PLAYING WITH YOUR ROLE IN PLAUTINE THEATER

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
Christopher William Bungard, M.A.

The Ohio State University
2008

Dissertation Committee:
Professor William Batstone, Adviser
Professor Bruce Heiden
Professor Jon Erickson
Professor Paul Iversen

Approved by

Adviser
Greek and Latin Graduate Program
Copyright by

Christopher William Bungard

2008
ABSTRACT

This dissertation seeks to open a discussion about the comedies of Titus Maccius Plautus. It focuses on plays that explore how characters’ attachments to particular roles affect the ways that they are able to interact with their world. Recent scholarship has focused on Plautus’ use of metatheater for scripting his plots. This view often sees Plautus using the stock roles of New Comedy as building blocks for his plays. Instead of being descriptive, the roles of the angry old man, the pathetic young lover, and the tricky slave have set limits to our expectations. The old man will oppose the young lover. The clever slave will masterfully beguile all. I argue that Plautus does not privilege the role, but the character’s relationship to that role. For Plautus, there is nothing essential in the role. The clever slave succeeds because of an attitude not because of his role. Provided that he does believe he is essentially his role, a free character can enjoy the same sort of comic freedom as the shape-shifting clever slave, who often plays any role he might like.

In order to examine this topic, I have focused on four plays of Plautus in particular, Pseudolus, Menaechmi, Mercator, and Captivi. By carefully examining the interactions of characters and characters’ own reflections on their situations, I have teased out a different way of approaching Plautine comedy. Plautus is not interested in the role society gives us to play, but what we do when given the chance to play that role. In taking this approach, I am interested in what Plautine theater has to say to Roman and modern audiences about our experiences off the stage, reminding us that any one given role is never sufficient for our daily interactions. We are always more than the roles we temporarily adopt, and thus, always a work in progress.
Dedicated to
all those who are funnier than they realize
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank William Batstone for further fuelling an enthusiasm for Plautus that began in a class at Denison University with Garrett Jacobsen. His class on the Bacchides my first year at The Ohio State University helped propel me along an interest in 2000 year old comedies. This project would not be what it is without the conversations that we have had about Plautus, comedy, and literary theory over the past six years. I thank him for pushing me to try and find new and interesting ways to understand what it is in ancient authors that we still find compelling for our modern lives. From the classroom to summer afternoons on the Oval over lunch, his willingness to help me develop a better understanding of my ideas will long be appreciated.

I would also like to thank Bruce Heiden for all of his input in this project. I never thought I would hear someone put a play of Plautus and Oedipus Rex in the same sentence as sophisticated plays. Though typically working on Greek epic, he has brought vigor to the project, and I consider the greatest compliment to the project to have come from him when he informed me that he would be using Pseudolus for the first time in his undergraduate course on drama. Always prompt with feedback, he has been a fine inspiration.

I am grateful to Jon Erickson and Paul Iversen for rounding out the committee.
Bringing in concerns outside the specific scope of this dissertation, particularly Paul Iversen’s interest in the Greek comic Menander, they have helped broaden the potential readership to this project and any that might follow from it.

Many thanks to the rest of the Department of Greek and Latin at The Ohio State University, faculty and graduate students, for attending and responding to countless talks presented on Plautus in preparation for this dissertation and conferences over the past two years. I would like to especially thank my dear friends and colleagues Aaron Wenzel and Yasuko Taoka. Their willingness to listen to me express my enthusiasm, my concerns, and my frustrations at all times of day has come at much needed times. Thanks are also owed to Richard Fletcher whose reactions to my ideas on Plautus during Indians games have been welcomed.

Though less responsible for this project specifically but essential to my interest in Latin, I owe a great debt of gratitude to Tom and Beth McCaffrey. They instilled in me the joy that can come from reading Latin back in my days at Stow-Munroe Falls High School. Though she has passed on far too early, Beth McCaffrey’s infectious laughter and appreciation for the absurdity inherent in human life helped put me on the path to an interest in humor in literature. The McCaffreys have inspired decades of high school Latin students, and I am thankful that long ago I decided to pursue Latin as my foreign language with them.

Thanks for many years of laughter and an admiration for the ability to bring mirth
and humor to the world are owed to my many friends from Northeast Ohio, particularly Ann and James Patterson, Steve Wolff, Dave Komito, Jeff Horak, James Hill, Rich Maskiell, Josh Witsaman, and the Kaczmarski brothers. At times while writing this dissertation, I have relied on their ability to reduce me to tears of laughter when work on the project had slowed down, appearing as an unending mountain.

Finally, I owe many thanks to my mom, dad, brothers Matt and Scott, sister-in-law Katie, grandparents, aunts, and uncles. We Bungards are a collection of oddballs as my Aunt Dee-Dee is fond to point out. Good natured, loving, but in the end, simply odd. I believe that my commitment to the humorous in the world comes from the way my family embraces opportunities to laugh, knowing how to get what needs to be done done with a bit of room to have fun in the process. I thank them for their unquestioning support as I headed off to college to study of all things Latin. Unwavering in their confidence that I would figure out how to make it work, they have supported me through it all, and I thank them from the depths of my being.
VITA

January 18, 1980 ....................... Born – Akron, Ohio

2002 ................................. B.A. Classical Languages, Classical Civilization, and History, Denison University

2004 .................................... M.A. Greek and Latin, The Ohio State University

2005 .................................... Visiting Instructor, Denison University

2002-present ......................... Graduate Teaching Associate, The Ohio State University

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Greek and Latin
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... ii
Dedication .................................................................................................................. iii
Acknowledgments ....................................................................................................... iv
Vita ................................................................................................................................... vii

Chapters:

1. Starting to Play Your Role: An Introduction ..................................................... 1
   1.1 The Question of Originality ........................................................................ 3
   1.2 Metatheater: Theater about Producing Theater ........................................ 5
   1.3 Metatheater: Theater about Life as Theatrical ......................................... 12
   1.4 The Role of the Role .................................................................................. 14

2. Fake It ‘Til You Make It: Improvising the Role of Servus Callidus in Pseudolus .................................................. 21
   2.1 Establishing the Great Improviser .............................................................. 24
   2.2 Masterly Control and the Failure to Effect Change .................................. 34
   2.3 How to Get a Girl in 3, Maybe 4, Maybe 5 Not So Easy Steps ................. 37
      2.3.1 Shaming of a Pimp ........................................................................... 37
      2.3.2 Pseudolus’ Initial Plan (Fleece a Father?) ..................................... 39
      2.3.3 Revision and a Second Plan ............................................................ 43
      2.3.4 New Character, New Plan ............................................................... 49
      2.3.5 Replan and Win a Girl ................................................................. 54
   2.4 Master and Student .................................................................................... 56
   2.5 Failure to Improvise .................................................................................. 65
   2.6 Lessons Learned ......................................................................................... 70

3. You Give a Little to Get a Little: Social and Economic Control in Menaechmi ......................................................... 74
   3.1 Menaechmus E: Man of Commerce ........................................................ 79
   3.2 Peniculus and Erotium: Adapting to Commercial Needs ....................... 91
      3.2.1 Part One: Pandering for a Meal ...................................................... 93
3.2.2 Part Two: Sweetheart for a Price ........................................ 98
3.3 Messenio: Loyal Slave .......................................................... 103
3.4 Menaechmus S: Man of Opportunity ...................................... 110
3.5 Reunion ................................................................. 120

4. You Are Your Father’s Son: Pleasure and Business in Mercator ........ 125
4.1 Charinus ................................................................. 126
4.2 Demipho ................................................................. 137
4.3 Like Father, Like Son ........................................................... 149
4.4 Eutychus: The Helping Friend .............................................. 159
4.5 Charinus in Exile ............................................................ 167
4.6 Eutychus the Resolver ........................................................... 169
   4.6.1 Eutychus and Charinus ..................................................... 169
   4.6.2 Eutychus and Demipho ..................................................... 173

5. You and the You You Try to Hide: The Case of Hegio in Captivi ....... 177
5.1 Hegio’s Mastery ............................................................... 180
   5.1.1 The Affable Hegio .......................................................... 180
   5.1.2 The Philocrates and Tyndarus Show .................................. 184
5.2 Hegio’s Failure to Live up to his Mask ..................................... 197
   5.2.1 Ergasilus ................................................................. 199
   5.2.2 Lorarius ................................................................. 202
   5.2.3 Stalagmus ................................................................. 204
   5.2.4 Tyndarus ................................................................. 206
5.3 Hegio’s Isolation ............................................................... 211
5.4 Ergasilus’ Comic Return ...................................................... 213
5.5 A Somber Reunion ............................................................ 218
5.6 Epilogue ............................................................................. 221

6. An End to Your Role?: A Conclusion ........................................ 224

Bibliography ................................................................. 237
CHAPTER 1

STARTING TO PLAY YOUR ROLE:

AN INTRODUCTION

Trapping his fellow slave into not seeing what he saw, the crafty slave Palaestrio toys with his fellow-slave Sceledrus, pretending to be equally concerned with the slave he intends to deceive. He has convinced Sceledrus that the young woman Philocomasium is in fact not one girl but a set of twins, and that Sceledrus has been wrongly accusing Philocomasium of kissing a young man at the neighbor’s house. Sceledrus expresses his fear as he begins to believe that he really did accuse an innocent woman, and the interchange between these two slaves raises one of the most important questions in Roman comedy.

**Pal.** Quid metuis? **Scel.** Enim ne [nos] nosmet perdiderimus uspiam; nam nec te neque me novisse ait haec. **Pal.** Persectari hic volo, Sceledre, nos nostri an alieni simus, ne dum quispiam nos vicinorum imprudentis aliquis immutaverit.

**Scel.** Certe equidem noster sum. **Pal.** Et pol ego. (429-33)

**Pal.** What are you afraid of? **Scel.** Well, that we lost ourselves somewhere. You see, this one [Philocomasium] says she doesn’t know you or me. **Pal.** I want to follow up on this point, Sceledrus. Are we our own selves or someone else’s, lest
at some point in the meantime one of our neighbors changed us when we weren’t looking. **Scel.** I am certainly ours. **Pal.** And me too by golly.¹

Titus Maccius Plautus is busy playing a game on multiple levels here. Within the play, there is the question of who is control of Sceledrus’ role in the plot. He believes that he is faithfully doing his work as a guardian, though Palaestrio is busy constructing a new part for Sceledrus to play. Under Palaestrio’s fabrication, Sceledrus ceases to be the guard who saw his charge in the embrace of a young man next-door. Instead, Sceledrus has become a meddlesome slave with a big mouth. In this new plot, directed by Palaestrio, he has not seen the young lady Philocomasium, but rather he has seen her twin who has come with a lover to retrieve Philocomasium. Sceledrus unwittingly falls out of his role as guardian when he begins to believe the lie. No longer the careful guardian, Sceledrus opts to play no more part in this play.

Stepping outside of the inner-world of the play, we may also note the irony of Sceledrus’ concern in being someone else’s self. He has been translated from a Greek original into the new Roman form of the *comoedia palliata*. Whatever the nature of the relationship between *Miles Gloriosus* and the Greek *Alazon*, which is impossible to determine, the character of Sceledrus has been compelled to play a different part for a new audience. Pulled into a Roman context and given a new name,² Sceledrus now entertains a distinctly different audience than his Greek counterpart.

From Plautus’ own lifetime to Cicero’s time down to our own, Plautus has enjoyed the attention of audiences and scholars alike. In the past few years in particular,

---

¹ All translations are my own.

² Unlike the other names in *Miles Gloriosus*, the name Sceledrus points to no Greek roots, suggesting that Plautus has invented a name for this slave, playing on the Latin word *scelus*. 
he has received increased attention among scholars of Greek and Latin. Before turning to the particulars of this project, I will briefly outline the primary interests of scholars over the past few centuries.

1.1 The Question of Originality

As Plautus freely admits and often plays with, his plays are not original creations. Instead, Plautus conceptualizes the process of adapting his plays from Greek New Comedy as a transformation rather than a translation, as he states in the prologue to *Trinummus*, “Plautus vortit barbare / Plautus turns it barbaric.” (19) Scholars have also looked at Plautus as an adaptor in an attempt to understand what his contributions to the Greek originals are. The question of Plautine originality has undergone several stages, as Lowe has deftly outlined. I will attempt to address the most important developments of the question here.

Through the work of 19th century scholars, contaminatio became the mark of Latin originality in *comoedia palliata*. The project of the rest of the 19th century and into the 20th century has been an investigation into the precise nature of this mingling in Plautus. In his groundbreaking work, Friedrich Leo suggested that Greek references were not necessarily to be attributed to the Greek original. For Leo, Plautus was able to drastically change his Greek originals only through the process of contaminatio, incorporating material from another play. Plautus could cut from his Greek originals,

---

3 A personal anecdote underscores this renewed interest. The year that I am completing this dissertation, 2008, has witnessed an Annual Meeting of the American Philological Association with a greater number of paper presentations on Plautus than in canonical authors such as Vergil and Homer. My thanks to Timothy Moore for this observation.

4 See particularly Lowe (1992), 152-7.

5 Leo (1895), 77-169.
recombining elements in order to heighten his dramatic aims. Though Leo gave Plautus little credit for the ability to create new dramatic situations, he acknowledged Plautus’ creativity with language and meter.

Leo’s work inspired a boom of scholarship which criticized Plautine comedy by focusing on careful analysis of form, diction, and meter in order to determine the relationship between Plautus and the Greek comics. In reaction to the increasing theories of *contaminatio*, some of these scholars preferred to see Plautine plays as the creative vision of Plautus, eschewing a multiple author vision of Plautus’ plays. Scholars interested in Plautine originality have since disputed how close Plautus’ work adheres to the Greek originals.

Pushing the work of his teacher further, in 1922 Eduard Fraenkel published his monumental and still pertinent work on Plautine originality, *Plautinisches im Plautus*. In this extensive volume, Fraenkel made the case for greater Plautine originality. He emphasized the increased role Plautus gave to certain stock types, particularly the *servus callidus*. For Fraenkel, Plautus still did not often invent fresh plot material, but what he expanded scenes by creating monologues and dialogues that advanced the plot very little. Instead, these more substantial monologues and dialogues added to the comic potential of the scene. By changing meters and the importance of certain types of characters, Plautus could change the emphasis of his Greek original, thus offering something beyond Greek New Comedy.

---

6 A panel was organized for the 139th Annual Meeting of the American Philological Association which sought to explore the lasting ramifications of Fraenkel’s work in light of the recent English translation.

Since Fraenkel, the question of Plautine originality has especially thrived among German scholars. The possibility for deviation from Greek originals without the need for another Greek source arose in Günther Jachmann’s work on the *Rudens*.\(^8\) The work of Eckard Lefèvre and his school have urged scholars to recognize the importance of the Italian farcical tradition as an influence on Plautus’ work.\(^9\) Ekkehard Stärk has gone so far as to suggest that the *Menaechmi* in fact has no Greek original.\(^10\) In contrast, Otto Zwierlein has urged scholars to see Plautus as sticking more closely to his Greek originals, while seeing deviation from Greek models and norms as the result of later interpolators.\(^11\)

### 1.2 Metatheater: Theater about Producing Theater

Meanwhile another segment of Plautine scholarship has focused on the use of metatheater. Though he was not the first to apply the term to Plautus,\(^12\) the work of Niall Slater has been particularly influential to Plautine scholarship over the past 20 years. In *Plautus in Performance: The Theatre of the Mind*, Slater draws on the work of Lionel Abel\(^13\) in order to push the use of metatheater back beyond Shakespearean drama. Slater argues for the possibility that the Roman comic theater was capable of being “theatrically self-conscious theatre, i.e., theatre that demonstrates an awareness of its own

---

\(^8\) Jachmann (1931).


\(^12\) The first to do so explicitly is Barchiesi (1970).

\(^13\) Abel (1963).
For Slater, it is important that Plautine comedy is metatheatrical not only in the sense that it is constructed from previously existing comedies, as Bruno Gentili defined metatheater, but also that it is capable of incorporating theatricality internally, recognizing that it is a production. As metatheater, Plautine comedy then becomes increasingly non-illusory, making no pretensions to disguise the fact that the audience is watching a performance. In this shift from illusory to non-illusory theater, “the object of the audience’s admiration becomes the dramatic skill, not the illusion.” In emphasizing this approach to metatheater, Slater ultimately emphasizes the importance of theatrical production.

Slater hones in on characters who must negotiate the relationship between the actor and the playwright. Focusing on clever slaves, he traces a development “from Epidicus the improvisational player talking himself into the role … to Chrysalus … an improvisational playwright too powerful to be contained … by his role” to “Pseudolus, a playwright who must eventually give up playing a role in his own creation.” In this progression, the place of the playwright takes center stage. Since Plautus is not creating his comedies from scratch, but rather adapting them from previously existing texts, “Plautine theatre is not mimetic in conception – it is metatheatrical. Plautus does not imitate life but a previous text.” Slater’s observation is useful if we take it to mean that

---

15 Gentili (1979), 15.
16 Slater (2000), 11.
17 Slater (2000), 97.
18 Slater (2000), 118.
Plautus is creating non-illusory theater. He does not pretend to show us actual lives, put on display on the stage. Instead, Plautus presents characters who are to varying degrees cognizant of the fact that they are playing a role. The emphasis on text in Slater’s interest in metatheater takes over, and the theatrical lives of the audience are wiped clean out of the discussion. As he says in the conclusion to his work, “the transformation of reality happens only in the theatre and through theatrical means. The stage is his world.”19 For Slater, metatheater becomes a way of understanding not what Plautus thinks about human life, but what Plautus thinks about how to produce good comedy. It is in the theater that reality can be turned around, remolded, and refashioned to fit our desires. The audience watching a play may be caught up in the struggles of everyday life, but it is on the stage that we can escape these struggles and mold them to our liking. There is here a one-way movement from the audience to the stage, without the reciprocal possibility that the stage reaches back into the audience’s approach to the world.

Since he is interested in the role of Plautus as the one who controls the imitation of text, Slater gravitates toward the role of the playwright within the drama. In this view, the playwright stands outside of his play, fashioning parts for all of his characters to play, and it is possible, once metatheater is introduced, to see characters within the play imagining themselves in a similar role. The character most aware of this potential is the *servus callidus*. Because they know their positions as characters in a drama, the clever slaves of Plautus are able to recreate their own roles and, by extension, the roles of other characters. As we have seen at the opening of this chapter, Palaestrio is able to recognize that he is playing a part in the drama, and by becoming self-aware of his theatrical

---

19 Slater (2000), 146.
existence, he is eager to craft himself a new part to play. Taking control of the plotting of the play, Palaestrio creates a new plot for the characters to embark on. Sceledrus, who was a faithful guard before Palaestrio changed his role, now becomes a busybody making false accusations about an innocent, freeborn woman. When we get to the end of the play, we find Palaestrio has managed to transform himself in the eyes of others, convincing the soldier Pygropolynices, if only briefly, that he truly was a faithful slave though before that day he had been the worst of slaves. (1374-6)

By tying the *servus callidus* to the role of playwright, Slater in turns draws a connection made elsewhere by scholars, namely that it is possible that Plautus himself played the part of the slaves in his comedies. Whether this is the case or not, this idea is important for Slater’s understanding of Plautine comedy. In thinking that the playwright Plautus played slaves who pretended at times to be playwrights, Slater sees the mastery of theatrical language as the crux of Plautine comedy. Being the mouthpiece of the actual poet played by the poet, the clever slave is in a position to know exactly how things will turn out since he is partly outside of the drama. Because of his identification with the playwright, the clever slave is given autonomy over the comedies that no other character is given. When the clever slave says something will happen, there is little room to doubt that this will be the case. After all, the slave is the playwright Plautus writing the play in which he said something would happen.

Slater’s interest in the clever slave as playwright, which propels many Plautine comedies into the realm of metatheater as plays-within-plays, has taken firm root among scholars. In turn, discussions of Plautus, with nods to his reception by 3rd and 2nd century BCE Roman audiences, have tended to focus more on the compositional process than the
audiences. In *Slaves, Masters, and the Art of Authority in Plautine Comedy*, Kathleen McCarthy sees two great forces at work. Reacting to the work of scholars interested in the originality question, McCarthy responds, “What is needed is not a finer gauge for separating the genuine Plautus from the distracting accretions but a way of theorizing the text as we have it.” Roughly parallel to the influence of Greek New Comedy and Atellan farce, McCarthy suggests that we view Plautine comedy as a dialogic contest between naturalistic and farcical comedy. In Bakhtinian fashion, neither is truly privileged over the other, but they are given the chance to compete equally over the course of the play, and thus, they open new understandings of both modes of comedy.

McCarthy presents the following picture of the two modes. Naturalistic theater “represents the familiar world of the spectators, but with all the rough edges smoothed away.” As these plays draw toward the happy reunion of families and lovers, the artificiality of a play is masked in order to strengthen the idea that reality has been obscured by misperceptions. Characters once thought to be slaves or illegitimate turn out to have been freeborn all along. There is “the possibility of stripping away the distracting details of life that prevent us from perceiving the truth.” In an extreme form, social conventions appear as the genuine way society should be run with problems arising in the system from a misunderstanding of the true operation of the system. It is not that the system is flawed, but that we fail to understand how the system actually should operate.

---

22 McCarthy (2000), 12.
Strongly aligned with this mode of comedy is the figure of the good slave, who has accepted the reality of rewards and punishments from masters as the truth of slavery.

In contrast to naturalistic theater, farcical theater presents the wrinkles in reality as the truth of reality. Flaws in characters and situations are not dispelled by the discovery of truth. The idea that the real world coheres seamlessly is a fiction that farcical characters expose. For this reason, farcical theater emphasizes its artificiality, dismissing the idea that there is a truth that lies behind all the confusion. As McCarthy notes, “in its willingness to leave loose ends untied, it could be seen as more realistic; or at least, it is more faithful to a vision of reality that sees the details of life as the real thing, not as static that is clouding the picture of the real, underlying pattern.”23 Typically connected to this mode is the clever slave, who dismisses the meaningfulness of his master’s rewards and punishments. The clever slave sees the master’s rhetoric as ultimately empty. He does not believing that there is a truth behind it all which can be seen if we only brush aside the confusion of misperception.

Once this dichotomy has been established, McCarthy offers an understanding of Plautine comedy that explains how Roman masters could flock to theatrical performances that repeatedly show a clever slave triumphing over his master, mocking the position of the master. McCarthy suggests, “the good slave embodies the view that masters would like slaves to have of slavery, and the clever slave embodies the view that masters themselves would like to have of their own lives.”24 Romans on all rungs of the social ladder are in a position to respond to these two modes, keeping them in careful balance.


When dealing with superiors, Romans are in a position to appeal to the farcical mode that affirms any degradation that may come from subordination is empty rhetoric, whereas they can quickly switch modes when dealing with subordinates, trusting in the true power of their position.

This approach to Plautus, though, focuses on the characters as indicative of one of the two systems. Thus, Menaechmus E of *Menaechmi*, in his desire to rebel against his household, becomes emblematic of farce while Menaechmus S, in his desire to reunite with his lost twin brother, becomes the champion of naturalism. This approach, which suggests the possibility of a dialogic exchange between the two modes, locks characters into playing a particular part. The image McCarthy develops is of a Plautus who decides how he wishes to pit farce and naturalism against one another, and then fits his characters into the roles most appropriate for the contest. A play that will operate mostly in the farcical mode will have a clever slave duping his master, whereas its naturalistic equivalent will have a young man, helped by a loyal slave, gaining the girl of his desires in order for society to be renewed in all of its current forms. Within this competition, little room appears for characters to not be engines for farce or naturalism. The competition dictates the characters before they have any chance to emerge as characters who might appeal to either mode to further their own plots. This stance puts us in an odd place as spectators, figuring our experience of life as the workings of naturalism or farce, wherein we have little room to switch camps.
1.3 Metatheater: Theater about Life as Theatrical

In response to Slater’s work on metatheater, William Batstone pushes an understanding of Plautine comedy that reintroduces the issue of the audience’s living experience. In his essay “Plautine Farce and Plautine Freedom: An Essay on the Value of Metatheatre”, Batstone explores the one case where a direct comparison can be made between Plautine adaptation and the Greek original: Plautus’ *Bacchides* and the approximately 100 lines of Menander’s *Dis Exapatohn* that were brought to light by E.W. Handley. In both plays, a young man has entrusted a friend to work out a deal with a beloved prostitute. The problem is that the prostitute has a sister of the same name with whom the friend has fallen in love. Convinced that his friend has betrayed him, the young lover delivers a soliloquy as he assesses the situation. Menander’s young lover, Sostratos, expresses his frustration with his friend and his desire for the prostitute. He ultimately situates the prostitute at the center of the problem, which enables him to stabilize himself and maintain his friendship. Plautus’ young lover, Mnesilochus, takes another turn. Mnesilochus stumbles to pull himself together. As Batstone has observed, Mnesilochus is caught up in a web of desires between not wanting the prostitute and wanting her, between wanting to be a good son and wanting to enjoy himself at his father’s expense. In Mnesilochus’ struggles with himself Plautus allows us to see a character who recognizes the contradictory pulls within himself. Unlike Menander’s character who puts on a show of not wanting the prostitute in order to preserve his friendship, Plautus’

---


26 Handley (1968)

27 Batstone (2005), 21.
character understands that, whatever course of action he might take, he will still be playing a part. He will follow one desire at the expense of the other, but not in a way that tries to ignore entirely the existence of the other desire.

It is precisely at this juncture that Batstone draws in his development of the concept of metatheater, freeing it from an understanding of theater as a way of conceptualizing how theater works. Batstone argues that we should see in Mnesilochus’ farcical display of his identity “precisely what Abel had in mind when he invented the term ‘metatheatre’ to identify a kind of drama that results when the hero finds his world as stage, his life already theatricalized, and his own identity just another role to be played.” Batstone seeks to understand what it is that Plautus says about our experience in everyday life. Though his theater may be non-illusionary and farcical, Plautus’ comedies “expose and exploit the theatricality of our lives and … depend on a sense that we are all more complicated than we ever let on, even to ourselves.” Comic metatheater appeals to the constructedness of human life, and herein lies one of the key elements to Plautine comedy.

At the time that this is being written, it seems to early yet for Batstone’s approach to metatheater to have taken hold in Plautine scholarship. His approach to metatheater offers a distinct break in the use of metatheater for scholars of Plautus, and one that

---

28 The use of metatheater as restricted to the theatrical implications of metatheater is at the heart of Rosenmeyer’s criticism of the concept. Rosenmeyer (2002).

29 Batstone (2005), 15. The emphases are Batstone’s.

30 Batstone (2005), 36.

31 Mention of the essay by Ariana Traill in her paper, Fraenkel’s Mythological Material in Light of the New Menander, for the Annual Meeting of the American Philological Association has begun to develop the potential of this approach with respect to Plautus’ use of mythological material in the Bacchides. Traill (2008).
seems crucial for a better understanding of Plautus in his Roman context as well as his continued popularity through the centuries. It is from this juncture that this dissertation takes its jumping-off point, attempting to open a further discussion about a view of humanity that Plautus offers his audiences.

1.4 The Role of the Role

When we turn to the 20 more or less complete plays of Plautus, we often try to find in them a simple plot with standard characters. The typical line for *comoedia palliata* goes: a young man falls in love with a girl he cannot have, typically a prostitute. With the help of his clever slave, he is able to overcome the blocking figures of the angry old man or pimp, and thus a celebration is set in motion in which young man and beloved are united at last. The ‘stock’ qualities of Plautus are aided by the influence of Atellan farces which were improvised performances, drawing on a fairly standard set of stock characters, namely the fool Bucco, the glutton Dossenus, the clown Maccus, and the old man Pappus. However, anyone who has in fact tried to explain a particular Plautine comedy to a friend or colleague who has never read the play quickly realizes that a problem emerges. What at first seemed a simple problem of a young man getting a girl through the help of a slave soon morphs into a myriad of variations, each presenting their own unique comments on the roles played by our stock characters.

Well acquainted with the theater, Plautus found the potential power in presenting characters who at first seem to fulfill our generic expectations, but do not perfectly coincide with those expectations. This is in part the work of comedy. As Slater notes

---

32 Though the Atellan farces of Plautus’ time were improvised, at a later point, Romans began to compose scripted Atellan farces. Frassinetti (1967) has collected the surviving fragments.
about comic devices, “As the device solidifies into a pattern, it becomes as much an object for comedy as any other pattern or order. Just as comedy is the critic and opponent of rigid social order, so too it becomes the opponent of its own artistic order.” In the working of comedy, concrete reality is privileged, embracing deviations from idealized forms and patterns, even those that have become internal to comedy. Hegel long ago observed this in his discussion of the spiritual work of art, as he traced a development in Greek art from epic to tragedy to comedy. Privileging the material world, Hegel sought to reverse the movement of Platonic philosophy. Instead of privileging abstractions as the model to which the concrete, material world fails to fully replicate, Hegel argued that the concrete world generates the abstractions. It is the work of comedy to expose this process. It is not the abstract notion of the role of the servus callidus that creates certain types of slaves, but rather it is the work of several particular slaves that enable us to develop the idea of the servus callidus. Abstractions become embodied in characters who cannot be separated from the abstraction. A character’s failings are portrayed as an inherent aspect of the abstraction, not as a remainder outside of the abstraction. The stumbling and bumbling of a character is displayed as the inconsistency of the abstraction itself.

To turn back to Plautus in particular, this dissertation explores plays where Plautus is clearly interested in the failures of roles to produce successful and productive characters. Though the genre may set up our expectations, Plautus has found ways to explore those points of tension where roles restrict characters from fully understanding

33 Slater (2000), 11.

their situations or saying what they need to say. The role of the *servus callidus*, or the *paterfamilias*, or the *dominus* are insufficient for creating fully-functioning characters, and they crumble under the demands of Plautus’ dramatic scenarios, unless supplemental roles can be found to bolster the weaknesses inherent in these roles. Instead of privileging the role, this dissertation seeks to look at the ways Plautus’ characters appeal to the opportunity to play those roles while acknowledging that they are in fact separate from those roles. It is precisely the gap between character and role that drives the energy of Plautine comedy, creating a world that is constantly in need of new forms of understanding and acting.

I start by looking at *Pseudolus*, a trickster-slave comedy in which the main character Pseudolus attempts to win a girl for his lovelorn master Calidorus. At first glance, *Pseudolus* appears like many other plays with a *servus callidus* at the heart of the action. Like his generic brothers, Pseudolus diligently plots in an effort to help Calidorus, but there is something unusual here. While other slaves are able to manipulate the other characters like puppets, making them act as the slaves wish, Pseudolus spends a significant amount of the play replottting, abandoning plan after plan. With a name which is potentially a Greek-Latin hybrid meaning “false trick”, he has bluffed his way into the role, while knowing full well that he is not essentially a *servus callidus*, not a slave like Palaestrio in *Miles Gloriosus* who acts as architect and puppet-master to the plot. He relies on improvisation to negotiate what he needs to do to fulfill the requirements of his role, but he never pretends to be more than he is. As soon as Pseudolus realizes that one plan has failed, he concocts a new one, repeating his mantra that he knows things will turn out well in the end, even if he does not know exactly how. When the deception
actually comes to fruition, it is not Pseudolus who achieves the deception, but an assisting slave Simia who functions more like the stock *servus callidus*. Pseudolus claims victory, not because he plays the role perfectly but because he is able to bring about the desired result, even if it did take some extra help.

The second chapter comes back to this question of identity in *Menaechmi*, where two bodies are asked to play one role. Menaechmus of Syracuse (Menaechmus S) goes in search of his twin brother in Epidamnus (Menaechmus E), not knowing that they share the same name. Complications arise as the two brothers are mistaken for each other by the other’s dependents, since the two brothers do not approach the relationships they have in the same way. Menaechmus E has structured his personal relationships in terms of commerce, a system that tries to treat the world with indifference. He maintains a dowered wife through gifts, but steals these to keep the good favors of his favorite prostitute, Erotium. Deeply committed to a version of himself as the *paterfamilias*, Menaechmus E believes that he controls the market of his relationships. A mantle stolen from his wife is equivalent to an afternoon of fun and food with Erotium. By introducing Menaechmus S into the plot, Plautus is able to expose the violence done to the world when we take it in commercial terms of equivalencies.

While his brother is busy trying to embody what it means to be a master of a household, Menaechmus S is willing to play the different roles the Epidamnians give him the chance to play. For a time, he will take on an easy role, and be the welcomed guest of Erotium, gladly taking the gifts that he has supposedly given her. At another point, he will take on an unexpected role that shows so well his willingness to adapt himself to another’s scenario. When Menaechmus E’s wife accuses him of madness, Menaechmus S
sees this as his chance to escape, and feigns madness. By inadvertently playing his brother, Menaechmus S short-circuits the commercial relationships that Menaechmus E has worked hard to build. He is not an equivalent to his brother, nor could he ever fully be. Personal relationships depend on difference, which the logic of commerce attempts to cover over. Not anyone will do, but a particular person for a particular relationship. When the two brothers finally meet, Menaechmus S suggests that Menaechmus E ought to sell off his household in Epidamnus, right down to the wife. In offering his brother the chance to come back to Syracuse, he gives him the opportunity to start anew. With his commercial life fully jettisoned, Menaechmus E can enter into relationships that do not treat the world with the indifference of commerce.

Drawing on this interest in commerce, the third chapter turns to Mercator. I look at the competition between the household as a place for personal relations and as a workplace. Charinus enters the scene worried that his father, Demipho, will be angered when he learns that his son has brought the lovely Pasicompsa back from a business trip. Based upon stories he remembers from his childhood, Charinus sees his father only as a stern businessman, concerned with finances, not pleasure. In painting his father in these terms, Charinus is unable to see the possibility that his father will not be angry, since Charinus has procured this girl out of his personal finances, whereas earlier in life, he had been squandering his father’s. He thus makes efforts to convince his father that Pasicompsa has been bought for another purpose, namely to be a maid-servant for his mother. When we finally meet Demipho, we learn that he is not angry with his son. Contrary to the father Charinus created for us, we find an old man who has become enamored with the captivating Pasicompsa, but he is unable to talk to his son about this.
He has convinced himself that he has done such a good job of raising his son, profligate recently turned good merchant, that he actually believes the story about Pasicompsa as a maid-servant. He convinces himself that the problem is not that Charinus is in love, but that Charinus actually has no personal interest in the girl. Father and son circle around each other, unaware that they both have an interest in Pasicompsa, but their relationship to the household as a workplace prevents them from discussing the problem that is really at hand, namely their connection on the personal level. It finally takes Charinus’ friend Eutychus to straighten out all the problems created through the inability of father and son to declare their personal intentions openly. Uninvested in who father and son think they are, Eutychus can step in as a friend, enabling the father to see the son for who he is and vice-versa. Father and son recognize that there is something more to who the other is. They cease to see each other only as merchants, and begin to acknowledge the multiple roles they play within the household, the neighborhood, and the community.

My dissertation finally turns to Captivi, exploring competing versions of how one plays the role of the master. In a play marked for its nobility, many find it difficult to explain how the affable and generous master Hegio could so callously sentence the slave Tyndarus to the rock mines, asserting his mastery through his ability to physically punish his slaves. At the beginning of the play while Hegio is negotiating with his newly bought captives, he presents himself as a kind master. He allows his captives to walk about unchained, hoping that his generosity will make his slaves willing to help him get back his son, who was lost in war. While Hegio jokes around, his two captives, the master and slave Philocrates and Tyndarus respectively, stage a fictional version of their relationship. The two captives have conspired to switch roles in an effort to free Philocrates. Put in the
shoes of the other, they can play the role they wish the other would. At the same time, they have the opportunity to comment on their ideas of how they play their usual role. In this show, we see an affectionate connection between master and slave. We see a slave who sacrifices himself for the good of his master, no matter what danger that might entail. Moved by this, Hegio releases Philocrates to go retrieve his own son, but when Hegio discovers that he has been duped into letting the master go, his demeanor quickly shifts. Hegio’s kind mastery holds up so long as he gets his way, but when the situation shifts, he does not hesitate to reassert his mastery through physical punishment. Even when he discovers that the slave he sent to the mines is his own son, Hegio does not repent the action, only that it happened to his son. This, though, is more a concern about what his neighbors will say about him. Plautus uses Captivi to expose the contradictions that we live with in playing many of our daily roles. While wishing to appear as the affable master, Hegio betrays the foundation of that affability, namely a reliance on the physical violence that is part of slavery.

In exploring these plays, I hope to ask what is at stake in a character’s attachment to his roles. It will be the work of this dissertation to investigate the potentials of a flexible attitude toward the roles that we play. I also aim to look at the consequences of believing too strongly that we are essentially the roles that we play with one another. In the end, I hope to open an understanding of Plautus’ approach to our roles as something crucial to our human experience.
CHAPTER 2

FAKE IT ‘TIL YOU MAKE IT:

IMPROVISING THE ROLE OF SERVUS CALLIDUS IN PSEUDOLUS

With its ever twisting and evolving plot, Pseudolus has been considered one of Plautus’ greatest creations. Its title character has become an icon for Plautine slave trickery, a slave that outdoes his role as servus callidus, those “cunning masters of intrigue,” as Duckworth calls them. Yet we must ask how this Pseudolus fits the mold, since “in spite of temporary setbacks [servi callidi] are never really at a loss.” When we read or watch Pseudolus, we cannot avoid noticing that Pseudolus must change his plan at least four times before he successfully separates Phoenicium, the love interest, from the pimp Ballio. Perhaps we need to consider more carefully Pseudolus’ name, the fibber who has bluffed his way into the position of clever confidant. Through this slave,

---

35 It is Moore’s view that the whole play is designed to outdo the comic potential of any stock player that it brings on stage. Moore (1998b), 94-6.

36 Duckworth (1952), 250. Duckworth recognizes in the servus callidus the occasional “moments of helplessness and despair” to a greater degree than later scholars have.

37 Duckworth (1952), 252.

38 I take Pseudolus’ name to be a Greek-Latin hybrid, meaning “false-trick”. Given the typical conventions for transliterating Greek words into Latin, it is unlikely that Pseudolus is purely Greek for “lying slave”.

21
Plautus allows us to consider the role of *servus callidus* as a role to be played like any other. Unlike *servi callidi* who show an exceptional ability to ensnare their victims, making them dance like puppets,\(^{39}\) Pseudolus recognizes his need to improvise as situations develop, adopting new plans again and again. In his moments of doubt, Pseudolus recognizes the gap between himself and the demands of the role he is called to play. He is willing to play, but he has no delusions of being fully enabled by his role to perform his task without complication. He is not an arch-playwright controlling events like a puppet-master, but rather constantly improvising his part, testing any angles that might help him ultimately reach his goal.\(^{40}\)

By approaching Pseudolus in this way, I do not think of Pseudolus as fully controlling his destiny within the play. Instead of privileging Pseudolus’ status as a playwright writing the drama that unfolds, I see Pseudolus as operating within a world where he, as much as any other character, is called to negotiate the means to his goal. His status as slave does not give him a theatrically governed advantage within the play. Instead, it is Pseudolus’ approach to the world within the play that constitutes his success. He does not write the play as it unfolds, but interprets what has happened so he can best position himself within the drama. He plays the part of the clever slave so long as he needs to, but given the opportunity to let another slave play this part, he gladly steps

\(^{39}\) Cf. Palaestrio in *Miles Gloriosus* in particular. It is worth noting that several members of the supporting cast refer to Palaestrio as their architect, recognizing his role in controlling the drama.

\(^{40}\) Barsby (1995) has done a great deal to show the various ways in which *Pseudolus* is an improvisatory play. I am in agreement with many of his opinions, but, as will be discussed throughout this chapter, I would disagree with his ultimate portrayal of Pseudolus, a picture that keeps Pseudolus in the role of play architect.
aside. His goal is not to be the *servus callidus*, but to separate the young lady Phoenicium from the greedy pimp Ballio.

Though *Pseudolus* offers a wide range of characters who are interesting for questions about the relation of Plautus to the stock types of New Comedy, this chapter will focus primarily on those moments that highlight Pseudolus as a different type of *servus callidus*, exploring the potential that Plautus finds for a slave to be the clever trickster without exercising a heavy-handed control over the plot itself. In so doing, I have accepted a view of Pseudolus that takes him more at his word when he expresses doubt about his situation.\(^{41}\) This view is in contrast to scholars like Slater and Sharrock who use metatheatricality as the loophole by which the somewhat bumbling slave can really be a figure for heroic control. The metatheater argument seems to privilege the final outcome of the play. As a result scholars tend to argue that by realizing he is in a play, Pseudolus is able to master the limits of the genre and its language so as to theatrically fashion a role that others are made to play. We may question how much control Pseudolus has on the plot, but this then is part of the game Plautus plays with his audience. Instead of enjoying the game as it unfolds, we watch the play with the sole goal of guessing whether or not Pseudolus will ever succeed. In this chapter, I embrace the experience of an unfolding drama instead of an approach that sweeps aside the moments that Pseudolus second guesses himself by looking at the final outcome in which one can pretend this Pseudolus was in control all along.

\(^{41}\) Cf. particularly *Pseudolus* 106-7, 394-408, 566-8, and 683-5.
2.1 Establishing the Great Improviser

The opening scene between Pseudolus and his young master Calidorus gives us the impression that we may see yet another trickster-slave comedy. Following the short two line prologue, Pseudolus appears to be doing what servi callidi do. An agent for flexible adaptation, Pseudolus undertakes a project of transformation, both through words and actions.\textsuperscript{42} Pseudolus’ first trick? To make the silent Calidorus speak. Confused by Calidorus’ extended misery, Pseudolus prods his young charge to make him a confidant. The goading is effective, and we see what we might expect from a servus callidus. He has made the mute Calidorus speak, but we need to consider the content of that speech. Echoing Pseudolus’ words, “quae miseriae te tam misere macerent / what miseries are so miserably emaciating you,” (4) Calidorus says, “Misere miser sum, Pseudole. / I am miserably miserable, Pseudolus.” (13) The speaking Calidorus is an echo of the mute Calidorus Pseudolus introduced. In so far as Pseudolus has changed the world, he has not produced a version of Calidorus that will be productive for solving the dilemma at hand. Now vocal, the young master is as useless as he was when he was silently sulking. Right from the start, Pseudolus is not quite the clever slave we are used to. There is something else at work in his efforts.

Pseudolus is prepared to try to help solve the dilemma that has so thoroughly crippled Calidorus. In expressing his willingness to help, Pseudolus makes two important statements regarding how he will help. He first offers to help,

\textsuperscript{42}Zupančič (2006), 195 believes this to be the essence of comedy as a whole. “The stuff that comedies are made of is precisely this hole in finitude.” To be comical is a refusal to see man’s life as finite. Comedy seeks to explore the ways in which ideas, language, action and even people are never finite and fixed. In as much as they begin to become so, they crumble into bits to be rearranged. To become finite is to become abstracted from action which is always an ongoing process, only artificially stopped by the convention of the curtain.
aut re aut opera aut consilio bono (19)

either with goods or with effort or with a good plan.

While a slave like Palaestrio from Miles Gloriosus pursues a more or less fixed plan, fitting better the image of master architect and puppet-master so commonly attributed to the servi callidi, Pseudolus approaches the potential problem as one to be tackled from any of several approaches. The fact that he does not yet know what the problem at hand is does factor into how he can begin to help, but it does not prevent him from beginning to project plans. Even when he does not know exactly what he will need to tackle, Pseudolus sets out on a project designed for flexibility, adaptability, and improvisation.

Pseudolus leaves himself open to a variety of avenues. Calidorus offers him the tablets that contain the source of his grief, to which he replies,

mos tibi geretur. (22)

I will change my ways for you. 43

This is the blank slate’s motto. Those who can never hold household potestas must adapt themselves to the demands, needs, and desires of those who do. Slaves like Pseudolus need to be a multitude of things for all those who hold power over him. In playing his role as slave, Pseudolus is directed to be a conglomeration of roles, a potential which Plautus often exploits for comic purposes.

As Pseudolus begins to look at the letter, he takes on the guise of the servus callidus, changing what he holds in his hands. The interchange between Pseudolus and Calidorus over the letter gives Plautus an opportunity to draw a stark distinction between

---

43 Of the couple dozen times that this and similar phrases appear in the Plautine corpus, the majority of these are spoken about or in direct reference to the actions of women and slaves in about equal proportions.
the flexibility that Pseudolus embraces and the fixity that Calidorus adheres to. For Pseudolus, this letter is not just a fixed text, inscribed in wax, but a place for jokes and fun. For Calidorus, the letter is a message of doom and despair, the death knell for his love. Pseudolus approaches the letter as an opportunity to make three separate jokes about the poor state of the handwriting while Calidorus supplies overly alliterative responses.

**PS.** Vt opinor, quaerunt litterae hae sibi liberos: alia aliam scandit. **CAL.** Ludis iam ludo tuo?
**PS.** Has quidem pol credo nisi Sibulla legerit, interpretari alium posse neminem.
**CAL.** Cur inclementer dicis lepidis litteris lepidis tabellis lepida conscriptis manu?
**PS.** An, opsecro hercle, habent quas gallinae manus? nam has quidem gallina scripsit. **CAL.** Odiosus mihi es. (23-30)

**PS.** As I see it, these letters are looking to get themselves some kids. They’re climbing all over each other. **CAL.** Are you playing a game with me? **PS.** By golly actually I believe, unless the Sibyl reads ‘em, no one can interpret these. **CAL.** Why do you speak harshly about lovely letters, written on lovely tablets, by a lovely hand? **PS.** Oh come on, by gum, what hands do chickens have? The truth is a chicken actually wrote these. **CAL.** You are annoying me.

All three jokes, exploit the possibility that letters on a page can take on aspects that are not immediately apparent. For the comic jokester, the world can never simply be as it appears. Pseudolus can see what his eyes perceive as letters, a literary orgy, the mysterious scribbling of the Sibyl, and chicken scratches.

Calidorus though keeps floundering in frustration in alliterative responses. His responses introduce a habit that will develop over the course of the next few scenes. In contrast to the shifting nature of Pseudolus, Calidorus begins to draw definite links between concrete individuals and abstract universal qualities. Here his slave becomes strongly connected to games, his actions described with the superfluous *ludis iam ludo*.
Calidorus then goes on to make a strong identification between his love Phoenicium and *lepida*. This letter is thrice lovely, lovely letters on lovely tablets by lovely hands. What is the source of that loveliness besides the object of Calidorus’ affection, Phoenicium? By continually undergoing this process, Calidorus has written himself into a particular role, thus ensuring his dependence on someone who can help shift the surrounding circumstances so he himself may persist in playing the role of the young lover.

This hopelessness is quickly reiterated by Calidorus when he is asked to pay attention (*advortito animum*). Inadvertently making a joke by playing on the Latin idiom for attentiveness, he informs Pseudolus that his spirit is not at hand. Pseudolus asks him to bring it back, to which Calidorus responds,

> Immo ego tacebo, tu istinc ex cera cita;  
> nam istic meus animus nunc est, non in pectore. (33-4)

> No, I will be quiet. Go get it out of that wax you’re holding.  
> For my spirit is there now, not in my chest.

Calidorus’ spirit is trapped in the static text of the letter. His existence is circumscribed in his love for Phoenicium, whom he is about to lose. Trapped within a letter of mourning, he does not have the resources to solve the dilemma. He has developed such a deep investment in the fixity of his relationships to the world that he is unable to do anything but what the forlorn young lover does in New Comedy, mourn. His helplessness can only be alleviated by someone like Pseudolus who is able to loosen the stranglehold his investment in his role has created.

---

44 I am indebted to William Batstone for the reminder that there is at work in this passage an underlying joke of the loveliness of the love object to the lover, which has a long tradition. See in particular the catalogue of blemishes turned lovely by Lucretius. See *De Rerum Natura* 4.1153-1170 particularly.
After a few more jokes about the tablets he is holding, Pseudolus finally proceeds to reveal the contents of the letter. This letter provides information to set the play in actual motion, but before any plot related information is revealed from the letter, Calidorus interrupts in a mournful outburst to which Pseudolus responds with a few thoughts.

**CAL.** Perii, salutem nusquam invenio, Pseudole, quam illi remittam. **PS.** Quam salutem? **CAL.** Argenteam. **PS.** Pro lignean salute vis argenteam remittere illi? vide sis quam tu rem geras. (45-8)

**CAL.** I am done for. Pseudolus, I’m not finding a “how do you do” which I might send back to her anywhere. **PS.** What “how do you do”? **CAL.** The money kind. **PS.** For a wooden “how do you do” you want to send that girl a money one? Come on, look what you are doing.

Calidorus is beginning to see a bit of mutability in the world. He can play around with the nature of his *salus*, but his fixation on rescuing Phoenicium places a tight restriction on the forms that *salus* might take. At this point, Pseudolus does not necessarily know what it is that ails his master, namely the potential loss of his love Phoenicium, but what he does do is to try to present Calidorus with the opportunity to see his problem not as one that has a predetermined answer with a fixed path to a solution. More importantly for this play, Pseudolus’ admonition carries with it the possibility that there may be other ways to get Phoenicium besides an exchange of money. Calidorus though pushes his slave to read on so as to discover how useful that silver will be. He drags the path of the drama back to a need for some money, and thus Pseudolus must read on.

---

45 It is worth noting that Pseudolus’ several schemes throughout the rest of the drama will all be attempts to get money in order to satisfy the contract Ballio has made for Phoenicium. I am inclined to see this as partly the result of Calidorus closing off the opportunity to solve the problem in non-monetary ways.
Phoenicium has been sold, and Calidorus needs to get some money together to keep her. Since the letter is read in full, its contents divulged in full, the letter is given a more fixed reality in the play. What happens in the letter has come to be, and events have largely become completed, though there remains a window of opportunity in the *salutem* that Phoenicium sends and requests. As regards the letter, there can be no change, but as regards the reaction to the letter, therein lies the opportunity that the play indulges. Calidorus fails to appreciate the window that is left open to him, locking its meaning to a message of hopeless loss. After hearing the letter read, Calidorus reacts as we might expect him to. Pseudolus deals with this situation not necessarily as a problem, but as an opportunity to play, to improvise, to manipulate the world he inhabits. The letter is not a mandate of what must happen, but rather a framework within which Pseudolus has the opportunity to act and improvise.

