BOOK REVIEW

Slaves and Slavery in Ancient Greek Comic Drama. By BEN AKRIGG and ROB TOR-
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This volume consists of a collection of essays that were presented at an interdisci-
plinary conference on the theme, hosted by the University of Toronto in Decem-
ber 2008. As explained by Rob Tordoff in his introductory chapter (1–62), the es-
says aim at outlining the ways of representing slavery on the comic stage, exploring,
among other things, the controversial issue of the degree of verisimilitude and dis-
tortion of the representation; how these ways changed through time from Aris-
tophanes and the fragmentary Old Comedy to Menander and the Hellenistic
World; and what the reaction of the audience to the spectacle of slaves and masters
was. Consisting of eleven chapters (including the Introduction), the volume ends
with a useful *apparatus* of *indices* ('References', 'Index locorum', 'General index')
which helps the reader to easily navigate through the volume.

The investigation proceeds through various analyses of single comic plays, of
specific historical period and geographic area (e.g. Kathryn Bosher's contribution,
which singles out Sicily's and Southern Italy's 'case' in fourth century, 197–208),
or by using different sources: two of the contributions in particular rely on mate-
rial-culture (Kelly Wrenhaven and Kathryn Bosher); another two apply compara-
tive data for the practice of slavery in other and modern societies (Cheryl Cox, and,
even more, C. W. Marshall).

The Introductory chapter by Tordoff provides a well-informed overview of
the institution of slavery in Athens alongside with an account of the scholarly de-
bate on the topic. It also offers a survey about the problematic relationship be-
tween reality and comic representation, and an analysis of the audience response
with the interesting result that, despite the rigid distinction between free and slave
in the Athenian civic ideology, in reality citizens envisioned themselves as being
treated like slaves in their everyday life. Identifying themselves with the slaves on
the stage, and watching them outwit their masters, they would give vent to their
frustration and anxieties, and found some comfort, still preserving, anyway, the so-
cial distinction as long as "slaves acted out' onstage" (52). Tordoff concludes his

chapter with a useful synopsis of the essays, providing not simply a list of concise summaries of the essays, but also his own comparative analysis, drawing together the variegated strands of discussion presented in the ten following chapters (59–62).

S. Douglas Olson's essay in chapter 2 ("Slaves and politics in early Aristophanic comedy", 63–75) analyzes the connection between slavery and politics through the poet's use of the master-slave relations as a metaphor for the dynamics of the Athenian polis. Focusing on the extant comedies written in the 420s BC (with the exception of the *Clouds*: see 63 n.1), Olson pairs the *Acharnians* and *Peace* on one hand, and the *Knights* and *Wasps* on the other, with the master representing the state and the slaves representing its politicians. In all these four comedies slavery is consistently configured: a slave is an extension of his master's will; as such, he can be (a) in a tension-free relation with his master, as ideally he should, which means he would carry out the master's order and act for his master's benefit (e.g. *Acharnians* and, partly, *Peace*); or (b) in an antagonistic relation with his master, which means he would manipulate his master's will for his own beneficial (e.g. *Knights*, where the political allegory is fully realized, and *Wasps*). Accordingly the master must remain vigilant to avoid to be turned—as it was in contemporary Athens—into a slave of his own slave.

Susan Lape's "Slavery, drama and the alchemy of identity in Aristophanes" (chapter 3, 76–90) faces questions of identity of what, in Aristophanes' comedy, makes a slave, and who the slave is. Lape argues that Aristophanes' representation of slavery would answer these questions by providing two quite contradictory views: (1) an essentialist view, according to which one is slave 'by birth', i.e. some people are bearers of an inborn servile identity, which in turn works as a mark of inferiority (not surprisingly it is ascribed to foreigners, bad politicians and bad poets); and (2) flexible, transmutable view, i.e. identity can be altered or created by way of mimesis, by imitating what or who one seeks to be; hence the concept of a 'transmutable self' originates (72). Lape focuses on this second conception of identity by analyzing in depth the figure of Xanthias in the *Frogs*. This slave, indeed, who often 'transmutes' himself by way of imitation, often acts more like a master than Dionysus, his master, does, and at certain point he explicitly changes places with Dionysus. This transmutability, implying a confusion of identity, would suggest that there is no difference between slave and free/citizens, and would convey a political concern about the incorporation of slaves into the citizen body. The balance and the distinction, i.e. some sort of essentialism, are, however, reasserted in the *parabasis* of this play, which makes clear that such an incorporation would be

