V PLAUTUS

Life and times

If Plautus had a real name, it seems never to have been known or inquired after. 'Titus Maccius Plautus' means something like 'Willy McBozo Greasepaint', and the disquieting proliferation of variants in the manuscripts is the equivalent of indecision over whether 'McBozo' should be spelled with a 'Mac-' and a small B. *Plautus* is a variant form of *planipes* ('flatfoot'), attested as a nickname for performers in the barefoot Latin mime; *Maccius* means 'son of Maccus', the buffoonish hero of the Oscan *fabula Atellana*; while even the innocuous-looking praenomen Titus was used as a pet name for the male organ of business.[87] The strong theatrical connections are nevertheless suggestive in the light of the ancient biographical tradition on Plautus, which is a shaky-looking edifice, but on one striking central point, there seems never to have been any doubt in antiquity: unlike other early Roman dramatists, Plautus came to the writing of plays not as a poet but as a professional man of the theatre. In contrast to his contemporaries Naevius and Ennius, he specialized in a single dramatic genre, and it may be his indifference to epic and tragedy in particular that kept him out of the aristocratic patronage and politics in which the careers of others were enmeshed.

Cicero gives the date of Plautus' death as 184, though this is likely to be simply the last year for which a new production could be documented. (The birth-date of 254 still occasionally glimpsed in modern biographies has no authority, ancient or otherwise.) Only two plays are transmitted with dates: *Stichus* from the Plebeian Games of 200, and *Pseudolus* from the historic Megalensia of 191, when the temple of the Magna Mater was dedicated. Assembling the other nineteen plays into a chronological sequence is largely an exercise in self-amusement,[88] though we have Cicero's testimony (*De Senectute* 50) that *Truculentus* was a late work; *Bacchides* seems to date itself to the

[87] Gratwick 1973.

[88] See Gruen 1993: 125 n. 2, and Leigh 2004: 21 f. for a case study in the contradictions of apparent topicality. The most confident attempts, still useful for the arguments they collect, are Buck 1940; Sedgwick 1949; de Lorenzi 1952; and Schutter 1952 See Woytek 2001 for a recent attempt.

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mid-eighties by an apparent reference to the *senatusconsultum de bacchanalibus* of 186, the decree restricting Bacchic rites at Rome, and its hero refers to *Epidicus* as an earlier work that was nevertheless recent enough for its audience to remember; *Casina* also seems to be late. These more-or-less fixed points fit with the long-held belief that the proportion of lyric song increased over the course of Plautus' career; *Casina* has the most, while *Miles Gloriosus* uniquely has none at all, and an early date for that play would synchronize with an ancient tradition that identifies the unnamed 'barbarian poet' of line 211 as Naevius. The most significant unknown is how early the earliest plays should be placed, with estimates ranging between 220 and 210 or later.

Nevertheless, and notwithstanding the uncertainties over the dating of individual plays, Plautus' career spans the most remarkable generation in the story of Rome's emergence as a Mediterranean superpower: the age of Hannibal and of Flamininus, of Carthage neutralized at Zama and Greece settled under Roman authority after the breaking of Macedonian power at Cynoscephalae. The Hannibalic war was the event that, in later cultural memory, would stand as the Republic's defining moment of triumph over its imperial nemesis at a time of darkest threat, Rome's own counterpart to what the Persian wars meant to Greeks; while the Macedonian war was a landmark in the development of Roman attitudes to Greek culture. Plautus' Rome was a highly militarized society, and the plays' complex engagement with issues of power and authority draw obsessively on military imagery and ideology. But it was also a society deeply engaged in an imperial project of cultural differentiation and self-assertion, as Roman power extended itself beyond the Italian peninsula into the wider world of old Mediterranean cultures, while a raft of domestic legislation attempted to regulate private behaviour in ways that Plautus' plays were especially well positioned to reflect.

220 starting point of Polybius' history
219 Hannibal's siege of Saguntum
218 2nd Punic War 218–202; Hannibal crosses Alps into Italy
217 Hannibal's victory at Lake Trasimene; dictatorship of Q. Fabius Maximus
216 Hannibal's victory at Cannae; revolt of Capua
215 First Macedonian War 215–205
213 Siege of Syracuse
212 Siege of Capua; fall of Syracuse

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211 Hannibal's march on Rome
206 Roman conquest of Spain (from Carthage)
204 Cato brings Ennius to Rome; Megalensia founded
203 Hannibal recalled to Carthage
202 Scipio defeats Hannibal at Zama; Fabius Pictor's history
200 Plautus, *Stichus*; Second Macedonian War 200–197
196 Flamininus proclaims freedom of Greeks
195 *lex Oppia*
194 Flamininus' triumph; plays introduced at Megalensia
191 dedication of temple of Magna Mater; Plautus, *Pseudolus* (Megalensia)
186 *senatusconsultum de Bacchanalibus*
184 death of Plautus; birth of Terence; Cato censor

