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An Ancient Theatre Dynasty: The Elder Carcinus, the Young Xenocles and the Sons of Carcinus in Aristophanes

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Abstract: The elder Carcinus and his sons are mentioned, or appear on stage, as tragic performers in three plays by Aristophanes (*Wasps*, *Clouds* and *Peace*). They provide a unique insight into how the performance of tragedy could be (and frequently was) a family business. This study attempts to establish what can be known about this theatrical family from the evidence of comedy and how it functioned as an acting troupe. Moreover, in examining how the family troupe changed over time, we begin to learn more about the process by which one of Carcinus' sons, Xenocles, was trained as a tragic poet. Though little is known about Carcinus, Xenocles was a relatively successful tragedian, who was active in the final two decades of the fifth century B.C. Both ancient and modern scholars have assumed that Xenocles was a poet by 422, when he is thought to have appeared as a character in the *Wasps*. I argue that Xenocles did not in fact make his debut as an independent poet until after 420. Before this date Aristophanes recognises Carcinus as the poet of the family company, which suggests that the young Xenocles was still serving his apprenticeship with his father at this time.

Keywords: Aristophanes, Carcinus, Xenocles, tragedy, actors

Introduction

Theatre in the fifth century was often a family business. Sons, grandsons and other relations of tragedians frequently followed their forebears into a career in the theatre, either as actors or poets.¹ The same was true of comic performers, though

¹ See Sutton (1987) 11–9; Olson (2000) 69–70. Phrynichus' son Polyphrasmon was a poet (*TrGF* 7 T 4). The sons of Aeschylus, Euphorion and Euaeon, were both said to be tragedians, the former producing his father's plays posthumously (*TrGF* 12 T 1). The same was true of the son of Pratinas

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there was no overlap between the two: no son of a tragic poet is known to have produced comedies and *vice versa*.² The house of Carcinus was just one such theatrical family. Xenocles, son of Carcinus, was a poet who won at least one victory in 415 B.C., defeating Euripides in the process.³ Xenocles' son, named Carcinus after his grandfather, was also a successful tragic poet in the fourth century, winning eleven victories in the Athenian Dionysia and gaining Dionysius II of Syracuse as a patron.⁴ Not only did the art of the tragic poet run through the generations of this clan, but the careers of father and son overlapped. The elder Carcinus and an uncertain number of his sons are satirised by Aristophanes as a performing troupe in the 420s. This family is thus of interest both for the questions it raises regarding the transmission of the poetic profession from father to son and as an example of a performing troupe organised along family lines.

Unfortunately we have very little certain information regarding the theatre career of Carcinus and it is possible that he may have been eclipsed very quickly by his more famous son, Xenocles. A kappa and an alpha on the *Fasti* inscription was restored to KA[PKINOΣ and, if correct, would mean that he was victorious at least once in 446 B.C. as a tragic poet.⁵ However, the restoration is uncertain and Callistratus, who is known to have won a victory in 418 B.C., is another possibility.⁶ The evidence of comedy, which we will consider below, is ambiguous, referring as much to the sons of Carcinus (and, it is often believed, to Xenocles in particular) as to Carcinus himself. The only definite record of Carcinus' activities concerns his actions as general in 432/1 B.C., when he raided the Peloponnesian coast with an Athenian fleet.⁷ This sheer paucity of information on Carcinus'

of Phlius, Aristias (*TrGF* 9 T 1–3) and Sophocles' son Iophon (*TrGF* 22 T 1a, 5c). The younger Euripides staged the *Bacchae* and its attendant plays after his father's death (Σ VMEΘBarb [Ald] *Ran.* 67 [Holwerda 3.1a, 14]). Euripides' other son Mnesilochus was an actor (*Vit. Eur.* Ia 8 *TrGF*).

2 See Sutton (1987) 19–26. The sons of Aristophanes were comedians (Ar. T 1 K-A; Ar. T 3 K-A; Ararus T 1 K-A). Philonides and his son Nicochares (Philonides T 1 K-A; Nicoch. T 1 K-A) and Philemon and his son, also called Philemon (Philem. T 1 K-A; Philem. Jun. T 1 K-A), were also all comic poets.

3 Ael. *VH* 2.8.

4 *IG* II² 2318.199; see Millis and Olson (2012) 148. On Dionysius see Diog. Laert. 2.63.

5 *IG* II² 2318.81; see Millis and Olson (2012) 32 and 54.

6 *IG* II² 2319; see Rothwell (1994) 241–2.

7 *PA* 8254; Thuc. 2.23.2; *IG* I³ 365.36; 38; 39. Aristophanes and the comedian Plato, in giving him the epithets θαλάσσιος and ποντομέδων, may have alluded to his naval career, although this is also probably a pun on his name 'crab' (Ar. *Vesp.* 1518–19 and 1532–3; Plato fr. 143 K-A = Σ Ar. *Pac.* 792 [Holwerda 2.2, 124]).

career as a poet in part prompted Rothwell to argue that Carcinus was a comic, rather than a tragic poet.⁸ His suggestion, Olson rightly notes, is unlikely, principally because, as we have seen, there is no other known instance of an overlap between tragic and comic families.⁹ Nevertheless, it goes to show how obscure a figure the elder Carcinus was to become.

