

Plautus and the English Renaissance of Comedy. Richard F. Hardin.
Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2018. x + 196 pp. \$90.

It is extremely hard, dear reader, to restrain my enthusiasm for this book. Hardin contends that the Renaissance rediscovery of Plautus (fl. 200 BCE)—as opposed to Terence, his younger peer—was a crucial ingredient in the creation of European drama as we know it. And Hardin does more than just argue that contention; to my mind, he proves it conclusively. His is an exciting and important monograph, jam-packed with arresting observations, the telling detail, and well-chosen quotations. It belongs in every research library and on the shelf of any reader interested in Roman comedy, the Renaissance, and theater history.

The first two chapters (reworked from previously published articles) establish the story of how it is that we have the twenty-one comedies of Plautus that survive today. After a period of relative neglect in the Middle Ages came a fascinating recovery in the Renaissance that began in Germany, crossed the Alps to help spark the Italian Renaissance, and then recrossed the Alps to help spark the Northern Renaissance. From my classicist's perspective, Hardin has covered all the relevant research (most of it in German), and he tells the right story. He emphasizes the crucial importance of a scholarly circle in Leipzig in the early 1500s, a circle that included not only a young Joachim Camerarius, but also his enigmatic teacher, Veit Werler. Beyond the narrative, Hardin also compiles a tremendously helpful and detailed timeline—the first such anywhere—of ca. sixty editions, translations, performances, and imitations of Plautine comedy from 1428 to 1600. These two chapters are now the go-to place for anyone interested in the Renaissance recovery of Plautus.

The second three chapters deal with the influence of Plautine comedy on Shakespeare and English comedy. In Hardin's view, the influence was crucial and it explains many features in Shakespeare—or to put it more strongly: no Plautus, no Shakespeare, at least as we know him. To show this, Hardin transcends one-to-one comparisons of characters, language, or motifs, and takes us so high up that all the contours at last come into view. He demonstrates how whole plots and webs of interactions are indebted to Plautus: the breaching of the fourth wall, the jokes, the puns, the asides, the slapstick, the telltale names—those elements are indebted to Plautus so directly and so thoroughly that we must not assume they arose independently. He walks us through many examples of English comedy from about 1560 to 1640 (especially Shakespeare, Jonson, and Middleton). In each he highlights features that are in great and abundant evidence in Plautus, but that simply do not appear in drama of the early sixteenth century—in addition to those just mentioned, Hardin also shows how aspects of dialogue, metatheatricality, characterization, and atmosphere all flow from the Roman comedian. In reading these chapters, I found myself nodding along and thinking to myself, "You dummy! If it were a snake, it would've bit you!"

This monograph is a sparkling gem, and, with its tight concentration on its theme, a model of its kind. It is also the clear product of long research and sustained reflection. I wondered how much investigation must lie behind a single sentence such as this: “Handwritten lines from the 1490s by Jakob Wimpheling (1450–1528) suggest that while teaching at Heidelberg he may have mounted the first performance of Plautus in Germany” (66). In fact, most sentences in the book give you that impression, the “iceberg effect.” That is why I am deeply impressed with Hardin’s bold conclusion: “A narrow definition of ‘the Renaissance,’ in fact, would be the period in which comedies were revitalized” (2). Or, if I may again rephrase that thought, the recovery of Plautus’s comedies is tantamount to a huge part of the Renaissance itself.

On page 195 the author’s blurb says Hardin retired in 2009 from his appointment at the University of Kansas in order to write this book. A high cost! And, I say with great admiration, well worth it. *Plautus and the English Renaissance of Comedy* is a masterpiece.

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Greek Tragic Women on Shakespearean Stages. Tanya Pollard.
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. x + 332 pp. \$70.

Central to Tanya Pollard’s thesis in *Greek Tragic Women on Shakespearean Stages* is the supposed collaboration between George Peele and Shakespeare on *Titus Andronicus*, and what Shakespeare learned, as a result, about particular features of Euripidean tragedy from Peele. Hecuba and Iphigenia emerge as “synecdoches for the tragic theater” and “especially for the sympathetic transmission of emotion between bodies with which it was linked” (2). In addition, a third, Alcestis, is claimed as the authority to whom the origins of tragicomic form can be traced (188). Throughout her six chapters, six appendixes, and a meticulous collection of footnotes (sometimes unnecessarily repetitive), Pollard adduces a surprising amount of evidence in support of her claim that despite the infrequency of translations directly into English of Euripides from the Greek, his texts were transmitted via Latin, and that references to Hecuba, Iphigenia, Alcestis, and Medea, and to theatrical situations resembling some of their predicaments (as passionate victim or as active heroine), can be traced through Shakespeare’s tragedies (chapter 3), comedies (chapter 4), tragicomedies (chapter 5), and, surprisingly, in Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair* (chapter 6).

One of Pollard’s objectives is to revitalize source studies, but she is periodically aware of the difficulties of doing so. She dismisses Bloom’s Oedipal account of the anxiety of male influence (14), though Bloom himself had already ruled out Shakespeare and the early modern period from his Freudian thesis. Instead, she invokes Longinus’s account of the identification of “literary influence and creativity with a Euripidean model of the