Works

Including the fragmentary *Vidularia*, 21 plays survive under Plautus' name, a fraction of the 130 or so that circulated in antiquity; they are surely the same as the 21 listed by Varro as of universally accepted authenticity, as opposed to his longer inventories of (i) plays whose authorship had at some point been impugned but which Varro believed to be Plautine, and (ii) plays Varro himself regarded as apocrypha.[89] Plautine authorship of all twenty-one is not in doubt, though some have suffered interpolation at an early date, and Zwierlein 1990–2 has put a case for much more extensive interpolation than has generally been suspected; his often troubling arguments have tended to be sidelined rather than answered.[90]

Latin title	English	Greek title	English	Greek author
Amphitruo	*Amphitryo*			
Asinaria	*Donkey Business*	*Onagros*	*The Donkey*	Demophilus
Aulularia	*A Crock of Gold*			
Bacchides	*Two Bacchises*	*Dis Exapaton*	*Tricking Them Twice*	Menander
Captivi	*Captives*			
Casina	*Casina*	*Kleroumenoi*	*Taking Lots*	Diphilus

[89] Gellius iii.3, quoting the example of the *Girl from Boeotia*, alternatively attributed to Aquilius and denied to Plautus by Accius.
[90] See now Deufert 2002, who bravely endorses even Zwierlein's view that most of the interpolation is the work of a single hand.

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Latin title	English	Greek title	English	Greek author
Cistellaria	*A Tale of a Trinket-Box*	*Synaristosai*	*The Bruncheon Club*	Menander
Curculio	*Curculio*			
Epidicus	*Epidicus*			
Menaechmi	*Two Menaechmuses*			
Mercator	*The Merchant*	*Emporos*	*The Merchant*	Philemon
Miles Gloriosus	*Major Bigmouth*	*Alazon*	*The Bigmouth*	
Mostellaria	*Ghost Story*	*Phasma* (?)	*The Ghost*	Philemon?
Persa	*The Persian*			
Poenulus	*A Little Man from Carthage*[91]	*Karchedonios*	*The Carthaginian*	Alexis
Pseudolus	*Pseudolus*			
Rudens	*Rope*			Diphilus
Stichus	*Stichus*	*Adelphoi (A)*	*The Brothers (I)*	Menander
Trinummus	*Threequidsworth*	*Thesauros*	*The Treasure*	Philemon
Truculentus	*Truculentus*			
Vidularia	*Bag Story*	*Schedia*	*The Raft*	Diphilus (?)

Amphitruo.[92] The king of Thebes comes home from war to find that both he and his slave have a doppelgänger: in fact the gods Jupiter and Mercury in disguise, Jupiter having become infatuated with Amphitryo's queen, Alcmena, and fathered the infant Heracles as a twin brother to Amphitryo's unborn child.

The only fully mythological comedy extant in either Greek or Latin treats a story that we know from both literary and visual evidence to have been a (even the) staple of the subgenre, particularly in the era of Middle Comedy. The Greek source remains unidentified, but not for lack of candidates; a Middle or even Old Comic original is a possibility, though Philemon's *Long Night* has the attraction of advertising one of the unusual theatrical features of Plautus' version, the nocturnal first act caused by Jupiter's miraculous prolongation of his night of love with Alcmena. It is, as has long been recognized,[93] comedy's *Bacchae*,

[91] The untranslatable diminutive is part condescending, part contemptuous.

[92] See especially Galinsky 1966; Forehand 1971; Fantham 1973; Dupont 1976; Phillips 1985; Moore 1998b: 108–25; Slater 1985: 70–93; Anderson 1993: 53–9; Schoeman 1998, 1999; Baier 1999; Bond 1999; McCarthy 2000: 77–121; Christenson 2000, 2001; Peter O'Neill 2003; Schmidt 2003; Mahoney 2004.

[93] Stewart 1958.

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with its disguised god, palace miracles, supernatural climax reported in a messenger speech, and *ex machina* finale, and thematically in its pervasive metatheatrical reflection on the construction of illusion, the playing of roles, and the ironic collusion with a knowing audience at the expense of an internal cast of dupes. But it is also Plautus' most unsettling essay on his recurrent theme of identity displacement, with especially close parallels to the other doppelgänger play, *Menaechmi*: a hero pointedly shut out from his house, his wife, and the citizen identity that they theatrically embody, while a double occupies his place in the world both physically and socially. (Significantly, the play is, with *Captivi*, one of only two to use a single door.) The play has a fine line to tread for a Roman audience in presenting the supreme deity of the Roman pantheon as a comic adulterer and seducer of matrons, but navigates this ideological minefield deftly by delegating the more overtly comic business to Mercury, who assimilates himself to the the role and identity of the comic slave lead, while the character of Alcmena is kept chastely clear of overt taint.

Asinaria.[94] The mercenary madam Cleareta pimps her daughter Philaenium to a pair of rival suitors, only for her preferred bidder to find himself facing a further competitor in the father who has pretended to be his ally.

As in similar bidding wars in *Bacchides*, *Curculio*, and *Pseudolus*, the impoverished hero outplays his wealthier opponent by an ingenious identity theft (though always afterwards converted into a legal transaction; Romans were sensitive on such matters). But the father's inappropriate collusion in his son's affair, using money diverted from his own wife, turns the second phase of the action into a cautionary tale of a dirty old man's comeuppance in the manner of *Casina* and *Mercator*; and, as in Terence's *Phormio*, the defrauded wife emerges as the key player in the final round, restoring the balance by deploying the cash (from an overseas sale of donkeys) in her son's interest rather than her husband's.