By contrast, there can be no doubt that Xenocles was presented in comedy as a tragic poet. His first appearance as a *komodoumenos* takes place four years after his victory over Euripides in 415. In the *Women of the Thesmophoria*, dated to around 411, Xenocles is named for the first time as a poet who writes wretched plays because of his poor character.¹⁰

ὁ δὲ Ξενοκλέης ὦν κακὸς κακῶς ποιεῖ (169)

In the same play (440–3) he is characterised again as a clever speaker, though bested on this occasion by the woman Mica. His name appears again in the *Frogs* (86) of 405 B.C. as one of the mediocre successors of the great Euripides. Xenocles was also mentioned by name in the *Sophists* by Plato the comedian, where he was possibly mocked for his overuse of stage machinery.

Ξενοκλῆς ὁ δωδεκαμήχανος,
ὁ Καρκίνου παῖς τοῦ θαλαττίου (fr. 143 K-A)

This play also belongs in the final decade of the fifth century.¹¹

Our purpose, however, is to assess what can be learned from comedy concerning Carcinus as a poet and Xenocles' early career before his first appearance as a named poet in the plays of Aristophanes. A comparison between the presentation of Carcinus' family in the 420s and the later characterisation of Xenocles as an independent dramatist raises a number of previously neglected questions. After 415 Xenocles' brothers do not receive any attention from the comic poets and neither does Carcinus, whose name only appears as a patronymic. However,

⁸ Rothwell (1994).

⁹ See n. 1; Olson (1997) 258–60.

¹⁰ For the date, see Sommerstein (1977) 112–26 and (1994) 1–4.

¹¹ Fr. 150 K-A refers to one of the ten commissioners who were ordered by Pisander and the oligarchs to propose changes to the constitution in 411. Kassel and Austin (7,492) suggest the play could even post-date the restoration of the democracy in 404.

Carcinus and his sons are mentioned in three early plays of Aristophanes: the *Wasps* (1497–1537) of 422, the *Peace* (782–95) of 421 and the *Clouds* (1260–6), which was first performed in 423 but later revised. A fragment from Pherecrates' *Wild Men* (fr. 15 K-A) of 420 also mentions the family ensemble. In all of these cases, Carcinus is the only named member of the troupe and, I argue, appears in the role of director and poet. The sons are mentioned as a group: none of them is named or (with the possible exception of *Wasps* 1510) singled out in any way. Moreover, unlike their father, they appear as performers, either as dancers or (as I will argue) actors. They are uniformly mocked as small in stature and likened to birds or crabs. By contrast, in the later passages, which concern Xenocles alone, there is no suggestion that he is of a diminutive build and no reference is made to either animal.

I suggest that Xenocles' career developed gradually in stages and that between around 420 and 411 a change took place in the organisation of the troupe, one that served to fully launch him as a poet on the Athenian stage. What exactly was this change and what role did Xenocles and his father play within the family unit before this rise to fame of Carcinus' most precocious son? We will now assess each of these passages in detail to see what can be learned regarding father and son in the years of Xenocles' apprenticeship.

Peace

In the *Peace*, performed in 421, Aristophanes lampoons Carcinus' family. The chorus, looking forward to the ensuing peace, urge the Muse to cease inspiring poems about war and to attend to the weddings and festivals of gods and men. They then advise the Muse not to have anything to do with Carcinus and his dancing troupe:

ἦν δέ σε Καρκίνος ἐλθὼν
ἀντιβολῆ μετὰ τῶν παιδῶν χορευῆσαι,
μήθ' ὑπάκουε μήτ' ἔλ-
θης συνέριθος αὐτοῖς (781–6)

The first thing to note is that it is Carcinus who will take an active role in approaching the Muse. His sons follow him as a performing ensemble. There is no mention of Xenocles. Aristophanes seems to treat Carcinus as the representative of the troupe and the fact that he might seek to recruit the Muse as an additional performer suggests that he is involved in the practical business of theatre production. Although choruses were ultimately the gift of the *archon* and the responsibility of the *choregos*, at least part of the work of recruiting performers, and

especially actors, seems to have fallen to poets.¹² In particular, it is poets in the fifth century who are credited with selecting the number of actors. Carcinus thus seems to be fulfilling the role of poet *qua* theatre producer (*didascalus*).

The chorus then attempt to discredit the family business. To do so, they give an example of an occasion when the troupe proved unreliable in the past.

καὶ γὰρ ἔφρασχ' ὁ πατήρ ὃ παρ' ἐλπίδας
εἶχε τὸ δρᾶμα γαλῆν τῆς ἐσπέρας ἀπάγξει. (792–5)

The father appears to have been telling a wild story that a play, for which he had unexpectedly been commissioned, had been strangled by a weasel during the evening. This story concerns Carcinus, not one of his sons, and may be said to prove *prima facie* that he was regarded as a tragic poet in the late 420s.

