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Platter, Charles. *Aristophanes and the Carnival of Genres*.
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In an article published in 1993, Charles Platter threw down the gauntlet: "I think Bakhtin seriously underrates the complexity of Aristophanes" (209–10). In *Aristophanes and the Carnival of Genres*, Platter backs up his claim by showing the rewards of reading Aristophanes through a Bakhtinian lens. In each chapter, Platter spins out innovative readings of select scenes; taken as a whole, his book offers an important contribution to classics' ongoing incorporation of Bakhtin whose catchphrases, such as carnivalesque and dialogism, are now becoming common fare in some areas of classical scholarship. Platter's text will be of central interest to anyone wanting to venture into the complexities of Aristophanic language as well as for those seeking innovative methodologies that can be exported into studies of other authors or genres.

The application of Bakhtinian ideas to Aristophanes is neither new nor straightforward. Since the late 1960s, when Julia Kristeva brought Bakhtin's work to center stage in literary studies, numerous classical scholars have tried their hand at applying Bakhtin to Aristophanes. But such a project places the Aristophanes scholar in a tricky bind. On the one hand, Bakhtin's theories of carnival, laughter, dialogism, and the grotesque all seem to cry out for Aristophanes. On the other hand, Aristophanes is puzzlingly absent from much of Bakhtin's thinking on the history of laughter. The much less famous tradition of Menippean satire and the Socratic dialogue receive pride of place in Bakhtin's formulation. The Sirens' song of recasting Aristophanic comedy as Bakhtinian carnival, then, can all too easily make us forget the dangerous pitfalls of such an undertaking.

The main impediment to connecting Aristophanes and Bakhtin derives from classical Athenian drama's role as part of state-sponsored festivals. This institutionalized starting point for Aristophanic laughter clashes with

Bakhtin's theory of carnival: "[Carnival laughter] always remained a free weapon in [the people's] hands" (*Rabelais* 94). This means that any simple equation of Aristophanic comedy with Bakhtinian carnival quickly confronts the reality that Old Comedy simply was not a popular, organic, bottom-up, antihierarchical event that those at the top of the social power structure grudgingly tolerated. Thus, anyone wanting to apply Bakhtin to Aristophanes must carefully consider how to proceed. Can we understand the Dionysiac festivals of Athens (both the City Dionysia and the Lenaia) as examples of carnival *despite the fact that they were run by the polis*? Or can we see the Athenian democracy as a government rooted in the same popular currents as carnival (though such a position would call into question the very concept of a carnival festival)? Or is there some other way out of this apparent bind? The closest that Platter comes to answering these questions in *Aristophanes and the Carnival of Genres* is the comment that "[e]ven what appears to be comedy's overall aristocratic bias becomes intelligible in carnival terms as the attempt by the polis to institutionalize carnival laughter and so limit the disruptive and destabilizing forms that carnival laughter could take" (2).

We can gain a deeper understanding of Platter's stance on this issue by dipping into his earlier articles (Platter 1993 and 2001). Here he fully admits the challenges of applying Bakhtin to Aristophanes and argues that we can make progress by recognizing two points about Bakhtin's theories. First, ideas about carnival as a historical, sociological reality can be separated from the idea of carnival literature, which can exist without any corresponding festive event. Thus, while the Athenian dramatic festivals might not count as a form of carnival, Aristophanic comedy can still exhibit traits of carnivalesque literature (though Bakhtin himself might have denigrated such literature as having "a private 'chamber' character," *Rabelais*, 37). And second, Bakhtin underestimated the complexity of Aristophanic drama as a tissue of intertextual voices that fits well into Bakhtin's model of dialogism. Platter sidesteps the thorny question of comedy's role in the official hierarchy of the Athenian polis and focuses our attention on the more purely literary aspects of Aristophanes' (and occasionally others') plays: "Although the concept of carnival is important to Bakhtin's thought, it can be applied most profitably to comedy as a metaphorical application of dialogism" (Platter "Uninvited," 208).

The result of this is that we hear more in Platter's book about *dialogism* (i.e., a matrix of literary registers, styles, and allusions) than *carnival*. Instead, Platter frequently uses the term *carnivalization* to refer to the incorporation into literature of certain phenomena rooted in carnival festivals, such as the overturning (or "uncrowning") of authority and an appreciation for textual ambivalences that we should not seek to resolve: "carnivalization is not merely the result of specific sociological conditions but something that *always* happens within language as the inevitable result of a (public) critical discourse that problematizes the official categories of

everyday life" (*Aristophanes* 8, emphasis in the original). With all this Platter aims to utilize a "Bakhtinian philology" that can explore the relationships between texts, authors, genres, and individual words in a manner that eschews attempts to reduce Aristophanic comedy to a set of vectors that each points in a single direction: "Bakhtinian philology focuses on the quality of the exchange—both intratextual and intertextual—where no single aspect of the dialogical situation is the sole determiner of meaning" (*Aristophanes* 5). Platter succeeds admirably in this goal, and I will highlight a few representative cases before returning to the more general question of how he situates his book against Bakhtinian scholarship on classical literature.