Aulularia.[95] The miser Euclio discovers a buried treasure in the family home, and grows so paranoid about what he believes to be others' designs on the gold that he fails to realise that his daughter is nine months' pregnant from a rape.

[94] Hough 1937; Bertini 1968; Konstan 1983: 47–56; Slater 1985: 55–69; J. C. B. Lowe 1992; W. S. Anderson 1993: 79–82; Danese 2004; Questa 2004: 1–13; John Henderson 2006.

[95] See especially Arnott 1964b, 1988; Hunter 1981; Konstan 1983: 33–46; Bain 1992; Anderson 1993: 66–8; Lefèvre 1998, 2001; Kruschwitz 2002.

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The Greek play is unidentified, though the close *Dyskolos* parallels would sit plausibly with a Menandrean original.[96] The central figure is again a solitary misanthrope, violent and paranoid, with a virtuous daughter who respects the patron god her father offends. To reward her, the god explains in the prologue that he plans to marry her off to a well-to-do *adulescens* he has already caused to fall in love with her. To obtain the father's necessary permission, the hero finds himself in a position to rescue the old man from a personal calamity born of his own misanthropy – an experience that shocks him into renouncing and reforming his past ways, apparently (the ending is lost, but we have a couple of telling fragments) in a characteristically Menandrean recantation-speech such as we find in *Dyskolos*, *Samia*, *Epitrepontes*, and Terence's *Adelphoe*. The distinctively Roman figure of the *Lar Familiaris* or tutelary household god sets out the play's moral ground rules in the prologue: only the young should marry the young, and familial wealth brings only misery if hoarded rather than put to the service of the family's continuance in marriage. In attempting to keep his daughter's dowry for himself by marrying her to the unsuitable Megadorus, Euclio loses both daughter *and* gold to the young man Lyconides, leading to an artful scene of significant cross purposes where the two offences are confounded. But, in the end, the burden of the gold is lifted from Euclio as he channels it into his daughter's dowry and legitimizes his grandson through her marriage.

Bacchides.[97] Twin sisters, both named Bacchis (for reasons that have perished with the prologue), are loved by Mnesilochus and his best friend Pistoclerus but, when Mnesilochus mistakenly believes his Bacchis to be two-timing him with his best friend, he returns to his father the cash earlier tricked out of him by his slave Chrysalus to buy Bacchis' contract, only to find that Bacchis is faithful after all and Chrysalus must somehow trick the cash again from a father now forewarned.

Plautus' adaptation of Menander's *Dis Exapaton* is our first fully extant specimen of the Menandrean double-stranded love plot so favoured by Terence, where two *adulescentes* pursue different girls without rivalry, though in this case, uniquely and significantly, neither is a citizen affair directed towards marriage. The complex multiple intrigue (there are actually three, at least in Plautus' version) is played

[96] A dissident view is in Arnott 1988 (and cf. 1989): *q.v.* 182 n. 6 for earlier discussions.

[97] Clark 1976; Slater 1985: 94–117; Barsby 1986; Goldberg 1990; Damen 1992, 1995; Owens 1994; Soubiran 2003; Salamon 2004.

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out in an elaborate ballet of doubles: two youths, two sisters, two reluctant fathers who are eventually drawn into the sisters' web themselves. But the centre of all, even in Menander's title, is the versatile serial trickster Chrysalus, whose fabrications drive the plot and systematically overthrow the attempts by figures of citizen authority to assert the structures of moral and familial control.

Captivi.[98] Philocrates and his slave Tyndarus, captured together as prisoners of war, are sold to old Hegio, who aims to arrange an exchange for his own remaining son by sending the slave back to negotiate for the master's release – only to discover that master and slave have exchanged identities and he has let the valuable prisoner go and kept the slave. But Tyndarus is actually, unknown to any of them, Hegio's long-lost other son, abducted and enslaved in childhood.

This unique and unsettling play turns a probing ironic gaze on the institution of slavery itself, confounding the categories of slave and free whose utter separateness is a basic premise of New Comedy's character typology and plotting. The genre cheerfully tolerates female enslavement and emancipation through recognition, and the manumission of slaves of both sexes; but Tyndarus is a freeborn male who has been raised to adulthood in slavery, and is presented as a complex hybrid of sophisticated ethical agent and loyal slave trickster, while both dialogue and situation reflect extensively on the essentially accidental nature of enslavement. Hegio subjects his own son to brutal slave punishment for being more loyal to his lifelong master than to his present legal owner; it is Philocrates who treats Tyndarus as person rather than property, returning voluntarily to redeem him from Hegio, restore Hegio's other son, and deliver the fugitive slave Stalagmus, who abducted and enslaved his master's young son in the first place. Tyndarus resumes his rightful status, and Stalagmus is consigned to a dark and brutal end. Although the play is undated, all this resonates strikingly with the stories preserved of the fates of Roman prisoners in the Hannibalic and Macedonian wars, and it is tempting to follow Lefèvre and Leigh in connecting the production with Flamininus' triumph in 194, which featured a parade of 1200 Romans ransomed from slavery in Greece.