This initial letter and the one later handed to Pseudolus by the soldier’s messenger Harpax are crucial to this play. Looking at the initial letter, Slater sees Pseudolus receiving a tragic text, but Pseudolus “does not accept the play as handed to him in the letter (which functions also like a script or script outline).”[46] The strength in Slater’s evaluation here is the idea of this letter as a script outline. In a play that lacked a substantial prologue, this letter provides the backdrop against which the play develops. It is important to not lose sight of the fact that this letter as a pseudo-prologue does not contain the whole of the play. Given the rough framework set out in the letter-prologue, as an audience, let us see where the plot goes. In reading the letter, Pseudolus is finally able to understand the nature of the dilemma that needs to be overcome. The letter has set

---

up the way things have come to be, and in that state, things are finalized and done with. If nothing is done, the girl leaves with the Macedonian soldier and Calidorus’ love comes to an end. Pseudolus is called in to provide his master a way to alter events, to set the mechanism of change and adaptation into motion so Calidorus may change from the shut-out lover to the hugged-in.

The reactions of Pseudolus and Calidorus to the letter again help emphasize these two characters’ relationship to the plot.

CAL. Est misere scriptum, Pseudole. PS. O, miserrime.
CAL. Quin fles? PS. Pumiceos oculos habeo: non queo lacrumanm exorare ut expuant unam modo.
CAL. Quid ita? PS. Genus nostrum semper siccoculum fuit. (74-7)

CAL. It’s miserably written, Pseudolus. PS. Oh my, quite miserably. CAL. Why aren’t you crying? PS. I have pumice eyes. I can’t coax even one tear to spring forth. CAL. Why’s that? PS. My people have always been dry-eyed.

Whereas Calidorus continues to adhere to his miserable state, echoing those early lines first spoken between Pseudolus and Calidorus, Pseudolus takes the opportunity to have a bit of fun. Pseudolus presents us with another way to react to Calidorus’ situation, not joining in the sorrow but rather seeing the ridiculousness of this young man. Though the minute we begin to see Calidorus as ridiculous through the non-weeping eyes of Pseudolus, the slave presents the audience with yet another possible way to understand his lack of tears and one that taps into Roman views of heredity. A dry eyed people with their pumice eyes would have a difficult time producing tears even for such a pitiable situation. The improvisatory nature of Pseudolus never seems to rest. When we as an audience settle in on one way of understanding Pseudolus’ words, he deceives us again
by opening up yet one more avenue. Each moment has the potential of spilling out in
many different directions.

When Calidorus asks for a more sympathetic Pseudolus, the slave is glad to play
along, asking his master what he wants. When Calidorus lets out an exasperated eheu,
Pseudolus takes this as his cue to help in his own particular way.

PS. Eheu? id quidem hercle ne parsis: dabo.
CAL. Miser sum, argentum nusquam invenio mutuom.
PS. Eheu. CAL. Neque intus nummus ullus est. PS. Eheu.
CAL. Ille abducturus est mulierem cras. PS. Eheu.
CAL. Istocine pacto me adivas? PS. Do id quod mihi est;
nam is mihi thensaurus iugis in nostra est domo. (79-84)

PS. Oh my? Well don’t go easy on that, by gum. I’ll give ‘em. CAL. I am
miserable. I’m not finding money to exchange anywhere. PS. Oh my. CAL. And
there aren’t a few bucks inside. PS. Oh my. CAL. That man is going to take my
girl away tomorrow. PS. Oh my. CAL. Is that the way you help me? PS. I give
what’s mine. There’s a steady storeroom of this in our house.

On the surface, Pseudolus is willing to be transformed into whatever Calidorus asks him
to be, but at the same time, he also demonstrates a resistance to being totally subsumed in
others’ desires. Part of the energy of comedy comes from both a willingness to be literal
and non-literal as one chooses, never limiting oneself to a particular, necessary response.
Pseudolus opens up conventions by taking the response as a literal answer to what help
he can provide rather than an exasperated gasp.

Throughout the opening scene of Pseudolus, Plautus has paired an improvising
slave with his master, sinking quickly under the weight of the role that he has set out for
himself. He is unable to see his lot as anything but hopeless. As he says,

Profecto nullo pacto possum vivere,
si illa a me abalienatur atque abducitur. (94-5)
There’s now way I can possibly live, if that girl is taken away from me and shipped off.

Calidorus sets up chains motivated by cause and effect, which taken retrospectively can give the appearance of necessity. For Calidorus, one thing comes to equal another in what seems an exclusive relation. Phoenicium has already been declared to be Calidorus’ *animus*, without which there can be no life. No Phoenicium, no life. There is no escape in Calidorus’ view, a view that cannot look outside of its narrow perspective. By accepting a chain of events that starts in the past, moves to the present, and continues into the future, Calidorus sees his future loss of Phoenicium as already having happened. By granting a sense of necessity to this chain of events, Calidorus has allowed himself to play a static role in the world. There is no room for action because all action has been predetermined.

In contrast to the entrapped lover, Pseudolus figures himself a divine wonderworker,

\[
\text{Scis tu quidem hercle, mea si commovi sacra,}
\]
\[
\text{quo pacto et quantas soleam turbellas dare. (109-10)}
\]

By gum, if I have set my sacred works in motion, you of course know how I stir up trouble and how much of it too.

The advantage of Pseudolus’ constant shifting in this world is his ability to metaphorically hold any position in the cosmos. He is just as easily a slave as god, conjuring up storms for his opponents.\(^{47}\) Pseudolus is able to open up possibilities for the trapped Calidorus. He is hope for Calidorus, (111) that open ended feeling which can never be defeated though various obstacles may force it to take a different path.\(^{48}\)

\(^{47}\) This is partially a bluff on the part of Pseudolus who is trying to put on a good show for Calidorus. Pseudolus, the fake trick, conjures up imaginary storms as an imaginary god.
So far, Pseudolus has exhibited an ability to play with the world, improvising to find other possible reactions to any given situation, but nothing is yet at stake in the play. Unlike other Plautine slaves who are able to play the puppet-master, convincing other characters to see the world as the slaves wish, Pseudolus has been unable to change Calidorus in any significant way. As much as Pseudolus jokes around, Calidorus remains the forlorn lover, bemoaning his impending doom. Yet Pseudolus persists in his drive to help Calidorus see open possibilities. In an effort to assure his lovelorn master, Pseudolus says,

verum ego te amantem, ne pave, non deseram.
spero alicunde hodie me bona opera aut hac mea tibi inventurum esse auxilium argentarium.
atque id futurum unde unde dicam nescio,
 nisi quia futurum est. (103-7)

But, don’t worry. I am not going to abandon you, you little love-bird. I hope at some point today that I will find you that silvery help, whether by good work or my style of work. And I don’t know where I will say it’s going to be from, except that it’s going to be.

In the spirit of comedy, Pseudolus moves ahead, self-assured that his ends will come to pass, no matter what avenues must be traveled to get there. Note that no source of cash is stated here, but rest assured it will arrive. In a system of comic flexibility, the cash could come from anywhere, and this is more to the point. By leaving open the possibilities of where the money can come from Pseudolus embraces a plan of improvisation rather than one of control.

48 Tinder notes, “The mystery of hope is that it spans the chasm between the things we know and the things we do not know, between the world and transcendence. Hope is a way of thinking about time, and of living in time, in anticipation of things beyond time – things we desire above all else but cannot comprehend.” Tinder (1999), 77.
2.2 Masterly Control and the Failure to Effect Change

In contrast to the relaxed play of Pseudolus, Plautus introduces the pimp Ballio berating his slaves. Ballio demonstrates his ability to see flexibility in the world, connecting seemingly divergent things, but Ballio’s transformative ability in the world grows out of his position of power as master of a household, authorized through society’s conventions.

neque ego homines magis asinos numquam vidi, ita plagis costae callent: quos quom ferias, tibi plus noceas; eo enim ingenio hi sunt flagritribae, qui haec habent consilia, ubi data occasiost, rape clepe tene harpaga bibe es fuge: hoc est eorum opus, ut mavelis lupos apud ovis linquere, quam hos domi custodes. (136-41)

Nor have I ever seen men more ass-like, ribs so hardened to blows. When you hit these guys, you do more harm to yourself. That’s the way these whip-wasters are, who concoct these plans. You give them a chance: snatch, steal, take it, grab it, drink, eat, run away. That’s what they do. You’d prefer to leave wolves among the sheep than these guys at home as guards.

This comparison of his slaves to donkeys suggests that there is cleverness in the pimp Ballio, but his clever imagery is not transformative here. Ballio operates on a level that entertains through amusing description, but it ultimately describes the way things are, elaborating here the actual, physical qualities of his slaves. It does not transform them into asses so Ballio can whip them. Rather they are like asses in part because Ballio can whip them. Similarly, this angered pimp does not make his slaves a pack of wolves among the sheep, but rather is creatively describing their habits.

Ballio proves himself incapable of transforming his slaves into what he wants them to be. At this stage, he has left them as animate beings, asses and wolves. He turns to his slaves, threatening to further transform them.
ita ego vestra latera loris faciam ut valide varia sint,
ut ne peristromata quidem aeque picta sint Campanica
neque Alexandrina beluata tonsilia tappetia. (145-7)

I’ll make sure your sides are so staunchly striped with whippings that not even Campanian rugs or fine-worked, beast-embroidered, Alexandrian tapestries would be equally colorful.

His imagery reduces them to inanimate decorations for his household, rather than the human agents they are capable of being. Ballio has failed to transform his lazy slaves into anything but an amusing image of rug-backed slaves giving a splash of color to this pimp-estate. He can amuse us with his imagery, but he cannot make his slaves what he wishes them to be. He does not present his slaves with new opportunities which might improve the situation at Ballio’s household for everyone. Instead, he threatens to further dehumanize his slaves. Any ability he has to transform comes not from a divestment in the power of the symbolic world, but rather as a result of a deep investment in his position as slave master and the social relations of his world. His slaves are a beating-bearing race of men (*plagigera genera hominum*). (153) There can be no denying the cleverness of Ballio when it comes to describing slave punishment, but his abilities are ultimately empty, since his threats do not in fact make his slaves the hard-working souls he wishes them to be.

So far we have seen Ballio threatening to change his slaves into something they are not currently through his potential to whip them. He goes on to display a bit more flair for self transformation as he addresses his ladies. Addressing Hedytium, particularly beloved by the grain dealers, Ballio demands,

---

49 The success of Roscius playing the role of Ballio suggests that the role could in fact draw a significant amount of support and applause. Cicero, *Pro Q. Roscio* 7.20.
fac sis sit delatum huc mihi frumentum, hunc annum quod satis,  
mi et familiae omni sit meae, atque adeo ut frumento afluam,  
ut civitas nomen mihi commutet meque ut praedicet  
lenone ex Ballione regem Iasonem. (190-3) 

Make sure, if you will, that grain is brought back here to me, enough for the year,  
for me and my whole household, and so much of it that I overflow with grain, so  
the state will change my name and call me king Jason instead of pimp Ballio.  

This is the most transformative image that Ballio has provided the audience so far. It  
stretches the relationship beyond visible equivalents. He imagines that his increased  
wealth will cause the people to relabel him, elevating him from his position of pimp to  
king. For Ballio to become King Jason though, he would need the help of his slaves,  
whom, we have seen, he cannot rouse into positive action. He can imagine a world that is  
different, but he is incapable of bringing that world to pass.  

There is one moment in the opening few scenes where Ballio does successfully  
transform someone, but again this power comes through his role as a pimp. As Calidorus  
pleads with the uncooperative pimp to give him more time to come up with the money,  
Ballio informs him that Phoenicium is not for sale since she has been sold.  
As Calidorus slips back into despair, Ballio converts Phoenicium into all sorts of monetary units, 20  
minae, 4 times 5 minae, and finally the simple and crude silver. (344-7) When he actually  
transforms someone into something they both are and are not, it is more the result of the  
system of business and exchange than Ballio’s creative powers. In order to flourish in  
business, Ballio must see things beyond their present appearance. Here, a girl must be  
both a girl and cash. Even though Ballio shows a bit of gusto in playing with the amount,  

---  

50 For a discussion of the potential problems in plot inconsistencies between the opening scene in which  
Calidorus knows that Phoenicium has been sold and this scene where he does not seem to know see  
Williams (1956), 427-32.  

36
note that he only envisions Phoenicium as a fixed amount of cash. Even here in
transforming Phoenicium into cash, he can only do so in a very limited way. If we look
forward to the end of the play, we will notice that in fact he cannot even bring this
transformation about.

2.3 How to Get a Girl in 3, Maybe 4, Maybe 5 Not So Easy Steps

In watching Pseudolus, we are struck by the frequent stops and starts that lead to the
eventual union of Calidorus and Phoenicium. As one plan gets underway, it quickly gives
way to another which surveys the avenues for action that have become closed as well as
the avenues that either remain open or have just become open. To operate in a play where
everyone knows what he is up to, Pseudolus needs to be particularly adept at shifting the
way he thinks about the solution to the problem. Let us start with the first plan he finds
himself involved with to get Phoenicium away from Ballio.

2.3.1 Shaming of a Pimp

Frustrated with a pimp who cannot keep his word, Calidorus attempts to coerce Ballio
through flagitatio, which works when it labels people as what they do not wish to be. The
object of the abuse does as the abuser wishes them to in order to cease being called what
they do not wish themselves to be. If you call me a worthless friend and untrustworthy
confidant, I may do what you want me to do so that you will stop labeling me as
something I do not want to be. In this flagitatio, Calidorus fails to change Ballio’s actions
because he inadvertently uses terms that Ballio views as marks of pride. Calling on the
aid of his trusty slave, Calidorus lets fly a string of unpleasant thoughts toward Ballio.
Pseudolus agrees to play his master’s game, and the flagitatio scene gets under way.

(359) Once Calidorus’ governing problem is reintroduced, namely the potential loss of
Phoenicium, he cannot change something through words, being a force in the play for reifying words into concrete and fixed individuals. Ballio accepts any insult flung at him as part of who he is.\(^{51}\) The pimp is willing to be whatever negative elements of society Calidorus and Pseudolus can come up with. That will not stop him from doing business as the pimp that he is. So an effort to coerce Ballio fails, as Calidorus continues to label the world as it is.

Scholars have pondered why Pseudolus, the archetypical comic slave is so unsuccessful at this point in the play. Wright sees a deep contrast between the comically twisting Ballio and a Pseudolus who is giving up his strengths as a comic figure.\(^{52}\) Wright points in particular to Pseudolus’ answer to Calidorus’ request that he help in the abuse. Pseudolus tells Calidorus,

\begin{quote}
Licet.
Numquam ad praetorem aeque cursim curram, ut emitam manu. (357-8)
\end{quote}

Okay. I would never run off to the \textit{praetor} as quickly to be set free.

Pseudolus still privileges the opportunity to be a rascal over a desire to be free. He says that he would gladly play the slave rather than being free, since he has agreed to help out Calidorus’ wishes quicker than he would seize the opportunity to get freed. Freedom binds an individual to social obligations that the slave as an unauthorized agent and blank figure for a master’s desires is unbound by.\(^{53}\) As a slave, Pseudolus is a neutral entity

\(^{51}\) Wright (1975), 407 observes that Ballio here gets the upper hand through his use of comic language in the early phases of the play. Ballio is able to shift words of abuse into words of praise through his subjective command of language.

\(^{52}\) Wright (1975), 409.

\(^{53}\) See Segal (1968), 164 ff. Segal notes that it is only as a slave that the slave can revel. His jubilance comes from the inversion of his typical role, a revel limited to the day of the play.
onto which roles can be placed. As such, he is a figure for transformation, adapting
\textit{(morem gerere)} to the wants of his master.

Yet we are still at a loss about why Pseudolus does not take charge in this scene to
successfully coerce Ballio. Slater suggests, “Pseudolus’ lack of control in Ballio’s scene
is because the abuse is Calidorus’ idea.”\textsuperscript{54} This is helpful on one level since it recognizes
that the scene is largely an expression of the energy that comes from Calidorus’
character. Ballio needs to feel shame for him to change his ways, but standard \textit{flagitatio}
cannot accomplish this. One would need to attack Ballio on something he is invested in,
such as his position as master in control of his own household. If we focus on Pseudolus,
it is possible that he does not necessarily need to be in control of scenes and events. We
have begun to see that Pseudolus has hitched his wagon to improvisation. In many ways,
control over events only ties him to the workings of social dynamics. The slave’s not-
self-authorizing position in society grants him his comic freedom. The tighter he is drawn
into social power dynamics, the more he limits what he can do while still adhering to the
demands of the social system.

\textbf{2.3.2 Pseudolus’ Initial Plan (Fleece a Father?)}

When Ballio departs the stage, Pseudolus makes two important statements that reestablish
his approach to the world.

\begin{verse}
\textit{Ili hic homo meus est, nisi omnes di me atque homines deserunt.}
\textit{Exossabo ego illum simulter itidem ut murenam coquos.} (381-2)
\end{verse}

The man there is mine, unless the gods and men abandon me. I will debone that
man just like a cook does an eel.

\textsuperscript{54} Slater (2000), 102.
In an improvisational world, Pseudolus is able to see his project as much more than swindling a girl out of a pimp. As he does often in this play, he figures himself a craftsman. Just like a cook who transforms fish into food, removing some of the things that make them fish, so too will Pseudolus make Ballio more enjoyable and useful for his young master by removing part of what makes him a pimp, namely the lovely Phoenicium.⁵⁵

These transformations continue as Calidorus asks Pseudolus what to do next.

Hoc ego oppidum admoenire, ut hodie capiatur, volo; ad eam rem usust homine astuto, docto, cauto et callido, qui imperata ecfecta reddat, non qui vigilans dormiat. (384-6)

I want to lay siege to this town so it might be captured today. For this we need a man cunning, learned, wary, and clever, one to return orders completed, and one who wouldn’t fall asleep while on watch.

Pseudolus slips into the mode of military conquest, so often a feature of scheming slaves in Plautus.⁵⁶ Authorized by society to be whatever his master wishes and to make the world that of his master’s desire, Pseudolus has the opportunity, created by his ability to play with language, to make Ballio a town to be stormed. A plan seems in the works, as suggested by Pseudolus’ request for an assistant, but the content of that plan will have to wait. As he puts it,

nolo bis iterari, sat sic longae fiunt fabulae. (388)

I don’t want to go through it twice. The play is long enough.

Whether or not Pseudolus actually has a plan, when considering a slave who will prove himself a better improviser than planner, we might ask whether it matters if he actually

---

⁵⁵ In an extra Plautine twist, Ballio does become the object of a cook’s curiosity later in the play. (Pseudolus. 790-891)

⁵⁶ For a larger discussion of military language in Plautus see Fraenkel (2007), 159-165.
does. In satisfying Calidorus’ curiosity, he has managed to fashion a response that leaves open a myriad of possibilities. By keeping the details quiet, he has not committed himself to any particular path that we as an audience would expect him to travel down. There are many paths he can use to storm the town of Ballio, a stationary target to the mobile Pseudolus, if we put value in the metaphor.

When Pseudolus has the stage to himself for the first time, he takes the opportunity to talk to the audience. We might expect him to present us with a well-developed scheme, such as Palaestrio does in the *Miles Gloriosus* when he lays out his scheme to fool the soldier’s faithful slave Sceledrus (136-153), but he does not express confidence in one definite course of action. Instead, he vacillates about how he will get some cash to swindle Ballio with.

```
quid nunc acturu's, postquam erili filio
largitu's dictis dapsilis? ubi sunt ea?
quoi neque paratast gutta certi consili,
neque adeo argenti—neque nunc quid faciam scio.
neque exordiri primum unde occipias habes,
neque ad detexundam telam certos terminos.

sed quasi poeta, tabulas cum cepit sibi,
quae nusquam nunc sunt gentium, inveniam tamen.
```

What are you going to do now that you have glutted the master’s son with tasty words? Where are they? You don’t have a taste of a sure-fire plan, nor for that matter of the money – nor do I know what I’ll do. You don’t have an initial spot from which to begin putting things in order, nor a fixed limit for setting up your loom, but like a poet, when he’s taken up his tablets, he looks for what is nowhere in the world, and yet he discovers it. He makes a fib like the truth. Now I’ll become a poet. The 20 *minae*, which are nowhere on earth, nevertheless I’ll find
‘em. I had said that I would give it to this old man a long time ago, and I wanted to open fire on him. But he caught wind of this already somehow.

Pseudolus wavers on his plan, introducing a string of transformations, from cook to weaver to poet to spear-chucker. Each image here is of a craftsman at the beginning of his work. There is a notion of what the work will look like, but a clear picture of the final product is still long off. The cook’s dish is never exactly the same twice, seasoning it to the particular tastes of his current diners. The weaver’s tapestry develops in the weaving. The poem adapts as new elements come into the mind of the poet. From a dramatic standpoint, the poet responds to the imagined audience as well as the talents of the cast who will have to bring his literary imagination to physical life. The spear-chucker must be ready to shift his aim, ready to take into account the movements of his target as well as wind speed and direction. Though Pseudolus knows his ultimate goal, he recognizes that the path is not a simple and predetermined one.

We should not overlook that poet is only one of several professions Pseudolus likens his activity to. Even when the old men Simo and Callipho enter the stage, Pseudolus continues to tinker with his part in this play.

ex hoc sepulcro vetere viginti minas
effodiam ego Hodie, quas dem erili filio. (412-3)

From this old tomb today, I will dig up the 20 minae which I’ll give to the master’s son.

The appearance of Simo may have interrupted Pseudolus’ transformations, but it does not put an end to them. Here, Pseudolus does not fish around for the right role to play, ultimately deciding that playwright is the way to act today. He constantly leaves himself

---

57 Slater labels this soliloquy as the “poet soliloquy” (202). Slater emphasizes the fact that Pseudolus sees himself as a poet writing a plot.
open to a variety of roles, ready to adopt the one that gives him a temporary advantage. He ‘writes’ very few roles. Beyond playing with his own role in this play, he has asked Calidorus to find him a man, but he does not qualify what kind of man would be appropriate for the role beyond a description that would apply to any comic trickster. Writing a role to be played would fix him to a course of action. Calidorus has allowed himself to be written into a role, the foolish and helpless lover, and this has gotten him nowhere. I would suggest that Pseudolus is establishing a framework in which he can adapt and use whatever happens to free Phoenicium from the clutches of Ballio.

2.3.3 Revision and a Second Plan

As Simo enters the stage, Pseudolus abandons what seemed to be the initial plan, namely fleecing the father or perhaps the mother. Shifting gears, he also reasserts the lack of fixity in his view of the world. Seeing Simo, Pseudolus remarks,

\[
\text{occisa est haec res, haeret hoc negotium.}
\]
\[
\text{quo in commeatum volui argentarum}
\]
\[
\text{proficisci, ibi nunc oppido opsaetast via.}
\]
\[
\text{praesensit: nihil est praeae praedatoribus. (423-6)}
\]

It’s all over. The gig is up. Where I wanted to go scrounging for cash, now the road to town is blocked there. He caught wind of it. There is no loot for the looters.

In the eyes of Pseudolus, Simo, like Ballio, becomes a town full of useful plunder. The mobile Pseudolus envisions his victim as a stationary target, ripe for the plucking, but this prize will have to wait. He shifts focus from the image of the wealthy man as a city to the shut off road. Simo’s complaints about him and Calidorus have closed the road to easy money. The advantage of his imagery becomes quite obvious. When your target is

---

58 Pseudolus’ request for a man “astuto, docto, cauto et callido” (385) has the appearance of a laundry list of qualities in any generic trickster. Cf. especially *Amphitruo* 268.
stationary, it is a matter of finding a path to that location. You adjust yourself to a target that is unchanging. The road may be shut off, but all that means is that you need to take another route. Town Simo will still be there, stuffed with loot provided Pseudolus finds himself an open path.

Pseudolus reasserts his mobility when Simo greets him in typical fashion. Simo’s first words to him are as bland a greeting as can be, “Salve. Quid agitur? / Hello. What’s going on?” Pseudolus turns the discussion from common niceties to acting style. In response to Simo, Pseudolus says, “Statur hic ad hunc modum. / Standing here like this.” (457) Pseudolus manages to sidetrack the mode of speech through this simple shift in language, a move taken up without resistance by Simo and Callipho. At any moment with Pseudolus, this play can head off down another road. A potentially angry and unsupportive father can be easily steered into a conversation about acting styles.

When Simo questions Pseudolus posing as the Delphic oracle, he makes it clear that he knows Pseudolus’ plans about where to get the money. He presents Pseudolus with a challenge. How can Pseudolus proceed? Will he go elsewhere? He assures Simo that Simo will be the source for the cash, and in an effort to further elevate the greatness of the feat he is planning, he announces,

**PS.** Prius quam istam pugnam pugnabo, ego etiam prius dabo aliam pugnam claram et commemorabilem.
**SIM.** Quam pugnam? **PS.** Em ab hoc lenone vicino tuo per sycophantiam atque per doctos dolos tibicinam illam, tuos quam gnatus deperit, ea circumducam lepide lenonem. **SIM.** Quid est?
**PS.** Effectum hoc Hodie reddam utrumque ad vesperum. (524-30)

**PS.** Before I fight that fight of yours, even before that, I’ll give another fight, remarkable and noteworthy. **SIM.** What fight? **PS.** Well from this pimp, your neighbor, through deceit and learned tricks, that flute-player your son has gone
ga-ga over, I am going to delightfully separate the pimp from her. **SIM.** What’s this? **PS.** By nightfall I will come back and have them both done.

Come one! Come all! Tonight Pseudolus battles not one but two foes! Rest assured. Both will be defeated by the end of the day! As an audience, we should recognize that we are dealing with an unusual clever slave. As quickly as he suggests one course of action, he reminds us that there are always many more potential ways to accomplish the same goal. Even though Pseudolus’ goal of freeing Phoenicium can be accomplished by getting money from Simo, it can also be accomplished directly by deceiving the pimp. The world that he inhabits is one that has many paths leading to its conclusion. He is ready to improvise, making use of the opportunities that the other characters present him with, like a prize fighter waiting for the appropriate opening to swing at his opponent.

Even here in the midst of his grand proclamation, Pseudolus shows that he is in fact improvising as he goes. The positioning of *ab hoc lenone* sets the audience up to expect that Pseudolus will free the girl from Ballio. Pseudolus meanders, reveling in a series of additional thoughts. There will be great tricks and that flute girl of course, not forgetting Simo’s desperately-in-love son. Whatever verb Pseudolus plans to use with *lenone* in the ablative and *tibicinam* in the accusative is abandoned for *ea circumducam lepide lenonem* in 529. Pseudolus is not giving us a preformulated challenge, structured in straightforward phrases. The spirit of the moment is embraced to such a degree that Pseudolus loses track of where he started to go. He shifts verbal gears, and the game becomes separating a pimp from a girl, instead of separating a girl from a pimp, which would be the more common way to look at it.
A wager is now in the works. Simo asks whether Pseudolus would expect anything but a trip to the mill if he fails. Pseudolus does not object to Simo’s suggestion, adding that he will serve in the mill,

non unum in diem [modo],
verum hercle in omnis, quantumst. (534-5)

Not one day, but by gum, for all of ‘em, however many there are.

In amplifying the stakes, he allows himself to make a counter-demand if he succeeds, namely 20 *minae*. He has taken Simo’s question as an opportunity to develop a bet out of what could be simply a master’s threat. On another level though, we can see Pseudolus agreeing with Simo for another reason. If Pseudolus fails to bamboozle the pimp, he has failed to fulfill his theatrical bargain. If Pseudolus cannot do what theatrical slaves do, he deserves to be treated like a real slave, punished for his trouble-making activities.

At this point, the ever-wily Simo poses yet another possibility. The intrigue is really only against Simo. Pseudolus reacts to Simo’s suggestion in a way that helps to reinforce Pseudolus’ relation to the world as something that he is free to play with, not a world in which language has strict connections to real things. Through words, Pseudolus can transform his back, offering Simo,

si sumus compecti seu consilium umquam iniimus de istac re
aut si de ea re umquam inter nos convenimus,
 quasi in libro cum scribuntur calamo litterae
stilis me totum usque ulmeis conscribito. (543-5)

If we have consulted or ever entered into a plan about this affair, or if we have ever made an agreement about this, like when letters are written in a book with a reed, write all over me with elm-wood pens.

Pseudolus admits the possibility that any whip is a pen with which a master writes his authority on the back of those he has authority over. In whipping a slave, the master sets
himself into the role of master, agrees to play by the rules of that position, and adheres to the advantages and limits of his mastery.

With the departure of Simo to the forum and Callipho into the house, Pseudolus turns to us,

suspicio est mihi nunc vos suspicarier,
me idcirco haec tanta facinora promittere,
quo vos oblectem, hanc fabulam dum transigam,
neque sim facturus quod facturum dixeram.
non demutabo. atque etiam certum, quod sciam,
quo id sim facturus pacto nil etiam scio,
nisi quia futurumst. (562-8)

It is my suspicion that you suspect that I am promising such great deeds so far in order to delight you, while I act out this play, and that I am not going to do what I said I was going to. I will not deviate from the plan. I am certain that what I know about how I am going to do this is … that I don’t really know … except that it will happen.

Is this all the stuff of typical comedy? Is Pseudolus just a faker? It temporarily looks like Pseudolus has determined a path to take, as he says non demutabo. He continues to appear confident as he begins his next sentence certum, but just as quickly, he reveals that he will need to improvise. Like Socrates, he certainly knows that he does not know, but he persists in his confidence that things will turn out well in the end. He allows his scheme to lie open-ended, the destination being the only element that is fixed, a point at which the drama can aim. The destination, however, is not the focus of the play but rather the framework in which it happens. Pseudolus has committed himself to improv, and it

---

59 Shortly before this scene, Simo warns his friend Callipho that through his words Pseudolus has the power to make you think you are speaking with Socrates, not Pseudolus. Pseudolus. 464-5.

60 It is significant that we never see the union of Calidorus and Phoenicium. This ultimate reunion, the ‘destination’ of the play, is told by the drunken Pseudolus, who focuses more on his wine-enhanced dancing skills than the happy joining of lovers.
is this that enables him to accomplish anything in the play. His confidence is not based so much on his ability to manipulate as on his opportunism.

This becomes all the more clear after a musical interlude from the flute player.

Pseudolus returns to the stage, brimming with excitement. He tells us,

Pro Iuppiter, ut mihi, quidquid ago, lepide omnia prospereque eveniunt: neque quod dubitem neque quod timeam, meo in pectore conditumst consilium. nam ea stultitias, facinus magnum timido cordi credere; nam omnes res perinde sunt
ut agas, ut eas magni facias; nam ego in meo pectore prius ita paravi copias, duplicis triplicis dolos perfidias, ut, ubiquomque hostibus congrediari— maiorum meum fretus virtute dicam, mea industria et malitia fraudulenta— facile ut vincam, facile ut spoliem meos perduellis meis perfidiis. nunc inimicum ego hunc communem meum atque vostrorum omnium, Ballionem, exballistabo lepide: date operam modo; hoc ego oppidum admoenire, ut hodie capiatur, volo. atque hac mes legiones adducam; si expugno— facilem hanc rem meis civibus faciam— post ad oppidum hoc vetus continuo meum exercitum protinus obducam: inde me et simul participes omnis meos praeda atque opplebo, metum et fugam perduellibus meis me ut sciant natum. eo sum genere gnatus: magna me facinora decet efficere, quae post mihi clara et diu clueant. (574-91)

By Jupiter, how delightfully and fruitfully it’s all turning out for me, whatever I do. And I don’t have any doubt or fear. I got a plan well planted in my chest. It’s foolish to trust a great deed to a timid heart. Everything is just as you make it, worth as much as you make it. Truth is, I’ve prepared in my chest my troops, double, triple tricky lies in such a way that wherever I meet my enemies – let me say I am trusting on that virtue of my ancestors, my hard-work and deceiving wickedness – that I’ll beat ‘em easily, easily despoil my opponents through my tricks. Now I’ll delightfully ballistify Ballio, the common enemy of myself and all of you. Now pay attention. I want to lay siege to this town, so it might be captured today, and I’ll bring my legions forward. If I overwhelm him – I’ll make this business easy for my fellow citizens – immediately afterwards I’ll lead my army right to this old town. From there I’ll load up and stuff myself with booty and all my comrades too. Fear and flight for my foes when they know I was born. I was born from such a race. It befits me to do great deeds, which will make me famous for a long time to come.
Perhaps for the first time in this play, we have the sense that Pseudolus has committed himself to a plan. It is significant that the plot against Ballio echoes word for word the plot against Simo in line 384, *hoc ego oppidum admoenire, ut hodie capiatur, volo*. The difficulty that lies ahead is a matter of perception.\(^1\) There are at least two ways for Pseudolus to help Calidorus. When the way to Simo’s money becomes temporarily closed, Pseudolus redirects the city metaphor to Ballio. Pseudolus follows each ploy as far as he thinks it will take him, adopting a new one as the situation requires. Choose a path. Follow it until it comes to an impasse. Adopt a new one. Wash, rinse, and repeat. If you, like Pseudolus, approach the world as not fixed and finite, then the world and its inhabitants are a site for continual improvisation. You can hold out for the opportunity to proceed toward your goal even if it means that for the time being you need to move sideways.

### 2.3.4 New Character, New Plan

All of Pseudolus’ confidence and definite planning are a ruse on the part of Plautus. As soon as he presents us with a confident Pseudolus, enjoying the moment to add some comic bravado, he gives Pseudolus an opportunity to reassert his improvisatory nature. With the arrival of the soldier’s messenger, Harpax, a new plan is set into motion. Eavesdropping on Harpax, Pseudolus turns to us and says,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{St, tace, tace, meus hic est homo, ni omnes di atque homines deserunt.} \\
\text{novo consilio nunc mihi opus est,} \\
\text{nova res subito mi haec obiectast:} \\
\text{hoc praevoort principio; illa omnia missa habeo, quae ante agere occepi.} \\
\text{iam pol ego hunc stratioticum nuntium advenientem probe percutiam. (600-3)}
\end{align*}
\]

Shh. Be quiet. Be quiet. This man is mine, unless all the gods and men betray me. I need a new plan. A new situation has been tossed my way. I’ll turn to this one first. I am letting go of all those plans I was working on earlier. Now by golly I’ll smartly strike this soldier’s messenger who’s on his way.

The play has started anew, as Moore suggests. A new target is in Pseudolus’ sights.

Sharrock does not believe that Pseudolus had a plan before now, but if we keep in mind the image of an improvising Pseudolus, it does not matter how well formed those previous plans were. He can overcome the many obstacles he encounters because of his relentless energy to make it up as he goes. He has not accounted for all of the difficulties ahead of time, but he is quick to sidestep them as they come. Pseudolus extols the potentials of an improvisational stance toward the world. With each new turn of events, Pseudolus reevaluates and restructures his scheme. He allows the present moment to be perpetually a work in progress open to the potential of thousands of possible avenues. Pseudolus sets off down one for the time being until something, like Harpax here, gives him the opportunity to explore a new one.

---


63 Sharrock (1999), 166. “Once Harpax arrives, the ‘true plot’ gets underway. But this is a con-trick. Pseudolus is deceiving us into thinking he has a plan … but he wants us to think he has so that we can see how wonderful he is, and how resourceful he is when the real plot presents itself.”

64 Lowe is inclined to see the business of wagers as a way “to elevate Pseudolus’ stature as a brilliant and inveterate schemer.” Lowe (1999), 2. While I am not going to deny that Pseudolus is ultimately successful in his plotting, I would disagree with those who emphasize scheming to the detriment of Pseudolus’ commitment to improvisation. His willingness to replot frees Phoenicium more than the details of any one scheme Pseudolus cooks up.

65 Zagagi argues, “The Plautine improvisations … contribute little, if anything, to the action of the plays in which they occur; nor can any of them be claimed to be invested with true dramatic value in itself. Rather, their main function is to constitute an ad hoc means of raising the comic level … in the Greek original.” Zagagi (1995), 71-2 Whereas this may be more accurate about Plautine adaptations in which dramatic action grinds to a halt to give way to a bit of improvisatory theater, here in Pseudolus Plautus is staging improvisation as another means to success, creating a slave who does not get what he needs through elaborate schemes that ensnare their victims, but through his adaptability.
Pseudolus quickly begins to transform himself as he engages Harpax.\textsuperscript{66} The initial interchange between these two is worth a closer look.

**PS.** Quisquis es, compendium ego te facere pultandi volo; nam ego precator et patronus foribus processi foras.

**HARP.** Tune es Ballio? **PS.** Immo vero ego eius sum Subballio.

**HARP.** Quid istuc verbist? **PS.** Condus promus sum, procurator peni.

**HARP.** Quasi te dicas atriensem. **PS.** Immo atrieni ego impero. (605-9)

**PS.** Whoever you are, I want you to ease up on the knocking, because I, the intercessor and patron of the doors, have come forward. **HARP.** You’re Ballio? **PS.** Nope. Actually I am his Subballio. **HARP.** What’s that mean? **PS.** I store, pour, and take care of the food. **HARP.** It’s like you’re saying a butler. **PS.** Nope. I give orders to the butler.

Pseudolus becomes not Ballio but Subballio. Harpax requests some clarification. In response to Pseudolus’ description of his duties, Harpax suggests the title \textit{atriensis}, but Pseudolus refuses to let himself be tied to the title, changing into the man who gives orders to the \textit{atriensis}. One gets the impression that Pseudolus has not worked out the details of how to play Ballio’s servant. He continues to adjust his role as the situation progresses, reinforced through the echo in line 607 and 609 of \textit{immo} ... \textit{ego}. Through his adaptability, Pseudolus continues to keep free from a definite identity. As others, like Harpax, attempt to assign him a role, he dodges, exploiting an increasing range of new potentials.

Plautus now presents us with an interesting twist on the use of asides. Following an aside delivered by Harpax, Pseudolus turns to the audience, and turns Harpax into an anvil on which he will forge his tricks. It is at this point that Plautus gives us yet another

\textsuperscript{66} Wright (1975) and following him Slater (2000) have done much with the idea of Pseudolus transforming himself into an actor who plays the role of Ballio’s slave, Surus, but I would again emphasize the importance of Pseudolus working within the unfolding drama, not a theatrical agent who stands outside the drama.
moment to suspect Pseudolus’ deceiving powers. Harpax overhears Pseudolus, and is
overheard in return.

**HARP.** Quid illic secum solus loquitur? **PS.** Quid ais tu, adulescens? (615)

**HARP.** What is he saying to himself all alone over there? **PS.** What are you saying, young man?

Pseudolus has temporarily lost the upper hand. Denied the chance to speak secretly about his plans to cheat Harpax, Pseudolus recognizes the need to improvise a bit. As Pseudolus failed to go unheard, so Pseudolus hears Harpax speak a line that in other circumstances could easily be delivered as an aside. In asking Harpax what he said, Pseudolus has managed to regain the upper hand. He can proceed to confirm Harpax’ identity as the soldier’s messenger. (616-619)

Pseudolus begins to play the confidence game with Harpax, providing enough information to make Harpax believe he is who he says he is. He knows that Harpax has come from the Macedonian soldier, that the soldier left 15 *minae* with Ballio, and that Harpax ought to have the other 5. It is obvious that Pseudolus has opted to change targets for fleecing. Having failed to get the money out of Simo, who knew what he was up to, he adjusts his sights. Harpax is a fine stand-in for Simo when it comes to getting the money, but Harpax will not be a simple dupe. Though he does not exhibit a wide range of clever verbal acrobatics, he does display wariness about this slave who seems all too eager for the money. Pseudolus becomes frustrated with Harpax, and the two-line exchange is very telling about Harpax.

**PS.** Quasi tu dicas me te velle argento circumducere.
**HARP.** Immo vero quasi tu dicas quasique ego autem id suspicer. (634-5)
PS. It’s like you’re saying I want to separate you from the money. HARP. Nope. Actually it’s like you’re saying it and I, however, am suspecting it.

Here again we see Pseudolus’ failure to make others act as he wishes. Interested in the wallet that Harpax brings, he has an interest in Harpax acting in a specific way. In trying to assign an intention to the messenger, Pseudolus echoes Harpax’ language in line 609 (quasi te dicas atriensem). Just as Pseudolus found a way to redefine himself, so Harpax, echoing Pseudolus, finds a way to reconceptualize what is going on. Our clever slave has failed to keep the upper hand. Harpax gains an advantage over Pseudolus not through some mastery of verbal theatrics but because he is able to recognize the one thing the slave needs, the purse full of money. Eager to complete his business with Ballio safely, he is willing to wait at the local inn until Ballio returns. Having no reason to suspect that Pseudolus is anyone but who he says he is, Harpax entrusts him with a letter to give to his ‘master’.

As an audience, we must admit that we have not seen Pseudolus succeed in his plots. He has not gotten where he is through an innate clever ability to scheme, which bamboozles his foes, leaving them in a whirlwind of confusion. Simo caught wind of what Pseudolus was up to, and Pseudolus realized the need to turn his schemes elsewhere. Though he is able to convince Harpax he is a slave of Ballio’s, he cannot get what he wants, since Harpax refuses to trust this slave with the money. This does not stop our hero however. Pseudolus continues working to free Phoenicium for Calidorus. Any progress he has made so far has been as a result of his willingness to never give up and his commitment to adapt himself and his plans to the needs of the situation. If Pseudolus is to succeed this day, he must continue to trust in this talent.
2.3.5 Replan and Win a Girl

Pseudolus finds himself alone on stage, holding a letter that he has acquired through no real effort of his own. Harpax, who is skeptical only of Pseudolus’ intentions as an underling, never doubts that Pseudolus is Ballio’s slave. The unread letter presents Pseudolus, who is at his best when he is improvising and not following a strict script, with an opportunity to begin anew. As he phrases it,

nam haec allata cornu copiaest, ubi inest quidquid volo: 
hic doli, hic fallaciae omnes, hic sunt sycophantiae, 
hic argentum, hic amica amanti erili filio. (671-3)

Well this is a cornucopia that’s come my way. Whatever I want is right here. Here are all the tricks, here’s the fibs, here’s the deceits, here’s the cash, here’s the girl for that love-bird, my master’s son.

The letter becomes the key for the rest of the play, not for what it says but for what it can be. Left unread, it presents Pseudolus with the opportunity to play games. Unlike the first letter which was read, this second letter is not a prologue of sorts to tell what has happened or hint at what is to come. Rather, this new letter is a prop to be managed in one of many ways.

At this point, Pseudolus reiterates his debt to improvisation and luck. Reflecting on his past plan of action, he remarks,

atque ego nunc me ut gloriosum faciam et copi pectore: 
quo modo quicque agerem, ut lenoni surruperem mulierrcum, 
iam instituta ornata cuncta in ordine, animo ut volueram, 
certa deformata habebam; sed profecto hoc sic erit: 
centum doctum hominum consilia sola haec devincit dea, 
Fortuna. atque hoc verum est: proinde ut quisque Fortuna utitur, 
ita praecellet atque exinde sapere eum omnes dicimus. (674-80)

And now how I’m going to boast and puff my chest out. I already had everything decided and equipped just like I wanted it to be in my mind, how and what I was to do to filch that little lady from the pimp. I had it all firmly formed, but actually
it’s going to be like this. This goddess alone defeats the plans of a hundred learned men, and her name is Lady Luck. So this is the truth. However someone uses Luck, that’s how he’ll excel, and from that we all say that he’s got sense.

It is as if Pseudolus had forgotten about his success as an improviser when he approached Harpax. Pseudolus thought he had a nicely framed plan, but the plan failed because it was too obvious what the goal was. He succeeds when he embraces any situation as flexible. One needs to focus not on what was, since that has become fixed and static, but rather to make the most of the present, since it is always incomplete and open to improvisation. His commitment to Lady Luck is a gamble that, given time, what one wishes for will happen though where it will come from can never be known until some point down the road.

Now that Pseudolus has a new plan, he needs a new man. Calidorus’ friend Charinus was the man for the old job, but he has connections to those already in the play. Pseudolus has not been able to dupe his foes because of their knowledge of him, and he needs to improvise further, moving away from his initial plan. Pseudolus and Charinus begin to work out who this new assistant will be.

CHAR. Si servos est, numquid refert? PS. Immo multo mavor quam liberum.
CHAR. Posse opinor me dare hominem tibi malum et doctum domo, qui a patre advenit Carysto nec dum exiit ex aedibus quoquam neque Athenas advenit umquam ante hesternum diem. (727-31)

CHAR. Does it matter if he’s a slave? PS. Actually I much prefer that to a free man. CHAR. I think I can give you a troublesome and learned fellow from home. He comes from my father from Carystus, and he still hasn’t left the house to go anywhere, and he’s never been to Athens before yesterday.

At Pseudolus’ request, Charinus offers up a slave. Why is a slave, and an unknown one at that, so preferable? In a world of floggings and beatings, the slave has little to gain from
buying into the structures of his physical world. The comic slave rejects the stranglehold of this finite world to play with universal ideas that shape his experience in the world. As Hegel suggests about comedy in general, “The comical therefore plays its part more often in people with lower views … But at the same time they reveal themselves as having something higher in them because they are not seriously tied to the finite world with which they are engaged but are raised above it.” Instead of seeing beatings as a mark of shame, the comic slave can redefine those beatings as badges of honor, marking not disobedience but acknowledgement of his efforts. With no investment in what happens, a slave like Charinus’ Simia could best assume any role that might be needed. He has not been tied into the world that has defined and positioned expectations for Pseudolus and Ballio (the wily slave and the shameless, unethical pimp). Lacking such identity, Simia is in a position to play any role that might be useful. He can just as easily be a soldier’s messenger as he can be Charinus’ slave.

2.4 Master and Student

When Pseudolus enters the stage talking to his new assistant, we immediately observe that there is something not quite right. Pseudolus has come addressing Simia in words of praise, but Simia is nowhere to be seen.

Si umquam quemquam di immortales voluere esse auxilio adiutum,
tum me et Calidorum servatum volunt esse et lenonem extinctum,
quam te adiutorem genuerunt mihi tam doctum hominem atque astutum.
sed ubi illic est? sumne ego homo insipiens, qui haec mecom egomet loquar
solus?
dedit verba mihi hercle, ut opinor: (905-9)

If ever the immortal gods wanted a man to come and help, then they want Calidorus and me to be saved and the pimp to be snuffed out, since they produced

---

67 Hegel (1998), 469.
you as my helper, such a learned and crafty man. But where is he? Am I such a fool that I’m talking to myself about these things all alone? By gum he tricked me, as I see it.

Simia is not just a tool for trickery, the puppet that Pseudolus needs to orchestrate this final plot. Each time Pseudolus attempts to direct the squirrely Simia, Simia reasserts his prerogative to play it as he wishes to. When Pseudolus attempts to hurry his assistant up, Simia replies,

Quid properas? placide, ne time.
ita ille faxit Iuppiter,
ut ille palam ibidem adsiet,
quisquis illest, qui adest a milite.
nunquam edepol erit ille potior
Harpax quam ego. habe animum bonum:
pulchre ego hanc explicatam tibi rem dabo.
sic ego illum dolis atque mendaciis
in timorem dabo militarem advenam,
ipsus sese ut neget esse eum qui siet
meque ut esse autumet qui ipsus est. (923-30)

What’s the hurry? Calm down, don’t worry. Jupiter will make sure that man is clearly there, whoever he is, the one from the soldier. Never will there be a better Harpax than I. Take it easy. I’ll straighten this matter out beautifully for you. With my tricks and lies I will give that freshly arrived military man such a fright that he himself will deny that he is who he is and he’ll think that I am really he.

If Pseudolus is writing this plot, his creation has gotten out of control, but there is another way to understand the interaction between these two slaves. What we are seeing here is the give and take between two collaborators. Pseudolus has a project that needs taken care of, and he has finally found someone who may help him bring it to fruition. He is able to lay the groundwork for this plot, but he has left the finer details for Simia to attend to. Simia gladly takes up this opportunity, demanding from Pseudolus the artistic freedom to make this deception one of his own making. At the same time, he shows his
affiliation to Pseudolus by asserting his confidence that the gods are on his side, a move very in tune with the confidence Pseudolus has exhibited thus far.

Simia ultimately tricks Ballio through his powers to transform the world around him as well as his own identity. Those he chooses to play will swear he is they, rather than someone else. Like Mercury in the *Amphitruo*, Simia vows to out-Harpax Harpax. At the core of Plautine comedy there is the ability to jar people out of a sense of fixed identity, a sure knowledge about who they are. We are never only the roles we play from time to time. Hegel recognized that the importance of comedy is its ability to acknowledge that we live in a concrete world as concrete individuals. Though we may aspire to be the expert scholar, the clever observer, or the witty intellectual, we cannot embody these universal qualities. As Hegel says about comedy, “The pretensions of universal essentiality are uncovered in the self; [the Subject] shows itself to be entangled in an actual existence, and drops the mask just because it wants to be something genuine. The self, appearing here in its significance as something actual, plays with the mask which it once put on in order to act its part; but it as quickly breaks out again from this illusory character.” In exposing our failure to be what we aspire to be, the comic trickster forces us to remember that we were always something more and something less. By outplaying others as themselves, the comic trickster forces that other person to recognize the possibility that they are in fact someone outside of the fixed and finite person they thought they were. The dupe is forced to recognize he is not actually the role he plays.

---

68 See particularly *Amphitruo*, 596-602. Mercury does such a good job of playing Sosia that Sosia becomes fragmented from himself.

