

DOBROV (G. W.) *Ed. Brill's Companion to the Study of Greek Comedy*. Leiden: Brill, 2010. Pp. xv + 579, illus. €189. 9789004109636.

This is the first Brill's Companion devoted to the study of Greek Comedy, and there is no question that it is worth the wait but long overdue. The success of this volume is due in no small part to the editor Gregory W. Dobrov who has marshalled thirteen of the most renowned scholars of Greek Comedy for the purpose of outlining and exploring approaches to this field of study. With the aid of these contributors, the collection takes on the tricky task of examining a wide range of topics in depth, while doing so in a manner that is both accessible to the undergraduate reader and useful to the graduate researcher. As Dobrov himself puts it, 'Our efforts are directed toward producing a useful resource for navigating the fundamentals of the genre: authors, texts, language, production, dramatic technique, and sociohistorical context' (p. 5). This the volume achieves by purposefully avoiding a purely chronological approach to Greek Comedy. Instead the structure of the work falls into three parts: 'Contexts', 'History' and 'Elements' where each of these parts involves discussions of the different periods of Greek Comedy that reaches from Old Comedy and Aristophanes through to New Comedy and Menander (including some discussion of Roman Comedy).

Dobrov acknowledges that the introductory nature of the volume comes at the cost of exploring new and original lines of thought and research. This has the inevitable result that each chapter, one way or another, constitutes a survey of the relevant evidence. However, the different ways that this survey-technique is deployed does not fail to provide some thought-provoking discussions in some chapters. This is evident, for example, from S.D. Olson's and E. Csapo's contributions in the first part of the volume, 'Contexts'. This section offers five chapters dealing with diverse topics concerning Greek Comedy's relation to the history of comic criticism (G.W. Dobrov); politics (S.D. Olson); material evidence (J.R. Green); performance (E. Csapo) and myth and ritual (A.M. Bowie). Olson's chapter examines the heated history of debate surrounding the political (or not) function of Aristophanic comedy. The arguments of scholars from Gomme (1938) onwards are presented and critiqued in a manner that should itself stimulate debate. Olson ends by presenting his own position that Aristophanic comedy presented a satire of politics as a whole rather than taking a pro- or anti-democratic stance; the purpose was not to incite the audience to political action but to entertain. This interpretation depends in part on Olson's characterisation of audience members (pp. 68-9) which invites further consideration from the reader. The chapter by Csapo has a broader scope than Olson's by choosing to cover the history of dramatic performance and by exploring the breadth of evidence from later sources on which many of our suppositions about 5th c. drama are forged. The result is a chapter that reflects the liveliness of this area of research and encourages the reader to make their own closer engagement with this approach to studying comedy.

The second section, 'History', devotes chapters to the different periods of comedy, examining plays, themes and individual dramatists. The discussion ranges from the origins of comedy and fifth-century BCE fragments (I.C. Storey) and Aristophanes (R.M. Rosen) to the so-called Middle Comedy (W.G. Arnott) and New Comedy (S. Ireland). A surprising highlight, given the amount of literature devoted to him, is the chapter on Aristophanes. Rosen's approach is more upfront than others in confronting problems and interpretative issues in the study of Greek Comedy. There is a compelling examination of the problems in trying to define Aristophanes by using either the biographical tradition or the comedies themselves. A more disarming honesty is displayed in the insightful contribution by W.G. Arnott who, in trying to understand what happened to Greek Comedy in the years between Aristophanes' *Frogs* and Menander's *Dyskolos* (the period termed 'Middle Comedy'), states that 'we can guess, but we do not certainly know.' The chapter goes on to provide a refreshing evaluation of the material from this period. One cause for complaint emerges from this section, which is true for the overall work: the lack of interaction or dialogue between

several contributions is a missed opportunity. In the case of Arnott, his views on the nature and form of Middle Comedy are clearly at odds with H.-G. Nesselrath's approach taken in the third part of the volume. Neither contributor flags up the other's as a sign that the debate is still alive and relevant to a student of Greek Comedy. There is a similar lack of dialogue or awareness between Storey and Bowie's discussions of the ill-defined category of 'mythological comedy' or 'mythological burlesque'.

The final section is concerned with 'Elements' and its focus on text, metre and language makes it an indispensable introduction and guide on these topics. A.H. Sommerstein presents the textual tradition of Aristophanic Comedy; H.-G. Nesselrath discusses the complex transmission of comic fragments; B. Zimmermann discusses the musical and metrical form of comedy; A. Willi explores the language of Old Comedy. The level of specialism is at its highest but each chapter makes its material approachable and engaging. Sommerstein's concise explanation of the transmission of texts in general, and of Aristophanic comedy specifically, is a very useful resource, while Zimmermann effortlessly presents the topic of metre and structure, as well as the striking observation that the relationship between actor and chorus determines the structure of Greek tragedy and comedy.

The volume lives up to Dobrov's intentions of outlining the field, but there are inevitably some gaps that perhaps should have been attended to: there is little focus on discussing humour and laughter, or Greek Comedy's relation to other genres e.g. epic, lyric, philosophy, and tragedy. This might explain the omission from the bibliography of E. Medda, M.S. Mirto and M.P. Pattoni's edited volume *Komoidotragoidia* (2006) which deserved mention. The merits of this 'Companion to the Study of Greek Comedy' far outweigh any criticisms made above, and the volume will be of great value to students of Greek Comedy at all levels.

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