Although it is certainly the father who has lost the play, the scholiast notes that this play was either by Carcinus or Xenocles.¹³ And yet, Aristophanes makes no mention at all of Xenocles in this passage. The scholiast may perhaps betray an over eagerness to read a reference to Xenocles into a parody of the sons of Carcinus as a group. The author of the scholion then deduces that this play was defeated in a tragic competition, despite the great hopes of its author. In a similar way, the insult “searchers after devices” (μηχανοδίφας, 791), levelled at the sons of Carcinus as an ensemble, was thought to refer specifically to Xenocles’ penchant for stage machinery in his plays.¹⁴ The following two lines, however, which provide an example of the family’s unreliability (γάρ, 791), clearly refer to Carcinus’ story of the weasel. The good or bad reputation of the family firm is founded ultimately on the behaviour of Carcinus, rather than Xenocles. Moreover, although ancient scholars often seem to have placed greater emphasis on Xenocles as the main or even only poet in the family, the scholiast accepted that this passage referred to occasions on which Carcinus employed his sons as dancers in his plays:

εἰσέφερε γὰρ αὐτοὺς VI ὁ πατήρ Γ ἐν τοῖς δράμασιν
ὄρχομένους (Σ VI Pac. 789d–e [Holwerda 2.2, 123])

It is not impossible that he also had other evidence of Carcinus’ activities as the leader of the family troupe.

¹² Arist. *Poet.* 1449a 15–19; *Vit. Aesch.* 15 *TrGF*; καλλιφώνους ὑποκριτὰς εἰσαγαγομένους (sc. poets), *Pl. Leg.* 817c; cf. *Resp.* 568c.

¹³ Σ VI Pac. 795–6 (Holwerda 2.2, 124).

¹⁴ Σ RV Pac. 792a (Holwerda 2.2, 124).

The title of Carcinus' play was allegedly the *Mice* (μύες).¹⁵ This is almost certainly an invented title designed to explain Aristophanes' joke.¹⁶ Weasels, like cats, hunt mice and were tolerated by the Greeks for this very reason.¹⁷ A mock epic describing a comic battle between mice and a weasel is preserved on a second or first century B.C. papyrus fragment.¹⁸ Philocleon in the *Wasps* (1182) tries to tell a story that probably involved a weasel chasing a mouse. On the other hand, they were also inveterate thieves of meat from unguarded kitchens.¹⁹ The joke is thus often understood to be that Carcinus was behind in the writing of his play and gave the feeble excuse known to all school children: "my dog ate it".²⁰

However, does the title *Mice* hint at another possibility? All the sons of Carcinus are described by Aristophanes as small in stature. In line 788–9 they are described as quails because of their small size. In *Wasps*, a year earlier, Aristophanes similarly termed the sons as wrens (1513). Crabs were also known to be very small, approximately the same size as mice, and it is possible that the 'crab' Carcinus was the source of the family trait. In *Wasps*, the sons are characterised as both birds and crabs (καρκίνους, 1507). Both are small and good to eat, and therefore likely to fall prey to Philocleon.²¹ It may also be relevant that while μῦς was not a type of crab, it was nevertheless the name of another small sea-creature: the mussel.²² In addition, the crab was thought of as an ugly and rather extraordinary creature. We may compare the extended description of the small misshapen 'quail' sons of Carcinus in *Peace* with similar descriptions of crabs in later literature.²³

15 Σ RVTLh *Pac.* 795 (Holwerda 2.2, 124).

16 Van Leeuwen (1906) 126; Snell on *TrGF* 21 F 1; Olson (1998) 227–8 and (2000) 68. Rothwell (1994) 243, argues that *Mice* was a comedy rather than a tragedy, accounting for its unusual name. There is, however, no other positive evidence to support his view that Carcinus was a comic poet and, as he acknowledges, the tragedians Morsimus and Melanthius (803–4; cf. *TrGF* 23 and 29) are mentioned alongside Carcinus as two other poets whose company the Muse should avoid. Olson (2000) 70–1 suggests that Aristophanes may be urging the Muse to prefer comedy as a genre over tragedy.

17 Keller (1909) 1.164–71; Lloyd-Jones (1975) 76–7; Fusillo (1988) 90. Benton (1969) 260–3 disputed that weasels were ever, as Keller suggests, kept as pets.

18 P. Mich. inv. 6946; for the text see Schibli (1983) 1–25; West (2003) 258–63; cf. *Aesopica* 50; 165; 197; 244; 378; 511 (Perry).

19 Semonides fr. 7.55–6 (West); Ar. *Pax.* 1151; *Thesm.* 559; *Vesp.* 363.

20 Van Leeuwen (1906) 126; Sommerstein (1985) 171; Olson (1998) 227.

21 *Vesp.* 1506; MacDowell (1971) 328.

22 As was pointed out to me by Alan Sommerstein; see Aesch. fr. 34 *TrGF*; Phyllyllius fr. 12 K-A.

23 Statilius Flaccus, *Anth. Pal.* 6.196 = *GP* 3802; *Battle of Frogs and Mice* 294–9, cf. Gleii (1984) 206–9; Fusillo (1988) 133–4; West (2003) 290.

Aristophanes may have in mind a weasel assaulting a diminutive Carcinus, rather than his more usual prey the mice, and making off with his play. The Greeks and other ancient peoples often found conflicts involving animals, and small animals in particular, amusing. We have already noted the Hellenistic *Battle of the Mice and Weasel*. Combats involving cats and mice appear in Egyptian art from as early as the Bronze age and may have inspired the later Greek parodies.²⁴ The diminutive pygmies are said to battle against cranes in the *Iliad*, while mock epics featuring cranes, starlings and spiders are listed among the works attributed to Homer.²⁵ Another Hellenistic epic-parody, *The Battle of Frogs and Mice*, relates how crabs were sent by Zeus to save the frog army from destruction by mice.²⁶ A fox devours a crab who has ventured onto land in a fable by Aesop (116 Perry), and it is easy to imagine a hungry weasel doing the same.

