Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Review of Riemer, P.; Zimmerman, B. (1999) Der Chor im antiken und modernen Drama

Naerebout, F.G.

Citation
Naerebout, F. G. (2003). Review of Riemer, P.; Zimmerman, B. (1999) Der Chor im antiken und modernen Drama. *Mnemosyne*, *56*, 109-113. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/1887/8038

Version:	Not Applicable (or Unknown)
License:	Leiden University Non-exclusive license
Downloaded from:	https://hdl.handle.net/1887/8038

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

P. Riemer & B. Zimmermann (eds), *Der Chor im antiken und modernen Drama* (Drama, Beiträge zum antiken Drama und seiner Rezeption, 7). Stuttgart/Weimar, J.B. Metzler, 1998. iv, 301 pp.

This collection contains twelve articles that mostly arose from contributions to a colloquium held in Potsdam in October 1997. Two contributors to the colloquium, Theodoros Stephanopoulos and Bernd Seidensticker, published their papers elsewhere, and Anton Bierl replaced his paper with a new one.[1]) Several other elements of the Potsdam meeting, which involved choruses on stage, film and video, and a chorus workshop, have not been captured in any printed form. Nor has a lecture by F. Amoroso, on "the ancient chorus on modern Mediterranean stages," probably because it involved many (moving) images. However, we have an extra paper by Michael Silk, which apparently was not part of the colloquium, but which is a welcome addition, and also two book reviews, added for unclear reasons and much out of place.[2]) Some of the papers must have been revised by their authors after the colloquium, because they refer to literature not likely to have been available, or certainly unavailable, in the autumn of 1997. Also titles have been changed, but in how far this also concerns the contents is not clear. It is difficult to establish what exactly went on at the colloquium: the book contains no list of participants, programme or report of discussions. Nor are we being told anything about subsequent editorial policy. Some of the above information I got from the introduction, and some I had to recover from a website.[3])

Of the present twelve articles seven deal with the chorus in Greek and Roman drama: Michael Silk on choruses and authority; Anton Bierl on the meaning of *diplè* in Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazusae* 982; Bernhard Zimmermann on the chorus of Greek comedy; Lutz Käppel on the chorus in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*; Peter Riemer on the chorus in Sophocles; Martin Hose on the chorus in the tragedies of republican Rome; and Christoph Kugelmeier on the chorus in Seneca's *Phaedra*. The five remaining articles deal with the reception of the ancient chorus: Martin Brunkhorst on stagings between the late 16th and early 19th centuries; Michael Silk again, on the chorus in 19th century theory and practice; Detlev Bauer on stagings in the 20th century; Peter Drexler on the chorus in films by Woody Allen; and Siegfried Schoenbohm on his staging of the chorus in Euripides' *Bacchae* by Arghyris Kounadis. I will discuss these contributions one by one, but I will leave it at the shortest of summaries unless I consider an individual paper to be of above average interest.

Silk in his first contribution has produced a very interesting paper in which he investigates style in order to establish whether the pro-

© Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, 2003
Also available online – www.brill.nl

nouncements by choruses are authoritative, and if so, whether this concerns single or multiple authorities. He takes up a middle-position between a neo-Nietzschean opinion that the chorus has overriding authority and a neo-Hegelian one that the chorus is partial and has a limited view, and is not able to escape from its situatedness (a background to this is offered in his second contribution; cf. my comments below). According to Silk the chorus is a very complex element, not coherent or uniform, shifting both between and within plays. This may not be a very surprising insight, but the way Silk tries to demonstrate this from his analysis of high, low and hybrid styles at different levels of intensification seems to me to be a good attempt to introduce an objectifying element into this discussion without end.

Bierl interprets *diplè* rather as the double, reciprocal joy in the dance of gods and men, than as some kind of 'double dance'. But he also introduces the possibility that *diplè* in Aristophanes does not refer to (a) dance at all, but is a corruption, arising from a sign in the text for *diplè*, i.e. >, which sign was used by grammarians to indicate a suspect line (usually a doublet). Or possibly the word *diplè* was written out instead of the sign. Bierl appears to be the first to suggest this.

