

ASPECTS OF PLAUTUS' *MOSTELLARIA*

FRANKO (G.F.) *Plautus: Mostellaria*. Pp. xvi + 159, ill. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. Cased, £70, US\$95. ISBN: 978-1-350-18841-9.

doi:10.1017/S0009840X23000902

F.'s *Mostellaria* is the latest in Bloomsbury's *Ancient Comedy Companions* series (edited by C.W. Marshall and N.W. Slater), which 'present[s] accessible introductions to the surviving comedies from Greece and Rome . . . helpful for students and scholars, providing an overview of previous scholarship and offering new interpretations of ancient comedy' (front matter). Most of the contributors participated in the NEH Summer Institute for Roman Comedy in 2012 (organised by S.L. James and T.J. Moore) as scholars or student performers, and the dual focus of scholarship and performance is apparent in the series.

F. frontloads a 'Playbill' section, including a synopsis of eleven scenes, character names and meanings, and a synopsis of 'arcs' and scenes. F. defines 'arcs' as 'units of action that begin with spoken iambs and end with musically accompanied trochees or mixed meters' (p. xiv), a division attributed to Marshall (p. 89). Arcs replace anachronistic act divisions (Greek New Comedy was divided by choral interludes into five acts, Roman New Comedy was not). The first two chapters explore issues of Greek comic precursors, Roman 'translation', social problems, other kinds of cultural 'paratheatrical' and ghost/haunted house lore. The last two chapters address performance and the (English) reception of *Mostellaria*. Throughout, F. deploys his characteristic humour in a series of ghost puns (Warning against intentional fallacy, F. deadpans 'We cannot interview Plautus in a scholarly séance' [p. 130 n. 52]. To add my own ghost joke: I died.).

Chapter 1, 'Why Plautus? Why *Mostellaria*?' addresses the standard questions of how much *Plautus vortit barbare* from Diphilus, Philemon and Menander (hard to know without the originals), what native Italian features influenced the playwright (impossible to answer with the evidence we have) and why critics thought Roman Comedy was bad (it is not). Relieved of that prerequisite burden, F. revisits M. Janka's 2004 work on *Mostellaria-as-inverted-Odyssey*, reminding readers that, while Greek comic precursors are speculative, Plautus alludes to Homer numerous times, likening his trickster characters to Odysseus/Ulysses, as in *Bacchides* (11–15). F. also stands persuaded by S.L. James's contribution to Blackwell's *A Companion to Plautus* (edd. Franko and D. Dutsch [2020]) that, contrary to popular scholarship, Plautus did not write marriage plots and in fact refashioned expectations for what a 'happy ending' looked like. Love/marriage is something of a McGuffin in Plautus: ostensibly the point, but trickery really carries the plot.

Chapter 2, 'Foundations and Frames', anticipates audience distress at two looming modern *agelasts*: enslavement and sex trafficking. While F. rejects the knee-jerk professorial response, 'well, things were different back then' (p. 17), he relies on differentiating Roman slavery from American slavery for readers, noting that the former was neither race-based nor permanent. This is obviously a much bigger topic, but here are a few comments: contrasting racial enslavement can counterintuitively serve to reify it in students' minds; so starting with what it was, rather than what it was not, may be a better approach to the topic. F.'s comparison presupposes an equation of Mediterranean enslavers with American (white) enslavers, furthering the fallacy of Greek and Roman whiteness. F. also overstates the impermanence of Roman enslavement: while enslaved individuals could theoretically amass *peculium* to purchase their freedom, this is largely true only of

enslaved people who worked closely with their owners. The hundreds of thousands working mines, fields and mills would never see freedom. Audience response to staged abuse of enslaved people is sidestepped with a footnote directing readers to K. McCarthy (*Slaves, Masters, and the Art of Authority* [2000]), R. Stewart (*Plautus and Roman Slavery* [2012]) or A. Richlin (*Slave Theater in the Roman Republic* [2017]). That said, F. is more progressive than most by even considering how modern audiences may react to this troubling aspect of the play. On sex trafficking, F. highlights the bind in which former *meretrix* Philematium is trapped: no longer sex labourer, but neither wife nor freedwoman with a secure source of income. He summarises the situation of enslaved and free sex labourers in ancient Rome and points readers to plenty of scholarship (including, full disclosure, my own).

