
With this welcome volume on *Wealth*, a neglected play, Sommerstein has now (almost) brought his series of editions of Aristophanes’ extant comedies to a successful conclusion. Readers will be familiar with the format (and limitations) of an Aris and Phillips edition, but Sommerstein has packed a lot into a small package and made this comedy accessible to both seasoned scholar and Greekless novice.

Is *Wealth* Old Comedy? Sommerstein argues that if ‘we possessed only a synopsis of *Wealth* it would have probably been impossible to show convincingly that it was written towards the end of Aristophanes’ career’ (23). He does go on to admit that the *agon* is somewhat abbreviated and that the choral and lyric elements considerably atrophied. When we consider the overall lack of *vis comica* and the increased role of the slave Karion (24-5), very much like the clever slaves of New and Roman Comedy, it seems that we really are dealing with something other than Old Comedy, or at the very least comedy in transition.

Is it good Aristophanes? Sommerstein concedes that ‘there is little of the typically Aristophanic verbal wit that juggles effortlessly with multiple meanings and elaborate puns, and even less of slapstick and obscenity’ (25) and concludes that this deficiency owes more to Aristophanes than to ‘changes in public taste’. He is not the first to attribute this to Aristophanes’ failing powers—Dover in *Aristophanic Comedy* (1972) wondered if Aristophanes had suffered a stroke. But there is evidence of a change in comic tastes c. 400 BC, particularly the decline of political comedy and the return of the mythological burlesque, especially in the plays of Theopompos and Platon. Indeed a good case can be made for seeing Platon as a comedian with two careers, personal and political comedy in the fifth century and mythological burlesque in the fourth. The difference can be explained equally by a change in public taste as by the lack of comic enthusiasm by the poet.
On the social milieu behind the comedy, Sommerstein contends that the play’s ‘implications are as bleak and pessimistic as those of any play that its author had written’ (20). To this end he cites Knights, Lysistrata, and Frogs as pessimistic comedies, the first because the only way to defeat a vicious demagogue is by a more vicious demagogue, the second because peace is ‘an exceedingly remote prospect’, and the last because even a return to old-fashioned politicians may not be enough to save Athens. But Knights ends with a marvellous volte-face to the golden days of the past, as the ‘even more vicious demagogue’ turns out to be a saviour of the People, the ‘great Idea’ in Lysistrata what the oligarchs were in fact proposing (not a remote prospect for them), and, while the end of the parabasis of Frogs may not be upbeat, the end of the comedy is—what is really needed to save the city is a poet. On the whole Wealth is a tired and unimaginative comedy, and that may explain its bleakness as much as any pessimistic world-view by its author.

For the most part his translation is solid and accurate, although there remains the ever-present problem of translating for British and American audiences. ‘Shot its bolt’ (v.34) cleverly renders the pun on bios (‘bow’/‘life’), at v.581 ‘the truly prehistoric purblindness’ is rather nice, and Sommerstein does indicate well the various tragic parodies by quotation marks (vv.9, 39, 213 etc.). But at times the British slang strikes the wrong note: ‘saddo’ at v.118 for athlios; ‘cop it’ (v.174) for klausetai (‘come to grief’); ‘gone potty’ (v.366) and ‘barmy’ (v.903) for melancholan, a word not well handled by Sommerstein—‘crazy’ will do; ‘headtire’ for stemmata (v.686); ‘worse pong’ (v.693); and ‘that’s me, innit it?’, where ‘isn’t that what I am?’ (Henderson, Loeb) hits the mark better.

The commentary is packed solid with a wealth of information, bibliographical details, and solid discussion of passages of contention. I found particularly good notes on Apollo as sophos (v.11); his defence of gevnei and its Hesiodic allusion (v.50); the overtones of tyrannis (v.124); nearly two pages on the plucking of adulterers (v.168), a passage which still remains mysterious; his explanation of a ‘billygoat’s breakfast’ (v.295); the use of chairein (v.322)—but see Eupolis fr. 331; giving serious attention to Holzinger’s explanation of Pamphilos and the ‘Children of Herakles’ (v.385); on hypomnasia at meetings of the assembly (v.725); the silphium of Battos (v.925), which Sommerstein
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takes as comical distortion of ‘the gold of Battos’; and finally on the
opisthodomos (v.1193), which was located in either the ‘old temple’ or the
Parthenon. Sommerstein is especially good on komoidoumenoi, often
giving fuller notes than in some larger editions. That on Thrasyboulos
and Dionysios extends to two pages, but his conclusion that both ‘were in
bad odour with many Athenians in 388’ (p.175) seems out of step with the
force of the passage (v.550) that they should be opposites. On Neokleides
(p.181) some mention should perhaps have been made of Hess’s
suggestion that this is a comic nickname for Herakleides, the man given
Athenian citizenship in the 390s, hence ‘New-kleides’. In his note on
942-3 (p.197) Sommerstein suggests that the sykophantês in Demoi (fr.
99.78-120) is put to death, but the evidence is far from secure, and Harvey
(Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies, 1981) maintains that no-one is
killed in comedy. On 1037 (p.204) he gives a compelling explanation of
the comparison of the old woman to the ‘ring of a bread-seller’s tray’
(τηλία), but it is interesting that another old woman, Marikas’ mother in
Eupolis’ comedy, also has an association with a têlia. There seems to be
some sort of running-joke here about old women and bread-trays.

One of the best-known features of Wealth is not just the diminished
role of the chorus, the absence in the manuscript tradition of songs
between episodes, and in places the entry χοροῦ (‘of the chorus’).
Sommerstein makes the good observation that ‘these breaks were filled by
choral performances of some kind whose words, if any, were not
considered worth recording as part of the play-script’ (160-1), but I am
less happy with his earlier statement that these songs were omitted from
the scripts ‘because a convention was growing up among those who read
drama that they were not fully part of the play’ (24). Sommerstein does
not allow for a choral break at v.1170, because four actors can handle the
transition between episodes, but Marshall (Classical Quarterly 1997),
whom Sommerstein does cite (223), makes a strong case for three actors.

Sommerstein has done fine service in the twenty years since the
publication of the first of these Aris and Phillips volumes, filling
admirably the gap between basic school editions and the specialist
Clarendon editions, with which Sommerstein is often able to compete in
his notes. I said at the start that he has ‘almost’ finished, since a twelfth
volume of extensive indices will be needed. However, this volume does
contain considerable addenda and corrigenda (219-321) to the volumes on
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the first ten plays. It would require a separate review to do justice to this section, but I am glad to note in passing that I have convinced Sommerstein (259), at least, that Eupolis' *Demoi* belongs in 417 or 416 BC.

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