

Central to the audiences' involvement in the comedies was how the playwrights connected with them through humour. By being able to make them laugh, it meant that the audience actually listened in and paid attention, and therefore heard what was being said, rather than tuning out. As the playwrights focus was to entertain and teach, the audiences attention was very important.

Aristophanes' humour could be very subtle with political satire and theoretic allusions that took a little bit of knowledge and social understanding to be able to interpret. Jokes like this that took a little extra brain power, gave those who did understand the joke, a little extra satisfaction that they were slightly more knowledgeable than the common folks around them. It would have made them savour the joke for a little while longer. On the other side of the scale, he would also be very blatant with obvious, or exaggerated sexual innuendos, bawdy jokes, puns, and over the top slapstick scenes in order to gain 'easy' laughs. He made sure to put in a lot of humour that was guaranteed to get a laugh out of the audience as, although he was trying to teach his viewers, it was still a competition to see who could be the most entertaining as well. For example, in his play 'The Wasps', Aristophanes makes many references, and allusions to their leader at the time, Cleon. This would be inappropriate during either the Roman or Elizabethan periods due to their forms of government and the relationship between the people and the state. In democratic Athens, where all of the people share in the governing of the state, it would not be as inappropriate to mock a leading figure in public. Some citations can be very subtle, like when the dogs are used as a representation of Cleon due to his unofficial title as the city's 'watchdog' (1), but makes very obvious attempts at getting the 'easy' laughs with the old man Philocleons antics, especially in the second act when he is being re-educated by his son.

He also makes many references to well known citizens that he know will be in the audience. The rest of the audience would also know that the citizen that was being made fun of was in the audience with them, and would have found this very amusing, as would anyone nowadays if they were to see the person on stage take an obvious, humorous dig at someone they were sitting next too. However, some didn't see all of Aristophanes stabs as all that humorous. In fact after his play, 'The Knights', Cleon took him to court over some of the mocking remarks that were made in the play.

Like Aristophanes, Plautus also used a great deal of allusions and satire in order to make humorous references that made the audience laugh. However, the subject of this humour was "devoid of a serious political, social or intellectual content" and "could be performed in any number of social and political settings without risk of giving offense" (Sutton 1993, p. 57.), instead, focusing more on the 'home and family unit'. This would have also made a good connection with the audience as they could relate to the relevance in the play. Though trying to teach his audience valuable lessons, Plautus tended to have inadequacies in his moralizing performances, often giving outstanding advice, only to contradict himself, or portray a less honourable value in a good light, in one of his other plays. It is very unlikely that the audience noticed any of these inconsistencies, but it is what gave the ruling patrons the motive to restrict the construction of a permanent theatre, even if they hadn't known it at the time. The lessons, as entertaining as they may have been, were not seen to be what was wanted to be of permanent influence due to the powerful persuasiveness of the theatre. The Romans feared mass political gatherings in a public place; hence they would allow no permanent theatres. Pompey managed to establish one on the Campus Martius in Rome in 55BC (1) by ensuring that there was a shrine to the gods in the theatre.

Shakespeare's take on 'comedy' was rather different to that of Aristophanes and Plautus. A 'Shakespearean Comedy' tend was one that had a happy ending, and had a style and tone that was more, light hearted than his tragedies. All of Shakespeare's plays tended to begin in the middle of action that had already started before the rise of the curtain. This technique was very successful at getting the audience involved in the story immediately. Another technique he used for his comedy is a greater emphasis on his situations, rather than his character, which numbs the audiences connection with the characters so that if something misfortunate was to happen to them, they still had enough disconnection to laugh about it, rather than get caught up in emotion. Like Plautus, he also used the struggle of young lovers to overcome obstacles, mistaken identities, clever plot twists, humorous disputes between characters, most often family members, and plenty of obvious puns, to still keep the audience on their toes and in good spirits.

The impact that the audience has had on comedy can be seen by both the subtle, and obvious changes and adaptations each playwright has had to make in order to entertain and teach their fellows citizens. As the times have changed, and society's expectations and desires have transformed, comedy has had to change to

accommodate. In retrospect, a lot of the characteristics of Old Comedy can be seen in the comedy we see today, though through the evolution of the theatrical audience we can also spot the significant changes that have developed theatre into what it is currently. There can be no denying the vital role that the audiences have had in the changes between the works of Aristophanes, Plautus, and Shakespeare and how their plays have had a lasting influence on *our* cultural experience of the theatre.

3

4