CHAPTER I

The Experience of Roman Comedy

OppoRTuNITIES FOR PERFORMANCE

Romans enjoyed the *palliatia*. Adaptations of Greek drama constituted one of the principal forms of entertainment at the *ludi* ('games'). *Ludi* were public religious festivals that offered the only opportunity for dramatic performance in Rome.\(^1\) Combining sacrifices and other religious practices\(^2\) with public entertainments such as chariot events at the circus, *ludi* were the significant celebrations in the religious year of Rome. The evidence for the early history of the *ludi scaenici* ('theatrical shows') is confused,\(^3\) but, for the period of Plautus' plays, the situation is relatively stable. There were four major festivals at which comedies could be presented, each administered by magistrates under the authority of the senate. The *ludi Romani*, administered by the curule aediles and held in September, were the first site of Roman literary performance: Livius Andronicus staged a tragedy and a comedy in 240 BC.\(^4\) In 214 the number of days for *ludi scaenici* was fixed at four.\(^5\) The *ludi Plebeii*, administered by the plebeian aediles and held in November, had at least three days for performance.\(^6\) It was here that *Stichus* was performed in 200.\(^7\) The *ludi Apollinares*, administered by the praetor urbanus and held in July, were first celebrated in 212 and became annual in 208;\(^8\) they were the first of a wave of new festivals inaugurated during the Second Punic War, reflecting both an increased awareness of the societal value served by *ludi* and a genuine sense that there were theological benefits to be realised from such celebrations. They offered at least two days for *ludi scaenici*.

The *ludi Megalenses*, administered by the curule aediles and held in early April, were first celebrated in 204 and were made annual by 194, when for the first time *ludi scaenici* were introduced.\(^9\) The evidence for the number of performance days at this festival is ambiguous, but there were at least two and may have been as many as six, the number it would later have in the empire.\(^10\) It was here that *Pseudolus* was performed in 191. *Hecyra* in its initial appearance in 165, and, likely, *Trinummus* at some uncertain date.\(^11\)

The months in which festivals were celebrated can be misleading. At this time, the Romans used a 355-day year, and therefore required regular intercalations to match the actual seasons. After a period of considerable laxity, efforts to fix the calendar were advanced by a *leges intercalandae* in 191, by which time the calendar was four months ahead of the sun.\(^12\) The April of the *ludi Megalenses* was in Plautus' time experiencing short, cold, wet days typical of December weather; the *ludi Apollinares* were held in March by modern reckoning; the *ludi Romani* were in practice a spring festival celebrated in May, and the *ludi plebeii* were celebrated in the heat of July.

As for other festivals, there is no evidence that the Floraia (the *ludi Florales*, instituted in 238 and made annual in 173) ever included plays, though mime performances did take place. Similarly, while there were seven days for dramatic performances at the *ludi Cereales* by the time of Augustus, there is no evidence for *ludi scaenici* there during the republic.\(^13\)

Thus, for the first half of Plautus' career, there were at least nine performance days at three festivals for *ludi scaenici*, and this increased to perhaps fifteen performance days at four festivals in 194. This growth coincides with an increased cosmopolitan sophistication and awareness of Greek drama among many Roman men associated with their military experience in South Italy, Sicily, and Greece.

It is unlikely that these festivals alone could support many theatrical troupes. There were, however, other opportunities to perform in Rome. These were of four types. The first are *ludi magni* ('great games'), which

---

\(^2\) Probably involving processions; see Taylor (1935) 127–8, Hanson (1959) 81–6.
\(^3\) Contrast Bernstein (1996) with e.g. Wiseman (1996) 129–44.
\(^4\) Cicero, *Brutus* 77, *Cassiodorus* *Chronicon* p. 128M. Livy 1.35.9, 4.27.1, etc., calls the games *magni*, and at 6.42.12 he calls them *mecinii*.
\(^5\) Livy 24.43.7.\(^6\) Taylor (1937) 288.\(^7\) Stichus, *didascalia*.
\(^8\) Cicero, *Brutus* 78, assumes these were *ludi scaenici*.
\(^9\) Livy 26.14.14, 34.34.3. For the introduction of the *Magna Mater* (Cybele) to Rome, see Gruen (1990) 5–33.
\(^10\) Livy 34.34.3, Taylor (1937) 289–90. Duckworth (1951) 77. The dedication of the temple took place during the celebrations of the *ludi Megalenses* in 190.
\(^11\) *Pseudolus*, *didascalia*. *Trinummus* 990 refers to two *aediles*, a reference that only makes sense at a spring festival, since the *aediles*' term of office began on 15 March. See Taylor (1937) 89–91, Duckworth (1951) 77, Slater (2000) 176.
\(^12\) Macrobius 1.3.21. See Bricc (1988) 17–26, Gratwick (1982) 81, Goldberg (1998) 15. It was still two and a half months out in 168.
\(^13\) Taylor (1937) 289 believes there were probably at least two days in the theatre', but this is a guess.
were irregular and not held annually. Held five or ten years following a vow made by a magistrate, these *ludi* were likely theatrical, especially if the length of ten days (mentioned in vows made in 191 and 172) was typical. Second, there were other *ludi votivi* ('votive games'), beginning with those celebrated by Scipio in 205. In this category too may be placed the *ludi Iuventatis*, which, despite Cicero’s confusion concerning their date, were theatrical. Plays may have been common at the *ludi* associated with the dedication of other temples, too. Third, there were private *ludi* and in particular *ludi funebres* ('funeral games'). Four days of *ludi scaenici* were held during the funeral of T. Quinctius Flaminius in 174, and two of Terence’s plays were performed at the *ludi funebres* of L. Aemilius Paullus in 160 (this is the only indication we have of a troupe performing more than one play at a given festival, and it is significant that one of them is a revival).

Finally, the institution of *instauratio* complicates the matter further. *Instauratio* was a religious practice, which provided that the day of a given festival would be repeated if a defect in ritual was noticed. The relationship between the entertainments and the more traditionally conceived religious elements of the *ludi* are here bound tighter. Servius describes an instance of *instauratio* avoided, in 212, at the first *ludi Apollinares*:

denique cum ludi circenses Apollinii celebrarentur et Hannibal mutatus esset circa portam Collinam urbi inguere, omnes raptis armis concurrent, reversi postea cum piscialem formidarent, invenerunt saltantium in circu senem quedam, qui cum interrogatus dixisset se non interrupse saltationem, dicitum est hoc proverbium 'salvas res est, saltat senex.'

Finally, when the circus games for Apollo were being celebrated and Hannibal had been announced to be attacking the city near the Colline gate, everyone grabbed their weapons and ran there. Later, when they returned and were concerned about the necessary sacrifice, they found a certain old man dancing in the circus. When asked, he told them he had not stopped dancing, and so the proverb goes: 'All is well, the old man is dancing.'

---

14 Taylor (1937) 296–7. Such games were held in 217 and 207 (Livy 27.33.8), in 203 (Livy 30.27.12), and 194 (Livy 34.44.6, where he calls them *ludi Romani votivi*).
15 Livy 56.2.1–5, 42.28.8.
16 Taylor (1937) 297–98. Such games were held in 205 (Livy 28.38.14, 28.45.12), in 190 (Livy 31.40.4), and in 186 (Livy 39.22.3–4, 8–10, where the presence of *artefici ex Graecia* and *ex Asia* implies the usual presence of local theatre troupes).
17 Cicero, Brutus 73. Taylor (1937) 298.
18 Livy 41.28.11.
19 Ludi scaenici are not explicitly attested in every account of *ludi funebres* (Livy 23.30.15, 28.21.10, 31.50.4, 39.46.1), and we cannot assume their existence, despite Taylor (1937) 299–300. Nevertheless, plays were performed at some *ludi funebres*.
20 Servius, ad Aenidem 8.110. See also Taylor (1937) 294–5 and n. 26 citing Festus 436–8 L.
21 Livy 27.33.5–7 shows it was not foolish to associate an epidemic with the failure to hold *ludi*. The ability to maintain one’s culture during a military attack no doubt provided a great psychological boost; compare Glenn Miller and his orchestra playing through the bombings in London in the summer of 1944.
22 See Duckworth (1912) 78; Beacham (1999) 359–9; Pascoli (1997) 144 ties *Max Gloriosus* to the year 205 because of the large number of *instaurationes*.
23 A catalogue of Livy’s *instaurationes* can be found at Cicerone (1994) 466–8.
annually seems to be a fair guess, and more would not surprise. If these
did not offer enough to sustain a troupe, there was always the possi-
bility of travelling to other cities – Diodorus Siculus 37.12 has an Italian
actor claiming never to have worked in Rome – or to subcontract
oneself for a different kind of performance (as seems to be envisaged by
the joke at Rudens 335). Such subcontracting need not involve the
whole troupe: the troupe’s tibicen (‘piper’) could probably secure
additional contracts throughout the year. However, even thinking in
terms of ‘twenty-five to thirty performance days’ is to consider the
matter from the perspective of the audience. In many ways a more
important figure is the number of different plays a troupe would be
expected to mount, and the number of plays the magistrates would
expect from a successful troupe over the course of a year. Here, too, is
guesswork, but thinking in terms of three or four fixed contracts a year,
with possibly one to three more for ludi votivi or ludi funebres, provides
a reasonable approximation of the opportunities a successful troupe
could be given for dramatic performances in Rome. There will not be
many troupe able to flourish under such conditions, but a few could,
particularly if these same troupe also provided entertainments for
smaller cities in Latium and Campania, which also had flourishing
theatrical cultures.

THE BUSINESS OF COMEDY

The administration of the ludi was one of the chief responsibilities of
certain magistrates, and by this time the aedileship at least was open to
patricians and plebeians. There was no admission charge for the plays,
and no tickets: the audience was gathered from the assembled festival
crowd and had no direct financial investment in the performance. Comedy was,
however, a business, and given the limited number of contracts available from
a relatively fixed set of funds (all entertainments would come from the
same budget, which was fixed for each festival by the senate), each
troupe was obliged to seek as many profitable contracts in a year as it
could. There is certainly a political dimension to this: the senate controls
funds, and, since it was responsible for the regular re-building of the
temporary performance spaces, it also exerted ultimate control over artistic
matters.25 But the ludi did not provide a venue for overt political
campaigning, due perhaps to the social inversion that characterised these
events.26 Consequently, an economic perspective proves more informative.

The economic pressures were different for the different parties
involved. The magistrates were concerned to offer a full selection of
entertainments, of great variety. It is suspected that they would typically
supplement the state allowance for the ludi from their private funds, since
it was a basic tenet of ancient political theory that political influence
could be gained or asserted by the provision of spectacles.27 In doing so,
their cash investment was used to create a different type of capital that
nevertheless could prove just as valuable for an ambitious politician.28 For
some playwrights, those not actively involved in the play’s production,
the number of performance days is of little consequence. A manuscript is
sold, and with it came the rights to produce the play. Perhaps a play-
wright could think in terms of a new play for each festival. Here perhaps
lies the reason for the emphasis on new plays in the prologues of Terence
(e.g. Adelphoe 12), which seem to concern Plautus less – probably, this is
because Plautus was part of his troupe.

Still, the language for this dimension of economic activity requires
examination. Ovid indicates that in his day there was money to be made:
scena est lucrosa poetae, tantaque non parvo crimina praetor emit (Ovid,
Tristia 2.507–8; ‘The stage is profitable for the poet, and the praetor does not
buy these immoralities cheaply’).29 When we are told Plautus sold his
comedies (fabulas solitus . . . vendere),30 it is a performance that is sold, or
merely the manuscript? Confusion has existed because of an apparent
inconsistency in the prologues of Terence. Ennius 20 refers to a time
postquam aediles emerunt (‘after the aediles bought [the play]’). Nevertheless,
Ambivius Turpio, speaking the second prologue to Hecyra (lines 9–57),
claims the plays were ‘purchased at my own expense’ (57; pretio emputo meo).31

28 For the competitive environment at this level, compare the accounts of Millar (1984) 12 and Gruen
29 We may observe in passing that Ovid specifies the praetor, which points to the ludi Apollinares,
games which certainly by the Augustan period were celebrated with six days of ludi sceniici. They
therefore likely represented theatrical contracts of considerable expense.
30 Jerome, Chronicle ann. A.D. 863/64: sed solus aedilis vendit (Jerome, Chronicle ann. A.D.
31 Different views are given by Carney (1965) 33 n. 57, and Lebek (1996) 32–3, but it will be clear that I
find these less convincing. Lebek (1996) 32 associates this disruption with Julius Caesar, but without
reason. The confusion comes from equating Terence the playwright with the troupe and the actor
delivering the prologue in particular. It is the troupe’s perspective that is being represented in the
prologue. Nowhere is this clearer than in the rival accounts of aene equires involved, none of which, I
The stagecraft and performance of Roman comedy

The aediles have purchased the play (that is, a performance of the play) from this troupe. In anticipation of this, Ambivius Turpio has purchased the play (that is, the manuscript from which he can begin rehearsals) from the playwright, because Terence, and Caecilius before him, are not members of the troupe. This represents an initial outlay that Turpio hopes will be offset by the monies gained through the production, and is what he stands to lose. Turpio seems to have made a career of fostering young playwrights and bringing their work to the stage. However, a generation earlier, when the opportunities for performance were considerably fewer, there would be a strong incentive to have a playwright on the payroll as a share in the production, rather than as an independent agent requiring an initial financial outlay.

It is probably anachronistic to think of Turpio purchasing production rights along with the manuscript. While today's society is very concerned with abstract rights of intellectual property, the pressures on a performing troupe in the early second century would probably have been much more pedestrian. Without at least one copy of the script (itself a problematic concept) a new play cannot be staged. It is this technical restriction in a world without a printing press that ties ownership of the manuscript with rights of production, and we shall see ways this control could be maintained. After an initial performance, it becomes less easy to control a script, which could lead to unauthorised productions.

A consequence of this financial dimension is that the plays themselves must be flexible in their construction. Since a functioning troupe will be regularly looking forward to future bookings, a playwright in all likelihood does not know at which festival a given play will be produced. If for whatever reason a new play is not contracted at a given festival, work on the play will nevertheless have begun. We cannot know what the lead-in time for a production was at every occasion, but the troupe has an incentive to be ready to perform a new play with minimal time for rehearsals. The ludi Megalenses provides the clearest timetable. Since

suspect, may be fully trusted. Turpio does not ask for a high price from the magistrates (Hecyra 49, a line written by Terence), but Suetonius, de Poetis (Terence 3), says it was the highest price ever paid for a comedy. Donatus (Ennius, praefatio 6, Wenzler, 1902–8 vol. 1: 160) believed this represents Terence's take - 8,000 denarii = 32,000 HS, as Wenzler (1902–8, 6) notes. Suetonius is however discussing the performance, and this price may be seen to represent the troupe's price from the aediles; Gibula (1985) 77 and n. 11 hints at this possibility. Hecyra 49 is therefore distinguishable, but it may be that the audience was not concerned with the background finances, and such a pose of modesty was considered customary or at least polite.

15. The Ennius prologue distinguishes the poet in lines 3 and 38, which shows that the speaker represented is not Terence but a member of the troupe; see Andrea 1, Heaston Timorumnumen 2, Phaeo 1, Hecyra 13, Adelphi 1.

