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Soup to Nuts: Euripidean Tragedy as Food in Aristophanes' *Frogs*

The union of wine, poetry, and the god Dionysus in Greek ritual practice is often employed by poets as a powerful symbol of the divine and seminal nature of their craft. It is curious, then, that in the *Frogs* Aristophanes initially represents Dionysus' longing for Euripides not in terms of wine, but rather as a hunger for *etnos*, pea soup (60-67). This paper suggests that Dionysus' hunger for Euripides qua pea soup underscores one of the main themes of the *Frogs*: the gap between how tragedy should affect the polis and the actual effects of a diet of Euripidean tragedy.

Dionysus' longing for Euripides is initially concretized as a gustatory phenomenon of a positive nature (52-67). This desire literally eats at Dionysus (66) and is itself a comestible in that the god has an appetite for it analogous to Heracles' longing for pea soup (62). Although the comparison of tragedy to pea soup does trivialize Euripides' work, his tragedies do have a powerful effect when consumed (52-53, 59). Moreover, pea soup, like lentils throughout Greek comedy, represents the simple riches and civic virtue of traditional Athenian life. If *etnos* is a staple within the diet of a morally healthy Athens, then Aristophanes would seem to be implying that Euripidean tragedy fulfills this role as well.

However, if we trace the parallels between tragedy and food through the agon, we see that Euripidean tragedy is actually "junk food" with deleterious effects on those who consume it. Euripides, by removing the moral authority and *gravitas* from the genre (940-41), has turned tragedy into a sort of "drama lite" that causes those who consume it to become lazy delinquents (1014-15, 1069-70, 1083-97) and to indulge in the delights of the fishmarket (1068), a place whose wares encourage unhealthy gustatory and civic practices.

Following this connection between "food value" and "tragic value", it is of no surprise that Aeschylean tragedy is of more substance than Euripidean. On the level of the culinary metaphor, Aeschylus is the one providing the staple of the Athenian moral diet and, although, Dionysus may have craved a taste of Euripides, it is clear by the end that Athens needs a serving of Aeschylus.