

Colin Austin and S. Douglas Olson (edd.), *Aristophanes: Thesmophoriazusae*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. Pp. cvi + 363, incl. 1 colour frontispiece. ISBN 0-19-926527-5. UK£75.00.

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Aristophanes' play is given an excellent treatment here. Austin and Olson's new edition is not only a great pleasure to read, from the amusing cartoon on the dust jacket to the conclusion of the commentary, but also wonderfully functional and erudite. The product of a fruitful and very even collaboration between the two scholars,[[1]] the book will reward any form of consultation, even reading through it in one sitting (yes, I did try it). The *Thesmophoriazusae* is, as always, an excellent source for the study of gender relations in ancient Greece and, if only for this reason, deserves to be read and reread. The tension between genders, to us often rather unfunny, is particularly well treated by Austin and Olson. Readers are warned that some parts of the commentary constitute a fascinatingly complex and diverse yet ultimately depressing survey of the misogynist ideas of ancient Greek men.

Let us turn at once to the rich and varied contents. The bipartite preface (pp. vii-x) gives the two sides to the story of the creation of the book, a long-delayed rewriting of Austin's 1965 doctoral dissertation on the play. Austin also gives a delightful overview of his training and career as a classical scholar. Next, while the curtain rises, come the 'Abbreviations and Bibliography' (pp. xiii-xxix); the show of learning is beginning. The introductory sections which precede the text of the play contain all of the preliminary information that one would expect in a modern edition. The first section, 'Aristophanes and his Play' (pp. xxxi-xxxiii), makes a case, perhaps not sufficiently detailed to be convincing -- and the editors themselves do not seem entirely convinced -- for viewing the *Thesmophoriazusae* as 'the jewel in the crown' of extant Aristophanic plays. A detailed discussion of the 'Date and Political Background' of the play (pp. xxxiii-xliv) follows. Austin and Olson admirably do not accept easy explanations of the precise festival date in 411. There follows an analysis of the Athenian religious context, 'The Festival' (pp. xlv-li). Austin and Olson's treatment of the Thesmophoria is admirable, although they make strong assumptions about what Aristophanes and Athenian men knew about the festival (I will return to this below).

The following section 'Euripides and the City's Women' (pp. li-lxviii) is perhaps one of the best. One subsection 'The Problem' (pp. lii-lv) is a brilliant exposé of the origin of the women's complaints, a misogyny which is not exclusively Euripidean as some have assumed, but which instead relies on Euripides for comic reasons. As the editors comment, what transpires from the premise of the play is the 'larger cultural fact that men for some unspecified reason (into which there is an apparently no need to pry) believe that women are "bad". Blaming this on a single contemporary makes the problem solvable and is thus an effective dramatic device, which must be why Aristophanes has done it' (p. liv). Appropriately in the next subsection, 'Euripides' on Stage' (pp. lv-lxiv), we get an overview of Euripides as a character in the *Thesmophoriazusae*. The playwright, we read, 'represents not merely a distillation of his own tragedies but a highly tendentious reading of them' (p. lvi) and the Aristophanic readings are discussed in detail (*Telephos*, *Palamedes*, *Helen*, *Andromeda*, and possibly some influence from the *Cyclops*). The final subsection is questionably entitled 'The Resolution (Or What Passes For One)' (pp. lxiv-lxviii). The conclusion of the play seems to me as expected as some Aristophanic endings, which redress an imbalance or return a situation to some 'ideal state' or *status quo* (for example, the burning down of the *Phrontisterion*). Austin and Olson here usefully supply pragmatic statements of the moral of the play: 'Bad as women are, it seems, it does no good to call -- or perhaps even to pay -- much attention to the fact' (p. lxv), or, in other words, 'If the play has a point to make about the relations between the sexes, it seems to be (as in *Lysistrata*) that men need women and therefore have no choice but to ignore the ugly things they know to be true about their character and their behaviour' (p. lxviii). The point, in brief, is that Euripides' compromise is empty, and that, after all the fun with Inlaw and the Scythian archer, the conservative and misogynist Athenian viewpoint triumphs (p. lxvi).

