

The first and second centuries CE were also a period of innovation and renewal for theatre, as argued by Garelli, with the introduction of mimes and pantomimes into dramatic competitions in the second century CE (two genres particularly dear to autocrats) and of an imperial cult in which spectacles featured as important components of the propaganda surrounding it.

Theatre decorations and careful displays of power are especially evident in imperial Rome. Green presents a detailed study of the Antonine phase of the theatre of Paphos in Cyprus, focusing on the depiction of Antoninus and the portrait statues of the imperial family enclosing the theatre space.

The second section ends with a chapter by Bowie that, while reiterating the pervasiveness and lasting presence of a reperformance culture of old tragedy and comedy at competitions, speaks of the seemingly jarring fact that the content of some of these plays did not seem to intimidate emperors in the slightest, not even when the plot had the potential to stir up anti-imperial sentiments (Nero acted in *Antigone*, for example).

In the last section L. Athanassaki, S. Perris and R. Cowan discuss the content of tragedies and how they relate to and/or purport autocracy. Athanassaki's chapter on Euripides' portrayals of Theseus in a few of his tragedies shows that the tyrannicide and champion of democracy that was being celebrated on the Hephaesteion frieze (completed roughly at the same time as the production of the *Children of Heracles*) was challenged by the playwright's insistence on the hero's autocratic inclinations. Perris's focus is on oligarchic forms of government in tragedy: not only does he argue that these can be thought of as *the* local form of government in some tragedies; but, in a selection of fragments and (mostly Euripidean) whole tragedies, there emerges an idea of the rule of the few as preferable. Cowan's chapter focuses on Varius Rufus' *Thyestes* and its ties with the performance context it is believed to have been produced in: the Actian games of 29 BCE. His analysis is directed at reconciling the gruesome content of a tragedy about kin killing with its celebratory performative context.

This is a rich and exciting volume that will certainly become a reference point for those interested in theatre and autocracy. The book shows that autocratic rulers played a crucial role in the survival, spread and preservation of ancient Greek theatre and its repertoire.

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JOKING IN GREEK COMEDY

SCOTT (N.) *Jokes in Greek Comedy. From Puns to Poetics*. Pp. x + 181. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023. Cased, £85, US\$115. ISBN: 978-1-350-24848-9.
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This monograph is a revised version of S.'s 2016 thesis, which explores 'what jokes *in* poetry, and indeed jokes *as* poetry, can tell us *about* poetry' (p. 2). The overall answer/argument is that jokes in Greek comedy *amplify* – the verb is heavily repeated throughout the book – the incongruities and absurdity (defamiliarisation) inherent to all poetic representation (*mimesis*), and thus comedy exposes tragedy as no less ridiculous than itself.

In the introduction S. explains what jokes and poetry (or metaphor, which is poetry's trope par excellence) have in common: both are non-standard modes of speech that mobilise the unexpected, the implausible and the deceptive; they both draw attention to their linguistic form; and they are both characterised by interpretative openness. This kinship allows jokes to speak for poetry altogether, even for 'serious' poetry, whose pretentiousness they come to reveal. Such metapoetic jokes in comedy are not restricted to paratragic passages and the parabases, S. clarifies, but can be found even in seemingly irrelevant contexts (pp. 10–11). S. also provides a brief overview of the incongruity-based humour theories from Aristotle to Oring; the most pertinent to S.'s analysis is Schopenhauer's account, i.e. that humour arises from – hence jokes invest in – the realisation of the gap between reality and representations of it (pp. 9–10, 18, 40, 122).

The first chapter, 'Jokes and Poetic Language', opens by specifying the affinity of jokes to metaphors: they both entail an absurd connection of disparate semantic domains. It is only that jokes highlight that absurdity as such. For example, a commonplace poetic metaphor since Homer was to compare speech to liquids (e.g. sweet words to honey), but several puns in comedy entail a comparison of speaking *individuals* to liquids, for example Paphlagon to a boiling torrent (Aristophanes, *Knights* 919–22) or Archilochus to pickle-juice (Cratinus, fr. 6.1 K.-A.). Thus comedy makes concrete what in the poetic tradition is abstract, to bring 'before our eyes' its ridiculousness. Such a confrontation is also made possible by jokes that entail excess of imagery or multiple double entendres; for example, in *Clouds* 1088–94 the generic insult εὐρύπρωκτος, 'wide-arseholed / bugger', ostentatiously wavers between its metaphorical and literal sense (pp. 32–3). Here I missed some contextualising: what anatomical metaphors for one's morality are employed by 'serious' poetry, to which εὐρύπρωκτος may be (cor)responding? The second half of the chapter shifts focus onto puns that mock the falseness of poetic *ekphrases*. By such puns the comic poets nod to the physical unreality of their dramatic landscapes / the technical limitations of any theatrical production, even though they promise their spectators all kinds of fantastical sights. Comedy is led to question the quality of *thereness* that *ekphrases* claim to have, because in tragedy the most crucial developments in a plot happen off-stage and the spectators are left only with lengthy narratives, meant to be taken 'seriously'. So does Peisetairos/Aristophanes build his Cloud-cuckoo-land out of ... thin air, joking about the unreality of his own creation – I endorse S.'s proposal (p. 51) that the 'baked bricks' of Peisetairos' wall in *Birds* 552 is a pun on 'visible bricks' (ὄπτως < ἔψω vs ὄπτως < ὄραω).