Casina.[99] Lysidamus and his son Euthynicus are both smitten with their slave-girl Casina, but Euthynicus is abroad and Lysidamus is

[98] See especially Viljoen 1963; Leach 1969b; Gosling 1983; Konstan 1983: 57–72; J. C. B. Lowe 1991; E. Segal 1991; Franko 1995; Frangoulidis 1996a, 1996b; Thalmann 1996; Benz and Lefèvre 1998; Moore 1998b: 181–96; McCarthy 2000: 167–210; Leigh 2004: 57–97.

[99] Forehand 1973a; MacCary 1973, 1974; Cody 1976; MacCary and Willcock 1976; W. S. Anderson 1983; Leadbeater 1986; O'Bryhim 1989; B. Williams 1993; Connors 1997; Gold

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wary of his wife, Cleostrata (who indeed knows all about his plans, and surreptitiously supports Euthynicus), so both sides attempt to obtain Casina by using their male slaves as surrogates in an ostensible slave wedding. When Euthynicus' man loses the draw to marry Casina, Cleostrata substitutes him for the veiled bride, so that when Lysidamus attempts to consummate the wedding in his own slave's place he encounters a nasty surprise.

This major play, the rudest parts of which were suspiciously damaged in the ancestor of our modern texts, looks to be a late work: it seems to allude to the *senatusconsultum de Bacchanalibus* of 186, and its numerous mature-looking dramatic and stylistic features include the highest proportion of lyric in all of Plautus. The prologue has evidently been rewritten for a revival production a decade or two after Plautus' death, but confirms that both of the lovers have been eliminated from the stage action in Plautus' adaptation of Diphilus' Greek original. The citizen plot of recognition and marriage is relegated to a perfunctory closing announcement: Plautus' interests lie with the competition between the rival slaves and (increasingly) the middle-aged husband and wife, with Lysidamus systematically humiliated at the hands of his womenfolk and slaves as he makes the fateful choice between the house of duty and the house of pleasure, only to end up black and blue, cheated of supper and sex, stripped of his citizen costume, and barred from returning to his house and social self until his public humiliation is complete.

Cistellaria.[100] Alcesimarchus is torn between the fatherless mistress whom he has promised to marry and the neighbour's daughter arranged for him by his father; the dilemma is ultimately resolved by the recognition that the mistress too is a daughter of the same neighbour, thanks to a tangled trail of surrogate parentage that has to be pieced together from a chain of individual clues and witnesses.

An elaborate recognition comedy with affinities to *Epitrepontes*, *Epidicus*, and *Rudens*, this has been a relatively neglected play owing to the damaged state of its text; but it is of considerable interest for the domination of much of the action by female characters and the unusually systematic exploration of the ambiguities of Selenium's status as a *pseudohetaera* torn between two mothers, one a professional madam who both pimps and protects her daughter, the other a raped

1998; Moore 1998b: 158–80; Franko 1999; Fitzgerald 2000: 81–6; McCarthy 2000: 77–121; Way 2000; J. C. B. Lowe 2003; Andrews 2004; Questa 2004: 15–55, 137–54.

[100] Lange 1975; Konstan 1983: 96–114; W. S. Anderson 1993: 69–72; Goldberg 2004; Hartkamp and Hurka 2004.

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citizen married late in life to the father of her lost child. In contrast, Alcesimarchus, hitherto Plautus' most melodramatically deranged lover, recedes from the stage action entirely as the recognition climax approaches.

Curculio.[101] Penniless Phaedromus needs the help of the resourceful Curculio, a professional *parasitus* or freeloader, to undo the sale of Phaedromus' girl to a soldier rival; as in the similar *Pseudolus*, this is achieved by an ingenious identity theft that diverts the transaction to Phaedromus, but here there is the further twist that the key plot device of the soldier's ring then also enables the girl to be identified as his sister, averting incest and allowing her to be given to Phaedromus in citizen marriage.

This tightly-constructed play, Plautus' shortest, is notable not just for its economy of plotting but for its radical breaches of theatrical illusion, including an astonishing speech put into the mouth of the costume manager (*choragus*), in which the surroundings of the Roman forum are superimposed on the notional Greek setting of the play in Epidaurus. It is also Plautus' only play with a parasite lead (compare Terence's *Phormio*), though in practice Curculio's capacity for legal dealing *qua* citizen is not really exploited in the Latin version, and his characterization is closely in line with Plautus' trickster heroes of slave status.

Epidicus.[102] While his young master, Stratippocles, is away at war, the wily slave Epidicus has persuaded his master, Periphanes, to buy Stratippocles' slave mistress, Acropolistis, in the belief that she is his long-lost daughter, Telestis, and has been captured and sold in the war; but now Stratippocles breezes back with the news that he is no longer interested in Acropolistis, having instead become besotted with a prisoner of war whom he has bought on credit, leaving Epidicus to unpick the results of his earlier intrigue, offload Acropolistis, and finagle the cash for the new girl out of the old man instead via a ruse of headspinning complexity under which Periphanes will believe that he is buying the real Acropolistis (actually a third girl hired to impersonate her). But what nobody, including the audience, yet knows is that Stratippocles' girl is in fact the real Telestis, who really *has* been captured and sold as a prisoner of war . . .

