

BOOK REVIEW

Plautus: Casina. By DAVID CHRISTENSON. London, UK and New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. Pp. x + 162. Paperback, \$17.46. ISBN: 13: 978-1-350-020535.

Terence: Andria. By SANDER M. GOLDBERG. London, UK and New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. Pp. xiv + 142. Paperback, \$24.95. ISBN: 978-1-350-020627.

Bloomsbury Ancient Comedy Companions, a new set of survey volumes launched by Bloomsbury Academic, under the general editorship of Toph Marshall and Niall Slater, aspires to publish general overviews of the surviving comic plays of Greece and Rome, accessible to anybody interested in reliable introductions to these great works, Classics students and non-specialists alike. The Ancient Comedy series is the latest branch to be added to the *Bloomsbury Companions* series which offers in single-volume studies comprehensive reference works for major individual works or research areas in the humanities: each volume contributes a detailed overview of the subject under study, surveys the *status quaestionis*, identifies the key themes, offers a detailed reading of the play and points out its significance across the centuries—all these in no more than 150 pages, an ample bibliography included. The survey of Plautus' *Casina* by David Christenson, along with a survey volume on Terence's *Andria* by Sander Goldberg, and a volume on Aristophanes' *Peace* by Ian Storey, who already has produced a volume on Euripides' *Suppliant Women* for another of *Bloomsbury Companions* sub-series (Companions to Greek and Roman Tragedy), are the three volumes that open the Ancient Comedy sub-series.

The volumes of *Casina* and *Andria* expectedly set the bar high. As the inaugural studies, the two volumes operate also as introductions to the surveys on the other plays of Plautus and Terence. Both Christenson and Goldberg are leading experts in the field of Roman comedy and authors of influential and widely-cited

studies and both, each in his own style of approach, offer lucid, highly readable and informative overviews of the two plays and their respective contexts.

Plautus' *Casina* is an extraordinary comedy, reputed for its exuberant sexuality, and its boldness to test the boundaries of propriety and cross multiple lines (of gender, class, age), which probably was a leading reason for its considerable success in Roman republican times, both during Plautus' lifetime and in the decades to follow, but also among the comic dramatists of the humanistic and renaissance centuries. Christenson structures his discussion of the play in five chapters that deal with: an introduction to Plautine Comedy (Chapter 1); the social-historical context (Chapter 2); *Casina* in Performance, the book's *tour-de-force* (Chapter 3); the play's main themes (Chapter 4); and a survey of the considerable history of *Casina*'s reception (Chapter 5). The book opens with an alphabetical list of Plautus' 21 surviving plays and a brief statement explaining the rationale and the principal goals of the project. By way of introduction, the eighteen pages of Chapter 1 offer all the information a complete novice to Roman comic drama needs in order to begin appreciating *Casina*: the opening and the closing units are devoted to the play and frame an overview of the history, anatomy and performance of Roman comedy. At the opening of Chapter 1, DC captures his readers' attention with a brief summary of the plot and convinces them that a closer study of *Casina* is worth their while by introducing metapoetics and metacomedy as the underlying thematic force that distinguishes both the narrative development and its enactment on stage. Crossdressing is rightly set at the center of attention and convincingly introduced as the leading theme of the play, while DC judiciously closes the chapter by remarking on the self-referentiality of "novus" that transcribes a recurrent and no less deciding element of Plautine dramaturgy: the anxiety of influence.

Chapter 2 (19-34) discusses the social trends and tensions in Rome following the end of the second Carthaginian war, which may explain the emphasis on the culturewars of the era, including the militaristic and political language throughout, the master-slave binary, Cleostrata's dominance in plot-fashioning and plot-directing and Pardalisca's performance in light of the Bacchanalian affair of 186 BCE.

In Chapter 3 Christenson reads and at the same time interprets the play, scene by scene and unit by unit (35-80). I find this the most illuminating part of the book and typical of Christenson's methodological approach to Roman comic drama. His analysis combines several perspectives of interpreting the play and

systematically explains how these interlock constantly and in clever ways. Metapoetics and metatheatricality predominate, of course, as role-playing and cross-dressing are the core themes of the play, along with an unusually high emphasis on sexuality, with omnipresence and explicitness often stunning even for Plautus' exuberant taste. Plautus ingeniously nearly turns on its head the unwritten convention that sexual acts should never be performed on the *palliata* stage, by portraying his leading character as a sex-obsessed old man, whose mind, speech and thought are overrun by sex, and whose appetite does not discriminate between male and female; and by including too many narrative descriptions of attempted but failed sex. The Plautine audience is tempted to visualize with the eyes of their imagination the offstage sex, simultaneously and quasi-antagonistically with the descriptions verbalized by eye-witnesses. In this respect, the dramatist draws the audience both on stage and off stage into Lysidamus' bedroom—which thus becomes an extension of the actual stage, to Plautus' triumphant overcoming of dramatic convention at the same time he technically observes it!

