

relief. As a minor reservation it should be noted that, while most of the comparisons made between individual plays seem quite fitting, the pairing of *Persians* with *Peace* and *Birds* as wartime plays is least effective; perhaps another, later tragedy focusing on war would have made for a better comparison. This, however, does not detract from the overall quality and usefulness of the study.

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CARNIVAL AND GREEK COMEDY

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Old Comedy has an extremely complex relationship with reality, for it both transfers its spectators into the utopian world of fantasy and provides them with a powerful tool for reflection on burning political and cultural issues. This paradox is, however, avoided – with some exceptions – in scholarship so that the literary and the political aspects of comedy remain divorced. The present volume is an attempt to pinpoint and bridge this gap by contextualising the carnivalesque nature of Greek comedy in the real world: religion and cult, human body and language, cultural milieu and politics. This brilliant collection of nine essays plus introduction results from the colloquium held in Toulouse in 2009 to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the publication of J.-C. Carrière's book *Le Carnaval et la politique, une introduction à la comédie grecque suivie d'un choix de fragments* (1979). The editors divide the contributions thematically into four parts covering ritual origins of comedy, utopianism, dialogue with tragedy, and the echoes of the political world of Old Comedy in Menander and Roman mime. The volume is in French but for the two first essays which are in English.

A concise introduction, which gives a helpful insight into Carrière's achievement in the field, is followed by Part 1 on ritual origins containing just one discussion by R. Rosen, which is to my mind the most innovative and original piece in the volume. Rosen grapples with a much discussed concept of *aiskhrologia*, shameful speech encouraged at certain ritual occasions and including laughter, mockery, insults and obscenity. He rightly challenges the common view that *aiskhrologia* as observed in Greek rituals, especially Dionysiac rituals, is the source of comic abusiveness and transgression – and, therefore, evidence for the ritual origins of drama. The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, in Rosen's insightful analysis, is a convincing counter-argument here as it provides the opposite conception of the aetiology of ritual obscenity: it is the social mimesis that precedes ritual *aiskhrologia*, not the other way round. In conclusion, Rosen presents an interpretation of the parados in *Frogs* as the poet's self-conscious play with the two distinct types of obscenity, ritual and comic. The chorus' ironical claim to perform a pious and respectful ritual of *aiskhrologia* is revealed as Aristophanes' trick to get license to comment freely on the life of the *polis*. Indeed, if comedy does the same as religion, why would anyone object or be insulted?

Part 2, 'Utopie? Le corps et langage comiques comme outils d'autonomie et d'ancrage de la comédie', is made up by two deeply theoretically engaged contributions. The aim here is to trace the comic mechanism of distorting reality and simultaneously reaffirming and reinforcing the perception of reality within the audience. I. Ruffell argues that the comic body with its exaggerated ugliness makes the unreal and imaginary meet the real world through the emphasis on physicality. Comic body belongs to the comic fantasy, but it is also firmly rooted in the actual material world of food and fertility shared by the audience. This allows Ruffell to distance himself from the fallacy of structuralist approaches, for example Bakhtin's notion of carnival, with its lack of historical and social perspective and to regard comic body as a space for satirical comments and social reflection, with a modern parallel of *The Simpsons* or *South Park* series. P. Judet de la Combe continues this discussion – how an explicitly carnivalesque genre manages to remain politically relevant – from the point of view of the language and discourse. He meditates on *Clouds* as a play embodying the fundamental principle of the Sophists of seeking reality in language. Through the chorus of *Clouds*, various cosmological and meteorological theories become visible on stage, and the reality of the physical world is transformed through their self-referential speech. Judet de la Combe concludes by exposing four levels of referentiality in the play.

