FOR INITIATES

I. Lada-Richards: *Initiating Dionysus: Ritual and Theatre in Aristophanes'* Frogs. Pp. xxlv + 387, ills. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999. Cased, £80. ISBN: 0-19-814981-6.

Why is Dionysus in the *Frogs*? Ismene Lada-Richards argues that the god is the hitherto overlooked ingredient in the play and that he provides its unity and structure. The reading of *Frogs* that she offers is grounded in two distinct bites at the cherry of Paris School structuralism. Firstly, the play follows the path of initiation into the Eleusinian Mysteries: Dionysus is to be seen as a *mustes* undergoing ordeal and reintegration. Secondly, the progress of the play/initiation is measured out by a polarity between Dionysus and Herakles. The book tracks these structures through a broadly linear presentation of the drama. Chapters II–IV discuss the descent to the underworld, the initiatory structure and related Dionysiaca; Chapters V–IX concentrate on the literary *agon* and its civic concerns, interpreted around the Dionysus–Herakles binary, set up in Chapter I. A small epilogue follows, on the exodos, which works to pull the two strands together.

The kernel of the book, nearly a third of its length, is the account of the initiatory structure (Chapter II). Dionysus undergoes a threefold process (formulated by van Gennep, 1909): 'separation', 'limen' (liminality, marginality, etc.), and 'reaggregation' (reincorporation into and identification with the group). The group (of *mustai*) is to be identified as the civic, citizen body, i.e. the theatre-going public. Thus Dionysus is alienated from the contemporary cultural wasteland and the taste of its theatre-goers. The descent to the underworld is his period of liminality, in which he undergoes trials (apparitions, threats of dismemberment, flagellation, partial nudity) and re-education (rowing), and attempts (albeit unsuccessfully) to take on other identities (Herakles, a slave). In this period, he learns to be a 'good' citizen and thus becomes able to judge the contest in the underworld.

The establishment of the pattern and its internal logic have certain problems. L.-R. underplays Dionysus' proximity to the audience in the prologue, where both have lost decent poets and the intertextual joking *presupposes* a certain complicity from the audience. From the other side, it is not always clear how Dionysus is really to be reintegrated, or with whom (whether in Athens or Hades-as-Athens): the 'alienating' audience? the dead (equally lacking in taste)? the chorus? a putative group of *sophoi* or good citizens? Above all, the god's identity is fundamentally problematic. As L.-R. is honest enough to admit (and discusses in some detail), the iconography of Dionysus is not stable (any more than, in his own way, that of Herakles), and in particular he is never straightforwardly an Athenian male citizen—always already a visitor from outside, ambiguous in terms of gender and sexuality. L.-R. fudges this by arguing that such transgression makes him the ideal candidate for initiation. I would suggest rather that it is his fluidity of identity that enables him to move so smoothly through these different contexts, part yet not part of them.

Before the arrival of the chorus, the figure of Dionysus provides the clearest cue for reading against an initiatory context. L.-R. makes the most of him by collapsing Dionysiac and Eleusinian mysteries together, and by further introducing the ephebic ritual, even though (as she admits) Dionysus is no ephebe. Reductiveness aside, her historicity is defiantly sketchy. L.-R. admits that Dionysiac mystery cults are thinly scattered across time and space, that the scale was utterly unlike the Eleusinian, and that there is no evidence for Attica, but pins her faith on the alleged conservatism of

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mystery-cults. She works hard to establish that a *katabasis–anabasis* format was part of the Eleusinian ritual drama—but the evidence is weak, and even on L.-R.'s argument would not have been part of the initiand' s direct experience. I struggled to see the overall plot as initiatory.

The second structural element—the Dionysus–Herakles polarity—maps a psychological change in the initiated Dionysus. Here, L.-R. is aware of but does not meet Michael Silk's arguments against the realist nature of comic characters. She argues that Herakles and Dionysus are distinguished in the prologue (Chapter I) and come to embody contrasting values. Herakles represents the *polis*, the masculine, hoplite-fighting, epic; Dionysus is *oikos*, the feminine, anti-hoplitic, anti-epic. These are mapped onto Aeschylus and Euripides respectively (Chapter V). L.-R. explores the binaries in a series of areas: *ekplexis* (Chapter VI), society (Chapter VII), spectating (Chapter VIII). There is a progression towards the civic, Heraklean, and Aeschylean, and away from the Euripidean and Dionysian.

The argument is somewhat confusing. It veers from transition between (Chapters VI and VII) towards incorporation of opposing elements (esp. Chapter VIII). Certain details approach self-contradiction. Thus, despite his anti-civic position, Euripides can be Dionysiac because he is rather democratic (pp. 257–60). He can subvert the male oikos (pp. 261–8), held elsewhere by the author to be unambiguously female. Herakles upholds masculinity, but this excludes key episodes of his mythological career. Herakles is culture-hero and (more questionably) hoplite, but earlier, in Dionysus' impersonation of him, he is a barbaric force, away from which Dionysus has to progress (Chapter IV). However, Aeschylus is also set up as Dionysiac, because he engages in *ekplexis* (Chapter VI), whereas Euripides engages in Gorgianic *apate*. Weakest of all is the synkrisis of tragedy and comedy (Chapter IX). Comparison of the gods of *Frogs* and *Bacchae* reveals that the Dionysus of the *Frogs* prologue is, er, comic, and that this continues in the *Agon*. L.-R. concludes that the tragic and the comic, ludic and serious, converge, but the argument is somewhat derivative and lacks coherence.

