

Poets, translators and clever slaves in Ancient Rome

3:30pm, Friday 8th October, Elsie Locke 611



Seated poet with masks of new comedy. 1st century BCE-1st century CE. Princeton University Art Museum.

The beginnings of Latin literature are linked to professional outsiders who engaged in extensive translations of Greek literary texts. In this paper I focus on a few prologues and metatheatrical moments embedded in the comedies of Plautus, a poet operating in the early second century BCE. I argue that Plautus generated “contact zones” between the fictional world displayed on stage and the everyday life of the spectators through a

number of mirroring games. As Plautine comedies were staged during major festivals, these zones fulfilled a civic role by mediating multiple perceptions of reality; at the same time, they opened up alternative or even contrasting views on the world. Moreover, to Plautus (and other poets) these spaces offered the possibility to reflect not simply on the compositional process but on their ability to navigate the world through their creative skills.

Enrica Sciarrino is Associate Professor in the Classics Department at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch. She has published extensively on early Latin literature, Roman rhetoric and oratory, Roman translation practice, and Roman sociocultural history in general. She is the author of *Cato the Censor and the Beginnings of Latin Prose. From Poetic Translation to Elite Transcription* (Ohio State University Press, 2011) and co-editor with Siobhan McElduff of *Complicating the History of Western Translation: the Ancient Mediterranean in Perspective* (St Jerome Publishing, 2011). She is currently working on a chapter for *The Cambridge History of Rhetoric* and an extensive piece on Cicero’s self-citational practices.