Charalabopoulos, N.G.


While the ‘dialogue form’ has been a major subject of scholarly interest in the field of Platonic studies for a few decades, the monograph by Charalabopoulos (C.) sheds new light on Plato’s ‘dialogues’ in terms of their meaning and how they were treated in the ancient world by examining a variety of materials, ranging from literary texts to archaeological findings. Building on some preceding studies (e.g. Puchner, M. 2010. *The Drama of Ideas* (Oxford)), C. develops the radical view that Plato was not just a philosopher, but a dramatist or playwright who rivaled tragic or comic poets and produced his own dramatic works intended for performance.

The book consists of five chapters with an appendix (“An Academy inscription”), a substantial bibliography, and indices. The examined sources are printed both in the original Greek text and in English translation, accompanied by analyses and bibliographical notes. The book provides us with a useful collection of relevant texts and valuable information of the secondary literature.

Chapter 1, “Setting the stage”, first examines recent scholarship about Plato to show that philosophically oriented study does not take the dialogue form seriously. C. argues that “[e]ach dialogue should be read primarily as an independent, integral piece of dramatic literature, appreciated on its own terms, since this is how the original public first came to know it” (p. 11).

Chapter 2, “The metatheatre of dialogue”, carefully examines the historical context of Plato’s dialogues in relation or in contrast to the prose dialogues written before Plato, the Sicilian connection (Epicharmus, mime), and the “Socratic dialogues”. It is noteworthy that, in separating “Socratic” and “Platonic” dialogues, C. scarcely considers Socrates as a key factor for the latter. He then examines Plato’s passages concerning poetry and drama, including the severe condemnation of poetry in the *Republic*, and suggests “a more complex interplay between philosophy and dramatic poetry” (p. 76). The analysis of “metadialogical references” in the *Laws* (pp. 86-103) is particularly illuminating. In discussing the *Symposium*, C. tries to show that Plato’s dialogues constitute “the fourth dramatic genre”, along with tragedy, comedy and satyr play (pp. 71-7). On the other hand, a reader may find the author’s silence over sophistic or rhetorical performance (oral delivery) strange, since they must be important for some dialogues (e.g. *Ap.*, *Mx.*).

The next two chapters offer the main arguments for Plato as a “drama artist” by examining several ancient testimonies, many of which have not received detailed examination in Platonic scholarship.
Chapter 3, “Performing Plato”, tries to locate Plato the “metatheatrical dramatist” or “poet in prose” in the performance culture through the examination of passages from Aristotle, Themistius (Or. 26), Demetrius, Dio of Prusa (Or. 36), St. Basil (Ep. 135), and some others.

In Chapter 4, “Plato’s ‘theatre’: the fragments”, the author presents various materials and argues that they widen the perspective of the main claim of “Plato the playwright” in its historical reception. This chapter deals with the peripheral materials: the statue of “Papposilenus and child Dionysus” (NM 257), PHerc 1021 (Philodemus), Thrasyllus (in DL), POxy lxxiii 4941 (Anon. Comm. on Tht.), Plutarch’s Sympotic Questions, Athenaeus’ Deipnosophists, POxy xiii 1624 (musical (?) notation), and the “Socrates” mosaic of the house of Menander. Chapter 5, “Finale”, summarizes the results.

Through these arguments, C. makes two main claims. On the one hand, he compellingly argues that Plato is more related to dramatic genres than we normally assume, and should be placed in the cultural contexts of his contemporaries (dramatists and audiences) and subsequent generations. We should remember that the basic elements of drama, namely “role-playing and authorial effacement” (p. 59), are shared by Plato and other playwrights. Plato deliberately uses a theatrical vocabulary to appropriate or transform his work into an “all-embracing literary genre” (p. 65).

C. suggests, on the other hand, that Plato intended to put his dialogues on stage, i.e. performed by actors. This suggestion appears more speculative, and is not well-grounded. He shifts his point from “oral presentation” to “dramatization” or “performance” of the dialogues (e.g. p. 21), but recitation or oral delivery (depicted in the opening part of Tht.) does not necessarily entail dramatic performance. I think that these two claims should be clearly separated and examined in different steps.

To demonstrate these points, C. provides an arsenal of materials, whose relevance to the main arguments differs. It is unfortunate that some of the evidence in chs. 3-4 is shaky. For example, the discussion of “Plato the poet” in Dio of Prusa (pp. 119-24) depends entirely on the conjecture ποιητῶν for the manuscripts’ reading πολιτῶν (26.6), originally proposed by Heinze. While D.A. Russell offers some arguments in favour of this emendation in his recent edition, the other editors (von Arnim, Lamar Crosby, Calderón, Bost-Pouderon) retain the transmitted reading. C.’s argument makes too much of this single conjecture. Moreover, C.’s interpretation of POxy lxxiii 4941 (pp. 192-6) depends on D.N. Sedley’s reconstruction of fr. 1, col. i, l.4: [.. προ\(\textit{η}\)ι\(\textit{δε\tau\o}\) (for \(\textit{η}\), the editor suggests reading “H, M, or II, or possibly I or N”). In both cases, C. briefly mentions the shakiness of their philological grounds (p. 120, n. 30; p. 194), upon which their arguments are built in their entirety. Further, C. suggests that the notations found in the