Chapter 4 (81-99) succinctly treats (or rather, revisits individually since all of them received ample discussion in the course of the play's interpretation in the previous chapter) one by one the play's major themes: sexuality and sexual violence; the performance of gender and the significance of transvestitism in bringing this out more effectively; the interlocking of food and sexual appetite (all visual: incarnated by Lysimachus), and spices and scent (all invisible: felt only in the suggestive smell of "Casina")—sexuality and sensuality; and the masterminding role of Cleostrata, who assumes the part traditionally assigned to the clever slave and as a result offers one of the most sympathetic portrayals of the bossy matron on the Plautine stage.

For Christenson, *Casina* is "one of Plautus's most sophisticated comedies" (81) and to this attest the diverse and ingenious ways in which Renaissance and post-Renaissance dramatists were inspired by this play. The fifth and final chapter surveys the reception of this most unusual play. The opening section offers a brief overview of the transmission of Plautine texts throughout Antiquity, the peculiarity of the texts of *fabula palliata* that were subjected to ongoing change as every new staging of an older play included numerous alterations, without control, until their canonization in Late Antiquity. The rest of the chapter traces *Casina's* reception in the western dramatic tradition, first in Italian and English Renaissance comedy,

starting with Girolamo Beraldo's *Cassina* at the dawn of the 16th century only (1501) and including among other plays Machiavelli's *Clizia*, which receives by far the most detailed discussion of all receptions, spreading across several pages, and Shakespeare's selective employment of *Casina* elements in the *Comedy of Errors* and the *Merry Wives of Windsor*; and subsequently in 17th-century drama, centering on the reception of *Casina* in Beaumarchais' *The Marriage of Figaro*, which being a play relatively well known also receives a relatively detailed analysis. The last three pages of the chapter identify briefly possible influences of distinct *Casina* themes, especially crossdressing and male homoerotic play, in modern cinema. The volume closes with a table of *Casina*'s structure scene by scene, and a simplified metrical outline, noting the speaking, singing and dancing sections.

Sander Goldberg offers a similarly engaging critical introduction to Terence's *Andria*, while following a different methodological approach. His study spreads over five chapters, as well (preceded by a table of abbreviations, a preface and a brief biographical note). Chapter 1 (1-12) discusses the state of Roman comedy prior to Terence, concerned with asking all the necessary questions (how the Roman drama appeared, who Livius Andronicus was, how early plays were produced, who/what contributed to the instant popularity of the *palliata*, who attended these early performances, etc.), briefly going over the characteristics of the plays (plots, characters, music, etc.) and offering possible answers or suggestions in the place thereof. Students with limited experience in the study of ancient performance will find exciting the employment of computer technology for the reconstruction of the early stage and the overall theatrical experience (6) – Goldberg revisits and discusses the practical aspects of staging a performance in more detail and with the aid of modern technology in a recent article appropriately titled "Theater without theaters" (*TAPhA* 148.1: 2018, 139-72).

Given that *Andria* is the first of Terence's plays, Chapter 2 (13-25) takes on the issue of the poet's persistent stressing of his *novitas* (nearly in every extradiegetic prologue, Terence underscores that he is a new poet who fends off attacks by older poets) and explores the reasons for his success given his restraint style, contrary to the ekphrastic and kinetic exuberance of Plautus. For Goldberg, rightly, Terence's innovativeness is invested in a combination, on the one hand, of "Menandrian" characterization, the construction of characters of restrained exuberance and based on the New Comedy models as staged in Menander, and, on the other, of plot development with twists and turns, even inconsistencies, that

regularly remind one of Plautus. Factors that may have influenced Terence's dramaturgy include the changing attitudes in Roman society, the more conspicuous role of women, the demands of an experienced audience inviting experimentation and revival of the Plautine tradition – trends that justify the opposition against the young dramatist who was attacked by the earlier generation of comic dramatists with accusations against the legitimacy and originality of his compositions.

