address to the audience dividing the second act | The Knights' Defense |
| *Kômos* and Exodos | Departing chorus hailing victorious protagonist as the new divine ruler | Final odes celebrating Thomas as the new martyr and saint |

The play opens with an atypical element, a choral ode, but otherwise follows the general pattern of the Aristophanic comedy, a

brief series of dialogues designed to set the scene and introduce the primary actors. Cornford is not much concerned with the *Prologue*; it is the only section to which he devotes no chapter, which may explain Eliot's deviation. Yet, Cornford, in a digression, does contrast the Aristophanic and the tragic prologue: "Whereas the Euripidean prologue will foretell the whole general course of the action to the end, the prologue in Aristophanes only states the main idea."[54] Here, the comic structure is present; after all, "[t]he proper term for the comic plot is not *mythos*, but *logos*"—in other words, thematic conflict over narrative structure.[55] Thus, instead of foreshadowing the web of events that will lead to Beckett's death as a tragic prologue would, the Chorus deals with the essence of the play's themes with the cryptic suggestion: "We wait / [a]nd the saints and martyrs wait, for those who shall be martyrs and saints."[56] In fact, the events leading up to this utterance are downplayed by the Chorus's insistence that "Destiny waits in the hands of God, not in the hands of statesmen."[57] This particular theme will return in the discussion (below) of the play's ending as an *Exodos*.

The next portion of the play according to Aristophanic structure is the *Parodos*, the formal entry of the Chorus. Exigencies in the theatrical space (Canterbury Cathedral) may have required the Chorus to be on stage from the opening of Eliot's play, as Browne recalls that "[t]he only door to the building was at the back of the auditorium, ninety feet from the stage. This meant that all entrances and exits [had to] be made through the narrow central aisle between the seats."[58] One important member of the Chorus *does* enter here, and that is Thomas, who doubles as the Chorus Leader.[59] His narrative role as a spiritual leader of the women of Canterbury supports his structural identity within the play. Thus, the delayed entrance of Thomas serves as something of a *Parodos*.

As in the Aristophanic play, only a brief interlude spaces the *Parodos* from the *Agon*, which in the case of *Murder in the Cathedral* is the long sequence with the Tempters.[60] Cornford asserts that "[t]he *Agon* . . . occupies the first half of the play between *Parodos* and

*Parabasis*" and that "[i]t is more like a sort of trial, with a strict rule of procedure."[61] The most curious feature of the Aristophanic *Agon* is that its place in the play rather undermines the drama of the piece; "the *Agon* is often over and the victory proclaimed before the play is halfway through."[62] This is what occurs in *Murder in the Cathedral*.[63] The audience might expect this "battle" with the Tempters and Thomas's resolution to arrive at a more climactic moment, rather than so early in the play. Eliot's return to Aristophanic structure helps to account for the unexpected pacing.

The climactic scene follows the general outline of the Aristophanic *Agon*: the antagonist's speech, the protagonist's rebuttal, and the verdict. Operating with the theory that Thomas acts as both protagonist and chorus leader, this sequence evinces the Aristophanic pattern, with allowances for the multiple tempters. Although it does not begin with an ode of the full chorus (they have just spoken), there is a short poetic passage by Thomas, beginning "For a little time the hungry hawk," that introduces the antagonists and serves as the chorus leader's invitation to the adversary, which in Aristophanes is often similarly brief.[64] Because of the multiple antagonists, the *epirrheme* and *antepirrheme* are each repeated four times. Each time, the tempter speaks first and gives the longest speech before being "interrupted by objections and questions from" the protagonist Thomas.[65] Once again, the antagonist speaks first. Finally, Thomas gives a short rebuttal, the *antepirrheme*.[66] No odes interject between the *epirrhemes* and *antepirrhemes*; however, after the fourth tempter, when the pattern shifts to the next element, the chorus delivers its requisite two odes. Additionally, the interchange between the chorus, the priests, and the tempters is what Cornford would call an "epirrhematic 'syzygy,' a closed system of balanced antiphonal parts."[67] Such an interchange with its rising energy, I believe, functions as a kind of *Pnigos*, which would be delivered with similar rapidity.[68] As Thomas also acts as the Chorus Leader, his final speech takes the form of a *Sphragis*, wherein "the leader of the Chorus pronounces the verdict in favor of the [Protagonist]."[69]