16. Potter (1999) 270 discusses some first-century BC occasions where the rehearsal time was as short as a week, but these are not for new plays.

17. Could acceptas agi (Ennius 22) refer to the beginning of the rehearsal period?


19. In my production of Curculio, the speech was re-written to accommodate known haunts of students at the university campus where the play was performed.
As Donatus correctly recognised, Hecyra and the gladiatorial combat shared a venue, and the actors felt compelled to leave the stage when those expecting the next event would not listen to the play. The celebration of Anicius' triumph in 167 provides another example of a performance degenerating because of rival entertainments. In this case, musicians began an impromptu mock battle, and were joined by dancers and boxers.

Less clear are the reasons provided for the initial failure of Hecyra. The first prologue relates how ita populus studio stupidus in funambulo | animum occuparar (the audience took a foolish fancy to a tightrope walker who claimed their attention', lines 4–5). A fuller account is provided in the second prologue (lines 33–36):

\[\text{quam pri} \text{num cem agere coeci, pugilum gloria} \]
\[\text{funambuli eodem accessis expectatii,} \]
\[\text{comitum conventus, strepitus, clamor multierum} \]
\[\text{fecerit ut ante tempus extrema foras.} \]

The first time I tried to perform the play, I was forced off the stage early; there was talk of boxers— and added to that the promise of a tightrope walker— crowds of supporters, general uproar, and women screaming.

Two rival entertainments interfered with Terence's play. The praise of boxers (pugilum gloria) need not mean that they were next on the bill as the gladiators would be in 160, though this remains possible. The audience could be discussing boxers who had performed earlier that day (in the same performance venue, or at another) or indeed at some other time. Gilula insists that the promise of the tightrope walker (funambuli ... expectatio) means this performance was next, but this is not a necessary conclusion. Assuming the two accounts are both honestly representing

---

37 For bears, see Horace, Epistulae 2.1.85–6, and Macrobius 2.7.12–16; for gladiators in the forum, see Valerius Maximus, Memoriale 2.1.7, Livy 23.30.45 and 39–46. P. Oxy. 2707, a sixth-century a.d. circus programme, includes singing tightrope walkers among the entertainments, and Suetonius, Galba 6.1, mentions tightrope-walking elephants; for other performers of 'minor' arts, see Porter (1953) 276.

38 Duckworth, 1962 8–2 and 753 and Beure (1964) 161 argue for simultaneous performances; Gilula (1978) for serial performances.


40 We cannot of course know the real reasons for the play's lack of success, which need not be what we are told. Duckworth (1952) 378 n. 41 suggests 'various other factors also were responsible for the rejection of this play by the spectators, e.g., its unusually serious theme and Terence's unconventional treatment of plot and character'.


42 Donatus, ad Hecyra 39 (Wessner 1902–8 II: 200): his abhorret a nostra consuetudine, verumtamen apud antiquos gladiatorum in theatro spectabantur (This is inconsistent with our custom, nevertheless in olden times gladiators were seen in the theatre). This position will be refined below.

43 This further suggests Adelphoe was not presented on the same day back-to-back as Hecyra as a 'double bill' at the ludi funebres, but instead took place at a different time, with the two plays as it were 'in repertory'. This inference is based on the prologue's silence: we may presume that the prologue would mention the successful performance of another of the author's plays immediately preceding Hecyra, and it could not have followed immediately, since it is clear that gladiators had been scheduled.

44 Polybius 30.22, quoted by Athenaeus 630b–d.


47 Gilula (1978) and see Gilula (1981), and Sandbach (1982).
the event, Gilula’s hypothesis would mean the distraction (line 4) occurred as he was setting up in the venue where Terence was performing (or that the rope was set up before Terence’s play, which seems unlikely if the magistrates were not actively trying to sabotage the performance). It is equally possible that some of the audience could see the funambulis performing elsewhere, and that the expectatio accompanied an intention to move to that location. The actors left the stage because of the noise and possibly a departing crowd. Regardless, the Hecyra prologues demonstrate certainly that gladiators and actors could perform in the same venue (a ‘main stage’ location) and that perhaps secondary venues existed and secondary types of performance could occur in parallel with main stage attractions.

Also employed were other individuals essential to the smooth running of the games. Indeed, there was a whole section of the urban economy that would cater specifically to those individuals celebrating the ludi, the existence of many of whom cannot be recovered. Among these professionals are at least two people specifically concerned with the ludi scaenici: the choragus and the praeco. The Athenian chorégos provided the financial resources for the production of choruses, both dramatic and non-dramatic (dithyrambic). He was, in modern theatre parlance, the producer. In the Roman republic, the Latinised form choragus had assumed a very different meaning.

Plautus makes two references to the choragus, and at Curculio 462–84 introduces one as a character. At Persa 159–60, Saturio seeks a source for his daughter’s disguise:

SAT. pòllèv ornamenta?

TOX. abs chorago sumis;

dare debent praebenda aediles locaverunt.

SAT. Whence the costume?

TOX. Take them from the choragus. He has to give them: the aediles hired him to provide!

Toxilus here makes a meta-theatrical joke about the backstage reality of a Roman performance, and this brief mention provides sufficient data to suggest that the aediles... defrayed the production’s extra costs separately and paid the supplier of these extras directly, and this on top of the payment made to the troupe and the poet. Similarly, at Trinumnum 858, the sycopanta claims of his employer, ipse ornamenta a chorago haec sumpsit suo periculo (‘he himself got the costume from the choragus, at his own risk’). Suo periculo suggests that the costumes are rented and that a deposit has been paid against their return, and this is confirmed by the choragus in Cæresio, when he refers to ornamenta quae locavi (464: ‘the costumes I rented’). Gilula argues that the choragus ‘belongs to the off-stage fictional setting of Trinumnum’, i.e. that the reference to the choragus maintains the dramatic stage world and is not meta-theatrical. Rather, this is an entirely typical Plautine blurring of the play’s frame of reference, and that any reference to the choragus will be understood in the most immediate sense for the Roman audience, the theatrical context.

The choragus therefore provides ornamenta (‘costumes’), which are among the things that may be classified as choragium. When it is remembered that in Elizabethan theatre, the costs of costumes and their maintenance was the major expense for a permanent company, the presence of such a professional could greatly enhance the possibility for spectacle for an itinerant troupe. The choragus was a professional, no doubt working with a group of employees, and seems to have had contracts both with the aediles as well as with individual performers (it may be that with the performers, only a deposit was required). It is possible in any case that the choragus’ responsibilities do not end with this. The magistrates had to hire someone to build the stage building itself in the days before the festival. This too may have been the responsibility of

50 Gilula (1996) 482, with discussion at 482–2.
51 Gilula (1996) 480, with discussion at 480–81. The claim seems to be contradicted, however, on 482. Similarly, in Pseudolus 1183–5 when Simo and Bulos tease Harpax, believing him to be someone claiming to be Harpax, they ask the cost of his cloak (chlamys) and blade (machaera). I take this to be a meta-theatrical reference to the backstage presence of the choragus.
52 Perhaps Gilula believes this because the Curculio Choragus says he deal with Phaedromus, the character, rather than the scenic Curculio 467–8. My reading would suggest that Plautus is here deliberately blurring the theatrical reality with the fictional dramatic world.
53 This also shows that the choragus is not normally considered to be part of the troupe (i.e. ‘the stage manager’) – though obviously this is a troupe member playing the role. This seems to be the assumption of Donatus’ obscure comment ad Ennius 967, choragis est administratio, ut opportune in prosequentem (‘the choragus is the management, so that the prosequent runs smoothly’), Wesner (1992–8) vol. 1: 478), though perhaps the meaning had changed since Plautus’ day.
54 Festus, Græc. Lat. 41. 1, defines choragium as instrumentum scaenarum (‘stage apparatus’). There is no need to assume that the choragus is the play’s director, or is the stage manager, as is sometimes claimed, following Winberger (1892) 127; see Gilula (1996) 484 n. 2. Indeed, that he is contracted separately makes this fundamentally implausible.
55 In this sense he is exactly like his Hellenistic Greek counterpart, the himatiosmíasis. Sifilas (1967) 81–2 provides the sources for both types of financial arrangements, but does not consider that both might be operating at once.

49 The chorégos is discussed in detail by Wilson (2000).
the choragus and his team, and would then constitute his principal obligation
to the aediles, and leave him free to make separate contracts with the
performers for ornamenta. Captivi 61–2 demonstrate that the choragium of a
comedy is different from that of a tragedy, and that the tragic choragium
allows battles to be presented on stage but the comic one does not. Gilula
argues that choragium must include the set, interpreting Festus’ definition in
the broadest possible way. This is a possible but not a necessary conclusion,
and it could be that choragium and ornamenta are synonyms, both meaning
costumes. Regardless, someone is building a set, and the set will be used by a
variety of troupes, performing a variety of plays (Menachmi 72–6):

haec urbs Epidamnus est, dum haec agitur fabula;
guardo aliue agitur, aliud iter oppidum.
sicul familiae quoque solet mutari:
modo hic habitas leno, modo adulcens, modo senex,
pauper, mendicus, sex, parasitus, bariolus.

This city is Epidamnus, while this play is acted.
Where another is acted, it will become another town.
Households, too, are typically changed the same way;
Now a pimp lives here, now a young man, now an old man,
Poor man, beggar, king, parasite, see.

While all of the figures listed in line 75 are from comedy, at least some of
those listed in line 76 point to figures more often found on a tragic stage.
If this passage then is properly interpreted (that the same set building is
used for all types of play), then it follows that Captivi 61–2 shows that
choragium and ornamenta are essentially synonymous, with choragium
perhaps being used more broadly to include stage properties.

Rather than undergoing this expense at each festival, the creation of a
permanent theatre was contemplated from time to time throughout the
second century. Livy 40.51.3 records a contract being let for the
construction of a theatre and stage at the ludi Apollinares in 179. These
theatres were always to be wooden constructions (a permanent theatre
need not be stone; see Vitruvius 5.5.7); nor is it accidental that
the initiative in 179 came during a festival controlled by the praetors,
where more elevated political reputations were at stake.

A rising from this was the issue of rehearsal. While we cannot know
how long a play would be rehearsed (though, given the regular festival
timetable, I expect it was typically only a few weeks), it is improbable
there would be opportunity for rehearsals in situ – all preparations would
take place at other locations, in contexts that will not necessarily bear any
resemblance to the final performance space, since (at least in one sense)
the venue did not yet exist. There is no evidence concerning the nature
of actors’ scripts for republican Rome, but a later papyrus and some
reasonable inferences drawn from it point to further uncertainty and need
for flexibility. P. Oxy. 4546 is the remains of a first-century actor’s script
found in Roman Egypt. The actor played Admetus in Euripides’
Alcestis. So much about this performance remains obscure to us, but it is
clear that the actor had been given a ‘part’ – only his lines were written
down (arguably like the role of the mistress in most of the adultery mime,
P. Oxy. 413 verso), with perhaps a mark to indicate speech divisions.
Lacking even his cue lines, this actor apparently learned the lines of
Admetus from this text, and worked out the performance dynamics in
rehearsal. We do not know that this was the rehearsal technique
employed by Plautus’ troupe, but it is a good bet that it was. Writing out
any lines would constitute an investment of both time and resources for
the troupe, and again we can see the pressure to economise. When a
troupe bought a play, as did Ambivius Turpio’s troupe from Terence, it
would have received a single copy from the playwright. Copying parts
rather than full scripts streamlines the rehearsal process, allowing a
quicker dispersal of lines to the actors, and further provides a safeguard
against the unlawful selling of the troupe’s investment.

61 My actors experienced the same situation as they prepared for the outdoor performances I
directed, with the only opportunity to perform at the site being a ‘dress rehearsal’ the day before the
run began. There were always spectators – as with the ludi, the location had been selected
because it was a high-traffic thoroughfare. The actors at least never felt over-rehearsed. Throughout
the run, they availed themselves of new opportunities as they learned to react and respond both to
the performance space and to the audience.
63 These motivations also lie behind the use of parts in Elizabethan theatre. AMOR (1967) 44–6
suggests that ancient rehearsals were in fact accomplished without any physical text, but were all
learned with the aid of a ‘prompter’, as is still done in some countries today. Certainly such a
technique is possible, and may have been used for those actors not carrying the bulk of the play. It
does seem to be the system used in the rehearsal of Greek choruses (Plutarch, Moralia 83c).
fee received for his services came from the company. While the smooth running of the venue is clearly important (Hecyra 4–5 and 33–41 describe what happens when things do not go well), the offer of pay demonstrates that the praeco was not in the company but was an official appointed by the magistrates. A praeco was ‘a junior and uncoveted apparitorial post’ through which there might be some hope of advancement. It would seem his duties were to silence or at least to quiet the crowd, and in doing so no doubt he also served to help draw the audience to the performance area. Livy 33.2.4 refers to praeco cum tubicini ('a herald with a trumpeter'), and perhaps the use of a horn assisted in his task. This is likely to have been more than a simple fanfare, which the troupe itself could provide. The presence of an independent contractor with this job suggests not only that under normal conditions the task filled several minutes' time, but also that there were related duties as the praeco helped effect the transition from one performance to another. Perhaps he announced the title of the play to the audience (Donatus, de Comoedia 8.11, though this passage is confused). He was, in effect, the front-of-house manager, responsible to the magistrates for the smooth running of the ludi scenici or (more likely) of a single performance venue. If this is correct, then we may equally believe that the designator ('usher,' mentioned only at Poenulus 19), who stays near the front of the theatre (19: praeter ois) and helps people find their seats, works with the praeco, perhaps as an assistant. The force of the whole sentence suggests that there would be more than one designator working with the praeco.

**PERFORMANCE SPACES**

There was no permanent theatre, of stone or wood, in Rome until the theatre of Pompey was built in 55 BC, though several others followed soon afterwards. A number of attempts were made to create a permanent

---

64 Purcell (1983) 147. For the praecores generally, see Hinard (1976), and Purcell (1983) 147–8.
65 Further, the use of the praeco does argue against the presence of musical overtures provided by the tibicen, despite Cicero, Lucullus 20 (Moore forthcoming), ch. 1.
66 Terence's problems with staging Hecyra may therefore have arisen due to a particularly weak or disorganised praeco.
67 The references to the praeco jokingly imply that he failed to draw the audience as expected, and dismissively suggest he is a mere employee. In response, the praeco may be good-natured, and happily become the actor's stooge (Slater 2000) 155 n. 77). Alternately, any hesitation will serve to make the audience louder, forcing the praeco to stand and re-silence them. In contrast, Gilula (1993) 286–7 argues that the individual being addressed is not a real praeco (who having done his job is now sitting down), but a member of the troupe playing the part of the praeco. This seems to me an odd joke, and one that risks alienating the audience who, we must suspect, can still see the real praeco sitting before them (praeter ois).
The Stagecraft and Performance of Roman Comedy

The Experience of Roman Comedy

Theatres before this, but all were unsuccessful and postdate Plautine production. When theatres were built, they possessed a distinctive shape, with a semicircular orchestra and a long thin stage space in front of a multi-levelled scaena frons. It is unlikely however that the earlier, temporary stages upon which the extant comedies were performed ever had that shape. Part of the reason for this is architectural: temporary constructions made out of wood, constructed hastily in the days before the ludi, would possess neither the structural strength nor occupy sufficient space to anticipate the proportions of the later permanent performance venues. There are no indications that the temporary theatres looked like or were used like scaled-down versions of the later ones. Indeed, the topographical discussion below will suggest that the opposite is true, that performances took place in a variety of venues of different shapes. The situation therefore parallels the development of the Greek theatre, where the fifth-century orchestra was not always circular but was usually an irregular polygon.

