Michael FONTAINE, *Funny Words in Plautine Comedy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, 327 pp., ISBN 978-0-19-534144-7, ₤ 49.00.

In *Funny Words in Plautine Comedy* Michael FONTAINE (hence F.) argues that critics in the past have often been mistaken when interpreting verbal ambiguities in Plautine scripts. These mistakes, he posits, have led to serious misconceptions that continue to affect Plautine scholarship today. F.'s ambitious design is to use philology and textual criticism in order to offer a new reading of not merely a series of Plautine *loci*, but of the aesthetics of Plautine comedy as a whole. The term "funny words" in the title denotes made-up or misused words that are involved in those elusive puns whose interpretation depends upon readers' and spectators' unpredictable perceptions. Plautine puns are by no means a tangential issue: as any reader of Plautus – beginner or veteran – will attest, ambiguity is a pervasive feature of Plautus' language. In fact, I know one expert reader of Plautus who used to have a box filled with index cards listing puns and double entendres never mentioned in Plautine scholarship. Worried about the subjective nature of such findings, he never published them. While I am not persuaded by all of F.'s arguments – particularly his characterizations of Plautus' Roman audience – I am grateful that he is undaunted enough to share his important and insightful new readings of Plautine wordplay with us.

F. realizes his bold plan – opening our eyes to the true meaning of Plautine wordplay – in five chapters. In the first, titled "Verba Perplexabilia", he focuses on near-echo, or parechesis. Among his most persuasive proposals is the re-interpretation of the famous neologism *siciliciss-it-at*, "affects a Sicilian style", in *Men.* 12. F. observes that the parallel to *graecissat* and *atticissat* in the previous line distracts our attention from the extra syllable -*it*-. To F., this syllable conveys the real joke, which alludes to the *geminatio* of syllables, the *gemini Menaechmi*, and the comedy's double plot (pp. 8–11). F. is particularly interested in those cases in which textual corruption and the general misunderstanding of the transliteration of Greek into archaic Latin (see pp. 30 f. and references) has skewed our spelling of some names of Plautine characters, imposing easy jokes where more complex puns are intended. Thus, Phronesium ("Smarty") should be Phrynesium: "Little Phryne", as written in the Vaticanus 3870. Her name would thus merely evoke the word *phronesis* – and would do so obliquely in the form of parechesis rather than as a straightforward pun (pp. 33–35). Pseudolus ("Schemer") should be spelled Pseudylus, his name a light pun on *dolus* (cf. *Ps.* 1205), not a hybrid Greco-Latin formation (pp. 30–33). By the end of the first chapter the reader can already anticipate the particular aspect of Plautine comedy F. wants to present in a new light: many of the puns he uncovers would have required a solid knowledge of Greek on the part of the audience.

F. continues to reassess Plautus' wordplay by focusing on his use of parapraxis in Chapter Two. Here, Freudian theory comes briefly into focus as the source of the term parapraxis, a translation of Freud's *Fehlleistung* (p. 37). F. both discusses known examples of such slips and offers several new suggestions. Among the latter are comments on the obscure interplay of *subuoltorium* and *subaquilum* in *Rud.* 422, which offer an excellent example of F.'s ingenuity. The term *sub-aquilum*, he proposes, draws the audience's attention to the *hydria* that Ampelisca is carrying on her head in this scene; thus, the joke involves the unattested *aqu-ilum* as calque of *hydria*. Ampelisca is therefore both "of a rather dark complexion" and "under-the-hydria", finding herself in a posture often represented in Attic vase paintings, which renders her vulnerable to Scep(h)arnio's harassment (pp. 42–47). According to F., this and several other misunderstood *loci* demonstrate that many of the puns and allusions that editors and scholars tend to miss would have required the audience to be familiar not only with Greek language but also with Greek culture (pp. 88 f.). To F., such allusions demonstrate that the *palliata* was profoundly and plausibly – rather than superficially – Greek.

Chapter Three, "Equivocation and Other Ambiguities", is devoted to Plautus' use of verbal evasions and distortions that allow the speaker to be truthful while seeming to lie; such equivocations

involve both tricks of logic and slips of pronunciation, which allow two characters taking part in a conversation to interpret the same words differently. F. discusses several examples of this type of verbal play, always with the eye on parechesis. He suggests, for example, that in the famous scene from the *Persa*, in which the pimp Dordalus interviews Virgo, we should not hear (in 623–627) a repetition, Lucris (...) Lucris, but rather, the parechsis Locris/Lucris (pp. 93 f.). F. argues that not only Lucris'/Locris' name but in fact all of the Latin names in Plautus are nothing but misunderstood parecheses. Thus the name of Peniculus in the *Menaechmi*, for example, must be emended to Penicylus and evokes the Greek word for toupee – *penike* (pp. 102–110). F. goes on to argue that ambiguities and puns are truly essential to the understanding and appreciation of the plays: puns bridge logical transitions (pp. 112–114), work with visual cues (e.g., pp. 115, 121), stress irony (e.g., pp. 115–120), and exploit meter (p. 138) and prosody (pp. 141–147). Bilingual wordplay, he concludes, is thus central to the Plautine poetics.