Zimmermann intends to study certain aspects of *opsis*, staging. Although he mentions costuming as an important part of the staging and "nicht blosses optisches Beiwerk", his account is more concerned with the dramatic contents of the plays under consideration than with any formal aspects. Asking about the role and the characterization of the chorus and their interplay, he discusses the Aristophanic dramaturgic device found in the *Acharnenses, Vespae* and *Lysistrata* by which a chorus characterized as antagonist of the protagonist of the play, but at the same time as a praiseworthy role model, viz. old and experienced men who have given their best for the community, eventually comes round to the protagonist's viewpoint. This may have been intended to make the audience more receptive to the message borne out by the protagonist.

Käppel paints a wide canvas. He first considers the lyric chorus in general: a chorus performs at a ritual occasion, and its performance is a ritual occasion in itself. It offers the community an opportunity for identification (the performers are and remain community members) and at the same time can speak with authority (by a reflective stance, gnomic utterances and raising their subject matter to a mythic level). A tragic chorus is another such chorus, but there is one important difference: there is no identification between audience and performers, because the performers form part of the fictive world of the drama. But what part? Here Käppel combines Pfister's ideas about communication in drama (*Das Drama. Theorie and Analyse* [Munich 1988]): the chorus is both part of the communication process taking place inside

the drama, and of the communication process between drama and audience, and Kranz's notion of a triple function of the chorus (*Stasimon*, Berlin 1933): *dramatis persona*, idealized public, and the poet's mouthpiece. In analysing the *Oresteia* Käppel seeks to show that Aeschylus pushes the role of the chorus in his tragedies as far as it can go, making the chorus all the above at once, and having it oscillate between the different communicatory levels distinguished above.

Now the going gets a bit tougher. Riemer investigates the function of the chorus in Sophoclean tragedy, especially the *Trachiniae*. He allows his analysis, not uninteresting in itself, to fade out without any really graspable conclusions. Hose, on considering the chorus in the tragedies of republican Rome, sets off with a stimulating overview of the similarities and differences to be seen when comparing Greek and Roman tragedy and the modalities of their performance. The Roman chorus has less of a role of mediating between dramatic action and audience. It is rather a *dramatis persona* in an Aeschylean mode. But the evidence is insufficient to show how this was dramaturgically worked out. Kugelmeier on the chorus in Seneca's *Phaedra* shows that there are many different opinions about things about which we will probably never have any certainty. So there are no dramaturgical precepts to give about Seneca's *Phaedra*. Well, it most likely was a "Lesedrama" anyhow.

Amongst the second set of papers, those dealing with issues of reception, Silk's piece proves easily the most interesting again. In fact, his second paper should be read in conjunction with his other contribution to this volume, for here he shows in detail what important and influential ideas on the Greek chorus were formulated by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and by Friedrich Nietzsche (and not by 19th-century classicists!). His account also embraces the interplay between the study and the stage, when he picks three individuals, early, middle and late, viz. Friedrich Schiller, Richard Wagner and William Butler Yeats, and asks how they have approached the problem of the chorus on stage. An inspired and inspiring piece of work.

The remaining articles are somewhat less exciting. Brunkhorst provides a rather slight overview of stagings of the chorus in revivalist drama between 1585 and 1803, from the opening of the Teatro Olimpico to Schiller, with Milton and Racine centre stage. One had better turn to Brunkhorst's *Tradition und Transformation* (Berlin 1979) and *Drama und Theater der Restaurationszeit* (Heidelberg 1985). Bauer provides a very staid overview of choral stagings in the twentieth century, limited to German examples and largely to the 1980s and 1990s. Drexler shows that in his films Woody Allen uses a chorus or choral elements to manipulate or destroy the cinematic illusion (what is what is meant by "metadiegetische

Reflexionsfigur", p. 266), but this is a self-evidency. That this is also what happens in Greek tragedy whenever the chorus performs, I find a rather less acceptable suggestion. It might be noted in passing that there are many editorial slips in the text of the paper by Drexler, such as the interchanging of the images on p. 267 and 268 (but also otherwise the book shows some signs of carelessness). Bringing up the rear, Schoenbohm, opera director, tells about his staging of the chorus in Euripides' *Bacchae* to music by Arghyris Kounadis. He is a very pleasant *causeur* and I quite relished his anecdotes about the many troubles encountered. But his contribution stands strangely isolated.