In the *Peace* Carcinus, and not Xenocles, is the tragic poet. His sons are mentioned only as a group of performers, rather than poets, and are characterised as minute and strange creatures. Contrary to the belief of ancient scholars, this family trait probably did not originate with Xenocles or his brothers but with their father, the crab. They also, as the offspring of Carcinus, are crabs or other small animals.

Clouds

In line 1259 one of the distraught creditors of Strepsiades cries out in tragic style: ἰὼ μοί μοι. The startled Strepsiades asks who the weeping tragedian is, suggesting that it might be one of the ‘demons’ of Carcinus:

τίς οὐτοσί ποτ' ἔσθ' ὁ θρηνηῶν; οὐ τι που
τῶν Καρκίνου τις δαιμόνων ἐφθέγγατο; (1260–1)

According to one interpretation, this passage alludes to a play written by Carcinus, in which a god delivers a tragic lament.²⁷ Indeed Dover acknowledges that such a conclusion would be a “natural inference” from the text.²⁸ However, it is probable that Aristophanes is mocking Carcinus’ frequent use in his play of the

²⁴ See Morenz (1954) 87–94; West (1969) 124–5 and (2003) 230–1; Schibli (1983) 8.

²⁵ *Il.* 3.3–7; [Hdt.] *Vit. Hom.* 24; Suda ο 251 (Adler); see Bertolín Cebrián (2008) 95–121; West (1969) 124. Pygmy and crane battles also appear in art: see Dasen (1993) 294–305, nos. G40–103; Walsh (2009) 323–5, nos. 125–32.

²⁶ Lines 294–300; West (2003) 290–3.

²⁷ Σ *Ar. Nub.* 1261e (Holwerda 3.2, 432).

²⁸ Dover (1968) 243.

word δαίμων (repeated twice in exclamations in lines 1263–4), rather than his characterisation of a god. In addition, it is likely that the plural δαιμόνων is also a reference to the ‘diabolical’ sons of Carcinus. None of the sons, however, are singled out: Strepsiades refers only to “someone” (τις) and he does not have a particular son in mind. No direct reference is made to Xenocles and there is nothing to suggest that he or any of the others is acting as a poet or taking a leading role in the troupe over and above his siblings.

If Strepsiades confused the pitiful wail of the creditor with the terrible cries of the sons of Carcinus, it is likely that the sons figured in his imagination as tragic actors. We know of at least one comic poet (Crates) who began his career as an actor, and it may have been seen as useful training for aspiring poets.²⁹ A beautiful voice was the most highly valued quality in an actor.³⁰ A scholion by Tzetzes on the *Clouds* describes the sons of Carcinus as “very high-voiced actors” (ὑποκριταὶ ὀξυφωνότατοι) and suggests that here the creditor gives a high tragic lament in the manner of Carcinus’ family troupe.³¹ High-pitched voices may also partly explain the frequent comparisons made between the sons of Carcinus and birds. On the other hand, bad actors tend to have voices that are either too weak or too deep. Lacking any other talent, they simply shout and bawl at the audience. Aeschines’ colleagues on the stage, Simmucas and Socrates, were the so-called “deep-toned actors”³². Aristophanes may be suggesting in some way that the sons of Carcinus are poor actors only capable of exaggerated laments.

The following lines, however, contain a quotation, said by Euphronius to come from the play *Lycymnius* or *Tlepolemus* by Xenocles.³³

ὦ σκληρὲ δαῖμον, ὦ τύχαι θραυσάντυγες
ἵππων ἐμῶν, ὦ Παλλάς, ὡς μ’ ἀπόλεσας. (1264–5)

This is our first piece of evidence for Xenocles’ activities as a poet. And yet, if Xenocles was already established composer of tragedies, it is strange that Aristophanes has not chosen to name him. Poets could quickly become public figures, if they managed to secure a chorus. All poets appeared before the audience at the προαγών, as Agathon is said to have done shortly before his victory at the Lenaia

²⁹ Crates T 2–3 K-A.

³⁰ Pl. *Resp.* 586c; *Leg.* 817c; Arist. *Rhet.* 1404b 20–5; Plut. *Dem.* 10; DS 15.7; see Sifakis (2002) 160–1.

³¹ Σ Tzetz. *Ar. Nub.* 1261 (Holwerda 4.2, 663).

³² τοῖς βαρυστόνοις, *Dem.* 18.262; cf. Aesch. *Eum.* 794; *Vit. Soph.* 4; Philostr. *VA* 5.9; Easterling (1999) 154–66.

