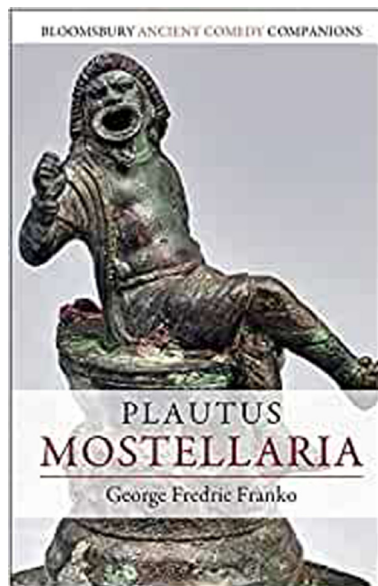


Plautus: Mostellaria

Franko (G.F.) Pp. xvi + 159. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. Cased, £70. ISBN: 978-1-350-18841-9

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The book forms part of a series of Ancient Comedy Companions from this publisher and it presumes neither a knowledge of Latin nor a familiarity with Roman Comedy. However, it does assume an interest in dramaturgy and an interest in ancient Roman society and culture.

A brief *Plot Summary*, *Dramatis Personae*, and a metrical synopsis which describes the play's *arcs* (units of action defined by metre) introduce a breezy first section which covers the play's background, translation/adaptation and what might be called

Homeric echoes. It is here the Franko stretches his brief somewhat, I think; the *Mostellaria* is surely not a deliberate reversal of the *Odyssey*, even if Plautus might have had Livius Andronicus in mind. However, there is, as always in this book, food for thought.

The second section, *Foundations and Frames*, deals with slavery and the precarious position, in particular, of slave women. Franko perhaps leans a little too heavily on modern sensibilities here; whilst one can import today's attitudes, a Roman comedy must stand on its own merits and is, of course, a product of its own society. Nevertheless, there is much that is informative, including the hybrid nature of the *palliata* and the role played by money in the play.

It is in the third section, *Staging Mostellaria*, where Franko seems to be at his most comfortable and it shows in his writing. He ranges across song (and dance), metatheatre, topical reference and the ambitious interplay of metre, farce and improvisation and stage-play. I learnt much from this section, even though I have produced and directed the play.

A briefer fourth section, *Afterlife and Ghost Lights*, alludes to what we can tease from the text about the play's transmission, but also usefully introduces comparison with *The Taming of the Shrew* (its Tranio-Grumio prologue), Heywood's *The English Traveller* (which contains pastiche of the *Mostellaria*) and Jonson's *The Alchemist*. Franko neatly elucidates the debt owed to Plautus by the three English playwrights. He finishes this section with a disquisition on *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (how could he not?), which may be much better known to most than early English drama. This leads nicely to a section (Tranio Trickster) which draws the many strands together.

There are four Appendices, copious Notes, an 11-page Bibliography and an Index, all invaluable. They are the cherry on top of a very digestible cake. This study would certainly be a very valuable resource for anyone studying the play in Latin or in translation.

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Aristophanes: Peace

Fraser (G.) Pp. 249, Independently published, 2022. Paper, £12.50. ISBN: 978-0-9775933-5-4

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This is an intriguing volume, produced as a labour of love by – I think – a non-classicist. Nevertheless, it displays throughout a thoroughly academic familiarity with the play. Fraser's original plan was a to produce an interlinear translation, the better to elucidate the play's 'mysteries' to students and other readers. The awkwardnesses inherent in this task then encouraged Fraser to produce a verse translation which is modern, colloquial and, for the most part, comically effective. Why not put both in the same book, he concluded.

Fraser clearly found the verse translation congenial; it romps along with its hero, Trygaeus, at some pace, and it achieves its purpose of elucidating the play for the modern reader. Fraser is Australian, so we get a mixture of British and American colloquialism, but little really jars. The rhymes are occasionally a little forced, but sometimes, it might be argued, for comic effect.

Fraser has elided or smoothed over some of the political/historical references, in the interest of readability; one cannot blame him. He is also refreshingly direct, so be prepared for some words not normally found in English translations.

The interlineal (*sic*) translation will be a positive boon for anyone wanting to get closer to the Greek original; it manages – just – to stay faithful and make good or adequate sense, despite the occasional harshness. The ascription of parts is in Greek capitals throughout, so Greekless readers will have to learn the alphabet or find themselves constantly checking the *dramatis personae* (which is bilingual).

There is a short bibliography, of which half the volumes consulted were published in the 19th century. There is also a bilingual glossary. The latter is occasionally deficient in detail.