Those considering early Roman performance venues look to two artistic sources, both of which are problematic. First is the collection of later Roman wall paintings with theatrical motifs. Beacham believes these temporary wooden stages provide a 'missing link' between the stone theatres of Hellenistic Greece and the stone theatres Rome began to build in the first century: these are paintings of actual Roman performance spaces, and the advent of permanent theatres did not affect the visual representation of Roman theatre architecture. This is not credible. The combination of imperial wall painting, incorporating features found on temporary South Italian stages, and employing Greek trompe l’œil painting techniques is too complex a combination to posit without corroboration. It presumes a fixed relationship between audience and performance space over time, which is not supported by the literary or archaeological record. The second source is the illustrations of stages on fourth-century South Italian red-figure vases. Though much earlier than Plautus' plays, these stages show a wooden stage approximately 1 metre high, sometimes fronted with banners (which serve to increase the appearance of permanence), and accessed by a low wooden staircase. It is typically suggested that these South Italian stages are like the temporary stages upon which phlyakes and Atellan farces would have been performed, and, following them, the plays of Plautus and Terence. There are three problems with this claim. First, it is no longer believed that these scenes depict the native Italian performance tradition exclusively. As the influence of fifth-century Athenian comedy on these illustrations becomes increasingly apparent, there exists less reason to assume that any Italian traditions used such stages, to say nothing of the chronological disparities. Second, the illustrations depict a performance space that gives access to the orchestra, with steps creating two levels of performance that may be used simultaneously, as on a Greek stage. The demands of Roman comedy are different. All plays are set on a (level) street in front of one, two, or three doors. No play employs a split-level main stage area. Third, the stage on the vases mandates a particular relationship with the audience. Every performance space creates a relationship between scaena ('performance space') and cavea ('auditorium')—between actors and audience. Consequently, 'We do not know exactly what the stage wall used in Plautus and Terence looked like'. The architecture defines this relationship, and it does so in a way that tends towards an ideal. This claim bears some examination.

Any culture with theatre will create a venue that is ideally suited to the drama it produces. This is not a causative relationship, but a recognition that there exists a nexus around which the venue, the work performed

72 For a duly cautious sample formulation, see Richardson (1998) 580: 'At first plays were given on simple stages ruf up for the occasion, and the spectators stood in a crowd before these. This, one gathers, must have been the way the Etruscan dancest were presented when their art was first introduced to Rome (Livy 7.2.3-7) and the way Atellan farces were traditionally performed.'
The Stagecraft and Performance of Roman Comedy

(or the playwright), and the performers will collaborate to yield an optimal result for the ideal audience. Experimental theatre will push these limits and in time alter the parameters of performance, thereby creating a new set of audience expectations of what the theatre can do. In republican Rome, all three of these were variables, and any one could be changed according to demands of any other. Shaw's lengthy and detailed stage directions imply an understanding of naturalism that could only be created on the picture-window stage of Victorian England. They imply an acting style that maintains a fourth wall, creating a rigid separation between the audience and the actors. Similarly, the structure of the ἀγῶν and stichomythia and the use of messenger speeches in Greek tragedy presume delivery to a much larger audience by actors wearing masks: these techniques developed as a means to facilitate audience comprehension in the vast Athenian theatre. To alter the intended performance spaces of any of these works – to perform Shakespeare in a proscenium arch or in a black box theatre, for instance – changes the variables and the nature of the performance that is possible. This is not a judgment – it is not ‘wrong’ to perform a play in a venue for which it was not intended – but it is ahistorical, and requires a number of adaptations (‘translations’) to the script and its means of presentation to create effective theatre. This is a truism among theatre practitioners, but, since it allows for so many permutations and no clear ‘best answer’, it is still easily overlooked. Changes may even be introduced subconsciously, as actors and directors work to create meaning out of the text.

Further, one element in this nexus can point to significant features of another. A raised stage, such as is found in the Globe and on the temporary stages seen on South Italian vases, means that at least some of the audience will be positioned below the stage, and therefore will be looking up at the performance. In Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre, this creates an area for the (low-paying) groundlings, and keeps sightlines clear for all those in the more expensive seats surrounding the stage. Similarly, if Aeschylus had been writing for a black box, the use of masks is unlikely to have developed as it did. While there will certainly be a period of growth and experimentation, performance practice will quickly realise an ideal means of delivery, which creates a standard with which future texts may engage. For any type of entertainment, this nexus of influences will exert itself.

Tacitus attests to a change over time in Roman theatrical venues: nam ante subitarii gradibus et scena in tempus structa ludus edi solitos, vel, si vetustiora repetas, stantem populum spectavisse, ne, si consideret theatro dies totius ignavia continuaret (Annales 14.20: ‘Before, the games had usually been exhibited with the help of improvised tiers of benches and a stage thrown up for the occasion; or, to go further into the past, the people stood to watch: seats in the theatre, it was feared, might tempt them to pass whole days in indolence’). Tacitus’ concern is the moral condition of the audience, but he points to a three-stage development in actor–audience relations at Rome. At first, the audience stood. If the performers were to hold the attention of more than two or three rows of spectators, this would require a raised stage to allow for effective sightlines: the audience were at this point like Shakespeare’s groundlings, and the actors would need a venue similar to what is seen on the South Italian vases, though perhaps without the staircase and the two levels of performance. The second stage Tacitus describes, with its ‘hurriedly built tiered seats and a stage built for the occasion’, represents a development whereby the audience can now look down on the performance space. The term scena need not imply a raised stage (rather than just ‘performance area’ or ‘backdrop’). This architectural change would necessarily be associated with a different kind of performance style. The third stage, the ‘modern’ stone theatres of late republican Rome, lead to a different performance style again. The first two stage types Tacitus describes allow for the creation of intimacy between actor and audience. Only the third, with the audience positioned only on one side of the stage space, leads to a separation between the two – as in the proscenium arch. Indeed, the huge scenaes frons and the long narrow stage of the permanent theatre

---

82 One aspect of this is evoked by Bennett (1997) 143–7. 83 Arnott (1961) 87–9.
84 This is one benefit of the reconstructed Globe Theatre in London; it allows discoveries about the intended performance space that have been forgotten.
86 Similarly, one may look at films in the 1920s and early 1930s and observe that actors are framed as if they were on stage: the audience is shown whole bodies, and faces are restricted to the very top of the screen. This however gave way to close-ups and (again) a different style of acting, which was better suited to the new medium.
88 There is no need to infer from this, incidentally, that shows were necessarily short ‘sketches’. Modern audiences stand for more than two hours regularly at the reconstructed Globe, myself among them. But when this is the case, both the physical environment and the actors are working to keep the audience members present, and prevent them from wandering off. Vitruvius 5.6.2 suggests Roman stages were never higher than 5 feet, out of consideration for the Roman senators sitting in the front (Goldberg (1998) 99).
89 Rome was very late in this development, though, and other Roman cities in Italy did have permanent performance venues earlier.
serve to reinforce this separation, and such features have no place in the earlier performance contexts Tacitus describes. They are also not going to foster drama that creates a rapport between actor and audience, such as is accomplished by the metatheatrical plays of Plautus.87

Leaving aside the issue of later performances (the venues played by Roscius were no doubt very different from the original locations, and would have required a different performance style and, likely, alterations of the text), even in Plautus' day there is no need to assume a single venue type. Different ludi were celebrated in different parts of Rome, and at each occasion a different performance venue might be found. Flexibility becomes central for both plays and players, since a given play may end up in any of a number of performance venues. In fact, the one location where we can feel confident we know a Plautine play was performed corresponds to none of the performance spaces described by Tacitus.88

Each festival was associated with a particular part of Rome. The ludi Romani and the ludi Plebei were centred on the forum, as apparently were ludi funebres.89 The bulk of the celebrations for the ludi Apollinares were probably celebrated on the other side of the Capitoline hill in the Circus Flamininus, and the ludi Megalenses were probably celebrated above the Circus Maximus at the top of the Palatine cliff in the front of the temple of the Magna Mater.90 At a minimum, then, we should expect three separate locations for theatrical performances. These places, where the set was constructed (which too might vary by some degree each year), need not be similar in shape to one other. Indeed, there is every reason to believe that they were not.

The situation is clearest for the ludi Megalenses. Cicero explicitly refers to those games quos in Palatio nostri maiores ante templum in ipso Matris Magnae conspectu Megalenses fieri celebrarique voluerunt (de Haruspicio Responso 24: 'which on the Palatine our ancestors wished to establish and celebrate as "Megalensian" before the temple in the sight of the Great Mother herself').91 In ... conspectu can only mean directly in front of the temple, so that the cult figure housed within can be thought to see the

events. The ludi were first celebrated in 194, and the temple itself was dedicated on 10 April 191 – celebrations that included performances of Plautus’ Pseudolus. Excavations demonstrate the nature of the space: 'it is too small (and probably too irregular) a space to accommodate a complete theatre structure, i.e. both a cavea and a proscenium, of any size. A freestanding building, however temporary ... is impossible.'92 The greatest pressures for space come not from the stage but from the cavea, which holds the audience. Goldberg's solution is elegant and convincing: the audience sat on the temple steps, and looked down, not at a raised stage but to the narrow and irregular trapezoidal podium in front of the temple, which constituted the performance area. The goddess is in a position to watch directly, from the same perspective as the majority of spectators, as the play is performed in the temple’s forecourt.93

A plausible reconstruction of the original Temple of the Magna Mater ... suggests seven steps, each c. 40 m long in the lower, wider tier and eighteen steps of c. 20 m length in the upper staircase leading directly to the temple ... This yields a crowd of just under 1,300, plus those who might gather on the nearby Temple of Victory or stand elsewhere on or by the podium ... To imagine any audience of over 2,000 gathering for a performance of Pseudolus at the dedication in 191 or fidgeting through the beginning of Hecyra in 165 therefore becomes very difficult.94

I will return to the size of the audience later, but for now we may note that Cicero speaks of constrictum spectaculis (de Haruspicio Responso 22: 'the small area for the spectators').95 The performance space at the ludi Megalenses bears no real relationship to theatres in Greek cities, but rather is seamlessly incorporated into the landscape of Rome.

A similar venue probably developed for the ludi Apollinares. In 179, M. Aemilius Lepidus attempted to construct a theatrum et proscenium ad Apollinis (Livy 40.51.3: 'a theatre and stage-building at Apollo’s [temple]'), at the north end of the forum Boarium. The archaeology of this site is complex, and there is no way of knowing precisely what existed there in the republic. Lepidus’ intended construction was part of a larger building programme, which included among other things the construction of a portico ad aedem Apollinis Medici (Livy 40.51.6: 'at the temple of Apollo

---

88 Given such flexibility and our ignorance of techniques of ancient actor training, I do not believe we need to accept specific limitations on the ability to project, as, for example, does Goldberg (1998) 17. I prefer to look for indications of the physical dynamics of the performance venues and to assume that actor training in antiquity was capable of producing performers with sufficient histrionic ability to meet the technical needs of the performance spaces.
91 Goldberg (1998) 6, incorporating results from the recent excavations at the site by Pensabene.
92 Tacitus' use of subterraneae gradus, improvised tiers of benches, suggests that temple steps had not always been used by theatre audiences, or not exclusively.
93 Goldberg (1998) 13–14, with illustration on 6, from Pracitane.
94 OLD s.v. spectaculum 3 cites this passage and Carv. 647.
Medicus'). While apparently the games were first held in the Circus Maximus, it need not still be used for theatrical performances in Plautus' day. When the Theatre of Marcellus (theatrum Marcelli) was built in the Augustan period, the area immediately adjoining the temple of Apollo Medicus was thought to have theatrical connotations, and Livy 41.28.11 confirms that the Circus Flaminius, slightly further to the west, could be used for theatrical ludus funebres in 174. It is not likely that Lepidus, as censor and pontifex maximus (Livy 40.51.1), would be innovating in his selection of a site for theatrical activity, which of course falls under the auspices of the god. Indeed, the ludi Apollinares commemorated the date of the temple's foundation, 13 July. At some point, then, perhaps soon after 212 (so the practice could be seen to be accustomed by 179), the site for the ludi Apollinares seems to have been moved closer to the area of the temple, near to it but still separate. Space was therefore restricted for the building of either a theatre or a temple in the 170s, but a connection is certainly present in Livy's mind. The site later occupied by the theatre of Marcellus was the obvious place for theatrical activity dedicated to Apollo.

It is tempting in this light to attempt to reinterpret certain passages in Plautus. When a character addresses Apollo, as Eucilus does at Aulularia 393–5 and Chrysalus does in Bacchides 170–73, it is possible that reference is not being made to a stage altar. While it would be natural in a Greek context to have a character address the shrine to Apollo Agueius that was part of the front of a typical Greek house, this would make no sense in a Roman context. The Latin may point to an aspect of the Greek original for these plays, but the reference would still need to be naturalised in the Roman context. If these plays were performed at the ludi Apollinares, the result would be a striking and amusing metatheatrical joke, as the actors evoke the god whose presence can be seen by the audience sitting in the area where the theatre of Marcellus was later built. Indeed, Bacchides 170–73 then masterfully blurs the dramatic setting of Athens with the theatrical context in Rome:

eritis patria, salve, quam ego biennio,
opsum bine in Ephesum abi, conspecto lubens.

saluto te, vicine Apollo, qui aedibus
propinquus nostris accolis . . .
Land of my master, greetings. It's two years
Since I left for Ephesus, and I rejoice to see you.
I salute you, neighbour Apollo, you who dwell
Beside our house . . .

(tr. Barsby)

The words vicine Apollo do not require a physical altar on stage, and emphasise the performance area's proximity to the Roman temple. While it is generally assumed that the stage altar has a 'default' affiliation with Apollo, in fact only one other passage makes such a connection explicit. Dorippa and her 84-year-old slave Syra have arrived home, whereupon Dorippa wishes to make an offering (Mercator 675–78):

\[\begin{align*}
da aequum cedo \\
qui hanc vicini nostri aram augetam,

da sane hanc virgam lauri. abi tu intro. \\

dor. & Apollo, quaeso te, ut des pacem propitius . . . \\
syra. & co.

dor. & Give me something

That I may offer on our neighbour’s altar here.

Good – give me this laurel branch. You go inside.

syra. & I go.

dor. & Apollo, I beseech you, kindly grant your peace . . .