³³ Σ *Nub.* 1264–5 (Holwerda 1.3, 229).

in 416.³⁴ Their names were publicly announced and recorded. Early actors, by contrast, do not seem to have enjoyed such celebrity, though there are signs that this was beginning to change by the end of the fifth century.³⁵ Although a prize was established for acting in 449, actors in general do not seem to have merited mention on late fifth century memorials of dramatic performances.³⁶ And while poets are frequently satirised by Aristophanes, and at some length, actors receive comparatively little attention.³⁷

The possible reference to the sons of Carcinus suggests that Xenocles was still in partnership with his brothers and father. This is especially likely if this passage was written for the first version of *Clouds* in 423, since we have seen that two years later Carcinus was still regarded as a poet. The young Xenocles may have written the *Lycymnius*, but left the production to his father. This might explain why Aristophanes associates Carcinus with a play that had been ascribed to Xenocles by the third century. As with actors, the names of young poets who opted to leave the production of their plays to experienced directors were probably not publicised at the time of the performance. A similar career path was in fact followed by Aristophanes, whose earliest works were produced under the names of other poets.³⁸ Fathers almost certainly trained their sons as poets and probably assisted them in the early stages of their career. Iophon was accused of relying for help

34 ἀναβαίνοντος [sc. Agathon] ἐπὶ τὸν ὀκρίβαντα μετὰ τῶν ὑποκριτῶν, Pl. *Symp.* 194b; Athen. 217a; cf. Aeschin. 3.66–8 with scholia; see Pickard-Cambridge (1988) 67–8. Sider (1980) 43–6 argues that Plato attempts to give the impression that Agathon's victory took place at the Dionysia.

35 For the late recognition of acting as an art see e.g. Arist. *Rhet.* 1403b 33 and 1404a 20–5; Ghiron-Bistagne (1976) 135–42; Slater (1990) 394–5; Csapo (2004) 55–7.

36 On the prize for acting see Pickard-Cambridge (1988) 104; Millis and Olson (2012) 13. Possibly the earliest depictions of actors are on the Pronomos Vase, which dates from around 400. Although the chorus, poet and aulete (the famous Pronomos) are named, this is not the case for the actors. See Csapo (2010) 21. Cf. *IG I³ 969*, a similar list of chorus members, but not actors; see Ghiron-Bistagne (1976) 119–21; Pickard-Cambridge (1988) 361; Wilson (2000) 131–3; Csapo (2004) 60.

37 Callipides (Stephanis 1348), who is mentioned by Aristophanes (fr. 490 K-A) and was possibly satirised at length by Strattis (fr. 11–13 K-A), and Mynniscus (Stephanis 1757), mentioned by Plato (fr. 175 K-A), are the main exceptions. Otherwise, we have only brief allusions to an otherwise unknown Automenes (*Vesp.* 1279) and Hagelochus (*Ran.* 303) who mispronounced Eur. *Or.* 269; cf. *ΣRan.* 303 (Holwerda 3.1, 50–1).

38 *Vesp.* 1018–22, *Nub.* 528–33; Halliwell (1989) 515–28. See Halliwell (1980) 33–45, who suggests that Aristophanes' name was only kept secret before 427. For the 'orthodox' view, that Aristophanes arranged for *Babylonians* and *Acharnians* to be produced by Callistratus and under his name, see MacDowell (1995) 34–41.

from his father Sophocles, long after he had graduated as a poet in his own right.³⁹

Alternatively, this quotation may have been inserted as part of Aristophanes' later revision of the *Clouds*. The second and extant version is usually thought to have been written between 420 and 417, though a date as late as 414 has been proposed.⁴⁰ It is unlikely that Xenocles' victory in 415 took place on the occasion of his first production. Xenocles could have produced a work by Carcinus shortly after his death or retirement: a common practice among emerging poets. It has been suggested that plays written by Euphoriion, who was victorious four times with works by Aeschylus, were later ascribed to his more famous father.⁴¹ It is not impossible that this pattern could have taken place in reverse.

Wasps

At the end of Aristophanes' *Wasps* (422 B.C.) an inebriated and overly excited Philocleon returns to his house and proposes a dancing contest. The sons of Carcinus appear in answer to Philocleon's challenge. Xanthias introduces the sons to Philocleon as they enter. At line 1500–2 the first son appears. Once again his name is not given, as is the case with all the other sons. He is, however, described as the middle of the sons, presumably in age (ὁ μέστος). We do know of a tragic poet called Mesatus, but this, as the scholiast notes on this line, is unlikely to be the name of this son of Carcinus.⁴² At lines 1504–6 a second son arrives, also described as a tragedian (τραγωδός) and as the brother of our first dancer. So far, then, we have at least two sons. At line 1508 Xanthias announces the arrival of another son of Carcinus (ἕτερος αὖ τῶν Καρκίνου). There are now a

39 Ar. *Ran.* 71–9, cf. Σ *Ran.* 78a–b (Holwerda 3.1a, 15). Iophon had actually been writing tragedies independently during Sophocles' lifetime, and for at least thirty years before the performance of the *Frogs* in 405. See Σ VMEΘBarb *Ran.* 73–74a (Holwerda 3.1a, 15); *IG II²* 2318.94; Capps (1943); Millis and Olson (2012) 13; 34; 54.

40 Revision: *Nub.* 520–6; Dover (1968) lxxx dates the second version to 420–417, on the basis of *Nub.* 551–9. These lines allude to the abuse suffered by Hyperbolus (ostracised c. 416) at the hands of the comic poets, which began with Eupolis' *Maricas* (421). Kopff (1990) argues that the death of Hyperbolus in 411 (Thuc. 8.73.3) is a more likely *terminus ante quem* and that a reference to Diagoras of Melos (830), who was outlawed from Athens in 415 (Diod. Sic. 13.6.7), suggests a date of 414. Kopff's views, however, have not been accepted: see Storey (1993) 71–84; Romer (1996) 396 and 398–401.

