

metatheatrical analogy between messenger and audience is theoretically valid, the argument seemed forced and I remain unenlightened by it.

Chapter 4 turns to Homer and the False Messenger speech in Sophocles' *Electra*, and here I think Barrett's grip on the fact that this is a self-conscious staging of a tragic convention does produce some genuinely new insights into an area already heavily explored. The Paidagogus' speech, so richly drawing on epic privilege, supports the view that the status of *angelia* is masterful and persuasive, while at the same time, his false story inevitably makes manifest the fictional status of the 'true' story into which the false one has been embedded, as do Odysseus' lying stories in *Odyssey*. Disappointing, though, that so much was made of the similarities between the *doloi mythoi* of the epic Odysseus and the tragic Orestes, when in Sophocles' version the lying rôle has been handed over to the Paidagogus—perhaps the most mysterious and still-unexplored figure in Sophocles.

The final chapter is entitled 'Oedipus Tyrannus: Epistemology and Tragic Practice'. I am grateful to B. for making me think about the extraordinary scene with the 'Corinthian' messenger (who gives the news first of Polybus' death, adds that Oedipus was not, after all, his son, and then points to the shepherd from Cithaeron; he does not deliver a continuous narrative and at times is disregarded as Oedipus and Jocasta discuss between themselves: what a fascinating scene that is!) I wish B. had devoted more space to it. He is more concerned, however, with the *exangelos*, whose narrative he subjects to a masterful analysis, highlighting the unusual mediation of memory and the equally unusual absence of *opsis* on the messenger's part (so that it is Oedipus, not the messenger, who sees the tableau of Jocasta hanging from the rafters, though the messenger has 'caught up' and become a third-person narrator again in time for the most gruesome spectacle of all, Oedipus' blinding). B. argues convincingly that the *angelia* here chimes in with the rest of the play, which is also mediated by memory, and constitutes in its entirety a search for an *angelia*, an autopsy account (of who killed Laius).

Building a little higher on footings laid by others, there are some fresh insights in this subtle and usually well-argued book. Not all will agree with his conclusions, or like the self-imposed constriction of subject-matter (I would have valued a comparison between the false narrative in *Electra* and those in *Trachiniae* and *Philoctetes*, for example), but anyone with an interest in message narrative will be stimulated to think again about the manipulation of its conventions and what that might mean for the text as a whole.

London

BARBARA GOWARD

ACHARNIANS

S. DOUGLAS OLSON: *Aristophanes: Acharnians*. Pp. cii + 379. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. Cased, £65. ISBN: 0-19-814195-5.

This edition of a crucially important play has been eagerly awaited. *Acharnians* has not received a full-scale English-language commentary for nearly a century and Sommerstein's useful 1980 edition made no pretence to completeness or originality in its examination of the textual transmission. Moreover, Doug Olson has been the fastest-rising star of Aristophanic scholarship over the last decade, with a number of important papers preceding his excellent replacement of Platnauer's *Peace* in the

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Oxford series in 1998. So it is an unmitigated pleasure to welcome his Oxford edition of *Acharnians*, which leaves the series now lacking only three titles (*Knights*, *Thesmophoriazusae*, and *Plutus*).

O. gives a very substantial introduction (pp. xxvii–xcix), which covers Aristophanes, the historical background to *Acharnians*, the political argument of the play, mythological and literary background, aspects of staging, dialects, and the text. The text itself is equipped, as in all the Oxford series, with a full line-by-line apparatus of citations as well as an extremely full apparatus criticus. The commentary (pp. 61–365) is comprehensive. There are Greek and general indexes (pp. 367–79).

There can be no doubt of the enormous contribution O. has made here to scholarship on the play. His work will, justly, remain standard for a very long time. However, this does not necessarily mean that he has resolved satisfactorily all the problems which surround the comedy. In this review, I want to concentrate on his attitude to two general issues, which will illustrate the way in which his methodology affects his stance on the interpretation of the play as a whole. The first is the problem of the ‘political argument’ of the play (treated in the introduction, pp. xl–lii). The second is the question of relationships between Aristophanes and his rivals (not adumbrated as such).