\end{align*}\]

In the Greek context, this would be interpreted as an offering at a household shrine. We cannot know what Plautus' source, Philemon's Emporos, had at the point corresponding to Mercator 675–8. In Mercator, however, it may represent the use of the stage altar (in which case we must believe Syra happens coincidentally to be carrying a laurel branch) or it may be another metatheatrical evocation of vicinus Apollo. Might we imagine the actor playing Syra actually leaving the performance area, going towards the real altar of Apollo and finding a pre-set laurel bough to be used by Dorippa? Whatever the answer, these passages are not

96 Livy 25.2.14, Macrobius, Sat. 1.17.27–29. Indeed, whether the Circus Maximus was ever used may be open to question: Macrobius 1.17.29 says merely in cire, and it remains possible that in Livy 25.2.14 ludus praxior in cire maicino sum facturos est, the adjective maxima represents a false inference by Livy or an interpolator.
97 Szandra (1911) 93–6.
98 Duckworth (1952) 8.
99 Indeed, the exchange between the two characters at 670–75 would suggest that Syra is not carrying anything. Dorippa's question at 673, quid emeris?, then sets up the joke answer. Nixon in his translation assumes she carries 'a few parcels'.
The Stagecraft and Performance of Roman Comedy

enough to warrant maintaining the Greek custom of the Apollo Agueius altar on the Roman stage.

The third likely location for theatrical performances in Rome is the forum Romanum, probably used at the ludi Romani, some ludi funebres, and possibly the ludi Plebeii, with equestrian events celebrated in the Circus Maximus. Where precisely the theatrical activity was located in the forum cannot be determined, but there are good reasons to believe that more than one area could be used: the forum and Rostra were the focal points for ludi funebres (Polybius 6.93.1); gladiatorial fights also featured. Livy 23.30.15, 31.50.4, and Cicero, pro Sestio 12.4). The forum was not nearly as built-up as it would be in the Augustan period: 'at the end of the third century BC the Forum Romanum remained an irregular open space marked by nothing more monumental than a handful of average-sized temples' (see Fig. 2). Major constructions were begun after Plautus' active career, including basilicas in 184, 179, and 169, though the burning of many shops had led to the rebuilding of the atrium Regium during wartime in 209 (Livy 26.27.2, 27.11.16).

The Choragus' speech in Circulo isolates almost a dozen individual locations in the forum. Further, each Roman space is connected in some way with the world of Comedy, and this is part of a larger series of references blurring the divisions between the world of the play and Rome itself. Here is Moore's conclusion for the location of the Circulo performance:

The choragus's tour is both restricted and orderly. It includes only places in the immediate vicinity of the forum, east of the western end of the comitium. It is most unlikely that, if the play were performed at some other location, Plautus would have discussed only this small area, or that the choragus would have been so careful to lead his spectators from the comitium east along the north side of the forum to the fish market, then back through the middle of the forum to the west of the Lacus Curtius, then along the south side of the forum to the Temple of Castor and Pollux, and finally south a little to the Velabrum. Given, then, that the choragus does not mention such places farther west in the forum as the temples of Saturn or Concordia, there is every indication that he speaks from a stage just south of the comitium, facing east.

---

101. Sambough (1988) 110. The illustration comes from Welch (1992) 29, fig. 11. I am grateful to K. Welch and the editors of The Journal of Roman Archaeology for permission to reproduce the image, which was drawn by Philip Scinson. K. Welch now believes that numismatic evidence shows that the temple of Vesta was not at this date a columnar tholos but preserved something of its original hut-like character.
102. Welch (2003) 7 and 17, and see Coarelli (1977) and Welch (2003) 17 n. 47: 'It was only after the first decade of the 2nd c. when money began to flow into Rome after the defeat of Hannibal and the Seleucids, that such large, public projects were undertaken.'
103. The first five locations follow the northern edge of the forum, from west to east:
1. the Comitium, line 470, attracts perjures (perjurium);
2. the temple of Venus Cloacina, line 471, attracts liars and braggarts (mentes ac gloriosum);
3. the basilica, lines 473-3, attracts husbands (damnavi maritum) and prostitutes (venera coelietis);
4. the Forum Piscatorium (fish market), line 474, probably refers to the Macellum, the great food market northeast of the forum; it attracts dining-club members (consules symbolum).
5. the open culverts of the Cloaca (in medio proper canalum), line 476, attracts show-offs (ostentatores); it was to be covered by 179 (Richardson 1992 373);
6. supra lacus, lines 477-9, must therefore refer to the Lacus Curtius (not the Lacus Iuturnae); it attracts the confirmed, the talkative, and the ill-willed (confidentes garrulique et malic.)
7. the Velabrum, lines 483-4, attracts various merchants known to cheat - bakers, butchers, and grocers (vel faciunt vel lanium vel haruspicem).
8. the temple of Castor, line 481, attracts the untrustworthy (quibus credas male);
9. the temple of Vesta, line 482, attracts 'those who sell themselves' (homines qui ipse se vendant; as in 473 the group of prostitutes is at least partly male).
10. the Tuscan villas, line 483, attracts 'those who sell themselves' (homines qui ipse se vendant; as in 473 the group of prostitutes is at least partly male).
Many aspects of this interpretation are convincing, and precisely this location would later be used for the Rostrum Augusti in the first century. However, by suggesting that the actor faces east, Moore places the audience in the bulk of the forum, essentially filling it. He describes how this compounds the joke, as individual spectators are physically positioned in at least some of the locations specified, and incorporated into the world of the play, and indeed, this is how the Rostrum Augusti is generally thought to have been used.\textsuperscript{106}

Several factors suggest that Plautus' audience would instead be positioned in the much smaller area to the west, and that an actor delivering the Choragus' speech would face in that direction. This has an effect on the dynamics of the scene: the actor gesticulates beside and behind himself, beginning stage right with the Comitium and with each location pointing further upstage; he refers to directly behind the stage building as he refers to the Cloaca and the Lacus Curtius (476–9), and then points stage left and begins working his way upstage with gestures along the south side of the forum. The chief advantage of this orientation is that the spectators are already facing the indicated direction without having to crane their necks. The Choragus' metatheatrical speech asks the audience to look beyond the limits of the theatre (in some cases over whatever temporary set has been constructed). There are indications that at least part of the audience must be able to see (or at least look in the direction of) the named locations clearly, since, having pointed to the tabernae veterae and the temple of Castor and Pollux (480–81), the Choragus then does not continue further east beyond the sightlines possible, but instead points to the road that lies between these two, the Tuscan vicus (482–3) which then leads to the Velabrum (line 483).\textsuperscript{107} This is the only interruption in the smooth S-curve the Choragus has been following, and it is explained best by taking advantage of the physical position of the entire audience. Even if not every spectator can actually see the road, all know where it is. As discussed below, Lyco the danista ('banker') in the scenes framing the Choragus' speech, arrives from stage left, which corresponds with where Curculio 480 places moneylenders. If the audience faces east, this limits the area allotted for the theatre space as a whole, and perhaps allows the steps of the temples of Saturn and Concordia to be used for audience seating. The forum is not overwhelmed with a single comic performance.

_Heckyra_ 39–42 demonstrated that gladiatorial combats and _ludi scaenici_ could share a venue. Jory believes there is a certain amount of evidence for gladiatorial combats in the theatres at Rome, that is at venues where _ludi scaenici_ were performed.\textsuperscript{108} The reverse is just as likely: that _ludi scaenici_ could be performed in venues designed for gladiatorial combat. Temporary wooden amphitheatres were built in the Roman forum.\textsuperscript{109}

The _cavea_ of such a temporary wooden amphitheatre could have been supported by a truss-like system of beams (which could have been constructed in a day or two, if the temporary seating for the Palio in Siena today is any indication). If the _cavea_ was 5 to 10 m high it could have had between 10 and 20 rows of seats and accommodated up to 10,000 spectators. The audience could still have watched the games from the second storeys of the basilicas...\textsuperscript{110}

Even if this overestimates the speed of construction (which I suspect it does, despite _subitariis_ in _Tacitus, Annals_ 14.20), a temporary gladiatorial venue would fill the eastern two-thirds of the forum, with a diagonal stretching from the Rostra to the temple of Castor and Pollux. Such a space would not necessarily be built at all festivals. When constructed, this represented a further significant cost for the magistrates. Plutarch describes how, later in the second century, some administrators attempted to defray these expenses: _τῶν ἀρχώντων οἱ πλείστοι θεωρητίρια κύκλῳ κατασκεύασαντες ἑξεμπλάσων_ (Gaius Gracchus 12.3: 'Most of the magistrates, having built spectator seats in a circle, were renting them out') – but Gracchus insisted the seats be removed.\textsuperscript{111}

If a wooden amphitheatre were in place during the performance of _Curculio_, then the _ad hoc_ theatre space could occupy the remaining part of the forum, as described. But it is also possible that the amphitheatre itself could be used for theatre, as at the _ludi funebres_ of Paullus in 160. Once the expense of an amphitheatre had been undertaken, it is possible the space would be used for all performances, including _ludi scaenici_. In some ways, this represents the clearest means of explaining what happened to the second performance of _Heckyra_. A temporary _cavea_ from placed within the arena would effectively reduce the seating capacity for a

---

\textsuperscript{106} See Dio Cassius, epitome of Book 74.4.4, for Pertinax's funeral in AD 193, held in the forum. Women sit in the porticoes, men under the open sun, which implies a similar orientation.

\textsuperscript{107} For the authenticity of this line, see Moore (1997) 354–5.

\textsuperscript{108} Jory (1986) 537. This was Donatus' interpretation, _ad Heckyra_ 39.

\textsuperscript{109} Welch (1994) 69–78. Livy 135.8–9 describes temporarily erected bleacher-type seating in Rome's earliest days.

\textsuperscript{110} Welch (1994) 76, and see the figure on p. 75.

\textsuperscript{111} Welch (1994) 77 associates this passage specifically to the wooden amphitheatre because of _κωλέω_.
play by two-thirds (we can imagine the audience seated along the minor axis of the ellipse on the western side, again facing east, so they are not looking into the afternoon sun). An audience entering such a space with the intention of seeing gladiators— it is an amphitheatre, after all—would indeed cause confusion (Hecyra 4:i: tumultuamur, clamant, pugnant de loco) particularly since a gladiatorial audience would expect to be able to fill all the seats, and not merely those at one end. This is speculative, but it does suggest another possible performance venue. It was not used for Circulus, however. The presence of the extensive wooden superstructure changes the amount of available space in the forum. Despite the audience being in the centre of the forum, most of the imaginative effects created by the Choragus' tour would be eliminated, since most of the spaces listed lie beneath the sightlines of the seated audience (regardless of where they sit).

In addition, a number of factors point towards the use of the Comitium as a site of theatrical activity within the forum. No archaeological record of the republican Comitium survives, but it seems certain that at this time 'it was a circular amphitheatre of steps, on which the Romans stood in their assemblies, leading up to the curia or the senate on the north side'. There was a speaker's platform, the Rostra, slightly built up from which magistrates would address the assembly and on which the praetor held his tribunal, facing the Curia (see Fig. 2).

The Rostra physically created a barrier that blocked the view of some of the rest of the forum for those present in the Comitium, but its precise dimensions cannot be determined. Perhaps we can imagine a temporary set being built directly in front of the Rostra, connecting two points of the circle of the Comitium, with the performance space facing north to the Curia, where the audience was situated on the steps. This produces a much smaller cavea, though it is one largely isolated from forum distractions. This seems to be the situation presumed by Livy 27.36.8: 'eo anno primum ex quo Hannibal in Italiam venisset comitium tectum esse memoriae proditum est, et ludi Romani senel instauratos ab aedilibus curulis Q. Metello et C. Servilio (In that year [208 BC], for the first time since Hannibal had entered Italy, it is recorded that the Comitium was covered, and that the ludi Romani were repeated for one day by the aediles Q. Metellus and C. Servilius). The end of the sentence suggests that the context for the beginning is the ludi Romani. This surprising claim is very important, for the covering of the Comitium almost certainly indicates that the space was being used as a performance venue.

The use of vela (sails) as sunscreens becomes standard much later: according to Pliny the Elder, Natural History 19.23, Caesar covered the whole forum with vela. While Livy indicates he has a sure source for the antiquity of the practice, Pliny and Valerius Maximus date the innovation much later, to 69 BC: Q. Catulus . . . primus spectantium consessum velorum umbrae velaris textit (Valerius Maximus 2.4.6: 'Q. Catulus was the first to cover the sitting spectators with a shady awning'). This might mean that the coverings provided in 211 were not (technically) vela but were made of some other material, or that Catulus reinstated a practice that had again fallen into disuse, or that there is some other distinction to be made. In any case, though it becomes a standard practice in the first century, there is no reason to doubt Livy's claim. Pliny also mentions the bright colours of theatricalawnings, which are also evoked by Lucretius, On the Nature of Things 4.72-84:

*nam certe iacere ac largiri multa videmus, non solum ex alto penitueque, su diximus ante, versum de summis ipsum quoque seae colorem, et volgo factum est latere russaque vela et ferrugina, cum magnis intenta theatris per modas volvata trabesque tremenda fluitant, namque ibi consecus cavea subter et omnem scenam speciem, patrum urbanique decoram inficiunt cognataque suo fluitare colore.*

stand, with his upper torso appearing above the set. However, the plot of the play is exceptional in so many ways that we may even imagine it was written for a completely non-Roman context—perhaps for a Greek theatre in South Italy, where a gabled roof was part of the theatre architecture—Welch (1994) 71 rightly relates this to an overstate but temporary wooden amphitheatre in the forum. See also Dio 45.24.2. Several inscriptions from Pompeii attest the use of vela with gladiatorial hunts (Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum 4.1189, 1190, Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae 5145).

For assuredly we see many things cast off particles with lavish bounty, not only from the depths and from within (as we said before) but from the outermost surface, amongst other colour not seldom. This is often done by yellow and red and dark purple awnings, when outspread in the public view over a great theatre upon posts and beams they tremble and flutter; for then they dye, and force to flutter in their own colour, the assembly in the great hollow below, and all the display of the stage, and the glorious throng of the fathers; and the more the walls of the theatre are enclosed all round, the more all within lauds in the flood of beauty when the light of day is thus confined. Therefore, since canvas throws off colour from its outermost surface ... 117

While Lucretius’ description is meant to evoke the theatre in his day (and is used to clarify his atomistic theory of colour), many details coincide with what is known of Plautus’ theatre, and we are given a fleeting image of the effects of lighting within one of the Roman performance spaces. When linen vela were set up, they not only offered shade and protection from the heat for the spectators, but a joyous and festive series of colours that bathed both the audience and the stage space. Modern theatres typically use lighting to separate the audience from the stage, directing attention towards the actors. Lucretius suggests Rome instead separated the whole theatre from the outside world. This was a special space, awash with colour and encouraging a collective response to a comic performance (4.83: condiment). Rather than use lighting to create specific effects to complement an aspect of the dramatic narrative, in at least some outdoor venues specific lighting effects were sought to heighten the playful theatricality of the event. The double reference to the wind on the vela (4.77: fluens, 80: fluere) suggests that the awnings had an acoustic effect as well, perhaps providing a low level of background noise that could dampen other sounds coming from outside of the performance space – a kind of ‘white noise’ – and conceivably it was something against which actors’ voices might struggle.