In Chapter Four, "Innuendo and the Audience", F. finally turns to the question of the audience and their knowledge of Greek. The conceit of this chapter is that by identifying the cultural references behind Plautine allusions, we will discover what his audience knew and who they were. F.'s identifies numerous allusions that would require the audience to know Greek (pp. 150–163) and comments on those Plautine lines in which unusual expressions, such as *prandium cenatile*, *meliores* [*cenas*] (*St.* 222–225), seem to be advertised as calques directly taken form a Greek text (pp. 163–190).

In brief, Plautine artistry, according to F., would have been accessible only to literate connoisseurs of Greek. In second-century Rome, he posits, such connoisseurs could only have been found among the Philhellene elite. F. further argues that the elite indeed attended the performances, occupying nearly all available seats. Small spaces (F. cites GOLDBERG's estimate of a maximum of 2,000 in one specific case) would only have accommodated a small percentage of Rome's population of ca. 350,000 (pp. 183 f.)[1]. Since the senate law of 194 BCE guaranteed theater seats to the 300 senators (p. 185), there would hardly have been place in the audience for anyone but the senators and their retinues. The implications of this proposal are revolutionary. Instead of constructing Plautus' *palliata* as a carnivalesque genre of popular theater (as many critiques have since Erich SEGAL's seminal *Roman Laughter*), we would, according to F., have to see it as a sophisticated and exclusive entertainment for the Philhellene aristocrats. Several scholars have criticized F.'s representation of the audience of Roman comedy, pointing out that his arguments about the size of performance space are not decisive[2].

For my part, I have misgivings about F.'s assumptions about Roman Hellenism. While, I think, he is generally right in drawing our attention to Plautus' Hellenism, manifest in his wordplay, his riddles, and literary reminiscences of Sappho and Callimachus (pp. 192–200), I would take issue with his perception that Hellenism separates the aristocrats from the rest of the population. Hellenism often encompassed – indeed fostered – hybrid identities, and the Roman Hellenism would not have been different[3]. The practice of performing Greek plays in Latin, during a public

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[1] See S.M. GOLDBERG, *Plautus on the Palatine*, JRS LXXXVIII 1998, pp. 1–10.

[2] During the seminar "The Audience of Roman Comedy" on January 8, 2011 at the APA meeting in San Antonio, Texas, several counter arguments were proposed. For example, as Sander GOLDBERG observed in his paper *Terence and the populi studium*, the law does not guarantee that the senators were always present, only that they had priority, if they wished to attend. Moreover, as Amy RICHLIN noted in her paper *Talking to Slaves in the Plautine Audience*, there is a distinct possibility that the show would have been taken on the road, and presented to far wider audiences.

[3] See, e.g., G. BOYS-STONES, B. GRAZIOZI, Ph. VASUNIA in their introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of Hellenic Studies*, Oxford 2009 (p. XIII); on Greco-Roman culture in particular, see A. BARCHIESI's chapter in the same volume on *Roman Perspectives on the Greeks*, pp. 98–113 (here at 109 f.).

holiday, and in a public space, strikes one as a gesture of inclusion, not exclusion, and as an effort to forge a hybrid cultural discourse, rather than to mark the separateness of the educated elite. Drama can accommodate diverse levels of both spectatorship and readership. While some Plautine references might have reached only the cognoscenti – and it is good to remember that among the third- and second-century cognoscenti were the likes of Livius Andronicus and Ennius, both former slaves – there is no reason to assume that only elite spectators could have been familiar with Greek language and culture. In fact, many well-educated individuals would have been Greek and of low social status; recall the rhetoricians and philosophers repeatedly exiled from Rome[4]. This type is perhaps portrayed by the pretentious *Graeci palliati* crowding the Roman streets in the *Curculio* (287–298). Many Roman slaves, not necessarily intellectuals for hire, might have been bilingual. It is worth noting that both Plautus and Terence portray heavy use of Greek words as characteristic of the speech of slaves and pimps – not of upper class males[5]. It is the slaves who engage most often in all the code-switching and code-mixing that enables bilingual wordplay[6]. If these characteristics of Plautine language reflect the nature of Latin bilingualism in the second century BCE, we should assume that slaves, such as those whom the prologue to the *Poenulus* describes as sneaking into the audience (cf. 21–25), were quite likely bilingual.