69 Hegel (1977), 450.
Slater is correct to observe some similarity between Pseudolus and Simia.\textsuperscript{70} I would add that the purpose of Simia in this play is to complement Pseudolus’ style of comic trickery. Bluffing his way through the play, Pseudolus is willing to let another slave take his spot for the ultimate deception. In all the moments where he needs to replan, he betrays his weakness as a deceiver, but this is not his strength. Whereas Pseudolus excels at improvising, trusting that things will turn out eventually,\textsuperscript{71} Simia’s strength comes from his non-existence in this society. Not already a part of the landscape that has produced a desperate lover, an energetic slave, and a greedy pimp, Simia can enter the play as anything that might be useful for Pseudolus. He thus can win the confidence game that he is who he says he is. Pseudolus succeeds through good fortune, the luck that will come to his aid so long as he remembers his faith in improvisation. Simia, however, must convince Ballio that he is who says he is in order to succeed. He can improvise, but his method relies on getting others to act in certain ways.

When Simia begins to engage Ballio, a contest of knowledge is at work. Simia knows that he is and is not Harpax. Ballio knows that he is the money-interested pimp of bad repute, but he does not know that this stranger is Pseudolus’ man for the job. Searching for the pimp, pseudo-Harpax asks whether Ballio knows who the pimp is, knowing full well who he is talking to. Suspecting nothing, Ballio answers that he is the pimp. If he better knew this messenger, Ballio would not be so forthcoming with

\textsuperscript{70} Slater is interested in the idea of Simia as an “even more comic slave than Pseudolus himself is – and he is a consciously theatrical one.” Slater (2000), 112.

\textsuperscript{71} I am inclined to disagree with Sharrock’s assertion that “Only Pseudolus has the right to make offers with confidence, because only Pseudolus ‘knows’ the script.” Sharrock (1999), 163. In so far as Pseudolus knows the script, it is a script that is unfinished. Pseudolus has repeatedly had to admit that he is at a loss about what to do. When Pseudolus makes an offer, it is just as likely to need readjusting as it is to come to fruition.
information, but he is not in a position to see everything that is going on. Simia can now speak two philosophizing lines that carry more ironic weight than Ballio can realize.

Pauci istuc faciunt homines quod tu praedicaras, nam in foro vix decumus quisque est qui ipsus sese noverit. (972-3)

Few men do what you’re saying. Truth is, in the forum there is scarcely one in ten men who really knows who he is.

Simia is in a position of power in the comic world as a result of knowing who he really is as well as knowing who his opponent is. While Ballio knows who he is, both the good and the bad, he is incapable of knowing the true identity of this stranger. It is now Simia’s job to seal the deal and make Ballio completely sure that this really is the soldier’s messenger.

In order to win this confidence game, Simia decides to fully establish the identity of the man he is searching for, not just in name, but in qualities as well. Having established that Ballio lives where the pimp Ballio is supposed to live, Simia continues his questions, in which Ballio finds himself all the more.

SIM. Hominem ego hic quaero malum, legirupam, impurum, peiurum atque impium. BAL. Me quaeritat, nam illa mea sunt cognomenta; nomen si memoret modo. quid est ei homini nomen? SIM. Leno Ballio. (974-7)

SIM. I am here looking for a man, wicked, law-breaking, shameful, a perjurer, and impious. BAL. He’s looking for me. Those are my epithets. If he just remembers my name. What is the name of the man? SIM. The pimp Ballio.

Ballio appropriately recognizes these negative qualities as part of his identity, and here, he becomes trapped by his own understanding of who he is in the world. As in the *flagitatio* scene, Ballio is provided with qualities that end up describing who he is, but here Simia is beginning to cause a short-circuit in that knowledge. While recognizing
himself, Ballio does not notice that he is becoming the dupe because he fails to recognize who the other person truly is, not the soldier’s messenger but Pseudolus’ accomplice. Thinking of himself as a businessman tying up some loose ends, Ballio believes that he may finally be in the clear, escaping Pseudolus’ traps.

Ballio has been established as Ballio, in several different possible forms, owner of a household, reprobate, and finally pimp. Now all that Ballio needs to establish in order to complete his deal for Phoenicium is proof that Simia is the soldier’s messenger. Plautus has composed this scene in such a way that we can see the difference between Simia and Pseudolus all the more starkly.

**BAL.** Quis homest qui iussit? **PS.** Perii, nunc homo in medio lutost; nomen nescit, haeret haec res. **BAL.** Quem hanc misisse ad me autumas?

**SIM.** Nosce imaginem: tute eius nomen memorato mihi, ut sciam te Ballionem esse ipsum. **BAL.** Cedo mi epistulam.

**SIM.** Accipe et cognosce signum. **BAL.** Oh, Polymachaeroplagides purus putus est ipsus. novi. heus, Polymachaeroplagides nomen est. **SIM.** Scio iam me recte tibi dedisse epistulam, postquam Polymachaeroplagidem elocutus nomen es. (984-91)

**BAL.** Who is the man who ordered you? **PS.** I am ruined. That man is stuck in the mud. He doesn’t know the name. This whole to-do hangs in the balance. **BAL.** Who do you think sent this to me? **SIM.** Take a gander at the seal. You go and tell me the name so I know that you’re actually Ballio. **BAL.** Hand me the letter. **SIM.** Take it and identify the seal. **BAL.** Oh, it’s Polymachaeroplagides, plain and simple. I recognize it. Hey, the name’s Polymachaeroplagides. **SIM.** I know that I was right to give you the letter, now that you’ve said the name Polymachaeroplagides.

On the one side of this scene, we see Pseudolus fretting, worrying whether or not the gamble he takes in trusting Simia will pay off. Pseudolus’ comic energy is not so much cleverness that causes things to happen, as improvisation that enables possibilities to

---

72 In agreement with Slater and opposed to Wright, I am taking *nescit* to mean ‘is ignorant of’ or ‘is unfamiliar with’.
open up. He is committed to adapting his schemes as situations change. He is able to mobilize people who are the sort to be useful to the current scheme, knowing full well that this may need to change down the road. As such, Pseudolus does not necessarily have to pull the trick off himself. He takes advantage of people’s talents, and he is willing to let another slave do the legwork. Simia is the clever slave who tricks others through his inner cleverness. While Pseudolus frets, Simia dodges the potentially devastating blow of Ballio’s request for the soldier’s name, turning the question into an opportunity to further establish the identity of Ballio. Simia changes Ballio from questioner to informant.

Ballio, in a way, needs Simia to be Polymachaeroplagides’ messenger so he can be freed from Pseudolus’ designs. Once again we see how Ballio’s investment in business has come to trap him. Pseudolus has sent the right man at the right time, even if he failed to give him full instructions. Simia is clever enough to provide Ballio with a full knowledge about who Ballio is, as well as a letter from the soldier. The letter provides the last bit of information, namely that Simia is Harpax, the soldier’s messenger. At this point, Ballio puts these together and accepts Simia’s claim to be Harpax. Simia sheepishly asks what will happen next, and Ballio supplies the rest,

Argentum des, abducas mulierem. (1016)

That you give the money and take the girl away.

Simia allows Ballio to trick himself, offering himself as what Ballio wishes him to be. The two go inside, leaving a lurking Pseudolus on stage alone.

As Pseudolus awaits the emergence of Simia from Ballio’s house, he is at his most helpless. Pseudolus has found a plan that he believes will be the one that works, and he has finally settled on what he believes will be the final plan he has to set in motion.
Pseudolus is ultimately opportunistic. His fortune comes from his ability to approach the world and the obstacles he encounters in a flexible way. Waiting for events to unfold in a specific way, Pseudolus begins to falter.

Peiorem ego hominem magisque vorsute malum
numquam edepol quemquam vidi, quam hic est Simia;
nimisque ego illum hominem metuo et formido male,
ne malus item erga me sit ut erga illum fuit,
ne in re secunda nunc mi obvertat cornua,
si occasionem capsit qui sit mihi malus;
atque edepol equidem nolo, nam illi bene volo.
nunc in metu sum maximo, triplici modo. (1017-25)

By golly I have never seen any man worse and more cunningly wicked than this guy Simia is. And I am so afraid and troublingly worried that this man will be as wicked to me as he was to that man and, since things are going well, I’m afraid that he’ll turn his horns against me if he should have the chance to cause me trouble. And by golly I don’t want that, because I want to wish him well. Now I am really afraid, thrice so.

Pseudolus allows himself to be trapped by his relationship to the plot. Caught by his desire for things to turn out here in a specific way, namely Simia leading Phoenicium away from the pimp, Pseudolus can only cross his fingers and wait. At the same time, he recognizes that Simia has no real commitment to playing the role that he wishes him to play. Simia had professed,

Nisi effecero, cruciabiliter carnifex me accipito. (950)

Unless I accomplish this, as my executioner go ahead and torture me.

Apart from this, he has little to lose should he not play the role that Pseudolus has asked him to play. Simia is in a position to enjoy the moment, to enjoy the opportunity to play. On the other hand, everything hangs in the balance here for Pseudolus. If he fails to pull off his comic trick, he will devolve back into the more tangible and real world of whippings for slaves, handed over to the mill for his failure to fulfill his bet with Simo.
He continues to fret about his fate until that moment when Simia reappears with Phoenicium, but even his fretting gives us a hint of the way his mind constantly sorts through the potentials of any given moment, whether good or bad. Contemplating the three forms his fear takes, namely betrayal by Simia, the arrival of Simo, and the return of Harpax, (1025-31) Pseudolus expresses all the ways that his scheme may fall apart. He envisions not failure from one particular source, but a multiplicity of disasters. Just as success can come in many forms, so can defeat. All of this worry though is erased the minute Simia comes back out with Phoenicium in tow. He has come to his destination, and now it is time for a celebration.

Pseudolus’ commitment to improvisation has paid off as he has said it would all along. Improv must stake a gamble at various moments, committing if even temporarily to one path of events, taking it as far as it will allow the character to go. Pseudolus abandons enough plans that by the end of the play, we as an audience are no longer able to keep straight how many plans he actually formed. His success has not come from the cleverness of more typical comic slaves, who convince their foes that things are not as things are. As Moore has observed, Pseudolus ends up giving all of the types of speeches that are associated with comic slaves.73 This shows versatility in improvisation, a higher sense of flexibility. It is Pseudolus’ ability and willingness to play the play as it goes that puts him in situations he can take advantage of. He has not so much written a comic plot for his scheme, as brought together resources that he has acquired from Lady Luck.

73 Moore (1998b), 94. As Moore puts it, “The eponymous character fulfills and then exceeds all the possible expectations of the stock servus callidus: two ‘I don’t know what to do’ monologues (394-405, 562-73a), two ‘I do know what to do’ monologues (574-91, 759-66), a philosophizing monologue (667-87), a monologue of anxiety (1017-36), and a song of triumph (1246-84).” For further discussion of these monologues, see Petrone (1983) 64-74.
2.5 Failure to Improvise

This play however is not finished. As the jubilant Pseudolus departs the stage, Plautus reintroduces Ballio, confident that he has everything under control. The general agitation we have seen Ballio engulfed in is lifted, as he triumphs over his ‘success’.

Hahae, nunc demum mi animus in tuto est loco, postquam iste hinc abii atque abduxit mulierem. iube nunc venire Pseudolum, scelerum caput, et abducere a me mulierem fallaciis. conceptis hercle verbis, satis certo scio, ego periurare me mavellem miliens, quam mi illum verba per deridiculum dare. (1052-8)

Ha ha. Now at last my mind is in a safe spot, now that your man has left here and taken the girl away. Order Pseudolus, that rascal, to come now and take this woman away from me with his deceitfully contrived words by gum. I certainly know this well enough. I’d prefer to perjure myself a thousand times, rather than have that man quite ludicrously fool me.

What has put Ballio into this self-confident mood? Simia, who we have seen fluster even Pseudolus, has allowed Ballio to believe what he wanted. Looking back to their encounter on stage, Simia provides only a name for himself, Harpax, and his purpose as conveyed through the letter. Ballio fills in the missing details for himself. Ballio fails to see Simia as Pseudolus’ ally because he is willing to let himself believe he is actually meeting with the soldier’s underling. Now that the ‘real’ Harpax from Ballio’s perspective has gotten what he needed, Ballio believes that he is clear of his investment in keeping the girl out of Pseudolus’ hands, placing himself in control of his situations from this point forward. When the real Harpax arrives, Ballio can only see him as a man hired by Pseudolus because the ‘real’ Harpax has already passed through.74 Ballio,

---

74 In a way, Ballio becomes trapped in his “belief in the Other” to use Zupančič’s words. As she goes on to say, “The subject’s universe will really change only at the moment when she attains the knowledge that the
convinced that the world is simple now and wholly in accord with his viewpoint, is primed to become the butt of Pseudolus’ trick. One falls into the comic trap when they believe that the world must work in one firm way.\footnote{Other knows (that it does not exist).” Zupančič (2006), 174. In believing that he is in the clear, Ballio moves into a fixed relation to the world. He is the wary pimp who has outwitted Pseudolus. Any unknown person who comes along must belong to Pseudolus. It is only at the point that Ballio realizes that he is not in fact as clever as he thought that he must admit the cleverness of Pseudolus.}

As the true Harpax enters the stage, Ballio, confident that he is freed from his investment in household concerns, begins to look like the comic trickster. As he prepares to lay into Harpax, he turns to the old man Simo, unknowingly echoing Pseudolus’ lines.

**BAL.** Hic homo meus est. **SIM.** Quidum? **BAL.** Quia praeda haec meast: scortum quaerit, habet argentum. iam admordere hunc mihi lubet. **SIM.** Iamne illum comessurus es? **BAL.** Dum recens est dator, dum calet, devorari decet iam. (1124-7)

**BAL.** This man is mine. **SIM.** Why? **BAL.** Because this booty is mine. He’s looking for the whore. He has the money. Now I’d like to nibble on him. **SIM.** You’re going to gobble him up? **BAL.** While a customer is fresh and hot, it’s right to swallow him whole.

Throughout the play Ballio shows hints of his potential to be a Plautine trickster, but he fails to capture the ability of transformation that does not issue from his power as master of a household of prostitutes. He can make a back like a curtain, but he cannot make backs curtains to be embroidered. Here Ballio embraces the spirit of comic trickery more, in which the world is set into free motion. Harpax is fodder for a hungry Ballio, which unbeknownst to Ballio ties back into that image of the comic trickster as cook, preparing

\footnote{Cf. Stott (2005), Bakhtin (1984), and Bergson (1956), among others. The notion that inflexibility and rigidity form the backbone of the comic runs throughout a wide swathe of comic criticisms. Where these forms of criticism differ is more in the purpose of the comic, or the reaction of individuals to these moments of inflexibility and rigidity.}
his victim for consumption. Ballio who was once harangued by a cook is ready to gobble up the mincemeat he will make of the ‘pseudo’-Harpax.

There is a problem here though from a comic standpoint. Whereas Pseudolus knows he is Calidorus’ slave but transforms himself into something he is not, namely Ballio’s slave, Ballio believes Harpax is Pseudolus’ assistant and tries to make that identity stick. Instead of seeing Harpax for who he really is, Ballio is eagerly attempting to expose this slave as an impostor, insisting that this ‘pseudo’-Harpax play the role Ballio wants him to. Ballio asks Harpax coarsely,

Quid hoc quod te rogo?
noctu in vigiliam quando ibat miles, quom tu ibas simul,
conveniebatne in vaginam tuam machaera militis? (1179-81)

Why am I asking you? When the soldier used to go out on watch at night and you used to go along with him, did the soldier’s sword fit in your sheath?

Inspired by the rascally Simo, Ballio works in phrases that manipulate the image of his victim. Freed from being on the lookout for how Pseudolus would trick him, Ballio dives into this comic world where everything is up for play, and a soldier’s underling can be a handy place to keep a sword. At the same time that Ballio allows himself to play with words, he is not transforming Harpax. Ballio’s idea of what is comic turns out to be abuse. We may chuckle at the imagery Ballio gives us, but we also realize that Ballio is not actually changing anything around him. He cannot make his slaves do what he wants

76 Remember in 382 Pseudolus said he would debone Ballio like a cook does an eel.

77 Cf. Pseudolus, 1167-8. It is Simo who really gets the comedy of this scene rolling when he advises Ballio to make ludi out of this Harpax. After he was calmed down by Callipho, Simo has been rather detached from the play. He heads off to the forum, though Pseudolus wanted him to observe the downfall of Ballio. Completely released from any financial concern he may have by Ballio’s promise in 1070-1075, Simo becomes an instigator. He is willing to join in with Ballio, who temporarily finds himself in the same position, believing now that he has caught Pseudolus red-handed.
them to do, leaving him to threaten to make them curtains. Abuse as he may, he cannot make Harpax what he wants Harpax to be. Instead of Pseudolus’ impostor, Ballio is stuck with the soldier’s actual messenger Harpax.

As the true identity of Harpax becomes more and more undeniable, Ballio is forced back into a position of concern for his household. The problem with Ballio stems from the way he tries to engage with the comic world. Pseudolus willingly adapts himself, changing who he is so as to allow others to believe he is what they want him to be. Harpax trusts that Pseudolus is a servant of Ballio’s, and thus produces the letter. Simia does the same when interacting with Ballio. Other than the tiniest bit of information, Simia allows Ballio to define who he is, adopting the role that Ballio allows him to play. In so doing, Simia allows Ballio to create an environment that he is most pleased with. Ballio wants to believe Simia is the true Harpax, and that he is now untouchable when it comes to Pseudolus. He needs Simia to be the soldier’s messenger, so he can continue to be what he himself wants to be, the carefree birthday boy looking forward to a hearty feast.

Ballio does not seem capable of letting people be who they are, especially when they are something other than what he wants them to be. This is part of his commitment to mastery since mastery is an attempt to stamp onto the world something that is different than it is. Convinced that the real Harpax is Pseudolus’ hireling, Ballio finds himself attempting to make Harpax believe that this is the case. One exchange between these two will illustrate this well.

**BAL.** Non tu istinc abis?
nihil est hodie hic sucophantis quaestus: proin tu Pseudolo nunties abduxisse alium praedam, qui occurrit prior
Harpax. **HAR.** Is quidem edepol Harpax ego sum. **BAL.** Immo edepol esse vis. purus putus hic sucophanta est. (1196-1200)

**BAL.** Won’t you go away? There’s no profit here today for swindlers. Go ahead and tell Pseudolus that someone has taken the booty away, since Harpax rushed up here earlier. **HAR.** Indeed by golly that Harpax is me. **BAL.** No by golly, you want it to be. Plain and simple this guy is a swindler.

The question here is how long Ballio will insist on believing his words rather than his eyes. Ballio clings to the hope that this Harpax is in fact an impostor, trying to make his words make this the truth in the face of mounting evidence that it is not. Comic words do not transform the world magically by themselves. They change the world in so far as others are willing to buy into them. Pseudolus becomes Subballio when Harpax willingly accepts him as such. He becomes a Socrates when you accept the image, but he does not become so through sheer assertion that he is. In contrast, Ballio thinks that what he says has the power to make the world so. As the pimp becomes reattached and reinvested in his business obligation through the mention of the letter, his control over the situation falters more and more. He has no hope of making this Harpax what he wishes him to be. He cannot make this Harpax not Harpax. He can only wish he were actually not.

Prompted by Simo to reconsider things, he is forced to consider the very real possibility that his control of the situation is all an illusion, admitting that Pseudolus has gotten the upper hand already.

When Harpax provides a physical description of Pseudolus, (1218-20) Ballio can no longer insist that his words hold power over what he is seeing. The physical description compels his words to lose any power they may have temporarily had, since he is not dealing here with a fake Harpax, but the real one. The physical description locks in Pseudolus as the man who played Surus, and correlative to this, it locks Ballio into the

69
position of pimp with a girl yet to deliver. Pseudolus never transforms others into something they are not.\textsuperscript{78} His success again comes from his ability to adapt who he is to the situations he encounters. Ballio attempts to force others to conform to his view of the world. He is able to do so only so long as the truth of who those others are stays hidden, lurking beneath the surface. Eventually the tension between what Ballio wants the world to look like and what it does look like breaks, leaving him to remark,

\begin{quote}
Certumst mi hunc emortualem facere ex natali die. (1237)
\end{quote}

I am sure going to make today my death-day instead of birthday.

For perhaps the first time, Ballio actually causes a transformation to happen, but this transformation is in a way a backwards one, as Ballio turns something enjoyable for himself into something unpleasant.

\textbf{2.6 Lessons Learned}

It is now time to turn to the conclusion of the play and that potentially odd fellow Simo.

If we have begun to expect a stereotypical \textit{senex iratus}, Simo is an odd master. Convinced by Callipho of the advantages of not playing the stock role New Comedy provides for him, Simo becomes something of an observer to the play.\textsuperscript{79} We may wish to think of the way Simo handles Ballio in a much more sinister way than most do, keeping in mind his opening gambit, looking to see what his Ulyssian slave has done to the

\textsuperscript{78} An exception may be argued for Simia who is not really a military man, but Simia is as willing a participant in this transformation as Pseudolus.

\textsuperscript{79} Note that most of Simo’s lines in the scene between Ballio and Harpax are spoken as comments on what is going on, whether delivered to Ballio in asides or simply comments on the action of the scene.
Trojan pimp.  Now that Ballio has found himself duped and in financial woes, Simo here appears as a triumphing trickster, echoing Pseudolus’ early plan of fleecing Simo himself.  

Bene ego illum tetigi, bene autem servos inimicum suom.  
nunc mihi certum est alio pacto Pseudolo insidias dare,  
quam in alis comoediis fit, ubi cum stimulus aut flagris  
insidiantur: (1239-41)  

I got that man good, and my slave got his enemy good too. Now I’m determined to set a trap for Pseudolus. Something different than in other comedies where they set traps with goads and whips.  

It is unwise to approach Simo as some agelast, opposed to the actions of the young lover and his slave. We cannot deny that he has taken joy in bilking Ballio out of 20 minae. So at play’s end, he takes a stab at being unlike his role would have him, actually having a go at his tricky slave in an effort to win back the money he owes.  

He first tries paratragedy, attempting to win over Pseudolus’ non-existent sympathetic side. (1318-22) When that fails to soften his slave up, Simo returns to the role of senex iratus, but Pseudolus is nonplussed, since he has a back. (1325) Simo alters himself in attempt to play on some aspect that Pseudolus sees in himself. Even when he appears as an angered father, he is not really this. As he will admit shortly, he is not angered with Pseudolus or with Calidorus. He has come to a point where he can enjoy the comedy unfolding, dabbling in it as he pleases. In being willing to change who he is and play along with the drama, he has found himself at no financial loss, enjoying the

---

80 I am inclined to see Simo as baiting Ballio in line 1160, when Ballio asks him if he understands what is happening. Ballio has already promised him any money he may owe Pseudolus. Simo now moves into make more money on his bet, looking to get at least half of what the soldier has available.  

81 Cf. McCarthy (2000), 26-27. The important thing in a slave’s indifference to punishment is not a rejection of the reality of the punishment, but rather its inability to actually make a Pseudolus shamed. Whip as he may, Simo will be like Ballio if he tries to coerce Pseudolus through physical punishment, since Pseudolus will not see in those whippings their symbolic value, which would mark Pseudolus as doing what he is not supposed to do.
games of Pseudolus and the opportunity to play a bit himself. He is even presented with
the opportunity to make a bit of his money back, so long as he is willing to go join in the
party with Pseudolus and Calidorus. Excepting those early moments when he first
appeared on stage, we have no reason to believe that Simo needs much convincing to join
in the fun. By not insisting on being the domineering master, he has gained an
opportunity to make some money back as well as a few rounds of carousing.

Before departing from the stage, Simo asks Pseudolus to invite the audience to the
feast. Pseudolus declines, and then says to the audience,

verum si voltis adplaudere atque adprobare
hunc gregem et fabulam,
in crastinum vos vocabo. (1333-35)

But if you want to applaud and show your approval of this troop and this play, I’ll invite you tomorrow.

If we applaud improvisation, we will be given the opportunity to come to yet another
play, as most people take it, but perhaps in crastinum can be pushed a bit further. Perhaps
we can take it as the chance to consider the world that will go on beyond the play as an
opportunity to improvise, an opportunity to refuse the world as finite, fixed, and
determined. When the festival comes to a close, we will still need to negotiate our way
through the world, improvising our way through so many situations in which we are not
totally sure what needs to be done, but still believing that if we keep adapting to the

---

82 Slater does not give Simo much credit for potential comic energy. In Slater’s eyes, Simo’s efforts are
futile, tapping into theatrical modes, but “[t]heater is Pseudolus’ own game, and he cannot be beaten at it.
Simo tries to leave, but Pseudolus will not let him … He insists Simo go drinking with him, and in that way
perhaps recover some of his money.” Slater (2000), 117. For reasons that there is not enough room here to
go into fully, I believe that Simo has a keen eye for the game, especially once he agrees to abandon his
strict role of senex iratus. Simo recognizes in line 464-5 the power of Pseudolus to be more than he
appears, even showing a bit of comic potential in 469-70 when he tells Pseudolus to make a vacancy in the
Ear Drum Inn.
situation and adopting new roles, we will be able to play a bit of the role that we envision for ourselves.

As the cast departs from the stage, we are given an opportunity to contemplate how clever this Pseudolus was, or perhaps was not. We cannot help but wonder what he really did do to bring things about the way they have come about. If we believe, whether knowingly or unknowingly, in the power of stereotyped roles to create characters, compelling them to act in certain ways, we have become like Calidorus, doomed to watch comedies that can only turn out in a certain way. Pseudolus will get the girl for Calidorus, because this is the way *comoedia palliata* work. If he is able to dupe, Pseudolus must be quite clever, capable of making people act the way he wishes them to. We may at this point want to think of him as we do so many other slaves, the man of the theater carefully organizing all the elements so as to produce a nice and polished play. We have to admit though that he is not clever in this way. By committing himself to improvisation, he has relinquished the opportunity to play his stereotypical role. He comes up triumphant at the end exactly by not being in control of what is happening. In doing so, he can keep free from the restrictions that come with playing particular roles in society. Not bound by a particular role and a particular governing concern, he can put pieces in place so as to maximize his opportunities, but it ultimately is the work of another in the play that allows Pseudolus to collect on his bet with Simo. This then is the energy at the heart of the play, that ever shifting, ever adapting spirit of improvisation, keeping the world open as a source of potentials.
CHAPTER 3

YOU GIVE A LITTLE TO GET A LITTLE:
SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONTROL IN MENAECHMI

In deciding to discuss Menæchmi, Haberman explains his reasons as “just because it is so familiar and because it is often enough still assumed to be almost all surface fun with a dash, perhaps, of social satire.” Tension over who is in control of any given social situation runs deep throughout this play, and it is exacerbated by the heavily economic interests that color most of the exchanges between the characters, particularly the Epidamnian brother and his dependents. In viewing how the twin Menaechmus brothers respond to the demands of their dependents, we are asked to consider the opportunities that arise from relinquishing absolute control over our social exchanges and adopting a more flexible attitude toward our own role.

Plautus begins Menæchmi with the suggestion that drama is a medium well-suited for an exploration of the constant need to negotiate, update, and adopt new roles as different situations present themselves. Right as the prologist begins to unravel the plot, Plautus begins toying with the audience’s expectations. He anticipates the audience

---

83 Haberman (1981), 129.
waiting to see yet another *comedia palliata*, but this play, like so many others, is not a mass-produced copy from a Greek mold.

atque adeo hoc argumentum graecissat, tamen non atticissat, verum sicilicissitat. (11-2)

And though the plot is Greekified, nevertheless it is not Atticized, but Sicilized. Expecting Attic Greek, Plautus shifts the audience’s focus to Sicilian Greek, a nod to the farcical, dramatic influences of Sicily and Southern Italy.84 Plautus invites the audience into the game that will pervade the rest of the play. Do the audience and the producers of the festival determine the type of drama that will be performed, or is the process a much more interactive one between poet and audience? The audience is given the chance to reevaluate their expectations, and if they stick around, perhaps they will be able to enjoy an unexpected pleasure in this Sicilian Greek drama. Even this though is a bit of a ruse, since the play is set in the town of Epidamnus on the Adriatic coast.

The prologue then gets underway in full,85 introducing one of the most important aspects of the rest of the play, economics. We learn that the Menaechmi are sons of a merchant father, and that they are so alike that their mother and their nurse are unable to tell them apart. With the twins comes a blurring of what should otherwise be clear boundaries. The language used to describe the mother and the nurse is worth a closer look.

---

84 Gratwick (1993) notes the general association in the Plautine corpus of Attic with first-class and Sicilian with lesser quality. He also notes the “contrast between the humour of Doric Sicilian farce represented by Epicharmus, Rhinthon of Tarentum (see *OCD*) and in Campanian vase-paintings showing that kind of farce on the one hand, and the subtler wit of New Comedy on the other.” (135) The second observation is likely more important for *Menaechmi*.

85 Plautus recognizes that the first 12 lines of the play have been a digression, and by way of a humorous *captatio benevolentiae* (13-6), he introduces the actual plot of the play.
ei sunt nati filii gemini duo,
ita forma simili pueri, ut mater sua
non internosse posset quae mammam dabat,
neque adeo mater ipsa quae illos pepererat. (18-21)

Two twin sons were born, the boys looked so similar that their own mother wasn’t able to tell them apart, the one who gave them her breast that is, nor likewise the mother herself who gave birth to them.

In hearing *mater sua*, we expect the prologue to be referring to the birth mother, but that expectation is quickly subverted, only to be filled in the next line. Born to a commercial world, these two boys are equally exchangeable to the people who ought to be able to distinguish them.  

Even within their family, there is the hint that they are not much different than identical casks of wine their father might sell. To the consumer, in this case the two mothers, one is as good as the other.

In describing how the two brothers became separated, the prologist mentions very specifically that an Epidamnian merchant (*Epidamniensis quidam ... mercator*) stole the one named Menaechmus, and it is not entirely coincidental that it is a merchant who steals the boy, not a profiteering slave or other shameless character. Menaechmus, son of a merchant, is stolen by a merchant, and he is eventually adopted by the Epidamnian merchant and made his heir. The one brother has become the perfect stand-in for what the Epidamnian merchant lacked and the Syracusan merchant had a surplus of, sons. Raised

---

86 It is often the case with twins that they make great efforts to distinguish themselves from each other. This is in part the result of the outside world treating them as if they are mysteriously one person in two bodies. We might think of the countless times we see young twins dressed alike by their parents, riding identical bicycles, participating in the exact same set of activities.

87 In *Captivi*, Tyndarus is, of course, stolen by the shameless slave Stalagmus.
by a merchant father, Menaechmus E\textsuperscript{88} becomes well indoctrinated into the world of commercial exchange, where goods grease social wheels.

The brother left in Syracuse undergoes another process. When the despondent father dies before returning home, the grandfather, also named Menaechmus, changes the boy’s name from Sosicles to Menaechmus because of his deep affection for the lost twin. For seven years the unlost twin was Sosicles, but for the rest of his life up to the day of this play, he has been compelled to live another’s life. He has grown up in such a way that he recognizes that he is not entirely in control of his life, in many ways living out another’s life. It is perhaps in an effort to regain his former identity that Menaechmus S sets out on his desperate search for his lost brother.

The stage is now set for a play where characters will be called upon to play different roles than they are used to playing. The end of the prologue as we have it acknowledges the transitory nature of the roles we play for each other by reminding the audience about the nature of the Roman stage.

haec urbs Epidamnus est, dum haec agitur fabula:
quando alia agetur, aliud fiet oppidum;
sicut familiae quoque solent mutarier:
modo hic habitat leno, modo adulescens, modo senex, pauper, mendicus, rex, parasitus, hariolus. (72-6)

This city is Epidamnus, while this play is being acted. When another play will be acted, the town will become another one. The households usually change as well. Sometimes a pimp lives here, sometimes a young man, sometimes an old one, a poor one, a beggar, a king, a parasite, a fortune teller.

\textsuperscript{88} For the sake of clarity, I will refer to the brother living in Epidamnus as Menaechmus E and the brother coming from Syracuse as Menaechmus S. This is a much clearer system than labeling the Epidamnian as Menaechmus I and the Syracusan as Menaechmus II. At the same time, this distinction maintains the tight connection between the two brothers that the Menaechmus and Sosicles distinction does not.
The houses that appear behind the cast are as likely to be a husband’s house today as they are to be a pimp’s tomorrow. Since Plautine comedy was performed on temporary stages, whipped up as the event called for, there is also the acknowledgement that the space the audience is physically occupying has a transitory existence.\textsuperscript{89} Today you see festival-going Romans, but tomorrow those same people will occupy the same physical bodies while playing the roles of fathers, husbands, statesmen, and soldiers. To borrow from Sondheim: daily life tomorrow, comedy tonight.

It will be useful to consider \textit{Menaechmi} based on a division between the two brothers’ relations to those they encounter, a division strongly paralleled by their dependents. Menaechmus E and his dependents are bound to one another through the ebb and flow of material goods. Menaechmus E buys goods to keep his dowered wife content. He then steals them to keep the favors of the prostitute Erotium. His parasite Peniculus participates in this world of exchange by providing flattery for succulent feasts at others’ expense. The exchange of goods amongst these figures commodifies social exchange. Every action is done for a price. As a commodity then, human interaction should be regulatable. Menaechmus E believes he is the man to do such regulating since he provides the goods for the services.

On the other side of the drama, we get a much different reaction to the demands placed on us from the outside world. Messenio has internalized his slavery, performing his services for Menaechmus S not under the stipulations of what material goods he will receive, but within a belief in the non-material value of performing his slave duties well.

\textsuperscript{89} For the most recent discussion of the mechanics of the Plautine theater see Marshall (2006), especially 16-82.
He does not withhold his services as a commodity which he is free to dispense. Instead, he takes his cues from the needs of his master. Menaechmus S acts similarly. Reacting to cues that others provide him, he plays the parts that others offer him the opportunity to play, finding opportunities in the mistakes of the Epidamnians.

The arrival of Menaechmus S shows the farce of Epidamnian life. Relationships that depend on something genuinely personal are really at stake in the competition over Menaechmus E’s attention. The Epidamnians, though, have framed their world as one that is wholly determined by the flow of goods, grumbling about the lack of loyalty whenever the goods stop coming their way.

3.1 Menaechmus E: Man of Commerce

Menaechmus E enters the stage, raving against the tyranny of his overly observant wife. He finds himself unable to be the person that he wants to be. Hollering back into the house, he attacks his wife,

\[
\text{nam quotiens foras ire volo, me retines, revocas, rogitas,}
\text{quo ego eam, quam rem agam, quid negoti geram,}
\text{quid petam, quid feram, quid foris egerim.
portitorem domum duxi, ita omnem mihi}
\text{rem necesse eloqui est, quidquid egi atque ago. (114-8)}
\]

Well as often as I want to go outside, you keep me back, you call me back, you ask where I am going, what affairs I am taking care of, what business I am working on, what I am looking for, what I am bringing, what I have finished. I married a customs official. Thus, it’s necessary for me to explain all my affairs, whatever I have done and am doing.

The problem with the wife is that she makes demands on her husband, not allowing this alleged master to be in control of his domain. She is regulating every aspect of his life, not conforming to the version of the world Menaechmus E seeks to create through material exchange. He sees his marriage as purely commodified, and thus in his eyes, he
has upheld his part of their marital agreement, keeping the wife well provided with goods. (120-2) As a result, he should be allowed to play his part as the head of the household. He believes that he is in a position to dictate the shape of the world, all the while not realizing that the world he has created is determined through material exchange. His demands on the world then need to be supplemented by giving gifts and banquets to his dependents, who often comment on the wealth that Menaechmus E exudes. Though he may like to think he drives his relationships, it may quite possibly be his expenditures that steer the reactions of Erotium and Peniculus in particular.

Menaechmus E has been making disingenuous claims though on his wife. As he finishes his rant against an overly diligent wife, he threatens her by saying,

\[\text{atque adeo, ne me nequiquam serves, ob eam industriam}
\]
\[\text{hodie ducam scortum ad cenam atque aliquo condicam foras. (123-4)}\]

And thus so you are not keeping an eye on me for nothing, as a reward for your diligence, I am going to take a whore to dinner and invite myself outside somewhere.

The wife’s efforts will not be for nothing. Menaechmus E is determined to give his wife something to actually be on the watch for as he heads off to Erotium’s. We soon learn what the true flow of goods looks like in his house. Goods come in to keep the wife happy, and then they make their way over to Erotium’s to keep her services coming. Menaechmus E’s gifts for his wife are a false exchange, as Ketterer has observed, and the *palla* that Menaechmus E has stolen “becomes the physical symbol of how Menaechmus I has arranged the logistics of his life and the movement of his property.”\(^{90}\) Menaechmus E cannot make a real claim on his wife’s actions through goods that are only temporarily

\(^{90}\) Ketterer (1986c), 52.
hers. As the one who is providing gifts, he believes that he determines the nature of the relationship between him and his wife, treating her and his prostitute as equivalents that can be kept with the same gifts. He refuses to recognize that economic exchanges are a negotiation between two parties. By refusing to accept the counter-demands of his dependents, he tries to frame the two women as commodities of whom he is the only consumer. This would allow him as consumer to be the one who controls the role of the women in their relationship.

It is also worth noting precisely the term Menaechmus E uses to frame his threat to spend the day whoring. Deeply tied to viewing his interactions with others as a system of economic exchange, Menaechmus E employs the term *scortum* to describe Erotium, rather than the more endearing term *meretrix*. If we look closer at the formation of these words, we can better see how Menaechmus E understands Erotium’s role. *Meretrix* comes from the Latin verb *mereo* ‘to receive as one’s wage or reward’\(^1\) with the common feminine suffix –*rix* ‘she who does’. Thus, we can see the term *meretrix* preserving the human agency of a prostitute. Menaechmus E though uses one of the few Latin words referring to people that is actually a neuter noun, *scortum*. On the use of the verb equivalent *scortari*, Varro notes that the term is connected to the notion of a hide or skin.\(^2\) There is the suggestion here then that Menaechmus E does not enjoy Erotium’s

---

\(^1\) OLD, s.v. *mereo*


Scortari est saepius meretriculam ducere, quae dicta a pelle: id enim non solum antiqui dicebant scortum, sed etiam nunc dicimus scortea ea quae e corio ac pellibus sunt facta.

To *scortari* is quite often to take a little working girl out for the night, and we call her that because of her hide. For the ancients not only used to say this *scortum*, but now we even say *scortea* are the things which are made from skin and hides.
company so much for her particularly human qualities, but more so for her role as an object that satisfies certain pleasurable needs. As a pleasure toy, Erotium can be procured for the price of a *palla* just as much as the *palla* might be used to acquire any number of other items that would suit Menaechmus E’s fancy.

When Menaechmus E and Peniculus first meet on stage, Menaechmus E quickly gets to work making claims on who he thinks Peniculus should be, though Peniculus is quick to make a counterclaim.

**MEN.** Quis homo est? **PEN.** Ego sum. **MEN.** O mea Commoditas, o mea Opportunitas, salve. **PEN.** Salve. **MEN.** Quid agis? **PEN.** Teneo dextera genium meum. (137-8)

**MEN.** Who is that man? **PEN.** I am. **MEN.** O my Good Timing, o my Opportunity, hello. **PEN.** Hello. **MEN.** What are you doing? **PEN.** I am holding my guardian spirit in my right hand.

Once the identity of Peniculus is firmly known, Menaechmus E turns Peniculus into something new, asserting his power to structure the world. Menaechmus E needs someone to boast of his deeds if he is to be the glorious victor he pictures himself being, and Peniculus, like any good parasite, is quick to play the needed part so long as he gets fed. Though he may hear Peniculus appeal for a guardian spirit, Menaechmus E will fail throughout the rest of the play to act upon this claim. He entered the stage demanding more freedom from his wife to act as he pleases, but he cannot see how he is becoming entangled in the demands others place on him. Just as easily as he makes Peniculus good timing and opportunity, Peniculus turns him into a protecting spirit, a position rife with obligations.

---

93 Cf. Fraenkel (2007), 17-44. Fraenkel observes that Plautus prefers to have his character transform the world rather than make comparisons.

94 Cf. *Captivi*, 879 where the parasite Ergasilus addresses his patron Hegio.
As Menaechmus E begins to boast about his triumphant theft of a *palla*, he unwittingly introduces confusion about how much control he has.

**MEN.** Dic mi, enumquam tu vidisti tabulam pictam in pariete, ubi aquila Catameitum raperet aut ubi Venus Adoneum?

**PEN.** Saepe. sed quid istae picturae ad me attinent? **MEN.** Age me aspice. ecquid adsimulo simili? (143-6)

**MEN.** Tell me. Have you ever seen that wall-painting where an eagle is taking Catameitus or where Venus is taking Adonis? **PEN.** Often times, but what about that picture of yours pertains to me? **MEN.** Come on. Look at me. Don’t I looking similar in a way?

Without even blinking, Menaechmus E switches roles in this compact mythological metaphor. Since he has boasted of snatching up a *palla* from his wife, we may suspect that he thinks of himself as the eagle. When we get to the second comparison, then by analogy we should expect Menaechmus to be the captor, namely Venus. Perhaps he has switched genders in his mythological rapture. He is of course wearing women’s clothing. His attempt to control how he is viewed falls short because it depends upon the agreement of others. Peniculus fails to make the connection Menaechmus E wants because ultimately the parasite’s only concern is what the metaphor means for him. As a result, Menaechmus E has to spell out the comparison clearly he hoped Peniculus would make for him.

There is still one more level to this analogy which Menaechmus E does not notice, though he opens up the possibility through this mythological comparison. Perhaps he is not the captor but the captive, not the eagle but Adonis. Menaechmus E becomes so entangled with his view of himself as the *paterfamilias* that he does not accept the

---


96 This is the way Gratwick (1993) understands the mythological comparison.
ways in which his role in Epidamnian society is controlled less by him than by his dependents. Framing his decision to spend an afternoon with Erotium as an act done out of compulsion, Menaechmus E sees himself trapped by his society. Against the hyper-vigilance of his wife, he struggles to reassert his role as an agent. Instead of recognizing that it is his actions that have produced a wary wife, Menaechmus E seeks a household where he feels he is more in control of the relationship. He has allowed himself to become deeply entangled in a situation where he is plundering his own household for the affection of his Venus. He has failed to live up to his social obligations as a husband and paterfamilias in order to dally in the charms of Erotium.

His relationship to his dependents is drawn all the more clearly when he presents Erotium with the palla he has stolen from his wife.

Nimio ego hanc periculo
surrupui hodie. meo quidem animo ab Hippolyta subcingulum
Hercules haud aeque magno umquam abstulit periculo.
cape tibi hanc, quando una vivis meis morigera moribus. (199-202)

I stole this with a good deal of risk today. In my opinion actually Hercules never took the girdle from Hippolyta with nearly as much risk. Take this for yourself, since you’re the only one who spends her life giving into my whims.

Menaechmus E envisions himself rivaling the deeds of the mighty Hercules. Pilfering a palla from his wife becomes an exploit for generations to speak about. Believing he is in control of his surroundings, he asserts on the world a grand image of its benefactor.

McCarthy picks up on the parallels between the language here of Menaechmus E and that used throughout the Plautine corpus by comic tricksters. Plautus presents us with a twist, giving us a character that enters the stage like the triumphant trickster but has not had to show us his ability to overcome the blocking figures. “This shift,” as McCarthy observes,
“places emphasis not on the brilliance of the scheming but on the benefits of the outcome, exactly the opposite from the emphasis in slaves’ trickery.”

Menaechmus E is not a trickster, though he may style himself as one, but an economist, much more interested in the material results of his hard work than the strategies employed. He does not revel in the process of getting the palla where the final result would still be unclear. Instead, he boasts of the final product, believing that this image is a completed one that he can master.

Even as he turns himself into Hercules fighting against his wife the Amazon, Menaechmus E fails to understand fully the nature of his relationship to Erotium. As the giver of gifts, Menaechmus E believes he is in control of Erotium’s favors. Gifts create the favors, and thus his giving creates her obsequious flattering. As Erotium reveals later, the situation is actually quite the opposite. Without the gifts, there are no afternoon romps in Erotium’s pleasure palace. Though claiming she is the one who is morigera, it is actually Menaechmus E who willingly yields to Erotium’s demands. He has stolen from his wife, presumably because Erotium requires new goods for continued services. This exchange of goods helps Menaechmus E overlook his social restrictions. He tries to ignore the demands of other characters because he believes the exchange of goods for services fulfills his social obligations. He controls his commodified relationships because he possesses the goods that keep them running, but he fails to understand that under such a system their can be no genuine morigera, since this is a recognition of one’s habits within a society, not the mechanistic workings of a market.

---

97 McCarthy (2000), 44.
Within a general discussion of the antagonism of business and pleasure in *Menaechmi*, Segal observes, “Citizenship, like marriage, places certain restraints upon a man. Menaechmus has been ‘tied up’ in the forum on business.” Menaechmus E is busy throughout this play managing a little world for himself as a master, while not realizing the very restrictions that come with such a position in society. Like an embroiled rock star, Menaechmus E seems to ask to not be made a role model while enjoying all the privileges of being a prominent businessman in Epidamnus. Kicking against the restrictions of society, Menaechmus E is unwilling to recognize the paradoxical restrictions that come with any position of social responsibility. To enjoy pleasure without constraint, arguably one needs to let go of demands for control, playing off and with the demands others place on you. Those without a reputation to maintain are most free to indulge in the pleasures of life.

But Menaechmus E cannot give up control over his social situations. Even after Peniculus has exposed him to his wife, Menaechmus E still tries to maintain control by feigning ignorance when everyone knows what he has been up to. The exchange between him and his wife nicely colors this picture.

**MEN.** Numquis servorum deliquit? num ancillae aut servi tibi responsant? eloquere. impune non erit. **MAT.** Nugas agis.

---

98 Segal (1969), 88. Cf. Haberman (1981), 134. Haberman comments, “[Menaechmus I’s] long monologue is an attack on the system of patron and client. He feels particular irritation with the greedy stupidity of his client ... His delay is as well a plot device that prevents his celebration at the same time it permits Menaechmus II to enjoy it, and it sets up all the comic scenes based on mistaken identity that follow.” Haberman is correct to observe the dramatic benefit of this delay, but it is not necessary to see in Menaechmus E’s rant against the system some sort of social commentary. His attack on the system of patrons and clients ultimately proves to be a complaint about the restraints it places on his ability to enjoy an afternoon of pleasure. (595-7) The value of this monologue rests largely in filling out the picture of Menaechmus E as a man caught in the web of social obligations, wanting to be a free agent, but unwilling to give up the control of his environment through his social position that has been restricting him.

99 The prologist had informed us that Menaechmus E inherited vast wealth from his abductor. (67)
MEN. Tristis admodum es. non mi istuc satis placet. MAT. Nugas agis.
MEN. Certe familiarium aliquoi irata es. MAT. Nugas agis.
MEN. Num mihi es irata saltem? MAT. Nunc tu non nugas agis.
MEN. Non edepol deliqui quicquam. MAT. Em rursum nunc nugas agis. (620-5)

MEN. Surely one of the slaves didn’t do wrong? The maids and slaves aren’t talking back to you? Go ahead. They won’t be unpunished. MAT. Gibberish.
MEN. You’re upset somehow. I don’t like that at least. MAT. Gibberish.
MEN. Certainly you’re angry with some household slave? MAT. Gibberish.
MEN. Well now, you aren’t angry with me? MAT. Now that’s not gibberish.
MEN. By golly I haven’t done anything wrong. MAT. And back to gibberish.

Menaechmus E knows why the wife is angry, but he hopes his feigned ignorance will pull him through this. While his wife presents an opportunity to come clean, Menaechmus E opts to try and dodge the inevitable by casting the blame twice on the household servants. Caught by his own feeling that he really can structure the world of Epidamnus as he pleases, he does not take the opportunity for negotiation that begins with accepting the legitimacy of the demands of others, but instead, he forecloses reconciliation with his wife. It is he not she who will determine the direction of business in this partnership. From Menaechmus E’s vantage point, the wife is in the position of receiving, whether it be gifts or orders, and he is in the position of provider.

Menaechmus E refuses to see that he is not in control of his environment, and as confusion caused by Menaechmus S mounts throughout the play, Menaechmus E is pushed more and more to recognize that whatever control he does have in his relationships is quickly slipping out of his hands. This develops especially after his encounter with Erotium over the palla and a bracelet.

abiit intro, occlusit aedis. nunc ego sum exclusissimus: neque domi neque apud amicam mihi iam quicquam creditur. ibo et consulam hanc rem amicos, quid faciendum censeant. (698-700)
She’s gone inside, she’s kicked the door shut. Now I have been utterly kicked out. They don’t trust me about anything at home or at my girl’s. I am going to go and ask my friends what they think I need to do about this business.

In trying to win over both the wife and the prostitute, Menaechmus E finds himself an *exclusus amator* at the doors of two houses. Where once there was in the mind of Menaechmus E an easy solution, he now finds himself in a completely unpredicted situation. The confidence with which he spoke after his wife gave him the boot is completely shattered. Tossed out by Erotium, now acting like a second Amazon wife, he has been forced to recognize his loss of control over things, and he heads off to ask friends how to act. For the first time, Menaechmus E, the confident master-about-town, is compelled to let another suggest a way to play the scene.

Yet when he returns to the stage, he is the same Menaechmus E that left. He bemoans his lot on this day when all his secret doings have been exposed by Peniculus. He imagines his life as some sort of bizarre mythological adventure. Formerly a mighty Hercules, he has been ruined by Peniculus, a wily Ulysses. Menaechmus E’s description of Peniculus as ‘my Ulysses’ helps reassert his notion of why he should be in control of his relationship with his dependents.

> quem ego hominem, siquidem vivo, vita evolvam sua<br>sed ego stultus sum, qui illius esse dico, quae meast:<br>meo cibo et sumptu educatust. (903-905)

That man whom, if I am indeed alive, I will toss right out of his life, but I am a fool to say that it is that man’s life, when it belongs to me. He has been reared at my expense, on my food.