Chapter 3 (27-50) discusses the play by following the unravelling of the plot. The latter is divided in four larger units (prologue; exposition; development; resolution) that follow the course of the "problem" around which the play's action is built. The problem in *Andria* follows the New Comedy model—a pair of young lovers cannot legitimately marry; further complications (the young man is pressured by his father to marry someone else, and he does not have the heart to refuse) threaten to tear their union apart; what is more, the wily slave who typically undertakes to resolve the impasse in a *palliata* fails to do so, and only thanks to an unexpected twist of fate the desired (and expected by convention) happy end is reached. Goldberg's analysis in each unit begins with a brief summary of the play. It then moves on to illustrate the various ways in which Terence adapts some Menandrian convention he conspicuously maintains; his investment in the composition of realistic characters with real feelings at the expense of exaggeration and caricature; his disregard for tying properly all loose ends when this lies beyond his primary concerns. Chapter 3 closes with a succinct discussion of the identity of Terence's audience, with Goldberg siding with Wright's theory of a universally popular Terence, who attracted an audience of supporters numerous enough for him to continue his writing, maintain his popularity, build a career and gain the endorsement of a leading actor and his troupe.

Chapter's 4 and 5 (the second half of the volume—51-100) are devoted to the afterlife of *Andria*, which was remarkable, as it had a centuries-long tradition as a textbook, inspired the production of other dramas and was itself brought on stage, and from the Renaissance onwards it became the subject of many philological commentaries and translations. Chapter 4 begins expectedly with Donatus, Eugraphius and Calliopius, grammarians of Late Antiquity and the most notable ancient commentators of Terence, and by listing examples of Donatus' comments on selective passage of *Andria*, Goldberg shows the continuous popularity of

Terence all the way through the end of the classical world. The plays of Hrotsvith of Gandersheim attest to the continuing popularity of Terence, in Hrotsvith's case as source of inspiration for new literature—illustrated through discussion of appropriately chosen excerpts from Hrotsvith's text in comparison with the passage of *Andria* that served as direct inspiration. Along with the revival of theater, the Renaissance brought a revival of Terence's *Andria* as drama, and several of those early performances of *Andria* are discussed in the later part of Chapter 3. Goldberg's focus, however, sets on three productions that were essentially creative adaptations of *Andria* and went on to a celebrated literary career of their own, including two dramas, Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* (18th cent.); Abildgaard's, *The Andria series* (early 19th cent.); and a novel, Thornton Wilder's *The Woman of Andros* (1930).

The fifth and final chapter (79-100) is devoted to some of the most important (for a variety of reasons) translations of *Andria* from Machiavelli and *Terens in Englysh* (both dated ca. 1520) to two widely used contemporary translations, Betty Radice's (Penguin) and Peter Brown's (Oxford), and is particularly useful for showing the diverse approaches across centuries and cultures, and the as many reactions to the same set of perennial questions tied to the interlingual transference of a sophisticated literary text. The section prior to the bibliography and the notes includes two brief appendices, of Donatus' critical comments on Menander in his *Andria* commentary, and of a detailed comparative chronology of Terence and his era.

Both Christenson's and Goldberg's volumes employ endnotes rather than footnotes, evidently in order to render the main body of the survey less disruptive and more attractive to the undergraduate reader or the scholar eager for a fast read. These notes are mostly bibliographical, substantiating the authors' analysis and suggesting items for further reading, though additional explanatory and interpretive material is not infrequent. Similarly, the two critics preface their respective bibliography sections with recommendations for further reading (Goldberg's recommendations are more numerous and they are categorized in four sections—General, on Terence, on Donatus and on Menander) and a ten-page long bibliography that includes all the important publications on the two plays, thus rendering the volume a first-rate reference piece and starting point for the study of this play henceforth (though expectedly for an aspiring survey targeting primarily the English-speaking academic public, non-anglophone scholarship is limited to a

minimum—I counted about a dozen items in total, most of them notable Italian works in Christensen’s bibliography, and even fewer in Goldberg’s own).

To sum up, based on the works of Christenson and Goldberg briefly described above, Bloomsbury Ancient Comedy Companions promise an exciting new series of introductory studies of the surviving Roman comedies, some of the most entertaining and popular pieces of Roman literature. Christenson’s reading of *Casina* justifies the popularity of this highly entertaining yet provocative comic drama of Plautus and illustrates its allure to audiences and actors across time. Goldberg’s tracing of critical and literary attitudes towards *Andria* across the centuries renders Terence’s first play a true universal classic. The precise and informative analysis of both studies, the up-to-date bibliography and the slender size of the volume leave little doubt that they will become reference handbooks for academic and non-academic audiences alike.

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