

BOOK REVIEW

Athenian Comedy in the Roman Empire. Edited by C. W. MARSHALL AND TOM HAWKINS. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. Pp. vi + 298. Paper, \$39.95. ISBN 978-15-4725-8883-8.

Pliny the Younger writes about a contemporary poet who has recently turned his hand to *comoedia vetus* (Ep. 6.21). The poet's skill is compared to Menander, Plautus, and Terence. This passage raises more questions than it answers—is *vetus* a temporal or generic marker? Greek or Latin? Dramatic readings or staged performance? Ignorance about questions like these pushed Marshall and Hawkins to pull together scholars to think about the role of Athenian comedy throughout the Roman Imperial period. While the volume is not organized thematically, interesting connections emerge from investigations covering an immense range of time (1st century BCE to the late 5th-early 6th century CE) and a wide range of genres (satire, epistolography, philosophic dialogues, and epigraphy).

The essays from Mathias Hanses and Julia Nelson-Hawkins provide a picture of comic impotence in Latin poets. Hanses focuses on Juvenal's complaints about Greek comic actors. While Juvenal presents himself as the inheritor of the *comoedia togata*, what emerges instead is the picture of Juvenal as a *pater durus* of New Comedy, the grumpy old man who fruitlessly bemoans the ways of the younger generation. Julia Nelson-Hawkins chronicles the development of speaking genitals from Aristophanes to Horace, Petronius, and Martial. Where such genitals are linked in the Athenian context to *parrhesia*, they become a tool for Latin authors to reflect on the loss of *libertas* under the emperors.

Athenian comedy as a means of self-fashioning forms the focus of Tom Hawkins and Ryan B. Samuels' essays. Hawkins explores Dio Chrysostom's use of the Old Comic *parabasis* to criticize rivals and provide insights for the community. Through this, Dio, a native of Prusa in Bithynia, is able, Hawkins argues, to present himself as a fellow-citizen of other cities in the East, one who seeks, in spite of the derision, to benefit those communities (83). Samuels explores the connection between Favorinus' trial of adultery and New Comic plots featuring transvestite or eunuch rapists, characters who challenge the norm. For Samuels,

such boundary crossing is perfectly well suited to Favorinus himself, a Gaul skilled in Greek; an adulterous eunuch; one who challenges an emperor and lives (107).

Fritz Graf and C. W. Marshall consider what types of comedy were preferred. Graf deploys epigraphic evidence from Oenoanda and Aphrodisias to argue for the performance of new comedies being staged as well as revivals of plays from New Comedy, a point compellingly made by the existence of prizes for only the actors of the “old” plays, but for both actors and poets of the “new” plays. Marshall considers the textual history of Plutarch’s *The Comparison of Aristophanes and Menander*. While such a comparison makes perfect sense from a modern perspective, Plutarch’s access to plays by other Old Comic playwrights does not make such a comparison inevitable. Ultimately, Marshall sees the focus on Aristophanes as the result of the interests of an epitomizer.

These considerations smoothly transition into discussions about the role of comedy in public discourse. Ralph M. Rosen sees Lucian’s use of Old Comedy as a way to think about the problem of laughter itself. By the Roman Imperial period, Old Comedy was synonymous with vitriol and buffoonery. For Rosen, Lucian encourages contemporaries to reevaluate the richness of that tradition, relieving some of the anxiety of public ridicule. In an interesting juxtaposition,

Anna Peterson finds the opposite response in Aristides’ *Or.* 29. If festivals are “tokens of friendship” with the gods (29.7) and if the abuse in comedy is harmful to friendship, then the inclusion of comedy in festivals threatens good relationships between the people and the gods. For Peterson, Aristides expresses his anxiety about comedies to the *pepaideumenoí*, but more importantly seeks to redefine what it means to be one in a way that is contingent on the rejection of comedy.

The remaining essays focus on the literary reworking of Athenian comedy. C. W. Marshall demonstrates Aelian’s creative engagement with various New Comic plots, especially that of Menander’s *Dyskolos*. What emerges are epistolary exchanges that could be imagined as happening in the choral interludes within the Menandrian plot. Building on this notion, Melissa Funke highlights places in Alciphron’s letters where the Menandrian plots are reconceptualized from the viewpoint of secondary characters. For Funke, Alciphron is able to use the flexible timeframe of the epistolary genre to explore dynamics prevented by the strict chronology of the stage.

Ian C. Storey and Emilia A. Barbiero find skillful inversions of Old Comic plots. Storey illustrates how Lucian reworks Kratinos’ *Wine-Flasks*, but here instead of the author leaving his initial genre/wife for a younger woman (Drunk-

eness), Lucian leaves for an older male lover (Dialogue) who is tempered into a much more pleasant companion. Barbiero explores the twisting of *Clouds* in Aristainetos' letters where a rich husband now complains about his poor wife, explicitly noting the dangers of marrying a rich wife. The husband here, as Barbiero suggests, "cannot escape his fate as miserable husband, for it has already been enshrined in the literary tradition." (245) To know Aristophanes is to know what will happen to Aristainetos' characters.

A few irregularities throughout the volume (e.g., discrepancies between contributors of CE or AD or differences in the transliteration of Greek names/titles), do not detract from the contributions to our thinking about the afterlife of Athenian comedy. The essays herein cover a broad range of authors and time periods, and readers from many interests are likely to find something engaging in these essays.

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