[101] Fantham 1965; Moore 1991, and cf. 1998b: 126–39; W. S. Anderson 1993: 72–4; Wiles 1991: 58–62; Wright 1993; Goldberg 1995.

[102] Duckworth 1940; Goldberg 1978; Slater 1985: 19–36; Willcock 1995; Auhagen 2001.

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Plautus' second-shortest play bears the ancient theatre's most mind-boggling plot – perhaps a factor in its special appeal to Chrysalus (*Bacchides* 214). The confusions, coincidences, and relentless identity switches are so many and so rapid that it is hard to tell, even on determined reading, just how much sense the whole astonishing imbroglio actually makes, and it is especially bold of Plautus to dispense with a divine prologue and leave the audience to work out the probable truth for themselves. The intricate legal and political underpinnings of the plot are far from clear in Plautus' version, but it is a hugely ambitious compendium of key Plautine concerns in a virtuosically restrictive compass.

Menaechmi.[103] Syracusans Menaechmus and Sosicles were identical twins, but when their father's favourite, Menaechmus, was abducted as a child, Sosicles was renamed Menaechmus in his memory, while the real Menaechmus grew up in Epidamnus, married into the community, and inherited his abductor's estate. When the former Sosicles visits Epidamnus, he is taken for his brother and vice versa, magnifying the faultlines in Menaechmus' Epidamnian life till it threatens to fracture entirely.

Like the other doppelgänger comedy *Amphitruo*, this source for Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* is a play of identity usurped. Even before his twin arrives on the scene, Menaechmus' life in Epidamnus is unstable: his wife and property are a legacy of his abduction, and he is already diverting his wife's resources to fund an extra-marital liaison. Now his brother arrives to intercept Menaechmus' stolen pleasures, while Menaechmus' progressive loss of control of his social identity is played out in his exclusion from wife's and mistress's houses alike. Justice is finally restored with Menaechmus' restoration to his true Syracusan family and identity, and the decisive auctioning-off of the property inherited from his original abductor (which Plautus cheekily extends to include the wife, the marriage being apparently childless).

Mercator.[104] Demipho and his son Charinus are unknowing rival suitors for the slave Pasicompsa, each hiding behind their counterparts in the family next door; but Demipho's hard-won victory in the

[103] Fantham 1968a; Leach 1969c; E. Segal 1969; Haberman 1981; Jocelyn 1984; Muecke 1987; Damen 1988–9; Stärk 1989; Gratwick 1993; McCarthy 2000: 35–76; Questa 2004: 57–75.

[104] Hubka 1984; W. S. Anderson 1993: 36–41, 109–13; Lefèvre 1995: 9–59; Frangoulidis 1997: 133–43; J. C. B. Lowe 2001.

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bidding quickly falls apart when his surrogate's wife returns and takes her husband's charade for the truth.

Gilbert Norwood 1932: 15–99 divided his chapters on Plautus ('the worst of all writers who have ever won permanent repute', 4) into one on *Mercator* ('shines forth magnificently . . . comes near perfection', 36) and one on 'The Other Nineteen Plays' ('mostly deplorable', 27). More recent judgment has been less polar, as the stock of the closely comparable *Casina* has risen and its more risqué and subversive treatment of the same essential situation has come to seem a strength rather than a fault. But *Mercator* is a play of great elegance and symmetry, with its mirrored houses each containing a family of father, mother, adult son, and slave, and the Oedipal rivalry pointedly contrasts the father's higher social authority with his lower moral and generic entitlement to pleasure. If Demipho is swifter than *Casina*'s Lysidamus to retire from the field once he realizes his rival is his own son, it is because this play is less interested in the systematic degradation of the adulterous offender himself and more in the tensions of paternal authority eliminated from the action of *Casina* by the deletion of the son from the onstage cast.

Miles Gloriosus.[105] The egomaniacal Pyrgopolynices has kidnapped Philocomasium from Athens, but has been tracked to Ephesus by her lover, Pleusicles, whose slave Palaestrio has fallen into the soldier's hands and is secretly working against him to reunite the lovers: first by a secret passage into Pyrgopolynices' house, and then by an elaborate adultery sting to trick him into letting Philocomasium go while placing himself in the power of his enemies.

The self-deluding boastful warrior is not unique to this play, but his systematic emasculation is, as Palaestrio's tricks draw Pyrgopolynices ever deeper into his fantasy self of epic masculinity and sexual magnetism, while his actual power is gradually taken from him as house, mistress, slave, and finally his very person are surrendered into the power of his enemies in the house next door. As in *Pseudolus*, the soldier's bamboozled disempowerment is further reflected in a leakage of military imagery from the warrior to his slave-hero antagonist. The Athenian hero Pleusicles is unable to act under Ephesian law, but finds a ready surrogate in his mature bachelor host, Periplectomenus, who willingly plays the necessary role in trapping the soldier in a staged *delictum flagrans* that will drive him to blubbering humiliation

[105] Fraenkel 1922, translated 2007: 174–9; G. Williams 1956a; Forehand 1973b; Leach 1980; Frangoulidis 1996d, 1998; Questa 2004: 77–97.

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and a legally binding oath to seek no redress for the beating that he receives from Periplectomenus' slaves.