After the *Agon* is the *Parabasis*, a feature of Old Comedy that was already dying out in the days of Aristophanes, which Cornford describes as "a long passage which cuts the play in two about half way through its course and completely suspends the action. This passage is almost wholly undramatic."[70] Cornford spends a good bit of time moderating contemporary scholarly dialogue on the *Parabasis* but concludes that its "essential character . . . . should, perhaps, be found, not in the nature of [its] contents, but rather in the practice of directly addressing the audience."[71] Thomas's sermon between Sections I and II constitutes the *Parabasis*.[72]

According to Cornford, the scenes between the first *Parabasis* and the second are devoted to "a scene of Sacrifice and prayer," which is the scene of the martyrdom in Eliot's play.[73] The presence of the "Impostors," as Cornford calls them, further suggests an Aristophanic model. "The scene of sacrifice, cooking, or feasting has no sooner begun than" these Impostors "interrupt the proceedings."[74] In *Murder in the Cathedral*, the priests repeatedly intercede to keep the knights from Thomas and then abscond him to the cathedral. Like with the Impostors in the Aristophanic comedy, the priests' attempt to interrupt or halt the sacrifice of Thomas is ultimately futile.

A second *Parabasis* occurs between the sacrifice and the *Exodos* in the "seven earliest plays" by Aristophanes, including *Birds*, the play that most interested Eliot.[75] Eliot also included a second *Parabasis* in "The Superior Landlord" outline. That he intended the knights' defense to be a *Parabasis* is signaled by the stage directions: "The Knights, having completed the murder, advance to the front of the stage and address the audience."[76] Cornford insists in the *Parabasis* that the speakers "turn their backs on the scene of action and advance across the orchestra to address the audience directly—the movement from which the *Parabasis* takes its name."[77] Generalizing the results of the seven plays featuring a second *Parabasis*, Cornford asserts that the second *Parabasis* often takes the form of an appeal to the judges or to the audience, "practically a *débat*" between the opposing principles in the play that reconciles the divided halves of the chorus.[78]

Eliot seems to have merged these disparate elements: the knights speak in rounds.[79] While there is an appeal to the audience, it is as the representative of the antagonist's principle attempting to reconcile itself with the audience.

The final movement of the Aristophanic play is the *Exodos*, wherein "the protagonist . . . is fêted in the torchlit *Kômos*"—the chorus's song in praise of the victor.[80] Appropriate staging facilitates the *Exodos* of *Murder in the Cathedral*. As Malamud notes, "after the murder, Becket's body was carried out in a procession through the audience."[81] There was only one exit to the chapterhouse of Canterbury Cathedral, requiring the procession in Eliot's play to pass through the audience. Yet, not merely the staging matches the Aristophanic structure. To accomplish his fertility-ritual scheme, Cornford's plot-formula typically concludes in a sacred marriage, or, in a variation such as the ending of *Birds*, the inauguration of a new religious authority. In this light, the ending of *Murder in the Cathedral* would seem to fit the pattern of the Aristophanic *Exodos*: the second priest speaks of the unseen "glory of [Thomas's] new state," and the conclusion is that God "has given us another Saint in Canterbury."[82] Thomas the exile has become a saint, evincing God's authority over all creation.

Eliot's interest in Cornford's *The Origin of Attic Comedy* was lasting and pervasive, extending beyond *Sweeney Agonistes*—the common touchstone in Eliot studies—to "The Hollow Men" and *Murder in the Cathedral*. Eliot found the Aristophanic structure both vital and vitalizing, employing it in deep, technical detail. For perhaps no reason other than their arrangement in the *Collected Poems*, "The Hollow Men" and *Sweeney Agonistes* are often treated as belonging to disparate phases of Eliot's career, to say nothing of the placement of *Murder in the Cathedral* at the end of that standard volume alongside the completed dramatic works. However, Eliot returned to Cornford throughout his career, and Cornford provides a structure through which we can see many seemingly disparate aspects of Eliot's work as a whole.

**Notes**

1 Ron Schuchard suggests more emphasis should be placed on *Sweeney Agonistes* as Aristophanic, although his focus is more on themes than on structure (*Eliot's Dark Angel* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), 97). Robert Crawford also emphasizes the Aristophanic structure but almost exclusively from "The Superior Landlord" outline (*The Savage and the City in the Work of T. S. Eliot* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 161). See also Richard Badenhausen, *T. S. Eliot and the Art of Collaboration* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 123–34; Christine Buttram, "*Sweeney Agonistes*: A Sensational Snarl" in *A Companion to T. S. Eliot*. Edited by David Chinitz (Chichester, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 180; and Carol H. Smith, *T. S. Eliot's Dramatic Theory and Practice* (New York: Gordian, 1977), 40–47.