O. handles the difficult strands relating to the political argument of the play independently (as he does with all aspects of the comedy) and produces an interesting new slant. First, the connection between Dikaiopolis and ‘the poet’, which emerges at various points, is not systematic (because the poet of the parabasis does not apparently want immediate peace, and is also not intent upon withdrawal from public life). Secondly, the parabolic claim that the poet’s abuse of Athenian democracy has an educational purpose is not supported by the actual nature of the play: ‘The basic political argument of *Acharnians* is that everyone in the city with any power is corrupt and that the people could put a stop to this by paying more attention to what is going on around them and acting more responsibly. Beyond that, the drama offers very little in the way of concrete policy proposals . . .’ (p. xlix); ‘The image presented of the Athenian state . . . is . . . so wildly exaggerated . . . that, were one to take the political argument . . . seriously, one would have little choice but to condemn the play as irresponsible . . .’ (p. l). Finally, the explanation for the poet’s success with *Acharnians* needs to be given with reference to what can be deduced about Kleon’s response to *Babylonians* (that it was an act of political treachery). Kleon’s view was not supported by the general public (as represented by the Council and the judges of the dramatic contest): ‘the obvious conclusion is that ordinary people were content to watch a comedy in which the state was portrayed as in a terrible mess and in which they were presented as fools, provided that they were simultaneously allowed to affirm . . . that they were victims of their leaders . . .’ (p. li). O. supports this conclusion with reference to the Old Oligarch ([X.] *Ath.* 2.17) and his observation that ‘one basic characteristic of the Athenian democracy was the people’s individual readiness to disclaim responsibility for whatever collective decisions turned out badly’ (p. li).

One ought to be cautious about seeing this remark of the Old Oligarch as unbiased by political ideology. O. seems here to be (like others before him) conjuring an interpretation by (effectively) a circular argument: the play reads like this politically, the judges voted it first prize, *therefore* the audience (= the *demoi*) approved of the critical portrayal of the democracy in it. Besides, recent experience suggests that even a very large and complex modern society like the USA during time of war will respond negatively to public criticism of its institutions. But the crucial assumption here is that close reading of the *text* will of itself offer the clues we need for interpretation. What

if, though, the Old Oligarch's contention ([X.] *Ath.* 2.18) about the *demos's* restrictions on abuse of democracy in comedy is factual (so that the purpose of invective comedy was to *protect* the *demos* against its own political leaders)? In that case, the audience conjured by O. could not exist and the play, despite appearances, could not be saying what it appears on the surface to be saying. O's thesis would be undermined further if the play referred to at 378–9 were not *Babylonians* (we have only the assertion of the notoriously unreliable scholia as evidence), or if Rosen (*Old Comedy and the Iambographic Tradition* [Atlanta, 1988], 63–4) is correct in seeing the whole Kleon conflict as a fiction constructed to enhance the poet's own reputation (admitted by O. on p. xxx to be 'impossible to prove . . . not true'). With comedy especially, one needs to establish a context for interpretation independently of the text, precisely because the comic text is designed to mesh with and respond to knowledge already possessed (or presumed to be possessed) by the intended audience.

My second question, the relationship between Aristophanes and his comic rivals, also has a bearing on this issue. There can be no doubt that there is cross-reference between comedies. What if allusion to and parody of other comedies were a central rather than a peripheral feature of the genre? This would mean that inferences which connect the text directly with reality would all be questionable: a comic scene might be the point of reference. On the more specific application of this theory to *Acharnians*, O. (p. 180 on 405–6) dismisses Bowie's suggestion that Dikaiopolis was meant to recall for the audience not Aristophanes himself but the comic poet Eupolis with the argument that 'the intrusive "I" that breaks into the text for the first time at 299–302 is beyond any doubt the voice of the author of the present play rather than of one of his rivals'. I note here first the lack of consistency between this interpretation of the 'I' of 299–302 and that offered for the 'me' of 1154–5, where O. is prepared to see (among a number of other possibilities) the chorus referring to its past self as a chorus of Cratinus or Eupolis. On what grounds can we say that the 'I' of 299–302 might not have a similar referent? Secondly, it is a standard narrative ploy in modern fiction to have an 'I' represent someone other than the actual author, and given the state of our evidence and of the discussion on this issue, there is no way of telling from the text itself whether or not this is the way the device is being used in *Acharnians*. O. seems altogether too positive given the state of the evidence that a knowledge of the plays of Aristophanes' rivals would not fundamentally transform our understanding of Aristophanes' comedies. More generally, we risk fooling ourselves if we think that there is safety in sticking to the positivistic notion that texts—especially comic plays from a widely different and long-dead culture—offer us the blueprint for their own understanding.

University College Cork

KEITH SIDWELL

CITIZENS IN COMEDY

J. F. MCGLEW: *Citizens on Stage. Comedy and Political Culture in the Athenian Democracy*. Pp. vii + 239. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002. Cased, US\$52.50/£37.50. ISBN: 0-472-11285-6.

James F. McGlew, previously known to scholarship for *Tyranny and Political Culture in Ancient Greece* (Ithaca, 1993), now turns his attention to Old Comedy. However, despite the reference to the stage in the title, his new book is not about stagecraft or performance, but about political ideology. He aims to show the relationship between

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