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The Proof of the Wording is in the Crust: Food Preparation and Persuasive Rhetoric in Aristophanes' *Birds*

In the "Birds" of Aristophanes, the success of Peisetairos' coup would seem to depend on two things: his persuasive abilities and his control of the gods' food. This paper traces how the power of Peisetairos' rhetoric is enhanced through the use of the language of food preparation and dining as "vehicles" (the figurative elements) within metaphors describing the presentation of persuasive rhetoric. Since Peisetairos must invest his persuasion with greater power in order to seize permanent control of the cosmos, these vehicles evolve from the image of production and consumption of food (43-628) to the physical reality of banquet preparations (1565-1693). The power inherent in the reification of Peisetairos' vehicle of persuasion allows Aristophanes to show us not only the increasing efficacy of Peisetairos' rhetoric, but also the fruition of his plan for universal conquest.

In the first third of the play, Aristophanes etymologically and syntactically links Peisetairos' persuasive abilities with the device of his ultimate victory, the manipulation of food, to such an extent that word becomes, figuratively, food. Peisetairos, who is "intellectually fine flour" (430), plots to destroy the gods with hunger (185). He kneads his plan like bread (462-63) and presents it as great, fat-marbled words (465). When also he calls for a garland (463) and for water to pour over the participants' hands (463-64), Peisetairos carries the presentation of word as food into the physical preliminaries of both feasting and public speaking. Food and rhetoric have been mixed so successfully at this point that even Euelpides mistakes dining for speaking (465).

During negotiations with the divine embassy, however, Peisetairos must give his rhetoric even more persuasive weight. Since the gods are starving, the physical presence of food (1579, 1583, 1590), its handling (1579-80, 1585-86, 1637), and discussion thereof (1582-86, 1590) allude to what the gods lack and to what Peisetairos can restore. Consequently, the series of non sequiturs between the political and the culinary (1581-90), by creating confusion between food and word, lends real substance to Peisetairos' persuasive abilities. As Herakles is swayed by this rhetorical sleight-of-hand, he begins to adopt the vocabulary and content of both Peisetairos' culinary language (1582-86, 1590) and of his political language (1674; cf. 1599). Once he has been led to hand over Basileia and all Olympus, Herakles even offers to stay in Cloudcuckooland and roast the dressed birds (1690). Poseidon snaps that Herakles is talking about massive gluttony (1691) but here Poseidon, too, has mistaken the vehicle of the persuasion for its literal element (the "tenor"). What Herakles ultimately cannot be trusted with is not the job of roasting meat; it is the job of shrewd negotiating. Swayed by the complete synthesis of Peisetairos' vehicle and tenor, Herakles, along with the other two gods, mistakes where one ends and the other begins long enough to be persuaded and to grant Peisetairos precisely what he needs to establish himself as the new and permanent Zeus.