2 A. D. Moody, *Thomas Stearns Eliot, Poet* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980), 120.

3 David Chinitz, *T. S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2003), 122–24.

4 Eliot, "Poetry and Drama," *OPP*, 86.

5 E. Martin Browne, *The Making of T. S. Eliot's Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1969), 41–42.

6 "The Superior Landlord" displays a relatively sophisticated engagement; however, the date of the outline remains uncertain on that manuscript (*CPP*, 790–91), and scholarly opinion is divided: Buttram, Crawford, and Schuchard believe it is a draft of *Sweeney Agonistes*; Chinitz treats it as a later attempt to revise the play.

7 *L2*, 209.

8 Eliot, "Ben Jonson," *TLS* 930 (November 13, 1919) in *Complete Prose 2*, 151.

9 Buttram, "*Sweeney Agonistes*" in *A Companion to T. S. Eliot*, 181.

10 *L3*, 782.

11 Eliot, "Ben Jonson" in *Collected Prose 2*, 151 and Eliot, "Phillip Massinger" compilation in *Complete Prose 2*, 254.

12 *L1*, 487 and *L2*, 307 and 23.

13 *L2*, 162. It is equally obvious that Eliot thought very little of Cornford's 1912 monograph. Disparaging remarks, seemingly centered on the perceived Bergsonian elements in Cornford and the early work of the other Cambridge Ritualists, dot the earliest essays. See, for example: "The Interpretation of Primitive Ritual" (manuscript, 1913–1914) in *Complete Prose 1*, 114; "An unsigned first review of *Group Theories of Religion and the Individual*, by Clement C. J. Webb," *The New Statesman* 7 (July, 29 1916) in *Complete Prose 1*, 417; "An unsigned first review of *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life: A Study in Religious Sociology*, by Émile Durkheim. Trans. Joseph Ward Swain," *Saturday Westminster Gazette* 48

(August 19, 1916) in *Complete Prose 1*, 420; "Second review of Group Theories of Religion and the Individual, by Clement C. J. Webb," *The International Journal of Ethics* 27 (October 1916) in *Complete Prose 1*, 430. This is an unexamined problem with David Ward's application of Gilbert Murray to *Murder in the Cathedral*. David Ward, "The Pain of Purgatory" in *T. S. Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral*. Edited by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1988), 71.

14 Eliot, "Euripides and Gilbert Murray: A Performance at the Holborn Empire," *Art & Letters* 3 (Spring 1920) in *Complete Prose 2*, 197.

15 Eliot, "A Prediction in Regard to Three English Authors: Writers Who, Though Masters of Thought, are Likewise Masters of Art," *Vanity Fair* 21 (February 1924) in *Complete Prose 2*, 514. Kristian Smidt, *Poetry and Belief in the Work of T. S. Eliot*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961).

16 *L6*, 566.

17 Carol Smith in *T. S. Eliot's Dramatic Theory and Practice* (New York: Gordian, 1977) emphasizes the importance of Cornford and the other Cambridge Ritualists; however, her interpretation is focused on an extension of the mythical method delineated in "Ulysses, Myth, and Order" using all of the Cambridge Ritualists and diverges from the structural argument presented here (40–47). See also Buttram, "*Sweeney Agonistes*" in *A Companion to T. S. Eliot*, 180.

18 Francis Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy* (London: Edwin Arnold, 1914), 3.

19 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 2. Cornford's transliteration of Greek terminology and names is rather idiosyncratic (including the capitalization and italicization), but it is followed here for internal consistency. The original Greek is supplied on the first instance.

20 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 3.

21 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 3.

22 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 3.

23 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 3.

24 Butcher, quoted in Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 73.

25 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 72.

26 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 72–73.

27 The repeated invocation to "let Mr. Sweeney continue his story" may serve as a sort of *Katakeleusmos* or at least the ghost of one (Eliot "Fragment of an Agon" 101–02, 116).

28 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 73. Buttram questions whether or not the last of these is the *Sphragis*, the pronouncement of the victor, and whether the last chorus "expresses [Sweeney's] perspective" (Buttram 189). I would suggest this may be the ode that transitions to the protagonist's *Antepirrheme*, if Sweeney's final speech is the *Pnigos*.

