

BOOK REVIEW

Roman Theatre. By TIMOTHY J. MOORE. Greece & Rome: Texts and Contexts. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pp. x + 174. Paperback, \$27.50. ISBN 978-0-521-13818-5.

Moore's *Roman Theatre* is the twelfth volume to appear in Cambridge's "Greece & Rome: Texts and Contexts" series. Designed for use in the secondary school or undergraduate classroom, the series' publications offer primary sources (both literary and visual), explanatory notes and discussion questions, but they forego narrative and interpretation. These are books that give teachers tools for the classroom without binding their hands. Moore's volume adheres to the series format closely. It is a welcome publication since, as far as I know, there are no other textbooks dedicated specifically to Roman theatre and its evidence. I have not had the opportunity to teach with this book, but I can confidently say that it would be a worthy choice for covering a few weeks in a Roman Culture and Civilization or a Roman Literature Survey course.

The book falls into nine chapters covering the origins of Roman theatre, its performance conventions, the major extant authors (Plautus, Terence, Seneca), the theatrical genres (including mime and pantomime) and the legacy of Roman theatre. Each chapter is organized around a series of literary and visual excerpts, consistently well-chosen and well-translated by Moore himself. The occasional inset box gives students information not easily inferable from the ancient evidence (e.g. biographies of the authors, meter and music, stock characters, Saturnalian characteristics of comedy, etc.). The chapters on performance conventions and genres are particularly strong.

Moore uses excerpts primarily from Plautus to elucidate theatre architecture, acting styles, costumes and props in comedy. In the chapter on mime, the long quote from the so-called Charition Mime (P.Oxy. 413) does not read effectively in English, but the follow-up materials from Horace, Valerius Maximus, Suetonius and others paint a vivid picture of the ephemeral genre. The pantomime chapter enables Moore to add information about theatre architecture at the end of the Republic, with a good description and illustration of the Theatre of Pompey. The chapter's passages from Lucian's "On the Dance" (the only Greek

text quoted extensively) give good opportunity to discuss an author's realistic vs. idealistic reporting about a performance genre.

The chapters on Seneca, Terence and especially Plautus, while useful, are more disappointing. Each is constructed around long quotations from a single play (*Thyestes*, *Heauton Timoroumenos* and *Mostellaria*). Moore tries to show each play as a representative sample of its author—and to that end, the choice of plays is very good—but, for the novice student, it will be hard to see the patterns from the particulars. We learn, for example, that Terence “took the genre in new directions” (61), but students will be hard-pressed to define comedy's previous directions from the Plautus chapter. The Terence chapter is the best of the three, with some discussion, for example, of Terence's double plots. It also contains clear reproductions of Terence's illustrated manuscript tradition. Still, it may be more useful to assign students the complete plays instead of these chapters. The discussion questions printed here, though, will remain valuable.

The discussion questions, printed in beige boxes throughout each chapter, are the book's driving force. Moore, as the series dictates, avoids narrative background and interpretive essay. At times, the absence is keenly felt. Students would have benefited from a clear statement of what a tragic chorus is or how a running slave gag works. It would also have been useful to have greater factual information about theatre's social contexts. In lieu of such statements, though, Moore has crafted discussion questions that will allow a good teacher to engage students in Socratic discussion and that will spur students to ask for the factual information they need.

For example, a question about Plautus's *Mostellaria* asks, “How do you think men in the audience might have responded to Simo's words about wives with dowries? What about women in the audience?” Students will not learn scholarly theories about gendered responses to Plautus, but they will devise their own theories. Under an expert teacher's guidance, the tactic will be more effective. Other questions query plot developments, the differences between sung and spoken verses, textual parallels within plays (requiring very close reading), stage conventions, comparison of visual and textual evidence and parallels with modern performance genres. Occasionally a question will be too hard for the novice student and the instructor will need to fill in the blanks. For example, in the Terence chapter, Moore asks how the relationship between Syrus and Clitipho “compares with the relationships between Roman masters and slaves outside the theatre” (71), an impossible question without fairly extensive background knowledge of Roman slave practices and laws. Overall, though, the questions will successfully

generate discussions enabling students to discover knowledge in collaboration with their teachers.

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