For Menaechmus E’s approach to the world, his dependents are always his, bending to his will, following his view of the world, but Menaechmus E is forced again and again to realize that this is not the case. He thinks that his output compels his dependents to be the
versions of them he wishes them to be, in turn praising a version of himself he wants himself to be. We may have hoped that he would have learned from being locked out of two houses, understanding how much of his life is beyond his control. His desire is external to his existence. He is dependent on the good will and fawning of his dependents, but he is unwilling to come to terms with his general lack of control over his life.

After he has been saved by the mystery wonder-slave Messenio, Menaechmus E begins to reflect fully on what has transpired.

```
nimia mira mihi quidem hodie exorta sunt miris modis:
  alii me negant eum esse qui sum atque excludunt foras;
etiam hic servom se meum esse aiebat quem ego emisi manu
  socer et medicus me insanire aiebant. quid sit mira sunt.
haec nihilo esse mihi videntur setius quam somnia. (1039-42, 1046-7)
```

Indeed, very strange things have happened to me today in very strange ways. Some deny that I am who I am, and they kick me out. Even this guy was saying that he was my slave, and I freed him.

```
  ...
  ... 
```

My father-in-law and the doctor were saying that I’m insane. It’s a wonder what’s going on. These things seem to me nothing short of a dream.

Here toward the end of the play, Menaechmus E has found himself forced to recognize a position outside of himself. As a result of those who refuse to let him be who he is, who he claims to be, who he wants to be, he is forced to reorder his understanding of who he is. Still slightly committed to the idea that he should be in control of his life, Menaechmus E conceptualizes this day as a dream, that one place in human life that particularly eludes our control. Working within this dream-framework, Menaechmus E is

---

100 It is worth recalling that the idea of “life is a dream” is particularly important to Abel’s conception of metatheater as drama about the theatricalization of everyday life. We live our lives in the tenuous intersection between the past and the future, grasping to give that illusory experience real meaning.
able to reconcile events to his way of thinking. He can still picture himself as a man-in-
charge in all of its abstract perversity.\footnote{Cf. Hegel (1977), 451. Hegel favors comedy as the dramatic form which best reveals an unabstracted form of self-conscious, no longer hiding behind the mask of perfected abstract universals. When comedy operates fully, “then there is exposed more immediately the contrast between the universal as a theory and that with which practice is concerned; there is exposed the complete emancipation of the purposes of the immediate individuality from the universal order.” Menaechmus E attempts to see his abstract position as master as creating the world the way the master wants it to be, while Menaechmi grinds against this, exposing the error of trusting in some abstract universal notion of mastery. Mastery does not come from holding the title, but from the concrete particular instances of itself. Within this play, as will be discussed at more length when we get to Menaechmus S, Plautus stages successful mastery as deference, playing off of the whims of others. We have here a paradoxical mastery that arises out of giving up control on situations.} This particular dream though will soon come to a close. With the reunion of the two brothers, Menaechmus E will have to give up his false idea of who he is. He will need to recognize that he was in fact not in control of much of what has happened. The introduction of another him has exposed how tenuous his real control on his world was.

Menaechmus E provides roles for others to play for him, but he refuses to take cues from his supporting cast. While he is a man of action, demanding particular actions from his dependents, he has failed to observe that important rule of the theater, the need to not only act, but more importantly to react to the rest of the cast. Here is where I particularly diverge from McCarthy’s reading of the play. In contrast to an approach that sees the play as a discussion of power and control,\footnote{In explaining how a person in the position of authority could be a comic hero, McCarthy (2000) remarks, “This concept of the paterfamilias as comic hero is possible only if we agree to see him ‘normally’ (i.e., in the imagined comic life that goes on before and after the script of the play) downtrodden, and the dependent members of the household … as ‘normally’ in power over him.” (35) She goes on to add, “When the master rebels against his own dependents, he is rebelling against the frustrating ability of dependents to find the loopholes that allow them to turn the master’s promises/threats against him. In the service of his rebellion, he uses exactly the same tactics that dependents use against him, though at the same time maintaining his own authoritative power.” (36)} I suggest that what is at stake in Menaechmi is an exploration of the potentials that develop from not demanding strong control over your surroundings. We are not dealing with a farcical master who does not

\footnote{In explaining how a person in the position of authority could be a comic hero, McCarthy (2000) remarks, “This concept of the paterfamilias as comic hero is possible only if we agree to see him ‘normally’ (i.e., in the imagined comic life that goes on before and after the script of the play) downtrodden, and the dependent members of the household … as ‘normally’ in power over him.” (35) She goes on to add, “When the master rebels against his own dependents, he is rebelling against the frustrating ability of dependents to find the loopholes that allow them to turn the master’s promises/threats against him. In the service of his rebellion, he uses exactly the same tactics that dependents use against him, though at the same time maintaining his own authoritative power.” (36)}
realize that he is in a naturalistic plot of reconciliation. If farce is typified by the clever slave like Pseudolus, Palaestrio, or Chrysalus, then we should expect Menaechmus E, as the farcical master, to hold a more flexible view of himself and the world. Menaechmus E is trapped because of his inability to play with the demands others place on him.

3.2 Peniculus and Erotium: Adapting to Commercial Needs

In light of this view of Menaechmus E, let us focus now on the two characters who depend on his goods the most, the parasite Peniculus and the prostitute Erotium. The side of the drama tied to Menaechmus E works under economic interests. Peniculus and Erotium are bound to Menaechmus E only by the exchange of goods for services. In a play that emphasizes the movement of goods, it is not surprising that economic interests problematize the position of the prostitute and the parasite, turning them into blocking figures, where, in non-economic plays, they might be enablers to pleasure. Both of these dependents are willing to play the roles that Menaechmus E envisions for them so long as their economic needs are met. Once the promise of goods is threatened, Peniculus becomes embittered and Erotium becomes withholding. At these moments, we see the true nature of the relationship, one built not on loyalty but rather on the satisfaction of material wants.

103 Cf. McCarthy (2000), 29. McCarthy equates farce with the clever slave. Good slaves, then, represent the naturalistic mode.

104 Cf. Chrysalus’ witty observation that the master will make him a Crossalus from a Chrysalus. (Bacchides, 362) or his long Trojan War monologue (Bacchides, 925-978).

105 Cf. McCarthy (2000), 40. “Both of these characters have strong associations with the sensual pleasures that are so clearly opposed to the drudgery of everyday life, and thus they are emblematic of festivity.”
Commenting on the interaction between Peniculus, Erotium, and Menaechmus E, McCarthy observes, “We have seen that Menaechmus’ normal life consists of using money, food and luxury goods to get for himself the flattery of Peniculus and the amorous attentions of Erotium, and to pay off the wife’s claims on him. However, it is not Menaechmus himself who is in control of this system but his three subordinates.”

While Peniculus and Erotium comprehend how the system works, an understanding made all the more prominent by Peniculus’ running commentary on the interactions between Menaechmus E and Erotium, Menaechmus E believes he is in control of a situation he is not. Economic exchanges are a negotiation between two parties. Neither the buyer nor the seller can be said to be in absolute control of any exchange, since the seller depends on a buyer for the services and the buyer depends on the services of the seller. Such an interest sits nicely at the heart of this play, which wrests control out of the hands of those who think they have it.

Menaechmus E believes he controls the actions of Peniculus and Erotium, but they turn on him the minute they see the gravy train running dry. Erotium thinks she is manipulating Menaechmus E, when in reality she is giving away goods to his twin brother. Peniculus expects to find food for helping the wife catch her profligate husband, but he is turned away. When Menaechmus S finds success in this play, it is at the expense of those who believe they have a firm grasp on the way the world of Epidamnus works.


107 Generally speaking, believing that you are firmly in control of a situation endangers your position over it in the Plautine world. Why do the clever slaves from Palaestrio to Pseudolus fret so much about their plans failing? This fretting is a very real acknowledgement that success in a situation is not traditional mastery of control, but the ability to position characters and props as the situations call for.
Menaechmus E’s dependents occupy a convenient middle ground, understanding the need to play off of others’ projections, wants, and desires while at the same time trying to monopolize the flow of Menaechmus E’s goods in their direction. Like neighborhood rival businesses, Peniculus and Erotium position themselves to rake in the most they can from Menaechmus E, adapting their selling tactics as conditions shift. They are willing to play their part for him, but only so far as they need to in order to get his business.

3.2.1 Part One: Pandering for a Meal

Let us turn first to Peniculus, that friendly well-wisher turned vindictive saboteur. He enters the stage, explaining why he is called Peniculus.

Iuventus nomen fecit Peniculo mihi, ideo quia mensam, quando edo, detergeo. (77-8)

The young folk gave me the name Peniculus, because when I eat I actually wipe the table clean.

His opening words embrace the mutability of the world, as Peniculus accepts the duality of his life. Though a man in search of a meal, the ravenous parasite is a slave to his appetite. As such, he is equally a tool for clearing off banquet tables. His identity is not self-determined but provided by the youth of Epidamnus, among them Menaechmus E. His livelihood comes from being what these young feasters make of him.

Peniculus then proceeds to change food from a simple source of nourishment to a potential means to bind subordinates. Those who bind men with physical chains will find they have runaways, but those who bind people with feasts will have men who gladly live

---

108 Parasite nicknames occur elsewhere in Plautus (cf. Captivi) as well as in New Comedy (cf. Alexis’ Parasitos fr. 178 K). The tradition can be seen to go back to Homer, as Gratwick (1993) notes, where Arneaus is called Irus because of his association with the messenger goddess Iris. (Odyssey, 18.1ff.)
in servitude, *suo arbitratu*. (87-93) The figurative image for Peniculus has a greater power than the physical chains. Those who are given the opportunity to be a dependent will do so much more faithfully than those forced to be, but this non-physical binding needs constant refreshment. The food chains are an economic method of control, depending on an ever-renewed source of food. So long as there is plenty of food, Peniculus will allow himself to be bound tightly,\(^{109}\) but once there are no longer ample offers for meals, Peniculus is no longer bound to his provider.

Peniculus in fact acknowledges that he hires his flattery out to the man with the finest feasts. He explains his reason for being on stage today by recounting the splendor of Menaechmus E.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{nam ego ad Menaechmum hunc eo, quo iam diu sum iudicatus; ul} \\
\text{tro eo ut me vinciat.}
\end{align*}
\]
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{nam illic homo homines non alit, verum educat,}
\end{align*}
\]
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{recreatque: nullus melius medicinam facit.}
\end{align*}
\]
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ita est adulescens; ipsus escae maxumae. (96-100)}
\end{align*}
\]

You see, I am going to this guy Menaechmus. It’s been a long time now that I’ve been sentenced by him. I am going voluntarily so he can tie me up. You see, that guy doesn’t feed men. He rears them and reinvigorates them. Nobody makes medicine better. That’s the kind of young man he is. He’s got the best food.

Through food, Menaechmus E is fashioning a certain type of dependent, if we follow Peniculus’ logic. The provisions not only nourish and bind, but they also are training the parasite, keeping him in good health to continue providing his services. Peniculus recognizes the value in playing off the cues Menaechmus E provides, while Menaechmus E is too busy trying to control his own image by coercing the reactions of others. He fails

\(^{109}\) This is a common theme among Plautine parasites. One might think particularly of Artotrogus in *Miles Gloriosus* where food is explicitly given as the excuse for putting up with Pyrgopolynices’ excessive boasting. (*epityrum estur insanum bene* (24)) The parasite though can sometimes exploit the information he has to coerce the patron into playing the part of the generous patron (cf. *Curculio*).
to acknowledge fully the counterclaims being made on him. The energy Menaechmus E expends is not productive but consumptive.

There is still something more to be said of the type of men Menaechmus E creates through his banquets. Drawn deeply into an economy of expense, he creates dependents who act as minimally as they need to in order to get their rewards. Excited about triumphantly stealing the palla from his wife, he tries to get Peniculus to compliment him through the mythological imagery of the eagle and Catameitus and Venus and Adonis. When Peniculus’ only reaction is confusion and puzzlement, Menaechmus E must then resort to more direct tactics.

**MEN.** Dic hominem lepidissimum esse me. **PEN.** Vbi essuri sumus?
**MEN.** Dic modo hoc quod ego te iubeo. **PEN.** Dico: homo lepidissime.
**MEN.** Ecquid audes de tuo istuc addere? **PEN.** Atque hilarissime. (147-9)

**MEN.** Say that I am the most delightful man. **PEN.** Where are we going to eat?
**MEN.** Just say what I order you to say. **PEN.** I say: most delightful man.
**MEN.** Are you going to venture something else of your own? **PEN.** And most amusing one.

Peniculus will act for food, but he is not going to expend any more effort on his part than he needs to. Menaechmus E’s way of control has created a dependent that will parrot back the flattery that is provided for him to speak, but does not elaborate unless told to do so. Peniculus will be Menaechmus E’s cheerleader, but his motivation does not come from affection toward Menaechmus E. Instead, he has his sights on a very commercial goal, Menaechmus E’s renowned feasts. Paired well with a young man who gets what he wants by giving, Peniculus’ output precisely matches his patron’s input. Though Menaechmus E may hope for more, he fails to realize that the pleasure he gets out of his dependents is constructed in a zero-sum system of exchange.

95
Peniculus is driven by his conviction that a meal is in fact waiting at the end of that long flattery tunnel. As the promise of a free meal becomes more and more elusive, Peniculus becomes increasingly hostile. Having followed Menaechmus E to the forum, Peniculus returns and rails against the system. After calling the wrath of the gods down on the man who decided to hold public assemblies, he proposes that those not busy with feasts should be corralled into public service, leaving folks like himself more time for their feasts. (451-9) And why is he really upset about the system?

si id ita esset, non ego hodie perdissem prandium, quoi tam credo ~ datum voluisse quam me video vivere. (460-1)

If that were the way it is, I wouldn’t have squandered a lunch today. As much as I see I am alive, I believe [Menaechmus E] wanted to give me one.

Much as his patron will do later in the play, Peniculus attacks the way public business is handled. His complaint is not grounded in some moral objection about the system. Instead, he is upset because public business has kept him from indulging his own personal desires. Peniculus is a fitting companion to Menaechmus E, who finds himself frustrated by the demands Epidamnian society places on him. Since his world is constructed around procuring food at no expense to himself, Peniculus finds himself constantly in tension with a world that is trying to cheat him out of the meals he has deserved through his constant toadyism. This scene then provides a smooth transition to the other side of Peniculus that we glimpsed in his earlier commentary regarding Erotium. There is Peniculus the good-natured, flattering parasite, and Peniculus the embittered hunger-haver. Cut off from the food he thinks he deserves, Peniculus shifts gears, turning to the wife as a potential source of food.
Paired with the wife, Peniculus presents an embittered version of himself, well suited to the wife’s temperament. When the wife asks for advice on how to deal with Menaechmus E, Peniculus says,

*Idem quod semper: male habeas; sic censeo.
  huc concedamus: ex insidiis aucupa. (569-70)*

The same thing you always do, treat him badly. That’s what I think. Let’s step back over here. Catch him in an ambush.

Believing the lunch, which he earned by deferring to Menaechmus E’s demands, barely escaped him, Peniculus chooses to play the suspicious, disgruntled card, hoping this will win the favor of the wife. Peniculus though is blinded by his desire for food. Like Menaechmus E, Peniculus believes he is creating a situation that will warrant a meal from the wife. Instead he gets the promise that she will help him should he lose something. (664) Peniculus believes playing to another’s personality leads to rewards, but operating within a world lacking in trust or cooperation, he fails to recognize that the wife is a consumer of goods not a provider of services. Through her hawk-like watch over her husband’s activities, the wife tries to keep whatever has come into the household part of the household. Her response to Peniculus’ request then is quite fitting as she promises to help him restore goods to his household should those goods somehow escape.

---

110 Cf. McCarthy (2000), 62. McCarthy sees Peniculus as relying on “another kind of metatheater where the conventions of comedy operate as the fictional background experience of the characters.” Peniculus’ comments on the generic character of Erotium and the wife then are an attempt to cause the world of this play to operate under the conventions of comedy, shutting down “any deviation from the stereotype that might lead towards an unconventional characterization.” For McCarthy then, “since here in the Menaechmi the naturalistic mode dominates the ending of the play, Peniculus’ metatheatrical control will give him no stake in the final resolution.” The failure of Peniculus’ is the failure to deal with the actual wife, not a generic type. Peniculus, caught in a world of economic exchanges, turns to the wife. Providing her with information, he hopes that he will get some reward, but he fails to recognize that simply saying the wife will give a reward does not mean that she will. The power of the trickster is deeply connected with knowledge of the target. In *Miles*, Palaestrio does not make Pyrgopolynices a dupe out of whole cloth. Instead, he plays with those aspects of Pyrgopolynices he knows will get a favorable reaction.
Peniculus comes close to getting a free lunch through his flattery of Menaechmus E, but he is shut out due to an accident of chance, namely the arrival and misplaced invitation of Menaechmus S. He recognizes the advantages of playing the parts that others offer him the chance to play, but he is consumed by his desire for a free meal. Since the trajectory of the play moves away from an economic approach to social situations, there is little room for Peniculus, who ultimately plays along so long as he can still hope for a meal. Thus, limited in range, Peniculus heads off to the forum in search of a patron who will allow him to play the part he plays best.

3.2.2 Part Two: Sweetheart for a Price

In direct competition with Peniculus for much of Menaechmus E’s attention is Erotium, and much like her parasite counterpart, she deals with the world, primarily focused on potential material gains. She plays her part to the greatest advantage, trying to squeeze all the profit she can out of the tiniest output of goods. Her willingness to play the roles that fulfill Menaechmus E’s desires is even more explicitly a zero-sum effort. She will provide him with as much pleasure as the material worth of what he puts in.

After Menaechmus E and Peniculus head off to the forum, Erotium begins to make preparations for lunch for three. This is the first opportunity we have to observe Erotium apart from her house-plundering lover, and right away the sweet, indulging prostitute moves into business mode, calculatedly telling her cook what to buy for lunch.

---

Ketterer (1986c) suggests Erotium’s initial reaction to the presentation of the *palla* “characterize her as a mercenary courtesan, and her relationship with Menaechmus as an exchange of goods. It has nothing to do with the genuine love felt by such women as Palaestra, Selenium, or Alcumena.” (53). Her interest in the *palla* gives an early glimpse of this prostitute as an economically driven working lady.
Erotium is very explicit in how much effort and expense she will put into her seduction of Menaechmus E. The good business woman that she is, she makes it very clear that she will expend just the right amount to keep her lover content, maximizing her profits from the plunder of his home. She will play the endearing prostitute as much as she needs, but not much beyond that. Once Menaechmus E is out of sight, there is no need to keep up the ruse of any genuine affection beyond the joy his expense brings her.

A bit later when Erotium reappears on stage putting the finishing touches on her banquet, she makes clear the relationship between her interests and those of her lovers.

The interests of Erotium and her lovers are placed in direct conflict here. Lacking the sentimental attachment of a Philocomasium, Erotium is primarily concerned about the economic aspects of her relationship with her clients, particularly here Menaechmus E.

---

Her activities are constantly mediated through this economic filter. Her house is arranged to ensure a high yield from her invested energy, and her interest in Menaechmus E is deeply driven by the exceptional profits he brings this household.

As we watch Erotium, we do not get the sense that Erotium plays to the personalities of others for the sake of comic freedom. Instead, she has an economic interest in adapting to the personalities of her lovers. Haberman hits upon this when he remarks, “Although Erotium represents joy and pleasure to Menaechmus, she is herself enslaved to the desire of others because of money. She knows what Menaechmus wants and is prepared to provide it. The Wife snoops to discover what Menaechmus wants so that she can prevent it. Both women identify their sense of themselves, like Peniculus, with control of Menaechmus.”¹¹³ Those who connect themselves to Menaechmus E operate within an economic system of exchange wrongly focused on who can control the flow of goods and in turn Menaechmus E. Instead of developing relationships that acknowledge the give and take in any exchange, the wife, Peniculus, and Erotium make claims to the exclusive rights over the goods that come with Menaechmus E. In order to monopolize profits coming from Menaechmus E, Erotium recognizes that she needs to play the role that Menaechmus E wishes her to play. She seems to have been quite successful in doing so until a non-economic interest is introduced into the play, namely the twin brother Menaechmus S. So long as what is at stake is the material flow of goods, the dependents’ quest for control is a useful and productive one, but once Menaechmus S enters, ostensibly in search of his brother, this system breaks down. When success is no

¹¹³ Haberman (1981), 133.
longer measured by control of the flow of goods, efforts to control others directly becomes unprofitable.

Believing that she controls Menaechmus E, Erotium becomes ensnared when she mistakes Menaechmus S for his profligate brother. As she tries to entice him to come in for a bite to eat, she is met with unexpected results. The two talk past each other as Erotium sets herself up for loss because she thinks she knows what is going on.

 Erotium’s question then expresses “surprise and fear that her lover Menaechmus has already enjoyed himself with another meretrix, which would threaten her calculated plan to get more profit from him.”

Marsilio has done a nice job teasing out the double entendre at work here. We can safely assume Menaechmus S is referring to his actual ship, while Erotium, her economic interest in mind, takes his meaning to be a metaphorical ship, the kind all the sailors in port might take a ride on. Erotium’s question then expresses “surprise and fear that her lover Menaechmus has already enjoyed himself with another meretrix, which would threaten her calculated plan to get more profit from him.”

interests in jeopardy now that she believes a rival prostitute has entered the game, but of course her economic interests are at risk because she has mistaken Menaechmus S for her lover, his twin. The control she believes she has in this situation is tenuous at best, and Menaechmus S will take full advantage of this opportunity.

When Erotium appears on stage for the last time, she is berating Menaechmus E for asking for the *palla* back. Suspecting that Menaechmus E is genuinely trying to cheat her out of the *palla* she unknowingly gave to Menaechmus S, Erotium barks at her dismayed lover,

```
tibi habe, aufer, utere
vel tu vel tua uxor, vel etiam in loculos compingite.
tu huc post hunc diem pedem intro non feres, ne frustra sis;
quando tu me bene merentem tibi habes despicatui,
nisi feres argentum, frustra me ductare non potes. (690-4)
```

Have it for yourself, take it away, use it, you or your wife, or even lock it up in safe keeping. After this day, you will not step foot inside here, lest you waste your time. When you treat me with disrespect when I deserve to be treated well, unless you bring hard cash, you can’t lead me on pointlessly.

Like her lover who has found that he is losing more and more control over his life, Erotium finds her situation more and more desperate. She has lost control of the flow of goods she once thought she had a firm grip on. Her efforts to make Menaechmus E a supplier for her household have come to naught with the introduction of an element outside the economic system of Epidamnus, namely Menaechmus S. A monkey wrench has appeared in the seamless exchange of goods coming into Erotium’s household.

Though Erotium has adapted her role to fit the desires of her provider, ultimately she has done so in an effort to influence the amount of goods that she can enjoy. She has been foiled by someone who has no interest in controlling the world of Epidamnus.
3.3 Messenio: Loyal Slave

In contrast to the economically enmeshed world of Menaechmus E and his dependents, Plautus stages the personal connection between Menaechmus S and his slave Messenio. As far as their world is economic, it is a sort of failed economy. Menaechmus S has been spending vast sums of money in order to find his lost brother with little-to-no results thus far. Messenio expends a great deal of his own personal energy not to get whipped. As Menaechmus E’s dependents complemented his structuring of the world, so Messenio complements Menaechmus S’ approach to this strange world of Epidamnus.

Messenio has not been on stage long when he begins to display what kind of slave he really is. In response to Menaechmus S’ delight (voluptas) in finding firm ground after a long voyage, Messenio replies,

Maior, non dicam dolo,
quasi adveniens terram videas quae fuerit tua. (228-9)

There is a greater [pleasure]. I am not going to say it craftily. Whenever you return and see the land which was yours.

We have ourselves a straight-talking, no nonsense slave. Messenio is not here in Epidamnus to play all the angles, bilking the residences for everything they are worth. He has been dragged along by his eager young master, and as the good slave that he is, he will follow, tossing in objections along the way, but ultimately yielding to the whims of his twin-seeking master.

As he learns more and more about why they have come to Epidamnus, Messenio shows what kind of slave he is to Menaechmus S. He attempts to dissuade his master

\footnote{Gratwick (1993) has done a good job of elaborating the significance of the name Messenio to a reliable and steadfast slave.}
from continuing this search that has taken them all about the northern Mediterranean, traipsing from east to west and back again if we follow the order of the peoples he names.117

MESS. In scirpo nodum quaeris. quin nos hinc domum redimus, nisi si historiam scripturi sumus?
MEN. Dictum facessas, datum edis, caveas malo. molestus ne sis, non tuo hoc fiet modo. MESS. Em illoc enim verbo esse me servom scio. non potuit paucis plura plane proloqui. verum tamen nequeo contineri quin loquar. (247-53)

MESS. You are looking for a tangle in a bulrush. Why don’t we head back home, unless we are going to write a history? MEN. You do what you’re told. You eat what you’re given. You watch out for trouble. This won’t be done how you want it to. MESS. Well, well. By those words I see that I am a slave. He couldn’t clearly say more in a few words. But nevertheless I can’t be kept from speaking.

Messenio asserts his position as the concerned slave, looking out for the interests of his master. Like other Plautine slaves, he does not act out of pure self-interest, believing that his faithful service makes him the good slave who should be free from whippings.118 In contrast to his Epidamnian twin, Menaechmus S’ dependent is capable of doing what a slave ought to, namely bend to the will of the master while at the same time not bending so much that he cannot assert himself when the time is fit. While Peniculus and Erotium are trying to maximize profits, playing their parts to the bare minimum, Messenio has internalized his role as slave. He does not act in the hopes of gain, but in the hopes of helping his master as situations show a need. He recognizes that as a slave he must back

---

117 Namely starting along the Danube with the Histrians, then to Spain, then to the Massilians, and finally here today among the Illyrians.

118 In contradiction to most who see the rebellion of the slave as directed very much against a master, I would assert that most slaves act on behalf of their young master. Their rebellion is not pure rebellion against authority, since they take their cues from their young masters. Palaeestrio sets off in a boat to aid the interests of Pleusicles. Prompted by the rather heavy-handed orders of Charinus, Acanthio does what he can to fool the old man. Messenio here provides yet another version of slavery that works on the Plautine stage.
down when the master tells him to do so, but he cannot hold back his concerns for his young master. If there is danger for the master, Messenio must speak.

Messenio acts more like a friend to Menaechmus S, and thus, he feels the need to warn Menaechmus S about the land that they have recently arrived in, so his master does not find himself trapped by the beguiling natives. Messenio enters into a long description of the kind of people found in Epidamnus.

nam ita est haec hominum natio: in Epidamnieis voluptarii atque potatores maxumi; tum sycophantae et palpatores plurumi in urbe hac habitant; tum meretrices mulieres nusquam perhibentur blandiores gentium. propter ea huic urbi nomen Epidamnus inditum, quia nemo ferme huc sine damno devortitur. (258-64)

For this nation of men is like this: among the Epidamnians are the biggest pleasure-seekers and drinkers. Then you’ve got the most sycophants and flatterers residing in this city. Then you’ve got ladies of the evening, a more flattering lot you will find nowhere on earth. Moreover the name Epidamnus was given to this city because there’s hardly anyone who ever gets out of here without some damage.

Unlike Menaechmus E’s dependents, Messenio puts in a fair bit of unnecessary energy, hoping to protect his master from the locals. Though he is a good slave, I would nevertheless argue that it is unproductive to think of Messenio as some simple dupe, destined to find things going poorly for him as a result of his views on the slave-master dynamic. Realizing the advantages of approaching his master in a flexible way, Messenio knows that as a slave he needs to bend to the demands of his master, but he also realizes that a good slave may need to play more than the part of a speaking tool for masterly desire. Messenio ends his rail against Epidamnus with a flourish that displays some comic cleverness. This Messenio has some punch to him, even if he is a good slave.
As Menaechmus S encounters strangers who think they know him quite well, Messenio is there to warn him about the wily Epidamnians. Erotium enters and mistakes the Syracusan traveler for his indulgent brother. Reacting to Menaechmus S’ perplexity about a woman who treats an unknown man so familiarly, Messenio replies,

Dixin ego istaec hic solere fieri? folia nunc cadunt, praeut si triduom hoc hic erimus: tum arbores in te cadent. nam ita sunt hic meretrices: omnes elecebrae argentariae. (375-7)

Did I say that usually happens here? Leaves are falling now. Compare that to if we will be here for three days. Then trees will fall on you. Well that’s the way it is with prostitutes. They are all silver lures.

Erotium may seem to be offering an afternoon pleasure-romp, but she really is after the goods, as Messenio suggests. This good slave is adept at seeing through external facades, offering Menaechmus S an alternative way to view Erotium. The pleasures she puts on the market all come at a price, and any sense of loyalty to the customers is one more trick to keep her patrons coming back. When the goods stop flowing her way, she cuts the men off. Recognizing the possibility that Erotium’s flattery flutters over her targets like leaves in an attempt to swindle the men out of their silver, Messenio does not come to the table with an agenda of needs from the world, but rather he reacts to the demands of the world, finding room to play around.

At the same time, it is important that Messenio does not perfectly understand Erotium’s intentions. Though his warning may be useful, it is not an omniscient statement that will save Menaechmus S. Messenio fails to understand that the enticements that Erotium offers are not a prostitute’s usual bag of tricks for luring in travelers. Erotium fails to understand that Menaechmus S is not actually the one who asked for a meal to be prepared. In the gap between these two understandings of what is
going on, Plautus is able to let the world continue to slip from complete comprehension. Throughout this play, neither the Epidamnians nor the Syracusan travelers have a firm grasp on what is happening, nor could they ever fully. What does get developed through the play is the ability of the Syracusan travelers to adapt to this odd world they have recently become a part of.

In playing with creative comparisons, Messenio also shows his ability to mimic his master’s language, while adding something new. As Menaechmus S follows Erotium inside, Messenio turns to the audience, saying,

> Perii, iamne abis? perit probe:  
> ducit lebnum dierectum navis praedatoria.  
> sed ego inscitus qui domino me postulem moderarier:  
> dicto me emit audientem, haud imperatorem sibi. (441–4)

I am ruined, now you’re going away? He’s rightly ruined. The pirate ship is towing our skiff right to ruin. But I am a fool to demand that I restrain the master. He bought me to listen to what he says not at all to be his commander.

Picking up on the comic misunderstanding earlier about shipboard lunches, Messenio again displays an affinity for comic forms of expression, turning Erotium into a pirate ship and Menaechmus S into a skiff. This passage suggests Messenio has actually been able to recognize the confusion between Menaechmus S’ physical ship and the metaphorical ship, a *meretrix*, Erotium had in mind. Positioned outside of the conversation, Messenio is able to evaluate his master’s position, and then to try to protect him from harm. Ultimately he accepts his position in this world as a slave, but he realizes the power of comic language. He understands that Menaechmus S does not need a mirror for his orders, but rather a servant who can act in his broader interests, whether told to act or not. Messenio’s success as a slave comes from his ability to move seamlessly between
subservient yes-man and trusted advisor. He knows he needs to respond to the will of the master, yet he must also keep possible avenues of action open through his advice.

This adaptable slave has found for himself room to operate within the system of slavery. Even as he expounds the merits of being a dutiful slave, Messenio finds space to play with the world he must constantly adapt to in order to best serve his master’s interests. Messenio says to the audience,

{id ego male malum metuo: propterea bonum esse certumst potius quam malum;}
{nam magis quo patior facilius verba: verbera ego odi,}
{nimioque edo lubentius molitum, quam molitum praehibeo. (977-9)}

I am troublingly afraid of this trouble. Moreover I am determined to be good rather than bad, because it’s a whole lot easier for me to endure a tongue lashing. I hate thrashings, and I’d be quite glad to eat a meal than work the mill.

His dutiful service has not impoverished his comic potential. Messenio sees within the system of slavery the potential to toy with the world. Slavery under Menaechmus S does not limit an individual to one position, unlike under his brother whose dependents

---

119 On this matter, I am in disagreement with the *communs opinio*, which equates strongly the bad slave with cleverness and the good slave with uncleverness. (cf. Segal (1968), Stace (1968), Slater (2000), McCarthy (2000)) Reacting to this position, Haberman (1981) notes in the case of Messenio’s song on the life of the good slave, “The evidence of the play does not bear this out.” (135) Messenio comes out as one of the most successful characters in this comedy. Faithfulness that is not mere obedience allows Messenio to work in this comic world in an active way. He is not only the will of his master, Menaechmus S, not only a limited agent in the world. He constantly pushes such singularity open, which even plays out in the suggestion that he is quite the ladies man, even though this will not be featured much in the play.

120 Cf. Leach (1969), 36. Commenting on the pairing of Peniculus’ and Messenio’s songs, Leach observes, “The symmetrical opposition of these characters is reinforced by thematic opposition of their *cantica*: that of Peniculus which opens the play and that of Messenio preceding the resolution. The songs are inversions of one another, the first dealing with slavery in freedom, the second with freedom in slavery.” The two songs speak to the attitudes of the Menaechmi. By embroiling himself with the desire to orchestrate his environment, Menaechmus E frustrates his own ambitions. He has surrounded himself with people who are each doing the same. The wife is attempting to create for herself a certain type of husband. Peniculus seeks to arrange himself a meal at another’s expense, and Erotium is constantly preparing new ways to get more for less. As a slave, Messenio is in a position to act as he likes within certain bounds. Capable of acting beyond his position when he knows that they serve the ultimate interest of his master, Messenio is not a non-volitional tool. He bends his performance to suit the desires of his master, and is ultimately rewarded for his hard work with freedom.
do exactly as he asks of them, no more, no less. Messenio has found potential profit from yielding to Menaechmus S while at the same time doing what he believes to be in Menaechmus S’ best interest, whether he is explicitly told to do so or not.

Toward the end of the play, Messenio manages to get himself freed, but he immediately qualifies the conditions of his freedom.

Salve, mi patrone. cum tu liber es, Messenio, gaudeo. credo hercle vobis. sed, patrone, te obsecro, ne minus imperes mihi quam cum tuos servos fui. apud ted habitabo et quando ibis, una tecum ibo domum. (1031-4)

Hello my patron. “When you are free, Messenio, I am glad.” By golly I trust you guys. But, patron, I beg you not to give me orders any less than when I was your slave. I will live at your house and when you go, I will go home with you.

Even though he has been freed, Messenio wishes to retain much of his slave life. Freedom for Messenio is not freedom from living for and through another, playing the roles the other wants him to play. For Messenio freedom is release from physical punishment. He hopes to continue being what Menaechmus wants him to be without the looming threat of whippings. He has found the freedom that comes from releasing absolute control over one’s own individuality, reacting to cues from the world. Unlike Menaechmus E’s dependents who are constantly vying for dominance over the world around them, Messenio wishes even in freedom to play his part not for himself but for the others, finding in this a liberation that cuts deeply.

121 Keep in mind all of Peniculus’ cynical barbs when he sees Erotium gaining ground on Menaechmus E’s attention.

122 Cf. McCarthy (2000), 73. “[Messenio and Peniculus] form a contrast exactly at the thematic center of the play: the reliability of an exchange of food and material goods as the foundation of authority. Messenio represents a challenge to this notion of mastery, since he is an emblem of a slave-master relationship based on true personal authority rather than on the master’s ability to provide material luxury.” On the one hand, we have Menaechmus E who believes that authority is a reified thing. He works on his dependents through
3.4 Menaechmus S: Man of Opportunity

While Menaechmus E and his dependents turn social interactions into an economic system of exchange, Messenio and Menaechmus S expose the problems with this impersonal system. Acting as a foil to Erotium and Peniculus, Messenio displays a type of loyalty that is not dependent on impersonal goods. Mistaken for his twin brother, Menaechmus S proves that not just any Menaechmus will do for the social gears of Menaechmus to turn. Erotium and Peniculus need the Menaechmus E they are accustomed to in order for them to enjoy the profits they are used to. When Menaechmus S is introduced to the system, it falls apart. Economics are not based on the impersonal movement of goods, but on the interactions of particular human beings, negotiating what they will give for what they will get.

The deep comparison of the brothers is established immediately as Menaechmus S enters the stage. As Segal observes, “By artful coincidence, the very first word which Menaechmus II speaks is voluptas (line 226). He is little aware of the reverberations which this word will have for him, and how apt a description it is of the way of life in this town.” Though framed in terms of goods, it is voluptas that leads Menaechmus E to spend so much wealth and effort on Erotium, but he tries to impersonalize his desire. By material, real world goods. On the other hand, we have Menaechmus S who sees the advantage of giving up authority at certain key moments. Menaechmus S does not always place demands on the Epidamnian world through his existence as Menaechmus S, the young lad from Syracuse who has recently come to Epidamus to find his long lost brother. Instead, he nullifies the self he is familiar with, making use of a new self, Menaechmus, lover of Erotium, crazed husband. His slave Messenio is capable of autonomous action that is mediated through his relation to Menaechmus S, just as Menaechmus S mediates his act through the roles the Epidamnians suggest for him.

Segal (1969), 85. Segal goes on to emphasize the festive nature of this strange land.
framing it as a pursuit that is done out of compulsion from his wife’s constant nagging, he rejects his own personal responsibility. The *voluptas* that Menaechmus S speaks of here though is not the womanly pleasures of his twin brother. Instead, he speaks of the joy that comes to sailors when they have finally reached their destination (226-8), which in his case is a city that might finally reveal the whereabouts of his brother. For Menaechmus S, *voluptas*, initially, is the joy of the possibility of reestablishing a personal connection that has long been severed.

There is another issue at stake in this doubled *voluptas*. Even before Menaechmus S has entered the stage, his initial word is already beyond his control, as words are so apt to be. Without knowing it, he has entered into the semantic world of his brother. He is enmeshed in another’s life. As Haberman notes, “The object of the quest of Menaechmus II is … paradoxical. He cannot explain to his slave Messenio why he has devoted his life to searching for his lost brother, but he knows in some fashion that his own true identity is dependent on the discovery of his brother. His quest has become a burden, but it is his freedom as well.”

From the moment his grandfather changed his name, Menaechmus S has been compelled to live another’s life. The experience of growing up as someone else has taught him to play his role as others suggest he should. He knows that his existence is not completely under his control, and thus, he is more willing to be something more than he is, which will prove profitable in Epidamnus. The quest for the brother then is partly an attempt to regain a life of his own.

As the initial interaction between Menaechmus S and Messenio continues, Plautus works to distance the two brothers’ approach to the world. Warned of the dangers that

---

124 Haberman (1981), 133.
Epidamnus has to offer, Menaechmus S demands the wallet, expressing some fear about Messenio.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ne mihi damnum in Epidamno duis.} \\
tu magnus amator mulierum es, Messenio, \\
\text{ego autem homo iracundus, animi perciti;}^{125} \\
id utrumque, argentum quando habebo, cavero, \\
\text{ne tu delinquas neve ego irascar tibi. (267-71)}
\end{align*}
\]

[I am afraid] that you are going to cause me some damage in Epidamnus. You are a great lover of ladies, Messenio, I, on the other hand, am an irritable man with an incorrigible temperament. I will be watching out for two things when I have the money, that you don’t do me some harm and that I don’t get angry with you.

In demanding the wallet from Messenio, who becomes unexpectedly a perennial skirt-chaser, Menaechmus S establishes himself as a man on a mission. He is not a sensual character like his brother, but rather a calculating man. While Messenio is likely to squander their funds on some hot dish here in Epidamnus, Menaechmus S is something of a killjoy by his own standards. His expenditures are not for the finer things in life, but rather the increasingly desperate search for his lost brother.

Yet there is something more to this picture. Menaechmus S presents the audience with a contradiction between the loyal, financially-concerned Messenio we see and the girl-crazed one he tells us about. Perhaps we should be doing the same as regards Menaechmus S, the disgruntled youth, freshly landed in a place that offers all sorts of pleasures and delights. As the play progresses, we see a version of Menaechmus S that is not averse to pleasure, much like his brother, but unlike his lost twin, he does not tightly regulate pleasure through commercial exchange. Instead, his pleasure is the result of

---

125 I follow Gratwick’s suggestion that we should read Lipsius’ emendation *perciti* for the MS tradition *perditi*. The sense is better if Menaechmus expresses the turbulent nature of his temperament rather than some sort of moral depravity as he chastises his servant for being a lover of ladies.
knowing that he is not the person these Epidamnians think he is. He reacts to the ways the Epidamnians talk to him, and by doing this, he is able to make the most of a given situation.

As Menaechmus S encounters the Epidamnian locals, he must find a way to negotiate with these people who insist that they really do know him, though he has never seen them before. With each misidentification, Menaechmus S must reevaluate who he is. He first encounters the cook Cylindrus. Apprehended by this complete stranger, Menaechmus S is convinced the man must be off his rocker for troubling a stranger so, and thus he offers Cylindrus some money to buy sacrificial pigs. (290-3) A brief interchange occurs, hinting at a process that will become more important for Menaechmus S as the play progresses.

CYL. Cylindrus ego sum: non nosti nomen meum?
MEN. Si tu Cylindrus seu Coriendrus, perieris. ego te non novi, neque novisse adeo volo.
CYL. Est tibi Menaechmo nomen, tantum quod sciam. (294-7)

CYL. I am Cylindrus. Don’t you know my name? MEN. Whether you are Cylindrus or Coriendrus,127 you’re lost. I don’t know you, nor do I even want to know you. CYL. Your name’s Menaechmus, that much I know.

In suggesting that this stranger could be Cylindrus or Coriendrus for all he cares, Menaechmus S exposes a potential that he will exploit down the road. Cylindrus is determined to make the man he encounters Menaechmus, lover of Erotium, and thus he approaches Menaechmus S with a certain set of expectations. At the same time, Menaechmus S is not invested in who the other person is. Cylindrus can be whatever he

---

126 Menaechmus S treats each misidentification at some point as a question of sanity.
127 Cf. Gratwick (1993), 170. Following Gratwick’s suggestion, the pun is likely here on cylindrus, rolling pin, and the name of a spice. Menaechmus S then does not care what kitchen object the cook claims to be.
claims to be. Not seeing any advantage in playing with Cylindrus, Menaechmus S dismisses the cook quite abruptly.

Enter Erotium, putting the finishing touches on an afternoon of earthly pleasures.

The scene that follows is full of the back-and-forth claims of knowing and not-knowing that the previous scene had. All the pieces of the play are trotted back out, the adequate lunch, the parasite eating buddy, and the stolen mantle. Menaechmus S is still unconvinced that Erotium is really looking for him, which prompts Erotium to provide a very thorough description of who he is.

Non ego te novi Menaechmum, Moscho prognatum patre, qui Syracusis perhibere natus esse in Sicilia, ubi rex Agathocles regnator fuit et iterum Phintia, tertium Liparo, qui in morte regnum Hieroni tradidit, nunc Hiero est? (407-12)

I don’t know you? Menaechmus, progeny of your father Moschos, who was born in Syracuse in Sicily, so they say, where king Agathocles was the ruler and second Phintia, third Liparo, who handed over his kingdom to Hiero after he died, now it’s Hiero.

This prostitute seems to know quite a bit about who Menaechmus S really is. Though he is pretty sure he has never met her, he cannot deny that he may be mistaken. There is an opportunity here, as Menaechmus S sees it. Perhaps Erotium’s knowledge is all part of a trap, but he is willing to see what will come of being someone known by Erotium.

Reacting to Messenio’s warning, he lets Messenio and the audience know how he will deal with Erotium.

Quin tu tace modo.
bene res geritur. adsentabor quidquid dicet mulieri, si possum hospitium nancisci. (416-8)

Why don’t you just shut it? Things are going well. I will agree to whatever the lady says if I can get some hospitality.
Menaechmus S identifies an opportunity for gain at no expense. He takes a gamble that the mistaken identity is in fact a genuine one, not another scortatory trick to lure in a john. The mistaken identity thus becomes an opportunity to get ahead in the world.\textsuperscript{128} He will play the part that Erotium offers him the chance to play, and see just how far it gets him. Knowing who he really is, he trusts that he has the upper hand here. In playing another’s roles, he finds a way to profit without risking any of his own goods.\textsuperscript{129}

When he emerges from Erotium’s love nest, Menaechmus S speaks directly to the audience, in case anyone missed what he planned to do with Erotium.

\begin{quote}
Ait hanc dedisse me sibi, atque eam meae uxori surrupuisse. quoniam sentio errare, extemplo, quasi res cum ea esset mihi, coepi adsentari: mulier quidquid dixerat, idem ego dicebam. quid multis verbis [opust]?
minore nusquam bene fui dispendio. (479-85)
\end{quote}

She says that I gave her this \textit{palla}, and that I filched it from my wife. Since I sensed she was making a mistake, right away, as if I had some business with her, I began to agree. Whatever the woman had said, I was saying the same thing. Why do I need to say more? Never did I have a good time at less expense.

When he realizes that he has actually been misidentified, he begins to play with Erotium.

Jocelyn reacts to Menaechmus S’ actions by saying, “His readiness to take advantage of those who mistook his identity in order to steal a cloak made of expensive cloth and a

\textsuperscript{128} Cf. Hansen (1977), 389. Hansen sees Menaechmus S’ conscious adoption of a role, but failure to realize that he has been mistaken as a twist that “transforms an event that is clever and serious into one that is clever and humorous.” The mistaken identity does provide much humor throughout the play. At the same time, Menaechmus S’ conscious decision to adopt the role Erotium offers has its serious consequences. Through Menaechmus S, Plautus opens the potentials of flexible identities, allowing that flexibility to not only be a source for humor, but also for Menaechmus S a source of real profit.

\textsuperscript{129} At Messenio’s urging, he gives Messenio the wallet. (384-386)
golden bracelet could only be approved by villains." The figure of Menaechmus S cuts deeper than petty theft. He is given the opportunity to see how far adopting the image provided for him will get him. In a way, this is like Cato, a contemporary of Plautus, railing against Greek culture, making a prominent name for himself in politics, all the while educating his children in Greek. The most Roman of Romans seems to have had few qualms about getting the most miles from one image, which crumbles under careful scrutiny.

Once Menaechmus S enters Erotium’s house, he puts the search for his brother temporarily on hold. A new opportunity has presented itself, and he intends to make the most of it. He is willing to be the Menaechmus that Erotium keeps telling him about. By embracing the role that he is given by Erotium, he manages to short circuit the prostitute’s method. He makes off with the palla, an item which could be an identifier here in the play, but fails to be throughout. He is indulging her indulgence of him for herself. He is now the one playing a role for Erotium who is used to playing the role provided for her by her financially-endowed lovers. She may think she is playing her part, when she is in fact providing the cues that drive the interaction between herself and Menaechmus S.

---


131 For a more in depth study of Roman identity in Republican literature see Batstone (2006).

132 Cf. Ketterer (1986c), 61. Ketter has specifically in mind a contrast between the use of the palla here as a failed identifier and the token boxes found in Cistellaria and Rudens. “The Menaehmi, Erotium, Peniculus, and the wife and father all react to the economic values represented by the mantle, not to its value as an identifier.” The economic focus on the mantle may help explain why the play concludes with an auction of all Menaechmus E’s goods. Menaechmus E’s marriage is not a sentimental one, but an economic alliance. The way to dissolve such a marriage is then by sale of the whole household, all the way down to the wife, since everything in Menaechmus E’s household is deeply entwined with the economic.
Later on in the play, Menaechmus S finds himself dealing with Erotium’s maid, and again he tries to make the most out of the role he is given the chance to play. He has heard that there is a Menaechmus who provides Erotium’s household with luxuries, luxuries that need some refurbishing. As the maid works out the details about a bracelet, which Menaecmhus E stole before the play, Menaechmus S is busy exploiting the potential of this new found role.

ANC. Scin quid hoc sit spinter? MEN. Nescio, nisi aureum.
ANC. Hoc est quod olim clanculum ex armario te surrupuisse aiebas uxori tuae.
MEN. Numquam hercle factum est. ANC. Non meministi, obsecro? redde igitur spinter, si non meministi. MEN. Mane. immo equidem memini. nempe hoc est, quod illi dedi.
ANC. Istuc. MEN. Vbi illae armillae sunt, quas una dedi?
ANC. Numquam dedisti. MEN. Nam pol hoc unum dedi. (530-7)

ANC. Do you know which bracelet this is? MEN. I don’t know, except it’s gold.
ANC. This is the one which you were saying that you had stolen unbeknownst to your wife from her chest. MEN. By gum I never did that. ANC. Please, you don’t remember? Then give the bracelet back if you don’t remember. MEN. Hold on. Actually, I do remember. Of course this is the one I gave that lady. ANC. That’s the one. MEN. Where are those armlets I gave along with it? ANC. You never gave them. MEN. Oh of course, by golly, I only gave this.

If these crazed ladies are willing to entrust him with a *palla* and a bracelet, perhaps they will send out some more past gifts from this super-generous lover. He gladly plays the

---

133 Cf. Haberman (1981), 130. Criticizing Segal, he notes that Segal “expresses the generally held view that the play is about Rest and Recreation from the domestic battle, with Epidamnus representing some sort of adult Disneyland. Although this is one of the issues, it is too narrow an understanding of Plautus’ strategy, because it reduces all the characters other than the Menaechmus and the Wife to mere conveniences of plot.” It is good to see the play in a broader sense of freedom, especially one that develops not in a radical and absolute sense, but one that develops from one’s reaction to the limits people try to impose. Menaechmus S is successful in the play as a free agent not because he imposes his freedom on the other characters, but because he is able to see the freedom to play within the roles that people feed him. He can be Erotium’s lover and win a *palla*.

134 Cf. Segal (1969), 78 and McCarthy (2000), 48. Segal remarks, “Plautus’ comedy, though it deals in duplicates, has no duplicity, and, though its heroes are doubles, it has no double-dealing. There is only error, pure, simple … and harmless.” In creating a moral, naturalistic trickster out of Menaechmus S,
role of Menaechmus, past giver of gifts, knowing all along that he has no intention of
doing any of the things Erotium and her maid ask him to do. By accepting the chance
to play a role that others present, Menaechmus S manages to filch a palla and a golden
bracelet. Instead of material exchanges keeping the social wheels of Epidamnus turning,
the transfer of goods from Erotium’s house to Menaechmus S’ pockets perpetuates
trouble for the Epidamnians. No longer do goods prompt desired actions from the
receiver. Unable to recognize who they are really dealing with, Erotium and her maid
give away goods that will never be returned by a lustful gentleman caller. Menaechmus S
will use the goods he gets from Erotium’s for his own purposes, and in so doing, he
proves that goods do not prompt expected results unless they reach their intended
destination. It should be social interaction that drives the exchange of goods more than
the other way around.