The awnings in 208 represent an additional expense towards the comfort of the audience. While they were less technologically developed than the later, first-century examples, Livy is referring to something: the unusual nature of the claim and the presumption that vela had also been used earlier make it unlikely Livy is inventing the fact. This suggests that the Comitium too could hold a theatrical audience. In itself, such a conclusion is surprising, and invites two counter-arguments. The Comitium was, formally, a templum (‘sacred area’; see Cicero, de Republica 2.11) and perhaps a dramatic performance would be inappropriate for the sacredness of the place that also served as the political centre of the city. On a more practical level, even as early as Plautus it was customary to dedicate staturae within the templum, and this would have affected sightlines. While neither argument can be denied, the clear indication that the Comitium could be covered by vela diminishes their force. The theatre of Dionysus at Athens (which was a sanctuary) and the Odeion of Pericles (in which pillars affected sightlines) provide obvious counter-examples from the Greek world, and, further, the seating in a temporary wooden amphitheatre physically would have covered the Lacus Curtius, another sacred location. 118

There is therefore evidence for many separate venues for theatrical performance at the ludi in republican Rome, not all of which were always employed. Locations in front of the temples of the Magna Mater and of Apollo, near the centre of the forum directly south of the Comitium, within a temporary wooden amphitheatre, and in the Comitium itself may all have been used as theatrical venues at various times during Plautus’ career. They were all, in essence, ‘found spaces’: areas not specifically demarcated for theatre most of the year, which became theatrical venues at the appropriate time. Temple steps or places of political assembly could when needed be turned into a cavea, with whatever area it faced becoming the stage. While we have no details of seats in the area of the Circus Flaminius, various possibilities exist. Further, there is an idealising tradition of turf seating used in early Rome (Ovid, Ars Amatoria 1.107–8), which might be at the Circus Flaminius, but equally this might point to other venues again. 119

We cannot know the precise spaces in which a play such as Heauton had been mounted, but the use of three different venues seems likely. The initial performance at the ludi Megalenses would have been before the temple of the Magna Mater on the Palatine, before the sight of a tightrope walker led to the actors being forced offstage. The second performance at the

---


118 Welch (1999) 76 n. 41.

119 Livy 1.35.4–9 presents a different account of earlier theatrical seating. Juvenal 3.173 suggests turf seating was still used outside Rome in imperial times.
The Stagecraft and Performance of Roman Comedy

*ludi funebres* in 160 may have taken place in a wooden amphitheatre, built for gladiatorial combats but used for other entertainments as well, including *ludi scaenici*. That too resulted in disaster for Turpio's troupe. A few months later, at the *ludi Romani*, the speaker of the prologue can confidently claim *nunc turba nullast* ('Now there is no mob', *Hecyra* 43). His confidence comes because the play is being performed in another venue again — the Comitium, perhaps, or the west end of the forum — where gladiators were not expected.

Taken as a whole, the importance for flexibility on the part of the performers is clear. The plays needed to be adaptable to any of a variety of venues, each of which will create its actor–audience dynamic in a different way. Barriers could be erected to direct traffic and delineate the performance area (*cancelli* are mentioned in *Vatru*, *Res Rusticae* 3.5.4; Cicero, *pro Sextio* 12.4.1, and Ovid, *Amores* 3.2.64), but it would be wrong to assume either that there was a clear division between *proscenium* and *cavea*, or that a theatre audience was ever completely removed from the rest of Rome, despite efforts to isolate the theatre space from the rest of the city. Further, in some passages Plautus has attempted to create the sense of the play being site-specific, a technique that allows the audience to believe that it is seeing something unique to themselves, which in turn reinforces its commitment to the play.

Theatre architecture encourages this commitment from the audience. There were not that many opportunities for dramatic performance in Rome, but when one arose, there was very little that would prevent an individual who wanted to see a play from getting to the theatre. A spectator made no financial commitment, and did not even need to plan to attend, since it was not necessary to claim tickets in advance. Theatrical venues were always situated centrally, in a location appropriate to the god or person honoured at the *ludi*, and so for many, attending a play would not even require any significant travel, as most in the audience would be spending some time (before or after the show) at the other celebrations. Spectators could make a day of it. The theatre space becomes a focal point, concentrating and heightening the spirit of the festival, but this mood spreads beyond the theatre infusing the surrounding area with the spirit of the comedy — as most clearly in Plautus’ *Curculio*.

---

120 Bennett (1999) 126 describes how 'the milieu which surrounds a theatre is always ideologically encoded' by the presence of the theatre; restaurants are places for meals before or after a performance, etc. In Rome this encoding is bidirectional: the theatre space helps to define the surrounding area as a focal point for the day's events at the *ludi*, but the festival atmosphere contributes significantly to the otherness of the space created for the theatrical event.

---

The Experience of Roman Comedy

SET

Against this diversity, uniformity was provided by the set.121 The temporary stage structure, whatever its form, could be erected quickly and might serve as the backdrop for a variety of entertainments. The set requirements of Roman comedy are surprisingly minimalistic: the texts rarely provide any hints concerning set decoration, and this points to a simple backdrop. This is not to say that there was no detail on the set. When characters go house shopping in *Mostellaria*, there are references at lines 817–19 to a *vestibulum* ('forecourt'; and see fr. 146) and *postes* ('columns'; *Asinaria* 425 has *columnis*). While these might be part of the stage set, realised either with actual columns or through a painted backdrop,122 it is as likely that all such details were supplied by audience imagination.123 As long as an audience member can imagine an ordinary object from everyday life, verisimilitude in the set building is not required. Similarly, there is no positive evidence for the long, thin stages that become common in the empire: they are a product of a changing dynamic between performers and the audience. Indeed, such a stage shape would not be possible in many of the venues actually used.

The set was of wood, it was temporary, and, depending on the particular venue in which the play was mounted, it may have been set up and taken down in a matter of hours.124 Everything about the theatre context suggests that the set was generic: constructed by the magistrates for the *ludi* and not by the troupe hired to perform, a given performance area might be used by multiple troupes in a given festival (Livy 42.27.5, in 174 BC). There were three doors (which, as in life, opened inwards125) and a *scaenae

---

121 This claim will be corroborated in Chapter 3, with the discussion of role doubling.
122 Valerius Maximus 2.4.4 indicates the first polychrome stage building was made in 99 BC: *Claudius Pulcher scaenam variaret colorum adurnam, victis ante pictura tabulis extensam* ('Claudius Pulcher applied a variety of colours to the stage, which previously had consisted of unpainted boards'; text and translation, Shackleton Bailey (2000) 18–9). This is unlikely to be true. *Skenographia* ('scene-painting') was apparently used in the Greek tradition in the fifth century (see Aristotle, *Poetics* 1459a18), and it would be surprising if it had never been employed in Rome.
123 When I have directed Plautean comedies, the minimalism suggested by the evidence was taken to an extreme, and only empty doorframes were used to delimit the performance area with no further backdrop. This demonstrated that this limit did not in fact pose any difficulties for the actors or the audiences.
124 On this question see also Gilula (1996) 486–9.
125 Beare (1964) 289–90, drawing on *Curculio* 158–61.
from, which was painted to resemble three generic attached buildings. It was possible to lock a door from the outside; when it is additionally bolted from inside (as at Mostellaria 425–6), Plautus emphasises that no one can cross the threshold from either direction. The two side entrances of the performance area serve to polarise all outdoor offstage locations. Discussions often employ the terms ‘left’ and ‘right’ without reference to whether this is from the actors’ or the audience’s perspective. On the Roman comic stage it seems to be typical for the exit stage left to lead to the urban centre (the forum), and the exit stage right to lead to the harbour and the countryside. Characters appearing stage right come from away (a peregrin, Vitruvius 5.6.8), as at Menæchmi 553–6, when Sosicles (Menæchmus II) attempts to throw off pursuers by throwing a garland stage left (ad laetam manum) before exiting towards the harbour stage right. Similarly, at Amphitruo 333, Mercurius hears the voice of Sozia to his right (dextra), who has returned from the harbour. It is unlikely, however, that a universal convention existed and ‘it is hazardous to infer a rule’. In Andria, the entrances are reversed. Davus says, ego quoque hinc ab dextra venire me assimulabo (734–5: ‘I’ll pretend that I too am arriving here from the right’) and soon exclaims, quid turbaest apud forum! (745: ‘What a crowd in the forum!’). Confusion exists only because of the assumption that the forum must always exist stage left. It is much simpler to remove the convention entirely: the forum is in whatever direction someone exists when they say they are going to the forum, and the country is the other way, unless the play provides an alternate offstage geography. Rudens falls in this category. In this play, the city and harbour are thought to exist on the same side of the stage, with the shore where the shipwrecked Labrax

and his meretricies are washed up on the other. At 855–6, Plesidippus says:

abi sane ad litum curriculo, Trachali,
ibique illis in urbem ire obviam ad portum nifi . . .

Go then, Trachali, run to the shore, and
tell them to go to the city and meet me at the post.

Duckworth says the shore is stage left and the city and harbour are stage right, and argues that ‘the playwright is following the normal stage setting as closely as possible’ given the remote setting of the play. This is special pleading, given that Daenones looks offstage at drowning men: hac ad dexteram – | viden? – secundum litum (156–7: ‘There they are, to the right – do you see? – along the shore’). In the end, of course, it does not matter for an audience seeking to understand the play in performance. Assuming the actors have been consistent, the audience will already know what the offstage geography is: Arcitus’ prologue identifies both villa proxima proper mare (34: ‘a house right next to the sea’) and the direction from which the young man comes onstage, ad portum (65); each comment could be reinforced with a gesture. In Rudens, all those not native to Cyrene arrive shipwrecked at the shore stage right, while the economic centre of the area is presented stage left. This distinction is maintained consistently throughout the play, and only those expecting a non-existent stage convention have difficulty.

The Roman stage polarises local and foreign, not discriminating whether the traveller comes by road or by ship. Most plays do not indicate which lies in which direction, because, in performance, it is always obvious. It may be that on the Greek stage a consistent convention was employed, with the harbour and urban centre presented on stage left and stage right leading to the country. But even if a Roman audience knew this convention, it could not be followed when the natural distinction for the Roman mind (employed in every play except Rudens) was between harbour and city centre. At times the playwright would have

---

127 Barton (1972) and Milnor (2002).
128 Duckworth (1952) 85–7. See also Beare (1964) 248–55, with his summary of ancient sources and previous discussions.
129 Since modern theatrical parlance prefers ‘stage left’ and ‘stage right’ (i.e. from the actor’s position, as he faces the audience), I follow that convention here.
130 Garwick (1993) 130; and see Milo Gloriosus 126.
131 Text and translation, Barsby (2001) 1: 134–5. Barsby’s convoluted explanation, following Beare (1964) 380–81 and 248–55, requires ab dextra to mean ‘from stage left’: both suggest the actor turns to face upstage sq that the actors’ right and audience’s right coincide (134–5 n. 42, and see Beare (1964) 181 n.), Davus says quoque because Chremes is also coming from that direction (his house is there according to lines 335 and 356). Soon Davus wishes to confer with Mysis ad dexteram (line 751), which must mean that the crosser past Chremes to meet Davus near the wing he has just used. Beare is determined to demonstrate that the Romans pepper-struck the Greek assignments; that claim too is dubious.

132 Duckworth (1952) 86, and see p. 83 for the setting of Rudens generally (which also applies to Vulciaria).
133 The logical difficulty of having a shore in one direction and a harbour in the other, is of a different order. If we must, we can assume the play takes place on a peninsula.
134 In my experience, any difficulties with the offstage geography become painfully obvious in rehearsal.
135 See Pollux, Onomasticon 4.126, though there are inconsistencies in Pollux: ‘On any view his account is confused’ (Beare (1962) 254).
to rearrange entrances as he adapted his model, but much more significant changes were regularly made.

In addition to the side entrances, it is possible for an actor to access the performance area through one of the doors in the scaena that constitutes the backdrop for every Roman comedy. The demands of the plays require variously one, two, or three doors. All doors will have been of equal size, and Beare is surely correct in suggesting the construction will always have had three doors, but at times one or more may not have been used: ‘any door which was not required in a particular play was for the time being simply disregarded’.136 The distance between one door and another was tres minus passus (Bacchides 832: ‘three single steps’), assuming that these are normal-sized steps and are not comically exaggerated. The regularity of comic plots means that a door could represent one of three things: the house of a prominent male citizen, the house of a meretrix or leno, or a temple. The most common situation calls for two citizen houses: *Casina, Cistellaria, Epidicus, Miles Gloriosus* (where one is the house of the miles137), *Andria*, and *Enucluchus*. Another common situation has two doors, representing the house of a citizen and of the meretrix: *Asinaria, Menandri, Persa*, and *Poenulus*. Terence’s *Adelphoe* finds a mid-ground between these two, depicting the houses of Micio (a prominent male citizen) and Sosstrata (a female citizen, whose daughter Pamphilia is the beloved of Micio’s adopted son Aeschnus). Rarely when only two doors are used one may designate a citizen’s house, the other a temple (as in *Rudens*). Against these twelve instances, we may count two where only one door is used, and thirteen where three doors are used. When one door is used, it always represents a citizen’s house (see *Amphitruo, Captivi*). When three are used, two would typically represent citizen houses, and the third may equally be a third citizen (*Sichus, Trinummus, Heauton Timorumenos*138), a temple (*Aulularia, Mercator*,139 *Mostellaria*,140 *Vidularia*141), or the house of a meretrix (*Pseudolus, Phormio, Heepra*). The last possibility, where one house contains a citizen, the second a temple, the third a meretrix, is found in *Bacchides*,142 *Curculio*, and *Truculentus*.143 One door always leads to the house of a citizen; there are never two houses of meretrices or two temples; every other permutation is represented in the extant plays.144 Wales suggests that ‘no play requires more than two domestic doorways’145 and in a sense this is correct: there is no play which contains entering characters talking back into three different houses as they emerge (and this is the only means of determining when a door is ‘required’). Nevertheless, so many *palliatum* plots naturally presume three doors, that we should assume three doors were always available.

Some plays require an altar in the performance area.146 Seven plays use three doors and have one designated as the entrance to a temple; six plays use three doors and do not have a temple. It follows that there must have been a means to identify a temple that was separate from the set, and which could be introduced by the troupe. I suggest that in these cases a generic stage altar is positioned in front of the door representing a temple;147 convention and audience imagination would provide the rest. This is not the only solution possible (minor set dressings for temples or other distinctive houses, such as that of a leno, may also have been added by a troupe), but a removeable altar is the most expedient solution. There is no indication of more formal sets of any kind.148 Altars are not required simply because a character invokes a god or utters a prayer: indeed, I suggested above that prayers to Apollo make best sense in terms of production at the *ludi Apollinares*. The stage altar has no presumed association for the audience with a god until it is provided one during the performance of the play. As with the wing entrances, it remains unmarked until labelled by an actor’s speech.

Occasionally, the altar is used as more than an iconographic shorthand for a temple location, and is incorporated into the action of the play.

