

To what extent do you think Aristophanes has serious targets in Wasps and to what extent is he simply trying to make the audience laugh? Give reasons for your views

While the 'Wasps' is largely considered as one of the "old comedies," it does however appear to be making subtle attacks on various people associated with the Wasps. For example, by observing the behaviour of Philocleon we see that Aristophanes is discreetly satirising the judicial system of Attica in this period.

The opening of the Wasps informs the audience of a monster of sorts living in the entrapped house we see on stage. This "monster" however is later revealed to be the elderly father of the main character (Bdelycleon) and is described as being addicted to the judiciary. While comic effect is produced by the bizarre situation before us, the underlying message is to demonstrate how those of the judiciary are ultimately slaves to Cleon's will. This is shown by the condition that Philocleon has found himself in after years of serving under Cleon's rule – he has been trained to believe that his job is one of immense value and privilege, regardless of the truths later revealed by Bdelycleon.

Cleon himself is represented in two contrasting lights by his supporters and his opposers. On the one hand he is illustrated as a mighty figure who has created a fair and appropriate society. This is the stance taken by Philocleon who believes that Cleon is the creator of a perfect system of law and therefore providing his beloved courts. On the other hand this view is fought against by Bdelycleon who makes the argument that what Cleon is truly doing is denying the judges their reasonable payment and tempered them into believing that they hold immense respect and authority. This idea is further enhanced by the pretend court scenario created by Bdelycleon and the dogs. On some levels the use of dogs in the place of people is included to produce comic effect. The very idea that animals can share common quarrels with man is undoubtedly a result of Aristophanes' desire to create humour. While this is true, it is also the case that the dogs are used as symbols of real people. The fact that the dog representing Cleon is accusing the Dog representing Laches of not sharing the stolen Sicilian Cheese is perhaps making a remark about Cleon's greed. Cleon requires to own everything.

The system of the law courts is shown to be both corrupt and naive. This is demonstrated by the fact that the jury is made up of voiceless kitchen utensils (a cheese-grater, a bowl, a pestle, a brazier and a pot) who represent the officials of the court who remain silent to Cleon's obvious extortion. Furthermore the character of Philocleon shows how the jurors are ignorant to the harsh treatment given to them by Cleon – he is totally unaware that he is being programmed to believe certain things as well as underpaid. When the court is presented with the puppies in order to soften Philocleon's heart, Philocleon believes that he is following his own devices in remaining uninfluenced by their appearance. This further shows the ignorance of the jurors as despite Philocleon's unwavering stance he end up making the decision that Bdelycleon always wanted him to make, and always expected he would make. This demonstrates how Cleon has turned the jury system into *predictable* extension of his own will. The way in which Bdelycleon completely overpowers his fathers reasoning creates comedy by satirising the naivety of the jurors/ law system.

The relationship between Philocleon and Bdelycleon has been deliberately included to offer both sides of the argument over Cleon and the jury system. This helps to emphasise the faults of both. On the other hand by giving them entirely conflicting personalities we see a lot of humour generated. It is a comedy device comparable to modern comedies in that wit is produced through strong comebacks to the previous argument and a banter is created as a result. The constant barrage of conflicting stances is certainly on some levels included to make the audience laugh.

It is conceivable that Philocleon's eventual humiliation at the dinner party is a jest at the ignorance of youth. While on the one hand this stands out as a moment to laugh at (watching a drunken old man making a disgrace of himself and making matters worse when he tries to amend this) on the other hand it may be pointing out how the young cannot change their elders personalities as much as they would like to believe. What we see in the play at this stage is the exact opposite of what Bdelycleon had predicted. Philocleon could not hold his liquor, he could not make interesting anecdotes and he could not talk his way out of his mistakes. What this shows is that despite the obvious intelligence demonstrated by Bdelycleon, even a young man of his intellect cannot change the stubborn ways of a man like Philocleon.

Towards the end of the play we see two events that produce arguments for the idea that Aristophanes is just trying to produce humour and an argument against this suggestion. The first of which is the speech given to the audience directly by the Chorus and the Chorus leader. In this speech he explains the significance of the wasp costumes they are wearing and the plays title. However one key part of the dialogue here is the attack he makes on the audience. This unorthodox move is undeniably a personal attack with no apparent comic value to it. They call the people ignorant for not heading the messages of Aristophanes' previous play 'The Clouds.' In this address to the audience, Aristophanes praises himself as a hero for standing up to men like Cleon and declares those who hoard revenue for themselves as "unworthy." Furthermore the chorus indicate that only the simple minded will not understand and agree with Aristophanes' message in 'The Wasps.' This speech shows how Aristophanes dislikes those who oppose his views. He is targeting the unworthy hoarders and anyone else who disagrees with him.

While what we have seen previously indicates that more often than not the comedy is used to produce a serious message, the final scene discredits this implication. The play ends with all the characters forgetting their troubles and their differences and dancing merrily for no apparent reason. In my view this final act is used to lift the heavy atmosphere generated by previous scenes. While the play may have serious morals behind it, Aristophanes' ultimately wanted this play to be remembered as a *comedy*.

In conclusion it is clear that Aristophanes' wanted to create humour from his creation, however he also wanted to provoke serious thoughts amongst his audience. In my opinion the overall idea of the play is to single out certain people and groups and hold them to account for their actions. This aspect appears more important than simply making the audience laugh, however the humour is essential in putting across his message. As a writer of comedies humour is integral in upholding his reputation, but in order to sustain his self imposed status as one who will stand up to injustice he also requires the input of serious moral communication.