Though thus far my discussion has focused on the material rewards Menaechmus

McCarthy remarks, “Furthermore, the emphasis on misunderstanding creates, in Syracusan Menaechmus, a
trickster who is free from cynicism; when he enjoys pleasures without paying for them, his actions mirror
the swindles of the most ambitious tricksters, yet he never consciously plots to deceive anyone.” When
Menaechmus S emerges from Erotium’s with the palla, he displays joy in his unfound profit, but when he
deals with the maid, a more conniving character develops. Now that he knows Epidamnian mistakes can
lead to profits, he actively tries to dupe the maid into giving him more of what this supposed Menaechmus
has given. Menaechmi displays the triumph of recognizing the opportunities that come with a flexible view
of oneself, and part of that triumph is the opportunity to take advantage of the mistakes others make about
who they are and who the people they interact with are.

identical twin and, through him, the naturalistic mode. The Syracusan brother, although he is not in love,
still represents a commitment to real moral principles, in this case, the reintegration of the family.”
The search for the lost brother forms the frame in which this play happens. After Menaechmus S’
initial scene with Messenio, we lose track of him actually looking for his brother, as Stärk (1989), 27 notes.
There is no mention of the lost twin until the scene where they are both on stage. Menaechmus S spends the
majority of his time on stage trying to negotiate with strangers who think they know him, though he does
not recognize them. To see Menaechmus S as committed to real moral principles is to ignore the bald fact
that he steals a palla from Erotium, as well as a bracelet, as well as trying to get as much as he can out of
Erotium’s house. Menaechmus S is also willing to threaten the wife and the father-in-law with violence,
feigning divine madness. This moral agent is one with a weak foundation if he really is a moral agent,
unless family reunion trumps all stumbles in his moral rectitude.
S receives for adopting a new idea about who he is, the advantage he gets does not have to take the form of material rewards. Finding himself trapped by Menaechmus E’s wife and her father, Menaechmus S finds a way out of this bind by reacting to the image of Menaechmus the wife tosses into the ring.

\begin{quote}
MAT. Viden tu illi oculos virere? ut viridis exoritur colos ex temporibus atque fronte, ut oculi scintillant, vide.
MEN. Quid mihi meliust, quam quando illi me insanire praedicant, ego med adsimulem insanire, ut illos a me absterream? (828-32)
\end{quote}

MAT. Do you see that guy’s eyes are turning green? Look how that green color is springing up on his temples and forehead! Look how his eyes are flashing! MEN. What’s better for me to do, when those guys say that I am crazy, than pretend I am crazy so I might scare those guys away from me.

The wife may overreact in suggesting madness, but Menaechmus S does not let this opportunity pass. Trapped between an angry wife and her father, he finds himself in a tricky situation, but he is quick to take his cue from his antagonists. He discovers that feigning madness will get him enough room to wiggle out of this situation. It does not matter for him what the wife and her father think because he has no obligation to them. He will be what they want him to be so he can get away.

Once the wife and father exit the stage, Menaechmus S drops playing the Apollo-inspired, crazy man. As much fun as he seems to have had while inventing commands from Apollo, he ultimately is a practical man. As he suggests to the audience, the insanity act was done under compulsion. (877) He can play the roles others allow him to play, letting go of a strong sense of who he is, but he does so when he sees something to be gained. Cylindrus is told to go purify himself, (291) and Peniculus is told that he is a cinaedus before being told to get himself purified. (513, 517) Menaechmus S sees no
advantage in playing the Menaechmus these two keep referring to, and his reaction to them takes on a more abusive form.

3.5 Reunion

As the two brothers take the stage together for the first time, Plautus has the opportunity to draw out the contrast between the brothers more clearly. Throughout the play, Menaechmus E has tried to coerce his relationships through the exchange of goods. As the giver, he believes he is in a position to dictate his relationships. Compelled to be someone else from a young age, Menaechmus S has shown himself quite capable of pretending to be the Menaechmus the Epidamnians all know so well. Menaechmus E does not allow others to determine his acts in the world. He attempts to assert his autonomy over his wife. He tries to create a Peniculus who will praise him of his own accord. He looks for Erotium to care for him without necessarily needing goods to keep enjoying her services. For all his efforts to make the world conform to his desires, he gets into a slew of troubles. He finds himself ultimately saved from this environment by his Syracusan brother, who negotiates his way through Epidamnus by being what others say he is. As an outsider, Menaechmus S is not wholly bound by the expectations that have molded the way the Epidamnians act. He can more easily play the role of someone else because he does not have a past with the Epidamnians which would limit the type of person he might be. He can indulge Erotium and the pleasures she has prepared for the generous Menaechmus he keeps hearing about. He can be the crazed husband and son-in-law that the wife and father-in-law suggest.

Plautus maintains this split between the two brothers even through the recognition
that will finally reunite them. Spying Menaechmus E, Messenio invites Menaechmus S to make a direct comparison. The Syracusan brother, soon to regain the name Sosicles, replies in a way that fits well with a character who has spent much of the play not creating an image of himself, but reacting to what he encounters in Epidamnus.


SOS. Quid negoti est? MES. Tuast imago. tam consimilest quam potest.
SOS. Pol profecto haud est dissimilis, meam quom formam noscito. (1062-4)

MES. By the immortal gods, what do I see? SOS. What do you see? MES. Your mirror. SOS. What’s that? MES. He is your spitting image. He’s as like you as can be. SOS. By golly he really is not at all unlike me, when I look over what I look like.

Menaechmus S accepts the likeness proposed by Messenio, but not outright. The similarity is accepted as a negation. Menaechmus E does not look unlike Menaechmus S. The similarity is not the product of creation by Menaechmus S, but a consideration of in what ways he reflects the image he is presented with, recognizing in the image something like himself.

This recognition of similarity prompts a more thorough investigation of the look-alike. As the two Menaechmi participate in a see-sawing dynamic of identity, Plautus has managed to maintain Menaechmus E’s proclivity for asserting his will on the world as well as Menaechmus S’ tendency to mimic the world he is presented with. Messenio makes a stake on which brother is his master which propels the recognition forward.

MESS. tu erus es: tu servom quaere. tu salveto: tu vale.
  hunc ego esse aio Menaechmum. MEN. At ego me. SOS. Quae haec fabulast?

136 Cf. Fantham (1968), 175. As Fantham notes, credit for the balanced structure likely goes to Greek sources, but also some credit is due to Plautus for maintaining the symmetry. The symmetrical structure works well for Plautus’ purposes, allowing him to contrast two brothers that could potentially be the same person. Their positions toward the world prevent them from being simply one man in two bodies, but their identical physical appearance entices us to want to see them as very similar in every way.
tu es Menaechmus? **MEN.** Me esse dico, Moscho prognatum patre. **SOS.** Tun meo patre es prognatus? **MEN.** Immo equidem, adulescens, meo; tuom tibi neque occupare neque praeripere postulo. (1076-80)

**MESS.** You are my master. You find a slave. You hello. You farewell. I say this one is my Menaechmus. **MEN.** But I am me. **SOS.** What’s that you say? You’re Menaechmus? **MEN.** I say I am the progeny of Moschos, my father. **SOS.** You’re the progeny of my father? **MEN.** No, lad, actually of mine. I make no claim on taking or stealing yours from you.

Using the same words, the brothers make counterclaims on the way the world is to be structured. “Papa Moschos is my dad, but can he be your dad?” “Of course he is my dad.” Menaechmus S attempts to reorient himself with each new claim of Menaechmus E. He does not reject his brother’s assertions. Instead, he pushes him on each claim, asking him to further verify his identity. He has found the advantage of redefining himself several times in dealing with the Epidamnians, and here again Menaechmus S negotiates his position in the world, though this time with a man who claims to hold the same position.

Discussing the recognition scene, Leach suggests, “The resistance of the brothers to their meeting reminds us that their true faces are unknown to each other; to each the speculum reveals a personality and a life entirely alien to his own. Their adventures have shown that the face is not a reliable index of self. Confronted by an unknown semblance of the self, each seeks to defend his identity, to prove that his own self-knowledge makes him unique.” From its outset, *Menaechmi* has questioned the firmness of self-knowledge and identity. Young Sosicles found out that perhaps he was not actually Sosicles but Menaechmus. He has lived a life that has forced him to realize that what he knows about himself is not the only thing that determines who he is. I would shy away from Leach’s emphasis on the singular uniqueness of the two brothers. Instead, I would

---

137 Leach (1969), 32.
emphasize the progression of the recognition scene as a negotiation Menaechmus S undergoes with his potential brother. In the final scene regarding the claims of Menaechmus E to be Menaechmus the Syracusan, son of Moschos, we do not see Menaechmus S defending his position as Menaechmus. Rather he appears skeptical about this stranger who looks quite like himself. He is not on the defensive, protecting an impenetrable fortress of Menaechmusness. Instead he appears incredulous about the tale he is hearing. Seemingly befuddled by the story he is being told by his look-alike, he is testing out its potential truth.

Prompted by Messenio, the recognition comes fully into view. Menaechmus S has rediscovered his brother, and in so doing he has returned to a previous existence as Sosicles. (1125) Elated by his recent discovery and subsequent renaming, Sosicles invites his brother to give up any claims he might have on the world of Epidamnus. The play ends with the announcement of an auction by Messenio.

Auctio fiet Menaechmi mane sane septimi. 
venibunt servi, supellex, fundi, aedes, omnia. 
venibunt quiquis licebunt, praesenti pecunia. 
venibit uxor quoque etiam, si quis emptor velerit. 
vix credo tota auctione capiet ~ quinquagesies. (1157-61)

In seven days, bright and early in the morning an auction of Menaechmus’ effects will happen. Up for sale: slaves, furniture, farm, house, all of it. Up for sale for whatever we can get, cash in hand. We’ll even sell the wife as well if some buyer comes. I believe he’ll hardly get from the whole auction 50~percent of what its worth.\textsuperscript{138}

\textsuperscript{138} Literally a 5,000,000\textsuperscript{th}, playing with an expectation of 5,000,000 sesterces. Cf. Gratwick (1993), 243-244.
The end of the play revels in the transitory nature that the play opened with. The auction marks an end to the commercial society of Epidamnus. The household that operated through the movement of material goods becomes a commodity right down to the wife. Menaechmus E is offered the opportunity to begin anew in Syracuse, dispensing with the material goods that have restricted his relationships. In liquidating his household, he can reexamine his sense of who he is, taking up the role suggested by his Syracusan brother.

Menaechmus S puts his brother in the position to realize that the world that he attempted to create for himself through economic means was always deeply personal. Menaechmus E could not be in absolute control of his world because his desires entwined him in the desires of his wife, his parasite, and his prostitute. He cannot create himself autonomously. Rather, he is dependent on the reactions of Peniculus and Erotium, both of whom, as long as the material goods keep flowing, play the part he wants them to. The end of the play then presents Menaechmus E with a serious opportunity to begin anew, to view the world and himself anew, surrendering control of who he is to the new world of Syracuse.

---

139 Cf. McCarthy (2000), 38. Driven by a competition of farce and naturalism, McCarthy says, “But in the resolution of the play, which I described above as informed by the Syracusan brother’s worldview, the naturalistic mode eventually absorbs the farcical mode in this play and uses the farcical mode to its own ends.” Menaechmus E really is married though, unless his position as not really an Epidamnian washes away all this concern. Does naturalism absorb the farce to wash away Epidamnian society as an illusion, replacing it with Syracusan society, which never enters the play? If naturalism is about dismissing illusion and renewing society in its current form, Menaechmi demands a heavy restructuring of the ideas of naturalism.

140 Cf. Haberman (1981), 138. In finding serious reflection on freedom in Menaechmi, Haberman says, “[Plautus] is a man of the theatre, [critics] confess, but his plays – Amphitruo sometimes excepted – are not serious. His psychology is accurate, but he has no vision.” If we take jokes as just jokes, then we eliminate the potential they have to reorder the world, opening up further possibilities for understanding the world. The joke depends on expecting the world to work in certain, preestablished, and predictable ways. From those assumptions, jokes and comedy breaks up the solid, transparent, knowable world into new constellations. Menaechmi ends with a thorough reordering of Menaechmus E’s life, moving him to Syracuse and wiping away his current life.
CHAPTER 4

YOU ARE YOUR FATHER’S SON:
PLEASURE AND BUSINESS IN MERCATOR

Most scholarly attention to Mercator has gravitated toward the dream sequence related by Demipho\textsuperscript{141} or a discussion of the play as yet another instance of a senex amator’s failed attempts to get the girl his son is desperately in love with.\textsuperscript{142} In translating Philemon’s Emporos, Plautus pushes us to see the roadblocks that develop in communication because of rigid notions about who other people are. My discussion will focus on the conflict that develops between Demipho and his son Charinus. Though remarkably similar, they are unable to articulate their actual conflict, dissimulating in an effort to maintain their father-son bond as they perceive it working. Throughout the play the cast of characters constantly talk past each other because their perceptions of their relationships foreclose the types of conversations they are willing and able to have. As the play progresses, Plautus pushes us to consider more and more the position of Charinus’ friend Eutychus, as the other characters become less and less able to

\textsuperscript{141} Cf. Arnaldi (1956), Katsouris (1978), and Averna (1987). Arnaldi is primarily interested in the relationship between Demipho’s dream, Plautus’ Greek originals, and the role of dreams in Hellenistic poetry. Averna pushes the powerful idea of seeing this play as a double-dream, namely the dream specifically articulated by Demipho and the imaginary world that Charinus reacts to, misunderstanding the situation as it really is.

\textsuperscript{142} Cf. Duckworth (1952), Konstan (1983), Ryder (1984), and Lowe (2001).
communicate effectively. Positioned outside the father-son dynamic that has only increased the problem, Eutychus is able to open conversations that are necessary but incapable of happening without altering the relationship Demipho and Charinus have with one another.

4.1 Charinus

Instead of having an external figure provide the opening address to the audience, Plautus opens the play with a prologue spoken by the young lover Charinus. Torn between a life of business and pleasure, Charinus enters the stage with a double task before him, namely explaining the plot and his loves. As prologist, he is in a unique position to guide our initial expectations about this play’s relationship to what we normally expect from a *comoedia palliata.* Before giving any particular details about the plot or his loves, he immediately negotiates his relation to comic traditions,

> non ego item facio ut alios in comoediis
> [vi] vidi amoris facere, qui aut nocti aut die
> aut soli aut lunae miserias narrant suas:
> quos pol ego credo humanas querimonias
> non tanti facere, quid velint quid non velint;
> vobis narrabo potius meas nunc miserias. (3-8)

I am not going to do the same thing I have seen others in comedies doing out of compulsion from love, when they tell the night or day or sun or moon their woes, and by golly I believe these don’t give a hoot about human grumblings, what they want, what they don’t want. I will tell you guys my woes.

---

143 Cf. Slater (2000), 122-5. Slater identifies three broad categories of prologists, a god in some way connected to what will happen, a character within the drama such as we have here, and the unidentified speaker. Slater recognizes the expository nature of most prologues, but he focuses primarily on how the prologues draw the audience into the theatrical space of the play. Here it is important that our initial entrance into the play is not entirely trustworthy.
Instead of speaking to divinities who do not care,144 Charinus hopes his miseries will fall on more amenable ears. By positioning the audience in the role normally reserved for the gods, Charinus makes the audience complicit with his love problems. As Anderson has observed, “Charinus has projected no personal character so far and thus earned no sympathy for his dramatic role or his love, yet as prologue speaker, playing with his opportunity to be within and outside the drama, he has aroused our interest.”145 He has made an appeal to us to play the role of the gods and to actually care about his problems. With no other choice but to keep listening to this lovesick youth, we are initially aligned with his interests, but we are in no position to help him out of his predicament. As the play progresses, it becomes increasingly obvious that Charinus is unable to accurately assess his problems, and thus, he is unable to clearly see who he needs to address his concerns to.

The prologue then takes a predictable turn, and after a statement of Greek title, author, and Plautus’ translated title, Charinus gives us the set up to the play, namely that the conflict today will have something to do with the love that developed with a girl named Pasicompsa while on a business trip to Rhodes for his father. Before Charinus can fully tell us the background to today’s plot, he quickly interrupts himself with a lengthy, 20 line discussion about the vices that come part and parcel with love, concluding with multiloquium: parumloquium hoc ideo fit quia, quae nihil attingunt ad rem nec sunt usui, tam amator profert saepe adverso tempore; hoc pauciloquium rursum idcirco praedico.

144 For a brief discussion of Plautus’ relationship to Greek dramatic traditions of the lover appealing to the elements see Lowe (2001), 144 ff.

quia nullus umquam amator adeost callide
facundus, quae in rem sint suam ut possit loqui. (31-6)

Talking-too-much. This becomes then talking-too-little because a lover so often at
the wrong time offers up things that are irrelevant and useless to the matter at
hand. Therefore again I pronounce this talking-too-much talking-just-a-little
because no lover is ever so cleverly eloquent as to be able to say what matters for
his affairs.

The sympathy gained by placing the audience in the role usually reserved for the gods
begins to weaken. In connecting himself to the life of the lover, Charinus suggests that he
is likely to have an inability to say what needs to be said. Fixated on the object of his
love, he will say more or less than he needs to when the time calls because he will fail to
effectively assess his problem, caught within the discourse of the lover of comoedia
palliata, where the love object defines the lover’s whole existence. Though he is
unable to see this in himself, Charinus provides us with a hint of the major problem he
will have in dealing with his father throughout the play, namely an inability to say what
needs to be said to clear up the situation.

Now that we have a bit of insight to his character, Charinus provides us with some
insight into the past that has led to his current situation. This prologue that promises both
a plot and loves has barely provided either. Now that Charinus has reined in his
loquacity, he can return to love, but instead of immediately delving into the love that he
briefly hinted at before his lengthy love discussion, Charinus relates the love that led to
his trip to Rhodes. When he was younger, Charinus fell madly in love with a prostitute,
and like any boyish lover, as Charinus has it,

res exulatum ad illam clam abibat patris. (43)

146 Think of Calidorus in Pseudolus in particular.
Charinus’ pursuit for pleasure is intimately connected with the exile of Demipho’s property. In relating the story of his first love, Charinus establishes the two poles that he sees his life oscillating between. On the one hand, he is a creature of desire, which drives him to empty Demipho’s coffers. On the other hand, he feels the pull of filial duty. He believes he should be the good merchant son that his father has urged him to be all along.

Within this dichotomy, he cannot find common ground between the life of *otium* and *negotium*. Pulled by each, seemingly incompatible type of life, Charinus is unable to see other possible ways of understanding his father’s complaints, not as complaints against pleasure but as complaints against bad business practices.

Charinus goes on to explain his own reaction to his father’s early frustration.

> ego me ubi invisum meo patri esse intellego
> atque odio me esse quoi placere aequom fuit,
> amens amansque ut animum offirmo meum,
> dico esse iturum me mercatum, si velit:
> amorem missum facere me, dum illi obsequar. (79-84)

When I understood that I was detestable to my father and a nuisance to the one whom I really should please, though out of my mind and in love, when I got my mind straightened out, I told him that I would go on a business venture if he would like me to, that I would put love away, so long as I could gratify him.

Charinus is caught between a desire for ladies and a desire to please his father, two desires that are constantly tugging at him. He is willing to give up his current love affair and go on a business venture, but there is a part of Charinus that cannot fully escape the allure of love. His existence then becomes determined by an incompatible dual.

---

147 Cf. Segal (1968), 66. “The *Mercator’s* son has surrendered to the same *damnosa libido* against which the elders in Horace’s ‘Roman day’ have preached. He has squandered all of his earnings on a girl whose very name, Pasicompsa (‘Omni-pleasant’), suggests that she is pleasure personified. Since it is not unlikely that Plautus invented her name, the metamorphosis of *peculiwm* into *Pasicompsa* would then be a
existence that he is unable to resolve on his own. Because of a nagging duty to be the
good son he wants to be, he cannot whole-heartedly be the lover he enjoys being, but at
the same time, he cannot give up on his desire. He can never fully be a non-sexual,
working machine. Because he sees these two ways of living as polar opposites, he is
unable to realize the possibility of being the good business man his father wants him to be
while still being able to indulge in a life of pleasure.

Charinus proceeds to detail the trip to Rhodes which leads smoothly back into the
love that he briefly mentioned before his earlier digression. Arriving in Rhodes, he is able
to easily unload his cargo at a larger profit than expected, providing him with a bit of
extra spending cash. As part of his peculium, he ought to be free to dispense with it as he
sees fit. A dinner invitation from his host tosses him back into the world that he has
struggled to free himself from.

discubitum noctu ut imus, ecce ad me advenit
mulier, qua mulier alia nullast pulchrior;
ea nocte mecum illa hospitis iussu fuit. (100-2)

When we went to bed for the night, what do you know, she comes to me, a
woman more beautiful than any other woman. She spent the night with me at the
bidding of my host.

Earlier in the prologue, the love affair with Pasicompsa was simply introduced as a story
of love. In this second telling of the love plot, the business venture comes to the fore,
with the love story providing a coda to Charinus’ trip to Rhodes. This time the love plot
is coupled with the story of filial duty. In abandoning a love affair to be the good son he
wants to be, he is thrown right back into the world of love. He does not go around
Rhodes, actively seeking out some quick fling before heading back home. Instead, he is invited innocently enough to a dinner, and there by the bidding of his host, he is lured right back into an affair.

Unlike the love affair that prompted Demipho to send Charinus off, the affair with Pasicompsa comes from accepting the hospitality offered by Charinus’ host. Charinus is doubly justified in this love affair. On the one hand, he has done what his host bid him to do, and on the other hand, any money that becomes invested in acquiring this girl likely comes from the extra profit that he explicitly states he added to his peculium. Demipho’s complaint about the previous love affair is presented entirely on the grounds of bad business practice, not that Charinus should not be consorting with such women. There is no profit to be gained from financing a pimp’s house, but this current affair costs no more than whatever money needed to be spent initially. Charinus can reap the benefits of his newly acquired love because she is his outright. The objection is about money not morals. Charinus though is convinced that his father opposes the pursuit of pleasure rather than business, as evidenced through his perception of his father’s industrious upbringing. Misunderstanding this objection, Charinus feels trapped between acting on his desire for pursuing love or yielding to the desire of his father for a business-minded son who is willing to work hard in the pursuit of financial gain.

Caught between these two poles, Charinus then wraps up the prologue in abrupt fashion. Having gone on and on about love, Charinus turns to the audience saying,

quid verbis opus est? emi, atque advexi heri.
eam me advexisse nolo resciscat pater. (106-7)

148 The objection in New Comedy and the comoedia palliata is typically a concern that the son will squander his patrimony, not some general objection to pleasure.
What need is there for words? I bought her and I brought her here yesterday. I don’t want my father to find out that I brought her here.

Commenting on the prologue, Anderson notes, “In that query, quid verbis opus est?, Charinus for the first time seems to consult brevity. But it is significant that he chooses to shorten background narrative, whereas he has greatly expanded the ‘business’ with the audience and his ‘dialogue’ with the Greek play Plautus has adapted.” For the purpose of Charinus’ character, the background is less important. As will become evident in considering the character of Demipho more fully, Charinus has misunderstood the past that he would have related anyways. Plautus opts to focus more on Charinus as a loquacious lover, not quite in touch with how he ought to act. Instead of talking about what will happen, in this unusual prologue he focuses more on an abstract discussion of the virtues and vices of love.

As soon as the prologue comes to a close, the conflict of the plot gets quickly underway, introduced through the servus currens Acanthio. This scene of a bit more than 100 lines advances the plot very little, establishing that Demipho has seen Pasicompsa and that Charinus needs to plan for dealing with his father. Instead of plot development, this scene establishes Charinus’ inability to change the world around him through language alone. Instead of being a figure for flexibility, Charinus fails to effectively use his language because it attempts to firmly fix him in the role of the lover in spite of the wishes of his father as he perceives them.

---

149 Anderson (1993), 111-112.

150 As Mercury suggests in *Amphitryo* (988), the servus currens typically appears in comedy to announce the arrival of a ship or the approach of an angry old man. Marshall is right to identify the servus currens as a routine as opposed to a stock character. Marshall (2006), 193. For more on the servus currens see Duckworth (1936), Csapo (1987), Csapo (1989), and Csapo (1993).
Acanthio bursts onto the scene spelling trouble for Charinus. Flustered, Charinus attempts to avert this trouble with a verbal dodge, but Acanthio will not let him.

CHAR. Quae te mala res agitant? ACAN. Multae, ere, te atque me.
CHAR. Quid est negoti? ACAN. Periimus.
CHAR. Principium [id] inimicis dato.
ACAN. At tibi sortito id optigit. (134-6)

CHAR. What troubling matter has you all stirred up? ACAN. All sorts, master, for you and me. CHAR. What’s going on? ACAN. We’re done for. CHAR. Give that opening to our enemies. ACAN. But it’s slotted to happen to you.

Instead of asking why he is done for and developing an appropriate response, Charinus tries to shift Acanthio’s periimus to his enemies, but talk alone cannot save him. There is going to be trouble, and it is coming for him. Unable to respond effectively to real problems, he is condemned to the doom Acanthio promises is on its way.

Charinus continues to press Acanthio for information, but Acanthio is winded from his hasty run. Offering a home remedy, Charinus receives an abrupt response.

CHAR. Resinam ex melle Aegyptiam vorato, salvom feceris.
ACAN. At edepol tu calidam picem bibito, aegritudo abscesserit.
CHAR. Hominem ego iracundior quam te novi neminem.
ACAN. At ego maledicentior quam te novi neminem.
CHAR. Sin saluti quod tibi esse censeo, id consuadeo?
ACAN. Apage istiusmodi salutem, [cum] cruciatu quae advenit. (139-44)

CHAR. Drink Egyptian resin and honey. That’ll make you well. ACAN. By golly why don’t you drink burning hot pitch? That’ll make your illness go away.
CHAR. I don’t know a more irritable man than you. ACAN. And I don’t know a more abusive man than you. CHAR. For urging you to do what I think will make you well? ACAN. Get rid of them cures that come with torture.

We are no closer to information about what trouble is brewing for Charinus, yet we are being bombarded with Charinus’ inability to produce positive results. Seeing the slave who has accompanied him from his childhood, Charinus seeks to be a pleasant, concerned interlocutor, but niceties will get him nowhere. Whereas in the prologue we
saw a helpless Charinus, trying to do the noble thing of following a father’s wishes, this scene opens the possibility of seeing him as a source of trouble. In his efforts to help, he does not see how he is a source of harm. Acanthio will pass on Charinus’ treatment, since things that come from him are always mixed with some trouble that he does not foresee.

Charinus ineffectual use of words quickly becomes a source of overtly theatrical comic business. As Charinus tries to get Acanthio to obey him, holding out the promise of freedom, Acanthio reacts skeptically. Will this youth actually follow through on what he has said he will do, or will he fail to bring his words into actions, much as he did in abandoning love for obedience to his father? Acanthio confronts his young master bluntly in an exchange that further hammers home Charinus’ ineffective use of language.

**AC.** Quid vis faciam? **CH.** Tun? id quod volo.
**AC.** Quid [id] est igitur quod vis? **CH.** Dicam. **AC.** Dice. **CH.** At enim placide volo.
**AC.** Dormientis spectatores metuis ne ex somno excites? (158-60)

**AC.** What do you want me to do? **CH.** You? This is what I want. **AC.** What then do you want? **CH.** I’ll tell you. **AC.** Tell me. **CH.** I want us to talk calmly.
**AC.** Are you afraid that you’ll rouse the snoozing audience from their sleep?

This whole dialogue advances the plot minimally, if at all. Acanthio can halt Charinus’ commands. By pointing to the audience, he hints at the growing dissatisfaction we might feel with Charinus, who is unable to bring about action even in a slave. Acanthio has his finger on the largest problem Charinus will need to overcome in order to effectively deal with his father, namely the need to speak words that will bring about action in accord with his wishes. Instead, Charinus’ language dodges the issue at hand. When the time comes, he will not be able to tell his father who the girl really is, thus allowing Demipho room to make Pasicompsa what he wants her to be.
Oddly though, Charinus does have a moment in which his words have an effectual power. When we finally get to why Acanthio has run from the port, Charinus cannot keep himself from providing a prediction about what Acanthio will say.

_ACAN._ Tibi equidem a portu adporto hoc— _CHAR._ Quid fers? dic mihi.
_ACAN._ Vim metum, cruciatum curam, iurgiumque atque inopiam.
_CHAR._ Perii, tu quidem thensaurum huc mi adportavisti mali. nullus sum. _AC._ Immo es— _CH._ Scio iam, miserum dices tu. _AC._ Dixi ego tacens. (161-4)

_ACAN._ Indeed I bring you news from the port— _CHAR._ What are you bringing? Tell me. _ACAN._ Violence, fear, torture, concern, abuse and poverty. _CHAR._ I am ruined. You really brought me a storehouse of trouble here. _AC._ Actually you are— _CH._ I know. Now you’ll say I am miserable. _AC._ Even silent I spoke.

Charinus provides himself with a view of the world, while pretending to need dialogue to mitigate his world. His inability to keep quiet makes someone like Acanthio superfluous. Unlike the good actor, Charinus does not react, react, react. Instead, he works to define his existence here. News from the port means his father has discovered Pasicompsa, which spells trouble for poor, miserable Charinus. He only needed to see Acanthio coming from the port to decide that disaster would be on the horizon for his desire, but he is unable to find in this landscape room to maneuver against his father.

The information that Acanthio has come to present has been delayed and delayed, and just as we see it looming on the horizon, Plautus manages to delay it just a bit more. This delay comes again through Charinus’ impatience. He is unable to let Acanthio relate the message and then proceed to action. Instead, he spends several lines trying to predict what exactly Acanthio meant by the abstracts _vim metum, cruciatum curam, iurgiumque atque inopiam_, always missing the mark.

_CHAR._ Obsecro, num navis periit? _AC._ Salvast navis, ne time.
_CH._ Quid alia armamenta? _AC._ Salva et sana sunt. _CH._ Quin tu expedis
quid siet quod me per urbem currens quaerebas modo.

AC. Tu quidem ex ore orationem mi eripis. CHAR. Taceo. AC. Tace. (173-6)

CHAR. I beg you. The ship didn’t sink did it? AC. Ship’s fine. Don’t worry about it. CH. What about the other gear? AC. Safe and sound. CH. Why don’t you explain why you were running through town just now, looking for me? AC. Well, you keep taking the words out of my mouth. CHAR. I’ll hush up. AC. Hush.

There is an opportunity to find out what happened at the port, but Charinus cannot hold himself back. The ineffectual Charinus cannot provide a real world explanation for Acanthio’s abstractions. Maybe it is about the ship, but no. Maybe then the gear, but again no. Presented as a problem solver, Charinus cannot solve the mystery of the precise nature of the disaster in the port. He is unable to accurately assess the obstacles he needs to overcome, a problem made all the worse by his inability to listen to those who have come to help him more fully understand the nature of his opposition.

When the information finally comes out, Charinus again cannot keep himself from speaking, though his interjections add nothing to the information. In contrast to the ineffectual problem solver, Acanthio shows Charinus that it is possible to think about matters in a broader way.

ACAN. Eloquar, quandoquidem me oras. tuos pater— CHAR. Quid meus pater?

ACAN. Tuam amicam— CHAR. Quid eam ACAN. Vidit. CHAR. Vidit? Vae misero mihi.

CHAR. Qui potuit videre? ACAN. Oculis. CHAR. Quo pacto?

ACAN. Hiantibus. (180-2)

ACAN. I will tell you since you ask me. Your father— CHAR. What about my father? ACAN. Your girlfriend— CHAR. What about her? ACAN. He saw her. CHAR. He saw her? Damn my miserable hide! CHAR. How could he see her? ACAN. With his eyes. CHAR. How’s that? ACAN. With ‘em wide-open.
Charinus echoes Acanthio’s words, adding nothing to the real problem as it unfolds. He is not the type to change what this information means for his situation. He cannot find the loophole that provides him an opportunity to play off others, which is exactly what Acanthio does in a typically Plautine joke. Inspite of Acanthio’s efforts to assure the young lover that everything will be okay, Acanthio’s news has reinforced the view of the world Charinus already believed in, the self-fulfilling prophecy of Charinus doomed in love.

4.2 Demipho

In considering the character of Demipho, we may be tempted to accept the picture that we receive from the mouth of Charinus in the prologue. Demipho, a classic agelast, who berated his son’s involvement with a meretrix, has for a day himself fallen madly in love. Lowe has teased out an important distinction that needs to be maintained. “It is prima facie inconsistent that Demipho, who had been so hostile to Charinus’ previous affair with a meretrix, should himself succumb to Pasicompsa. It is not however, altogether incredible; it is clear that Demipho in his opposition to Charinus’ love-affairs was always primarily concerned with money.”

Charinus believes his father disapproves of love affairs as something that keeps one from a strict regimen of daily labor, but there are hints throughout the play that we should reexamine the general conception of Demipho from the prologue. It will be necessary to consider the depiction provided to us in the prologue by Charinus in more detail, and then to readjust that picture through an examination of the scene where Demipho explains a dream he has recently had.

---

In explaining the circumstances around his first love affair, Charinus details Demipho’s frustrations. When we examine the content of Demipho’s complaint, though, we notice a particular, recurring thread.

obiurigare pater haec noctes et dies,
perfidiam, iniustitiam lenonum expromere;
lacerari valide suam rem, illius augerier.

…
amorem multos inlexe in dispendium:
intemperantem, non modestum, iniurium
trahere, exaurire me quod quirem ab se domo;
ratione pessuma a me ea quae ipsus optuma
omnis labores invenisset perferens,
in amoribus diffunditari ac didier. (46-58)

My father reprimanded me day and night, explaining the treachery, the wrong-doing of pimps, how his own stuff was mightily torn up, and that one’s was increased.

…

[He says] love enticed many to spending money. I was uncontrolled, immoderate, brought trouble in my wake, sucking right out of the house whatever I asked from him. The finest things, which he himself had found in enduring all his toils, in the worst way I was scattering and squandering these on love.

The complaints that Charinus assigns to Demipho swirl around finances, as Charinus is busy emptying his father’s coffer to the enrichment of the pimp’s house. Charinus takes Demipho’s ranting as a general attack on love, not as a commentary on love that entails bad business practices. Focused on the image of his father as a joyless toiler, he cannot see that his current love affair is significantly different than the one his father complained about so bitterly. Having procured Pasicompsa from his own peculium, Charinus is in a position to enjoy a love affair that is free from ongoing expenses. Acquired in a shrewd business move, Pasicompsa is a well-suited beloved for a budding merchant like Charinus.
This image is heightened all the more as Charinus recounts Demipho’s youth.

Unlike other youths who might idle away their days in the company of expensive
prostitutes, Demipho devoted himself whole-heartedly to labor.

\[
\text{sese extemplo ex ephebis postquam exsesserit,}
\text{non, ut ego, amori neque desidiae in otio}
\text{operam dedisse, neque potestatem sibi}
\text{fuisse; adeo arte cohibitum esse [se] a patre:}
\text{multo opere immundo rustico se exercitum,}
\text{neque nisi quinto anno quoque ~positum visere}
\text{urbem, atque extemplo inde, ut spectavisset peplum,}
\text{rus rsum confestim exigi solitum a patre.}
\text{ibi multo primum sese familiarium}
\text{laboravisisse, quom haec pater sibi diceret:}
\text{'tibi aras, tibii occas, tibi seris, tibi idem metis,}
\text{tibi denique iste pariet laetitiam labos.' (61-72)}
\]

Straightaway when he completed his ephebic service,\textsuperscript{152} he did not, like me, give
his attention to love and lolly-gagging about in idleness, nor did he have \textit{potestas}
over himself. So skillfully was he held in check by his father. He exercised
himself with a bunch of dirty work out in the countryside, and he was not
disposed to visit the city except every four years [for the Greater Panathenaea],
and when he had seen the \textit{peplos},\textsuperscript{153} he was usually dragged right away from there
back to the countryside again by his father. There he was first among his family in
hard work by far, when his father would say these things to him, “You plow for
yourself. You harrow for yourself. You sow for yourself. Likewise you reap for
yourself, and then at last that toil of yours will bring you happiness.”

Charinus presents this story as proof of his father’s joyless existence. Demipho speaks no
words of objection throughout this lengthy description of joyless farm work, yet in
thinking of his father in this way, Charinus does not seem to notice that Demipho does
not perform his tasks here out of a self-motivated feeling that he ought to be doing these
things as a young man. The role of Charinus’ grandfather is essential in making Demipho

\textsuperscript{152} Following the reforms of Lykourgos c. 336/5 BCE, Athenian \textit{epehebes} were required to perform
military service for two years, manning the border forts of Attica.

\textsuperscript{153} The mention of ephebic service and of the \textit{peplos}, which was woven anew for the statue of Athena and
presented at the Greater Panathenaea, indicate that Plautus may be following Philemon’s \textit{Emporos} fairly
closely.
be the Demipho that is so deeply concerned with hard labor. Demipho is essentially kept away from even having the possibility to squander his father’s profits on love, kept on a farm, only allowed to visit the city every four years, and even then only for the minimum time needed to see the peak of the festival.

Though Charinus does not comment on its significance, what Demipho does after his father’s death is even more telling about the possibility that he is not a non-sexual, laboring automaton. Charinus immediately transitions from his grandfather’s advice on farming to

\[
\text{agrum se vendidisse atque ea pecunia}
\]
\[
\text{navem, metretas quae trecentas tolleret,}
\]
\[
\text{parasse atque ea se mercis mercatum undique,}
\]
\[
\text{adeo dum, quae tum haberet, peperisset bona. (74-7)}
\]

[My father] had sold the farm, and with that money he equipped a ship which could haul 2700 gallons, and with it he sold wares from all over, all the way until he had acquired the goods which he had then.

For Charinus, the transition from farming to sailing is part of a continuum of hard work, yet there is something suspect in this transition. The father abandons the traditionally sound income of the farm for business as a sailing merchant. Though still driven by work and profit, Demipho has undertaken a riskier form of business. The traditional laborer has abandoned his farm for the more glamorous life of the urban merchant, and in doing so, he has managed to acquire a sizeable profit, as Charinus suggests.

Hill has discussed at greater length one more aspect of this transition that ought to make us question Charinus’ view of his father. Demipho has grown up in a family that presumably does not have a great deal of wealth. Though Charinus portrays his grandfather’s words as words to mold strong character in youth, there is something of
necessity to Demipho’s perpetual toiling. The size of Demipho’s ship suggests an
alternative reading of Demipho’s short festival visits. Demipho gets for the value of his
farm a ship of 300 *metretae*. As Hill explains in examining evidence for ship sizes, “It
thus becomes obvious that Demipho’s ship was ludicrously small by either Greek or
Roman standards. If Plautus found the word *metretae* in his model, he certainly did not
find there the number three hundred.”

Demipho’s farm yields a quite modest ship, with which he has managed to build up a decent amount of property. Demipho’s concern with his son’s expenditures on love is less motivated by the love than by the enormous drain on his hard-earned goods. Charinus, though, has conflated these two.

Before turning to Demipho’s actual appearance on the stage, we need first to consider the lie that Acanthio tells Demipho as a temporary staying measure. Seeing Demipho on board, snooping around, and asking questions about the stunning Pasicompsa, Acanthio recognizes the need to act. The exchange between Acanthio and Charinus here helps further establish Charinus’ distorted image of his father.

**ACAN.** Ilico occucurri atque interpello, matri te ancillam tuae emisse illam. **CHAR.** Visun est tibi credere id? **ACAN.** Etiam rogas?

**CHAR.** Quid faciam? credo, non credet pater, si illam matri meae [me] emisse dicam; post autem mihi scelus videtur, me parenti proloqui mendacium. neque ille credet, neque credibile est forma eximia mulierem, eam me emisse ancillam matri. **ACAN.** Non taces, stultissime? credet hercle, nam credebat iam mihi. (200-2 and 207-12)

**ACAN.** Right then and there I ran up to him and interrupted. Said you bought her as a maid for your mom. **CHAR.** Did he seem to believe it? **ACAN.** You even ask?

---

154 Hill (1958), 256.
CHAR. What am I going to do? I believe my father will not believe it if I say that I bought her for my mom. Besides now that I think about it, it seems criminal to me to tell a lie to my parents. He won’t believe it, nor is it believable that I would have bought her, a woman of exceptional beauty, as a maid for my mom.

ACAN. You blathering idiot, are you still talking? He will believe me by gum, because he has already begun to believe me.

So there is a mystery woman on board. Maybe she is a maid. Acanthio’s words have an effective power, if we are to trust his confidence. He has given an alternative identity to Pasicompsa, and Demipho has bought it. Charinus, though, even before he has the possibility of testing his father, is unwilling to believe that Demipho would buy such a lie. He has no confidence in Acanthio’s ability to deceive, or is it that he has put too much faith in his father’s determination to destroy his search for pleasure? He has boxed himself in throughout the prologue and this opening scene with Acanthio. Unable to confront his father about the girl he has bought out of his peculium, Charinus sits, waiting for his father to destroy his pursuit of pleasure. Charinus cannot reconcile the two poles of his existence, finding a way in which they can operate mutually. Either he will have to give in to his sense of filial duty, or he will have to fully plunge himself into the pursuit of pleasure.

With the entrance of Demipho, we are finally in a position to test how accurate this depiction is. In having the prologue delivered not by an anonymous character, but by the young lover Charinus, Plautus has the opportunity to play with our understanding of the relationship between the young man and his father. We may be accustomed to taking the prologist at face value, trusting that his words are accurate depictions of the world of the play, but Charinus’ picture of his father and what his father’s reactions to the girl will be both prove mistaken.
Demipho enters the stage, telling us about the dream that he has recently had. The
Demipho, whom we have come to expect is a joyless, man of industry, kept from city
festivals as much as possible, first says to the audience,

Miris modis di ludos faciunt hominibus
mirisque exemplis somnia in somnis danunt. (225-6)

In wondrous ways the gods play games with us humans, and dreams in wondrous
forms do they give us in our sleep.

Even in telling of his father’s trips to the Panathenaea, Charinus managed to avoid the
possibility of play by not referring to the festival by name, but when Demipho enters the
stage, he has not said four words before introducing the ludi which men are for gods. The
stern, materially grounded father forewarned by the prologue arrives on stage telling of us
the gods’ games and dreams.\textsuperscript{155}

In his study of Plautine meters, Marshall has demonstrated how Plautus uses
different meters to establish what Marshall calls an arc. The unaccompanied senarii are
followed by accompanied meters. Plautine audiences would not know how many arcs a
play would have, but they could expect dramatic shifts to follow these structural
patterns.\textsuperscript{156} Following Marshall’s arc scheme, I am inclined to see a parallel between the
prologue and Demipho’s dream, which open successive arcs in iambic senarii. This
dream acts as a secondary prologue. Whereas the prologue proper explained Charinus’
role in what has happened previously, the dream presents the story of what will happen

\textsuperscript{155} Plautus often shows a fondness for playing with the expectations created by stock types, as we have seen
with Pseudolus, not quite the servus callidus we expected. Plautus does so elsewhere with free characters
like Periplectomenus in Miles Gloriosus, who enters the stage sounding like a senex iratus, but proves
himself to be quite the senex lepidus.

\textsuperscript{156} For more discussion on the relationship between meter and dramatic action in Plautus see Marshall
on Demipho’s side of the drama. The dream sequence (229-51) has received a good deal of scholarly attention, and here, a brief outline of the dream will suffice. Demipho informs us that he dreamed he bought a she-goat, but in an effort to prevent problems between this one and the one he already has at home, Demipho entrusts the she-goat to a monkey, who later bitterly complains that the she-goat is eating the monkey-wife’s dowry. A young goat then appears to inform Demipho that it has taken the she-goat away from the monkey’s house and away from him, causing Demipho to mourn the loss of the she-goat he felt tenderly toward.

Demipho then proceeds to tie elements of the dream to the world that he inhabits. Like the audience watching the play, he is unsure about exactly what this dream may mean, but he tries to fill in some of the pieces. For Demipho, much of the plot will then be a confirmation of the dream. He suspects that Pasicompsa is indeed the she-goat he dreamed of, and unlike his son, Demipho tells a story that more closely follows what will happen during the play. When we reflect upon the play at the end, an interesting contrast develops between Charinus’ prologue and Demipho’s dream. Whereas the prologue proper set the background story, it does not give any information about the play’s plot. Charinus envisions trouble arising from his father, but he has no plan on how to deal with what seems inevitable to him. In contrast, Demipho’s dream lays out the plot perfectly.


158 For a discussion of the animal symbols of the dream see Katsouris (1978).

159 Cf. Averna (1987), 10. I believe that Averna is right to see Plautus establishing two parallel prologues. While Charinus’ prologue establishes the past, Demipho’s dream sets up expectations for the dramatic trajectory of the play. As an obscure vision of the future, Demipho’s dream engages the perspective of the audience, who can only test the truth of the dream as events unfold.
Though he cannot escape the outcome of the dream, Demipho will see the other characters taking on the roles his dream has set up.

As Demipho informs us about his suspicion that Pasicompsa is indeed the she-goat of his dream, the crack between who Demipho is and who Charinus thinks he is widens. He explains how he came to board Charinus’ ship after conducting some business in the harbor. Some unknown impulse pushes him to check out the ship.

*atque ego illi aspicio forma eximia mulierem,*
*filius quam advexit meus matri ancillam suae.* (260-1)

And I see there a woman of exceptional beauty, whom my son brought as a maid for his mom.

If there was any doubt whether Demipho did or did not believe Acanthio’s lie, the lie which Charinus was convinced Demipho would not be fooled by, Plautus provides the answer quickly after the dream is revealed. As an audience, we are now in a position to reconsider how firm a grasp Charinus has on the nature of his father. Charinus is absolutely convinced that his father will not believe the lie. Demipho is still busy setting up the background of his story when he acknowledges Acanthio’s lie as true. As the slave said, the stunning beauty Demipho has found on the ship is bound to become his wife’s maid. It is the lie that structures Demipho’s approach to his son, not the rigorous life of business over pleasure that Charinus suggested in the prologue.

It is also worth noticing that Demipho echoes his son’s words from the prologue, concluding a line with the exact same line ending Charinus delivered in line 13, *forma eximia mulierem.* As much as Charinus thinks he is different from his father, Plautus has framed Charinus’ prologue and Demipho’s opening scene in such a way that the similarities become all the more evident. Demipho was kept from pleasure by his father,
pushed to farm so that the family would continue to be viable. Given the modest means that Demipho’s family had, there was little room for him as a young man to pursue the pleasure-life. Likewise Charinus is kept from the pleasure-life, not out of some moral objection to it, but rather out of financial concern for the family. Charinus pursuit of pleasure before he was sent to Rhodes was draining the family coffers, whereas Pasicompsa will require no ongoing expenses. Without the continuing demands of a pimp, Demipho’s property will not be redirected to another household as a result of this love.

Like his son, but unlike his son’s image of him, Demipho has fallen into the typical role of the young lover. As he continues to talk about his reaction to seeing Pasicompsa, the gap between who Demipho is here on the stage and what we expected him to be splits further.

quam ego postquam aspexi, non ita amo ut sani solent homines, sed eodem pacto ut insani solent.
amavi hercle equidem ego olim in adulescentia,
verum ad hoc exemplum numquam, ut nunc insanio.
unum quidem hercle iam scio, periisse me. (262-6)

After I looked at her, I fell in love not like sane men usually do, but exactly as the insane usually do. By gum indeed once upon a time in my youth I was in love, but never in love in this way, now as a madman. Indeed by gum I know one thing now, I am utterly ruined.

We were guided to expect a sharp-minded, miser, devoting his life to the pursuit of negotium, not the insane pursuer of love in otium that we see here.¹⁶⁰ Part of the problem that Charinus has in dealing with his father is his inability to understand accurately the real father with whom he must deal. Charinus is so utterly convinced that his father

¹⁶⁰ Demipho explicitly identifies old-age as the time to settle into a life of leisure. (552-3)
opposes all love that he forecloses the potential that Demipho is in love and happy to spend some of his own hard-earned cash for an afternoon of pleasure.

As the dream is related, Mercator moves away from the “real” world predicted by Charinus’ prologue. The dream takes over, aided by Acanthio’s lie. What we see on stage looks more and more like Demipho’s dream and less like the picture Charinus established in the prologue. Charinus believes he has firm grasp on what is going on, but he responds to situations that do not exist as he sees them existing. Charinus’ reality becomes more illusory than the dream of Demipho, which proves solidly true. Plautus allows us to consider the possibility that the dream of Demipho is in fact much more accurate than the waking life of Charinus.¹⁶¹

Plautus makes good use of Demipho’s initial conversation with Lysimachus to further establish the contradictory nature we see in Demipho, the old man turned boyish lover.

DEM. Quid tibi ego aetatis videor? LYS. Acherunticus, senex vetus, decrepitus. DEM. Pervorse vides. puer sum, Lysimache, septuennis. LYS. Sanun es, qui puerum te esse dicas? DEM. Vera praedico. (290-3)

DEM. How old do I look to you? LYS. Deathly old, an ancient old man, decrepit. DEM. Your eyes are all messed up. Lysimachus, I’m a seven-year old boy. LYS. Are you sure you are right in the head, calling yourself a boy? DEM. I profess it like it is.

