

## Βαχῆια Κρατίνου and the Bacchants of Plautus

In her seminal monograph *Cratinus and the Art of Comedy* (2010), Emmanuela Bakola attempts to reconstruct every facet of the theater of Cratinus in as great of depth as one can given the fragmentary state of his corpus: from elements of political satire and stage properties to paratragedy and metacomic references, her work is totalizing. One idea she dwells upon throughout is the way in which Cratinus seems to have aligned himself against the *euripidaristophanizers* (fr. 342) as a kind of old master of Comedy in opposition to the ‘technical’ (that is, wrought by *techne*) poetry of rising sophistic *didaskaloi*, especially Eupolis and Aristophanes. In her view, Cratinus sought instead to deliberately portray his work as the product of divine inspiration, in no small part the product of copious drinking which enables his rushing torrents of words (*Pytine* fr. 198, 203). It is in this Dionysiac light that he is both mocked (*Eq.* 526–36) and later praised (*Ran.* 354–7) by Aristophanes, who tellingly hands the victory of the *agon* of *Frogs* to Aeschylus, the *Baccheios anax* (1261).

By contrast, the function of the Bacchae in Plautus has been relatively obscure, though common trends tend to show Plautus as a voice of traditional Roman values in opposition to the Bacchanal cult. MacCary’s argument that centers the justifications detailed in Livy 39 for the violent repressions in 186 proved impactful for the reference found at *Cas.* 974–82, however (1975). Flower further argues that references throughout the Plautine corpus all reflect (and helped to shape) a growing discontent with the cult practices of the Bacchanal worshipers (2000, 32). There is a great deal of evidence to this point, not least in the case of the cook of *Aulularia*, whose assault by Bacchants is given some detail (though lacks explicit connection with sexual assault; *Aul.* 408–9).

However, scholarship on Plautus' self-presentation has evolved substantially since the 1980s, and where once was the image of a rustic playwright with relatively little understanding of the works he adapted, now stands Plautus, the self-deprecating multilingual poet of aural pleasure, who was educated on the writings of high Hellenism, let alone his own genre (Christenson 2020, 2–3). Moreover, such a self-serious political perspective would seem to be somewhat incongruous with Plautus' broader skepticism about the value of didactics in comedy (Moore 1998, 67–90). As such, this paper will re-examine the place of the Bacchantes across the Plautine corpus to demonstrate that the poet's opposition to and mockery of the Bacchantes does not simply serve the goal of portraying and propagating Roman cultural values but also feeds into his self-portrayal as the supposedly "barbarous" poet of pure comedy-as-entertainment.

### Bibliography

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