

BOOK REVIEW

Brill's Companion to the Study of Greek Comedy. Edited by Gregory W. DOBROV. Leiden and Boston: E. J. Brill, 2010. Pp. xv + 579. Hardcover, €189.00/\$279.00. ISBN 978-9004-10963-6.

This authoritative volume, with contributions by thirteen leading scholars, gives readers an up-to-date synthesis of scholarship on Greek Comedy. Part One, "Contexts" (the first five chapters), surveys the intellectual, physical and historical setting; Part Two, "History" (four chapters), reviews the history of comedy, with significant contributions on Aristophanes and Menander as well as on lost playwrights; Part Three, "Elements" (four chapters), discusses the textual tradition, meter, and language.

Gregory W. Dobrov, "Comedy and her Critics," surveys scholarship on comedy over the millennia, with special attention to ancient criticism by Plato, Aristotle, and Alexandrian scholars. A compressed but excellent five-page section summarizes trends in modern criticism.

S. Douglas Olson, "Comedy, Politics, and Society," after considering ancient reactions such as the Old Oligarch's remarks about comedy and democracy, critiques seven twentieth-century perspectives on Aristophanes' politics. Gomme thought Aristophanes advocated no policy at all, de Ste. Croix saw Aristophanes as paternalistic toward the demos, and others have offered more recent perspectives. Olson present his own formulation: a willingness to criticize need not imply a lack of confidence in the concept of democracy. This is persuasive, though discussion will no doubt continue.

J. R. Green, "The Material Evidence," gives an expert overview of the evidence of ancient vase-painting, figurines, reliefs, and mosaics, accompanied by fifteen black and white illustrations. A perennial question is whether the visual evidence squares with the literary evidence. Green introduces a recently published relief of ca. 330 BCE from Brauron: a dedication to Dionysus, with Artemis, and five human figures shown with comic masks over them, perhaps the cast of a play. For most of antiquity what represented comedy was not Aristophanes but Menander. Green citees newly discovered mosaics of Menander's *Theophoroumene* and *Synaristosai*.

Eric Csapo, "The Production and Performance of Comedy in Antiquity," addresses the festivals, competitions, *choregia*, and archaeological evidence for theaters, with attention to the variety of shapes of orchestras. Much interesting evidence is post-classical.

Angus M. Bowie, "Myth and Ritual in Comedy," notes the relative importance of the Trojan War myths in Old Comedy; local Athenian legends, which one might expect, given the civic nature of the competition, are curiously absent; by contrast Middle and New Comedy turned to myths of Theseus and Erechtheus. Bowie touches briefly on some of the ritual patterns in Aristophanic comedy, but suggests that these types of patterns are less illuminating for plays of New Comedy.

Ian C. Storey, "Origins and Fifth-Century Comedy," after a short account of theories of the origins of comedy, describes the three "generations" of comic poets: Cratinus, who made comedy into a substantial dramatic form, using mythological burlesque; four poets who arrived "with a vengeance" in the 420s: Aristophanes, Phrynichus, Eupolis and Plato Comicus, with their topical and political comedies; and Archippus and Strattis, leading into the fourth century. Storey reviews patterns prominent in the fragments: the Golden Age, burlesque of myth, comedy of ideas, domestic comedy, and political comedy.

Ralph M. Rosen, "Aristophanes," faces a special challenge: the eleven comedies of Aristophanes would be worthy of their own "Companion" volume, so Rosen narrows his focus to three recurrent themes: the "best leader," peace, and utopia. Yet Rosen's real contribution is to show that pretenses, inconsistencies and generic requirements make it impossible to locate a stable authorial voice. A tone of self-righteousness, for example, is a natural outcome of satire and is impossible to distinguish from authorial intention.

W. Geoffrey Arnott, "Middle Comedy," addresses the era about which we are least informed: all we have are fragments, titles, and names. Arnott gives the names of the leading dramatists of the period and teases out trends. To judge from the titles and fragments, mythological burlesque is what most sets Middle Comedy apart from Old and New. Also distinctive is the growth in comedies titled after occupations (cook, hunter, pimp, soldier, etc.), a range that suggests a striving for novelty and that anticipates New Comedy.

Stanley Ireland, "New Comedy," after considering evidence about other playwrights, the audience, and new social conditions, offers extended discussions of Menander's techniques, including variation on expectations, mirror scenes, bridging characters, the use of the prologue to create dramatic irony, and love

themes. Ireland defends Menander's craftsmanship. I read this chapter before teaching a class on the *Dyskolos* and found it extremely helpful.

Alan H. Sommerstein, "The History of the Text of Aristophanes," offers a lucid survey of the fortunes of the comedies. We proceed through rehearsal texts, revisions, possible family archives, the great libraries of antiquity, the transition from papyrus scroll to codex, and the transcription into minuscule. I especially appreciated the explanation of the roles of the Byzantine commentators. The most important advances were finally consolidated in the nineteenth century.

Heinz-Günther Nesselrath, "Comic Fragments: Transmission and Textual Criticism," notes that many fragments of Old Comedy survive because they were important for lexicographers interested in pure Attic speech; fragments of Middle Comedy, by contrast, were not mined for Atticisms and instead owe their survival to Athenaeus. Nesselrath suggests that the disproportionate number of passages about food really could stem from its prominence in Middle Comedy, not just from Athenaeus' interests.

Bernhard Zimmermann, "Structure and Meter," begins with a relatively dry description of the structural elements of Old Comedy (agon, parabasis, etc.), but notes that once conventions are established and expectations have been created, departure from them becomes a creative act. Omitting a *pnigos*, for example, could surprise the spectator and take a play in a new direction. (This is surely right, though the recovery of plays by other poets would confirm it.) Similarly, meters carried associations that could be manipulated to help define a character.

Andreas Willi, "The Language of Old Comedy," is only for those who know Greek. Willi reviews basic features of Attic Greek and can then gauge the verbal virtuosity of Old Comedy. Aristophanes moved into a different registers by parodying language specific to tragedy, epic, prayers, and decrees; some characters speak in other dialects or foreign tongues; and words were manufactured for comic effect. Willi finds that Cratinus also enjoyed switching styles whereas Eupolis' range was somewhat more limited.

This book is indebted, above all, to the publication since 1983 of *Poetae Comici Graeci*. But it also reflects meticulous work in recent decades on every other aspect of comedy. New discoveries and approaches are incorporated into each chapter. The cover illustration is of a previously unknown pelike, now at Emory University, showing a bird dancer closely resembling the "Getty Birds" (which, incidentally, have been repatriated to Italy).

A reader who proceeds from beginning to end will encounter overlapping discussions, as if topics had never been raised before, but I expect that most read-

ers will dip into individual chapters and not notice this; moreover the different perspectives are fruitful. It would require a much longer review to explore the connections and questions suggested by these chapters. For example, it would be worthwhile to juxtapose Olson's perspective on Aristophanes' politics with Rosen's stress on the generic nature of the authorial voice. The importance of the theme of the Golden Age is treated by Bowie, Storey and Rosen. The nature of the audience is a problem that cuts through every chapter. It would be most welcome if the fates that brought us the *Dyskolos* would also bring Cratinus' *Dionysalexandros* and Eupolis' *Demes* (not unreasonable to hope for—the latter survived on papyrus well into later antiquity).

The only mistake of import that I caught is the date of the abolition of the Theoric Fund (p. 337): the 320s, not the 420s, was intended.

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