137 It is possible that there should be a third house representing a temple, but the reference at line 411 to an altar is as likely to be figurative.
138 It is not clear that Phainia’s house is onstage. Barnby (2001) I: 194–5 n. 23 argues that it is, based on lines 168–72.
139 Reference is made to an altar at 676.
140 While the temple is not used, an altar is required from 1097 to at least 1145.
141 Though fragmentary, the references in fr. iv have myrrex Venus est and fr. viii myrrexi serres e myrrexus pozoitum demonstrate that there is a ‘myrric grove’ of Venus on stage which could be represented simply as a temple with altar.
142 Reference is made to an altar at 172–3.
143 Reference is made to an altar at 476. This is an unusual scene, however, blurring the indoor/outdoor distinction (see Duckworth (1952) 127).
144 This is not to say other combinations were inconceivable. What, for example, was the disposition of houses in Plautus’ lost *Leminae Geminae* (*The Pimp Twins*)? Perhaps in this play two houses lead to the house of a leno (played by the same actor in the same mask), and therefore each contained a meretrix. We cannot know.
145 Wales (1991) 55. The only source cited in support is Beare, who believes there were three doors. Indeed, his discussion of *Curculio* (Wales (1991) 58) requires two (side) doors and an altar to Aesculapius in the centre. Such an altar is thought to be in front of a temple of Aesculapius, from which Cappadox emerges at 246.
147 Duckworth (1952) 83–4.
At Mostellaria 1094–1180, the slave Tranio seeks refuge at an altar onstage and is joined by Callidamates. Similarly, at Rudens 691–885, Palaestra and Ampelisca seek sanctuary at the altar of Venus. Such sanctuary is inviolable, based on a religious tenet that had been exploited as a dramatic trope since fifth-century Greek tragedy. Nevertheless, a loophole existed: when the girls seek sanctuary at an altar of Venus, Labrax threatens, *Volcanum adducam, is Veneris adversarius* (Rudens 763: ‘I’ll bring Vulcan: he’s Venus’ opposite’). With an allusion to the divine marriage and Venus’ famous adultery, Labrax intends to smoke his quarry away from their refuge. If they leave by choice (because of the heat or smoke), it would seem he has not technically violated their sanctuary (the threat is also made at *Hecatom Timororumenos* 975). Rather than seek to explain this behaviour in religious terms, it is better to see it too as a stock solution to a recurrent problem in New Comedy, one that was well known to Menander as well. In an extant fragment of *Perinthus* (‘The Girl from Perinthus’), the servant Daoš finds himself being smoked off an altar by his fellow slaves.  

There is an ordinariness in the regularity of the set. However exotic or contrived the offstage settings, and whatever name the play happens to give to the town, the setting of the *fabulae palliatae* is, essentially, always the same street. What happens on a stage street goes well beyond real-world practice. Banquet scenes (*Asinaria* 828–914, *Perse* 757–848, *Stichus* 683–775, *Mostellaria* 568–91) and *toilette/houdoir* scenes (*Mostellaria* 157–292, *Truculentus* 444–642) were occasionally taken out-of-doors to comic effect. These were indoor activities for the Greeks and the Romans, yet the inherent artificiality in the stage world of the *palliatae* allows such immodest behaviour. At no point does the audience stop to wonder why Philematium in *Mostellaria* is getting dressed in public (though in performance the fact that she is invites many possibilities for comic business). It is, indeed, symptomatic of the comic exuberance of the Platine stage world. It would be unnecessarily restricting and no less unrealistic to assume that such scenes must be performed in the *vestibulum* (assuming doors were recessed, which we have seen is unnecessary). While the setting is ordinary, it is not naturalistic.

Equally artificial is how little neighbours seem to know about each other before a play begins, even though neighbours are always thought to share a common wall (this is key to the plot of *Miles Gloriosus*, for example). There is no alley between houses that may provide locations from which one may eavesdrop, as is sometimes suggested. The word used in Roman comedy for the street can be *platea* (e.g. *Adelphoe* 574), via (*Mercator* 798), or *angus pendum* (*Pseudolus* 560–61), though more usually *angiporum* refers to ‘a street in the rear and parallel to the stage, from which a character can reach his house through a garden’. *Angiporum* is never used for a route perpendicular to the stage, though this old idea is perpetuated in the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, which defines it as ‘a narrow passage, alley, lane’. The *angus pendum* is most often used in Roman comedy to explain why a given character does not return to the stage by the same means that he had left it. At *Perse* 444–6, for example, Toxilus tells the *lenu* Dordulus,

_abit inae travoris angiporis ad forum; eadem itae facito mulier ad me transeant per horum._

Go that way to the forum, using the next street.  
(Toxilus points away from the forum.)

Let my woman come to me that same way, through the garden.

However we choose to rationalise Toxilus making Dordulus go to the forum ‘the long way’ (perhaps it is to avoid the chance of meeting Sagaristio and Saturio’s daughter in their Persian costumes, or perhaps it is to provide a petty annoyance for the pimp), Toxilus’ instructions mean that the character of Lemnisilenis does not appear on stage until line 763, a dramatic revelation at the end of the play. Later, Toxilus tells the disguised Sagaristio, _per angiporum rursum ve ad me recipi prius per horum_ (‘come back to my house by the next street, through the garden that way,’ lines 678–9). Sagaristio exits by means of a wing at line 710, and when he re-appears (following on the heels of Lemnisilenis), he does so from the house of Toxilus’ master. The *angiporum* may have been a conventional device playwrights used to help smooth the adaptation of Greek New Comedy, or it may have been a means to create stronger entrances for key characters. In either case, it too is part of the stage world defined by the set. These examples demonstrate that backstage communication existed between all the points on stage. Not only could actors leave by one route

---

149 Arnott (1996a) 472–491.
155 Isles (1991) 53–6 believes alleyways could exist, but does not consider the requirements of *Miles Gloriosus*.
The Stagecraft and Performance of Roman Comedy

and return by another, but characters could as well, when the text provided an appropriate explanation. This is what we would expect, but it should be stated since not every possible stage structure would allow this. Given that a Roman troupe could be using any of a number of performance spaces, a uniform set is needed: uniform both as it appears to the audience, but, more importantly, how it functions backstage. The architecturally simplest design (a flat wall with three doors placed in it) is in fact the most flexible set building from the perspective of the actors, and the most versatile for the comic narratives. Its use by Roman performers means it should be possible to discern the mechanics of the stage action even for those plays about which didascalic information (and consequently the precise performance venue) does not survive.

COUSTOME

In fact costume is relatively unimportant in New Comedy.

W. Beare 154

The genre of fabula palliata is defined by its costume. All characters wear a tunica (tunic', Greek chiton) over which men typically place a pallium ('cloak', Greek himation), women a palla. There are of course exceptions to this, and comedy did provide opportunity for outlandish get-ups that would contribute to the humour of a play. The question is whether costuming practices represented custom (and so were flexible in their application) or convention (and thus provided rigid codification). The data concerning comic costume are mostly late, and almost certainly do not refer to second-century performance. Thus, however informative Donatus, de Comediea 8.6–7, and Pollux, Onomasticon 4.118–20, may seem to be, and however beautiful the miniature illustrations in Terentian manuscripts may appear, 'all of this material is of doubtful value'. While there is no doubt these sources present an account of comic costume, we cannot know if they refer to palliatae as originally performed. Pollux seems to be thinking of Greek sources, and Donatus and the Terentian miniatures reflect, if anything, later Roman stage practice. Even if these were found to be applicable to Plautus and Terence, they represent a codification that is unduly rigorous and is not likely to be applicable universally on the comic stage. While senes may often have worn white and carried sticks, and lenones may have often worn garish, multi-coloured pallia, it does not make sense for this to be required, when one of the chief purposes of theatrical costume was to distinguish individuals from each other. When there were two senes, one may have had a stick and another not had one.

Some general tendencies may be observed. For the most part, costume coincided with a generic representation of contemporary real-world clothing. The combination of tunica and pallium/palla is standard: even the shipwrecked, shivering Labrax washes ashore with both items (Rudens 549–50; the diminutives tunica and palla may imply they have been shrunk by the seamer, with the actor wearing clothes that are too small for him). The pallium indicated the genre of the play, but otherwise the plays refer to standard items of Roman clothing. Young men and particularly soldiers could wear a chlamys, a shorter Greek cloak fastened at the shoulder. Pseudolus declares etiam opust chlamyde et machaera et petaso (Pseudolus 735: 'I also need a military cloak, sabre, and broad-brimmed hat') for the costume of a soldier's attendant; at the end of Miles Gloriosus, Pyrgopolynices has been stripped de tunica et chlamyde et machaera (1423: 'of his (his) tunic, military cloak, and sabre'); for Sargasistro's costume, Toxilus orders tunicam atque zonam, et chlamyodem... et casceam (Persa 155: 'tunic and belt, military cloak and Macedonian broad-brimmed hat') 157 the use of Greek names for articles of clothing reflects an interesting transference, as Roman attitudes to Greek costume items (which characterise individuals as foreign, military, and perhaps eastern)

153 Indeed, Tanner (1969) suggests that the earliest stages were built on streets of Rome and actually used real house doors for the left and right doors, while the central door was 'false' – that it just led to the alley that was perpendicular to the street with the stage. Such a stage would severely limit an actor's possibilities because any move from a stage to a door would require travelling at least the equivalent of three city blocks (and possibly moving through buildings), many doubling options and narrative options would become impossible.
154 Beare (1964) 87.
function in the notionally Greek world as symbols for Persia, another foreign, eastern, military power. Here and elsewhere, there are indications that a slave’s costume would essentially be like that of his or her master, though Epicticus needs to be given socces, tunicam, pallium (Epicticus 725: ‘shoes, a tunic, and a cloak’) when he is freed. Harpax in Pseudolus (and Simia disguised as him) wears the same costume as a soldier. Domestic slaves wore the pallium, but on the stage at least it may have appeared more like a modern winter scarf, and consequently was more easily thrown over the shoulder, as in the traditional gesture of the servus currus (‘running slave’), a stock routine in Greek and Roman New Comedy (Captivi 778–9, Epicticus 194–5, fr. 178L, Phormio 844–5). Varro’s claim that men who worked in the countryside wore goatskins (Res Rusticae 2.2) may also have been reflected in stage practice.

While costume was not used in specific ways to identify characters (beyond the general practices described above), there were ways items of costume could create specific associations for the audience. The use of the petasus funtioned as a shorthand within the stage world to indicate that a character had travelled (or was about to travel) a great distance: it was an iconographic signifier of Hermes the Greek messenger god, who corresponds in many respects to the Roman Mercurius. In Amphitruo, Sosia, Mercurius, Amphitruo, and Jupiter all wear a petasus with Mercurius and Jupiter disguised as Sosia and Amphitruo respectively. Mercurius addresses the audience (142–7):

\[ nunc internosse ut nemo positis faecibus, \\
\text{ego haes habebo usque in petaso pinnales,} \\
\text{tunc meo pari autem turbac inruri aureus} \\
\text{sub petaso: id signum Amphitruoni non erit.} \\
\text{ea signa nemo horum familiarium} \\
\text{videre potest: verum vos videbitis.} \]

Now, so that you can identify us easier, I shall always have this little feather in my hat.

---

158 Similarly, Satrio’s daughter will wear trepidae (‘Greek slippers’, Perist 464) as part of her Persian disguise.

159 When Mercurius complains about nunc ornatum (‘this costume’, Amphitruo 116) and his servilia schema (117: ‘appearance as a slave’), he is contrasting it with the special appearance normally reserved for divine characters. There is some distinction between the appearance of slaves and free, however, as discussed in Chapter 3.

160 Comic footwear generally is either the soces (‘slipper’; Castellaria 597, Bacchides 334, Tritonura 720, Perit 124) or the rubet (‘sandals’; Caesaria 709, Monateria 384, Trundemus 365, 367, 479, 651).

161 A South Italian comic vase (Oxford 1928.12, PhV 52 + Tiendall (1967) 40) shows Dionysus and an actor dressed as Hermes, wearing a petasus.

A passage like this demands speculation concerning the nature of comic description. Precise details distinguish two pairs of characters which might enable the audience to tell them apart. But since each role is played by a different actor, this is not a challenge in any case. What then is the purpose of the tokens? Both are presented with diminutives (pinulae, torulae) but they are, of necessity, able to be seen easily by members of a large audience. To serve the narrative function, the tokens must be visible and consequently they cannot actually have been small. The joke lies rather in the tokens’ invisibility to the human characters in the play. If Mercurius wore a large ostrich feather in his broad-brimmed hat (‘this little feather’) and Jupiter’s hat had dangling from it a long garish braid (‘a little golden knot’), comic benefits emerge: Mercurius gets a laugh with the inappropriate description of his feather; Jupiter gets a laugh when the audience eventually sees his torulae; both divine characters wear a silly costume throughout the play that doesn’t alter the way they are treated in the stage world, reducing their status, and could increase audience identification with the human characters. Further, the supposedly identical characters are probably distinguishable in any case. This example points to many of the difficulties involved in examining comic narrative for evidence of stage practice. When Curculio complains of Graci palliati (Curculio 288: ‘cloaked Greeks’), the Roman audience is aware not only that the character is a Greek himself (the play is set in Epidaurus, though Curculio’s complaint and prejudices are clearly Roman), but that he, though a parasite, is performing the stock routine of the ‘running slave’ as the line is delivered; his pallium was no doubt distinctively hitched over his shoulder as he says this. Such comments cannot be taken at face value.

As these examples show, many plots of fabulae palliatae involve impersonation and disguise. In Asinaria, Leonida’s impersonation of the household slave Saareae does not require any change of costume, since

---

162 Christenson (2000) 164 believes ‘apart from the unusually high number of (legitimate) hiatuses in 142–7, there is no certain indication of interpolation’; even if this passage were interpolated, the issues discussed here would still hold true for the performance of the play. See also Bear (1964) 189.

163 See Muecke (1986).
The merchant deceived has met neither. Within the world of the play, Sauria exists, but he does not appear on stage except through the impersonation. Similarly, Casina does not appear on stage in *Casina* except as played by Chalinus; there, however, Casina is a known quantity and consequently Chalinus is disguised with wedding veils. In practice, a disguise need not be convincing; the audience knows when one character is impersonating another, and so the disguise functions only within the play. In *Casina*, part of the humour stems from Lysidamus being fooled by what is clearly a poor disguise. We know that Chalinus continues to behave in a masculine way (see 840–54) and the humour is maximised if, through the audience’s discrepant knowledge, it can see the dual identity that Lysidamus cannot. Perhaps the wedding veils insufficiently cover the slave’s beard. It follows that the nature of the plots of Roman comedy will favour a disguise that emphasises the disparity between what the audience sees and what deceived characters perceive.

An eye patch seems to have been a sufficient means to conceal one’s identity. Curcillo adopts this disguise in his encounter with Lyco, who calls him *Onoculius* (‘one-eye’; see 392–400, 543, and 582). This and the name Summanus, who is not a real person in the dramatic world (543–7), permit the deception to last long enough. Because the disguise is particularly ineffective in real terms, it is something that Curcillo can hastily don, while delivering 391:

```
simulabo quasi non noverim. heus tu, te volo.
```

(to audience) I’ll pretend I don’t know him.

(He puts on an eyepatch.)

(to Lyco) Hey you, I want you.

