Initiating Dionysus: Ritual and Theatre in Aristophanes' Frogs by I. Lada-Richards
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three actors plus speaking child extras (though this does not prove that it was so performed, and the fundamental discussion of MacDowell, CQ 44 (1994) 326–35, should anyway have been referred to). On the vexed question of the staging of Peace’s rescue, O. concludes that she was hauled out on the ekkyklema (clarifying some important details of the process for the first time); from Trygaioi’s movements before and after the parabasis, he tentatively deduces that the hero’s house and Zeus’s palace were represented by the same door (not the central one) in the skene façade (in his commentary O. more than once marks in his text nor mentions in his commentary the lacuna of 7–9 lines which p indicates at 440/1; to judge from Comford’s (untenable) thesis that Dionysus in Frogs represents a dying and rising god than for L. R.’s claim that he is an initiate going through ‘a ritual initiation sequence grafted upon a comic dramatic plot’ (119)).

At 890 O. convinces me that my interpretation of δναπροσις was wrong, but his own (taking it as = δναποσις) gives a tame repetition of 889. I would now take the word as meaning ‘drawing back [not, as in sacrifice, the neck, but] the thighs’, i.e. as equivalent to τδ δημηρίς (cf. Birds 1254 ανατενας τω σκελες διαμπρω). At 1191–6 O. suggests (i) that the ‘crowd of wedding-guests’ (1192) is the audience, and (ii) that tables, food, cooking gear, etc., are brought out on stage; if so, we may have here a variant of the comic topos whereby food or other gifts are ostensibly offered to the audience and then denied them (cf. Lys. 1043–71 + 1188–1215, Eccl. 1144–8). The mysterious ταιτή of 1193 is identified as Trygaioi’s old εξωμις, on the assumption that he is already dressed for the wedding (but he is still a farmer, and will need working clothes; whatever the object is, it must be something for which in peacetime a country-dweller would have no use). At 1318 ff. there is surely no ‘perhaps’ about Trygaioi having an erect phallus. After this performance, O.’s forthcoming Acharnians, in the same series, will be awaited with the greatest eagerness.}

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Old Comedy often has caught the eye of interpreters who wish to see a ritual pattern in its plot lines, most famously in F.M. Cornford’s The Origins of Attic Comedy (London 1914). Lada-Richard’s new book differs from Cornford’s by focusing on only one play and on specific Dionysiac cults and institutions (mysteries, wine, theatre), as well as coming-of-age rituals. While this approach looks more promising, the result is equally disappointing; in fact, there is more to be said for Cornford’s (untenable) thesis that Dionysus in Frogs represents a dying and rising god than for L.-R.’s claim that he is an initiate going through ‘a ritual initiation sequence grafted upon a comic dramatic plot’ (119).

L.-R. in the Introduction presents her main thesis as well as her methodology. She argues that in interpreting the play one should take the fullest possible cultural context into account, especially in the case of a stage figure like Dionysus, who already had a ‘divine personality’ outside the play (2). In ch.1, she observes that Dionysus and Heracles have more in common than their confrontation in the Prologue suggests. Ch.2, the largest in the book, lays out her main thesis, namely that Dionysus, starting as a wild and ambiguous god in the Prologue and ending as a civilizing presence at the end of the play, undergoes an initiation, reminiscent both of that of a young adult (51–78) and of an ithyphallic in the Bacchic or Eleusinian Mysteries (78–120).

Chs.3–9 are intended to fill out this picture. Ch.3 studies the allusions to wine in the play and sees a progression from Dionysus’ self-description as ‘Dionysus,
son of the Wine-Jar’ (fr. 22), through ritual references to the Anthesterae (fr. 211–19b) and a Theoxenia that doubles as a lewd party with flute girls (fr. 503 ff.), to the Agon, which, L.-R., argues, represents ‘a refined symposium’ and ‘the most civilized’ of Dionysiac activities (154). Ch.4 contends that Dionysus starts out as a failed actor, but by gradually discarding Heracles’ persona (and with it the uncivilized aspects of this figure and of himself), emerges as a god who can judge theatre. With this transformation his understanding of tragedy changes from a selfish desire for Euripides in the Prologue to an appreciation of Aeschylus’ civic value in the Agon (ch.5). Ch.6 makes the case that Aeschylus can be judged a ‘Dionysiac poet’, although L.-R. has to admit that Euripides is very ‘Dionysiac’ as well (ch.7). She maintains, however, that Aeschylus represents the more positive Dionysiac (a Bacchic or Eleusinian initiand) (277–8). In chs. 8 and 9, L.-R. considers some of the social issues raised by the Euripides–Aeschylus debate, and Dionysus’ role as the ideal spectator and god of both tragedy and comedy. An epilogue discusses Aeschylus’ immortalization in the play’s exodos, and an appendix lists more examples of ritual disguise in the Greek world.