The second chapter, 'Jokes and Dramatic Performance', deals with puns that dismantle the utterly non-naturalistic and hyper-stylised theatrical code. A good deal of jokes cluster around non-human roles, such as animals or abstract concepts, and those jokes come to emphasise the human identity of the actors. For example, the fish-chorus of Archippus' *Fishes* are described as γαλεοί, 'dogfish', which hints at Γαλεῶται, a Sicilian clan of soothsayers (fr. 15 K.-A.). This is a 'fairly terrible' pun – 'plastic sturgeons' is an apt rendering by I. Storey, we read in the endnotes –, and it is *consciously* so, S. suggests; for the 'groin-inducing awfulness' of the pun matches the embarrassing costumes of the chorus: the gap between human- and fish-anatomy means that any costume would look terribly unnatural (pp. 61, 63). Especially with roles of personified (as females) abstract concepts, such as Reconciliation in *Lysistrata*, Theoria in *Peace* or Music in Pherecrates' *Chiron*, sexual puns come to visualise the harassing of their tangible bodies: nothing abstract. Of course, to personify something abstract is in itself a ridiculous enterprise, Aristophanes admits in *Clouds* 340–5: he makes no attempt to make the chorus meaningfully cloud-like, but conveniently (and self-embarrassingly) describes them as shape-shifters. A metatheatrical potential is also found in jokes about the use of the *mechane* and the *ekkyklema*, whose real/technical existence is ignored by tragedy, yet

loved by comedy. For example, in fr. 4 K.-A. by Strattis a character complains about his hanging from a κράδι, which means a ‘branch’, but also the *mechane*. Whereas tragedy wishes to disavow the gap between fictionality and performance, comedy manifests its willingness to embrace that gap, S. concludes.

The final chapter, ‘Jokes and Storytelling’, looks at how comedy employs jokes to undermine traditional storytelling, such as tragic plots, epic narratives and historiographical aetiologies. Mythological comedies offer an excellent opportunity for such parody, for they mobilise comedy’s topicality and hyper-materiality (e.g. through the focus on the grubbiest of everyday objects or through sexual innuendo) to underscore the unnatural loftiness of serious storytelling. The eponymous protagonists of Cratinus’ *Dionysalexandros* (a god-hero hybrid) and of Aristophanes’ *Aeolicon* (a god-chef hybrid) epitomise this merge of incompatible ‘scripts’ and attract many jokes on their questionable nature: the coinage σκοροδομίμητος, ‘garlic-masquerading’, in the latter play (Ar. fr. 5 K.-A.) is telling. Quite often comic poets invest this gap between reality and myth with political satire, in what S. calls a ‘comic triangulation’ (p. 109); for example, *Dionysalexandros* was a satire for how Pericles had brought war upon the Athenians. Yet the most interesting and original idea in this chapter is that, whereas serious storytelling is structured upon the highly artificial principle of linear and predictable causality (κατὰ τὸ εἶκος ἢ τὸ ἀναγκάσιον, for tragedy in particular), comedy, rather paradoxically, proves more naturalistic in that it embraces haphazardness. At the same time, comedy amplifies single-factor causality – an entire comic plot may revolve around a single gag – to expose the antirealism of traditional storytelling (pp. 89–91, 113).

The book’s tripartite structure (i.e. jokes about language, about performance and about plot) is economical and covers the most prevalent aspects of drama. With a main body of 123 pages, concise notes reserved for the end, simple yet precise writing style, translations for all Greek passages, generous indexes and meticulous copy-editing, the book is an epitome of reader-friendliness. It is neither too theoretical nor too technical, and the commentary on individual jokes (featuring several original proposals) serves perfectly S.’s argumentation. However, not all jokes discussed are puns in the strict sense (paronomasia / double-meaning) – very few are puns in the last chapter – nor will readers find a typology of jokes. S. has updated the bibliography since 2016, but this is done somewhat superficially, in the form of passing mentions in the introduction or citations for further reading, while the analysis does not engage critically with some recent works that are relevant and would have been useful (e.g. the essays in P. Swallow and E. Hall’s *Aristophanic Humour* [2020]; C. Jendza’s *Paracomedy* [2020]; and my own *Aristophanes and the Poetics of Surprise* [2020] – the latter two are not listed). Of older scholarship, the most striking omission for a book interested in poetic absurdity is that of P. Cartledge’s *Aristophanes and his Theatre of the Absurd* (1990). Any minor reservations aside, this is a well-researched and well-written contribution on the competitive attitude of comedy towards tragedy, and also (what should be a gauge of success for such books) it is fun to read.

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