That the costume is assumed mid-line suggests that it takes only a fraction of a second, which further reinforces its comic success. Similarly, when in *Miles Gloriosus* Pleurides disguises himself as a sailor, within the play the disguise is perfect: Pyrgopolynices says *nescio quis eccum incedit | ornatu quidem thalassico* (1281–2: ‘I don’t know this guy coming rigged like a seaman’; Pleurides repeats the word *ornatu* in his soliloquy, line 1286). Part of this disguise involves an eye patch: *nam ille qui lanam ob oculum habebat laevam, nauta non erat*! (1430: ‘Hey, that guy with the wool on his

---

164 See Johnston (1980).

165 The passage in which the price for Saturio’s daughter is negotiated (*Persa* 666–81) is odd. Once the price of 80 minas is agreed upon (666–7), Sagaristio attempts to negotiate for more money for her wardrobe (669), with no clear resolution, and Dondalus only pays 60 minas (683), and removes the price of the bag that holds his payment (684–5; see also *Epitome* 632 and Kerkeus (g888) 97–8). The *lino* Dondalus’ pay gain is successful, but *Toxillus’* scheme is not. It is possible that *Persa* 668a–671a are intrusive, reflecting an alternative performed tradition.
four passages, it is unlikely her jewellery was never seen or that all four passages were ironic. Further, the play is generally thought to be early, and, though this should not be pressed, it was probably written while the lex Oppia was in effect. The function of the choragus may be related to this. Most references in the plays to getting clothing are necessarily understood in a metatheatrical context (Curtius 464–6, Persa 157–60, Trinummus 857–8) or may be so understood (Pseudolus 1184–6). We do not know if troupes owned their own costumes, or if they rented some or all of them from the choragus, but there does seem to be a mechanism for itinerant troupes to have access to elaborate theatrical resources.\(^{167}\)

One issue not usually considered is what the Romans wore under this costume. In the Greek tradition, of course, padded body suits simulated the nudity of a grotesque human form: men appeared with a distended belly, padded buttocks, and an oversized phallus. This Greek costume was distinctive, and a key part of the Greek tradition.\(^{168}\) Over the course of the fourth century, however, the grotesqueness of the form was reduced: the phallus gets increasingly shortened until, by the time of Menander, it is no longer on display beneath the next layer of the character’s costume.\(^{169}\) Since we lack contemporary illustrations, the evidence comes only from the text.

There are hints that in some form, the phallus was preserved as the Greek plays were adapted for the Roman audience. In Rudens, the slave Scapinio has seized and released the meretrix Ampelisca (see 424–5), who has appeared from the temple of Venus where she has been taking refuge with a water pitcher (428–9):\(^{170}\)

\textbf{Scep.} quid nunc vis?
\textbf{Amp.} sapiens ornatus quid velim indicium facit.
\textbf{Scep.} meus quoque hic sapiens ornatus quid velim indicium facit.

\textbf{Scep.} What do you want?
\textbf{Ampel.} (pointing to her pitcher) To a person of sense,
This piece of equipment reveals what I want.
\textbf{Scep.} To a person of sense, this piece of equipment
Of mine reveals what I want, too. (tr. Smith)

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{167 In an epigram of Lucilius dating from the time of Nero, a tragic actor tells his props to relieve his poverty, which suggests they are his possessions (Palatine Anthology 11.89).}
\footnote{168 Beare (1964) 336–8 n. 2 argues against the phallus in Aristophanes, but without success. Clouds 577–9 is funny precisely because the padded body suit was a standard component of comedy. See also Clouds 73–4, Acharnians 952–53, 764–7, and 118–21, about which see Porter (2004).}
\footnote{169 Green (2006).}
\footnote{170 Ketterer (1986) 38–9.}
\end{footnotes}

If the actor has a visible phallus, the double entendre is reinforced, as the repeated ornatus evokes the ornamenta of the costume and properites. More oblique is the exchange between the drunk Callidamaties and his patient meretrix Delphium at Mostellaria 324–31:

\textbf{Call.} ducem me. amabo.
\textbf{Del.} cave ne cadas, asta.
\textbf{Call.} o . . o . . ocellus es men;
tuas sum alumnus, mel memon.
\textbf{Del.} cave modo ne prius in via accumbas
guam illi, ubi lectus est stratus, concumbimus.
\textbf{Call.} sine, sine cadere me.
\textbf{Del.} sino, sed hoc, quod mi in manu est:
si cades, non cades quin cadam tecum.
\textbf{Call.} inventis toller postea nos ambos aliquis.
\textbf{Del.} mades homo.
\textbf{Call.} Lead me, please.
\textbf{Del.} See you don’t fall. Stand up.
\textbf{Call.} (snuggling into her breast)
You’re my eye-eye darling; I’m your baby, honey.
\textbf{Del.} Only see you don’t first lie down in the street,
Till we sleep together there where the bed is all spread.
\textbf{Call.} Let ... let me fall.
\textbf{Del.} I will, but this, here in my hand ... 
If you fall, you won’t fall unless I tumble with you.
\textbf{Call.} Then someone’ll lift up the two of us lying there.
\textbf{Del.} (to the audience) The man is drunk.

The passage contains unusually frank references to sex. Questa accepts Leo’s concumbimus (‘sleep together’) for the coitus (‘have sex’) of the manuscripts (this would be the only use of coevo before Lucretius). Hoc in 328 refers to Callidamaties’ penis: Nixon avoids the innuendo in his translation, but like Questa is satisfied to assign the end of 328 to Delphium, so that hoc is in her hand; in contrast, Lindsay assigns only sino to her, with Callidamaties completing the rest of the line. Cadere is being used in multiple senses: Callidamaties falls to the ground literally in lines 324 and 328; in 329, though, two other meanings are introduced: Callidamaties’ penis will fall once it loses its erection (cades . . . cedes; see
Martial 7.8.12), after they have had sex (câdam, 'tumble'). Neither hic ... ornatus nor hoc require the actor to be wearing a costume phallus of any size; a well-placed gesture is sufficient for comic effect. But the possibility cannot be ruled out, and it is not acceptable to suggest the joke is an accidental holdover from the Greek original of these plays: we should always assume Plautus recognises the potential for humour in his own plays.

The most explicit double entendres occur at Casina 902–15, but (since the confusion is being described after the act) there are no necessary costume requirements. Granting that a phallus may be part of a character’s costume, potential references multiply: when Paenulium assaults Dordalus with the phrase restim tu tibi cape crassam ac suspende te (Persa 815: ‘take a thick rope and hang yourself’), it should not surprise that an actor in performance would naturally add a genital gesture; in my experience actors need very little to motivate taking an easy laugh based on bawdy humour. The nature of double entendre means that there is no need for a physical phallus as part of the actor’s costume, but if it existed, such an accessory would be able to be put to use.272 A papyriform fragment, P. Berol. inv. 13927,273 lists a mime requiring two prop phalli. In a fifth-century AD mime, at least, they were not standard equipment and needed to be placed on the prop list for a particular narrative.

Further, the regular description of slaves, old men, and lemones as ‘potbellied’ (veneriosus, as at Mercator 659, Pseudolus 1218, Rudens 317), corroborated by visual evidence such as terracotta statuettes, also argues for some form of padding beneath the costume of certain character types. In some cases, artificial padding seems assured: Cappadox in Carculio has a belly so grossly distended that genninos in ventre habere videor filios (221: ‘I seem to have twin sons inside my gut’) and Alcumena in Amphitruo is actually pregnant with twins, which Phillips argues was represented with exaggerated comic padding.274 Other padding for female characters may have been common. Antamönides’ claims he does not want the company of a tibicina (‘pipe-girl’) because necias utrun et maiiores buccaeae an mammæs sien (Poemus 1416: ‘you don’t know which are bigger – her cheeks or her breasts’). Since the distended cheeks of pipers or her breasts.

64

The Stagecraft and Performance of Roman Comedy

to be ugly.275 The humor of this line depends on both cheeks and breasts being large (and both being ugly), and this in turn suggests that comic women would have large breasts.276 In Casina, Olympio uses a diminutive to describe the disguised Chalinus’ breast: edepol papiliam bellulam (848: ‘Pollux, what a nice little breast’). He is probably being ironic, or is describing what he expects to see (if this were really Casina) and not the chest evident before him.277 Chalinus metaphorically manipulates the same variables usually employed by an actor. Such padding was not universal: there is no indication of padding on adolescentes, for example.

One piece of evidence that seems not to have been adduced in this context is Cicero, de Officiis 1.129:

sciencorum quidem nos tantam habet vetere disciplina verecundiam, ut iv saeclum sine subigivulo prodest nemo, vererurun exin, ni, si quo casu eveniret, ut corporis partes quasdam aperiantur aspicientur non decor.

As for stage people, their custom, because of its traditional discipline, carries modesty to such a point that no actor would ever step out upon the stage without a subigivulum on, for fear he might make an improper exhibition, if by some accident certain parts of his person should happen to become exposed.278

The use of sciencorum demonstrates stage actors are being described. These actors display modesty, despite the loss of political rights associated with being infamis. The subigivulum provides protection against

272 This is the traditional reason given for why Athena discarded the auloi when she invented them, e.g. Teleses 15, 209a Poenae Melas Grecas (Page), Apollodorus, Library 1.4.2; Ovid, Fasti 6.659–692, Hyginus, Fabulae 165, and Plutarch, Alcibiades 3.5.

275 Brown (1993) explores related issues in his discussion of Eunuchus 313–17. On the Greek stage, female padding was identical to that of the men: same belly, same buttocks, same sagging breasts: ‘to create a female role the actor wore a female mask and female clothing over the top of the standard costume’ (Green 1997: 115); such characters are not pregnant, but just have the conventional padding. This means that on the Greek comic stage, it was conventionally customary that the body suits of comic women also would have a phallus, though it was notionally absent and was covered by the more modest female clothing (this has implications for the “unmasking scene” in Aristophanes’ Thesmophoriazousai). For a Greek actor doubling roles, however, the process of changing costumes between sexes does not entail also changing the body suit. While the Roman stage did use padding, there is no indication that the use of the body suit persisted, and consequently a change of roles between sexes may have required more time for the actor to complete. Nevertheless, at least in the case of Casina, a good joke exists when a male character disguised as a woman is discovered to have male genitalia beneath the bridal costume (lines 904–15).

273 At Miles Gloriosus 989 and Poenulus 347 bellulam is used to describe an attractive young woman.

274 Olson (2003) 206, 414 and see 206–7, and see Wilson (1987). See Nonius 221 (55M): subigivulum est qui judenaeae partes corporis sequantur: dictum quod nullae legere (‘the subigivulum is that by which the shameful parts of the body are covered, so-called because it was “girded from below”’).
accidental exposure of the actor’s real genitalia. In Cicero’s day, at any rate, Roman actors did not wear a padded bodysuit (the leggings of which extend to the ankles). Padding is part of the costume, not a base upon which all other costumes are placed. This does not rule out the possibility of an artificial phallus, but if it existed, it was not represented in the Greek manner. It is more likely, that it was something worn over the subgigiam but below the (costume) tunic, perhaps hanging from a leather cord tied around the waist. This is the most likely construction for the two phallices needed for the mime in P. Berol. inv. 13927. This would then explain the implied costume of the title character of Naevius’ Triphallus (‘The Guy with Three Penises’). No special construction would be needed; the actor would wear three cords beneath his costume, each with a hanging phallus extending beyond the length of the tunic.

Costume in Roman comedy apparently broke with Greek tradition and did not use padded bodysuits. Additional padding was used for certain roles, typically stock characters such as old men (senex), pimps (leunones), and slaves (serni). In some of these circumstances, an artificial phallus may also have been added, but it was not part of the standard costume for male comic characters. This technique would have been adopted from a local performance convention. Such padding has a necessary consequence for acting styles: ‘one could say that padded costume almost invites violent or unsubtle activity: beating, kicking and so on seem to have been commonplace’. The discussion has begun to blur the difference between costume and property, however, and it is worth having a clear understanding of how these terms can helpfully be differentiated.

### Stage Properties

The term ‘prop’ or ‘stage property’ is variously applied to various things. To understand best how properties function within a play, we can distinguish three levels at which a physical object can be used during a performance: as costume, as set, or as a property. The way these terms are used in everyday parlance (in antiquity as today) is blurred, and in particular the application of ‘property’ can blend into both ‘costume’ and ‘set’. The costume includes all the physical objects that go into identifying a given character (and in Greek and Roman drama this includes the mask). A staff carried by a senex, since its primary signifying function on the Roman stage is to define aspects of his character (that he is old and weak), is better thought of as part of the actor’s costume than as a (separable) stage property. As costume relates to character, so set relates to space. The performance space is defined by words, the movements of actors, perhaps in some contexts by painted scenery, and by physical objects that can be labelled stage properties – the altar before the shrines in Roman comedy and its models, while it may physically be touched by actors and indicated by their words, nevertheless constitutes an inanimate fixture on stage at least for the duration of the play. Its presence defines an aspect of the play’s setting and is part of its set, even though it is not a permanent element of the performance space. Given this, it seems worth reserving the term ‘property’ for those particular physical objects in a drama that create relationships: objects that are separable from their characters, the movement or transfer of which will be reflected in the dramatic action of the play. The paraphernalia worn by the cook at Curetius 251–73 is part of his costume, since it does not relate to the play’s action; its purpose is exclusively to identify the character as a cook. This is not true of the supplies brought by the cooks in Aulularia, where the lamb is the object of comic business (327–34). Similarly, the writing tablets Calidorus hands to Pseudolus at Pseudolus 20 are physical objects that move between characters and, at lines 41–59, give voice to a third.

Properties are necessarily involved in stage action. ‘Any time an object must be moved, handed from one person to another, or acted on in any way, the action required will dictate the way the stage picture looks, and the movement attracts audience attention.’ What the audience sees, though, is an object that may stand for many things simultaneously. This polyvalence has been examined in detail by Ketterer, who develops an elaborate semiological typology for Plautine props.

---

179 It cannot be an ‘apron’, as Wilson (1918) 72 notes.
180 Other titles of comedies by Naevius suggest the use of the phallus: Testicularia (‘The Testicle Play’) and Appella (‘The Circumcised’).
182 For this distinction, see Ketterer (1986a) 193.
183 This routine was drawn from Greek comedy, where it seems to have been standard, e.g. Menander, Dyskolos 193–4.
184 Ketterer (1986a) 198.
meaning is not static. Second, every stage object must have at least a mechanical function; it may further possess one or more signifying function at any given time. Third, stage objects may have different meanings for different characters simultaneously, and they may mean something else again for the audience. Comedy develops out of this discrepant awareness. There is however a practical distinction that Ketterer does not make, which has an impact on stage performance.