The stress on the civic dimension of drama is welcome, and in tune with the neo-historicist times; but as an account of the debate, the treatment of Euripides and Aeschylus is a thoroughly traditional one, no more than reiterating the surface readings, through the prism of forced polarities and a teleological optimism. Confusions abound here, not least due to the continual taking of all comic utterance straightforwardly and with an utter po-face. Questions of 'who speaks?', 'who sees?', and 'what motivation?' are too often left hanging.

Both in the introduction and elsewhere, L.-R. insists that the work is not meant to be *the* reading (of either audience or author), but simply opening up interpretative possibilities and exploring a cultural context. In this sense, it should be read as a Dionysiac/religious commentary and not a meta-narrative or interpretation. This will not wash. For L.-R. equally insists that the religious is the single most important context against which to read *Frogs* and this becomes, rather circularly, the major (or only) justification for accepting the selections offered, the connections made, and the readings preferred. In any case, even if it is not to be read as *the* story, but an interpretative possibility amidst a sea of others, we are, as readers, compelled to ask, 'Is this a story that really works?' A Rorty-esque pragmatics of interpretation does not bracket these questions but makes them still more necessary.

As with much work of this nature, either you buy the principles or you do not. And yet not only traditional philologists but card-carrying (post)modernists will have reservations. L.-R. raises a host of modern critical problems—e.g. author; character;

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history and historicity; reading vs. performance; carnival and carnivalesque; and the situatedness of critic, theorist, and/or anthropologist—but fails to appreciate their significance. Even so, she is a thorough scholar, and in her cult digressions often (as in her treatment of Dionysus) offers the seeds of her own deconstruction.

Overall, this book has valuable things to say—and I learnt a lot about Dionysian and Eleusinian cult and Aristophanic imagery. And, when the dust settles, there remain the *mustai* in the *Frogs* and there remains Dionysus. As a work of literary or cultural criticism, however, this book makes a rather forced religious commentary. Perhaps worst of all, there is little evidence of a sense of humour. In seeking to open up interpretation, I fear that L.-R. has come close to imposing a straitjacket on the methods and materials of this most kaleidoscopic of literary forms.

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THE SCHOLIA ON ARISTOPHANES

J. HANGARD (ed.): *Scholia in Aristophanem II: Scholia in* Vespas, Pacem, Aves *et* Lysistratam; Fasc. IV, *Continens Scholia in Aristophanis* Lysistratam. Pp. xvi + 58. Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1996. Cased. ISBN: 90-6980-083-7.

M. CHANTRY (ed.): *Scholia in Aristophanem III: Scholia in* Thesmophoriazusas; Ranas; Ecclesiazusas *et* Plutum; Fasc. Ia, *Continens Scholia Vetera in Aristophanis* Ranas. Pp. xiv + 180; Fasc. IVa, *Continens Scholia Vetera in Aristophanis* Plutum. Pp. xxviii + 201; Fasc. IVb, *Continens Scholia Recentiora in Aristophanis* Plutum. Pp. xxix + 318. Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1999, 1994, 1996. Cased. ISBN: 90-6980-105-1; 90-6980-055-1; 90-6980-084-5.

Dindorf's three volumes (1838) and Dübner's monolith (1842) win the prize for longevity. Though ninety per cent obsolete, they still survive by a thread. Rutherford—with only the R material—was a lame duck from the start, except perhaps for *Thesm.* (1896). Stein on *Lysistrata* (1891), White on *Birds* (1914), and Schuringa's V Scholia on *Frogs* (1945) all had great innings until they were overtaken by a slow-moving giant. Subsidized by Z.W.O. (The Netherlands Organization for the Advancement of Pure Research), the mighty Dutch juggernaut entered the fray four decades ago. W. J. W. Koster was at the helm, and D. Holwerda took over in 1975. By a strange inversion, the *finale* was staged as a spectacular *première*: 'Tzetzes can never have had it so good' (*CR* 11 [1961], 120). Here is the cast in order of appearance:

1960–4: PART IV, The Commentaries of John Tzetzes: (1) on *Plutus*, ed. Lydia Massa Positano (1960); (2) on *Clouds*, ed. Holwerda (1960); (3) on *Frogs* and *Birds*, ed. Koster (1962); (4) *Indices* (1964).

1969–77: PART I: (1A) *Prolegomena* on Comedy, ed. Koster (1975); (1B) Scholia on *Acharnians*, ed. Nigel Wilson (1975); (2) Scholia on *Knights*, ed. Mervyn Jones, Nigel Wilson (1969); (3^1) Ancient Scholia on *Clouds*, ed. Holwerda (1977); (3^2) Recent Scholia on *Clouds*, ed. Koster (1974).

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