

STEPHEN HALLIWELL: *Greek Laughter. A Study of Cultural Psychology from Homer to Early Christianity*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge – New York 2008. ISBN 978-0-521-88900-1 (hb), 978-0-521-71774-8 (pb). XIII, 616 pp. GBP 70, USD 126 (hb), GBP 32.50, USD 58.50 (pb).

Readers of *Arctos* may well remember the conferences, organised over a decade ago by Siegfried Jäkel and Asko Timonen in the University of Turku, entitled "Laughter down the Centuries". The three-volume proceedings of the conferences are included in the wide-ranging bibliography of Stephen Halliwell's massive tome on *Greek Laughter*. In reviewing the first conference proceedings, Stanley Ireland commented (*CR* 46/1 [1996] 188) on the ease with which such studies all too often manage to "kill their subject stone dead" and dubbed symposia as something of a "can of worms". Halliwell's treatment falls into neither category.

His interest in gelastics dates back at least twenty years to talks he gave in Oxford and Boston "where the audiences failed to laugh". His first article on the topic was in *CQ* 41/2 (1991) 279–96 "The uses of laughter in Greek culture" to be followed by, "Greek laughter and the problem of the absurd" (*Arion* 13, 121–46) in 2005. There he pinpointed the key Greek factor of festivity and named the two poles around which Greek views of laughter tend to be concentrated: "a perpetual tension between the spirit of celebratory, playful release and the forces of derisive antagonism" (*CQ* 41/2, 292). In this massive tome, Halliwell has assembled a formidable array of bibliographical tools including an exhaustive list of articles from encyclopedias on carnivals, humour, laughter, *Lachkultur*, *le rire*, ridicule and mocking. The material addressed in the book cuts across the fields of education, politics, law, religion, war, philosophy, sex, sport, drinking and more besides from the violently derisive suitors of the *Odyssey* to early Christianity's imprinting of laughter with the sinfulness of corporeal (even diabolical) disorder and dissolution. The name of David Konstan is habitually associated with work on Greek emotion and, sure enough, his name crops up as "a perceptive critic of the final draft" (p. X). Other relevant works are Donald Lateiner's *Sardonic Smile*, and D. B. Levine's article ("Homeric laughter and the unsmiling suitors" *CJ* 78 [1982]), references to which are made recurrently in footnotes in the Homer chapter.

His book starts with an introduction on Greek laughter in theory and practice, from which he then goes on to consider the laughter of Homeric gods and men in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The remarkable images in both songs of collectively "unquenchable" or irrepressible laughter among the Olympians- laughter, what's more, directed by gods against other gods – are the most concentrated testimony to the nature of Greek laughter. A fascinating parallel can be drawn to studies on American laughter where it has been shown that "when laughter is used as ridicule, it functions as a mechanism of social control" (*Laughter: A Socio-scientific Analysis*, Joyce Hertzler 1970). As Halliwell points out much later in his book (p. 245): "Greek ethical, social and educational attitudes, as attested from Homeric poems onwards, frequently express or display reservations about inappropriate and/or excessive laughter." Halliwell's aim is not just to pursue the concept of "humour" per se, but to tackle the wider psychological, ethical and cultural concerns which such behaviour generates within ancient frameworks of perception (p. 7).

He has masterly control of the sources for Homeric episodes of laughter, smiling, ridicule and mockery, chiefly involving the gods on Olympus at the end of *Il.* 1, the Thersites episode in *Il.* 2, Hector and Andromache *Il.* 6, the fighting of the gods in *Il.* 21 and the funeral

games *II*. 23. In text and footnotes Halliwell sustains a sophisticated logomachy with Lateiner and Levine and others on the nuances of (sardonic) smiles and overt laughter. Homeric laughter, he concludes, spans a spectrum of feeling that includes both positive and negative emotions (p. 53). He notes that in the *Odyssey* laughter is mentioned twice as often as in the *Iliad*, often in the form of the suitors' smiles and laughs (p. 53). Depressingly there is extremely little amiable laughter in either poem.

This leads to chapters on sympotic elation and resistance to death, on ritual laughter and the renewal of life, on aischrology, shame and Old Comedy, on Greek philosophy and the ethics of ridicule, on Greek laughter and the problem of the absurd, on the intermittencies of laughter in Menander's social world, on Lucian and the laughter of life and death and finally on laughter denied, laughter deferred: the antigelastic tendencies of early Christianity. He appends an appendix on the Greek (body) language of laughter and smiles and on gelastic faces in visual art. He stresses (p. 7) that the emphasis is rather on laughing including smiling rather than on humour. Right through the history of Greek literature Halliwell traces the same traits till on the last page (p. 552), he states: "The rarity of depiction of laughter, less so of subtle smiles, is in part a reflection of this larger pattern of artistic choices and cultural preferences – laughter, its potential association with ideas of bodily excess, indecency and shamelessness." The abiding test case of institutionalised shamelessness from alpha to omega is the Iliadic Thersites.

