
In the admirably brief compass of about 100 pages Mr. Rothwell (R.) tries to show that the Ecclesiazusae dramatizes the automatic linkage in the minds of the Greeks of eros and politics through peithô (persuasion) (p. x). Peithô is held to encompass both seduction and persuasion in a more rational sense. As a secondary goal he proposes to show that "the portrayal of women in the Ecclesiazusae is key to an understanding of peithô, rhetoric and politics" (p. xi).

In order to achieve this, R. first gives a rapid sketch of some preliminary problems. In his first chapter he defends the view that the Ecclesiazusae is essentially a political and social comedy (p. 2). It must be remarked here, that not until note 49 on p. 11 do we hear that he takes the "political" to mean "the way we organize our social life together, and the power relations which this involves". This is somewhat misleading when he rejects previous "political" readings (in the more conventional sense of the word), p. 5 f. R. describes the situation in Athens in the 390's, making it probable "that public cohesion in Athens had not disintegrated" (p. 3) in that period and that "the ideal of loyalty to the polis still remained a powerful force" (ibid.). A brief survey of the political, economic and military situation of the time adds up to "cause for optimism" in 393 (p. 5). R. does not take position in the question whether the Ecclesiazusae was performed before or after the setback of 392, but he feels the public spirit cannot have suffered too severely from it.

As a satiric target R. suggests "the selfish behavior of the Athenian démos" (p. 10). The introduction of communism is no more than a "device for throwing light on the behavior of the démos since it brings out the worst and the best in them" (p. 11). The problems of human conduct involved are timeless and communism is a vehicle for dramatic expression.

R. proceeds to undermine the thought that the Ecclesiazusae reflects the supposed misery of a general disinterest in Athens at the time. He argues that democracy functioned still (or rather, again) (p. 14 f.) and that polis-life had not been pushed aside by growing individualism (p. 16 f.). One critical remark must be made here: R.'s distinction between Blepyrus' apragmosyne ('quietism') and the Dissident's self-interest on the one hand, and "fourth-century individualism" on the other, is unconvincing (p. 17), for these labels are far from mutually exclusive.

Mnemosyne, Vol. XLV, Fasc. 3 (1992)
R. then somewhat superficially discusses the position of women, both their historical situation and their representation in drama. He believes that in the early fourth century "a revaluation of the role of women" was under discussion (p. 21). When he adduces the figures of Lysistrata and Praxagora to corroborate this view (p. 22), he falls into the trap of circularity which he himself had previously called attention to (p. 13, note 56). But he rightly concludes that exceptional women like Diotima and Aspasia tell us nothing about the actual status of women in Athens. The chapter ends with the warning that we should not look for a tightly constructed plot in Aristophanes. The "thematic continuity ... arising from its comic inspiration" (p. 25) should suffice.

The second chapter is devoted to the relationships between peithô, erôs, politics and women. R. shows that peithô not only includes "the winning over of an opponent through reasoned and logical argument" (p. 28), but also more deceitful or forceful means of overruling an opponent. Besides, it can also refer to 'seducing' with erotic allure (p. 29).

Some marginal remarks may be added:—R. is on slippery ground when he states that (p. 30) "peithô could as easily mean 'seduction' in an erotic context as it meant 'persuasion' in a rhetorical or political situation" (my italics). Although peithô may in some contexts be interpreted as referring to seduction, it means 'persuasion'. The euphemism should be left intact.—As a further illustration of the (rare) link between βλα and πειθω (ibid.), R. might have quoted Pind. P. 4.219 μάστερι. Πειθω. I think, incidentally, that both this passage, A. Ag. 385 βιάται δ' ἄ ταλανα πειθω and Thuc. 3.36.2 (describing Cleon) must have made the impression of an oxymoron.

R. proceeds (p. 35) to record the fact that women were always associated with peithô, especially in its connection with seduction and deceit. He tries to establish a link between women and rhetoric as well (p. 36), but comes no further than the topos of rhetorical embellishment being compared to make-up, and he concludes somewhat sophistically (p. 36 f.): "Thus women persuade with rhetoric [no attestation, I.S.] as easily as they disguise themselves with cosmetics". In an interesting section R. demonstrates how politics were often linked on a lexical level with erôs (p. 37 ff.). Aristophanes picked up the metaphor and turned it into comical reality, e.g. in the Knights. There, Cleon was depicted as an erastês attempting to seduce his erômenos Demos (the fun being enhanced