



2001

J. Henderson, Aristophanes Volumes I-III (Loeb Classical Library 2000)

John F. Makowski

Loyola University Chicago, jmakow1@luc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/classicalstudies_facpubs



Part of the [Classics Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Makowski, JF. "J. Henderson, Aristophanes Volumes I-III (Loeb Classical Library 2000)" in the *Classical Bulletin* 77, 2001.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Publications at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Classical Studies: Faculty Publications and Other Works by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](#).
© Xavier University, 2001.

passive grief to active retribution; but history makes the same case for theatrical ritual, whether in Ireland, Chile, South Africa, and perhaps ancient Athens. I wonder whether the author here, like Lili in the film by that name, has not perhaps failed to see beyond the puppet to the one pulling its strings. That movement is precluded, I suspect, by her commitment to the principle that all social creations are gendered, which among other things means that the playwrights of Athens were conditioned to write as males and did so, and that we all know what that means. My only proviso here is to suggest that we don't. We don't really know what that means, not in this instance. We only know *what* they wrote, and Helene Foley has given us in *Female Acts* a brilliant and enduring guide to their creations. She has indeed told us nearly everything about Greek Tragedy except "why?"

ROBERT EMMET MEAGHER
Hampshire College

Aristophanes, *Clouds, Wasps, Peace*. Ed. and trans. by Jeffrey Henderson. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1998. Pp. 606. ISBN 0-674-99537-6. \$19.95.

Aristophanes, *Acharnians, Knights*. Ed. and trans. by Jeffrey Henderson. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1998. Pp viii + 408. ISBN 0-674-99567-8. \$19.95.

Aristophanes, *Birds, Lysistrata, Women at the Thesmophoria*. Ed. and trans. by Jeffrey Henderson. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2000. Pp. 618. ISBN 0-674-99587-2. \$19.95.

Of all the Greek authors in the Loeb Classical Library the most in need of an updated translation is Aristophanes. The 1924 edition by B. J. Rogers, bowdlerized, expurgated, often rendered in Gilbert and Sullivan style, and at times intentionally mistranslated in accord with Victorian sensibilities, has been off-putting to the contemporary reader. The choice of Jeffrey Henderson to redo the Loeb Aristophanes is as brilliant as it is logical, and the editors of Harvard University Press are to be commended for the result. Certainly, these first three volumes are a resounding success. Here we have a fresh text edited by Henderson himself, facing translations that are contemporary, lively, and accurate. There is also much useful ancillary material in the general introduction, in the prefaces to the individual plays, in the explanatory notes, and in the bibliography.

The reader of Henderson's earlier editions like *Aristophanes: Acharnians, Lysistrata, Clouds* (Focus 1988) and *Three Plays by Aristophanes: Staging Women* (Routledge 1996) will be familiar with his snappy, performable translations as well as with his critical discussions of the plays and their contemporary issues. Henderson has under his control not only the traditionally requisite material such as history, religion, philosophy, and literature, but he also has shed light on issues of Aristophanes's day that concern performance, audience, women, and gender. Much of the material in the current Loeb editions will sound familiar to readers of the earlier volumes, but there is much that is new. The beauty of the general introduction to the first volume lies in the concise distillation of the discussion which ranges from the traditional biographical and historical material to the more contemporary issues just mentioned plus the representation of "naked women" in plays staged by

all-male casts. For an informative, well-balanced, and up-to-date treatment of Aristophanes the reader could hardly do better than Henderson's general introduction. Excellent too are the individual introductions to each play. These contain much more information than the 1924 edition, providing the details of each comedy's production, the historical background, and a discussion of key themes.

It is the translation on the right side of the page, however, which is the draw for most users of the Loeb Classical Library. To the reader coming from the old edition to the new, the most striking departure from Victorian prudery and euphemism is Henderson's un squeamish accuracy in regard to Aristophanes's diction of scatology, anatomy, sex, and what used to be called obscenity. One example to illustrate the difference between Rogers and Henderson: the 1924 edition of *Thesmophoriazousae* renders line 57 b (καὶ λαϊκάζει) as "does what is wrong," while Henderson, as one would expect from the author of *The Maculate Muse*, offers a graphic rendition which the reader may find shocking or amusing but which no one can call inaccurate or unliteral. Accuracy is the hall-mark of this translation, and a spot check of certain passages where the nuance is invariably lost on translators indicates that Henderson's translation is one to be relied on. A case in point is the word ἀπηνέξ at *Clouds* 974, where Henderson captures the nuance of "torment," a subtlety missed by Peter Meineck in his translation (Hackett 1998), despite K. J. Dover's explication of the word and its significance for understanding the character of the Better Argument. The translation besides being accurate is a pleasure to read. Thus, for example, Lysistrata's speech on how to clean a sheepskin deftly captures the political implications of the fleece simile, and the parabasis of *Clouds* with its density of literary and political allusions is as lucid as can be. Of course, some things cannot be translated from one language to another, puns, for example. In such cases, Henderson always gives a useful explanatory note. While the translations are marked by accuracy, there is some inconsistency in tone from play to play, but this is in no way a problem. Some of the comedies, especially the earlier ones, get a more literal translation, with the joke often explained in the footnote. In other plays Henderson opts for more colloquial, more "performable" diction, preferring to portray the original Greek in a note. For example, we are told that the Megarian in *The Acharnians* speaks a local dialect which is not reflected in the translation, while the Archer in *Women at the Thesmophoria* speaks "hillbilly" slang. Also, some of the plays employ contemporary usages. Thus, Myrrhine at *Lysistrata* 131 is addressed as "Ms. Flounder". One personal quibble: the consistent translation of προκτός as "arse." As that term is unfamiliar even to many college students, it should have been rendered in good old-fashioned American style.