Mostellaria.[106] Tranio's young master, Philolaches, has been living it up in his father's absence abroad and, when the old man returns, Tranio tries to conceal the truth and service Philolaches' debt by means of an increasingly complex stack of lies in which the family house has been abandoned as haunted.

Plautus' most hopeless slave hero, Tranio finds himself constantly on the back foot to try and prop up a teetering deception that the audience can see is doomed from the start. His moments of exultation alternate with more clear-sighted moments of gibbering panic, his whole edifice in continual threat of collapse and shored up by ever more desperate and flimsy improvisations. The generic identification between house, body, and citizen identity is effectively spelled out in Philolaches' allegorical entrance-song, and developed further in the returning father's exclusion from his own door, the interior behind which has been occupied instead by a dissolute party of youths, slaves, entertainers, and whores. However, in an elegant twist, one of the guests repays Philolaches' generosity by bailing out both master and slave from his own pocket, just as Tranio is clinging to the stage altar to stave off crucifixion.

Persa.[107] In charge of his master's household while its owner is abroad, the hero Toxilus, though a slave, devises an elaborate intrigue to buy his mistress, Lemniselenis, from her pimp at the pimp's own expense, using the freeborn daughter of Toxilus' citizen parasite to impersonate a foreign chattel and entrap the pimp in an illicit traffic in persons.

Plautus' strangest play is full of generic anomalies: a masterless slave whose owner never does return from his mission abroad; who is free to conduct a pecuniary love affair of his own, notwithstanding his alienation from the legal mechanisms of property and contract; and who is attended by a citizen parasite with (uniquely) a daughter available (again uniquely) to be traded, against her inclination, in a high-stakes impersonation and legal charade. It seems fairly clear that these paradoxical inversions of convention are key to the play's meaning, but interpretation is divided between lighter and darker readings of the ethical world presented.

[106] Leach 1969a; J. C. B. Lowe 1985b; Frangoulidis 1997: 21–75; Milnor 2002; Questa 2004: 99–112.

[107] Woytek 1982; Hughes 1984; Slater 1985: 37–54; J. C. B. Lowe 1989; W. S. Anderson 1993: 76–8; McCarthy 2000: 122–66; Faller 2001; Hardy 2005; Richlin 2005: esp. 111–20.

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Poenulus.[108] The Carthaginian Hanno arrives in the Aetolian city of Calydon in search of his two daughters, who were kidnapped in infancy and have been raised for prostitution by the pimp Lycus; a nephew, Agorastocles, was separately kidnapped and has been raised as a Calydonian in the house next door to Lycus', where he has fallen in love with one of the sisters. With his slave Milphio, Agorastocles stages a legal trap for Lycus and, on learning that the girls are free-born Carthaginians, Milphio plans a follow-up under which the newly met Hanno, now recognized as Agorastocles' uncle, will impersonate the girls' father – which of course he turns out to be in truth.

This is a fascinating if perplexing and oddly shaped play, with its pimp plot framed in the much more interesting Carthaginian plot of the prologue and finale. The comic high point is Milphio's attempt to train Hanno to play a fictitious character who turns out to be himself and marvels at his stooge's skills of simulation before the cross purposes are untangled; a similar scene in Menander's *Sikyonios/oi* may owe something to Plautus' Greek source here, perhaps a play by Menander's supposed mentor, Alexis. But the play's significance lies in its exploration of Roman views of both Aetolian and Carthaginian ethnicity in the aftermath of the Hannibalic war, which had given both the play's worlds a topicality inconceivable to the audience of Alexis' original. Like the passage of ostensible Punic in Hanno's speech, it is not easy to interpret; the most rewarding of recent readings have been those most willing to see point in puzzles rather than solutions.

Pseudolus.[109] By an elaborate imposture, the artful slave Pseudolus tricks the unscrupulous pimp Ballio, who has sold Pseudolus' young master's girl to a rival bidder, into surrendering the girl to Pseudolus instead and stumping up the cash out of his own pocket.

Plautus' most celebrated slave hero displays an exuberant metatheatrical command of the other characters' roles in his drama and his own relationship with the audience, constructing a dizzyingly complex network of cash transactions and wagers around a characteristically Plautine act of identity theft.

[108] Fraenkel 1922, translated 2007: 179–90; Gratwick 1971, 1982: 101–3; Arnott 1988; Maurach 1988; Slater 1992; John Henderson 1994; Franko 1996; Starks 2000; Baier 2004; Richlin 2005: esp. 185–99.

[109] G. Williams 1956b; Wright 1975; Arnott 1982; Stehle 1984; J. C. B. Lowe 1985a; Slater 1985: 118–46; Willcock 1987; Griffith 1988; Hallett 1993; Barsby 1995; Sharrock 1996; Lefèvre 1997; Moore 1998b: 92–107; Fitzgerald 2000: 44–7; N. J. Lowe 2000a: 207–9; Questa 2004: 113–33; Tornau 2005.

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Rudens.[110] In Cyrene, the slave-dealer Labrax has sold Palaestra on deposit to her lover, Plesidippus, only to swindle him by sailing off with cash and girl alike. But the storm-star Arcturus arranges a shipwreck that washes up Labrax, Palaestra, and luggage separately on the lonely stretch of African coast where Palaestra's long-lost father, Daemones, lives, and an *Epitrepontes*-style arbitration between slaves over the luggage leads to Daemones' reunion with his daughter, allowing her to marry Plesidippus while Labrax gets his legal deserts.