F.'s final chapter on double entendre in Plautus introduces the one aspect of linguistic play that F. considers genuinely Roman. He begins with a series of puns that he believes could have been derived from Plautus' Greek models. These center on the *adulescens* and his penis/phallus (*Most*. 319–329), suggest the Phoenicians' alleged preference for cunnilingus (*Poen*. 59–61), to allude to a fear of the *vagina dentata* (*Truc*. 350–353). Conversely, F. argues that sexual jokes alluding to young men's inclination to play the passive role in homoerotic intercourse are probably originally Plautine. (It is a pity that he does not engage with the scholarship on Roman attitudes toward homosexuality to explain his assumptions.) Most persistent among such jokes are double entendres suggesting that parasites often carry on relationships with their patrons (pp. 223–246). F. posits that such jokes go back to the tradition of Atellana and are Plautus' addition to the otherwise Greek aesthetics of the *palliata*. The placement of this final chapter, after his radical conclusions about the Greek nature of Plautine word-play, is quite intriguing. It is as though, having argued lucidly and forcefully for a profound and pervasive Greekness of Plautus' theater, F. realized that he could not escape the specter of what he dismisses as "the Greco-Roman blur" – that the tension between the two cultures is after all essential to the aesthetics of the *palliata*.

What then should we make of F.'s impressive display of ingenuity and philological erudition? Wit and language games are matters of perception. There is no foolproof way of distinguishing a linguistic coincidence from an intended pun. However, even if some of F.'s finds were to be put down to accidents of translation/adaptation, enough remains to corroborate his thesis that the *palliata* can be comfortably situated within the Hellenistic aesthetics of language play. Thanks to F.'s discussion of an array of Plautine jokes, the playwright now appears before us, more than ever, as an *artifex verborum*: a keen observer of Greek and Latin morphology and semantics, expert at taking advantage of potential ambiguities. F. also successfully argues (quite correctly, I think) that allusions to Greek literature are purposeful and deserve more attention than recent scholarship has tended to accord them.

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[4] Cf. E. GRUEN, *Studies in Greek Culture and Roman Policy*, Leiden 1990, p. 177 and his references.

[5] On the distribution of loan words, see R. Maltby, *The Distribution of Greek Loan Words in Terence*, CQ XXXV 1985, pp. 110–123.

[6] On slaves and bilingualism in Plautus' Rome, see S. SWAIN, *Bilingualism in Cicero? The Evidence of Code-Switching*, in: N.J. ADAMS, M. JANSE, S. SWAIN (eds.), *Bilingualism in Ancient Society*, Oxford 2001, pp. 128–167 (here at 130 f.) and his references.

Where I differ from F. is in my vision of the intellectual *milieux* of third- and second-century Rome. While in F's view, the aristocratic audience of the *palliata* was separated from the less educated populace by their Hellenistic cultural competence, I would argue that Plautus' Rome already was a Hellenistic city, an urban society, in which bilingualism, even polyglossia, was not exceptional[7]. To be sure, the elite policy-makers played a leading role in Hellenizing Roman literature through a system of patronage[8], but multiculturalism would not have been a preserve of the aristocracy, but a fact of life for merchants and slaves, who would have watched the plays[9].

These objections, however, do not diminish the value of F.'s undertaking. On the contrary: even if one is not persuaded that every single of the puns F. disentangles for us is more than a coincidence, his book is beyond doubt an important contribution to Plautine scholarship. F.'s imaginative use of philology and textual criticism and his insistence that we rethink our assumptions about Plautine theater make for a most thought-provoking book. I strongly recommend it to anyone seriously interested in Roman comedy.

Dorota Dutsch
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[7]   Recall the Punic passages in the *Poenulus* (esp. 930–949) or the *tria corda* of Plautus' younger contemporary, Ennius (Gell. *NA* XVII 17). Cf. N.J. ADAMS, S. SWAIN in the introduction to *Bilingualism...* (n. 6), pp. 16 f.

[8]   On patronage, see D. KONSTAN, *Friendship and Patronage*, in: S.J. HARRISON (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Latin Literature*, Oxford 2005, pp. 345–359.

[9]   On slaves, see above, n. 6; on merchants, see ADAMS's discussion of epigraphic evidence: N.J. ADAMS, *Bilingualism at Delos*, in: *Bilingualism...* (n. 6), pp. 103–127.