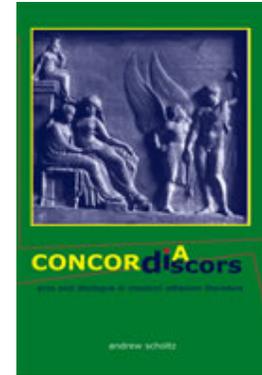


Concordia Discors: Eros and Dialogue in Classical Athenian Literature

by Andrew Scholtz
(Washington, D.C.: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2007)



This book takes a close look at Athenian democracy as dialogue and at literary reflections of that dialogue. Its focus is dissonance between communitarianism and individualism, consensus and conflict, in the works of authors for whom *erōs*, passionate, destabilizing desire, expressed that dissonance. My approach is an untried one for this kind of topic. In the past, scholars taking the pulse of Athenian society have pursued symptomatic reading of texts reflecting the *Sturm und Drang* of Athenian ideology, a technique allowing them to palpate the surface of texts for the mindsets that lie beneath. With symptomatic reading and its insights as my starting point, I ask what can be learned from an *asymptomatic* approach, one concerned with the text as *Gestalt*, what Holquist calls “the struggle to effect a whole out of the potential chaos of parts.” Through “aesthetic reading” building on the work of Bakhtin and others, I argue for *concordia discors* in works attuned to the songs Athenians sang about themselves—dissonance, in other words, as integral to the textual record of an author’s “hearing.”

After an introductory chapter, I undertake four case studies. In the first, I examine divergent implications of city-*erōs* in the Periclean Funeral Oration: *erōs* as, on the one hand, a lover’s generosity toward his beloved, on the other, a lover’s self-centered pursuit of a love-object. In the next, I look at the lover-as-politician image in Aristophanes’ *Knights*, where *erōs* expresses a whole tangle of contradictory reciprocities, symmetries, and asymmetries—strategies, in other words, whereby power is got through surrender, and dominance through subservience. I then turn to Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* and *Assembly-women*, comedies in which consensus and individual autonomy contend as rival values under democracy. Following that, I consider Socrates as a kind of boundary phenomenon, a figure for the dialogical self as a negotiation between Self and Other, in works of Plato and other Socratics. I close by considering the methodological and ethical implications of my findings, and their relevance for today’s world.

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