

ridicules their ambition and extravagant dreams of conquest; in the "Knights" he bitterly attacks the demagogues and mob-leaders of Athens, whom he regarded as fostering and exciting these dreams; and in the *Clouds* he mercilessly ridicules the sophists, who under pretence of teaching true eloquence, and the art of public speaking, merely imparted an elaborate system of ingenious rhetorical quibbles, "who substituted logical discussion for the old æsthetic education of the Greeks, and who sought to replace their mythological religion by meteorological explanations of natural phenomena." Thus, though the theme is varied to suit time and circumstance, the purpose remains the same.

So in the "Frogs," in which he turns to literary criticism, he shows the same conservative spirit. His hostility to Euripides is founded upon the sophistical nature of his works; "In fact the Demagogues, the Sophists and Euripides were looked upon by him as three different forms of the same poison which was corrupting the moral character of the nation."

The play falls into two parts, as will be seen from the synopsis, the first describing the adventures of Dionysus and Xanthias on their journey, while the second describes a poetical contest between Æschylus and Euripides, the two great tragic poets, to decide which of them Dionysus shall take back with him to the Upper World. This part of the play, which consists of an elaborate parody on the styles of the two poets, has little interest for a modern audience as compared with the first part, and in the edition which is being acted has accordingly been considerably abridged. It is hoped, however, that enough has been retained to enable the audience to grasp the general tone and drift of Aristophanes' criticism.

The "Frogs" was produced in January, 405 B.C., the last year but one of the Peloponnesian War. Though victorious at the sea-battle of Arginusæ in 406 B.C., the Athenians were soon destined to meet with disastrous defeat at Ægospotami in the Hellespont (August 405 B.C.), after which the city first endured some months of siege, and then surrendered to the victorious Spartan confederacy under Lysander. Thus ended the "Athenian Empire." Athens had in the great Persian Wars (490,