

BOOK REVIEW

Aristophanes: Clouds, Women at the Thesmophoria, Frogs. By STEPHEN HALLIWELL. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. xcvi + 304. Hardcover, \$100.00. ISBN 978-0-19-814994-1; Paperback, \$13.95.

Stephen Halliwell has now brought forth the second installment in his planned three-part series of new verse translations of Aristophanes' comedies. The first volume (Oxford 1997) presented *Birds*, *Lysistrata*, *Assembly-Women*, and *Wealth*. This one contains *Clouds*, *Women at the Thesmophoria*, *Frogs*, and a selection of fragments from the lost plays, a feature not evident from the book's title but which is a welcome bonus. The accurate and lively translations will serve well anyone wishing to study these comedies, and Halliwell's informative general introduction, stimulating introductions to individual plays, rich explanatory notes, and ample references are an excellent guide to the world of both Aristophanic and ancient Greek comedy.

The first part of the book consists of a general introduction, select bibliography, and chronology, and is almost identical in content to what is found at the beginning of the 1997 volume. The bibliography has been updated with scholarship published through 2014, and the chronology, which begins with the birth of Aeschylus and ends with the death of Aristophanes, now lists the premieres of a few tragedies by Aeschylus and Euripides, such as *Persians* and *Hippolytus*, that are mentioned or alluded to in the comedies of this volume. Of the general introduction's many subsections ("Old Comedy and Dionysiac Festivity," "The Dynamics of Fantasy," and "Formality and Performance," among others), the most important is the one titled "Translating Aristophanes," where Halliwell lays out his principles of translation. He draws an opposition in translating ancient Greek comedy between, on the one hand, "assimilation and modernization," and, on the other, "the acknowledgement and savouring of historical distance" (lv). Coming down in favor of the latter, Halliwell chooses to translate Aristophanes' comedies into modern English verse while maintaining, rather than eliminating, "the historical fabric of names, references, and allusions" that is omnipresent in the plays. It is a project that Halliwell undertakes with success.

Perhaps the most appealing aspect of this translation is its use of verse. (In the introduction, Halliwell discusses some of his predecessors' attempts at translating Aristophanes into verse.) Halliwell turns Aristophanes' iambic trimeter dialogue into a five-beat line that mixes feet of two and three syllables, as in Heracles' verses from the *Frogs*: "Aren't there lots of other young kids around the place / Composing tragic plays—huge numbers of them, / And all with more gift of the gab than Euripides has?" (176). For Aristophanes' varied tetrameters (iambic, trochaic, and anapestic), Halliwell prefers the English "fourteener," and he uses non-rhyming free verse for the lyric sections.

Halliwell pairs his fluency in rendering verse with deftness at capturing the complexities of Aristophanes' language, which gives his translations particular verve. In a passage from *Clouds*, Strepsiades imagines the abuse he will incur once he has learned the art of persuasion. Aristophanes presents a litany of inventive insults, part of which Halliwell translates as: "A quoter, a yapper, a fox, and a wriggler / A schemer, duplicitous, oily and phoney/A rogue and disgusting, a twister and cheat / A lip-smacking creep!" (39–40). Halliwell also varies his registers when characters adopt a tragic tone, something that happens frequently in two of these three comedies. Many of these moments are flagged with a note explaining the exact nature of the tragic allusion, but even when they are not, the tragic coloring is still evident, as when, in *Women at the Thesmophoria*, Agathon's servant asks Euripides and his Kinsman: "What rustic comes nigh to this enclosure?" (105).

One question to ask of this volume is: Why these three plays? Halliwell provides an answer in the preface to the series' first volume: *Clouds*, *Women at the Thesmophoria*, and *Frogs* deal with "cultural" themes. Given the stated reason for collecting the three comedies together here, I wonder if more could have been made of the unifying thread of "culture." While Halliwell has much to say on the matter, he spreads out his observations across the general introduction and the introductions to the individual comedies. I, for one, would have welcomed a concentrated examination of the topic, all the more so because Halliwell has contributed so much to our understanding of Aristophanes' role as a cultural critic. Still, having these three comedies in one volume will give readers an opportunity to consider on their own what resonances there are among them. As Halliwell puts it in the preface to this volume, he hopes his translations will "engage the imagination of modern readers." This they will do.

MATTHEW C. WELLENBACH

Catholic Memorial School, matthewwellenbach@catholicmemorial.org