

BOOK REVIEW

Change and Exchange in Plautus's Mercator. Edited by Nina COPPOLINO. *New England Classical Journal Special Issue* 37.1: February, 2010. Pp. 95. ISSN 0739-1188.

This volume contains seven brief essays all devoted to the *Mercator* of Plautus. They address the play from a number of perspectives and collectively demonstrate quite how interesting and entertaining a work it is.

Niall Slater opens proceedings with an account of the prologue spoken by Charinus. He observes that this is the only Plautine prologue spoken by an *adulescens amans* but acknowledges the precedent of Menander's *Samia*. Slater is also alert to commercial language in this speech.

Timothy Moore analyses the metrical content of the *Mercator* with real skill and shows good knowledge of the works as a whole. He is strong on the mix of sung and spoken verses and on the tendency of sons to start and parents to stop the music. He also comments helpfully on the doleful Bacchiacs of Charinus.

Mira Seo explores the cook scene as an encapsulation of the tensions between love and lucre throughout the play. Seo implies on occasion (29 and 37) that Charinus could have married Pasicompsa before returning to Athens and may even be able to do so at the end of the play, but I find little support for such hopes in the play itself or in Plautus' oeuvre as a whole. Seo is, however, fully alert to what makes the cook scene so funny and translates much of it with real verve and humor. If the study of Classics ever palls, she has a future as a scriptwriter.

Sharon James offers a cogent and hard-headed discussion of the status and destiny of Pasicompsa. Once Charinus has had his fling, Pasicompsa will be trafficked again and again. Only in the few lines which she exchanges with Lysimachus does she reveal her own subjectivity and dreams. A couple of slips mar this fine piece: *occentent* at v. 408 must imply bawdy chanting at the door and not knocking on it (44); *laboriost* at v. 507 is a misprint for *laboriosi* (46).

John Starks looks at ethnic stereotyping of Syrians in the *Mercator* and elsewhere, then considers Syra's account of the sorrows of women at 817–29. This certainly is a striking speech though the entry of Dorippa and Syra at 667–75 suggests that the principal oppressor of the aging maid is in fact her mistress.

Here too an interesting contribution is marred by some small blemishes: *seruitati for seruituti* (57) and an apparent garbling of the plot of the *Truculentus*, implying that Callicles is the father of Diniarchus and not of the victim of the rape (60).

Toph Marshall has some interesting things to say about the relationship between the households of Demipho and Lysimachus, and suggests that the *Mercator* is thus a play about living next door to a Roman comedy. He also comments on the dream of Demipho and the patterns of animal imagery in the play. There is, however, a bit too much in this piece of the *ipse dixit*. I would be less certain than is Marshall (66) that the early stages of the play alienate Charinus from the audience's sympathies. It might be useful to recall that the impromptu legislation of Eutyclus at the play's close defends the right of every *adulescens* to a reasonable indulgence in love affairs and prostitutes (vv. 1021–2).

Antony Augoustakis writes interestingly on the theme of exile and the potential allusion to tragedies on the exile of Teucer, most importantly that of Pacuvius. The chapter ends with an attempt to relate the trajectory of Charinus' hallucinatory journey to Roman experience of expansion into Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean. When we consider tragedies on Teucer, it may also be useful to consider Teucer's anticipation of his own exile at Soph. *Aj.* 1006–20, especially the description of Telamon as one unable to laugh even when things go well. If Telamon hands on misery and impossible expectations to Ajax and then Ajax to his own son, Eurysaces, so Demipho's oppression of Charinus is the mirror image of what his own father did to him (vv. 61–78).

This is a stimulating and enjoyable collection, which successfully meets the *NECJ*'s stated aim of producing papers that can be helpful to school and university teachers alike. With a full-scale edition on the way from Boris Dunsch and a Bryn Mawr commentary from Antony Augoustakis, the *Mercator* looks set to receive the attention it deserves.

MATTHEW LEIGH

St Anne's College, Oxford, matthew.leigh@st-annes.ox.ac.uk