¹⁶¹ In discussing whether or not Plautine theater adheres to Abel’s ideas about metatheater, treating real life as if it were a dream, Slater claims, “Two actual dreams that foreshadow the action of the play are reported by characters (in Mercator 225ff. by Demipho, and in Rudens 593ff. by Daemones). There is, however, no continuation of the conceit throughout either play, nothing to suggest a dreamlike quality to experience.” Though dream imagery does not reappear explicitly in Mercator, this tension between the reality of Charinus’ prologue and Demipho’s dream pervades the rest of the play. Demipho essentially lives out a day in the dream he has just had.
We might see an old man. For that matter, we might see the Demipho of labor that Charinus guided our eyes to see, but here before our eyes, under the urging of Demipho himself, we ought to be looking at a young man, primed for love. Knowing that Demipho is bound by his social roles, including that of friend, Lysimachus passes off his friend’s claims as insanity, not because Demipho is inherently a non-lover, but because as an old man, *paterfamilias*, and father he is not in a position to give into his desires. Demipho struggles to enjoy pleasures that his role would normally prevent.

Later when he believes he has for the time beguiled his wife and his son, he launches immediately into a discussion that should all the more shake the picture we had of him from Charinus’ prologue. Pleased with his recent purchase, he says to the audience,

> certumst, antiqua recolam et servibo mihi. (546)

I am determined to take up the old ways and be good to myself.

The fact that Demipho refers to whoring it up as *antiqua recolam* should raise our suspicions of who this Demipho is that Charinus introduced us to in the prologue as a perennial, no-nonsense, busybody, toiling away to make a good profit. Industrious Demipho has given way to profligate Demipho, as he goes on to justify his position as an old man in love.

> decurso spatio breve quod vitae relicuomst voluptate, vino et amore delectavero.
> nam hanc se bene habere aetatem nimiost aequius.
> adulescens quom sis, tum quom est sanguis integer,
> rei tuae quarerundae convenit operam dare;
> demum igitur quom sis iam senex, tum in otium
te conloces, dum potes ames: id iam lucrumst quod vivis. hoc ut dico, factis persequar. (547-54)
In the short span of life which remains, I am going to take delight in pleasure, wine, and love. For it is so much more fair that one spends this period of life well. When you’re a young man, when your blood’s still fresh, then is the right time to put your energy into making your money. Then at last when you are now an old man, that’s the time to set yourself right down in leisure and love while you can. Every day you live is profit. I am going to practice what I preach.

He has finally provided us with another way to view the problem with Charinus, which we learned from the prologue. The problem is not so much pleasure or work to the exclusion of the other. The problem he had with Charinus’ initial affair was entirely economic. Had Charinus had money of his own to support his pleasure romps, Demipho would have little reason to send him off to Rhodes, but seeing as Charinus was constantly draining another’s hard-earned goods, Demipho groaned about his son throughout the whole city.

4.3 Like Father, Like Son

Now that we have established the general character of the father-son pair Charinus and Demipho, we are better able to examine the nature of the conflict that arises between them. By the time Charinus has talked with Acanthio and Demipho with Lysimachus, the real problem is fully established. Both Charinus and Demipho desperately want to enjoy the company of Pasicompsa, but for differing reasons each one is unwilling and unable

162 It is this tension in the character of Demipho that pushes me to oppose Duckworth’s observation, “These *senes* are stock types without individuality, and Plautus presents them as lecherous old reprobates whose amorous activities provide hilarious comedy.” Duckworth (1952), 246. It is important that Plautus presents a contrast between two versions of Demipho, the one we meet through Charinus’ prologue and the ridiculous boy of an old man he introduces himself to Lysimachus as. Plautus has not churned out another stock *senes amator*, and plugged him into this drama. As far as stock roles go, they provide a basis, but not a pure mold for the way the character will work within the drama.

163 Cf. Konstan (1983), 20. “The explicit issues of ancient comedy, however, point to a different analysis [than Freudian, Oedipal complex]. The competition between father and son is always the result of paternal encroachment, never of incestuous desires in the youth. By violating the connubial code himself, the father implicitly gives sanction to the son’s impulse, and thereby weakens the status boundaries that are his obligation to uphold. A dovetailing or mutual equilibrium exists between the internal structure of the

149
to tell the other that this is the case. The play then unfolds as a matter of mistaken intentions. Because father and son have failed to completely understand the character of the other, the two sides jockey for position against each other not fully realizing that the competition arises from a mutual interest in Pasicompsa. Committed to being the good father and son, neither is able to fully articulate the parameters of the competition, thus revealing that the contest is directly between father and son.

Seeing his son coming back on stage, Demipho contemplates what he needs to do. He is firmly convinced that Charinus has no amorous intentions for the girl, but as a responsible father, Demipho cannot come right out with his own intentions.

hoc nunc mihi viso opust,
huic persuadere quo modo potis siem,
ut illam vendat neve det matri suae;
nam ei dono advexe audivi. sed praecauto opust,
ne hic illam me animum adiecisse aliqua sentiat. (330-4)

Now I need to see how I might be able to persuade this boy to sell me that girl and not give her to his mom. I heard that he brought her as a gift, but I need to take precautions so he doesn’t sense that I have my mind set on her.

Charinus expects his father to object to Pasicompsa out of a general distaste for love affairs. Demipho, fully believing the lie, instead disapproves of Charinus’ intentions. Acting on his merchant instincts, Demipho tries to turn Charinus’ gift into a commodity to be bought and sold. He objects that the girl is too beautiful to be given as a gift, and thus that Charinus should rethink how best to use this girl. Since Demipho is willing to

household and the outer articulation of the community over and against strangers. This system defines the basic roles and preoccupations that characterize ancient new comedy.” In the case of Demipho, it should be noted that the objections to the pursuit of desire are framed as an objection to the loss that it causes the father specifically, leaving open a possibility that Demipho would have no objections to a love affair that causes him no financial loss. Demipho does not oppose desire, but desire unsupported by one’s personal funds. When Demipho learns about Charinus’ interest in Pasicompsa at the end of the play, he backs down, raising no objections to the match.
offer good money, his son should willingly hand her over, reacting as a businessman
would to a good offer from a potential buyer. In this way, Demipho hopes to gain access
to the girl without betraying his non-business interests.

Plautus pairs Demipho’s statement about how to handle Charinus with Charinus’
soliloquy on how to deal with his father. Grumbling about his lot, Charinus says,

is rescivit et vidit, et perdidit me;
neque is cum roget quid loquar cogitatumst,
ita animi decem in pectore incerti certant.
nec quid corde nunc consili capere possim
scio, tantus cum cura meost error animo,
dum servi mei perplacet mihi consilium,
dum rursum haud placet nec pater potis videtur
induci ut putet matri ancillum emptam esse illam.
nunc si dico ut res est atque illam mihi me
emisse indico, quem ad modum existumet me?
atque illam abstrahat, trans mare hinc venum asportet. (343-52)

He found out about her, and he saw her, and he ruined me, and I haven’t thought
what I will say when he asks me about her. So, ten uncertain minds duke it out in
my chest, and now I can’t form a plan in my heart. I know there’s so much
confusion and concern in my mind. Sometimes I like my slave’s plan, then again I
don’t like it, and I don’t think my father can be led to think that that girl was
bought as a maid for my mom. Now if I tell him how it is and admit that I bought
her for myself, what would he think of me? He’ll drag her away, carry her away
from here across the sea, and sell her.

While Charinus speaks to himself, he restates his doubts about Acanthio’s plan. In doing
so, Charinus effectively boxes himself in. He underestimates his father’s appreciation for
pleasure, and thus, he cannot tell his father who the girl really is. At the same time he
overthinks the situation. He cannot commit himself to the story that she was bought to be
a maid for his mother because he believes his father sees right through him. The world of
Demipho’s expectations, as perceived and detailed by Charinus in the opening scenes,
informs the possibilities Charinus allows himself to envision for his situation. Caught
between a father who would not believe Acanthio’s lie and a father who disapproves of pleasure, Charinus is unsure where to proceed. This contrast can equally be thought of as the tension between Charinus the good son of a merchant and Charinus the deadbeat, pleasure-monger. It is in this gap between the two that the truth of the relationship with his father emerges. Demipho has sought to raise a son who recognizes the advantages of good business which can extend into a form of pleasure seeking that does not continually drain one’s resources. Because he cannot see this bridge, Charinus feels trapped between two ways of existing which he believes are mutually exclusive.

Charinus recognizes that his pursuit of pleasure and filial duty have come hand in hand. Renouncing pleasure in order to be the good son, Charinus traveled to Rhodes, performed his filial duty, and found himself right back in love. Caught in a binary opposition between the two, Charinus fails to see how this love affair is different, one that allows the possibility of being both a lover and a good, merchant son.

nequiquam abdidi, abscondidi, abstrusam habebam:
muscast meus pater, nil potest clam illum haberi, 
nec sacrum nec tam profanum quicquam est, quin ibi ilico adsit. (360-2)

All in vain, I hid, concealed, and kept her under cover. My father’s a fly. There’s nothing that can be kept secret from him. Doesn’t matter, sacred, profane, there he is right away.

Under the watchful eye of his fly-father, he can never escape the gaze of his ever-condemning father. In internalizing this image of his father, Charinus has established for himself a relationship to his father in which all actions must be mediated through the disapproving gaze of his father. He cannot confront his father openly about the girl, because he hears, even before he speaks, the business-minded dad who never went to the city more than the time needed for a minimum of pleasure. He cannot see how this love
affair is different. Pasicompsa was procured through a surplus of profit, through Charinus’ personal funds, and as such she does not fall under the category of love affairs that will sap Demipho’s resources. Add to that the fact that Pasicompsa has seemingly been bought once and for all and thus that there will be no pimp to continually demand fresh cash. The affair with Pasicompsa marks a business-savvy transition in the type of love affair Charinus is involved in, which could potentially win the approval of his merchant-minded father.

When we finally see Charinus and Demipho together on stage, they play the part that they feel they need to toward each other. They find it impossible to say what they really would like to say. Seeing an ill son, Demipho tries to play the concerned, wise father to which Charinus reacts as the dutiful son, who has learned the lessons of his father.

**DEM.** si sapias, eas ac decumbas domi.  
**CHAR.** Otium non est: mandatis rebus praevorti volo.  
**DEM.** Cras agito, perendie agito. **CHAR.** Saepe ex te audivi, pater: rei mandatae omnis sapientis primum praevorti decet.  
**DEM.** Age igitur; nolo advorsari tuam advorsum sententiam. (373-7)

**DEM.** If you’re wise, you’d go and lie down at home. **CHAR.** No time for leisure. I want to tend to some commissions. **DEM.** Do it tomorrow, or even the day after. **CHAR.** I have often heard from you, “It is proper for all wise men to tend to their commissions first.” **DEM.** Go on then. I don’t want to contradict your contradicting intention.

When urged to take it easy, Charinus replies with a maxim from his childhood. He will give no hint of not being the dutiful son that he believes his father has urged him to be.

Though initially urging Charinus to take it easy, to enjoy a bit of leisure after a productive business trip, Demipho sees an opportunity to let his son do as he intends, which is at the same time a reflection of the son that he has long been trying to raise. By
echoing his father’s maxim, Charinus inadvertently insures that Demipho will believe
that Pasicompsa truly has been bought as a maid, and consequently guarantee that he will
not suspect that Charinus has any other intention for the girl. Demipho has finally raised
an obedient, successful merchant. As a good merchant, Charinus ought to respond well to
a better business offer, and thus, Demipho finds his way to get the girl without raising
any suspicion.

Charinus steps away, muttering to himself. At this point in the conversation,
Plautus makes excellent use of the double aside to show each side of the conflict.

DEM. Quid illuc est quod ille a me solus se in consilium sevocat?
[iam] non vereor ne illam me amare hic potuerit resciscere;
quippe haud etiam quicquam inepte feci, amantes ut solent.
CHAR. Res adhuc quidem hercle in tutost, nam hunc nescire sat scio
de illa amica; quod si sciret, esset alia oratio. (379-83)

DEM. Why is that boy summoning himself into secret counsel away from me? I
am not afraid now that he could have found out that I love that girl. Of course I
haven’t even done anything at all whatsoever foolishly, like lovers usually do.
CHAR. So far by gum things are indeed in a safe spot because I know that this
one doesn’t know enough about that girlfriend of mine. If he did know, he would
talk differently.

Each side is confident that the other has no clue about their intentions. Demipho believes
that he is sitting in a nice position to procure Pasicompsa without his son ever finding
out, whereas Charinus has not found the angered, omniscient father he expected. Neither
Demipho nor Charinus are able to see the situation for what it is because they believe
they fully know the nature of the other. Charinus cannot see the lover in Demipho, and
Demipho fails to see his newly reformed son as the lover he sent to Rhodes. Failing to
understand each other, father and son cannot solve their dilemma because they cannot
recognize the dilemma for what it is, a father and son in love with the same girl.
Demipho decides to confront his son about Pasicompsa, believing fully that she is destined to be a gift for his wife. He tries to portray his objection as one about bad business practice rather than about his own interest in the girl.\textsuperscript{164}

\textbf{DEM.} Quia ~non nostra formam habet dignam domo. nihil opust nobis ancilla nisi quae texat, quae molat, lignum caedat, pensum faciat, aedis verrat, vapulet, quae habeatcottidianum familiae coctum cibum: horunc illa nihilum quicum facere poterit. \textbf{CHAR.} Admodum. ea causa equidem illam emi, dono quam darem matri meae. 
\textbf{DEM.} Ne duas, neve te advexisse dixeris. \textbf{CHAR.} Di me adiuvant. 
\textbf{DEM.} Labeiacto paulatim. verum quod praeterii dicere, neque illa matrem satis honeste tuam sequi poterit comes, neque sinam. \textbf{CHAR.} Qui vero? \textbf{DEM.} Quia illa forma matrem familias flagitium sit si sequatur; quando incedat per vias, contemplent, conspicient omnes, nutent, nictent, sibilent, vellicent, vocent, molesti sint; occentent ostium: impleantur elegerorum meae fores carbonibus. atque, ut nunc sunt maledicentes homines, uxori meae mihique obiectent lenocinium facere. nam quid eost opus? \textbf{CHAR.} Hercle qui tu recte dicis, et tibi adsentior. (395-411)

\textbf{DEM.} Because ~ she has a look that doesn’t go with our household. We have no use for a maid except one who weaves, mills, cuts wood, spins wool, sweeps the floors, takes a beating, and daily cooks food for the household. That girl won’t be able to do any of these things. \textbf{CHAR.} Agreed. That’s the reason why I actually bought her as a gift for mom. \textbf{DEM.} Don’t give her, and don’t say that you brought her here. \textbf{CHAR.} The gods are helping me. \textbf{DEM.} I am softening him up bit by bit. Oh something I forgot to say. That girl won’t be able to attend your mother honorably enough and I won’t allow it. \textbf{CHAR.} Why’s that? \textbf{DEM.} Because if she should attend her, with her looks that one will bring disgrace to a materfamilias. Whenever she goes out in the streets, everyone will gawk at her, ogling her, they’ll nod, wink, whisper, pinch her, call her, and harass her. They will serenade our doorway, fill up my doors with their charcoal scrawled elegies. And, seeing as men nowadays are slanderous, they will charge my wife and I with running a whore-a-torium. Now what need is there for that? \textbf{CHAR.} By gum, how rightly you speak, and I agree with you.

\textsuperscript{164} Cf. Ryder (1984), 186. In an effort to not see \textit{senes amatores} as a cookie-cutter role, Ryder sees Demipho’s efforts to not expose his own intentions as remarkable in the Plautine corpus.
Demipho presents his objection to the girl as one of family image. Such a beautiful girl with a wife like his will surely bring unwanted attention to their household. Fully enveloped in the idea that his son has returned from Rhodes a mercator, he never questions whether or not Charinus intends for this girl to be a maid. Instead, he presents the decision to Charinus as a matter of sound judgment. Does Charinus really intend to bring such scandalous attention to his father’s household? Could a better use for the girl be found? Demipho has managed to save the girl from becoming a maid, and at the same time, avoided making his son think that the alternative would be as Demipho’s lover. As Charinus hears his father’s objections, he too begins to see an opportunity. Demipho’s objections are just the ticket he needs to end the lie that the girl is really going to be a maid, though he cannot then chime in with the suggestion that she be put to the use he has intended all along. At this juncture when he has an opportunity to assert his desire for the girl, he fails to do so, leaving the door open for Demipho to assert his will over her fate.

A decision needs to be made on what to do about Pasicompsa. What emerges is, as Segal refers to it, “a marvelously ironic agon between the generations, with neither father nor son aware of who his adversary is.”165 The son and the father do not compete for Pasicompsa on level footing. Unlike in Casina where the father knows that his son has an interest in the slave-girl Casina, here we have a father and son who are unaware that the other one is genuinely interested in enjoying the pleasures of Pasicompsa. Committed to their social roles, particularly their relationship as businessmen, Demipho

---

165 Segal (1968), 28.
and Charinus cannot fully acknowledge their interest in Pasicompsa without having recourse to whom can make better use of her as a resource.

Charinus suggests that she could be returned to the man she was bought from, but Demipho naturally will have none of it. He suggests that she be bought for an unnamed old man Demipho conveniently happens to know, and Charinus counters with a certain young man who has an interest in purchasing a girl of Pasicompsa’s ilk. The bidding war that ensues (426-48) is framed entirely under the model of rival businessmen, which is what dictates the relationship between this father and son. Charinus fights hard to top Demipho’s bids, but facing an older opponent with greater resources, he is forced to eventually give in, unless he can openly tell his father that he is the young man that he has been bidding for, which of course he never can, even at the end of the play.

Seeing himself beaten in the bidding-war, Charinus shifts gears, and tries to introduce a legal complication. The girl is not his outright, and so a third party needs to be consulted before any transaction can be made. Demipho recognizes the contradiction in Charinus position, and quickly shuts down this new objection.

Quid? illi quoidam qui mandavit tibi si emetur, tum volet, si ego emo illi qui mandavit, tum ille nolet? nihil agis. numquam edepol quisquam illam habebit potius quam ille quem ego volo. (458-60)

What? If she will be bought for that one who bid you to buy her, then he will be willing. If I buy her for that man who bid me to buy her, then he will be unwilling? You’re getting nowhere with that. By golly no one will have that girl except that man whom I want.

By appealing to the logic of the marketplace, Demipho has found a way to completely derail Charinus. So long as Charinus wishes to play the role of a merchant, he must recognize that it is only the highest bidder who determines where the goods go. It should
not matter who the buyer is so long as the buyer brings the highest profit. Unless he is 
willing to introduce a new mode for understanding the situation, love instead of business 
for example, Charinus is beaten. He cannot get his father to back down, since his father 
has the upperhand in the world of business.

Thoroughly outmaneuvered by his father, Charinus is left on stage to bemoan his 
lot. Unable to be both the merchant son and the young man in love, Charinus finds 
himself cut off from both positions. In high melodramatic tones, he wails to the audience,

\[
\text{Pentheum diripisse aiunt Bacchas: nugas maximas} \\
\text{fuisse credo, praeut quo pacto ego divorsus distrahor.} \\
\text{cur ego vivo? cur non morior? quid mihi in vita boni?} \\
\text{certum st, ibo ad medicum atque ibi me toxico morti dabo,} \\
\text{quando id mi adimitur, qua causa vitam cupio vivere. (469-73)}
\]

They say the Bacchae tore Pentheus apart. I believe that that was the biggest 
bunch of trifles compared with how I am being torn in different directions. Why 
am I alive? Why am I not dead? What good is there left in life for me? I’ve made 
up my mind. I will go to the doctor and there I will hand myself over to a 
poisoned death since the thing which is the reason I desire to live my life has been 
taken away from me.

Like many a Plautine lover,\(^{166}\) once the promise of Pasicompsa has been removed 
Charinus finds no reason to exist. Though less explicit than other comic lovers about his 
love as life-giving \textit{anima}, Charinus identifies Pasicompsa as the reason for his existence. 
Once the love object is put fully out of reach, the lover as lover cannot continue to exist. 
If Charinus sees himself only as a lover of Pasicompsa, then he cannot continue to 
function if the opportunity to play that role is removed. Incapable of settling for the role 
of obedient son, but equally incapable of asserting his position as lover, Charinus finds

\(^{166}\) Cf. Calidorus in particular. The young lover who threatens suicide when he believes he has forever lost 
his love is common in Greek New Comedy (cf. Menander’s \textit{Aspis}, \textit{Perikeiromene}, and \textit{Misoumenos}).
himself forced to take action, not to regain the love he has lost, but to forever close the problem at hand through death.

4.4 Eutychus: The Helping Friend

At this point, Plautus introduces the most important character for reconciliation in this play. Much as his name implies, Eutychus shows up in a timely fashion to help his troubled friend. He recognizes three levels of commitment to Charinus, as he makes clear when asked who is calling him. He sufficiently identifies himself as,

\[ \text{tuos amicus et sodalis, simul vicinus proxumus.} \] (475)

Your friend, your comrade, as well as next-door neighbor.

His involvement with Charinus is threefold, as will be the resolutions he brings about. As friend, Eutychus will need to look after the needs of his friend. As comrade, he will have to deal with Charinus’ foes, in this case the troubles caused by Demipho. Finally as neighbor, Eutychus needs to look to the well-being of those external to Demipho and Charinus’ household. This last attribute will prove important to his role in the play.

Standing outside the dynamic that has partially blinded the father and son, he is in a position to offer alternative vantage points. He comes to Charinus’ aid not as a yes-man supporter but as a concerned member of the community who can help expose what the relationship between father and son have shut off, namely their mutual interest in Pasicompsa.

Charinus immediately bursts in with his miseries, and the exchange between these friends becomes telling of their relationship with each other as well as with the rest of the cast.

\[ \text{CH. non tu scis quantum malarum rerum sustineam. EVT. scio;} \]
omnia ego istaec auscultavi ab ostio, omnem rem scio.

**CH.** Quid id est quod scis? **EVT.** Tuos pater volt vendere— **CH.** Omnem rem tenes.

**EVT.** Tuam amicam. **CHAR.** Nimum multum scis. **EVT.** Tuis ingratiiis. **CHAR.** Plurimum tu scis. (476–80)

**CH.** You don’t know how much misery I am going through. **EVT.** I know. I heard everything your’e going to say down at the port. I know the whole story. **CH.** What do you know? **EVT.** Your father wants to sell— **CH.** You got the whole story. **EVT.** —your girlfriend. **CHAR.** You know much too much. **EVT.** —and you don’t want him to. **CHAR.** You know it much much too much.

Again we find Charinus displaying a certain amount of ignorance about the way things are. He believes Eutychus cannot possibly know what is going on. As soon as he hears the word *pater*, he believes he has all the information he needs. Each continued bit of information becomes excessive. He is involved in a project in which he defines who he is, and plays out that definition, without yet trying to redefine that role. In order to obey his father, he believes that he must give up on himself as a lover, and thus he finds himself moaning about the helplessness of his condition.

In contrast to the often mistaken Charinus, Eutychus knows the whole story. Apart from Acanthio, who will take no further part in today’s drama, and Pasicompsa, Eutychus is the only one who knows that Pasicompsa is meant to be Charinus’ girlfriend. He is in a position to assess the situation, and react to it. Unlike Charinus, whose goals are fixed on one particular target, getting Pasicompsa, he has the much more nebulous task of rehabilitating his friend. Working for another, he is in a position to react to

---

167 Nadjo (1971) presents the contrast between the two friends thus: Charinus is a man of passion, often operating in a world that is not there, while Eutychus appears as a man of thoughtful reasoning and problem solving. I would add to this understanding of these two young men the important role that Eutychus plays in keeping Charinus from completely escaping into a world of misperceptions. Whereas Charinus has fixed himself into a world that operates differently from the real world, the thoughtful friend Eutychus is able to assess Charinus’ situation and provide potential alternatives.
information as it comes to him, instead of creating a world for himself to operate within, as Demipho and Charinus have done.

Eutychus proposes a plan to foil Demipho, and Charinus becomes immediately reinvigorated. Eutychus will go down to the port and pay Pasicompsa’s price. Charinus suggests they pay in gold, prompting Eutychus to ask the practical question of where the money will come from. Charinus’ response taps into that Plautine love of the mythological allusion, saying,

Acchilem orabo aurum ut mihi det Hector qui expensus fuit. (487)

I will ask Achilles to give me the gold which Hector was ransomed with.

With the promise of actually winning Pasicompsa back, Charinus begins to sound more like the exuberant comic trickster. As the scheme develops further, Charinus suggests that Eutychus ought to keep bidding up Demipho. This leads to a question and answer moment that helps establish Eutychus as a practically minded helper, while giving Charinus room to play in the comic world.

EVT. sed quid ais? unde erit argentum quod des, quom poscet pater?
CHAR. Invenietur, exquiretur, aliquid fiet; enicas.
EVT. Iam istuc 'aliquid fiet' metuo. (492-4)

EVT. But what about this? Where am I going to get the money you’re going to give, when your father asks for it? CHAR. It will be found, it will be asked for, something will materialize. You’re killing me. EVT. It’s that “something will materialize” of yours that I am afraid of.

Charinus’ confidence that money will eventually come ought to remind us of a character like Pseudolus. Charinus does not know where the money will come from for his scheme, yet he has no doubt that someway, somehow it will arrive. Charinus may be out of touch with what is really going on, but coupled with the practical mind of Eutychus to keep him
striving after his goal, Charinus speaks in the cock-sure attitude of Plautine tricksters. So long as someone like Eutychus is there to keep him going, Charinus will keep striving after his goal. He will not fall into the crippling helplessness of a Calidorus.  

Eutychus heads off to the harbor, making Charinus promise to stay at home. When next we see Charinus, he has slipped back into doubt. Eutychus has been gone long enough to destroy the confidence that temporarily prevailed. Complaining of his unfortunate situation, Charinus goes through the possibilities he sees available to him.

spem teneo, salutem amisi; redeat an non, nescio:  
si opprimit pater quod dixit, exsulatum abit salus;  
sin sodalis quod promisit fecit, non abiit salus. (592-4) 

I’m still hanging onto hope. I’ve lost feeling good. I don’t know whether that is coming back or not. If my father gets his way as he said he would, feeling good has headed right off into exile. If my comrade has accomplished what he promised, feeling good hasn’t headed out.

Charinus has fallen back into the language of the forlorn lover. He envisions for himself a dichotomy of what is to come. Either his father has won, and it is exile time for his love, or Eutychus has accomplished his goal, and Charinus is sitting pretty. Without the firm possibility of having Pasicompsa, Charinus falls back into his earlier helplessness, that helplessness that can only be dispelled by the arrival of practical Eutychus. It is Eutychus who keeps open possibilities for Charinus by suggesting avenues of action, based on the information he has available. Raised by a father who commits himself to helping his neighbors at the expense of conducting business, Eutychus has

---

168 It is perhaps significant that Charinus finds himself defined against two poles, lover and merchant, whereas Calidorus allows his entire self-definition to be encompassed by his love for Phoenicium.

169 Cf. Pseudolus, 709. Sizing up his situation, Calidorus bids Pseudolus, “Dic utrum Spemne an Salutem te salutem, Pseulde? / Tell me whether I am saluting Hope or Feeling Good?”
grown up in an environment that is open to the concerns of a wider array of relationships. Unlike Chainus, he has not been coerced to play a particular role. He is in a position to react to the world as it comes to him, and decide how best to proceed.

When Charinus sees his friend coming back, he asks straightaway where he himself is, again presenting Eutychus with a dichotomy of choices. In this exchange, Eutychus replies in a way that tries to keep open a third option.

**CHAR.** uno verbo eloquere: ubi ego sum? hicine an apud mortuos?
**EVT.** Neque apud mortuos neque hic es. **CHAR.** Salvos sum, immortalitas mihi data est: hic emit illam, pulchre os sublevi patri. impetrabilior qui vivat nullus est. dice, obsecro: si neque hic neque Acherunti sum, ubi sum? **EVT.** Nusquam gentium. (602-6)

**CHAR.** Tell me in one word. Where am I? Here or among the dead?
**EVT.** You’re neither among the dead nor here. **CHAR.** I am well. Immortality has been given to me. This guy bought her. He’s beautifully fooled my father. There is no one alive who is more successful. Tell me, please. If I am neither here nor down below, where am I? **EVT.** Nowhere on earth.

Caught in the dichotomy of Demipho wins or Eutychus wins, Charinus envisions life among the dead or here among the living. He has either forever lost *salus*, or never lost it. Eutychus though keeps open that third possibility that the situation has not been so written in stone. There is a space that is neither here nor there, a space along the journey between the two. There exists the potential of the situation to change, a possibility that Charinus’ dichotomy forecloses. Charinus attempts to get Eutychus to clearly define this third state of being as a nameable place, and when he receives a negatively named space, the joy which he had when he found out he was not among the dead quickly fades away.

---

170 Eutychus’ father Lysimachus explicitly states his willingness to help a friend though he has business to take care of. (287-8)
Discovering that Pasicompsa has been taken away, Charinus begins to attack his friend and comrade. While Charinus fully surrenders himself to irreconcilable loss, Eutychus tries to get Charinus to see that there is room for action.

**CH.** Eutych, capital facis.

**EV.** Qui? **CH.** Quia aequalem et sodalem, liberum civem, enicas.

**EV.** Ne di sierint. **CH.** Demisisti gladium in iugulum: iam cadam.

**EV.** Quaeso hercle, animum ne desponde. **CH.** Nullust quem despondeam.

(611-4)

**CH.** Eutychus, you are committing a capital offence. **EV.** How? **CH.** Because you are killing an equal and comrade, a free citizen. **EV.** May the gods not let that happen. **CH.** You’ve thrust your sword into my neck, and now I’ll die. **EV.** Please by gum. Don’t lose heart. **CH.** I’ve got none to lose.

In failing to get Pasicompsa, Eutychus has failed to retrieve the one thing that makes Charinus Charinus. Like other Plautine lovers, Charinus has made Pasicompsa such an integral part of his own self-definition that he is incapable of living as Charinus without her. In trying to encourage him to not lose heart, Eutychus struggles to get Charinus to see that possibility for redemption. There is still the hope that Charinus proclaimed before Eutychus delivered his bombshell.

Eutychus then finds himself faced with a friend determined to head into exile. Charinus hopes to escape his condition by cutting himself off from the society that has helped frame the type of person he thinks he possibly is. Part of that exile is an attempt to escape the bonds of love that have entangled him. Eutychus though puts his finger on the problem with exile.

Quid tu ais? quid cum illuc, quo nunc ire paritas, veneris, si ibi amare forte occipias atque item eius sit inopia, iam inde porro aufugies, deinde item illinc, si item evenerit? quis modus tibi exilio tandem eveniet, qui finis fugae? quae patria aut domus tibi stabilis esse poterit? dic mihi. cedo, si hac urbe abis, amorem te hic relicturum putas? (649-54)
What are you saying? What happens when you get to where you are preparing to go, if there you should begin to love and likewise there isn’t the opportunity to enjoy it? Will you then head out from there further away, and then in the same way from there, if the same thing happens? What end will ever come of your exile? What limit to your flight? What country or home will be able to be surely yours? Tell me. Come on. If you leave this city, do you think you will leave love here?

Eutychus frames Charinus’ problem as endemic to his status as lover. Wherever Charinus goes, he will be in the same situation. Though day and place may change, the lover will perpetually pine for the lost love object. For Charinus to escape this cycle, he must do something different. For Charinus to fully resolve his situation, he needs to either obtain the girl, or barring that, redefine what makes him him, fleeing not physical space, but the term around which he defines his being. With a vantage point outside of this ensnaring self-definition, Eutychus urges his friend to confront the problem at the root of his self-definition.

Eutychus though knows how stubborn Charinus can be, and so he attempts to suggest a different type of exile.

si id fore ita sat animo acceptum est, certum id, pro certo si habes, quanto te satiust rus aliquo abire, ibi esse, ibi vivere adeo dum illius te cupiditas atque amor missum facit? (655-7)

If you have made up your mind enough that this is the way it will be, if you are surely sure about this, how much more satisfying is it for you to go off to the country somewhere, be there, live there until such a time when desire and love for that girl lets go of you?

Eutychus suggests the place to avoid love is not another city, but the countryside.

Contrary to Charinus’ opinion, the business trip to Rhodes was no exile at all. Once in Rhodes, Charinus managed to find something akin to what he had before his father sent him away. Fleeing town to escape the wrath that loving a meretrix brought from his
father, he finds in another city another love. Changing cities has not changed him, but love objects, keeping him right where he was, a young man in love. The countryside is the place to avoid love, where a young Demipho was molded into an industrious businessman by Charinus’ own admission. He can come to know a new Charinus, who will take his self-definition from the inglorious life of the countryside, just as his father had done.

Charinus stomps off stage, refusing to listen to any of the advice Eutychus has proposed. Eutychus contemplates his own situation.

heu misero mihi,  
si ille abierit, mea factum omnes dicent esse ignavia.  
certumst praeconum iubere iam quantum est conducier, 
qui illam investigent, qui inveniant. post ad praetorem ilico  
ibo, orabo, ut conquaestores det mi in vicis omnibus;  
nam mihi nil relicti quicquam aliud iam esse intellego.  

Oh my oh my. If that one really takes off, everybody will say that it happened because of my laziness. Well I am determined no matter the cost to have all the public criers hired to look into that girl’s whereabouts and find her. Then, I am going to go to the praetor. I’ll ask him to give me some inspectors in all the districts. Truth is, I understand that there is nothing else left for me to do now.

Eutychus sees his status as friend, comrade, and neighbor compromised by the potential exile of Charinus. The neighborhood will find him at fault, and so Eutychus rallies himself into action. Unable to bring about a change in Charinus’ mindset, he turns to what he can do to keep open the potential of reuniting his friend with Pasicompsa. Unlike Charinus who has set up dichotomies of having/not having, alive/dead, Eutychus here exhausts all the avenues that he sees open to him. It is not a matter of convincing his friend or not. That path has come to a close, and so Eutychus must realign his methods, taking the task of bringing the lovers back together fully on himself.
4.5 Charinus in Exile

With things coming completely undone for Eutychus as he tries to find out where Pasicompsa is, Charinus reappears on stage, ready to travel into exile. Cut off from his love, Charinus prepares to cut himself off from the life he is accustomed to leading. He enters, addressing the threshold,

Limen superum inferumque, salve, simul autem vale. (830)
Doorway above and below, hello and at the same time moreover farewell.

The man who left the stage not quite in this world, reenters in a vacillating state. Coming and going, above and below. The man who had firmly committed himself to love of Pasicompsa has come to erase neat boundaries.

Cutting off ties to his household, Charinus begins to search for a new existence in a new town, driven away from this place where he no longer is able to see the nice boundaries he has hoped for.

di penates meum parentum, familiae Lar pater, vobis mando, meum parentum rem bene ut tutemini. ego mihi alios deos penatis persequar, alium Larem, aliam urbem, aliam civitatem: ab Atticis abhorreo; nam ubi mores deteriores increbrescent in dies, ubi qui amici, qui infideles sint nequeas pernoscre ubique id eripiatur, animo tuo quod placeat maxume, ibi quidem si regnum detur, non cupita est civitas. (834-41)

Penates of my family, father Lar of my household, I entrust to you the care of my parents. I will go find myself some other Penates, another Lar, some other city, some other state. I abhor Attica. Truth is, a place where inferior morals pile up day by day, where you can’t tell friends and the faithless apart, and where that which pleases your mind the most is taken away, there, even if a kingdom were given, a state is not desirable.

---

171 For a discussion of exile in the tradition of New Comedy see Zagagi (1988).
Even as he plans to abandon his life, he maintains that spirit of filial duty that has informed his existence in this place. Though he feels wronged by his father, Charinus begs the gods of the household to protect his parents. He regrets the loss of his household as he heads out to a new life in a new land, and thus, he is not fully willing to let go of the life that he currently leads. As predicted by Eutychus, Charinus’ character will follow him no matter where he might find a temporary haven.

Charinus continues his preparations, shedding all the attendants that might accompany a freeborn traveler. Throughout all of this preparatory talk, we get the impression that he has settled on starting life anew, but his concern for his parents ought to tip us off that he cannot really abandon the life that is so deeply engrained in his being. He is a creature caught between a love for family and a love for Pasicompsa. It could be possible to bring these love togethers, thereby expanding the household he loves by adding to it a wife. Charinus, though, is determined to go into exile, and lays out the reason he feels this self imposed exile is necessary.

Certa res me usque quaerere illam, quoquo hinc abductast gentium; neque mihi ulla obsistet amnis nec mons neque adeo mare, nec calor nec frigus metuo neque ventum neque grandinem; imbrem perpetiar, laborem sufferam, solem, sitim; non concedam neque quiescam usquam noctu neque dius prius profecto quam aut amicam aut mortem investigavero. (857-63)

Well it’s settled. I will continually search for that girl, wherever in the world she’s been taken. Nor will any river stand in my way nor mountain nor even sea. I fear neither heat nor cold nor wind nor hail. I will endure rainstorms. I will suffer toil, the sun, thirst. I won’t give up, nor will I rest night or day until I actually track down either my girl or death.

While he was offstage, Charinus transformed his exile into a self affirming exile. He is not leaving Athens in order to start anew, to recreate the terms that anchor his being.
Instead, Charinus will scour the earth at all costs in order to find that thing that makes him what he has been throughout this play, a lover. The search will continue until he can confirm this identity or forever be displaced from it in death.

4.6 Eutychus the Resolver

Mercator comes rapidly here to a close with Eutychus at the heart of all the resolution. Anderson finds in the end of the play “a very Hellenic, moral, sentimental, and socially edifying conclusion that features Eutychus as the dominant figure, helping all the fallible characters, old and young, to become reconciled and to return to useful, happy lives.”

Finding his friend panicked in exile and his family tearing apart, Eutychus steps in as the only character in a position to tell others how things really are. I will focus on two of the three resolutions that occur through Eutychus’ efforts, namely the reunification of Charinus with Pasicompsa and realignment of Demipho with his proper place in society, which finally resolves the tension between father and son.

4.6.1 Eutychus and Charinus

Eutychus realizes that he cannot steer Charinus away from the path he has set his mind on. So, Eutychus readjusts his own discourse, filtering it into the mode in which his friend has decided to act.

Si huc item properes ut istuc properas, facias rectius:
huc secundus ventus nunc est; cape modo vorsoriam:
hic favonius serenust, istic auster imbricus;
hic facit tranquillitatem, iste omnis fluctus conciet.
recipe te ad terram, Charine, huc ex advorsoque vide sis.
nubis atra imberque instat — aspicin? —ad sinisteram,
caelum ut est splendore plenum nonne ex advosro vides? (874-80)

If you’d hurry back here as quick as you’re hurrying where you’re going, you’d been doing better. There’s a favorable wind blowing here. Just turn around this way. Here the west wind is calm, where you are the south wind is stormy. This one makes the sea calm. Your wind will stir up all sorts of storms. Bring yourself back to land over here, Charinus. Look over this way please. A black cloud and storm looms up against you — do you see it? — portside, where the sky is crystal clear, don’t you see it?

Eutychus allows Charinus to pursue his plan, while urging his friend to cut the journey short. He recognizes Charinus’ tendency to try and define the terrain he inhabits, as we saw when Charinus reacted to Acanthio’s news from the port. Equipped with this knowledge of his friend’s character, Eutychus taps into Charinus’ world, accepting exile as a necessity, hoping that this concession to his headstrong friend will bring the journey to a quicker end. He of course has found Pasicompsa, thus making the exile superfluous.

Slowly reeling Charinus in, Eutychus drops hints about the whereabouts of Pasicompsa. Frustrated with the shadowy clues, Charinus desires visual confirmation, but Eutychus is unwilling to grant that joy yet.

Eutychus has pursued the task of finding Pasicompsa as a way to save face as a friend. In order to maintain his status as good friend in the community, Eutychus needed to make
an earnest attempt at finding Charinus’ girl. Now that he has found her, he tests his
‘friend credentials’ in giving Charinus the longed for information. Charinus, though,
cares not about the why, but the where. It matters very little why Eutychus has acted the
way he has, so long as the result is the reunion with Pasicompsa.

A temporary reprieve from exile comes with the discovery of Pasicompsa’a
location, but the news that Charinus cannot yet see her immediately kick starts Charinus
playing the role of exile. While Eutychus tries to rationally explain the need for delay,
Charinus gears himself up for exile.

CHAR. chlamydem sumam denuo.
EVT. Mane parumper atque haec audi. CHAR. Cape sis, puere, hoc pallium.
EVT. Mater irata est patri vehementer, quia scortum sibi
ob oculos adduxerit in aedis, dum ruri ipsa abest:
suspicatur illam amicam esse illi. CHAR. Zonam sustuli.
EVT. Eam rem nunc exquirit intus. CHAR. lam machaerast in manu.
EVT. Nam si eo ted intro ducam—CHAR. Tollo ampullam atque hinc eo.
EVT. Mane, mane, Charine. CHAR. Erras, me decipere haud potes.
EVT. Neque edepol volo. CHAR. Quin tu ergo itiner exsequi meum me sinis?
(921-8)

CHAR. I will put on my cloak again. EVT. Just wait a second and hear me out.
CHAR. Please take this cloak, boy. EVT. Mom’s really pissed at dad, because
he’s brought a whore into the house right in front of her eyes while she herself
was out in the country. She is under the impression that that girl is his girlfriend.
CHAR. I’ve got my belt. EVT. Now she’s looking into this business inside.
CHAR. And now sword in hand. EVT. Well, if I take you inside there now—
CHAR. Pick up my bottle and off I go. EVT. Wait, wait, Charinus.
CHAR. You’re making a mistake. You can’t deceive me at all this time.
EVT. And by golly I don’t want to. CHAR. Why don’t you let me go on my
journey then?

Charinus does not trust the promises of his friend, and insists upon his exile as soon as
Eutychus postpones the reunion of the two lovers. Until Charinus has the opportunity to
see Pasicompsa with his own eyes, he is determined to play the exile in search of his lost
love. It is all fine and good that she is in Eutychus’ house, but if it is not possible to be
reunited with her, then Charinus might as well be the person he previously pictured himself as being. Trying to balance the need to calm his mother and appease his friend, Eutychus desperately scrambles to keep Charinus nearby.

In insisting on exile, Charinus pushes Eutychus to disregard the needs of his household for his friendship. Though knowing Pasicompsa is inside, Charinus uses his feigned madness until Eutychus finally agrees to let him inside.

**CHAR.** Certum exsequist,
operam ut sumam ad pervestigandum, ubi sit illaec. **EVT.** Quin domist.
**CHAR.** Nam hic quod dixit, id mentitust. **EVT.** Vera dixi equidem tibi.
**CHAR.** Iam Cyprum veni. **EVT.** Quin sequare, ut illam videas quam expetis.
**CHAR.** Percontatus non inveni. **EVT.** Matris iam iram neglego.
**CHAR.** Porro proficiscor quaesitum. nunc perveni Chalcidem; video ibi hospitem Zacyntho, dico quid eo advenerim, rogito quis eam vexerit, quis habeat si ibi inaudiverit.
**EVT.** Quin tu istas omittis nugas ac mecum huc intro ambulas?
**CHAR.** Hospes respondit, Zacynthi ficos fieri non malas.
**EVT.** Nil mentitust. **CHAR.** Sed de amica se inaudivisse autamat, hic Athenis esse. **EVT.** Calchas iste quidem Zacynthiust.
**CHAR.** Navem conscendo, proficiscor ilico. iam sum domi, iam redii [ex] exilio. salve, mi sodalis Eutycche. (934-47)

**CHAR.** I am determined to carry this out, putting my energy into investigating where that girl is. **EVT.** But she’s here at home. **CHAR.** Well that’s what he has said, but ‘tis a lie. **EVT.** I’ve told you the truth really. **CHAR.** Now I’m at Cyprus. **EVT.** Why don’t you follow me so you can see the one you are looking for? **CHAR.** Close but no cigar. **EVT.** I deny that my mom is angry now.
**CHAR.** Onward with the search. Now I’m at Chalcis. There I see a host of mine from Zacynthos. I tell him why I’ve come. I ask him if he’s heard there who took her, who has her. **EVT.** Why don’t you stop that nonsense of yours, and walk inside here with me? **CHAR.** My host tells me, “In Zacynthus figs grow, not bad ones either.” **EVT.** That’s not a lie. **CHAR.** But he thinks he heard something about my girl, that she’s here in Athens. **EVT.** Your man from Zacynthus is a regular Calchas. **CHAR.** Back on the boat. I’m heading there. Now I’m home. Now I’ve returned from exile. Hello, my comrade Eutychus.

This imaginary exile allows Charinus to pass time until the long awaited reunion, but it also allows him a way to put the information about the girl onto someone else besides
Eutychus, with whom Charinus is upset. In undergoing this exile, it is not Eutychus that directly reunites the two lovers, but an informant from Zacynthus who suggested that Pasicompsa was to be found back in Athens. When Charinus returns from exile, he can reset his friendship with Eutychus. Eutychus is no longer the stubborn friend, withholding the long-awaited reunion. He is now the sight-for-sore-eyes, welcoming back the weary traveler, a welcome that ought to come with a meal where Charinus can finally see his beloved Pasicompsa again. Though denied direct responsibility for the reunion, Eutychus has managed to return his friend to life in Athens. Charinus will be able to enjoy the company of Pasicompsa, thus confirming himself as a lover.

4.6.2 Eutychus and Demipho

In order to fully resolve Charinus’ conflict, Eutychus must confront Demipho about his actions. When he openly chastises Demipho for grabbing his son’s girlfriend, Demipho shows genuine shock.

DEM. Quid tu ais? Charini amicast illa? EVT. Vt dissimulat malus.
DEM. Ille quidem illam sese ancillam matri emisse dixerat. (974-5)

DEM. What’s that? She’s Charinus’ girl? EVT. How badly he pretends to not know. DEM. He had actually said that he bought her as a maid for his mom.

Demipho has bought into the lie so much that he has been oblivious of the trouble he has caused for his son throughout the play. It is only at this point that Demipho realizes the direct conflict that has arisen between his son and himself. Unlike lecherous fathers in other plays, he has no intention of competing with his son in amatory matters.

---

173 One might think particularly of Lysidamus in Casina.
Though Demipho has begun to recant being in direct competition with his son for a girl, Eutychus and Lysimachus see the need to set straight an old man who has pretensions on being a lover. Needling Demipho on his impropriety, the respectable father-son tandem push Demipho to admit to failing to fulfil his role in Athenian society.

Eutychus accosts him most strongly by saying,

Etiam loquere, larua?
vacuum esse istac ted aetate his decebat noxiis.
itidem ut tempus anni, aetatem aliam aliud factum condecet;
nam si istuc ius est, senecta aetate scortari senes,
ubi locist res summa nostra publica? (983-6)

Still talking, ghostie? At your age you ought to keep clear of these vices. Just like the seasons of the year, it is fitting that one does different things at different times of life. Really, if what you did is legally permitted, that old men with their old age go around whoring, what state will our most important affairs of state be in?

Demipho, who has resisted the civic call all along, is compelled here at the end of the play to recognize that as an old man he has certain roles to play that he did not when he was a young man. While the young can gallivant about, enjoying the company of the Pasicompsas of the world, old men need to be taking responsibility for the way society runs. In assuming the position in society that he has, Demipho has obligations to others, including his son. These obligations restrict him from acting in anyway that he might please.

Demipho agrees to return to life as an old, married man. He asks for forgiveness for his temporary lapse in judgment.

Supplici sibi sumat quid volt ipse ob hanc iniuriam,
modo pacem faciatis oro, ut ne mihi iratus siet.
si hercle scivissem sive adeo ioculo dixisset mihi,
se illam amare, numquam facerem ut illam amanti abducerem. (991-4)
Let him take whatever punishment he wants for this wrong-doing. I beg, just restore peace, so he is not angry with me. If I had know by gum or if he had told me even jokingly that he loved her, I’d never have gone and taken her away from her lover.

Demipho desires family unity as much as anyone else in this play. If Charinus had even joked about his interest in the girl, Demipho would have stayed clear. Throughout the play, the relationship between Charinus and Demipho is built on distrust of the other. Though father and son try to please each other on the surface, they are unable to confide in the other their own desires. Demipho shows an interest in what he thinks is best for his son, but this often covers his desire to enjoy Pasicompsa. Charinus has endeavored to be the good son his father asks him to be, but ultimately he strives to find some way to indulge his desires. Driven by wrong impressions, Demipho and Charinus have circled around each other, making impossible their desire to be the good father and son they want to be. Their commitment to acting the way they believe the other expects them to act has prevented either of them from effectively communicating their desires, since they are perpetually double-speaking, playing the good son or father while wanting to be a lover.

Molded by their desire to play specific roles, the characters of *Mercator* constantly talk past each other. Whether it is Demipho, upright father, yet recently inflamed lover, or Charinus, dutiful son, yet perennial profligate, the complications that arise are not the result of some elaborate intrigue. Demipho is not scheming against his son but failing to understand that his son is interested in the same girl, a complication preserved until the end of the play by the inability of Demipho or Charinus to state their intentions clearly. Only with the introduction of Eutychus at the end as a resolver of

---

174 An element noted by Duckworth as unusual in the Plautine corpus. Duckworth (1952), 167.
intention can the complications come to resolution. Eutychus as trusting and trustworthy *amicus, sodalis*, and *vicinus* is able to maintain his social role while striving to restore his friend’s love, the peace of his household, and Demipho’s proper position in larger society.
CHAPTER 5

YOU AND THE YOU YOU TRY TO HIDE:

THE CASE OF HEGIO IN CAPTIVI

Scholarly discussion of Captivi has long focused on the different nature of this comedy, elevated for the most part above Plautus’ other plays.\(^{175}\) Whereas Plautine comedy is typically thought of as a world of farcical slapstick, Captivi provides a calmer, more somber comedy which leans toward the tragic at times. At its core, the play focuses on the mastery of the senex Hegio, a man who pictures himself as the hale fellow well-met, and his efforts to rescue the son he lost in war. In order to do so, Hegio has acquired a pair of slaves, Philocrates and his slave Tyndarus, who, by an accident, is actually Hegio’s other long lost son. The relationship between Philocrates and Tyndarus provides an important contrast to Hegio’s methods for ensuring his slaves act as he needs them to, and one that highlights the fissure that develops between the generous, affable, and witty Hegio who takes the stage early and the rather cruel and cold Hegio that we find toward the end of the play.

