or enmity with one's *philoi*, because one's actions are, were, or will be those of a friend or enemy' (p. 4). I doubt if *tous enthade* in *IT* 389 means the human race in general (p. 23), and the text of *IT* gives little attention to the fact that Pelops was the killer (*authentês*) of his wife's father (pp. 23–4). B.'s argument for supposing that Sophocles' Neoptolemus has really been robbed of his father's arms by Odysseus (pp. 75–6) elides the fact that traditionally (as in the *Little Iliad*) Odysseus was awarded the armour but later passed it on to Neoptolemus. Her translation of *Phil*. 942–3 to suggest a reference to Neoptolemus' acceptance of the bow at 776 (p. 70) overlooks the rhetorical parallelism between 942–3 and 941, and the fact that *labôn* is a supplementary participle. Preference for the MSS reading *ôpheloumenos* at *Phil*. 1383, so that 'Neoptolemos shows an Odyssean concern with profit, even at the end of the play' (p. 78), seems to me misplaced.

B.'s brief characterizations of the other extant tragedies are sometimes reductive, with concentration on the violation-of-*philia* template tending to divert attention from the particularity and complexity of individual plays. Thus in *Eumenides* 'mother, in the guise of her Furies, torments son' (p. 13), in *Prometheus* 'Zeus tortures his uncle' (p. 14), and in *Persians* 'Xerxes' act of attacking Greece can also be seen as unintentional harm of his own kin and other *philoi*' (p. 155). Rapid identifications of what the fragmentary plays were 'about' in terms of harm to *philoi* seem strained in some cases, while in others B. omits points that might support her. In Euripides' *Melanippe Desmôtis* (pp. 171–2) the queen's plot against her stepsons led to her own brothers' deaths. In Sophocles' *Odysseus Mainomenos* (p. 197) the crisis must have been Odysseus' near-killing of his own son. Sophocles' *Lakonian Women* (p. 197) must have had attendants of Helen as its chorus, and was probably about Odysseus' dealings with Helen as her xenos and suppliant in Troy.

If B.'s interpretative touch is not always as deft as it might be, her basic claim that *philia*-violation is a generic feature of tragedy is broadly convincing, and her book is a useful reminder of how tragic plots can be understood in these terms.

University of Calgary MARTIN CROPP

THE ART OF ARISTOPHANES

M. S. SILK: *Aristophanes and the Definition of Comedy*. Pp. 456. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. Cased, £50. ISBN: 0-19-814029-0.

Silk's main concern in this book is to explore the literary greatness of Aristophanes. His emphasis on Aristophanes as a poet and writer means that his approach is literary critical in the strictest sense, that is, it focuses on the analysis of the aesthetic qualities of Aristophanes' writings rather than on the historical context in which the plays were produced and performed. Discussion of Aristophanic comedy almost always ends up debating the question of whether, or to what extent, the plays are serious, usually in relation to Athenian politics. S. points out that even though critics may reach opposing conclusions (for some comedy is primarily a form of entertainment with no serious political intent, for others it can express serious political views), they share certain basic assumptions: that the seriousness of the plays depends on the poet's intentions; that it can only be interpreted in relation to external circumstances; that seriousness is better than non-seriousness (we say 'I was only joking', but never

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'I was only being serious'); that seriousness and humour are separable; and above all that we know what seriousness is and why it matters.

S. stresses the need for deeper scrutiny of the notion of seriousness, confusion about which is at least as old as Aristotle, who uses the term *spoudaios* as the opposite of both *geloios* and *phaulos*. S. himself distinguishes between three different meanings of the term serious: (i) serious as sober ('his voice suddenly became serious'); (ii) serious as honest ('is this a serious proposal of marriage?'); and (iii) serious as substantial ('this is a deeply serious contribution to the understanding of Aristophanes'—a statement which could well be used to sum up Silk's own book). S. contends that whether the plays are politically serious or not, Aristophanes' ultimate claim to seriousness should be sought not in relation to historical contingency, but in the plays themselves 'as achieved entities'. His aim is thus to re-centre the issue of Aristophanic seriousness by focusing on Aristophanes' achievements as a writer, particularly in the light of his own claims (as in the parabasis of *Clouds*, for example) that comedy should be original, sophisticated, and above all serious.

One of the defining characteristics of Aristophanes' comedy for S. is a preoccupation with tragedy, and particularly that of Euripides, which goes far beyond the level of parody. Rather, the ubiquitous presence of tragedy in Aristophanes' plays should be interpreted as a search for comic identity, for it is through the special relationship with tragedy that Aristophanic comedy forges its own definition. 'Trugedy has a sense of duty too', as Dicaeopolis says at *Acharnians* 500 (the punning formation driving home the point of comparison with tragedy), a statement which S. interprets not as a claim to seriousness in the political arena, as Helene Foley has argued, but in terms of comedy's claim to seriousness as an art form. Aristophanes appropriates the authority and prestige of tragedy for his own art, but it would be wrong to regard his comedies as parasitic or dependent on tragedy: comedy has its own form of existence whose seriousness depends on humour, a proposition which S. substantiates by means of a wide-ranging discussion of theories of humour in, for example, Kierkegaard, Freud, and Pirandello.

