

Compare and Contrast how Aristophanes depicts Euripides in “The Frogs” and “The Poet and The Women”.

Aristophanes and Euripides were poets in Athens during the Peloponnesian War. They had very different writing styles. Euripides was the older and he wrote Greek Tragedy and Comedy. He was one of the three important tragedy writers of the time, the others were Aeschylus and Sophocles. Euripides introduced new methods of handling the traditional myths, for example he used realism in his subject matter and was interested in the way women thought and how they acted. This is shown in his plays “Hippolytus” and “The Trojan Women”. Aristophanes wrote comedies in which inventive situations and colourful language were typical. His poems were mainly concerned with situations which were topical at that time. He satirized politicians and scholars and parodied his fellow poets. He used political and social fantasy a great deal as in the women’s sex strike in “Lysistrata”. Aristophanes wrote two parodies which featured the tragic poet Euripides. These were “The Poet and the Women” and the “Frogs”. Euripides died before Aristophanes wrote the “Frogs” and so he was able to make the parody greater.

Aristophanes wrote “The Poet and the Women” while Euripides was still alive and a respected and famous author. Aristophanes was unable to resist making fun of him in his play. He portrayed him as a man who was clumsy and in fear for his life, “This day is to decide whether Euripides is to live or die.” (Page 102). This was because Euripides was being threatened by the women of Athens who wanted to kill him because his plays showed the worst side of women, “the women are meeting up at the Thesmophoria today and they’re going to condemn me to death for slandering them” (Page 106). Euripides knew that the Thesmophoria, a religious festival for women, was going to happen soon and he wanted to send a spy to find out how the women were plotting his death. Euripides, with the help of his friend Agathon, therefore, persuaded his elderly relative Mnesilochus to dress up as a woman, “lend me a dress and a headband for my friend here? You can’t pretend that you don’t possess such things” (Page 108), and attend the ceremony. Mnesilochus was discovered by the women who captured him and threatened to burn him as they believed him to be a spy for Euripides. Mnesilochus remembering one of Euripides’ plays sent a message “A trick out of one of his own plays, The Palamedes. Chap wrote a message on an oarblade” (Page 125). Euripides came to the rescue as a character out of that play showing courage he did not have, “Thou lookst like Menelaos.” (Page 133).

In “The Frogs”, Euripides has been dead for some time and is portrayed as manipulative and greedy, “besides, Euripides will be readier to sneak away with me, he’s a much more slippery customer” (Page 159). The storyline is about the God of Wine, Dionysus, who travels to the underworld to find a poet who will increase Athenian morale and lead them to victory in the Peloponnesian War. After first consulting the hero, Hercules, to find a way to Hades “You could go via Rope and Gibbet: that’s a very quick way, if you don’t mind hanging around for a bit, to begin with” (page 160), he sets off with his servant. He arrives in Hades only to find out that position of the best poet in Hades was in dispute, “Oh, there’s great goings on among

the dead these days, great goings on. Civil war, you might call it" (Page 185). Aeschylus the older Athenian poet, who wrote at least 50 years before Aristophanes, was being challenged by Euripides, "Well then along comes Euripides and start showing off to all the fellers we've got down here – cut-throats, highwaymen, murders, burglars, regular rough lot they are", (Page 185) Euripides had the support of the bandits, rogues and the worst men in general while Aeschylus had the sole support of Sophocles, "he's sent a message: with this contest coming on, he says, he'll stand by for third man – if Aeschylus wins he'll just go on as before, but if Euripides wins he'll take him on himself." (Page 186). Sophocles was a friend of Aristophanes. Dionysus decided that even though Euripides had more support, it was Aeschylus chosen to restore Athens to its former glory, "Well in my heart of hearts I have known all the time. No question about it, the man for me is" (Page 210).

Euripides in "The Poet and The Woman" is extremely comical especially when he is playing his own tragic heroes as they have heroic qualities which he lacks, other than loyalty which he shows when he tries to rescue Mnesilochus from his Scythian captor. However, Euripides in "The Frogs" is more sinister and has the ability to manipulate the bandits and rogues. He is therefore portrayed as a demagogue, who were people who played on people's fears to increase their own political power.

Aristophanes depicts Euripides in these ways because I believe that Euripides and Aristophanes were not friends but poetic rivals that respected each other even though they did not agree with each others type of poetry. A version of Ancient Greek professional courtesy. I also feel that the political and social situation at the time that Aristophanes was writing influenced the way in which he portrayed him. Euripides in "The Poet and The Woman" is a reflection of his Euripides's personality in real-life but has been distorted to make the make the play comical. His clumsiness and cowardliness have been exaggerated for this end. Euripides shows how cowardly he is because he sends Mnesilochus to the Thesmophoria and not himself. His clumsiness is shown through his use of the Deix Ex Machina which he uses to create the parody of Perseus but he can't control it, "He must be coming to save me: he wouldn't have flown by just to pass the time of day." (Page 136), and he flies back and forth. However, Euripides does show loyalty to his friends by attempting to rescue Mnesilochus.

In "The Frogs", Aristophanes uses Euripides, who had just died shortly before it was written and most of the people would still be thinking about him as he was a famous tragic poet, as a demagogue to show how people can be influenced by them. The Peloponnesian War was going badly for the Athenians and Aristophanes felt that something had to be done to boost the moral of the people. Aristophanes tries to teach the people of Athens that listening to demagogues is how Athens is now near destruction and that the only way Athens could be saved was to return itself and its citizens to the way Athens was in the years before the Peloponnesian War.

Aristophanes did not hate Euripides, nor like him but Aristophanes did hate the tragedies as he thought that the best way to teach people morals is through laughter. However, in "The Frogs", Aristophanes uses Euripides as a gimmick and exploits his death by replacing Euripides real personality with that of a demagogue whom he hates and blames for the continuing problems that plague Athens.

When the social and political situation was stable Aristophanes wrote in a way that reflected this. He made fun of his fellow author Euripides by parodying his characteristics, by emphasising and exaggerating his behaviour to make him comical. When he wrote the "Frogs" he felt he had a point to make. Athens was no longer a carefree society, the political situation was difficult, and the War was going against the Athenian's. Aristophanes wanted to teach the people that they should return to their old values. When he was writing the "Frogs" he no longer wanted to make fun of Euripides but to use him to show the people where they were going wrong. He portrayed Euripides as a manipulative power greedy demagogue who was interested only in himself. He did this as he thought that making Euripides the villain in his comedy would make a greater impression on his audience than by actually stating what he thought in a straight forward way. Aristophanes' aim in using Euripides was to make people think while they were watching and enjoying his plays and to make them understand the necessity of returning to the old values.