plausible only if aristocrats keep the leadership; and also in the final, through the choice of the 'traditional/conservative' Aeschylus over the 'progressive/democrat' Euripides.

Analyzing the theme in the fragmentary production of the Old Comedy certainly adds to this volume. Representation of slavery in the comic fragments, outside the plays of Aristophanes, is the topic of chapter 4 by Donald Sells ("Slaves in the fragments of Old Comedy," 91–110). Drawing a comparison with Aristophanes' slave-character, Sells argues that in the extant fragments slaves appear conservatively portrayed, mostly in domestic contexts, doing works that more likely they would have done in real life (such as cooking, cleaning, serving, etc.); they have limited agency, limited freedom in their movements, and are completely subordinate to their masters. The fragmentary production thus provides a more diversified world of slave-characters, including women, a feature of Athenian slavery that does not find space on the Aristophanic stage.

In the fifth chapter, "Aristophanes, slaves and history" (111–123) Ben Akrigg approaches the latest extant plays of Aristophanes as a possible source both for a reconstruction of economic and social conditions of Athens in late fifth and early fourth centuries, and for an understanding of the dynamics of the evolution of the genre. Focusing on *Frogs* and *Wealth*, Akrigg identifies in Xanthias and Karion the forerunner of the so-called *servus callidus*, which will become a stock character in the Hellenistic and, above all, Roman comic genre. Such an emergence would mirror some social and economic changes in the real slavery system, and in the master-slave relation of that time. The demographic drop occurring during the Peloponnesian War resulted in an increasing of the value of labor and, in consequence, in an inflation of the cost of slaves. With the usefulness of slaves to their owners being reconsidered, this situation caused some imbalance of power between slave and master, as the above mentioned two comedies would demonstrate. The comic representation of slaves in early fourth century would mirror the restoring of a new balance in the relation master-slave, with more generosity on the part of the master, and more confident behavior on the part of the slave.

In chapter 6, "A comedy of errors: the comic slave in Greek art" (124–143) Kelly Wrenhaven aims at an examination of Greek ideas about slaves using both theater —i.e. a place for 'seeing'—and visual art depicting comic characters (mainly, terracotta figurines and vase paintings). Discussing the slave masks 'with exaggerated features' (127) and the grotesque characteristics of slave costume, both in art and on the stage (in the latter field, from Aristophanes to Menander),

Wrenhaven observes that mask and, above all, costumes were meant to express 'slavish traits', (e.g. 126–135) i.e., stereotypes that were usually applied to slave, such as lack of self-control, some sort of impudence, and proneness to gossip. But, while those masks and costumes would make it easy to distinguish between the 'ideal' comic figure (i.e. "the youthful Greek man", 136) and the grotesque slave figure, not the same can be said when it comes to distinguish between slave and other 'non-ideal' comic figures, i.e. old man and women and some categories of free people who performed tasks that could be performed by slaves as well (e.g., cooks, nurse, teachers). According to the author, this would suggest that the costumes were as superficial as the stereotypes themselves; they were thus meant not only to help explore and define identity, but also to challenge it, with the playwrights compelling the audience to look beyond the physical appearance.

