

that we can both accept Aristophanes' claim in *Acharnians* to 'teach the just things' while 'making a comedy of the city', that is, 'to be a tough critic of democracy as well as a prudent advisor of it' (10) and at the same time consider him 'a teacher of justice who teaches us by lampooning everyone and everything – even justice' (124). And to focus on the political elements of the plays to the exclusion of their cultural, theatrical and poetic dimensions impoverishes and blinkers the analysis. For example, to view Dicaeopolis naturalistically as a man who opposes the war for private reasons, who then selfishly 'profit[s] ... from everyone else's war' (128) and by celebrating the joys of extramarital sex ceases to be a 'dutiful family man' is to miss his multiform role in the festival and poetic competition: as the traditional padded and phallic comic hero kaleidoscopically impersonating a member of the audience, a displaced farmer, an assemblyman, an infantryman, the tragic hero Telephus, Aristophanes as competitive poet, citizen and target of Cleon, and (as his name reveals) an embodiment of the Just City, who (much like Lysistrata later) withholds the blessings of peace from a city still committed to war. When he must make a persuasive political speech, he turns to a poet, much as Aristophanes advises from a vantage point outside the political arena proper.

JEFFREY HENDERSON  
Boston University  
Email: [jhenders@bu.edu](mailto:jhenders@bu.edu)

ROSEN (R.M.) and FOLEY (H.P.) (eds) **Aristophanes and Politics: New Studies**. Leiden: Brill, 2020. Pp. x + 286. €112/\$135. 9789004424456.  
doi:[10.1017/S0075426922000374](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0075426922000374)

Aristophanes' comedies provide some of the most tantalizing evidence for Athenian democracy and attitudes towards it. Yet, as the papers in this collection of 'new studies' demonstrate, increasing critical sophistication in assessing these plays' dramatic and generic features has made questions about the poet's own political views harder to ask and to answer. Do they affect his depiction of Athens, and does he even hold any serious views of his own, or simply aim for apolitical laughs, more concerned with point-scoring against rival playwrights?

Co-editor Ralph Rosen sets out the current state of play carefully in his introduction, taking A.W. Gomme's influential 1938 article of the same title as a starting point ('Aristophanes and Politics', *CR* 52, 97–109), and developing its view that there is no simple relationship between author and context. Previous attempts to position Aristophanes as a 'conservative' or 'progressive' now seem unhelpful and anachronistic, as Isabel Ruffell's thoughtful chapter shows.

But the intersection of politics and humour cannot be ignored. What is funny about Aristophanic comedy? This question has also troubled modern readers and theatrical producers. Robin Osborne takes a comparative approach, starting with a close reading of a Victoria Wood song which offers insights into contemporary sexual politics, and then attempting a similar analysis of the portrayal of Cleon in Aristophanes' *Knights*, which is representative of his assessment of democracy as a whole. Osborne concludes that, while we know less than we think we do about Aristophanes' political alignment, his comedies tell us more than has sometimes been acknowledged about the debates and positions held by his fellow citizens.

The subsequent chapters approach the debate from different angles, some focussed on a particular play or theme, or the application of a particular method or theory, others delivering broader surveys of the corpus and its literary and historical context. One limitation

arises from what seems like a narrow working definition of ‘politics’, which focusses on political institutions and on interactions between citizens, rather than broader social or cultural approaches or questions. So there is little on gender, and less on the ‘women’ plays than one might expect given the involvement of Helene Foley as co-editor. *Birds*, *Acharnians* and *Knights* receive the most detailed attention, but the chapters range across the entire Aristophanic corpus and beyond it to accommodate his predecessors and contemporaries. Carina de Clerk subjects the corpus as a whole to analysis and categorizes speakers by gender and ontological status (human, beast or god), tabulating the lines allocated to each identity to show that Aristophanic comedy encodes a ‘politics of diversity’ which differentiates it from tragedy, even that of Euripides. By contrast, Deborah Steiner focusses on a short fragment from Aristophanes’ *Babylonians*, whose chorus of Ionic letters might represent the branding or tattooing of enslaved war captives, and so comment on Athens’ treatment of the recently defeated Samians, as well as the changing status of writing in Athenian politics.

Perhaps unsurprisingly Aristophanes’ depiction of Cleon is a recurring topic, but as two papers suggest, Aristophanes sometimes pulls his punches. Jeffrey Henderson points to nuance and indirection in Aristophanes’ mockery of known individuals, and the use of myth and allegory rather than direct attack, as well as the apparent failure of comedy to attack the threats to democracy which actually materialized in the late fifth century. Competition between playwrights drove some developments in the genre, Olimpia Impero suggests, while an anxious awareness of legal and extra-legal punishments handed out to individual authors might have driven some of what looks like excessive cautiousness around some names and topics.

Stephen Halliwell looks beyond institutions, developing the idea that Aristophanes’ eavesdropping on casual conversation might be a productive place to find the opinions of ordinary Athenians. Citizen interactions outside formal political settings, such as the conversation between Bleepyrus and Chremes in the *Ecclesiazusae*, might be moments where the Athenian ‘man in the street’ and his ideas can be detected.

The possibilities of new theoretical approaches are exemplified by Mario Telò’s chapter on the *Birds*, reading the ‘incorporation’ and then ‘interloper’ scenes in which Cloudcuckooland’s founders transform and then protect the birds’ domain through political philosopher Jacques Rancière’s concept of *dissensus*, the disruptive incursion of those outside the normal political process. Edith Hall takes a different approach, reading the play as a critique of specific episodes of Athenian colonial adventurism in Thrace rather than as a utopian response to domestic political frustrations. Establishing a broader rather than narrower political context opens up further meaning.

The papers in this volume demonstrate a wide range of fresh and productive inquiries which do not settle long-standing questions about Aristophanes and politics, but show that new approaches can deliver valuable insights.

CAROL ATACK  
Newnham College, Cambridge  
Email: [cwa24@cam.ac.uk](mailto:cwa24@cam.ac.uk)

GRIFFITHS (E.M.) **Children in Greek Tragedy: Pathos and Potential.** Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. Pp. 328. £75. 9780198826071.  
doi:[10.1017/S0075426922000386](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0075426922000386)

*Children in Greek Tragedy* challenges two widely held assumptions: first, that our knowledge and experience of children is instinctive or natural (the ‘Universal Child’ fallacy); and second, that children in tragedy are helpless victims whose primary purpose is to engage