In chapter 1, "Dikaiopolis on Modern Art," Platter scrutinizes the prologue of *Acharnians*, Aristophanes' earliest surviving play, which won top honors at the Lenaia of 425 BCE. This narrow focus is typical of Platter's surgical strikes and offers several excellent examples of how he reads Aristophanes. The play opens with the lead character, Dikaiopolis, pondering his life: *How often I've bitten my heart/and rejoiced at but a few things, very few—four./ But I've wept at countless sandstorms of them* (1–3). The Greek word for "countless sandstorms" is the Aristophanic neologism *psammakosioyargara*. Platter shows that three of Aristophanes' comic rivals (Aristomenes, Cratinus, and—based on the latest dating of a fragment—Eupolis) had all used words that are contained within this hyperbolic compound. But this is only the first pedestrian step in Platter's Bakhtinian philological analysis, and he goes on to argue that Aristophanes' word is not merely a fun cobbling together of earlier comic language. Rather, *psammakosioyargara* represents "a powerful statement of literary control [that] works to the detriment of all three [rival] authors" (50). The other playwrights' voices appear in his play but only under his control and at his pleasure. As such, they are circumscribed within and dominated by his own language. Finally, Platter finishes this section with a concession that he turns to his advantage: while it is true that some newly discovered fragment predating *Acharnians* could show that *psammakosioyargara* is not, in fact, an original Aristophanic concoction, this in no way would undermine the dialogical relationship among these various texts. Instead, such a discovery would merely shift the analysis to include a specific allusion rather than a sequence of more associative connections.

While the unpacking of *psammakosioyargara* exemplifies how Platter analyzes the way in which Aristophanes deploys language to jockey for position among his comic rivals, much of the rest of this chapter (and indeed the entire book) examines the relationship between Aristophanic language and other genres (especially Euripidean tragedy). One of his most striking conclusions results from pushing harder on a frequently noted quotation from Euripides' *Telephus* (produced in 438), a play that is not extant but about which we know a good deal from a variety of ancient sources. Again it is in the opening monologue that Dikaiopolis quotes directly from Euripides'

play the phrase “it is worthy of Greece.” Platter cites the full line from *Telephus* in which these words were spoken by Achilles, the character who had wounded Telephus in battle and to whom Telephus, disguised as a beggar, had to appeal in order to be healed. He shows that in these opening lines, “Dikaiopolis is Achilles . . . [and] Dikaiopolis’ hostility toward Cleon [an Athenian politician and Aristophanes’ *bête noire*] is the analogue for Achilles’ rage against Telephus” (53–54). Such an equation immediately knocks Euripidean tragedy down off its high horse and, as in the example above, shows Aristophanic comedy to be the arbiter of style and master of language. For anyone familiar with *Acharnians* it is plain that the identification of the great hero with the homunculus cannot stand. And indeed the flexibility of Platter’s Bakhtinian method easily accommodates the evanescence of this association. Dikaiopolis quickly gives up such pretensions and soon dons the actual costume of Telephus (obtained from an Aristophanic caricature of Euripides). Platter’s analysis of this quotation is bold without overstating his case, and it shows the value of appreciating “the productive collision” (52) between the various voices (Euripides, tragedy, Achilles, Telephus, Cleon, etc.) speaking within Aristophanes’ play.

Chapter 2, “The Failed Program of *Clouds*,” builds to an analysis of the contest between Right and Wrong in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*. The interesting history of this play, which attacks and parodies Socrates as a Sophistic quack, can be quickly summarized: the now-lost original was produced at the City Dionysia in 423 and flopped; some years later Aristophanes revised at least parts of the play, but it is doubtful that this revised version—which we have complete—was ever performed. (Revermann, 2006, the most recent scholar to address this matter, argues that the play was revised with the intention of restaging.) Again Platter includes a variety of insights about the dialogical workings of Aristophanic language as he sets up his main argument. Of particular value are his discussions of the reference to Megacles son of Megacles and the impact of referring to Athens as “bright” (*liparos*), though, since these analyses are very much in line with some of the topics I have mentioned from chapter 1, I will not spell them out in detail.