41 See n. 1; West (1990) 53, 68–71 and (2000) 338–52.

42 Σ Ar. *Vesp.* 1502b (Holwerda 2.1, 232). On Mesatus the poet see *TrGF* 11.

whole band of sons. Here we have the specific pun on the family name with the sons themselves termed crabs (καρκίνους, 1507).

At this point Philocleon exclaims with surprise “what on earth is this that is approaching” (1509).⁴³ A particularly unusual member of Carcinus’ family has entered and he is described at length. In line 1511 he is marked out as the smallest of the family (ὁ μικρότατος) and he is very strange in appearance. In line 1509 Philocleon gives a number of possibilities for what this apparition might be: a vinegar cruet and a spider (ὄξις ἢ φάλαγξ).⁴⁴ The new arrival is thus small and has several legs, resembling a spider or, what it in fact turns out to be, a crab.

Unlike Philocleon, Xanthias correctly identifies this particular figure as belonging to a small species of crustacean (πινοτήρης, 1510): a pea-crab (*pinnotheres pisum*) which lives as a parasite in the shells of bivalve molluscs, including the pinna (πίνη).⁴⁵ Presumably this particular actor was dressed as a crab, as perhaps were the other sons of Carcinus. Finally, Xanthias gives us one last clue to his identity: he is a tragic poet (ὄς τὴν τραγωδίαν ποιεῖ, 1511). Van Leeuwen followed Hamaker in deleting 1511 as an irrelevant addition.⁴⁶ Aristophanes would then have described the sons only as tragic performers, as in *Peace* and *Clouds*, rather than poets. However, it is likely that this verse, far from being a later addition, was in fact responsible for the belief among ancient scholars that the individual described was the poet Xenocles, an interpretation followed by all commentators on the play.⁴⁷ The joke, they assumed, was that Xenocles was a glutton for shellfish.⁴⁸ Alternatively, it made more sense for the son of ‘Crab’ to be small in stature, like a pea-crab or spider.⁴⁹

If this is correct, Aristophanes must have known that a son was responsible for writing plays for the family troupe. However, although scholars have reason-

43 τούτι τί ἦν τὸ προσέρπων; cf. *Vesp.* 183; *Ach.* 157; *Av.* 1495 and *Ran.* 39; for the imperfect used in exclamations see MacDowell (1971) 156.

44 The text is uncertain. Borthwick (1968) 44–51 suggested that the line be amended to “an owl or a mole” (ὄπις ἢ σφάλαξ). However, the text may well be sound if, following Sommerstein (1983) 247, we assume that ὄξις is a form of crustacean and that the name derived from its sharp (ὄξυς) spines. The manuscript reading is retained by Wilson in his OCT edition (p. 273).

45 Σ LhAld *Vesp.* 1510d (Holwerda 2.1, 234); cf. LSJ⁹ s.v.; Rogers (1930) 234.

46 Van Leeuwen (1909) 226, *e scholio natum versiculum*. The line is retained in all recent editions of the text.

47 The comment of MacDowell (1971) 329, is particularly noteworthy: “1511, if genuine, shows that the third dancer is Xenocles”. See Σ RVTAld *Vesp.* 1510a (Holwerda 2.1, 234); Starkie (1897) 385–6; Rogers (1930) 235; Davies (1971) 284; Sommerstein (1983) 247; Henderson (1998) 413 n. 118.

48 δῆλον, ὅτι περὶ Ξενοκλέους ὁ λόγος, διαβάλλει αὐτὸν ὡς ἀδηφάγον, Σ RVTAld *Vesp.* 1510a (Holwerda 2.1, 234).

49 Σ VTAld *Vesp.* 1509c (Holwerda 2.1, 233).

ably assumed that this is Xenocles, they have not asked why Aristophanes neglects to name the son, or whether his audience were expected to identify a known poet. Carcinus is still the only name given, one that affords the troupe its character and possibly its costumes as well. Although this passage may provide further confirmation that Xenocles was writing or contributing to plays at an early stage, it again suggests that he was working in partnership, perhaps as an apprentice, with his father, who was still active a year later at the time of *Peace*. The mention of a son “who writes tragedies” could even be interpreted as a slur on Carcinus for relying on the talents of his children.

However, in what follows, I would like to propose an alternative possibility: that the tragic poet is in fact the father Carcinus. The uncertain number of the sons of Carcinus raises some suspicions. Does line 1509 indicate a new arrival or does it refer back to the third son introduced in the previous line? Elsewhere the text suggests that there were only three sons. Aristophanes, at *Wasps* 1502, has called one of the sons “the middle one” (ὁ μέσσοτος). There cannot be a middle son if there are four of them. Furthermore, in line 1534 the sons of Carcinus are collectively termed buzzards (τοῖς τριόρχοις). This was interpreted by the scholiast as a pun on the Greek for “three dancers” (τρεις ὀρχησταί).⁵⁰ As a result, ancient scholars commenting on Aristophanes’ *Clouds* – who possibly derived their information from our passage in *Wasps* – believed that Carcinus had three sons, one a poet and another two dancers or actors.⁵¹

Nevertheless, the author of the scholion on *Wasps* 1502 believed that there were four sons on the stage in *Wasps*, rather than three, but that Aristophanes in this passage has divided them into three dancers and one poet, Xenocles. This arrangement is quite plausible: by the later fifth century the troupe of three actors had become standard, while at around the same time poets ceased to be performers in their own plays.⁵² It thus seems more natural to assume that the poet of line 1511 was accompanied by three rather than two performers.