\(^{175}\) For discussions on the extent to which Captivi is in fact different from the Plautine corpus, see Viljoen (1963), Leach (1969), Gosling (1983), and Segal (1991).
Starting with the prologue, Captivi urges us to anticipate characters who are more than they initially appear. In explaining how Tyndarus has come to be a slave to his father, the prologist remarks,

hic nunc domi servit suo patri, nec scit pater; enim vero di nos quasi pilas homines habent. (21-2)

This one now is a slave at home to his own father, and his father doesn’t know it. For truly the gods treat us like balls.

As playthings of the gods, vacillation from one state to another is the constant of human life. The freeman of today may quickly become the slave of tomorrow, and as the play will conclude, the freeman of yet another day. Characters cannot be coherent, self-determining agents because they are caught up in a complex web that will shape their lives. Though playing one role for the time being, the characters of Captivi are unable to see the true trajectory of what is happening. Without full knowledge of his situation, Hegio vacillates between generosity and anti-social suspicion.

Anticipating Hegio’s actions based on partial knowledge, the prologue proceeds to focus on the consequences of Tyndarus’ actions in particular. As a result of his unusual position, a position he himself is completely unaware of until the final moments of the play, Tyndarus will end up benefiting more people than he means to.

et hic hodie expediet hanc docte fallaciam, et suom erum faciet libertatis compotem, eodemque pacto fratrem servabit suom reducemque faciet liberum in patriam ad patrem, imprudens: itidem ut saepe iam in multis locis plus insciens quis fecit quam prudentia boni. (40-5)

And this one will skillfully help this trick along, and he will put his master back in possession of his freedom, and by the same plan unawares he will save his own brother and bring him back as a free man into his country to his father. It’s the same thing as happens often now in many places. One does more good not
knowing it than when they are aware.

Though Tyndarus will act in the hopes of freeing his own master Philocrates, there remains the unforeseen consequence of him helping his brother, who will be part of an exchange for the freedom of Philocrates. In turning our attention to this level of the plot, the prologue encourages us to keep in mind all of those unintended results of our actions. Characters cannot be fully self-contained. They inadvertently expose other elements of themselves through those unintended results of action.

The final words of the prologist drive home this message of the doubled nature of everything in the play. Closing off his remarks about the frailty of human knowledge, the prologist remarks,

haec res agetur nobis, vobis fabula. (52)

This will be performed as business for us, for you as a play.

The nature of a play is doubled: the real world that the characters find themselves caught in and the fictional world that the audience finds itself watching. With its unusual initial condition, namely a son enslaved to his own father, this play explicitly encourages us to consider the extent to which human life works under a fictional reality. Hegio will punish Tyndarus because he is convinced he has been duped by faithless slaves, but when he discovers that he has got his son back, he must reassess his actions. Equipped with the knowledge of the prologue, we see Hegio wrongly punishing a slave because we know that he will actually get his son back. While playing out one plotline, we are often in the midst of acting out another scenario, one that we do not see ourselves in, but those watching us are all too aware of.
5.1 Hegio’s Mastery

The prologue has now positioned us to carefully observe how Hegio in particular attempts to ignore a rift in his own character. Trying to play out the fiction of himself as a socially pleasant creature, Hegio fails at times to conceal an immense self-interest which crops up when he believes social affability has failed him. This tension has driven scholarly disagreement about how we should react to Hegio. One scholarly thread emphasizes a sympathetic view of Hegio, finding in Hegio an admirable mastery, miles apart from his compatriots in other Plautine plays. Take for example McCarthy’s analysis, “The strength of Hegio’s mastery lies in its complexity. Unlike many other Plautine characters, especially senes, he seems capable of an empathetic understanding of others’ points of view and attitudes, without slipping into undignified fooling.”

Though initially sympathetic, it is difficult to reconcile our sympathy for this bereaved father with our reactions to the punishment of Tyndarus near the end of the play, which draws this comedy toward a more somber ending than is common in Plautine comedy. What we have in Hegio is a conflict between Hegio, the socially affable master that he wants to play, one who can joke around and empathetically understand other’s viewpoints and Hegio, the master-of-physical-coercion who keeps creeping up when he believes that his social position is threatened. Let us first look at those moments when Hegio manages to maintain the façade of affability, which has generally captured scholarly attention.

5.1.1 The Affable Hegio

While recognizing Hegio’s less glamorous characteristics, Gosling taps into the tradition of finding something quite admirable in Hegio. “Almost all Plautus’ senes … lack dignity

---

… Hegio, as I hope to show, has some of the characteristics of the stock character *senex*, which are exploited a little for comic effect, but his portrayal is both more individualistic and more sympathetic than that of other Plautine *senes*.”¹⁷⁷ In a play that opened with a promise to rise to a higher level, skirting rude jokes and disreputable characters, many readers of *Captivi* are easily inclined to take a shining to this *senex*, who is deeply invested in the process of recovering his lost son.¹⁷₈

In considering the positive aspects of his role in this play, let us first see how the prologue conditions our initial reactions to him. In explaining the back story, the prologist informs us that Hegio has acted quite freely with his money,

> et quoniam heri indaudivit, de summo loco
> summoque genere captum esse equitem Aleum,
> nil pretio parsit, filio dum parceret:
> reconciliare ut facilius posset domum,
> emit hosce e praeda ambos de quaestoribus. (30-4)

And seeing that he heard yesterday that an Elean *eques* from the highest ranks and social standing had been captured, he spared no expense provided that he might spare his son. So he might be able to bring him back home more easily, he bought both of these from the *quaestors* out of the war spoils.

Hegio’s financial expenditure suggests a certain generosity which would bring him in line with comically likeable characters like Menaechmus S. Driven by a desire to reunite with his lost son, Hegio is quite free with his money, inspiring Konstan to comment, “Hegio, though a man of excellent character, has begun to purchase slaves on the slave market, not with an eye to profit, however, but in order to acquire an Elean captive whom he may

¹⁷⁷ Gosling (1983), 55.

¹⁷₈ Cf. Viljoen (1963), 46. “The traditional *comicus stultus senex* – the overbearing but deceived and outwitted father – is replaced by the kind-hearted and witty old gentleman Hegio, who throughout retains our sympathy.” As will be discussed in greater length later, it becomes very difficult to feel fully sympathetic for Hegio when he sentences Tyndarus to the mines, especially given his reaction when Philocrates returns with Philopolemus.
exchange for his own son.”¹⁷⁹ There is something disreputable about dabbling in the slave trade, but we can forgive Hegio because of his noble aims. This forgiveness has a way of taking over our impression, creating the notion that he does not really care about money, while at the same time overlooking the fact that his lack of financial concern exists in the limited sphere of what he can do to get his son back. These lofty expenditures are not the mark of a generous and sociable spirit, but of a father eager to regain his lost son.

The prologue’s suggestion that Hegio is generous with his money as a way to regain his son is reinforced by Hegio himself, when he responds to Tyndarus request that Hegio not ask too much from his Elean father. Reacting to the suggestion that he might act out of greed, Hegio tells his captive,

non ego omnino lucrative omne esse utile homini existimo:
scio ego, multos iam lucrative lutulentos homines reddidit;
est etiam ubi profecto damnum praestet facere quam lucrative.
odi ego aurum: multa multis saepe suasit perperam.
nunc hoc animum advorte, ut ea quae sentio pariter scias.
filius meus illic apud vos servit captus Alide:
eum si reddis mihi, praeterea unum nummum ne duis;
et te et hunc amittam hinc. alio pacto abire non potes. (325-32)

I don’t think that profit is at all useful for a man. I know it. Profit has rendered many men filthy. Actually there is even a place where taking a loss is better than making a profit. I hate gold. It has often persuaded many men to do many things wrongly. Now I want you to pay attention to this so you know exactly what I think. My son, taken in war, is a slave there in Elis among your people. If you return him to me, moreover you don’t give one red cent and I will set you and this one free from here. In no other way can you go away.

Hegio displays the greatest lack of concern for money matters, so long as he can get his son back. Though others become tainted with the prospect of making vast profits, Hegio cares little for it. He has risen above the scandalous desires of his fellow citizens to shine

¹⁷⁹ Konstan (1976), 76.
as a model of paternal concern. We should not lose sight of the fact that he is beginning
to negotiate with newly acquired captives, and in so doing, he has a vested interest in a
particular portrayal of his character. He is willing and able to play up his sympathetic
mask so long as he sees himself in a position to get what he is after. Hoping to win
sympathy from a young man who has just been taken from his father, Hegio plays up his
paternal concern at the expense of caring about money.

The mask of the witty old man also emerges as he deals with the parasite
Ergasilus. In deflecting Ergasilus’ requests for a hearty feast like his son used to give,
Hegio plays up his comic skill. In response to Ergasilus’ complaint about the lack of free
meals in the community since the loss of Philopolemus, he replies,

Non pol mirandum est fugitare hanc provinciam.
multis et multigeneribus opus est tibi
militibus; primumdum opus est Pistorensibus;
eorum sunt aliquot genera Pistorensium:
opus Paniceis est, opus Placentinis quoque;
opus Turdetanis, opust Ficedulensibus;
iam maritumi omnes milites opus sunt tibi. (158-64)

By golly it’s no wonder that [other young men] shun this assignment. You need
many and various kinds of soldiers. First up, you need Bakertons. There are
several types of these Bakertons. Going to need Breadvillians, Pancakeburgers as
well. Going to need Thrushites. Going to need Peckeringtons. Now you’re going
to need all the soldiers that come from the sea.\(^{180}\)

Though there is business to be taken care of, Hegio is willing to take some time to play to
his comic potential. This wit, though, is not deployed only for the sake of comic
exuberance. In rattling off this list of food-laden soldiers, Hegio is politely shutting down
the parasite’s hope for a free meal. With Hegio, comic wit does not stir within to be used

\(^{180}\) The translation tries to maintain the food overtones of this mixture of real and fictitious places.
for its own sake, rather he finds opportunities to deploy it for the advancement of his own motives.

Finally, we can turn directly to the question of how Hegio opts to deal with his slaves, particularly here the newly acquired captives who he hopes will finally be able to help him get his son back. Before considering this though, we need to understand more fully the relationship that Hegio believes exists between Philocrates and Tyndarus.

5.1.2 The Philocrates-and-Tyndarus Show

As a member of the audience, we are in a position to assess the relationship between Philocrates and Tyndarus differently than Hegio does. We gain some insight into their actual relationship from the prologue and the private conversations these captives have with one another, but we also have the opportunity to consider the type of relationship that they produce for Hegio in the hopes that they can make him amenable to their plan to let Philocrates go back to Elis. Let us first consider what might be said about the actual relationship between Philocrates and Tyndarus.

The prologue provides us with an important bit of information about the relationship that has developed between them. After he was stolen by a slave, Tyndarus was sold to an Elean man.

is postquam hunc emit, dedit eum huic gnato suo peculiarem, quia quasi una aetas erat. (19-20)

After he bought this one, he gave him to this son of his as his very own, because they were practically the same age.

The closeness that exists between Philocrates and Tyndarus is a bond that has developed over a long period of time (twenty years as we learn at the end of the play), between a master and a slave of approximately the same age. This long association has provided
Tyndarus with plenty of opportunities to show what kind of slave he will be. Like other
slaves of the *comoedia palliata*,\(^{181}\) he has proven his reliability and his ability to help his
young master out of tight situations. Now captives in Aetolia, Philocrates is able to trust
his slave to help carry out a scheme as he takes the lead.

The two captives have decided to play the other’s part in order to trick Hegio into
releasing Philocrates. As we see the trick unfold, we notice that it is Philocrates, the
young freeborn man playing the part of the slave, who acts like the trickster slave we are
familiar with. In prepping Tyndarus, Philocrates uses language typical for tricksters.

\[
\text{Secede huc nunciam, si videtur, procul,}
\]
\[
\text{ne arbitri dicta nostra arbitrari queant}
\]
\[
\text{neu permanet palam haec nostra fallacia.}
\]
\[
\text{nam doli non doli sunt, nisi astu colas,}
\]
\[
\text{sed malum maxumum, si id palam provenit. (219-23)}
\]

Come over here real quick, if it seems good to you. A bit further, so witnesses
can’t catch hold of what we are saying or so our plot doesn’t get out in the open.
Truth is, unless you hatch ‘em cunningly, tricks aren’t tricks, but the biggest load
of trouble, if they go public.

A bit later, he warns Tyndarus,

\[
\text{tanta incepta res est: haud somniculose hoc}
\]
\[
\text{agendum est. (227-8)}
\]

So great an endeavor has been started. Better not sleepwalk through this one.

Reminiscent of Palaestrio,\(^{182}\) Philocrates throws himself fully into the role of the trickster,
ready to use his new-found role as slave to full advantage. Philocrates does not need to be

---

\(^{181}\) It is worth noting that the slaves of Plautine comedy are quite loyal to their young masters. They do not
deceive on their own accord. Instead, they are called up to service by their young masters, and they
subsequently make the most of this opportunity to deceive the older generation. Though they may dupe the
*patria potestas*, slaves generally do so under the framework of loyalty to their young masters or the wives
of the *patresfamilias*. Cf. particularly Chrysalus in *Bacchides*, Epidicus in *Epidicus*, Palaestrio in *Miles
Gloriosus*, and Tranio in *Mostellaria*. 

185
a slave in order to be a plotter, keeping in mind that there is a practical reason why
Philocrates pretends to be the slave of the pair. The trickster is not confined to the role of
the slave, but as a trickster, Philocrates looks to maximize the potential of the role he is
able to play, here as the slave of Hegio’s freshly bought captive.

Much has been made of the nobility of Tyndarus’ efforts here on behalf of
Philocrates, but we need to look more carefully at Tyndarus’ response to his master’s
call for diligence.

TYND. Ero ut me voles esse. PHIL. Spero.
TYND. Nam tu nunc vides pro tuo caro capite
carum offere [me] meum caput vilitati.
PHIL. Scio. TYND. At scire memento, quando id quod voles hабebis;
nam fere maxima pars morem hunc homines habent: quod sibi volunt,
dum id impetrant, boni sunt;
sed id ubi iam penes sese habent,
ex bonis pessimi et fraudulentissimi
fiunt. (228-36)

TYND. I will be as you want me to be. PHIL. I hope. TYND. Well you see now
that for your dear self I am valuing my dear self very little. PHIL. I know.
TYND. But remember to know it when you get what you want. Truth is, in the
majority of cases men usually do this. As for what they want for themselves,
while they are busy getting it, they are good, but when they have it then in their
possession, from good men they become the worst and most deceitful men.

In response to his master who is beginning to echo the sentiments of trickster slaves,
Tyndarus replies first with words that echo those of young masters who are aided by the
clever slave. There is a twist here. In answering the request for help, Tyndarus, unlike
most young men, makes demands of his own. The noble sacrifice of Tyndarus is

---

182 Cf. Miles, 596-606. Palaestrio scouts out the stage before inviting his co-conspirators to join him. Like
Philocrates here, he emphasizes the importance of caution and secrecy when plotting against an enemy.

183 For a detailed synopsis of this opinion over the course of the 20th century see Thalmann (1996).

184 Cf. Calidorus in Pseudolus, 240.
conditioned from the beginning. In contrast to the picture of slavery that will develop when these two engage Hegio, Tyndarus here displays some skepticism about his master’s reliability. Hoping that his master will stay true to his word, he is willing to put himself in a vulnerable position because he sees in it an opportunity to help himself. He does not react to an altruistic call to be the good and loyal slave, but agrees to help Philocrates because he sees in this exchange the chance to improve his own situation. So long as Philocrates can be trusted, it is possible for Tyndarus’ lot to improve, perhaps even be freed.

As Philocrates and Tyndarus don the façade of the other, they demonstrate a more complex relationship as master and slave than those found in other Plautine plays. While Philocrates slips easily into the typical postures of trickster slaves, the long-time slave Tyndarus easily slides into the role of the freeman helped by a wily slave. Philocrates flings himself fully into the project of duping Hegio, as Tyndarus stands back, commenting on the action.

Nunc senex est in tostrina, nunc iam cultros attinet. ne id quidem, involucrum inicere, voluit, vestem ut ne inquinet. sed utrum strictimne adventurum dicam esse an per pectinem, nescio; verum, si frugist, usque admutilabit probe. (266-9)

Now the old man is at the barber’s. Here comes the razor. He didn’t even want to toss a towel on him so his clothes don’t get messed up. But will I call it a close

\[185\] Cf. Leach (1969), 274-275. “In the hope of gaining control over desperate circumstances, they have created these roles, but each feels strange and uneasy, and faces the problem of reconciling the assumed persona with his accustomed self … But the roles take command over those who play them; efforts to preserve the real self become futile as the actors slip into the postures of the stock figures of comedy.” Philocrates and Tyndarus have slid well into the tradition that their current roles have established, but I am unsure how uneasy this transition is for the two. Each of them quickly finds in the reversal opportunities to push their own agendas. Philocrates is pretty quick to take up the comic activity of a trickster slave, redefining his father in order to dissuade Hegio from being greedy. As master, Tyndarus is able to gloat on his perception of how he performs his role as slave. As for the matter of their real selves, Plautus has provided us as an audience with the opportunity throughout this play to question how real that self is. Tyndarus, really freeborn, has been playing the slave for 20 years.
shave or just a trim. Not sure. But, if he’s any good, he’ll completely shear him good.

In a scene that feels like a stock routine, Tyndarus has the opportunity to display an admiration for the craftiness of his master Philocrates. As the scene unfolds, we observe a relationship that shows little sign, if any, of the coercive side of slavery. Instead with Philocrates and Tyndarus, we see two characters eagerly in sync on the same project, mutually working out a way to get Philocrates back to Elis.

Tyndarus continues to praise Philocrates’ skill in working over Hegio. Having gotten through the shaving that old men often receive in comedy, Tyndarus moves to another time-tested sign of a skillful deceiver.

Eugepae, Thalem talento non emam Milesium, nam ad sapientiam huius [hominis] nimius nugator fuit. ut facete orationem ad servitutem contulit. (274-6)

Oh, oh my. I wouldn’t buy Milesian Thales for a talent. Actually, compared to the wisdom of this man, that one was quite the babbler. How charmingly he has treated the matter of slavery!

This sentiment is picked up yet again, when Tyndarus remarks,

Salva res est, philosophatur quoque iam, non mendax modo est. (284)

Situation under control. He philosophizes now as well. He’s not only a liar.

Tyndarus draws on comic tradition, seeing a philosopher of great stature in his master playing the role of slave. One might be reminded of Simo’s warning to Callipho, calling upon the skills of Pseudolus to confound and confuse more than Socrates.\textsuperscript{186} Master and slave are easily at home in the role of the other, following the general guidelines of character types found in \textit{comoedia palliata}. They can see how their parts are parts, and

\textsuperscript{186} \textit{Pseudolus}. 464-5.
not something essential to their existence. They are ready to deceive Hegio because they understand what is necessary for playing the other’s part.

It is important for us not to lose sight of the fact that we are not observing the actual dynamic that exists in the relationship between Philocrates and Tyndarus. They both are busy putting on a bit of theater in order to convince Hegio that they deserve his trust. They create a dynamic that may reflect their normal devotion to each other, but here it has been highly polished for the purpose of taking Hegio in. In discussing Tyndarus’ and Philocrates’ interaction with the lorarius, Thalmann observes that Philocrates and Tyndarus approach slavery different than the lorarius does. “[The] depiction of a power relation as voluntarily embraced by its victims doubtless represents the view of slavery that masters must often have wanted to take, although many slaves may have internalised it themselves.”

We need to keep in mind that everything Philocrates and Tyndarus do when not strictly alone is done to create a certain view of slavery, the gentler side of slavery, which emphasizes the slave as a member of a household, rather than the power of the master over the slave. In playing the benevolent slave, Philocrates hopes to elicit from Hegio a benevolent master. Tyndarus will also play up a certain version of mastery in the hopes that the new master Hegio will treat him as he shows himself treating his slave.

When Hegio directly questions Tyndarus, Tyndarus deploys the view of the master as head of the working, cooperative unit of the household in an attempt to play toward a certain image Hegio might have of himself. Rattling off the vicissitudes that have landed him on an equal footing with his ‘slave’, Tyndarus says,

et quidem si, proinde ut ipse fui imperator familiae, habeam dominum, non verear ne iniuste aut graviter mi imperet. (307-8)

And indeed if I would have a *dominus* just as I myself was when I was in command of my family, I wouldn't be afraid that he would order me unjustly or harshly.

Though bought for the purpose of being a commodity that Hegio can exchange for his lost son, Tyndarus attempts to ingrati ate himself by referring to Hegio as *dominus*, expressing a wish that he be considered a part of the household (*domus*). In being part of the household, Tyndarus attempts to show Hegio that their interests are aligned, which ought to help trigger the sociable master in Hegio. He appeals to a kindly notion of slavery in the hopes that Hegio will recreate the master-slave dynamic he sees enacted between his newly acquired captives.

This mastery though in the mouth of Tyndarus is inevitably partially fiction. The dynamic that we hear about through Tyndarus’ reflection on his experience, spoken not from his actual position but from the position of his master, has been deeply polished. In playing the role of his own master, Tyndarus is in an unusual position to authoritatively reflect on how he sees himself playing the role of slave.

At nihil est ignotum ad illum mittere: operam luseris. hunc mitte, hic transactum reddet omne, si illuc venerit. nec quemquam fideliorem neque cui plus credat potes mittere ad eum nec qui magis sit servos ex sententia, neque adeo cui suom concredat filium hodie audacios. ne vereare, meo periculo huius ego experiar fidem, fretus ingenio eius, quod me esse scit erga se benevolum. (344-50)

But you won’t get anywhere sending him some unknown man. You’ll have wasted your effort. Send this one. He’ll turn this matter back over to you all taken care of if he gets there. Nor can you send him anyone more faithful, nor one who you could trust more, nor one who would be a slave more in line with your wishes, nor even one who he would fully entrust his own son to quite boldly
today. Don’t worry. I will test his trustworthiness at my own risk. I’ve relied on his nature, because he knows that I am kindly disposed toward him.

Whereas other slaves metaphorically don the role of master and patron, Tyndarus is in a position to enact the role he adopts, which Hegio believes is real. Leach emphasizes the need for Tyndarus to remember that he is a slave, As Leach argues, “He must not confuse his pretense of freedom with reality, for in so doing, he would only lose the honor that long and faithful service has gained.” 188  Tyndarus, though, does recognize an opportunity to verbalize desires that, as a long-time, faithful slave, he may have needed to keep quiet. Given the chance to play the enslaved free, Tyndarus is able to act in a somewhat self-authorizing fashion, expressing fully his desire for freedom before he relinquishes his role, granting it back to Philocrates.

Because of the actual switch in roles, Tyndarus also has the opportunity to paint an immaculate picture of how he plays the role of slave. This gives Hegio the opportunity to insert himself in the position that Tyndarus speaks from. Just as Tyndarus has been a respectable master to a loyal slave, so Hegio has the opportunity to envision himself as the kindly master who will garner cooperation from his captives.

Hegio believes he is observing a relationship built on deep personal loyalty, not a relationship maintained by the master’s recourse to physical threats. He asks his slaves to unchain Tyndarus. Then because he envisions himself as a generous man, he adds in a request that his slaves also unchain Philocrates. 189  Tyndarus expresses his relief, and Hegio responds aphoristically,

---

188 Leach (1969), 276.

189 Cf. Gosling (1983), 55. Gosling sees in this moment Hegio’s humane nature, a man dealing in slaves because of his unusual circumstances.
Quod bonis bene fit beneficium, gratia ea gravida est bonis. (358)

A kindness well done for good men is a loaded favor for good men.

As Raccanelli has discussed, treating his act as a beneficium, Hegio hopes to show himself as a master who sees himself as an equal to Tyndarus, who he thinks is the freeborn Philocrates. He has found an opportunity to help himself, and in such a situation, he gladly plays the kind master, a position that is useful for him to play if he wants recently acquired slaves to react to a sense of obligation and loyalty to him. In playing the gentle master who has given the great kindness of removing his slaves’ chains, he hopes that he has earned the gratitude of his captives so they will do what he needs them to do.

Struck by the fondness and trust enacted by the captives, Hegio is willing to listen to Tyndarus’ suggestion that Philocrates should be sent instead of an anonymous negotiator. Philocrates and Tyndarus are willing to play up the opportunity that this show of kind master and loyal slave has produced. Though this dynamic may actually exist to some degree between the two captives, we should not, as Hegio cannot, fail to remember that this is a fiction produced by like-minded conspirators, playing to the character of their target like good comic tricksters.

---

190 Raccanelli (2002).

191 Cf. Thalmann (1996), 126. “By the end of the scene, Hegio orders that both prisoners be freed from their bonds, and he describes his relation with them as a mutual exchange of favours (358). There is a shift, then, to the other paradigm of slavery. What has happened in between to produce this reversal is that Hegio has witnessed, as he thinks, the faithful service of a ‘good’ slave, defined strictly from the point of view of his own interests.” It is equally important that Hegio sees an advantage to reacting to the show he has just seen by acting as if his relationship to his slaves works in the same way. In seeing Philocrates and Tyndarus act in mutual affection and aid, Hegio sees a version of mastery and slavery that may bring about the results he is looking for.
PHIL. Philocrates, ut adhuc locorum feci, faciam sedulo, ut potissimum quod in rem recte conducat tuam, id petam idque persequar corde et animo atque viribus.

TYND. Facis ita ut te facere oportet. nunc animum advortas volo: omnium primum salutem dicito matri et patri et cognatis et si quem alium benevolentem videris; me hic valere et servitutem servire huic homini optumo, qui me honore honestiorem semper fecit et facit. (385-92)

PHIL. Philocrates, as I have done up to this point, I will do it earnestly. As much as I can, I will look for what rightly pertains to your affair and pursue it with my heart and mind and efforts. TYND. You do so as it is right for you to do. Now I want you to pay attention. First of all say hello to mom and dad and my relatives and any other well-wisher you see.

While Philocrates is busy creating the image of a faithful slave, Tyndarus is busy establishing his character as a good son, concerned first with his mother and father. These two are able to fashion a relationship that idealizes the bond between the master and the slave. Without coercion, Philocrates, as Tyndarus, promises to be the good and faithful slave he has always been. Tyndarus, as Philocrates, then has the opportunity to approve of his slave’s actions. Hegio sees in this relationship the type of relationship that he would ideally have with any of his own slaves. The idealized portrayal of mastery, which appeals to Hegio’s character, distracts him from what is going on. He cannot see that he is being taken in by a fictional form of mastery because he is so deeply committed to the idea of himself operating in a similar relationship.

Once Hegio is willing to release Philocrates, thinking he is actually Tyndarus, Tyndarus has the opportunity to give his slave a few parting commands. Given his unique

---

192 The success of the Plautine trickster often comes from his ability to accurately assess the nature of his target. In *Miles Gloriosus*, all those who deceive the soldier do so by appealing to the image he has of himself as the pinnacle of masculinity on the battlefield and in the bedroom.
position, he is temporarily authorized to make requests that he would wish for himself as Philocrates’ slave.

Me hic valere et—tute audacter dicito,
Tyndare—inter nos fuisse ingenio haud discordabili,
neque te commeruiisse culpam—neque me adversatum tibi—
beneque ero gessisse morem in tantis aerumnis tamen;
neque med umquam deseruiisse te neque factis neque fide,
rebus in dubiis egenis. haec pater quando sciet,
Tyndare, ut fueris animatus erga suom gnatum atque se,
umquam erit tam avarus, quin te gratiis emittat manu ~
et mea opera, si hinc rebito, faciam ut faciat facilius.
nam tua opera et comitate et virtute et sapientia
feciisti ut redire liceat ad parentis denuo,
cum apud hunc confessus es et genus et divitias meas:
quo pacto emisisti e vinclis tuom erum tua sapientia. (401-13)

Say that I am doing well here –speak boldly, Tyndarus—there has been no discordance between us whatsoever nor have you been guilty of any fault—nor have I opposed you—though we’ve been in a heap of trouble, all the same you have bent your will well to your master, nor have you ever forsaken me either in your actions or your loyalty in these times of uncertainty and distress. When father will know these things, Tyndarus, how good-spirited you have been toward his son and himself, he won’t ever be so greedy as to not set you free at no charge … and by my own effort, if I ever go back from here, I will make sure he does it quite readily. Actually, by your effort and companionship and virtue and wisdom you have made sure that I be allowed to return home to my parents finally, when you have revealed in this man’s presence both my race and my wealth, and in this way you have set your master free from chains by your wisdom.

Through the ruse of being master-Philocrates, a self-authorizing figure, Tyndarus can request his freedom. From Hegio’s position, this request appears in the form of deep appreciation of a young master for the efforts of his slave. Tyndarus gives Hegio the opportunity to believe that there is so much trust and affection in this relationship that the master will quickly ensure his slave gain his freedom. Impressed by this display of trust and loyalty, Hegio is more willing to do as his captives ask him.
There is another side to this scene, though, which we are well aware of from our privileged position as an audience. The role reversal has put Tyndarus in a position to present a wish for himself as a wish for another. The hope for freedom helps insure Tyndarus’ continued participation in Philocrates’ plot. Philocrates will be able to go back home to his father, but that opportunity comes at the price of freeing his long-time slave. From this point on, we must evaluate how noble an action Tyndarus performs in staying behind for Philocrates. From the beginning of the ruse, Tyndarus has hinted at some reciprocal kindness, negating the possibility that he has played this part out of sheer loyalty to a kind master. Once he has stipulated freedom as the aim of his cooperation, it becomes necessary to recognize that Tyndarus proposes a new understanding of mastery. Even mastery that is highly affectionate is built upon a base of reciprocity.

A short bit later, Tyndarus again emphasizes the immense risk he is taking in staying behind.

Istaec dicta te experiri et operis et factis volo;
et, quo minus dixi quam volui de te, animum advortas volo,
atque horunc verborum causa caveto mi iratus fuas;
sed, te quaeo, cogitato hinc mea fide mitti domum

te aestimatum, et meam esse vitam hic pro te positam pignori,
ne tu me ignores, quom extemplo meo e conspectu abscesseris,
quom me servom in servitute pro ted hic reliqueris,
tuque te pro libero esse ducas, pignus deserat
neque des operam pro me ut huius reducem facias filium. (429-37)

I want you to prove what you said by both your efforts and deeds, and however much less I said than I wanted to about you, I want you to pay attention, and make sure you don’t become angry because of what I am going to say. But, I beg you,

---

193 For recognition of this conditional sacrifice see Viljoen (1963), 48. “For, throughout, the intention of the two captives is clearly not that the slave should be sacrificed for his master’s freedom, but that the latter, upon regaining his liberty, should also liberate his slave from captivity.” Discussions of the nobility of Tyndarus often fail to remember the very real profit Tyndarus might gain from his sacrifice. A risk needs to be taken, and Tyndarus is the man for the job. This risk, however, is not the blind sacrifice of a slave for his master.
think about the fact that you are being sent home at my risk and under forfeit, and my life has been put down here as a pledge on behalf of you. Don’t forget me, right when you have gotten out of my sight, when you have left me here behind as a slave in slavery in place of you. Don’t consider yourself a freeman. Don’t abandon your pledge and not put effort in on my behalf to bring this man’s son back.

To Hegio, this appears like the desperate plea of a master that his slave remain loyal even if he is given the opportunity to potentially slip off to freedom. For Tyndarus, it is a request that his master maintain a level of faith that is not explicitly required of a master.

While Tyndarus is obliged as a slave to act according to the will of his master, here going along with the ruse, Philocrates is not obliged as master to act reciprocally. Tyndarus recognizes this, but calls on his master to act not as a master but as a long-term acquaintance, remembering the favor of someone who was, if only temporarily, a fellow slave, a social equal. The accident that has brought these two together as slaves in Hegio’s household has opened the opportunity for Tyndarus to make requests on his master as an equal, as a man deserving kindness equal to that which he gives.

As Tyndarus begins to bid Philocrates farewell, his words, though tapping into the language of masters dependent on crafty slaves, take on a particular significance here.

haec per dexteram tuam te dextra retinens manu opsecro, infidelior mihi ne fuas quam ego sum tibi. tu hoc age. tu mihi erus nunc es, tu patronus, tu pater, tibi commendo spes opesque meas. (442-5)

By your right hand, holding on with my right hand, I beseech you to do these things. May you not be more disloyal to me than I am to you. Take care of this. Now you are my master, you my patron, you my father, I commend my hope and my welfare to you.

Making one last plea for Philocrates to maintain the faith that he has showed toward his master, Tyndarus hands the title of master back over. What in other plays rests on the
level of metaphor, here becomes an actual transference. The role reversal has come to a close. Philocrates is once again the master, and Tyndarus accepts his return to slavery. In doing so, he acknowledges his dependence on his master, here a double dependence. His life hangs on the whims of Hegio and the good will of Philocrates.

5.2 Hegio’s Failure to Live up to his Mask

Now that we have considered the affable side of Hegio, that Hegio who wishes his slaves to act out of pity and compassion for a financially generous master desperately searching for his son, we are in a position to look at the version of Hegio that dominates the end of the play. When things are going smoothly for Hegio, the mask remains firm and convincing, but Captivi constantly tries to pull that mask aside to expose another aspect of this master. Before examining the specific interactions with dependents that bring these cracks to the surface, let me turn first to an important distinction Hegio makes about his own mastery.

Full of joy at the prospect of retrieving his son, Hegio relates the plan to Philocrates. In addressing the captive who will help him achieve his ultimate goal, he recognizes a distinction between his mastery over his captives and the master-slave relationship that existed before Philocrates and Tyndarus fell into enemy hands.

Quae res bene vortat mihi meoque filio vobisque, volt te novos erus operam dare tuo veteri domino, quod is velit, fideliter. (361-3)

How things are turning out well for me and my son, both of you too! Your new master (erus) wants you to take care of what your old master (dominus) wants, and do it faithfully.
There is an important semantic shift from *erus* to *dominus*. Hegio refers to himself as *erus*, master in relation to his slaves,\(^{194}\) whereas he refers to Tyndarus as *dominus*, master of the household.\(^{195}\) Hegio has bought his captives for a specific purpose, which has no connection to the ongoing operations of his household. He thus emphasizes his relationship to Philocrates and Tyndarus as a relationship of power, not as part of a working unit of society. In calling upon the previous relationship as that of a slave and a *dominus*, he hopes that the slave will remember a long history of loyal service to a household. Philocrates is called to remember that he was once part of a household and that he is now on a mission to restore a household.

In discussing in greater depth differing forms of slavery in *Captivi*, Thalmann has observed, “Within this inherently exploitative relation, some masters treat their slaves kindly, and many slaves make the best of their position … Genuine bonds of affection can arise, especially when the slave has been brought up as virtually a member of the master’s family. But the leveling never goes too far, and when persuasion and kindness fail there is always the whip.”\(^{196}\) The contrast between Philocrates as *dominus* and Hegio as *erus* becomes all the more important in this play, when we take into account this version of slavery. Hegio realizes that his captives have not truly become part of his household, but he appeals to affection that may exist between his captives from their long history as part of the same household. He hopes the captive he sends away will be mindful of his *dominus*, but he also recognizes that he is in a position to promote certain

\(^{194}\) OLD, s.v. *erus* 1.

\(^{195}\) OLD, s.v. *dominus* 1.

\(^{196}\) Thalmann (1996), 117.
actions through his power over the captives. When the kind façade fails to produce results, the witty Hegio quickly can become the master of the lash.

In order to understand Hegio’s treatment of Tyndarus toward the end of Captivi more fully, let us look at how Hegio deals with the parasite Ergasilus. We will then consider the reactions between him and his slaves, the lorarius and that troublesome Stalagus, who stole Tyndarus from Hegio twenty years ago. Through the interactions Hegio has with these characters, we can observe the chinks in his social façade which illuminate his decision about what to do with Tyndarus when he realizes that he has been duped by his newly acquired captives.

5.2.1 Ergasilus

In a play that claims to aim for higher ground, Ergasilus, Captivi’s most traditionally comic character, provides an essential contrast between the past that used to be full of banquets and the famine-ravished present, a contrast directly connected to the loss of Philopolemus. In search of food, he has come to the home of Hegio, and once he has finished waxing eloquent on the parasite’s profession, he launches immediately into a lament how the loss of Philopolemus has affected Hegio and his household.

nunc hic occepit quaestum hunc fili gratia
inhonestum et maxime alienum ingenio suo:
homines captivos commercatur, si queat
aliquem invenire, suom qui mutet filium.
quod quidem ego nimis quam cupio ut impetret;
nam ni illum recipit, nihil est quo me recipiam. (98-103)

Now this one has gotten involved in this trade for his son’s sake, disrespectful and really unbecoming to this man’s nature. He is buying up men captured in war, if only he’d be able to find one who he might exchange for his son. Indeed how much I want him to accomplish this task! In fact, if he doesn’t get him back, I get to go hungry.
Ergasilus bemoans Hegio’s situation since it brings no profit. The profits of Hegio provide the feasts that Philopolemus so freely gave to Ergasilus, but ever since he was captured in war, Ergasilus has seen a period of non-feasting. In the mouth of the parasite, this dearth of feasts does not seem like a real problem. We are perhaps inclined to side with Hegio in dealing with this sponger, but through Ergasilus we begin to see how the quest for Philopolemus affects what normally happened at Hegio’s house. What used to be a reliable source of social gatherings has become fixated on a financially detrimental project. The search for Philopolemus has potentially shut this household off from the community which Hegio constantly keeps one eye on, assessing his public image.

As Ergasilus attempts to get himself fed at another’s expense, he tries to align his mindset with that of the potential provider of his feasts. Appealing to Hegio’s loss and mourning for Philopolemus, he hopes he will earn himself a meal, but he fails to size up his target accurately. Always concerned about how to position himself in relation to the other members of Aetolian society, even parasites like Ergasilus, Hegio responds,

Alienus cum eius incommodum tam aegre feras,
quid me patrem par facerest, cui ille est unicus? (146-7)

When you, an outsider, bear the loss of this one so difficultly, what’s right for me, his father, to do, me whose only boy that one is?

Ergasilus immediately rejoins in an effort to bring himself back inside.

Alienus ego? alienus illi? aha, Hegio,
umquam istuc dixis neque animum induxis tuom;
tibi ille unicust, mi etiam unico magis unicus. (148-50)

I’m an outsider? An outsider to that boy? Oh oh, Hegio, if only you had never said that and brought your mind to think it. That boy is your only, he’s really my only only.
Hegio attempts to increase his losses beyond those of Ergasilus. If anyone is to grieve, he believes he is in the greatest position of suffering. Ergasilus constantly repositions himself in response to those he encounters. While Hegio has lost much, Ergasilus even more. This exaggerated sympathy earns him respect from Hegio. (151-2) Even as he turns down an opportunity for public kindness, Hegio finds ways to preserve his public image.

Ergasilus cannot be easily turned away. He thinks he is poised to offer a great honor, having him over for a birthday feast for himself, but Hegio counters the request in a way that enables him to continue playing the generous and sociable neighbor.

HEG. Facete dictum. sed si pauxillo potes contentus esse. ERG. Ne perpauxillum modo, nam istoc me assiduo victu delecto domi; age sis, roga emptum: nisi qui meliorem adferet quae mi atque amicis placeat condicio magis, quasi fundum vendam, meis me addicam legibus.

HEG. Profundum vendis tu quidem, haud fundum, mihi. sed si venturu's, temperi. ERG. Em, vel iam otium est.

HEG. I modo, venare leporem: nunc irim tenes; nam meus scruposam victus commetat viam. (176-85)

HEG. Charmingly said, if you can be content with very little. ERG. Oh not just a little! Actually, I am constantly delighting myself with that fare at home. Come on please. Ask that some food be bought. If no one will offer up a better arrangement which would please me and my friends more, as if I am going to sell an estate, I’ll consign myself to you by my laws. HEG. You’re selling me an empty state, not an estate. But if you are going to come, do it in season. ERG. Well, I got time right now. HEG. Go now. Hunt up a hare. You have a hedgehog at the moment. To be honest, my fare travels a rocky path.

While Ergasilus desperately claws for some fancy foods, Hegio counters with a modest proposal. If Ergasilus wants more, he should scrounge it up, but if he is content to

---

197 Cf. McCarthy (2000), 185. “On the contrary, precisely because Hegio sees (or pretends to see?) Ergasilus as an equal rather than a dependent, he refuses to play the part of patron … Hegio offers a simple,
enjoy what Hegio has to offer, he can come right on in. Hegio is able to maintain the image of a generous member of society while refusing to give into the parasite because his refusal is cushioned by comic wit. Hegio, who the prologue told us was a free spender and who will soon proclaim his distaste for money matters, here refuses to put out the cash needed to sponsor a birthday meal. Watching the witty old man dismissing a desperate parasite, we may not think twice about Hegio’s refusal. While we may feel sorry for the parasite’s plight, we are hard pressed to see Hegio’s counter-proposal as too hard-hearted, but we should begin to question how genuine the commitment to freely spending money is. It is possible that money is freely spent in order to repair the damage done to the household, but when it comes to extending hospitality beyond the household, Hegio tightens up the purse-strings.

5.2.2 Lorarius

In dealing with his slaves, Hegio reveals the cracks in his sociable mask which were hinted at slightly in the scene with Ergasilus. In his first scene, Hegio asked that his captives be given the opportunity to walk about free from their chains, helping create a rustic meal clearly designed for nutritive, not festive, purposes.” This betrays Hegio’s lack of concern for money. He will spend money freely to help himself, namely retrieving his son, but he cannot be prodded into spending some cash for a communal meal, even if that community is himself and the parasite Ergasilus.

Cf. Viljoen (1963), 54. “But surely the connection of lines 192-4 with the proceeding scene suggests clearly enough that Hegio’s sudden concern about his bank balance has been caused by a comic fear, raised by his conversation with Ergasilus, that his pecuniary means might not measure up to the costs involved in entertaining such a gourmand as Ergasilus. His bank balance must already have slunk considerably as a result of extensively buying up captive Eleans from the war booty, but in the specific dramatic situation this fact could at the most be a contributory for Hegio’s financial concern.” Despite his claims to not care about money, Hegio does not dole out his money willy nilly. He is free with his money in a specific regard. Not generally sociable, he will spare no expense to bring his son back home. He plays to the image where he sees an advantage, but carefully steps back from the image when there is nothing to be gained, as here with the parasite Ergasilus.
kindly image of himself, but there is something sinister lurking behind this kind master which peeks out here as he interacts with his *lorarius*.

_**HEG.**_ sed uti adserventur magna diligentia
liber captivos avis ferae consimilis est:
semel fugiendi si data est occasio,
satis est, numquam postilla possis prendere.
_**LOR.**_ Omnes profecto liberi lubentius
sumus quam servimus. _**HEG.**_ Non videre ita tu quidem.
_**LOR.**_ Si non est quod dem, mene vis dem ipse—in pedes?
_**HEG.**_ Si dederis, erit extemplo mihi quod dem tibi.
_**LOR.**_ Avis me ferae consimilem faciam, ut praedicas.
_**HEG.**_ Ita ut dicis: nam si faxis, te in caveam dabo. (115-24)

_HEG._ But make sure they’re watched quite closely. A free captive is really like a wild bird. If an opportunity for flight is ever given, that’s enough. After that, you couldn’t ever get a hold of ‘em. _**LOR.**_ All of us actually are more gladly free than slaves. _**HEG.**_ Indeed, you don’t seem so. _**LOR.**_ If there’s something for me to give, do you want me to give you – the slip? _**HEG.**_ If you do, right away there will be something for me to give you. _**LOR.**_ I’ll make myself like a wild bird, as you predict. _**HEG.**_ Go ahead as you say. Really, if you do, I’ll cage you up.

We have been urged by the prologue to see a kind, prudent, and comical version of Hegio, a man trying to reunite his family. Hegio is no fool, and when given the opportunity, he puts on a display of generosity. When that generosity is pushed, he comes back, though wittily, with recourse to his power.\(^{199}\) His mastery is willing to allow for some flexibility so long as his slaves stay within the boundaries. It is not a truly flexible mastery as the threat of the cage starkly reminds us. Slaves can play, but stray too far and there will quickly be physical punishments to rein in the slaves. Plautus can play with the fiction of the kindly, generous master, the master who acts that way knowing that there is always the very real threat of physical punishment lying behind his generosity.

\(^{199}\) Cf. Thalmann (1996), 122-3. “The play on the word ‘give’ (*do*) creates a parody of the reciprocity that is a key part of the competing, ‘benevolent’ view of slavery, whereby the relation is seen as an exchange of services. Here, instead, attempted escape will be reciprocated by the gift of a whipping or confinement.”
5.2.3 Stalagmus

Of all the characters in *Captivi*, Stalagmus is the least discussed, though he provides commentary on the generosity and kind mastery of Hegio, a commentary that is essential for fully appreciating Hegio’s treatment of Tyndarus and subsequent reunion. While Hegio can still maintain a sympathetic image when threatening his *lorarius* with physical punishment, the figure of Stalagmus puts greater pressure on the affectionate façade presented by Hegio. Despite the master’s efforts to play the benevolent master, Stalagmus refuses to allow the façade to stand.

**HEG.** Age tu illuc procede, bone vir, lepidum mancupium meum.  
**STAL.** Quid me oportet facere, ubi tu talis vir falsum autumas? fui ego bellus, lepidus: bonus vir numquam, neque frugi bonae, neque ero umquam, ne [erres]: spem ponas me bonae frugi fore. (954-7)

**HEG.** Come on. Get over here, kind sir, my charming possession. **STAL.** What should I do, when you, a man of your type, tell a lie? I was handsome, charming. A good man never, nor one good for anything, nor will I ever be so you don’t go making a mistake about it, putting hope in me being good for anything down the road.

Even as he presents a certain kindly master, Hegio betrays the foundation of his mastery, not loyalty to a kind master, but the power of possession. While Hegio attempts to mold his possession back into proper shape, Stalagmus finds space to resist, and in so doing, he finds space to comment on Hegio as a master. Kind words are poorly aimed at a slave who will not respond to the socially affable version of Hegio’s mastery. From his position as the disobedient slave, Stalagmus is able to reveal that other side of Hegio’s mastery, hinted at in the term *mancupium*. He knows who he is, and he demands that

---

200 Even Fraenkel’s extensive discussion of the Plautine corpus (Fraenkel (2007)) passes over the initial scene between Hegio and Stalagmus. Konstan (1983) discusses Stalagmus briefly drawing ties between him and Ballio in *Pseudolus*. 

204
Hegio recognize this. This recognition would also entail recognizing that the relationship between this slave and master is not the show of loyalty and affection that came to the stage in the Philocrates-and-Tyndarus show. Dragged back to the master he ran away from twenty years ago, Stalagmus cuts through the niceties, as he shows us that Hegio should perhaps be viewed as the master who gets results through his power over his slaves, not because they have fully internalized their slavery.

Hegio needs information from Stalagmus though, and in order to get it, he tries to tread that line between the kindly master and a master of physical torments. As he tries to cut a deal with his slave, Stalagmus resists the offer.

**HEG.** sed iam fieri dicta compendi volo.

**STAL.** Vt vis fiat. **HEG.** Bene morigerus fuit puer, nunc non decet. hoc agamus. iam animum advorte ac mihi quae dicam edissere. si eris verax, [ex] tuis rebus feceris meliusculas.

**STAL.** Nugae istaec sunt. non me censes scire quid dignus siem?

**HEG.** At ea subterfugere potis es paucia, si non omnia.

**STAL.** Pauca effugiam, scio; nam multa evenient, et merito meo, quia et fugi et tibi surripui filium et eum vendidi. (965-72)

**HEG.** But now I want you to put a sock in it. **STAL.** So be it as you wish. **HEG.** When you were a boy that compliance worked well, now it’s not befitting. Let’s take care of this. Now pay attention and explain to me what I am saying. If you’ll stay true, you will make your situation a little better than it is now. **STAL.** Horse-hockey! Do you think I don’t know what I got coming? **HEG.** But you can avoid a few of ’em if not all. **STAL.** A few I’m going to escape, I know. Truth is, many things will come out, and I deserve ‘em, because I both fled and stole your boy and sold him.

Hegio attempts to play it polite, while Stalagmus cuts through the niceties. Hegio’s offers are not for pardon, but for a lesser sentence. As much as he attempts to be generous, his generosity is always predicated on his ability to resort to physical coercion if he should deem it necessary. Through Stalagmus, we can see the uglier side to slavery that has put on a good face in the early stages of the play. There is a subversive element to the
Stalagmus-scene that is largely overlooked because of the play’s epilogue. Stalagmus recognizes his lot as a slave, but he also allows us to consider how genuine Hegio’s affable mastery really is.

5.2.4 Tyndarus

Considering these two versions of Hegio’s mastery, we are now in a strong position to think about how Hegio treats Tyndarus when he realizes that his two captives have deceived him. Once Philocrates and Tyndarus’ plot is out in the open, the kind master who lightened his captives’ chains flies into a rage. Tyndarus is taken aback by this sudden shift.

HEG. Adstringite isti sultis vehementer manus.
TYND. Tuos sum, tu has quidem vel praecidi iube.
sed quid negoti est, quam ob rem suscenses mihi?
HEG. Quia me meamque rem, quod in te uno fuit,
tuis scelestis falsidicis fallaciis
deartuasti dilaceravisti atque opes
confecisti omnes, res ac rationes meas:
ita mi exemisti Philocratem fallaciis. (667-74)

HEG. Tie up your man’s hands, please. TYND. I am yours. Or even order these to be cut off. But what’s the deal? Why are you pissed off at me? HEG. Because myself and my dealings, which rested on you alone, by your wicked, deceitful tricks you ripped ‘em apart, tore ‘em to shreds, and wiped out all my wealth, resources, and accounts. Thus you took Philocrates away from me by tricks.

