

BOOK REVIEW

Music in Roman Comedy. By TIMOTHY J. MOORE. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pp. xvi + 452. Hardback, \$114.00. ISBN 978-1-107-00648-5.

Fourteen years after *The Theatre of Plautus: Playing to the Audience* (1998) and almost simultaneously with his overview of Roman theatre in the *Greece & Rome* “Texts and Contexts” series (2012), Timothy Moore contributes another valuable, lucidly written book for which both the specialist and the lay reader owe him a debt of gratitude. Moore’s book capitalizes on a large body of previous work on the issue of *palliata* metrics and music, which makes for the most substantial difference between Greek and Roman New Comedy. Never before, however, has there been such an illuminating association of rhythm and melody with the performance style, the dramatic structure and, above all, the meaning of Plautus and Terence’s works.

Music, Moore argues, is anything but a mere condiment in *comoedia palliata*: played by a virtuoso flute player (*tibicen*), who stands conspicuously on or in front of the stage, music accompanies the actors for the better part of a Roman comic performance, determining the nature and the pace of their delivery and defining their gestures and movements. More importantly, music functions as the major structuring device of the plays, which generally unfold along the tracks of a musical pattern. This consists, in succession, of passages in unaccompanied verse usually providing exposition and imparting crucial information (most commonly iambic senarii), units in a variety of rhythms and melodies (polymetry) marking significant entrances, heightening emotion, etc., and then long stretches of accompanied meters (usually trochaic septenarii), which further the plot. Additionally, by way of music the Roman playwright manipulates expectations, creating pleasurable surprise as assumptions are verified or disappointed, and determines audience response: specific meters are routinely associated with particular type-scenes and emotions, whereas changes of musical rhythm can mark significant turns in the flow of the drama. On a deeper level, music in Roman comedy is a method of characterization (associating characters and situations with specific meters, rhythms and melodies, and manipulating audience sympathies

towards the *dramatis personae*), even an ideological tool contributing significantly to comedy's carnivalesque inversion of everyday mores.

The book consists of an Introduction, ten chapters forming three distinctive parts (Chapters 2–4: music and the arts of the *tibicen* and the actor; Chapters 5–8: the musical input of the playwright; Chapters 9–10: two case studies), and five appendices.

The Introduction looks generally into Roman music and our sources of information thereon. Chapter 1, exploiting an impressive bulk of comparative material from various ancient and contemporary music traditions, focuses on the often-neglected star of Roman theatre, the *tibicen*, the various kinds of flute (*tibia*) at his disposal, and his most important playing techniques. Chapters 2 and 3 scrutinize the precise nature and the different varieties of the *palliata* actor's song and dance. Chapter 4 ("Melody and rhythm") examines the *tibicen* and the actor in combination, exploring the sophisticated interaction and cooperation between the two.

Chapters 5–8 turn to the playwright's input in the musical outlook of Roman comic performance. Chapter 5, one of the most enlightening parts of the book, is an impressive exposition of the meaningful (not at all random) use of meter in the comedies of Plautus and Terence, which does away with two prevailing myths at once: that meter is used by Roman playwrights in a casual manner, or, the contrary, that each meter has a rigidly, almost deterministically defined ethos, which cannot be toyed with. Roman comic meters, Moore counters, differing in orderliness, frequency and distribution, are malleable tools, used with a view both to fulfilling and to breaking conventional expectations and connected with issues of great hermeneutic substance, such as marking a change in dramatic pace and emotional intensity or distinguishing less sympathetic characters from those more worthy of the audience's sympathies (iambic senarii, for instance, are associated mostly with old men). Establishing such audience expectations, the use of meter can also function as an intertextual marker both between and across plays.

Chapter 6 surveys the numerous different ways in which Roman playwrights arranged their verses and achieved variation within individual metrical elements and lines. Chapter 7 shows conclusively how musical patterns, namely the alteration between musical and non-musical moments, are the key structuring elements of all Roman comedies. Finally, Chapter 8 analyses the principles that govern polymetry in *comedia palliata* (association of polymetry with specific units of thought and emotions, the pursuit of contrast and competition between

characters, and the achievement of symmetry). It also displays the different types of polymetric passages (six types in total) in Plautus and Terence.

Chapters 9 and 10 offer revealing close readings of, respectively, Plautus' *Pseudolus* and Terence's *Adelphoe* in terms of their use of music.

The five appendices concluding the book are extremely useful: Appendix I offers a comprehensive catalogue of all meters used in Plautus and Terence by number and percentage of verses and metrical elements. Appendix II shows the distribution of distinct meters to different characters according to gender, status and type. Appendix III provides information on the diverse types of accompanied and unaccompanied meters, as well as on meter changes, per play. Appendix IV lists all the instances in which the usual structural sequence of iambic senarii–polymetric units–trochaic septenarii is not kept. Finally, Appendix V catalogues all meter types other than iambic senarii and trochaic septenarii used in Plautus and Terence by number of verses and metrical elements as well as by metrical context (meter before and meter after).

Music in Roman Comedy boasts a rare combination of virtues. The book addresses the *palliata* specialist but also the more generally-minded theatre scholar and the music historian. It is, all at once, a sine-qua-non work of reference (apart from the appendices, it includes a twenty-page bibliography and several informative tables) and an exegetical essay touching the very core of *comoedia palliata*. It is both a technical handbook and an enjoyable read to be perused with ease from cover to cover (Moore's smooth and unpretentious writing style, the clear transitions from section to section and from chapter to chapter, the frequent recaps, and the ample cross-referencing facilitate this to the fullest). Moore offers an exhaustive and cogent analysis of all kinds of available evidence on Roman music, debunking many time-honored misconceptions; for instance, that *palliata* actors only mimed the *cantica*, which were actually sung by professional singers; that an actor with a strong and clear voice was more important in tragedy rather than in comedy; that Roman comic performance was a thoroughly improvised event resembling the *Commedia dell'arte* (Moore compares it rather to the *kyōgen* comedies of Japan, where everything is exhaustively rehearsed ahead of time, without this impeding the performance being funny); or that choice of meter was random or inflexible. Moore also fine-tunes the common idea that Western musical performance genres are a clear analogue of Roman *comoedia palliata*: there are significant analogies indeed, but there are also major differences that call for caution (Roman comedy was much

simpler, musically speaking, than modern opera, whereas its basic approach to musical structure was opposite to that of modern musical genres).

All in all, this is a book bound to make a major difference in the field of Roman comedy. At the moment it is rather pricey, but a paperback is certainly on the way.

ANTONIS K. PETRIDES

Open University of Cyprus, apetrides@ouc.ak