This short summary does not do justice to the book, whose value lies more in the detailed discussions of Dionysiac rituals than in its main thesis. L.-R. demonstrates convincingly that Dionysus’ actions in the play (his disguise, descent to the underworld, judging of the contest) are in keeping with his ‘divine personality’. The problem with the main thesis is that signals of initiation (role-playing, deception, seeing of monsters, flagellation, nudity, etc.) are not specific to this ritual complex, but can point to many different situations (including Cornford’s ‘dying and rising’ god), as H.S. Versnel has so elegantly demonstrated (‘What’s sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander’, in L. Edmunds, Approaches to Greek Myth (Baltimore 1990), reprinted in Versnel, Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion, Vol. 2 (Leiden 1993)). For example, Dionysus dons Heracles’ clothes not because he pretends to be an initiate, but rather to deceive the monsters that typically block the entrance to the underworld (on which see now S. Iles Johnston, Restless Dead (Berkeley 1999)), and he is stripped and beaten because Aeacus believes he stole Cerberus, and so on. In order to argue that these scenes nevertheless, somehow, secondarily, refer to initiation rituals as well, one needs strong evidence that Dionysus is presented as an initiate, but L.-R. admits that ‘this Aristophanic comedy has no ephoric figure in its cast of characters’ (50), and Dionysus’ status as a Bacchic or Eleusinian initiate is never made explicit in the text (elsewhere L.-R. identifies Aeschylus as the initiate, being rescued by the god).

The progression L.-R. sees in the play is often questionable as well. For example, it is surprising that someone so familiar with ancient Greek religion would judge a symposium gathering to be more civilized than the Anthesterae or a Theoxenia (and at any rate, I do not believe that the Agon is pictured as a symposium). Some of Aeschylus’ ‘Dionysiac’ qualities, such as his power to deceive (237 ff.), also belong to Dionysus’ darker side (and to Euripides: 285), and perhaps the most problematic claim of the book is that a more gentle, civic Dionysus can be distilled from the wild and dangerous god: such a separation is at odds with the ‘divine personality’ we know from the larger cultural context, and with L.-R.’s own assessment of the god as fundamentally ambiguous (8–9). This book has some interesting things to say about Dionysus, but as an interpretation of Frogs it fails to convince.

Finally, I have to say something about the price of the book. Oxford UP ought to be ‘stripped and beaten’ for pricing the book out of reach of anyone but Bill Gates; may I suggest that, after the author has received her well-deserved royalties, someone, anonymously, post the whole book on the Internet?

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This collection of articles on Josephus’ final composition, the Contra Apionem, is to be welcomed, as the CA has always suffered in comparison with the grander scale and theme of AJ and BJ, and yet is a work of great interest and no little importance. The contributions represent a variety of different approaches to, and interpretations of, the CA, and they paint a useful picture of scholarly directions, present and future; unusually for a volume of essays, it also comes armed with excellent indexes. There is appended a concordance to the Latin portion of the text, but although in their introductory chapter Levison and Wagner claim that this concordance forms ‘the anchor’ of the volume, to which is tethered the collection of articles, the truth is that the concordance stands quite on its own: the articles have nothing to do with it, and its presence does not substantially enhance the work. It could just as well have been published on its own.

L. and W.’s introduction is a model of its kind (1–48): they present a summary of the contents of the CA, an analysis of the articles in the volume, and finally a briefly annotated bibliography of work on the CA. Their discussion of the articles is particularly helpful. They manage to place the contributions in the following categories: textual history and relation to later Christian literature; literary style; sources; rhetorical strategies and purpose; the CA and Josephus. In this way we find out exactly what we are getting and are given a rationale for the contents. The odd thing is that after L. and W. have made nice sense of it all for us, the work then follows an entirely different, and apparently quite jumbled, order, and offers the appearance of precisely the sort of miscellaneous mélange that L. and W. have denied. Nonetheless, there is a good mix of safe, informative articles and more speculative ventures.

Schreckenberg (‘Text, Überlieferung und Textkritik’, 49–82) forms a useful introduction to many important aspects of the CA itself: the nature and title of the work; sources; language and style; the manuscript tradition and sixth-century Latin translation; afterlife. The CA had an unusually influential afterlife and Schreckenberg’s list of later citations and echoes (65–72) is helpful, although...