A few more introductory sections follow, beginning with useful notes on 'Staging' (pp. lxxviii-lxxvii). Then, Austin and Olson offer a discussion of the Wurzburg Telephos krater (pp. lxxv-lxxvii), two photographs of which appear as a frontispiece. Here the editors add necessary nuances to the received interpretation of the krater as a straightforward depiction of the *Telephos* parody in the play (lines 750-55 in particular). Austin and Olson attach a meticulous survey of the evidence for *Thesmophoriazusae II* (pp. lxxvii-lxxxix), probably a sequel to the extant play, where a Lysistratian sex strike took place. Some of the purported fragments seem very doubtful indeed and it would be wise to use them carefully. Next, there is a section on 'The Manuscript Tradition' (pp. lxxxix-xcviii), not as complex as elsewhere given that *Thesmophoriazusae* is 'unique in being a one-manuscript play'. This is followed by 'Modern Work on the Text' (pp. xcix-civ), an exhaustive list of critical scholarship on the text of the play. Finally we come to the list of metrical symbols and sigla (pp. cv-cvii) and the text of the play (pp. 1-49), with a complete *apparatus criticus*. Readers are forewarned, however, that a new OCT is being prepared by N. G. Wilson. Most unfortunately, in the tradition of Oxford commentaries, there is no facing translation. It may rightly be felt, since so many significant phrases are translated in the commentary, that the editors could easily have produced a full-fledged translation of the play.

The remainder of the book is largely taken up by the 300 pages of commentary (pp. 51-351), to which are added a Greek (pp. 353-58) and a general index (pp. 359-63). The lemmata, by their specificity and diversity, live up to the best in the tradition of learned notes. They will satisfy not only those readers who, like this reviewer, read the play for its religious context and content, but also philologists and social historians. On E)NETRU/LISEN (p. 164), for example, it is highly enjoyable to read that the verb is presumably onomatopoeic for the sounds made by a quail, although the common quail actually makes a sound like 'whip-whip-whip'. Remarks on comestibles, notably the multifarious uses of the garlic clove (p. 203, SKO/RODA) and ancient cress seeds (KAR/DAMA, p. 228),^{[[2]]} are followed by less appetising remarks on ancient torture (A)POTUMPANIASMO/J, pp. 294-95) and the meaning of the simile 'just like a flea on my sheep skin' (p. 341), hardly a pick-up line today. The full 'error sheet' of the Scythian archer (pp. 308f.) makes for entertaining reading, unless of course it is found to be reminiscent of one's students' (one's own?) lack of skills at Greek composition. Moreover, the editors' keen awareness of Athenian gender relations continues in these notes.^{[[3]]} Throughout the commentary, Austin and Olson also make frequent and relevant use of non-ancient literary parallels. They are to be praised for not shying away from the use of documentary and epigraphical evidence, often completely alien to literary commentaries. In some cases, more could have been done (for example, at lines 355f. on PROSH/KEI, a formulaic word in decrees), but the primacy given to literary sources is of course natural in this sort of commentary.

Only a few criticisms are necessary. First, it will be apparent that the editors' insights into *religiosa* sometimes miss the mark. It is certainly refreshing to read clear notes on various items of ancient religious practice,^{[[4]]} but some aspects of the Thesmophoria are rather loosely treated. In particular, I would like to draw attention to the fact that the editors never consider the women's assembly in the play as possibly representative of contemporary religious practice. They assume that Athenian men, who were excluded from the festival, knew virtually nothing about what went on during it, and that Aristophanes must himself have created the women's assembly as a joke.^{[[5]]} Women's assemblies, here as in the *Ecclesiazusae*, certainly have an element of parody to them, but that need not imply that women could not convene using some sort of social structure. There is, as a matter of fact, further evidence for women's assemblies as well as for the use of female counterparts of Athenian officials during women's festivals.^{[[6]]} It would therefore have been worth considering how the Aristophanic parody could have been pertinent because it reflected an institutional reality. Yet Austin and Olson may be forgiven for not providing the final word on the Thesmophoria, as a few studies on the subject are due to appear.^{[[7]]}

Second, some aspects of the commentary and the translation are inconsistent. The editors sometimes invoke common sense to the detriment of proper literary appreciation.^{[[8]]} The need to make things explicit renders some of the notes idle or obvious.^{[[9]]} In other cases, the note offers a detailed explanation of a passage without a practical explanation of the joke.^{[[10]]} The translation is, for the most part, completely accurate.^{[[11]]} Austin and Olson attempt to give the reader the choice between a standard and a more colloquial translation and show no reluctance to adopt a 'modern' translation for some words.