This expansive play takes dramatic and thematic advantage of an unusual setting where the human world meets the elemental, and where the central tug-of-war that gives the play its title turns on rival conceptions of natural ownership and justice, whose thoughtful arbitration gives the exiled Daemones back his family and his place in society.

Stichus.[111] Panegyris and Pamphila, sisters married to impoverished brothers who have been three years abroad, are under pressure from their father, Antipho, to divorce their husbands and remarry for wealth; but the brothers return in the nick of time (with the slave Stichus in tow), now wealthy men themselves.

Menander's play seems to have been taken apart and reassembled into a virtually plotless montage of festive variations on a theme of homecoming, organized less around events than in an intricate structure of mirror scenes and doubled types, with the spotlight moving progressively from the two sisters to their two husbands to their two slaves. The sisters' Penelopean predicament, noted by Panegyris in the opening lines, is fully resolved by line 409, and the resolution itself is relegated to an offstage scene recounted in a couple of lines; the remainder of the action celebrates the reunion and prosperity of both households above and below stairs, in a series of mirrored episodes attached to successive characters' arrivals from the harbour. Wiles 1988a attractively suggests that the date of 200 could link the play to the return of troops from overseas following the defeat of Hannibal at Zama; at any rate it seems to be Plautus' most radical experiment in detaching the poetics of Roman comedy from conventional Greek plot forms.

Trinummus.[112] During a business trip abroad, Charmides has charged his friend Callicles with keeping an eye on Charmides' son

[110] Lloyd 1963; Leach 1974; Konstan 1983: 73–95; W. S. Anderson 1993: 46–53; Louden 1999.

[111] Fraenkel 1922 translated 2007: 190–8; Arnott 1972b; Wiles 1988a; Owens 2000.

[112] J. P. Stein 1970; Fantham 1977; W. S. Anderson 1979, 1993: 41–5; Hunter 1980; Muecke 1985; Lefèvre 1995: 61–168.

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Lesbonicus, and also with the secret of a family treasure buried in the house and intended for his daughter's dowry; but when the congenitally overgenerous Lesbonicus seeks to sell the house and give his sister in marriage without a dowry, Callicles buys the house from his own pocket and tries to use the treasure to supply a dowry by hiring an impostor to masquerade as a messenger from Charmides – only for the impostor to turn up on Charmides' doorstep at the same moment as the real Charmides.

Unusual both for its absence of any erotic element and for its cast dominated by elderly citizen males, this thoughtful comedy of social obligation turns on the issues of familial responsibility seen also in the more farcical *Aulularia*. Here again, the proper use for family wealth is the propagation of the *oikos* through citizen marriage, lubricated by appropriate dowries; but, where in *Aulularia* Euclio's false priorities were the obstacle, here it is the combination of Charmides' absence with Lesbonicus' excessive good nature. Callicles has no power to block Lesbonicus' transactions, so must keep house, treasure, and daughter together by clandestine means. We do not need to assume, with Erich Segal 1987a, that the play's high-mindedness was externally imposed by the circumstances of the commission; Plautine comedy was a broad church, and was as capable of celebrating the wisdom of age as it was elsewhere of exposing its folly.

Truculentus.[113] The courtesan Phronesium dangles three males on her hook: the city youth Diniarchus, bankrupted but still besotted; the soldier Stratophanes, to whom Phronesium is pretending to have borne a child; and her latest victim, Strabax, a naive but well-heeled country youth. Phronesium's suppositious baby turns out to be the product of Diniarchus' rape of a citizen's daughter, whom he reluctantly agrees to marry – though Phronesium is allowed to borrow the baby long enough to complete her extortion of Stratophanes' cash while she simultaneously fleeces Strabax, whose slave Truculentus has already fallen victim to her maid Astaphium.

A play of situation rather than of plot, this exuberantly cynical comedy of female domination over a procession of uniformly feckless males is the prostitute comedy *par excellence*, staged entirely around the independent *meretrix*'s grant or refusal of access to her door, as a whole gallery of contrasting male types are ruthlessly exploited by turns for a quick cash profit, and the norms of masculinity, male

[113] Enk 1964; Dessen 1977; Konstan 1983: 142–64; W. S. Anderson 1993: 82–7; Moore 1998b: 140–57; Hofmann 2001.

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self-mastery, and citizen duty all crumble in the face of the women's mercenary deployment of their charms. A key word in modern criticism has been 'satiric': this most demonstratively amoral of Plautus' plays seems to celebrate a vision of society in which the traditional core values of New Comedy are systematically overthrown by the emasculating force of non-citizen desire.

Vidularia.[114] The shipwrecked Nicodemus is taken in by the fisherman Gorgines and taken on by Gorgines' neighbour Dinia as a labourer, while Nicodemus' lost luggage, probably containing recognition tokens, becomes the subject of a dispute and arbitration that leads to Nicodemus' recognition as Dinia's son. Clearly, in the little preserved of this twenty-first play, we have a situation with analogies to *Rudens*, Plautus' other play from an original by Diphilus, though there is no trace in the fragments of any romantic element or indeed of female characters.