"Menander's slaves: the banality of violence," the title of David Konstan's contribution, (144-158) is particularly revealing. Singling out the motif of violence in three specific plays, i.e. *Samias*, *Dyskolos*, and *Aspis*, the author clarifies the ambiguity of Menander's characterization of slaves between two poles of representation: mimetic and fictional (144), with the first implying some kind of realism, and the second referring just to dramatic convention. According to Konstan, there is no intention in Menander to mirror the social reality: violence is just taken for granted, for its presence, implicit in the real institution of slavery, is just a part of the background of the social world of Menander's theater. Its presence is thus dictated by dramatic purposes (hence 'the banality of violence'); the playwright could depict a young man beating his devoted slave (as Moschio does in *Samias*) just if it serves his dramatic aims. What seems to refer to the outside world should thus be examined for its value for the plot, including violence.

Cheryl Cox in "Coping with punishment: the social networking of slaves in Menander" (159–172) outlines the daily concerns of the slaves as represented in Menander's comedies. After determining the three main elements of a slave life, i.e., work, punishment, and food, true to the title, Cox focuses on the punishment, with the purpose being to identify the coping strategies that the slave used. As far as these strategies are concerned, the 'social networking' in which the slaves engaged—as shown in Menander's comedies—is particularly interesting: slaves were not isolated; they had some freedom of movement which allowed them to establish communicative link with other slaves. Though small, these networks provided them with some consolation, and helped alleviate their status of subordination with all the issues, including punishment, that it involved.

Using comparative data, C.W. Marshall presents an original discussion about a specific category of slaves, which has not often received much attention so far: the sex slaves. In "Sex slaves in New Comedy" (173–196), Marshall analyzes the representation of sex slavery in Menander (esp. in *Samia* and *Misoumenos*) and, partly, in Plautus (esp. in *Mercator*), comparing it to practices described by the literature on sex trafficking and tourism in Cambodia. Focusing on the female characters who are typically called 'courtesan' (ἑταίρα in Greek, and *meretrix* in Latin), the author identifies some similarities between the Greco-Roman representations of their status and life and real, contemporary situations in south East Asia. The stage silence of sex slaves, for instance, might partly reflect a real-world condition of women sold into slavery in a foreign culture, i.e. an inevitable linguistic isolation, which is a technique of disempowerment and a key strategy of the traffickers to increase the women's dependence on them. Marshall concludes advocating for a comparative approach—as the one he used—to familiarize with aspect of the existence of slaves that have not been taken into consideration with reference to the ancient world, by thus expanding our capacity to see and understand the problems existing outside the world of the New Comedy.

In "'Phlyax' slaves: from vase to stage?" (197–208), Kathryn Bosher analyzes the representation of comic slaves in fourth-century vases from Apulia (Southern Italy) and Sicily. On the basis of the large number of those vases, Bosher argues that slaves were a favorite comic character for the western Greek audiences, and suggests that this great popularity might have promoted the prominence of the slave figure not only on the stage of Roman theater, but also in the 'older' Greek world in the so-called Middle and New Comedy. Interestingly, Bosher's suggestion thus challenges and subverts the widely accepted assumption that material culture reflects and reproduces literary texts.

The last chapter (209–227) is a contribution by Christina Vester, "Tokens of identity in Menander's *Epitrepontes*: slaves, citziens, and in-betweens". Analyzing the functions of the recognition tokens, in particular in their capacity to grant civic status to their possessor, Vester argues that the distinction between slave and citizen is a social construction and that civic status is, in consequence, an unstable status, which can be transferred or even lost. The lack of access to tokens, in fact, threatens the identity of persons as citizens while, *vice versa*, the access to them by a slave provides him with a role above his own, a role pertaining rather to citizens. Identity and status are thus not located within a person, "they are shaped," Vester

concludes, "by cultural forces, evidenced by possession of markers …" Menander's *Epitrepontes*, displaying Athenian citizenship as unstable and transferable, would reflect the inability of fourth-century Athens to regulate its citizen body.

Impressive for the variety of the perspectives through which the topic is presented and for the large amount of texts analyzed—offering a multifarious survey of the representation of slaves in Greek comedy—it is safe to say that this volume constitutes a fine contribution to the scholarship of the institution of slavery in antiquity.

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