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UNIVERSITY OF ATHENS
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**INVITATION TO THE RESEARCH SEMINARS
OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICS**

When: Wednesday, 19 February 2014, 11.30 am

Where: Library of Classical Literature, School of Philosophy Building, 7th floor,
Room 745, Panepistimioupoli, Zografou, ATHENS

The Department of Classics, Faculty of Philology, invites you to the lecture of
Emiliano J. Buis, Senior Lecturer in Greek Language and Literature,
Department of Classics, University of Buenos Aires:

**“Love, Laws and Laughs:
Women and the Comic Poetics of Justice in Aristophanes and Menander”**

Prof. Stilian Hatzikosta

Head of the Department

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**LOVE, LAWS AND LAUGHS:
WOMEN AND THE COMIC POETICS OF JUSTICE IN ARISTOPHANES AND MENANDER**

Emiliano J. Buis

In democratic times, civic action was mainly exercised in Athens through the staging of public speeches in open spaces of participation. As it has been frequently stated, theater, courtrooms and the Assembly constituted areas that could be clearly connected within the large territory of political activity (cf. Pl. *Leg.* 876b). As formal spaces where every citizen could have his place —where actors and audience had discernible scripts—, legislative procedures, legal trials, and drama were basically performative activities organized around the centrality of a competition. Spectators attending comedies were used to listening to legal expressions and seeing ‘law-in-action’ in the streets, marketplaces, courtrooms, and assemblies.

Comic texts naturally exploited this shared knowledge as a functional dramatic device, but clearly by distinct means and to different ends. It is frequently stated that Old Comedy (*arkhaia komoidia*) and New Comedy (*nea komoidia*) were fundamentally different in their presentation of citizens and the law: whereas Aristophanes —as the main representative of Old Comedy— presented the language of tribunals and procedure in the course of instructing the audience on the perils of demagoguery, self-interest and the misuse of the public arena, Menander —the best example of New Comedy— employed law to create arguments in which justice and fairness were required to reestablish the family balance.

Despite these obvious differences, my purpose in this talk is to demonstrate that law is an essential part of both Old and New Comedy, and that the comic poetics of justice stands right in the middle of contemporary high-level discussions on the exercise of power in the public and private spheres of life. The concrete example of the “legal” roles played by female characters in plays such as *Birds*, *Ecclesiazusae*, *Aspis* or *Epitrepontes* —especially regarding the institution of marriage— will show that both in Aristophanes and in Menander there is a common interest to discuss the threats created by democracy *vis-à-vis* the benefits it conferred, as well as the interplay between the law of the *polis* and the rules of the *oikos*.