Hegio finally realizes that what he saw earlier was not really what was happening. The slave he thought had always been a slave turned out to be freeborn, and the man he kept, thinking he was freeborn, has turned out to be a slave. While Tyndarus reacts in a way that acknowledges the situation as it really is, encouraging Hegio to inflict graver punishments if he feels so inclined as a master, Hegio misunderstands the situation. He

---

201 It is the affable version that makes Hegio a more sympathetic figure, which has weighed heavily on scholarly discussions of Captivi.
believed the fictional show of mastery that led him to release Philocrates, and now he wrongly believes that it was Tyndarus who was the principal instigator of the deception. When we look back at the scene, we see that it really is Philocrates, playing the slave, who does the majority of the deceiving. Tyndarus steps in to confirm the lies that Philocrates has planted in Hegio’s mind. Failing to see this, Hegio also fails to see that the kind façade he donned earlier is quickly slipping away.

As the crueler side to Hegio’s mastery comes to the fore, it is highlighted by Tyndarus’ responses, which reintroduce a dynamic between master and slave which is grounded in loyalty. While Hegio may choose to resort to physical punishment, Tyndarus reminds Hegio of the loyalty he has maintained toward his former master.

_{Dum ne ob male facta, peream, parvi aestumo. si ego hic peribo, ast ille ut dixit non re}dit, _at erit mi hoc factum mortuo memorabile, [me] meum erum captum ex servitute atque hostibus reducem fecisse liberum in patriam ad patrem, meumque potius me caput periculo praeoptavisse, quam is periret, ponere. (682-8)_{

Provided that it’s not on account of something badly done, let me die. I care very little. If I’ll die here and that one doesn’t return as he said he would, still this thing that I have done will be remembered though I may be dead, that I uncaptured my master from slavery and his enemies and brought him back to his fatherland to his father free, and that I opted to put my own life in danger rather than let him die.

Driven in part by the loyalty that can develop from a long-term relationship, even one between a master and a slave, Tyndarus embraces the opportunity to have acted at his own risk on behalf of his former master. Like other tricky slaves who slough off a beating since they have a back, Tyndarus has performed his deeds at considerable risk for his young master’s interests. In referring to Philocrates as his _erus_, he subtly makes the claim that he recognizes the power of Philocrates over his life, in turn dismissing Hegio from
the position of master. Hegio may own him, but he does not take his identity from this possession. He reacts to the interests of Philocrates, even if this means potential death so his master might once again regain freedom.

As a slave explicitly caught between the interests of two masters, Tyndarus is in a unique position to propose a flexible outlook to the world. Since the truth was blocking the way to helping Philocrates, he found an opportunity in lies. (705-6) This is not a moral dilemma as Tyndarus sees it. Reacting to Hegio’s claims that he has acted in the worst way, he forces Hegio to evaluate the situation not from a predetermined stance toward fidelity and loyalty, but from a careful consideration of the particular situation.

TYND. At ego aio recte, qui abs te sorsum sentio. nam cogitato, si quis hoc gnato tuo tuos servos faxit, qualem haberes gratiam? emitteresne necne eum servom manu? essetne apud te is servos acceptissimus? responde. HEG. Opinor. TYND. Cur ergo iratus mihi es? HEG. Opinor. TYND. But I say it was correctly done, since I differ with you. For think, if some slave of yours did this for your son, what kind of thanks would you give him? Would you free that slave or not? Would he be the most welcome at your home? Respond. HEG. I think so. TYND. Why are you angry with me then? HEG. Because you were more faithful to that one than to me.

Tyndarus has found a way to push Hegio’s understanding of what has happened. Change the players, and Tyndarus’ actions become fully justified, even commendable, as Hegio himself admits. While acknowledging that he would act differently in a different situation, Hegio comes down on his sticking point, fides. So long as he saw Tyndarus acting loyally, he was willing to lessen the oppression of slavery, putting on lighter chains and later removing them all together. Now that fides has been irrevocably
shattered, he no longer acts as the kind and gracious master. Instead, Hegio turns to
another idea upon which his mastery is grounded.

Fully determined to avenge his loss, Hegio prepares Tyndarus for a sentence to
the rock quarries, a punishment that particularly emphasizes the master’s power over the
physical existence of the slave. In doing so, Hegio displays a bit of that wit that has been
part of his character all along, though here it takes a particularly distasteful turn.

\[
\text{ducite,}
\]
\[
\text{ubi ponderosas crassas capiat compedes.}
\]
\[
\text{inde ibis porro in latomias lapidarias.}
\]
\[
\text{ibi quom alii octonos lapides effodiunt, nisi}
\]
\[
\text{cotidiano sesquiopus confeceris,}
\]
\[
\text{Sescentoplago nomen indetur tibi. (721-6)}
\]

Take him where he might receive some nice heavy, thick shackles. From there
you’ll go right to the stone quarries. There, when some dig eight blocks out a day,
unless you make that and a half every day, you’ll be nicknamed Sir-Whipped-A-
Lot.

The witty master, who was willing to let his lorarius be a wild bird if he should choose to
be so long as he could be there with a cage, has returned, though here the aggressiveness
that lay behind the earlier remark comes to the fore. We may have chuckled at Hegio
dealing with a potentially rascally slave at the beginning of the play, but here toward the
end of the play, clever language raises a horrible specter of the potential cruelty inherent
in mastery.\(^{202}\) Our perception of the wit has changed, following our impression of the
target of the master’s punishment. The exchange between Hegio and the lorarius

---

\(^{202}\) Cf. Gosling (1983), 56-57. “The purpose [of the violent treatment] is of course to enhance our
impression of the nobility of Tyndarus’ character by what he endures on behalf of his master, but a
secondary purpose is that of adding depth to the characterization of Hegio, who is led to this extreme by his
bitter disappointment at losing (as he thinks) all hope of ransoming his son.” The loss of hope dispels the
façade of the humane, affable, and kind Hegio. When he believes that playing this role is getting him
nowhere, he sheds it, revealing the master who gets results through physical torture. Even more than
showing the nobility of Tyndarus, this scene helps to fully reveal the hints at this type of Hegio that have
been lurking behind scenes like that of the lorarius and Ergasilus.

209
maintains a playful attitude throughout, despite the threat of a cage because the lorarius presents his response as part of the comic exchange. Though the threat of violence lurks behind the master’s language, the playful dynamic takes over the scene. It is more difficult for us to focus on the comic potential in Sescentoplagus when Hegio threatens a slave who genuinely protests that he has acted properly and faithfully. We may still laugh. That laughter, though, is mingled deeply with an unsettling feeling. We know that this display of force is directed at a target that does not deserve this punishment, if we keep in mind that Tyndarus can always be seen as the freeborn son of Hegio.

The physical punishment that Hegio threatens is as ineffective here as it is elsewhere in the Plautine corpus when slaves display an indifference to the torments that await. Hegio’s mastery of physical coercion fails to redefine Tyndarus’ stance toward his own enslavement. As Tyndarus says,

Cur ego te invito me esse salvom postulem?
periculum vitae meae tuo stat periculo.
post mortem in morte nihil est quod metuam mali.
etsi pervivo usque ad summam aetatem, tamen
breve spatum est perferundi quae minitas mihi.
vale atque salve, etsi aliter ut dicam meres. (739-44)

Why should I demand that I be safe when you don’t want me to be? The risk to my life stands at the risk to your own. After death in death there is no trouble which I fear. Even if I keep on living right up to a ripe old age, nevertheless that is a brief span of time to endure the things which you are threatening me with. Farewell and good day, even if you deserve something different from what I am saying.

Even as he is taken off, Tyndarus finds the opportunity to restructure the event. He refuses to let Hegio’s punishment reshape his actions, performed for the benefit of Philocrates. Time in the mines will be unable to make him repent. This refusal to allow others to have the final, defining word is what marks the callous attitude to punishment,
which so many Plautine slaves have. Tyndarus has turned the danger of physical
punishment back on its inflictor, and he thus denies Hegio the satisfaction of actually
punishing a rebellious slave. He preserves his loyalty to Philocrates while removing from
Hegio’s mastery the power which has been leftover once \textit{fides} was removed from the
equation.

\textbf{5.3 Hegio’s Isolation}

In his despair, Hegio begins to turn increasingly inward, rejecting the social connections,
which have prompted the majority of his kind and affable activity. The potential
permanent loss of his son pushes him to appeal to a different role, no longer a sociable
member of society.

\begin{quote}
\textit{nunc certum est nulli posthac quicquam credere.}
\textit{satis sum semel deceptus. speravi miser}
ex servitute me examisse filium:
ea spes elapsa est. perdidi unum filium,
puerum quadrimum quem mihi servos surpuit,
neque eum servum umquam repperi neque filium;
maior potitus hostium est. quod hoc est scelus?
\textit{quasi in orbitatem liberos produxerim. (756-63)}
\end{quote}

Now I am determined, after this, to trust no one in anything. I have been deceived
once, and that is enough. Poor me, I hoped that I had rescued my son from
slavery. That hope has slipped away. I lost one son, a four year old boy whom a
slave snatched from me. Nor have I ever found this slave or my son. The older
one is in the hands of the enemy. What have I done wrong? It’s as if I bring
children into this world so I could be left childless.

Discovering that trust is lacking in his own household, Hegio turns away from society.
The sociable and affable master has failed to rescue his son, and thus, he changes how he
will play his role. Because he is unable to see himself outside the role of a deceived
master, he is unable to keep the hope that Philocrates could actually stay true to his word
to return with Philopolemus. He envisions himself as no longer a member of a
community, and there is the suggestion here that he begins to see himself bereft of a household, bringing children into the world only to have them taken away. This sentiment follows a turn from Hegio as *dominus*, concerned about the well-being and the functioning of the community of his household, to Hegio as *erus*, the master who defines himself not by the trust and loyalty of the household but by his power over his subordinates.

Bereft of his two sons and isolating himself from society, he dwells on what his neighbors will say in reaction to events.

> Quanto in pectore hanc rem meo magis voluto,
tanto mi aegritudo auctior est in animo.
ad illum modum sublitum os esse mi hodie!
neque id perspicere quivi.
quod cum scibitur, [tum] per urbem inridebor.
cum extemplo ad forum advenero, omnes loquentur:
'hic illest senex doctus, quoi verba data sunt.' (781-7)

The more I roll this matter around in my chest, the more the sadness in my mind is increased. The way they duped me today! And I couldn’t see it coming. When people catch wind about this, then I’ll be mocked throughout the city. As soon as I come to the forum, everyone will say, “This is that learned old man, who got fooled.”

Driven by shame, Hegio contemplates his image in the community. Herein rests the problem with the affable Hegio, a man who can put on all the social grace in the world when he sees the opportunity to benefit from it. Convinced that he has in fact been fooled by his untrustworthy slaves, he fails to trust the community to see him as anything more than the master who was tricked by his slaves. As Leach comments, “Thus Hegio shows himself as much an intellectual captive as his prisoners are physically. As a man deeply caught in the grip of past events and of his own fears and weaknesses, he is pathetically
cut off from the generous and provident man he had wished to be.” This is what is most important about the character of Hegio. There is a desire to be affable and generous, but he cannot fulfill that desire due to his inability to trust those he interacts with. Even when he believed that he would finally recover his son Philopolemus, he still felt the need to see if any of his other captives knew Philocrates. (458-9; 509-10) Though he never explains his motivation, we might suspect that he has done this in order to confirm the identity of the slave who he has partially trusted. There is a lingering suspicion that prevents Hegio from ever really being the sociable master he wants to be.

The generous master that lightened chains at the beginning of the play, the father that had been desperately spending his wealth in order to recover a son has given way to a misanthropic, introvert. This aspect of Hegio leaves an indelible mark on the conclusion to this comedy. So long as Hegio felt things were going as he wished, he was in a position to play the role of a witty and kind old man, but faced with adversity, he has begun to show another side, revealing a dark and disturbing potential for cruelty. This version of Hegio is important for the unusual conclusion to Captivi, a relatively somber reunion, especially given a father’s recovery of not one child but two, once thought lost forever. Before I turn to the reunion, let me first look at Ergasilus’ last hurrah, which acts as an important contrast in its comic exuberance to the subdued tones of the conclusion.

5.4 Ergasilus’ Comic Return

Throughout the play, Ergasilus appears as a source of comic exuberance, but this parasite has continually been denied the opportunity to play the festive role he prides himself on.

---

Ergasilus pegs the contradiction of his experience when he reappears about half way through the play, complaining about his inability to find a meal.

neque ieiuniosiorem neque magis ecfertum fame
vidi nec quo minus procedat quidquid facere occeperit,
ita venter gutturque resident esurialis ferias. (466-8)

I have seen no one either more hungry or more stuffed with famine or one for whom whatever he has begun to do makes less progress. Thus my belly and my gullet settle in for Hunger Days.

On a day that ought to be particularly marked for its hearty feasts, Ergasilus is unable to find something sufficient for his appetite. On a day marked with large communal gatherings, he has found only young men who prefer keeping to themselves rather than indulging this parasite’s trade, and finally on a day that should bring much rejoicing to Hegio’s household, he finds a man reluctant at first to give into the joyous outpouring this day deserves.

When Hegio leaves the stage angered by the recognition that he has been duped, Ergasilus emerges overflowing with comic energy because he knows that he has finally found that one thing he needs to get himself the meal he feels he has deserved all throughout. In alliterative tones (768-75) Ergasilus dispels the sour mood that has overtaken the play. Along with the reentrance of Ergasilus comes the reentrance of the joyous spirit that accompanies comedy. Finding himself on the verge of the meal that

---

204 We should keep in mind that the play would have been performed at a public festival (ludi Megalenses, ludi Apollinares, ludi Romani, or ludi plebeii). Dating of Plautine plays is notoriously difficult. Internal clues seem to suggest a date of approximately 189 BCE for Captivi. For detailed discussions on the dating of Captivi see Buck (1940) and Sedgwick (1949).

205 Cf. Viljoen (1963), 45. “It is clear that the poet uses Ergasilus mainly to provide diversion in the form of exuberant fun and frolic, and to remind the audience that after all they are watching a comedy, which becomes necessary in view of the unusually serious and almost tragic tone marking the play throughout.” Ergasilus also provides a useful contrast to the type of play Hegio’s character ushers in. By often pairing
will help him fulfill his role as parasite, he ushers in the transformative power of comedy, hamming up his *servus currens* routine, in which the stable world of Hegio’s isolation becomes transformed.

Facere certumst. proinde ita omnes itinera insistant sua, ne quis in hanc plateam negoti conferat quicquam sui. nam meus est ballista pugnus, cubitus catapultast mihi, umerus aries, tum genu quemque icero ad terram dabo, dentilegos omnes mortales faciam, quemque offendoro. (794-8)

I am determined to do it. So then let all keep to their paths so no one brings any of his business into this street. For my fist is a siege-gun, my forearm a catapult, my shoulder a battering ram, whomever I hit with my knee will bite the dust, I will make the whole mortal race a bunch of teeth collectors, whomever I run into.

Passersby will be vastly transformed by the one man war-engine known as Ergasilus. His excitement comes out of the joy of the reward he expects for helping another out. While Hegio left the stage embittered and distrustful of all those who live around him, Ergasilus bustles about determined to bring his good news to the man who will be helped most by it. Though he threatens violence to all those he comes across, the comic spirit has the power to overshadow the violence that lies beneath the comic language. He is on a mission of aid, not isolation, and as such, we are willing to enjoy the bubbling energy emerging from the frothing parasite.

As Ergasilus attempts to get Hegio to open up the pantry for a wondrous feast suitable to the good news that he holds in reserve, he is met with that dour old man who is determined to counter with an appeal to daily fare. Requests for pork and fish are met with offers of simple foods, and Ergasilus recognizes the need to continually modify his

the comic Ergasilus with dour Hegio, Plautus is able to comment all the more on the pretense of Hegio’s façade.
assault on the barred doors of Hegio’s generosity. His first strategy is to divert attention from himself. The feast is not for Ergasilus’ sake, though he may inadvertently benefit from it. When that fails, he turns to demanding dishes and a lamb for sacrifice. The interaction helps establish him in the comic spirit that the play has lacked at times.

**HEG.** Cui deorum? **ERG.** Mi hercle, nam ego nunc tibi sum summus Iuppiter, idem ego sum Salus, Fortuna, Lux, Laetitia, Gaudium. proin tu deum hunc saturitate facias tranquillum tibi. (863-5)

**HEG.** To which of the gods? **ERG.** To me, by golly. Truth is, for you I am Jupiter most high. Salvation, Fortune, Light, Happiness, and Joy all the same one, me! So then may you make this god at peace with you by stuffing him full.

While Hegio eyes the parasite with suspicion, Ergasilus allows himself to become a slew of divinities. What Fortune could not do, Ergasilus has managed to accomplish. Equipped with the knowledge that Philopolemus has returned, he knows that he can be everything Hegio needs in order to return to the version we saw in the opening of the

---

206 Cf. McCarthy (2000), 204 “This depiction of the parasite as powerless is much more damning than any charge of commercialism or self-interest could possibly be. Comic parasites, and in fact the whole world of scheming comic characters, freely admit to their roguish self-interest, even wearing it with pride as a mark of their distance from any moralizing perspective. But to show these characters as feeble bumbleras, whose much-vaunted wit cannot even put a dinner on the table – that is a truly stinging criticism.” Ergasilus provides an important contrast between the current situation, a time that has become in a twisted way more self-interested and shameless, and a previous time. The parasite had provided a scapegoat for covering over flaws and inconsistencies of character, but the men of Ergasilus’ current day make no distinctions, freely and openly displaying the same attitude whether acting politically in the court rooms or privately on the way to the prostitutes.

207 Cf. Frangoulidis (1996), 157. “The appearance of the parasite at this stage of the dramatic action may also be seen as the *deus ex machina* in Euripidean meolodrama and/or tragicomedy, given a New Comedy and then Plautine twist. Such a divine association, in turn, may explain why Ergasilus at 860-5 comically demands a sacrifice to his ‘godhead’ in pure and clean vessels before he proceeds to divulge to Hegio his good news, which equate with the noble intentions of the slave’s theatricalized trickery.” This approach is appealing in many ways, but we must ask why Ergasilus departs from the stage as soon as he does. Even if we count the brief scene of the pantry slave as part of Ergasilus’ last hurrah, there remains 100 lines of play in which Ergasilus plays no part. While prompting the necessary action to reunite Hegio’s family, Ergasilus’ function here is primarily to set off the expected mood for a comedy from the somber tones that Hegio draws around him. Stripped of his affability over the course of the play, Hegio continues in his suspicion practically to the end of the play.
play.\(^{208}\) In his generosity, Ergasilus offers Hegio the opportunity to embrace a joy that has departed for some time. He offers Hegio the chance to return to the days before Philopolemus was taken in war.

About 100 lines from the time Ergasilus emerged, exuding confidence that he could finally get his sought-after meal, he finally spills the information that he has hinted at.\(^{209}\) Hegio responds with skepticism as the parasite persists in his report. Unable to fully shake the old man from his distrust, Ergasilus must tell him to go investigate the truth of the report in person. Heading to the harbor for what should be a joyous reunion, Hegio promises the meal that has eluded the parasite the entire play. Ergasilus plunges into the pantry to enjoy the fulfillment of his role. He has provided the potential for social union, and in so doing, he has earned the opportunity to indulge in the preparation of a great feast. Our last picture of the eager parasite comes in the form of the report of a pantry slave, commenting on the voracious onslaught the parasite makes on the pantry. The frugality that has marked Hegio’s household, notably excepting the free spending on captives to rescue his son, is dispelled. The return of Philopolemus marks the return of feasting, hinted at throughout the play by Ergasilus. The departure of Philopolemus

\(^{208}\) Cf. Leach (1969), 291. “Although he is no more perceptive than the major characters, he is, as a stock character, more self-consciously aware of his foibles and better reconciled to his own motives. His description of men’s self-seeking shows instinctive recognition of a principle that others fear and strive to conceal, even from themselves. The vision of the world that Ergasilus articulates is as pertinent to Hegio and the captive as to himself, yet the atmosphere of benevolent good nature he longs for is better and kinder than the troubled world that his betters create.” In his transparency, Ergasilus illuminates the inconsistency in Hegio that leads to the unusually somber conclusion to this play. While Ergasilus makes no pretense of being anything other than he is, even going so far to complain when denied the opportunity to play his usual, generic role, Hegio is busy putting on a show at the opening of the play that he is not able to maintain.

\(^{209}\) It is not unusual for the parasite to demand a meal before divulging the information that warrants the meal. One might think of Curculio’s entrance in the play that bears his name. *Curculio*, 308-26.
plunged Hegio’s household into a bitterly basic level of existence, but his return ought to bring about the old days that Ergasilus reminds us of.

5.5 A Somber Reunion

With the departure of Ergasilus comes a departure of rollicking comedy. As Leach puts it, “[Ergasilus’] very absence points to the fact that the homecoming of Philopolemus has been turned from a potentially joyous to a solemn occasion. Once the stock character has been accommodated, the others face the consequences of their actions in a painful recognition scene that improves their practical circumstances, yet makes the dangers and losses of their blind errors uncomfortably clear.”210 In the end, the good, noble, freeborn characters do become better, but not in a cheerful, pleasant, festive way. The raucous fun that ends so many plays, echoed here by Ergasilus ransacking the pantry, has been replaced with the solemn reunion of family, including freeing a son from shackles. The main characters have suffered in gaining unforeseen perspective on their lots, recognizing the consequences of playing the roles that they have opted to play.

The closing scenes of Captivi take on the mode of a series of negotiations, piecing together what is owed to the various players involved. Having fulfilled his promise to Hegio that he would bring back Philopolemus, Philocrates is put in a position to make a request from Hegio.

Postulo abs te, ut mi illum reddas servom, quem hic reliqueram pignus pro me, qui mihi melior quam sibi semper fuit, pro bene factis eius ut ei pretium possim reddere. (938-40)

I request from you that you return that slave to me whom I had left here as a security for me, who was always better to me than to himself, so I might be able to give him the reward for his good deeds.

---

210 Leach (1969), 292.
Captivi does not raise the direct question of whether Hegio was justified in punishing Tyndarus as he has.\textsuperscript{211} The free return of Tyndarus seems to offset the punishment in Philocrates’ mind, and whether this is enough or not is quickly skirted. The issue that comes to the fore is how Hegio will react once he sees that Philocrates has upheld his end of the bargain. Now that Hegio has rediscovered the fides he thought was lacking in his captives, he is willing to reconsider his actions. He feels the need to make amends so that he can maintain faith with Philocrates, not because Philocrates inherently deserves it, but because the former captive has maintained faith with him. Under these circumstances, he promises to return Tyndarus in order to save face with Philocrates, even tossing Tyndarus in for free in compensation for sentencing him to the rock quarry. If he feels remorse for punishing Tyndarus, it is because he had broken faith before Philocrates had.

Later on, when Hegio discovers that Tyndarus is his long lost son, his reaction comes as a surprise. Hegio, who has sentenced his own son to severe physical torment, bemoans his own lot.

\begin{quote}
Et miser sum et fortunatus, si [vos] vera dicitis; eo miser sum quia male illi feci, si gnatust meus. eheu, quom ego plus minusve feci quam [me] aequom fuit. quod male feci crucior; modo si infectum fieri possiet. (993-96)
\end{quote}

I am both wretched and fortunate if you speak the truth. I am wretched because I treated him badly, if he is my son. Oh oh, when I have done more or less than was right for me to do. I am tormented because I have treated him badly. If only it were possible for this to become undone.

\textsuperscript{211} Cf. Konstan (1976), 85. “Whether Tyndarus’ loyalty to Philocrates was right is immaterial, since Hegio does not absolve him; he simply foregoes the punishment as an expression of his gratitude to Philocrates.” No one in the play questions Hegio’s treatment of Tyndarus because the question is overshadowed by his reaction to the faithfulness of Philocrates in keeping the promise.
Hegio fluctuates in accepting the news about Tyndarus, remorseful if the story proves true that Tyndarus is his son, but yet determined that he has acted more rightly if it does not prove true. Only at the end does Hegio even briefly accept that he may have acted improperly, but this is because of what he has done to his son, not what he has done to a man of Tyndarus’ character. Here at the end of the play, Hegio speaks the most self-damning lines, revealing the degree to which his kindness and generosity are conditioned by the perceived loyalty of others. Given the treatment of Stalagus, Hegio does not repent his form of mastery, only that his form of mastery has fallen upon his son. He never second guesses his reaction to being deceived. The revelation of Tyndarus’ identity makes him regret that the action had been taken, not that the action was necessarily wrong.\footnote{Cf. Konstan (1976), 85. “Only in this phrase, when he has just surmised the true identity of Tyndarus, does Hegio appear to concede that Tyndarus did not deserve the punishment he received … The fact that his deceiver is revealed as his own son has opened Hegio’s eyes to the worth of both his conduct and his character … Hegio’s sorrow remains, after all, a response not to what he has done to a good and loyal man as such, but to a son.”}

This brings us to the actual reunion of father and son, an event twenty years in the making. What ought to be a joyous and celebratory event is met with suspicion and doubt.

**HEG.** Salve, exoptate gnatem mi. **TYND.** Hem, quid gnatem mi? 
attat, scio cur te patrem adsimules esse et me filium:
quia mi item ut parentes lucis das tuendi copiam. (1006-8)

**HEG.** Hello, my unexpected son. **TYND.** Oh, what’s this “my son”? Oh oh oh, I know why you are pretending that you are my father and I your son. It’s because you are giving me the chance to look on the daylight, like parents do.

Where we might expect a feast-filled reunion, we see a wary slave. Tyndarus cannot at first accept that Hegio is being sincere. Perhaps this is all another ploy, Hegio showing
some generosity in the hopes of getting something. Hegio’s doubled nature has infected the play to such a degree that even his lost son, on the verge of attaining the freedom he earlier made Philocrates promise, is unable to rejoice. Tyndarus comes to accept his freeborn status with the aid of Philocrates confirming the story. Urged by the master who he feels personal affection and loyalty towards, Tyndarus is able to remember a hazy memory of his past in which he was freeborn.

Tyndarus will be granted his freedom as the cast head inside, but here right before the famous epilogue, something important happens. At the urging of Philocrates, Hegio prepares to remove the shackles from his son and transfer them over to Stalagmus. The final line spoken by the cast is given to Stalagmus, who responds tongue-in-cheek to the presentation of the shackles.

Quo peculi nihil est, recte feceris. (1028)

For a man whom there is nothing he can call his own, you have done rightly.

The play ends on a note of the power of the masters and the indifference of the slave. At the urging of the kind master, whose slave has been frequently referred to as acting out of a deep sense of loyalty, the master who has shown his crueler side opts to reshackle Stalagmus. As the play comes to a close, we are reminded of the tenuous place of the slave in a master’s world, no matter the type of master.

5.6 Epilogue

This brings us to the often remarked upon words of the epilogue. Distancing Captivi from the common elements of lower plays, the epilogue speaker informs us,

huius modi paucas poetae reperiunt comoedias,
ubi boni meliores fiunt. nunc vos, si vobis placet
et si placuimus neque odio fuimus, signum hoc mittite:
qui pudicitiae esse volitis praemium, plausum date. (1033-36)

Poets have found few comedies of this sort, where the good become better. Now, if it pleases you and if we have caused pleasure and not hate, send us this sign. You who want there to be a reward for virtue, applaud.

As Leach remarks, “When we hear in the epilogue that good men become better, we can only wish that they had been able to be better still.”213 But we still need to ask in what way they in fact become better at all. We should keep in mind that all that faithful service that Tyndarus performed was done so under one of two hopes. Either Tyndarus hoped that he would be transferred from Hegio to Philocrates, remaining a slave to a well-known master, which presumably was the plan that Philocrates and Tyndarus entered into at the beginning of the play, or he expected Philocrates to abide by his request that he would be freed for playing his role.214 At the end of the play, Tyndarus has been freed, but not really because of his faithful service to his master. For that, he received the gift of hard labor in the mines. He finds himself free because of the conditions of his birth, and here this is the case because he is found in servitude to his own father.

We might also consider the situation with Stalagmus as well. Given Hegio’s reaction to being deceived by his captives, we might begin to think about Stalagmus’

213 Leach (1969), 296.
214 Cf. Thalmann (1996), 112 “Why do we take it for granted that it is right, and praiseworthy for Tyndarus to sacrifice his own and Hegio’s interests to those of his original master? We may be rejecting the brutal logic of slavery, according to which the slave owes obedience to whoever holds power over him at the moment and only domination matters, not feelings … And in that case is not this appeal to a universal humanity an insidious disguise, making a relation of domination more palatable by representing it as voluntary and reciprocal exchange of services?” It is important from early on in the play that we recognize the nature of Tyndarus’ service to his master. Even though characters, including Tyndarus, comment on the immense faith and loyalty he has shown over the years, much of this is done to get characters like Hegio to react in a certain, kindly way. Much of what motivates Tyndarus to act is his own personal interest, knowing that he has the opportunity to improve his own lot by playing along with Philocrates’ scheme. In so far as he puts himself at risk for his master, there still remains something beyond his master that he is risking himself for.
motives twenty years before this play takes place. Stalagmus served the same master who so quickly resorts to an extremely vicious physical punishment, even when he is compelled to admit that he would admire the same actions if they were directed at freeing his son. Under these circumstances, the disloyal slave stole the young Tyndarus, making his escape for the free life. He reacts gruffly to the angered questioning of a master who cannot instill in his slaves a deep sense of loyalty, despite seeming to want to at times. Hegio’s mastery comes through the blunt tool of physical threats rather than the tool of deep commitment to one’s master.

Plautus may very well have written Stalagmus’ final line more tongue-in-cheek than is typically granted. The punishment at the end of the play, as the surly slave commends his captors for finally giving him something he can call his own, leaves an indelible comment on the nature of mastery and slavery. The kind master Philocrates, whose relationship to his slave has appeared before us in a fictional and idealized form, is the first to suggest that Stalagmus receive Tyndarus’ shackles. The mastery of affection that Philocrates may have come to represent in the early portions of the play reveals itself to be capable of the physical threats Hegio’s mastery has displayed most clearly. If we applaud the virtue of Tyndarus’ efforts to help his master, we are forced to commend the choice of Philocrates and Hegio to impose their power over Stalagmus so clearly.

215 Cf. Segal (1991), 566 “Still, the play concludes two line[s] later without jubilation, or any sort of komos. All merely go into Hegio’s house, without the slightest mention of the traditional concluding feast. One can only believe – on the basis of no textual evidence – that a few lines have somehow been lost. We might also argue e silentio that there was a musical finale (cf. Stich. 758 ff). That would have helped matters.” Why argue for a typical ending to this play? Part of the power of the play and the epilogue is that things have not turned out in the typically exuberant fashion of comedies. There is no need to explain a lack of exuberance at the end of a play that has so often focused on the disconcerting potential of a master’s power.
CHAPTER 6

AN END TO YOUR ROLE?:

A CONCLUSION

Reflecting on the process of bringing a play into existence, Australian playwright David Williamson said in 1978,

A playwright, however, operates on the assumption that the first point of contact between his work and its public will be in a theatre, where it will be interpreted by actors and a director to an audience. A playscript should thus be seen as a blueprint for stage production rather than as a finished literary product … Some interpretations may be less effective and coherent than others, but it should be remembered as you read a playscript that good plays can be interpreted, with equal validity, in more than one way. There is no one definite and ultimate production of a given play towards which all other productions must aspire. … It is not just the actors and director who add a dimension to the playscript. An audience contributes too.216

Though the playwright, the director, the cast, and various technical members of a production attempt to guide their audience to a particular understanding of what is at stake in any given production, there will always remain the reactions of the audience as an important element to theatrical action. In this admission, Williamson leaves open the possibility that there is always more to a play than any one production can offer. There remains more to ponder, more to react to, and more ways to play the characters who have taken the stage. Given this understanding of the theater, it is not all that surprising that

Williamson recently turned toward Plautus for inspiration, borrowing heavily from *Miles Gloriosus* in his 2004 play *Flatfoot*.

Plautus, returned to life, complains that time has not treated his memory well, boasting of his contributions to comedy as we know it today. As he says,

> I could read Greek, so I grabbed all the Greek comedies that had good roles for me and did very, very free translations. So free that in fact they became new plays. I wrote forty-seven, eleven more than Shakespeare, and twenty survived. Shakespeare, by the way, lifted two of mine. Holus-bolus. Next time you see *Comedy of Errors*, it’s Titus Maccius Plautus you’re seeing, not William S. And he wasn’t the only one. Ben Jonson, Molière and Racine helped themselves, and the sixties Broadway hit, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, took three of my plots, jammed ‘em together and everyone made millions.\(^{217}\)

Fed up with obscurity, Plautus returns to the stage in attempt to reestablish his position in the history of comedy. *Flatfoot* shows Plautus’ attempts to get his latest production staged. Negotiating with the rising politician Crassus Dives, Plautus must justify his plots, assuring his benefactor that his work will not undermine too severely the foundations of the Roman state. In incorporating *Miles Gloriosus*, Williamson has focused on Palaestrio’s scheming as a way to emphasize the faulty character of the soldier Pyrgopolynices.\(^{218}\) Cutting back on much of Palaestrio’s repetitious plotting and instructions to fellow conspirators, Williamson presents *Miles Gloriosus* as a veiled criticism of military figures in Plautus’ own day, particularly here a general named

\(^{217}\) Williamson (2004), 2.

\(^{218}\) Williamson makes no attempt to disguise his wholesale borrowing from Plautus. “It should have been billed as it is here (in the inside title page): ‘Flatfoot, by David Williamson, incorporating the comedy *The Swaggering Soldier* by Titus Maccius Plautus’. The audience should realize they’re not seeing me, they’re seeing Plautus. I’ve asked very strongly that it be marketed as a Plautus play as well. I objected to the advertising in Sydney, but apparently it’s too late to reprint the programs.” As quoted in Webb (2004).
Lucillius. The Greek element works to veil the criticism, just as, as Manuwald suggests, Williamson’s use of a Roman play is doing for his jabs at modern military forces.219

The strength of adaptation is its ability to expose elements that lurk in the original, offering up the possibility that the original had more to say than it originally let on. This is a process well suited to comedy, particularly a view of comedy that refuses to let the world fully settle into finalized forms. Though Plautus focused on Palaestrio’s ability to deceive, Williamson’s version of The Swaggering Soldier turns its eye toward the soldier. Williamson moves the prologue to the beginning of the play to reorient the audience toward disliking the soldier rather than reveling in the wit and cleverness of the trickster slave. As Plautus says to Crassus,

Brilliant set-up. We hate the General already, his girlfriend’s getting dicked, and my character [the slave] is about to swing.220

Criticism of the Roman military machine takes over. The Sceledrus section of the play was important to show what kind of household the soldier runs, further humiliating him because his girlfriend is slipping off to be with another man. Once Sceledrus is out of the picture, Plautus is ready to give the soldier his comeuppance. Trickery is not privileged, but the shaming of the soldier. From Plautus’ Palaestrio who offered up the importance of seeing the world differently than you see it, Williamson turns to a plot that is concerned with destabilizing authority.

In selling his play, Williamson’s Plautus is compelled to convince the noble politician Crassus Dives to go along with it. Crassus, who is financially committed to the

219 Manuwald (2008), 5.
220 Williamson (2004), 16.
production, expresses his concern about the message Plautus is sending to the audience.

His concerns are countered by Plautus’ wife Cleo.

CRASSUS: What’s the message the play’s sending to all those slaves? Lie and cheat your master and you’ll get your freedom. Cato would shut down the theatre.
CLEO indicates not.
CLEO: He’ll realise that Roman authority’s not really threatened because one smart slave gets away from one vile master.
CRASSUS: A trickle can become a flood.
CLEO: [grasping his hand] Noble Crassus. Roman authority is never going to be challenged while men like you are its leaders. And if this play is a huge success your election to high office is practically assured, isn’t it?
CRASSUS: It certainly won’t hurt.
CLEO: I know my stubborn husband only too well. The play will never be finished unless the slave goes free.
CRASSUS is still worried.
If you’re elected Consul, think of the prestige and wealth you’ll amass.
CRASSUS: I’m seeking high office for the good of Rome.
CLEO intensifies the stroking of his arm.
CLEO: Of course. And when you’re Consul, you’ll be able to do something for me that would make me very, very grateful.
CRASSUS: Anything. 221

Paralleling the work of Palaestrio in playing to the vainglorious Pyrgopolynices, Cleo plays to Crassus’ ego. Here in a play that is very interested in the duplicitous role heads of state play, Williamson toys with the tension between Crassus’ role as a public figure who must look to the welfare of the state and his role as a man who is being wheedled by the enticements of a lovely woman. Concern for the public welfare can become conflated with personal interest when helping a constituent because, of course, the constituent is part of the public Crassus needs to look out for.

With the help of his wife, Plautus finishes his play. Though he fails to convince Crassus to produce it as he wishes (with his wife playing the female roles and the wall of the house coming off so we can see the soldier punished inside), he admits that he is a

221 Williamson (2004), 42.
writer and thus would prefer a less than perfect production to no production. He describes the reactions of his audience, adding in a reminder of the relationship between theater and its contemporary political scene.

The play was still a huge hit, my biggest, and the slaves down the front actually got up and cheered when my character made it to freedom. And they laughed so hard at the conceited General that you'd've thought no Roman soldier would ever be able to hold his head up again. The best comedy, inoffensive as it might appear, is always, always, a weapon of attack. But anyone who thinks theatre can totally change society take note. The Roman Empire lasted another six hundred years, and the Roman Soldier went on to slaughter millions more. But on that day when the play was performed it made so many people feel better about their lives. At least for a while. I hope it still did that for you.\textsuperscript{222}

In reworking Plautus into his play, Williamson has attempted to find a social utility for Plautine comedy. In the end, Williamson’s version of Plautus is as an entertaining social critic, who could not wholly change the Roman military mindset as it sat on the edge of massive expansion across the Mediterranean. Williamson has hinted upon something that is important about Plautine comedy here. It has the ability to make us feel better about our lives, and we should ask what in particular about Plautine comedy does this.

It has been the work of this dissertation to open a discussion of Plautus that focuses our attention on Plautus’ interest in the roles we play in the world outside of the theater. Recent scholarship on Plautus often inscribes Plautus’ work in the theater. Farcical theater can come as a shock to modern readers who have developed an austere view of the Romans. Metatheater, as a way to understand how to be at an advantage within a play by knowing how theater works, allows us to maintain this composed, serious, and thoughtful picture of these Romans. We can take figures like Cato the Censor, Plautus’ contemporary, at face value as he decries the decay of Roman \textit{mores} due

\textsuperscript{222} Williamson (2004), 49.
to Greek influences. We can believe that Cicero really was triumphing the *mos maiorum*, while overlooking his position as a *novus homo* in Roman politics. What is at stake in Plautus is exactly the need to not do this. We need to remember that Cato really was not as firmly anti-Greek as he presented himself at times.\(^{223}\) We need to remember that Cicero brought Greek philosophy into a Roman context.\(^ {224}\) We need to remember that the Romans were actively playing their different roles at different times. Nor does this value go away as time progresses. Whether we are Athenians attending a festival or Romans conducting business in the forum, whether we are statesmen politicking for social reform or friends pleading for a chance to go someplace new for dinner, we are at all times playing a multitude of roles which will never fully coincide with one another or our identity.

The plays that have been examined in the preceding chapters have sought to tease out those moments when a character’s role fails to provide the necessary tools for the character to negotiate his world. I would urge readers of Plautus to think more seriously about those moments when Plautine characters express doubt about how to play their part in these comedies. These doubts are not a failure of characters, but an acknowledgment that one role is actually insufficient for people to operate successfully in the world. Our vitality as people stems from our ability to be more than an easily circumscribed stock character, operating as our type would have us act. Though we may appeal to various roles, we have been asked by Plautus to remember that we precede the roles, that we are not bound to them, but rather that they are bound to us.

\(^{223}\) I am indebted to Batstone’s observations on Cato in Batstone (2006).

\(^{224}\) Like Plautus, Cicero translates Greek ideas into Latin. In the *De Officiis*, Cicero explicitly deals with the issue of roles when he talks about the work of Panaetius.
My discussion began appropriately with Pseudolus in the play of his own name. Set up to play the role of the *servus callidus*, much like the eponymous Epidicus, Pseudolus has managed to foil our expectations. By the time Pseudolus took his place on the Roman stage, Roman audiences had been watching Plautine slaves dupe their free counterparts for approximately 15 years.\(^{225}\) When comic traditions became established, they too became the object of comedy, and thus, it became possible for Plautus to undermine the role he was most recognized for. Pseudolus allows us to rethink the role of the *servus callidus*, removing trickery and the inversion of power as the key characteristics for this role. If Plautine slaves are simply interested in getting the best of their masters, doing to them what the masters usually would do to the slaves, then the Plautine *servus callidus* has found no freedom. As such, he is a slave to trickery, compelled to play the same role play in and play out. In emphasizing the importance of self-transformation, Pseudolus has enabled us to see slave-trickery beyond its immediate goals. Committed to helping his young master, Pseudolus is not committed to accomplishing his tricks himself. He is willing to let Simia take a shot at the role, knowing that his success will come from how he reacts to whatever the result of Simia’s trickery is. Even if Simia should fail, Pseudolus, as the consummate improviser, ought to be willing to reassess his situation, and proceed yet again toward uniting his young master with the lovely Phoenicium. When Simia succeeds, Pseudolus is glad to enjoy the outcome.

\(^{225}\) Plautine dating is notoriously difficult. We can know for certain from didascilic notice that *Pseudolus* was performed in 191 BCE. It is likely that Plautus began his career sometime in the late 200s BCE.
The discussion then turned to a consideration of the Menaechmus brothers, taking contrasting approaches to their role in Epidamnus. While Menaechmus E frantically attempts to establish his role in Epidamnus, Menaechmus S has found the opportunity to play a different role than he is accustomed to. Compelled to be Menaechmus from the day his grandfather changed his name from Sosicles, Menaechmus S has spent a lifetime playing the part of someone other than who he knows himself to be. Now in Epidamnus, he is once again asked to be someone other than who he is. By releasing control of his identity to others, he has found room to disturb the control the Epidamnians believe they have on their society. While he knows that he is not who they think, he is able to make the Epidamnians something other than they think they are. Erotium is convinced that she will profit from entertaining Menaechmus, but she does not realize that she has taken in a stranger who is uncommitted to the relationship she believes exists. When the brothers finally reunite, Menaechmus S has the opportunity to become Sosicles again, and thus start a life that was previously shut off from him. Menaechmus E is presented with the opportunity to jettison an economical life which asked everybody to play a particular part in the market mechanism of Epidamnus. He will go to Syracuse, and there, he will start his life anew with the brother who, as a twin, reminds him that he will never be fully in control of his image. Though they may look alike and have the chance to play similar parts, presumably as merchants among others, the Menaechmus brothers are in a position to recognize the disconnect between how each one individually plays his part.

The feeling of the incongruity between how roles get played took center stage in Mercator. Charinus develops a firm idea of the role his father plays in his life, that stern and industrious merchant who is at his wit’s end with a profligate son. Committed to
seeing his father playing this role, he cannot understand the other concerns that tug on his father. Instead of as a lover or supportive father, he can only see his father playing the part of the blocking character who is there to foil any attempt at love, particularly the recent arrival of Pasicompsa. Constructing an all-seeing version of his father, he feels he cannot play his part without being caught by the disapproving gaze of his father. On the other hand, Demipho finds himself caught between a desire to play two roles which he cannot reconcile. Smitten at the sight of Pasicompsa, he attempts to find a way to play the lover while not betraying his position as a responsible father. Covering his tracks as a lover, he presents his interests in Pasicompsa as those of a shrewd merchant, thus confirming the role his son believed he would play. Responding to his father’s business proposal, Charinus attempts to cover his own love interest in the guise of a good merchant, thus inadvertently leading his father to believe that he has successfully turned his son away from playing a financially draining lover. In turn, Demipho believes that he has raised his son as a proper merchant, which allows him to never see that his son is also interested in playing the part of Pasicompsa’s lover. With the help of Eutychus, who explicitly states his interest in patching up rifts on three levels (as friend, comrade, and neighbor), the misunderstanding between father and son comes to light. Positioned outside of the internal interests of Demipho and Charinus, Eutychus is able to see that both are trying to play the role of lover. While Demipho sees his son as a recently converted merchant and Charinus sees his father as the perennial, hard-working businessman, Eutychus is able to bring about a resolution by informing Demipho about Charinus’ real interests in Pasicompsa. Lacking his friend’s commitment to be the merchant son, Eutychus can tell Demipho who Pasicompsa really is, and with the
revelation of this role for Charinus, Demipho is willing to relinquish his desire to be with Pasicompsa. He settles back into his role as father and merchant, gladly letting his son be the lover who has pursued his desire in savvy business fashion.

Finally, the discussion turned to *Captivi* to look particularly at the way Hegio plays his role as master. Presented with a pair of captives who demonstrate a master-slave relationship that appears to operate on a deep sense of loyalty, Hegio finds it to his advantage to play the role of the affable and kind master. He lightens the chains on his captives so they can walk about. He, of course, will need their cooperation if he is to regain the son he lost in war. Working with freshly acquired captives, he cannot rely on the faithful support of slaves who have demonstrated their loyalty in the past. Reflecting the kind mastery he sees Tyndarus presenting, Hegio hopes he can elicit the kind of activity he is led to believe the slave used to perform for his former master. Full of hope at the prospect of recovering his son, he willingly sends Philocrates back to Elis, but he cannot ultimately trust that things will turn out as he hopes. In order to put his anxieties at ease, he searches for another captive to confirm the identity of Tyndarus-Philocrates. When the captive betrays Tyndarus as the slave who has duped Hegio into letting his master go back to Elis, Hegio turns away from society. Believing that it is unlikely that his former captive would stay true to his promise to return with Hegio’s son, Hegio shows Tyndarus that he can also play his role as master in another way. Angry at a slave who has been more faithful to a master than himself, he sends Tyndarus to the mines, promising a lifelong punishment as the reward for his loyalty to another. Even when Tyndarus is freed from the mines, there remains a potentially haunting tone concerning the relationship between the master and the slave. Philocrates, who thus far has appeared
as a kind master whose slaves act as they do out of loyalty, suggests that the chains be transferred from Tyndarus to the fugitive Stalagmus. As an audience, we are put in the position to contemplate that the kind master is in many ways a role that is donned by masters to promote certain activities from their slaves, but even the kind masters always have recourse to physical coercion.

Shying away from an understanding of Plautus that emphasizes control as the ultimate aim of Plautine characters, whether free or slaves, this dissertation has avoided a discussion that focuses on overtly theatrical awareness by characters as a way to gain the upper hand within the genre. Given comedy’s tendency to undermine the fullness and perfection of abstractions, which can include the comic genre, it seems unlikely that what is at stake is a mastery of the genre. Once a comic model has been established, it is just as likely to be undermined as any other institution in society. To take a modern example, in the final season of *M*A*S*H*, when the trickery of “Hawkeye” Pierce and BJ Hunnicut had long been established, the writers developed a plotline which reminded viewers that even the tricksters are not immune to their own trickery.226 In an episode entitled “The Moon is Not Blue”, Pierce and Hunnicut contrive to get a copy of a notorious film *The Moon is Blue*, banned in Boston for explicit material, sent to the 4077th in an attempt to get a new film for the camp, thus releasing it from the unending grasp of *Sahara*. Through a series of wheeling and dealing, they convince Bannister, an underling of Major Frankenheimer who is responsible for the distribution of movies to army personnel throughout Korea, to slip the racy film past his superior officer in place of *State Fair*, a

---

226 There are several moments throughout the series’ eleven-season run that could be used, but this episode seems to illustrate the point particularly well.
tame musical by Rodgers and Hammerstein. Bannister switches the labels on the films. As the members of the 4077th settle in for a welcome change of pace, and Pierce and Hunnicut anxiously await the reward for their efforts, Colonel Potter announces that through the efforts of a two-star general, recently patched up by the doctors of the 4077th, they will not be seeing State Fair but rather The Moon is Blue. As the opening credits kick in, Pierce and Hunnicut can be seen slinking into their seats when they realize that their efforts have ensured that the 4077th will be seeing State Fair that evening. In an added twist in the final scene before the closing credits, the members of the 4077th are watching the long anticipated The Moon is Blue, only to discover that the racy film they were hoping for is in fact quite tame, though one of the actors, as Father Mulcahy points out, did say the word “virgin”. Though they are experts at the ins and outs of getting what one wants in the Army, even the most masterful tricksters are thwarted at times. We are reminded that even the most perfect performance of a role may not be enough. There is always the possibility, as comedy so often insists, that things may turn out differently.

Instead of taking an approach to Plautus that would look at how well or poorly characters play a particular role, this dissertation has sought to explore those moments when Plautus reminds us that one particular role may not be sufficient. In the preceding chapters, I have focused on how characters react to those moments when they realize that their current role is not enough, whether it be the slave Pseudolus or the freeborn Menaechmus S. Plautus does not privilege roles, but characters’ relationships to their roles. When characters cling firmly to the idea that they really are the role they see themselves playing, they find themselves cut off from their goals, much as Charinus does when he is unable to tell his father who he really is or as Hegio does when he is
convinced he really is playing the role of the duped. When characters approach their roles as one strategy to be put into play, then they are able to adapt to the events that unfold. In taking such an approach to Plautus, I hope that I have helped further open a discussion of Plautus that looks at what Plautus has to say to both ancient Roman audiences and modern audiences for whom Plautus’ comedies are still meaningful. Living in an era that would soon require Romans to critically examine their own understanding of who they were, Plautus offered up a message to the masses, noble and common alike, who thronged to his shows. The minute that you believe you really are who you think you are, along will come someone who knows that you are both more and less than that. Herein lies the potential of Plautine comedy, acting as a reminder of the vitality of human life that is never complete or finalized, even long after death, as over two thousand years of reacting to Plautus’ plays suggest.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


----- “*Meam Quom Formam Noscito*: Language and Characterization in the *Menaechmi*.” *Arethusa* 2: 30-45.