The specific features of Aristophanes' writing to which S. draws attention through a lengthy and detailed analysis of individual passages include stylistic diversity and mobility, discontinuity, sensuous physicality of language, and a preference for stylistic techniques of juxtaposition, parataxis, and parallel structures. The cumulative effect of all these stylistic features is to convey a particular view of the world, a comic vision which can be elucidated by the modern literary-theoretical principle of defamiliarization, whereby the purpose of art is to make objects unfamiliar and thus stimulate new responses to experience. Together with hybridity of style goes the discontinuity of characterization and plot-structure often noted as a characteristic of the plays, but not sufficiently appreciated for what they are. S. argues persuasively that the tendency to undervalue Aristophanic comedy as an art form derives not only from comparison with tragedy, but even more from the dominance of the realist tradition in literary critical theory with its Aristotelian norms. Indeed, it is precisely because Aristophanes has no Aristotle to theorize on his behalf that 'our definition of comedy needs to be so painstakingly reconstructed'.

Part of that painstaking reconstruction revolves around the theme of comedy and the existential, an 'improbable nexus' associated with the special quality of pathos discerned by S. in Aristophanes' comedies. Pathos, S. explains, is an essentially aesthetic quality, more subtle and less overwhelming than the tragic emotion of pity, and always involving a certain distance on the reader's (or viewer's) part. So, for example, Macbeth's response to his wife's death ('Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and

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tomorrow', etc.) evokes pathos rather than pity since we recognize in it 'an intimation or apprehension of the existential' which goes beyond the merely personal. Similarly, the many old men who feature in Aristophanes' plays lamenting their lost youth and vigour elicit pathos rather than sympathy, not least because the discontinuities of comic action discourage us from identifying with the characters. It is typical of S.'s approach that whereas others interpret the plays' preoccupation with the past, and particularly the pattern of old men looking back, in terms of politics, S. sees it as a vehicle of pathos—an aesthetic and literary quality.

Discontinuity introduces distance, but it also defamiliarizes, making the medium an intrinsic part of the message: Aristophanes' comedies enact their own meaning, presenting us with a comic vision which celebrates coincidence and an open-ended world in which all things are possible, and yet admits pathos. This vision is most fully realized in *Wasps*, for S. the 'purest comedy', which ends with its aged hero Philocleon, a grotesque and wierdly rejuvenated figure, free from all confines, energized by animal spirit, and dancing the dance of life in triumph over the 'limitations of age and its apprehension of mortality'.

This is a book of enormous richness and subtlety, which combines detailed and precise analysis of language and style with discursive meditation on the nature of comedy and the comic. It is unashamedly ahistorical ('for all its freedom and diversity, comedy is still identifiable as such without reference to any particular period'), and seeks to evaluate Aristophanes not only with reference to Bakhtin and Brecht, as others have done before, but also in relation to a vast panorama of writers and theorists from Aristotle to Nietzsche, from Shakespeare to Hardy and Eliot, from the blues through the Hollywood musical to Woody Allen. Reading it requires concentration and effort, but its effect is to destabilize familiar responses and make us think again about the critical assumptions we bring to the interpretation of Aristophanes' plays. More than that, S.'s learned and sophisticated engagement with wider theoretical issues opens up a new perspective on the claim that comedy too can be serious.

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A NEW COMMENTARY ON *PEACE*

S. D. Olson (ed.): *Aristophanes:* Peace. Pp. lxxiv + 330. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998. Cased, £55. ISBN: 0-19-814081-9.

Platnauer's 1964 commentary on *Peace* never really met the needs of most readers of Aristophanes of its time, and certainly did not offer students the help they needed. The appearance of Olson's new and substantial Oxford commentary is therefore a welcome event.

The introduction discusses Aristophanes' involvement in the production of his plays, the historical background, literary and mythical intertexts, theology and politics (the latter more important), staging (two doors; *Peace's* cave the central door), *Peace II* (a mild revision), and the textual tradition. The major contribution here is the full demonstration that, apart from RVG, the other seven MSS of the play and the Aldine edition all descend from 'a series of three independent copies of a single lost manuscript', β (p. liii). The individual sub-families and their interrelations are described, the foliation of β is reconstructed, and a stemma produced. There is also a very useful digest of O.'s article in *ICS* 21 (1996), 5–34, on the MSS' marking of

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