Thus far, the volume's primary offering has been succinct summaries of the elementary issues in Plautus, making them easy to cite or explore further through the bibliography. In Chapter 3 (the volume's longest), 'Staging *Mostellaria*', F. offers an important contribution to the play's scholarship by addressing various performance questions with examples specific to *Mostellaria*. He describes ancient stage design and how *Mostellaria* may have looked to spectators, what types of props may have been used (Philematium's mirror, clanging cups and dinnerware) and what masks can and cannot do for characterisation as well as how they may have been best used for role-doubling. For this last point, F. offers an intriguing prospect, that the same actor played Theopropides (father) and Philolaches (son), a choice that eliminates the possibility of a Menandrian father/son rapprochement. F. then points to various examples of embedded stage directions in the 'script' and how performers might use them. Metatheatre and improvisation get their due, with more *Mostellarian* details. The most interesting part of the chapter, the subsection 'Monologues, Asides, and Eavesdropping', applies T. Moore's 'hierarchy of rapport' to the characters in *Mostellaria*. Scene by scene, F. demonstrates how *servus callidus* Tranio creates a conspiratorial relationship with spectators through monologues and asides, while Theopropides and other unsympathetic characters demonstrate no awareness of, let alone rapport with, the audience. The chapter is capped with a summary of how Plautine metre worked, and how metre was an important part of characterisation (with *Mostellarian* examples).

The final chapter, 'Afterlife and Ghost Lights', begins with a summary of the Plautine textual tradition, yet another example of F.'s usefulness to those making a broader study of Plautus. F. reminds readers that the 'scripts' we have are not intended as such: they were compiled by early scholars for study many years after Plautus' death and demonstrate much textual instability (doublets, performance variants, transcription errors, player notes). While these features allow later performers much leeway in staging the comedy, they do not offer the guidance of a modern script. Likely of less interest to those unfamiliar with seventeenth-century British theatre is F.'s enumeration of *Mostellarian* influences on Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, Thomas Heywood's *The English Traveller* and Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*. Of course, *Mostellaria* has a limited reception history; so F. must explore what is available.

The appendices include Pliny's 'Haunted House' tale (*Letter* 7.27.5–11); a chart outlining how five actors might play all characters; character line counts separated into *iambic senarii*, *trochaic* and *iambic septenarii*, and mixed metre *cantica*; and a selective chronology of events relevant to Plautus and/or *Mostellaria*. Missing is a line-by-line breakdown of specific metres (particularly relevant for the *cantica*), but W. de Melo's *Loeb* edition (Plautus vol. III [2011]) includes this. Likewise largely absent is non-English scholarship in an otherwise dense bibliography, but F. notes (p. 2) that he deliberately emphasises English scholarship and editions (p. 141).

Organisation for scholars, students and performers is difficult: should one arrange topically or scene by scene? F. opted for topical, which makes sense given that enslavement, trafficking, metatheatre etc., are present throughout the work, but that means he must go scene by scene several times in Chapter 3 to demonstrate the hierarchy of rapport (pp. 72–6) and the various metres in context (pp. 83–90). Scholars are sufficiently served by this arrangement, but performers as well as undergraduates supplementing translation may wish for a more straightforward scene-by-scene breakdown throughout (rather than the line index at pp. xiv–xv). In sum, F.’s *Mostellaria* offers students and scholars valuable summaries of some of the biggest issues, both social and theatrical, running throughout the Plautine corpus and provides performers with numerous approaches specific to the play.

Wesleyan University

SERENA S. WITZKE  
[switzke@wesleyan.edu](mailto:switzke@wesleyan.edu)

## CICERO’S PERSONALITIES AS AN ORATOR

KENTY (J.) *Cicero’s Political Personae*. Pp. x + 274, fig. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Cased, £75, US\$99.99 (Paper, £24.99, US\$32.99). ISBN: 978-1-108-83946-4 (978-1-108-81319-8 pbk). doi:10.1017/S0009840X23000446

Ever since G. Kennedy’s publications on the importance of character in oratory (see especially *The Art of Rhetoric in the Roman World* [1972]), English-speaking scholars of Cicero have been interested in how the orator’s self-presentation helps to advance his rhetorical goals. More recent work has progressed this line of inquiry by considering how the carefully curated presentation of Cicero’s ethical and intellectual qualifications supports his political and intellectual career (especially J. Dugan, *Making a New Man* [2005]; H. van der Blom, *Cicero’s Role Models* [2010]; C. Bishop, *Cicero, Greek Learning, and the Making of a Roman Classic* [2019]). K.’s book returns to the original oratorical preoccupations of this body of scholarship by considering how Cicero’s self-presentation in the speeches delivered between 57 and 43 BCE helps him claim political significance in an environment dominated by Pompey and Caesar.

The post-exile speeches have primarily been studied for the strategies that Cicero employs to manage the legacy of his consulship. As a result, the speeches delivered immediately upon the orator’s return from exile and those that most vigorously engage with his political opponents have dominated the conversation. K. has broader aims. The book considers all speeches from *De domo sua* to the *Philippics* (including the three relatively under-studied Caesarean speeches) in order to explore thematic links between them. Moreover, K.’s Cicero does not just look back at his consulship, but tests out various strategies for negotiating Rome’s new political landscape.

K.’s central argument is that all these speeches are motivated by an interest in curating an image of Cicero as a figure of continued political importance. The overtly stated rhetorical goals of the speeches, be they to defend a client against bribery charges or to prove an opponent’s impiety, are therefore secondary. As a result, Cicero prominently appears in these speeches as a commentator, moral authority and man of action. In