Once into the heart of the chapter, Platter reassesses the discourse strategies of Right and Wrong in a manner that leads him to the general conclusion “that in Aristophanes, the monologic impulse is found in characters who are especially to be seen as objects of ridicule and whose inflexible ideas are subject to comic scrutiny. Rhetorical power lies instead in the hands of those who deploy more comprehensive language resources, and who are thereby able to outflank and confute their opponents” (73–74). Platter’s analysis is, again, on target though the results here are less innovative than the process. Even without Bakhtinian methods other readers of Aristophanes have been able to show that crafty, flexible speakers tend to outmaneuver their rigid opponents. The chapter ends on a positive note, however, as Platter shows that even after his victory Wrong (as well as every other

character in the play) is undermined, problematized, or upended: “the novelistic qualities of Aristophanic comedy work to produce relationships, visible in different degrees to the various audience constituencies, that are fundamentally ambivalent and mutually destabilizing” (83).

As in chapter 2, I find the main stated argument of chapter 3, “*Clouds* on *Clouds* and the Aspirations of *Wasps*,” rather timid: “The anti-*Clouds* revisionism of *Wasps* [produced in 422 at the Lenaia; placed second] should not be taken at face value . . . [and] despite its self-deprecation, *Wasps* actively reaffirms the aesthetic and intellectual allegiances of *Clouds* . . .” It is difficult to imagine who would take Aristophanic self-deprecation at face value in any context. Nevertheless, Platter does provide a subtle and helpful reading of many of the details of the ways in which *Wasps* “negotiate[s] the space between its ostensible claims of moderation and its inescapable sympathy with *Clouds*-style highbrow comedy . . .” (107). As in every chapter, there are numerous valuable points along the way, such as the move to deprivilege the position of the *parabasis* as the main center of programmatic pronouncements and the salutary reminder that the relationship between Aristophanes and the speaker of his *parabases* is closely analogous to the relationship between Plato and the Platonic Socrates (95–99).

Chapter 4, “Questioning Authority,” stands out in that it takes a different direction, namely assessing the role of hexametric poetry within Aristophanic plays. By this point in the book it comes as no surprise to find that oracular and Homeric poetry is parodied, trumped, ridiculed, blocked, capped, inverted, and otherwise controlled by leading Aristophanic characters. What is of more interest, perhaps, is Platter’s demonstration of how this general model plays out so differently in *Lysistrata* (411), *Knights* (424), *Peace* (421), and *Birds* (414) (to follow the order in which these plays are discussed by Platter). Among his most insightful comments, Platter claims that “resisters of epic-oracular authority turn hexameter poetry into a lingua franca that increases its base while reducing its rhetorical effectiveness” (142). This important conclusion may take on even greater significance when read in conjunction with the argument of Andreas Willi’s 2002 work, in which he traces the transition from Athenian comedy’s early self-presentation as a linguistic “anti-genre” to its role as one of the dominant literary registers by the end of the fifth century.

Chapter 5, “The Return of Telephus,” explores various aspects of the Telephus story in the two main parodies of it in *Acharnians* (425) and *Thesmophoriazusae* (411). This chapter continues the rich set of associations that are teased out in chapter 1, and Platter makes a number of significant observations. He points out, for example, that we too often see the Telephus parodies as exclusively Euripidean. While he admits that they are *primarily* Euripidean, Platter also reminds us that versions of the story are attested in Aeschylus and Sophocles, Pindar, and the cyclic epic *Cypria*. We can now include the recently discovered Telephus elegy of Archilochus in this (no doubt partial) list of models that were likely in circulation at

the time of Euripides' play in 438. Furthermore, Platter shows that the parody of the Telephus story in *Thesmophoriazusae* must be understood as being in dialogue with *Acharnians* as well as these other models. I found this chapter to be the most rewarding section of the book and (especially when read in conjunction with chapter 1) the best example of Platter's argument that Aristophanic comedy is "a polyglot production that borrows promiscuously from the oral-literary tradition as it stood in the late fifth century" (149). Here we see most clearly the dynamism of Aristophanic language as it dances amid Athens's myriad voices—literary and nonliterary, contemporary and traditional.

Having provided a taste of what can be found in the individual chapters, let me conclude with a few general but related comments on Platter's book. First, I believe that Platter's project would have been better served by bringing into the body of his text more of the recent efforts to apply Bakhtin to classical literature. Too much, in my opinion, has been relegated to the endnotes for a book that is not overly long. The problems inherent in Bakhtinian readings of Aristophanes that Platter so fruitfully addressed in 1993 and 2001 are not given enough prominence. Nor are the recent Bakhtinian readings of other classical authors and genres (though some of this material is mentioned too briefly in the notes). One result of this is that Bakhtin's views of the homogenous, antidialogical tone of epic and tragedy stand in overly stark contrast with Aristophanes in light of recent adaptations and modifications of this basic Bakhtinian formulation. At times Platter further entrenches this generic distinction, as when he refers to the tragic trimeter as "extremely regular" (18) without mentioning how flexible the Euripidean line eventually became.