All in all, this is a moderately interesting collection with just a few highlights (especially the two papers by Silk and the one by Käppel). Only those working on (or with) choruses might want to read all of it. I would have preferred more substance, but certainly more coherence. Especially the two main sections which I distinguished above, on the chorus and on its reception, refuse to come together in any way, except in the two contributions by Silk. It would have done no harm if this book could have had a more specific focus, for instance the actual performance by the chorus, both in its original setting and in the many attempts at revival. Considering the amount of time given to modern stagings at the colloquium this is a theme which might have knitted the contributions to the colloquium, and thus the contents of the book under review, more firmly together.

While the editors of the volume in their introduction praise the interdisciplinarity of the Potsdam colloquium, pointing at the presence of classical philologists, literary and communication scholars, directors and dramaturgists, the texts as published alas do not bear out the supposed fruitfulness of this encounter. I cannot see where the scholars would have said something different because of this get-together. Alas, only one theatre maker gets his say—and singles out the one classical scholar mentioned in his account as being rather uncooperative. But maybe in this respect the colloquium only bore fruit afterwards, and new attempts at working together are now underway, and the present volume actually has become outdated from the moment it came into being. If not, there is but little to show for the interdisciplinarity. This is not to say that I in any way reject the bringing together of scholars and theatre makers. I applaud any such initiative, but at the same time I know from experience that the gap between scholars and practicians is almost unbridgeable (it was not always like that, of course: some of the articles discussed above show just that). In order to bridge the gap, or even to start to do so, we need another book.

NL-2253 LJ Voorschoten, Welterdreef 85 F.G. Naerebout

1) His original contribution to the colloquium, on *ithyphalloi* and *phallophoroi*, has now been included in enlarged form, some 60 pages, as the second chapter of his impressive *Habilitationsschrift* (Leipzig 1998), on the comic chorus, especially in the *Thesmophoriazusae*, since published as *Der Chor in der Alten Komödie. Ritual und Performativität* (Munich 2001). To the article on the *diplè* in the volume under review, Bierl has added a three-page summary of his dissertation.

2) The two reviews are Luigi Bravi on *Oxford Readings in Aristophanes* (Oxford 1996), and Piero Totari on *Stage Directions. Essays in Ancient Drama in Honour of E.W. Handley* (London 1995).

3) Address as of 14 May 2001: www.uni-potsdam.de/u/klassphilol/drama.htm.

William J. Dominik (ed.), *Roman Eloquence*. Rhetoric in Society and Literature. London and New York, Routledge, 1997. xii, 268 pp. Pr. £60.00 (hardback), £18.99 (paperback).

Over at least the past four decades, Roman rhetoric and oratory have been the subject of an increasing body of—at least partly—high quality scholarship, and it would be very useful to have an accessible collection that would summarize, criticize and take further some of the insights of this extensive work. It was therefore a good idea of Routledge and/or William Dominik to produce a companion to the rather successful collection *Persuasion: Greek Rhetoric in Action* of 1994, intended for classicists as well as non-specialists (cf. p. i). Unfortunately, the resulting volume as a whole is less than satisfactory. This is not due to the editor's choice of subjects: omissions are always inevitable,[1]) but the fourteen chapters between them cover much of the relevant field, and devoting seven of them to the relationship between rhetoric and specific genres was a good choice. One difficulty is the difference between the authors of the different chapters as to their intended audience. The main problem, however, is that the book offers contributions of very uneven quality, ranging from the good or very good (in the order of appearance: O'Sullivan, Fantham, Goldberg) to the worse than mediocre (Kirby, Richlin, Hughes, Ronnick).

In the process, the volume interestingly illustrates some of the consequences of the rapid growth of rhetoric as a scholarly subject. On the positive side, many important questions are now asked for the first time or are now reconsidered with renewed sophistication, such as (to mention just a few) the relationship between rhetoric and gender, that between rhetoric and genres of literature, and the origins and nature of phenomena like Atticism and the Second Sophistic. In this collection, virtually all authors address such questions, and some do so successfully.

On the negative side, the popularity of the subject seems to have led to a mismatch between supply and demand, allowing too much

© Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, 2003
Also available online – www.brill.nl