29 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 72.
30 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 72–73.
31 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 74.
32 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 61–62.
33 Eliot, "The Beating of a Drum," *The Nation and the Athenaeum* 34 (October 6, 1923) in *Complete Prose 2*, 472–73.
34 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 147.
35 cf. Russell Kirk, *Eliot and His Age: T. S. Eliot's Moral Imagination in the Twentieth Century* (Wilmington, DE: ISI, 2008), 112–13 and Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel*, 87–100.
36 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 75.
37 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 90.
38 Crawford, *The Savage and the City*, 151.
39 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 82.
40 Aristophanes, *Aristophanes IV: Frogs, Assemblywomen, Wealth*. Translated by Jeffrey Henderson, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2002), 1478.
41 Buttram, "*Sweeney Agonistes*" in *A Companion to T. S. Eliot*, 181.
42 Buttram, "*Sweeney Agonistes*" in *A Companion to T. S. Eliot*, 185.
43 If the title "The Superior Landlord" does refer to this iteration of the play, it could be understood to refer to the turn to a landlord better than the exploitive Pereira.
44 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 108.
45 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 109.
46 *L2*, 209.
47 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 38.
48 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 41.
49 In the rather idiosyncratic dialogue section of his work, Hugh Kenner touches, almost intuitively, on *Murder in the Cathedral*'s connection to Greek drama. However, he quickly drops the matter. Hugh Kenner, *The Invisible Poet: T. S. Eliot* (New York: Ivan Obolensky, 1959), 210.
50 Eliot, quoted in *CPP*, 787.
51 Eliot, "Poetry and Drama," *OPP*, 84–85.
52 Browne, *The Making of T. S. Eliot's Plays*, 40.
53 Buttram argues that "Eliot tiptoed diagonally away from his Cornfordian-Aristophanic approach" after *Sweeney Agonistes*. "*Sweeney Agonistes*" in *A Companion to T. S. Eliot*, 181.
54 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 199.
55 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 199.
56 Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral* (New York: Harcourt, 1963), 13. The Chorus's emphasis upon witnessing is closely allied with this same theme—even a basic knowledge of Greek provides that the word for witness is *μαρτύριον*. The chiasm in the lines hints at the theme of crucifixion.

57 Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral* (New York: Harcourt, 1963), 13.
58 Browne, *The Making of T. S. Eliot's Plays*, 56–57.
59 Such doubling is not unheard of in Aristophanes: consider the aforementioned passage where Dikaiopolis acts as his own Chorus and Chorus-leader during the phallic song in the *Acharnians*; the Chorus Leader also serves as the antagonist in the *Agon* of the *Birds*, the Aristophanes play that Eliot knew best. See Cornford *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 38, 232.
60 Robin Grove touches on this, referring to the play as "Becket's *agon*," but this general usage glosses over the technical structure in Eliot's work. Robin Grove, "Pereira and after: the cures of Eliot's theater" in *The Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot*. Edited by A. D. Moody (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005).
61 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 70–71. See also Stanley Sultan who, arguing for *dédoublement* with the tempters, interprets this passage as largely an internal debate. Stanley Sultan, *Eliot, Joyce, and Company* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987), 244.
62 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 71.
63 John Peter states as much, admitting that after this point "the play is (at least in one, not unimportant respect) virtually over." John Peter, "*Murder in the Cathedral*" in *T. S. Eliot*. Edited by Hugh Kenner (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1962), 165.
64 When Cornford does a line-by-line exposition of an *Agon*, the *Katakeleusmos* is given only two lines. Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 73. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*, 23.
65 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 72.
66 If the length for the protagonist's *antepirrheme* quoted in Cornford is taken and divided by four, it leaves an average length of thirteen lines, and Thomas's rebuttals, excluding the tempter's objections, fall reasonably within this span. Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy,* 73.
67 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy,* 125.
68 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 121.
69 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 72.
70 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 2.
71 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 123.
72 Browne has little to add on this front only noting that "[t]he sermon was an integral part of the original plan of the play." Browne, *The Making of T. S. Eliot's Plays*, 46.
73 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 94.
74 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 132.
75 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 130.
76 Emphasis omitted. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*, 78.
77 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 2.

78 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 130–31.
79 This does provide an interesting modulation to Richard Badenhausen's understanding of the two *Parabasis* segments as collaborative. Richard Badenhausen, *T. S. Eliot and the Art of Collaboration* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 163.
80 Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, 24.
81 Randy Malamud, "Eliot's 1930s Plays" in *A Companion to T. S. Eliot*. Edited by David Chinitz (Chichester, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 244.
82 Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral,* 85–86.