Second, these matters are exacerbated by the fact that the bibliography is not fully up-to-date. Only two items have publication dates after 2002, and both are articles by Platter himself. Among the most unfortunate absences from the bibliography are the papers by John Peradotto and Gregory Nagy on Homeric epic in *Bakhtin and the Classics* (2002) and Nancy Felson's work (2001) on Euripidean dialogism. The incorporation of such scholarship so closely related to Platter's interests would have further enriched our understanding of where Aristophanes fits into current Bakhtinian readings of ancient Greek and Roman literature.

Despite the criticisms that I have outlined above, it is a testament to the importance of Platter's overall thesis and the value of his individual readings that my lasting impression of *Aristophanes and the Carnival of Genres* is one of the possibilities it opens for future research. Platter has amply demonstrated the payoffs of reading Aristophanes through the lens of Bakhtinian philology, but in watching Aristophanes exploit the dialogical possibilities in Euripidean tragedy, we realize that Euripides was no monster of monologism. His *Telephus*, which figures so prominently in these pages, presents a heroic king disguised as a beggar and, thus, offers a certain topsy-turvy sense of carnivalization even *within* tragedy—something Platter hints at when he

writes of Euripidean characters “whose appearance compromises tragic dignity” (19). But there is far more. The famous parody of the Aeschylean “recognition scene” in Euripides’ *Electra*, the *Alcestis* which usurped the traditional position of the satyr play in 438, the seriocomic or melodramatic plays, such as *Helen* and *Ion*, and Euripides’ freer iambic line that began to approximate the comic version of this meter all demonstrate that the Euripidean points of reference for many of Platter’s intertextual readings contain a chorus of voices as well.

Aristophanes, then, has become to Platter what Dostoyevsky was to Bakhtin—that richest example of the possibilities of dialogical reading. But this also highlights a final point: reading is key. Bakhtin banished epic and tragedy to the farthest extreme of monologic literature, yet recent Bakhtinian interpretations of Homer, Vergil’s *Aeneid*, and Greek tragedy show that we can hear oppositional voices if we attune ourselves to such harmonies. This takes nothing away from the best arguments that Platter offers, but it does open the door to understanding the “carnival of genres” as a common—perhaps even a necessary—dimension of literature more broadly. If “parodying is the creation of a decrowning double” (Bakhtin 1984a, 127), then it can already be found (writ small, perhaps) in the words of the Iliadic Thersites. Aristophanes may be among the most prominent, but far from the only, player in an ongoing game of one-upmanship in which texts, authors, and genres cap each other only to be capped in turn by others. As Platter notes among his conclusions: “Just as no one but the ‘mythical Adam’ gets the first word, so no one is truly permitted the last” (181). And so, while Aristophanes slumps over in his cups beside Agathon at the end of Plato’s *Symposium*, we might imagine the upstart genre of philosophical dialogue gloating as its own seriocomic hero, the grotesque and annoying Socrates, drinks his rivals under the table and exits the stage, having gained an element of revenge for a comedy that had attacked the historical Socrates way back in 424.

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Dickerson, Matthew, and Jonathan Evans. *Ents, Elves, and Eriador: The Environmental Vision of J. R. R. Tolkien*. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 2006. xxvi + 316 pp.

In the introduction to the second edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, J. R. R. Tolkien famously wrote that he “cordially disliked” allegory and that he preferred the term “applicability” for his work; “the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author.”¹ In *Ents, Elves, and Eriador*, Matthew Dickerson and Jonathan Evans argue that the repeated application of Tolkien’s work to environmental issues suggests that Tolkien had an early yet sophisticated environmental vision, and that his nature writing in *The Silmarillion*, *The Hobbit*, and *The Lord of the Rings* effectively predicts modern calls for sustainable agriculture. In this plausible and well-argued book, Dickerson and Evans argue that the good characters in Tolkien’s *legendarium* use the goods of the earth in a way that preserves both nature and their own freedom, while the evil characters dominate nature with a short-term, profit-based mindset that ultimately harms both the environment and themselves.

In the first chapter, Dickerson and Evans argue that one of Tolkien’s main mythological principles in *The Silmarillion* is that “the beauty and value of [creation] are independent of any practical or utilitarian purposes. . . . Their importance inheres in nature for its own sake” (11). Dickerson and Evans note that while the race of hobbits is connected closely to this creation, modern technological societies have broken this bond; they have much machinery and wealth, but also much more stress from living in an overly complex system. The authors illustrate such breakdowns through Tolkien’s depiction of characters such as Smaug, Saruman, the Dwarves, and the Orcs, who ruin themselves by overusing technology and resources. Dickerson and Evans suggest that they are bound to their wealth and “enslaved to the very machines meant to free them from toil” (17), in contrast to characters like

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