Bibliographic note

A replacement for Lindsay's centenarian Oxford text (1903) has been slow to emerge,[115] but the *Editio Plautina Sarsinatis* so far covers *Asinaria* (Danese, 2004), *Casina* (Questa 2001), and *Vidularia* with the fragments (Monda 2004), augmented by Questa's *hors série* edition of the cantica (1995); this is the authoritative text where available. Deufert 2002 is an important history of the vicissitudes of Plautus' text in antiquity, although few will endorse his endorsement of Zwierlein's single-reviser theory (1990–2). Essential modern editions in English of single plays are MacCary and Willcock's *Casina* (1976), Willcock's solo *Pseudolus* (1987), Barsby's *Bacchides* (1986), Christenson's *Amphitruo* (2000), Gratwick's *Menaechmi* (1993), and John Henderson's *Asinaria* (2006); for other plays, Italian or German is needed.

There is no satisfactory complete translation of Plautus in English. Nixon's first-generation Loeb (1916–38) stands up better for its age than might be imagined, and is more reliable than the four-volume variorum series edited by Slavitt and Bovie (1995) for Johns Hopkins. Watling's Penguin (1973, 1975) suffers from a narrow and conservative selection of plays, skewed towards schoolroom use and so

[114] Dér 1987; Calderan 2004; Monda 2004.

[115] On the deficiencies of Lindsay's edition, see especially Gratwick 2000, and cf. R. J. Tarrant 1983.

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excluding major plays such as *Casina* that were felt too spicy for their target users; Erich Segal's World's Classics volume (2002) offers superior, annotated translations of four of the same plays. The gap is partly filled by Tatum 1983, and a refreshingly radical approach is taken with the versions for performance of *Curculio*, *Persa*, and *Poenulus* in Richlin 2005, which includes very full notes; Henderson's *Asinaria* edition includes a similarly sparky cisatlantic translation. Note also Peter Smith 1991 and the *Miles Gloriosus*, *Menaechmi*, and *Bacchides* in Berg and Parker 1999.

Wiles 1988b is an extremely useful snapshot of trends in Plautine criticism internationally from the sixties to the mid-eighties. The cornerstone of modern Plautine criticism is Fraenkel 1922, now available in English (2007) with additional material from the 1960 Italian edition; its careful conclusions have since been largely vindicated by further papyrus discoveries, including the *Dis Exapaton* papyrus, though on structural changes Fraenkel was readier than most scholars since to believe in widespread Plautine *contaminatio* (see on Terence below) and the possibility of its detection. Plautine criticism since Fraenkel has found it hard to shake off the obsession with analyst approaches and, since the sixties, has followed different national paths, with German and British scholars generally pursuing different kinds of analyst agenda while Italian and American scholars have been more willing to read the plays as coherent compositions for a Roman audience. In Germany, Plautine studies have gone off on two near-opposite trajectories, which have both been more sceptically received abroad, with Zwierlein 1990–2 arguing that our texts are massively interpolated versions of significantly more conservative original versions of the Greek texts, while Lefèvre's Freiburg school has energetically argued (1982) for a very high level of Plautine creativity and originality under the influence of native Italian comic traditions.

Erich Segal 1968 marks something of a year zero in post-analyst Plautine studies, showing how the plays use their highly Romanized versions of Greek comedy to encode deep tensions in Roman society and culture under the comic licence of festival performance; it remains the foundational text for all subsequent Plautine criticism in North America, where the key works have been Slater 1985 (the first and most convincing Anglophone study of metatheatricality in ancient drama), W. S. Anderson 1993 (which includes pages on most of the plays, though its confidence on matters of dating should be taken with caution), Moore 1998b (a valuable introductory volume), McCarthy

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2000 (on the complexities and social function of the representation of slavery, on which see now the metacritical survey in McKeown 2007: 108–19), and above all Konstan's 1983 volume of new and revised essays on individual plays, focusing on the tensions in civic ideology negotiated by their plots. Gruen's pioneering historicist analyses (1990, 1993) have had fewer successors than they deserve, but Leigh 2004 is an important casebook of in-depth readings. Of the key works in Italian criticism, special mention should be made of Petrone 1977, Chiarini 1979, and above all Bettini 1982, a brilliant tour of the corpus as a transformational system of plot relationships.

Two series of edited volumes on individual plays are the Italian *Lecturae plautinae sarsinates* by Raffaelli et al. (annually, in alphabetical order by play, begun in 1998; the series has now reached *Menaechmi*) and the volumes in the ScriptOralia series, which focus particularly on plays that members of the Freiburg school suspect to be original or at least radically Plautinized compositions: *Captivi* (Lefèvre, Stärk, and Vogt-Spira 1991), *Amphitruo* (Baier 1999), *Persa* (Faller 2001), *Epidicus* (Auhagen 2001), *Poenulus* (Baier 2004), *Cistellaria* (Hartkamp and Hurka 2004), and the earlier monograph by Stärk on *Menaechmi* (1989), as well as the wider-ranging Benz and Lefèvre 1998, which includes similar claims made for *Truculentus*.

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