The scholiast cites as evidence a fragment from Pherecrates’ *Wild Men*, produced two years after the *Wasps* in 420 B. C.

καὶ Καρκίνος μὲν τις ἦν ὁ Θωρυκίου υἱός. ἦσαν δὲ αὐτῷ τρεῖς τινες μικροὶ κομηῆται τότε καὶ νῦν εἰσὶν μικροὶ καὶ κομηῆται. φίλαρχοι τότε παῖδες ἦσαν ὄντες νῦν φιλαρχικώτεροι. μὰ τὸν Δία οὐ τρεῖς τε ἐκεῖνοὶ εἰσὶν οἱ τέσσαρες. (Σ Vesp. 1509c [Holwerda 2.1, 233–4] = fr.15 K-A)

50 Cf. διὰ τὸ τρεῖς εἶναι, Σ RVΓ³LhAld Vesp. 1534 (Holwerda 2.1, 237).

51 Σ ΕΘΜΑ *Nub.* 1264 (Holwerda 1.3, 229); Tzetz. Ar. *Nub.* 1261 (Holwerda 4.2, 663).

52 See n. 32. Sophocles is thought to have been the last poet to have acted (*Vit. Soph.* 4 TrGF).

Both the text and the metre of this fragment are uncertain and we are told nothing regarding the context of the passage. Nevertheless, it is possible to establish that we have two interlocutors, one who says that there were three sons of Carcinus and another who interjects that there are not three but in fact four. The fragment is admittedly ambiguous: the first speaker does not hesitate to number the sons of Carcinus as three (ἦσαν δὲ αὐτῷ τρεῖς). If he is wrong, there must have been a good reason for his mistake, which was calculated to raise a laugh. The source of this confusion may have been that there were more than three sons, but that only three were needed to form an acting troupe. These three sons, who, in particular, appeared without masks in the company of the poet at the προαγών of the Dionysia, would have been the public face of the family. The poet thus completed the troupe as a fourth individual and it is he who enters at 1509.

The names of these sons are just as uncertain as their number. The scholiast on Aristophanes' *Peace* names three sons who were choreuts: Xenocles, Xenotimus and Xenarchus.⁵³ This source presumably subscribes to the theory that there were three sons: Xenocles, the poet, and two others. A number of other names, however, were known. The scholion on the *Clouds* gives three names, but instead of Xenarchus we have Demotimus. Again, it is suggested that Xenotimus and Demotimus were choreuts in the tragedies written by their brother Xenocles.⁵⁴ However, a scholion on *Frogs* names four sons: Xenocles, Xenocleitus, Xenotimus and Datis.⁵⁵ The only names that are certain are Xenocles and Xenotimus. The latter is mentioned by Isocrates and appears in inscriptions as the dedicator of a horse's bridle to the gods.⁵⁶ Xenocleitus and Xenarchus could conceivably be one man: Xenocleitus might be a misspelling of Xenocles. Demotimus looks like a play on the name Xenotimus. That would leave three plausible names (Xenocles, Xenotimus and Xenarchus), corresponding to Aristophanes' three dancers.

It is very unlikely that the final name, Datis, was ever more than a nickname for one of Carcinus' sons. Datis is the name of the Persian general at Marathon, mentioned in Herodotus (6.94.2). Trygaeus in *Peace* (289–91) mentions a “song of Datis” and the scholion also notes that some authorities believed this Datis to have been a tragedian, but that they were wrong.⁵⁷ He claims that the other Datis was a son of Carcinus but that he is not the Datis mentioned in *Peace*. Van Leeuwen suggested that the name Datis might have been a nickname for Xeno-

⁵³ Σ R *Pac.* 783 (Holwerda 2.2, 122).

⁵⁴ Σ EGMA *Nub.* 1264 (Holwerda 1.3, 229).

⁵⁵ Σ RV *Ran.* 86b (Holwerda 3.1a, 17).

⁵⁶ See PA 11269; Isocr. 17.52; IG II² 1388.74, 1400.62, 1451.27.

⁵⁷ Σ RVLh *Pac.* 289a–b (Holwerda 2.2, 49–50).

cles.⁵⁸ Aristophanes is, however, unlikely to have had a son of Carcinus in mind here.⁵⁹

There thus seems to have been some confusion as to the number of sons from an early stage and the *Wasps* only muddled matters further. Aristophanes makes mention of only three sons and actors, even though lines 1509–10 probably refer to a fourth individual, the poet. Though we cannot be certain, the balance of probabilities seems to suggest either that there were three sons or that, even if there were four in reality, only three appeared as dancers at the end of *Wasps*. The possibility that Aristophanes meant there to have been four sons only remains if a fourth individual enters at 1509. As the scholiast on the line claims, is another son, Xenocles, but one who is a poet rather than an actor and so is not numbered in the performing troika. If, however, we do not automatically assume that the poet of the family has to be Xenocles, it is more likely that there were four individuals on stage but that the poet was not a son, but the father Carcinus.