Always a challenge to the translator of Aristophanes are the choral parts and especially the poetic parodies which occur both in the lyrics and in the dialogue passages. For the choral lyrics Henderson has chosen the straightforward approach. Avoiding rhyme and poetical flights of fancy, he renders the choruses in versions that are both faithful to the original and highly readable, by virtue of being uncluttered by verbiage or otiose poetic elaboration. For example, the choral sections of *Birds*, often the object of heavy-handed poetic overworking, read neat, clean, and ever true to the Greek. One of the most difficult things to capture in translation is an ancient poet's comic parody of another poet, and, of course, the plays of Aristophanes are peppered with parodies of the three tragedians as well as of authors whose works are lost to us. In this regard Henderson succeeds brilliantly. To cite two examples: the parodic treatment of Euripides in *The Acharnians* and the Aeschylean oath-taking scene in *Lysistrata*. They are both appropriately mock tragic in tone, but their hilarity does not take false liberties with the sense of the Greek. This is a very readable version of Aristophanes, and adding to the

lucidity of the translation are the stage directions as well as the notes which in concise fashion comprise almost a mini-commentary of utmost usefulness.

The language of comedy, with its jokes, slang, topicality, and bawdiness, changes quickly from one generation to another, and perhaps decades from now Henderson's version will seem as outdated as that of Rogers appears to us. For readers of English, however, living at the beginning of our millennium Henderson's translation of Aristophanes is the best available.

JOHN F. MAKOWSKI
Loyola University Chicago

Tim Rood, *Thucydides: Narrative and Explanation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999. Pp. xi + 339. ISBN 0-19-815256-6. \$85.00.

Rood's aim is to uncover Thucydides' various interpretive techniques and to increase our understanding of the story he told by applying narrative theory (Genette, Kermode, Brooks, Ricoeur, Veyne) to areas previously neglected or not systematically covered by previous research (p. 4). He focuses on how Thucydides manipulates time and point of view and creates a dialogue between speeches and narrative to tell the story of a particular war that displays universal human tendencies.

R. argues that questions of the authenticity of speeches; of sources; and of compositional strata are inherently misguided and of little value to understanding the work. Regardless of their authenticity, speeches are attempts at persuasion not necessarily reflective of Thucydides' own views or the views of the speakers (p. 40). They are interpretatively potent because of their own contradictions and because of their interaction with the narrative (pp. 43 and 47). Since there is little to no source evidence for the work, explaining a narrative's emphasis by supposing a particular source is dangerous. Finally R. agrees with Finley that the internal unity of the work makes the compositional question moot (p. 54). Rather R., influenced by the works of Connor, Finley, Hornblower, Macleod, Parry, Romilly, Stahl, et al., seeks to uncover literary techniques that Thucydides uses in his interpretation of what happened and will continue to.

Displacement of information—analepsis or prolepsis (i.e. reference to an event in the past or to an event in the future)—may be employed to give readers information necessary for understanding current events, to create continuity in a discontinuous annalistic ordering, to emphasize, to compare and contrast, to justify authorial assessments, to refute or confirm contemporary conceptions, or to convey the experience of events. For example, anachronies (analepses and prolepses) in the Sicilian narrative support Th.'s analysis of post-Periklean Athens at 2.65 (p. 128). The analepsis on tyrannicides highlights the Athenians' tyrannical treatment of each other (pp. 180–181). Prolepses emphasize the advantages Plemmyrion had for the Athenians and, consequently, the significance of its loss (p. 176). In general displacement forms links between present, past, and future, making this war and future wars understandable.

R. offers interpretative explanations for Th.'s selection and omission of information. For the first two years of the war Th. mentions no political rivals to Perikles so as to portray Perikles' control of the *demos* and to prevent readers from thinking Athens' refusal of peace was due to political rivalry rather than to a desire to maintain power (pp. 137 and 139). Afterwards political rivalry is emphasized in support of