After the basics of the relation between carnival and politics in comedy have been set out, Part 3 presents more focused studies on comedy dealing with its rival dramatic genre – tragedy. Notably, the first three discussions combine to regard tragedy as the cultural reality with which comedy interacts, using the strategy of comic reversal. R. Saetta-Cottone builds upon Carriere's definition of comedy as reversal or negation of tragedy, illustrating how this term can be applied to the dialogue between tragedy and comedy: it demystifies tragedy and reverses the hierarchy between the two genres. This dialogue is of course imaginary. Comedy pretends to be in a position superior to tragedy and to freely exchange dramatic techniques with tragic poets: Euripides in the *Women at the Thesmophoria* adopts a role of a para-comic poet while on the meta-fictional level Aristophanes, the author of the play, interprets the tragic art of Euripides. The subsequent essay by A.M. Andrisano continues to explore comedy's engagement with the cultural reality of tragic patterns. Andrisano provides a convincing account of the chorus of *Frogs* as a mockery of new forms of dithyrambic choruses in Athens and their influence on tragic choreography. The extravagant chorus of *Frogs* is thus contrasted with the chorus of initiates, a more traditional one and associated with Aeschylus, which anticipates his victory over Euripides' innovative art in the poetic agon. The next essay by G. Jay-Robert is an excellent development of the approaches to comic physicality and language as proposed in Part 2. The theme of eye and vision, very significant in the poetical world of tragedy, receives a completely different perspective in comedy: the eye itself becomes a visible object evoking laughter by its emphasised materiality. The final essay in this section by S. Said on barbarians in comedy provides a survey of language and clothes associated with foreigners and divides barbarian characters into external barbarians (Persians and Thracians) and internal ones (Phrygian slaves, Scythian archers). The two categories, however, are not confronted, and the image of barbarians in comedies is arguably consistent and homogeneous, unlike in Euripides' tragedies, where the hostility and inferiority of barbarians can be questioned. The view on comic barbarians thus is more realistic, for example in terms of their speech, if compared with tragedy.

These studies are complemented by Part 4, which goes beyond Aristophanes and explores the continuation of the strategies of Old Comedy in Menander and Roman theatre. C. Cusset challenges the established view that a political dimension is absent from New Comedy and provides a convincing account of how the social and economic status of

the characters is fundamental for the structure of Menander's plots. He brings out the embeddedness of the comic love intrigue in politics (in the broad sense of the life of the *polis*) – the perturbations in the city, the degradation, poverty and insecurity have consequences for the lovers. The marriage hence reunifies the intimate and the political, being a form of the restoration of the integrity of the *polis*. M.-H. Garelli considers the Aristophanic tradition of parabolic techniques in the Roman theatre as a form of political satire. Her scope is to trace how literary parody and disruption of comic illusion in the vein of ancient comedy contributes to the liberty of speech directed against Caesar in Laberius' mime.

This collection makes for an instructive read for every student of ancient comedy. It is well-balanced in terms of theoretical approaches and their application to particular questions of interpretation and brings new urgency to the various aspects of tension between dramatic structures and the historical context in Aristophanes and beyond.

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READINGS OF GREEK COMEDY

TAUFER (M.) (ed.) *Studi sulla commedia attica*. (Paradeigmata 31.) Pp. 291. Freiburg: Rombach, 2015. Paper, €48. ISBN: 978-3-7930-9840-9.

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The present volume results from the international conference, 'La commedia greca', held in Trento (Italy), 4–6 June 2015, organised by AICC (Associazione Italiana di Cultura Classica) and the Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften. The book includes an introduction by the editor, thirteen articles dealing with aspects of ancient Greek comedy and a comprehensive index of the passages and characters referred to. A short abstract and a list of keywords precede each article. The papers are written in Italian, German and English.

Through his discussion of 'performance criticism' and of the political meaning of Attic Old Comedy, B. Zimmermann, 'Aktuelle Tendenzen der Komödienforschung', argues that external influences on philological and textual research can lead to misleading and anachronistic misinterpretations. Zimmermann argues that, although such anachronistic approaches might offer new perspectives on the investigation of old texts, the commentary remains the best way of analysing ancient (often fragmentary) comedies.

G. Mastromarco, 'Aristofane e le Termopili', discusses the poetic and historical implications of the references to the battle of Thermopylae in Aristophanes, *Wasps* 1084 and *Lysistrata* 1254–61. Mastromarco underlines the historical incongruity in the former passage, where the chorus of old Athenians/wasps falsely celebrate their own participation in the battle of Thermopylae – a battle that was famously undertaken without Athenian support. Mastromarco underlines the comic, improbable side of the passage and concludes that the incongruity presumably depends on Aristophanes' distortion of historical truth for fictional and comic purposes, the motives of which are sometimes impossible to detect. By contrast, in the passage of *Lysistrata*, Aristophanes reports the events in accordance with the historical sources, attributing to the Athenians the victory at Artemisium and to the Spartans the deeds at Thermopylae. Mastromarco maintains that, through the accurate description of historical events, including the reconciliation between Sparta and Athens