Yet some of these suggested translations are inappropriate, being excessively modern or archaic. [[12]]

Given the overall scope of the edition and the commentary, however, these are relatively minor quibbles. The editors and the Oxford University Press are to be praised for publishing a text with virtually no typographical errors. [[13]] Because of the utility of its wide-ranging commentary and its authoritative textual edition, Austin and Olson's volume will for a long time be definitive. Whoever invests in this book will not be disappointed.

NOTES

[[1]] As Olson writes: 'Some readers may be tempted to try to prize this volume apart so as to discover Austin here and Olson there. We encourage them to put their critical abilities to other uses' (p. x).

[[2]] KA/RDAMA are the seeds of KA/RDAMON, a plant which designated some form of ancient cress (the precise variety is, I think, uncertain). The editors identify it with *Lepidium sativum*, which they (somewhat archaically) call 'nose-smart'. The plant is usually called 'garden cress' or 'pepper cress'. 'Nose-smart' ought more properly to refer to plants of the nose-twisting genus, *Nasturtium* (e.g. *Nasturtium officinale*, English watercress).

[[3]] Note especially that the editors are rightly cautious about deciding whether or not Athenian women attended the theatre (p. 179).

[[4]] KAQAIMATW/SEI BWMO/N (p. 244), for example, is rightly interpreted as the customary action of pouring the blood of victims over the altar, and not only sprinkling the blood as is sometimes thought.

[[5]] Austin and Olson's argument runs as follows: 'That the women held an assembly on the second day of the Thesmophoria to discuss matters of interest to them (as in Ar.'s play) is possible, and *Eccl.* 16f., 59 refer to a similar meeting held at the Skira. In both places, however, this is more likely part of the fantasy. What the city's women did at their secret festivals was by and large a mystery to their sons, husbands, and brothers. But it must have made sense that they should use such occasions to plot trouble, and the imaginary political structure of their world was, not surprisingly, modelled on that of the real society with which the audience in the Theatre was familiar' (p. li). This is repeated in various forms at pp. xlvi., 150 and 230.

[[6]] In particular, the evidence for an assembly of women in *LSAM* 61 (Mylasa, 4th c. BCE) is given short shrift by Austin and Olson, being only mentioned in passing at p. 172. For deme *archousai* elected for the Thesmophoria, cf. *Isae.* 8.19 and *LSS* 124.3.

[[7]] It is pleasing to learn that 'A new comprehensive study of the evidence is being prepared by C. Austin and D. De Bartolo' (p. xlv n. 24). A chapter on the Thesmophoria will also be included in R. Parker's forthcoming second book on Athenian religion.

[[8]] For example, at p. lix n. 52 where Austin and Olson note how 'absurd' the premise of the Oiax myth is: 'One can easily imagine carving an SOS into oarblades, but it is wishful thinking to believe that even one of them would reach its intended recipient, if they were simply dumped into the sea hundreds of miles away'. Such wishful thinking, it seems to me, is the common substance of myths and ought not to be dismissed as absurd.

[[9]] For example, at p. 206 we read that, in Inlaw's invented story about his motherhood, 'the baby kicks from inside the pot just as energetic children often kick their mothers' stomachs from inside the womb'.

[[10]] For example, p. 234 at DIE/LKEIJ PUKNO/TERON *KORINQI/WN: the allusion to the Korinthian *diolkos* is explained with copious detail, but not the joke.

[[11]] A small point, however: at p. 185 TRE/FOUSI . . . KU/NAJ is translated 'they keep dogs', but the

verb TRE/FEI=N must mean the actual rearing of dogs, perhaps in a kennel.

[[12]] For example, at pp. 217 and 286, E)CO/LOIO, literally 'may you perish', is translated 'fuck you'. 'Fuck you' seems to me to lose the original sense of the Greek in favour of 'modernism'. Clearly to be preferred is 'to hell with you' or, perhaps, 'why don't you just die?'. A contrary case is PRWKTO/J, which is consistently translated as 'arse' or 'arsehole'. This seems altogether too prudish or old-fashioned when compared with translations such as 'fuck you'. A few more suggestions: at p. 163 on PROAGWGO/J, the translations 'pander' or 'procurer' both seem archaic, and something like 'pimp' may be preferable; at p.187, OI)KOTRI/Y is awkwardly translated as 'human pestilence', 'household scum' may seem more appropriate.

[[13]] Errata only at p. 162 ('inTEjury') and p. 202 ('daughters' is not hyphenated and the syllabic division is incorrect).