This final arrival on the stage is described as, and was probably dressed as, a small crab. Although all the sons are called crabs, the precise species is given, perhaps indicating that this individual was unusually crab-like. Xanthias' two additional pieces of information, that the new figure is the smallest in the family (ὁ μικρότατος) and a poet (ὄς τὴν τραγωδίαν ποιεῖ, 1511), are necessary if Philocleon is to correctly identify the member of the family, and both point more to Carcinus than Xenocles. The superlative μικρότατος indicates that this figure not only shares the crab family characteristic but almost embodies it. It is not clear why Xenocles should have been described as especially small, or as a crab, except in reference to his father. Neither Aristophanes nor Plato later make any reference to Xenocles' build: smallness is a characteristic of the family troupe as a whole. However, who could be more like a crab than 'Crab' himself?

We have already seen that Aristophanes presented Carcinus as a poet the following year in *Peace* and that he may have taken on the public role of poet for Xenocles' first plays. Moreover, although partnerships between fathers and sons were common, we know of no other known instance in which a brother employed his siblings. On being told that the new arrival is a poet, I suggest that Philocleon correctly identifies him as the father Carcinus. This is indicated by his sudden

⁵⁸ Van Leeuwen (1888) 435–8.

⁵⁹ Van Leeuwen (1888) argued that the majority of Aristophanes' audience would have known very little about the Persian Datis and that the name here must refer to the poet. Molitor (1986) 130 has, however, noted that the publication of Herodotus' *Histories* in the 420s could have stirred memories of the Persian general. The character of Datis might also have made an appearance in a recent comedy, possibly the *Ambassadors* by Leucon (produced the year before in 422 B.C.; see *arg. Vesp.* I.36); cf. Olson (1998) 128.

address to the elderly ‘Crab’, whom he congratulates on having raised such sons (ὦ Καρκίν’, ὦ μακάριε τῆς εὐπαιδίας, 1512). Although line 1512 has always been understood as an apostrophe to an absent Carcinus, it is better thought of as a direct address to the father, who has just appeared on stage.⁶⁰

Finally, we should note that the small crab is described as crawling onto the stage (τὸ προσέρπον 1509). This same verb is subsequently used to describe the motion of sea-lord Carcinus by the chorus (προσέρπει, 1531). This line follows a description of the dances of Carcinus’ sons and may reflect the order in which the family arrived in the preceding verses. The verb ἔρπω can mean simply “to go”, but its more usual meaning is to creep or crawl in a slow and gradual progression.⁶¹ The substantive ἐρπετά is used of plant-eating insects in the *Birds* (1070). It is also employed twice in the *Wasps* to describe the awkward movement of old men (272 and 552; cf. Eur. fr. 25 *TrGF*). This type of movement is more ideally suited to an elderly crab than to athletic young dancers.

A possible objection might be that προσέρπει in 1531 is in the present tense and, therefore, indicates that Carcinus is only now, in the final lines, in the process of appearing on stage. However, this is easily explained if the present tense refers not to Carcinus’ first appearance but to a later progress, possibly from the stage into the orchestra: the most likely location for a dancing competition. The sons of Carcinus, and Carcinus himself, could have appeared in turn up the side ramps. Once introduced by Xanthias, it is likely that they would then go down into the orchestra to await the start of the dancing, probably down a flight of steps in the middle of the stage. Such a flight of steps can be seen in fourth century vase paintings depicting comic scenes.⁶² Alternatively, even if Carcinus entered into the orchestra rather than the stage, he might then have remained at the back of the orchestra during the dances, and 1531 could still refer to a second movement forward to join his sons at their conclusion. The final choral ode (1519–37), in describing the dances of the sons and the approach of their father, closely mirrors Xanthias’ account of their arrival. At the close of the play the stage is deserted and Carcinus, sons, Philocleon and chorus all make their way out of the theatre together (1535–7).

⁶⁰ Cf. *Eq.* 147–8 and 186–7; *Av.* 1423; *Eccl.* 1129. The one exception, in which the character addressed is not on stage, is *Ach.* 400.

⁶¹ Cf. *Soph. El.* 1231; *OC* 502; fr. 157, 593 *TrGF*; Eur. *IT* 477; *Andr.* 269; [Eur.] *Rhes.* 319. For meaning “to go” cf. *Ar. Eq.* 673; *Lys.* 129–30.

⁶² See Trendall (1967) 13; e.g. *RVAp* 339, no. 11 = *Phlyax Vases* 52, no. 81: a calyx crater of 360–330 B.C., showing a similar stage.

Conclusion

Theatre was indeed a family business, and our study has revealed more about how the art was handed down from father to son. The interest of the comic poets before 420 was on Carcinus and his relationship with his sons. Although Xenocles was probably already developing his skills as a playwright, the troupe was initially led and directed by Carcinus. The later change of focus suggests that after 420 Carcinus was no longer in partnership with his sons (either due to his death or retirement from the role of poet) and that it was only at this point Xenocles established as an independent poet. Whether or not his brothers continued to second Xenocles on stage as actors is uncertain. If they did, it could be that without Carcinus, whose name had served to characterise the troupe, the comic poets were no longer interested in the family as a whole. What we can say is that Xenocles' career as a tragic poet developed more gradually than previously supposed. Comic poets, such as Aristophanes, certainly completed a long apprenticeship before they produced their own plays as independent poets. The same may have been true for tragedians.

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