The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and *to Hermes* understandably receive a good deal of attention under the category of ritual laughter. There is wide-ranging discussion of vilification, "agorification", aischrology. Halliwell stresses that one of the main uses of laughter in Greek culture is as an agency for the projection of dishonour onto people or things perceived as shameful (p. 244). He perceives in comedy a function of translating the energy of shame wholeheartedly into laughter institutionalising and in a sense ritualising this conversion of a potential negative force into the celebrations of communal enjoyment. Old Comedy thus manipulates a great polarity present in Greek attitudes to laughter – a polarity between the ideas of derisive, shame-directing antagonism, on the one hand and reciprocal, ludic gratification on the other. Seen from a wider diachronic perspective, Greek society developed distinctive institutions (including the symposium and certain religious festivals) for the celebration of laughter as a capacity which could bridge the gap between humans and gods; but it also feared laughter for its power to expose individuals and groups to shame and even violence.

This 600-page book covers a vast chronological and textual span, serving as an excellent reference work for sites and occasions for ritual laughter (p. 160 f.) and laughter of all kinds. Halliwell's English prose is a constant delight to read due to its fluency and logicity. It is no surprise to learn, then, that the book has been awarded the prestigious John D. Criticos prize for literature in 2008 just as Halliwell's earlier book, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis*, won the international "Premio Europeo d'Estetica". I have a minor quibble about the value of mentioning sources that have not been accessed as on p. 59 n. 18 "I have not been able to see Zervou 1990." This is a habit Halliwell has practised in all his writings (e.g. CQ 41/2 [1991] 280 n. 3) and I am not convinced that it is necessary. Unseen sources should be simply scrapped and omitted. But *Greek Laughter* is not really intended for those who want to discover why the Greeks found funny or laughed at. There is significantly no discussion of the *Philogelos* and no entry to "jokes" in the index. The main focus is on socio-gelotology (Hertzler's word) as it appears within, and is explored by, Greek literary and philosophical texts. I fully agree with Mary Beard (review *TLS*) that some of Halliwell's discussions are brilliant and refer to her perceptive

discussions of the chapters on Democritus and Menander. Halliwell delivers what he promises: a cultural history of ancient Greek laughter, *gelos*, including its negative counterparts, agelastie and antigelastie conduct. Time and again Halliwell derives from his material statements of unremitting clarity even though he resists any universalising theory of laughter (Conybeare, *BMCR* 2009.09.69). He shows irrefutably how laughter was a recurrent object of evaluative reflection in Greek culture.

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REBECCA LANGLANDS: *Sexual Morality in Ancient Rome*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge – New York 2009. ISBN 978-0-521-85943-1 (hb), 978-0-521-10900-0 (pb). VIII, 399 pp. GBP 62, USD 116 (hb), GBP 26.99, USD 50 (pb).

Rebecca Langlands argues that Roman morality has been a neglected topic since studies of ancient ethics have mainly focused on Greek philosophers and Christian thinkers. But as we know, Roman historiography and poetry were often highly moralizing narratives and thus literary sources offer ample evidence of Roman moral thinking. In her study, Langlands examines *pudicitia*, a Roman ethical concept that covered sexual morality in particular and regulated behaviour specifically associated with sex. It was also related to other (female) virtues and virtuous acts, from women's control over their bodies to stories about noble female suicides. Sexuality is thus approached from a slightly different angle than has been the case in the bulk of recent research, in which attention has been given, for example, to homosexuality or to male (and also increasingly to female) desire. However, Langlands has also several important predecessors, such as Catharine Edwards' book on the politics of immorality in ancient Rome, R. A. Kaster's research on the sense of shame and other emotions and virtues similar to *pudicitia* (*pudor*, *verecundia*), and Maria Wyke's discussions of Roman mistresses. Sourcebooks of ancient social customs have earlier collected evidence of Roman moralities. Langlands' decision to concentrate on one single concept allows her to dig deeper into Roman customs.

The rights and wrongs of sexual behaviour formed a prominent theme of several literary genres. Langlands covers a wide spectrum of well-known Roman literature which reflected the issue: Livy's (didactic) historiography (Ch. 2), Valerius Maximus' anecdotes (Ch. 3), Propertius' elegies, new comedy and Ovid (Ch. 4), declamations (Ch. 5) and Roman oratory (Ch. 6), among others. In oratory, *pudicitia* figured as an attribute of a male citizen as well. It was used in invectives to level charges about sexual misconduct and cupidity, and Roman historiography also employed accusations of *impudicitia* when portraying the degeneration of morals. Sexuality thus emerges as a significant factor in political discourse as well. Langlands' analysis proceeds by collecting and citing examples of Roman attitudes and reactions to moral and immoral sexual conduct, and of the public display of *pudicitia*. Langlands shows us, for example, how appearance, dress and various behaviours were read for important signs about female (im)morality. Some of the exemplary stories, such as the rape of Lucretia, are expected and widely referenced; nevertheless, Langlands quotes these passages in full, thus making her research luxuriously accessible also to readers who may not be familiar with these stories or with Valerius Maximus, for instance.