In the same way that the comic mask presents a distorted version of the real human face, there is no need for properties to look exactly like the objects they represent. This is particularly true when, as with the writing tablets in Pseudolus, their dramatic import greatly outweighs their real-world size. Exaggerating the size of a physical object can yield comic results. For example, Miles Gloriosus 2–78 is an exercise in character drawing; the scene introduces Pyrgopolynices, who will not return until 947, and Arrotrogus, his parasite who never returns. The scene’s purpose is to instil an idea about the play’s chief foil in order to create audience expectation for his return. Much of the humour comes from Arrotogus’ imperfect addition (42–7) and the elaborate names that trip from the characters’ tongues (such as the general Bumbomachides Clutomiasteridxarchides in 14).86 Like any stage soldier, Pyrgopolynices has a machaera (143), but it is worth considering whether for the actors it is actually a real sword. Certainly it is real within the narrative: Cario might even be holding it when he threatens to cut the soldier in line 1406 (with the threat of castration at 1420–22). But what do the actors hold? There are four possibilities of what it could be, any of which could be true: a real sabre; a prop designed to look like a real sabre; a prop sabre of comically diminished size; or a prop sabre of comically expanded size. For the audience, the first two are the same — it looks like a normal sabre, and is therefore functionally neutral.88 There are humorous benefits with the

86 In addition to these two, compare Polymachaeroplages (Pseudolus 88), Theraponigonous Pitaxagorus (Curculio 430), and Thrauxochyrmomachydrades (Cephal 28).
87 He need not hold it, however. Part of the appearance of the cook is a sacrificial knife (cetera — cum quom decet (Aulularia 417: “it suits a cook”) and it might equally be used; see Ketterer (1986a) 208, (1986b) 125, and 134 n. 51.
88 This is not always the case. As Aulularia 327–14, it does matter whether the lamb is real or not. In either case, humour arises for metatheatrical reasons; the audience sees the object both as a thing being manipulated by actors and as an object functioning within the narrative. In performance, problems can arise in a comedy when this distinction collapses. In a scene with a sword, all sorts of flourishes are possible, but if at any time the audience genuinely fears for an actor’s safety, enjoyment is likely to change. This provides a reason, especially in the raw theatrical context of Plautus, for props always to be artificial: the audience is trained never to expect genuine risks for the actors.
latter two possibilities, particularly for a blowhard soldier. As with Therapontogonous Platagorites’ sabre in *Curculio*, the *machaera* ‘becomes a symbol of the soldier’s inability to force his will on anyone’. At times, large props serve a practical function for the actors. When Demaetnus throws dice at *Asinaria* 904–6, it is unlikely that most people sitting in the audience would be able to see the physical objects. For the actors, then, it makes sense either to have oversize dice (producing an easy property to manipulate, which the audience can see) or to mime the dice completely (simplifying what is needed on stage, and producing the same result from the audience’s perspective). There are indications that this sort of humour was known in antiquity. While some properties depicted on the comic vases of South Italy are standard in size (ladders, spears, musical instruments, etc.), there are also some props that appear to be oversize for comic effect, such as the enormous writing tablets and stylus on a vase in Leningrad.

Any physical object used in a stage performance creates relationships with the characters and affects relationships between characters. As physical objects, *cruminae* (‘moneybags’), pouches worn around the neck and filled (supposedly) with coins, are essentially neutral: they need not have any distinctive size or appearance, since their connotative functions are already overdetermined. Plots of Roman comedy, so often concerning true love, depend on financial transactions. Plots create a ‘circuit of exchange’, whereby a payment cements relationships, or prevent them from happening. The contents of a moneybag may represent the purchase price for a slave’s freedom (e.g. Lemmiseleneis in *Persa*), or at least the means for a young man to have access to the company of a *meretrix* (e.g. Philaeum in *Asinaria*). Consequently a slave with a *crumina* will be treated with a disproportionate respect, even by his own master (as at *Asinaria* 545–745).

Some properties possess a cash value that is central to the resolution of the plot: unless the object enters into the cycle of exchange, the narrative cannot progress. In these cases, discrepant understanding of an object’s value by characters creates dramatic tension. Nowhere is this more clear than with recognition tokens. A recognition token provides the means to identify a character’s true nature—typically the circumstances of the birth of the *meretrax*, which can convey with it citizenship and marriage rights. In *Curculio*, Philaenium’s ring serves to identify her as a marriable citizen, to disenfranchise the claim of the soldier on her hand (since he is the long-lost brother who gave her the ring as a child), and to indict the leno Cappadox for trafficking in citizen girls. When the recognition token is held openly, as here, the plot must keep apart characters capable of making the identification. One way around this narrative difficulty is to keep the tokens in a container, such as a *vidulus* (‘bag’) or *cistella* (‘little box’), as happens in *Rudens*, *Cistellaria*, *Vidularia*, Menander’s *Epitrepontes*, etc. Some characters know the contents and their value, while others, such as Grippus in *Rudens* or Caecustis in *Vidularia*, can only guess at their prize’s worth. Such instances also raise the issue of discrepant value to different characters, particularly when relatively useless objects provide the means of identification of a character as freeborn. A stage property’s symbolic value therefore exists only in relationship to something or someone else. In Aulularia, Euclio’s pot of gold possesses a symbolic value that exists because he treasures it disproportionately over his pregnant daughter, Phaedria. In what survives of the play, she does not appear on stage, but is heard giving birth at 691–2. However, when the pot appears at 449, ‘the effect is like the first appearance of an important character which we have been waiting to see’. Euclio is shrouding the pot with his cloak, and consequently embodies a pregnant image of his unseen daughter.

Props become a site for the development of comedy. An audience sees objects on stage and invests them with symbolic values that create networks of meaning among the characters that change during the play. These complex interactions help the audience to understand the narrative by emphasising some of what is important, for nothing appears on stage unless someone has decided to bring it on stage. Such decisions are made for a variety of reasons. At one end of the scale might be the clutter associated with a dinner party, which helps characterise the feel of celebration (as at *Asinaria* 830–941 and *Persa* 758–857). At the other end are recognition tokens central to the unfolding of the plot. Sometimes the

---

189 In my production of *Milo Glorius*, the soldier wielded a small plastic toy sword, but an oversize blade would have made him appear equally preposterous.

190 Ketterer (1986a) 203.

191 The egg is on Bar 1899, *Phv* 1787 (Trendall 1967) 75–78. The writing tablets are on Leningrad inv. 1661 (Str. 1779; W. 1220), *Phv* 1783 (Trendall 1967) 34.

192 In reality, they were not filled with coins, but with lupines (Allen 1999); actual coins need to be seen by the audience (or mimed?) only at *Menades* 219.

193 Ketterer (1986b) 120, and see the important discussion of Lowe (2000) 188–221.

194 In my production, oversize rings were used so that they remained clearly visible to the audience.

195 See Ketterer (1986b) 128–9 n. 3; (1986c) 40 and 67 n. 8. 196 Ketterer (1986b) 125.
The Stagecraft and Performance of Roman Comedy

humour of properties is prepared in advance (as with comically oversize objects), and sometimes the humour rests entirely in the situation depicted (as when Leana serenades the wine jug at *Circe* 96–109). The process of putting a play on stage means that a decision needs to be made about every costume and property on stage. While this reality easily slides from the mind as one reads a play, their physical existence means that properties exert a constant influence on the fictional world created.

Finally, though it refers to the performance of a mime, *P. Berol. inv. 13927* provides important testimony of the role of properties backstage. It preserves information that must be available to every theatrical troupe—a guide for stagehands and actors, so that they might know the order of performances (compare *P. Oxy. 2707* for the circus), and the resources each scene requires. The document as it survives falls into three parts: a list of seven titles of mimic entertainments; a list of stage properties from a work called *Leucippe* (to which reference is surely lost before the fragmentary text begins); and a list of props from the seven scenes listed at the beginning. *Leucippe* was evidently the main entertainment, and the numbered entertainments were *exodia*. The two lists of properties, called τοί ὑπομνησικοι χορηγιας (‘the reminder of the stage apparatus’), can only hint at what was in store for the audience. One of the mimes required χαλιτάρια βι’ (‘two phalluses’), as well as κύπας (‘oars’) and χάρτον (‘grass’). Titles for the afterpieces include οθ χρεια ρημάτων (‘No Need for Words’, a mime that required a cithara, a little pig, a little dog, and soup ladles), το τον ἴλινον (‘The One with the Sun’, which had as its only prop ἀκτίνας (‘rays’), and το τῶν Γοθθων (‘The One with the Goths’, which required male and female Goth costumes and apparently a costume for an anthropomorphised green river). Between these last two came *tibia* music accompanied by a maiden, which required no props. The papyrus shows that there was some planning and structure to mimic presentation, and troupes could produce aediles-mémoire for backstage. Props, because they are transferable, require particularly careful backstage organisation. Comparable documents must have existed for hundreds of years for all performance genres, never written with an eye to posterity, but intended to ensure the smooth running of a performance.

---

The Experience of Roman Comedy

**AUDIENCE**

The theatre follows the path of least resistance to its audience...

Richard Schechner

One final component is essential to the experience of a *palliate*—the audience, without which theatrical experience is impossible. The audience takes an active part in the performance and it is necessary to consider the nature of its contribution: ‘Any artistic form depends upon some readiness in the receiver to cooperate with its aims and conventions.’ The theatre audience is unlike an audience at the cinema, which is only reactive. Nothing the cinema audience does can have any effect on the performance itself, though audience reaction will have an effect on the experience of the film by other spectators: one is more likely to laugh if others are laughing, and one is more likely to become uninterested if others are walking out. This same passive dynamic exists for the theatrical audience, but with it is the added dimension that the audience’s response does affect the actors’ performance. An enthusiastic, active, laughing audience can encourage, nourish, and inspire the stage performers. Actors talk about their relationship with the audience, and thinking in terms of a relationship rightly emphasises the sense of mutual dependency that theatre creates. An audience’s effect is psychological (actors feel emotions separate from their characters during the performance, and they are aware intellectually that the response is to their performance) as well as physiological (adrenaline is released, accelerating breathing and heart rate, increasing the blood flow to the muscles and brain, and contributing chemically to a sense of exhilaration for the actor). Actors adjust the length and timing of their pauses based upon their perceptions of audience attention and involvement, and feel the resulting rush. And so Palaestrio warns away the unwilling (*Miles Gloriosus* 81–2):

*qui autem auscultare nolet, exornat foras,*
*ut sit ubi sedeat ille qui auscultare volit.*

---

998 Schechner (1969) 35.
2001 Plutarch, *Moralia* 41 e–f, recognizes this in his metaphor describing the role of the ideal listener: *ὅσοι πέρι τούς σχολιαζόν τούς βασιλέως διώχθητε συγκεκριμένου εἱρύματος φόρμανα τον δοκίμονα, οὓς ἐπὶ τοὺς λόγους ὡστε τις εἰρύματα καὶ περὶ τοῦ λέγουσα καὶ περὶ τοῦ ἀκροίμασιν, ἃν ἑκάστος τοῖς προσφέροντι αὐτῶν φιλανθίαν (‘just as in playing ball it is necessary for the catcher to adapt his movements to those of the thrower and to be actively in accord with him, so with discourses, there is a certain accord between the speaker and the hearer, if each is heedful of his obligation’: text and translation, Lobbitt (1927) 244–5).
He who doesn’t want to listen should get up and leave
So that he who wants to listen can sit in that place.

It is rare that Plautus has an actor doubt the success of the theatrical enterprise, but the challenge comes early in a long play, immediately following a very funny exchange (lines 1–78). No spectator is likely to leave after such a challenge, and so the actor may continue on the assumption that the entire audience is on his side. Even if one or two individuals should decide to depart at this point, they leave themselves open for comic attacks, and the result is again an audience purged of potentially disruptive elements; again the audience is consolidated.

Audience members are both the consumers of the artistic product, but they also contribute to its success. Bennett describes ‘the production–reception contract’ that exists between actors and spectators: each side has an obligation to the other, but what unifies the two is not always finances. In fact, the economic basis for Roman comedy, funded through the magistrates, explicitly removes money from the performers’ contract with the audience. The obligation of the spectators is to enjoy the show in a sufficiently public way so that the magistrates will offer future contracts to the troupe.

The process of determining the size and composition of a typical theatre audience in an historical context is particularly difficult. A lack of clear, meaningful data and various assumptions lying beneath given estimates (when such assumptions are elaborated) further complicate matters. Academic trends also play a part. When scholarship downplays the size of theatre audiences, this serves as a corrective to previous tendencies to exaggerate audience size in order to magnify the significance of the cultural event. There are similar questions about the composition of the audience. Even the usual claim that Athenian New Comedy catered to more refined tastes and privileged a more affluent fraction of the potential audience has encountered reasoned resistance: ‘There is no reason... to doubt that New Comedy remained mass entertainment, with admission either free or at a modest fee of two obols, hardly enough to keep all but the poorest Athenians from attending.’

The audience of Plautine comedy was composed of individuals from every social station in Rome. Metatheatrical reference by stage characters to the audience provides a reliable gauge: one prologue of Captivi addresses vos qui potestis ope vestra conscrieri (Captivi 15: ‘you who with your wealth are able to be taxed!’), which means some spectators were on the citizen rolls. This group is later subdivided (Captivi 67–8):

\[\text{valet! indicus iustissimi}
\]
\[\text{domi duellique duellatores optumi.}\]

Farewell, most just justices
Here at home, and the best warriors of war.

Amphitrőio 1–7 assumes that some in the audience have business dealings that are both local and foreign (5: peregrique et domi) and Menæchmi 51–2 implies that these financial concerns might extend as far as Greece. The call for applause at Mercator 1025 isolates the adolescences in the audience. Ballio implies that boys in the audience are particularly interested in nugas theatri, verba quae in comœdias | solent lenonti dici, quae pueri sciant (Pseudolus 1081–82: ‘theatrical trifles, words which are usually said by the pimp in comedies, as boys know’). Cicero, de Finibus 5.48, emphasises the rightful place of children at spectacles. A particularly rich source for audience composition is the prologue of Poenulus, which addresses prohibitions to prostitutes (17: scortium exoletum, ‘whoring rent boy’).

\[\text{106 Roivach (2000) 170. He cites a scholion to Demosthenes 1.1 which ties the entrance fee particularly to the use of temporary wooden seats: ‘the admission fee was intended to cover the expenses of the contractor (arkhitektos) who maintained the wooden bleachers’ (170), and might not be in effect when there was an established stone theatre. While some performance venues in Rome would have had wooden bleachers, there is no indication that any in the audience paid an admission fee.}\]

\[\text{107 The military metaphors at Cistellaria 197–202 and the reference at Bucchides 1074 do not require soldiers in the audience to understand them.}\]

\[\text{108 The point of the joke involves wordplay with the (supposed) etymology of Epidamnus (see Grawitz (1993) 119–40), not with the exaggerated remoteness of the location.}\]

\[\text{109 Kießling, followed by Leo, deleted lines 1079–86. Though I believe the lines authentic, even if they are an interpolation from late in the second century, they attest to boys in the republican audience. See also Zwirlein (1991) 49.}\]

\[\text{110 The phrase is also found at Curculio 473.}\]
lictors (and the magistrates they accompany, presumably: 18), slaves and freemen (23–4), nurses with infants (28–31), married women and their husbands (32–5). The wording of each warning implies that normally each of these groups would be present to some degree. All levels of society were present at Roman comedy, with no apparent restrictions based on finances, sex, age, or social position. Indeed, so complete is the representation that any omissions (such as female infants and female prostitutes) should be seen as accident rather than exclusion. Yet we must be wary of importing modern demographic distributions to this set. Less than 20 per cent of the population reached age sixty, and three-generation families headed by a grandfather were rare.

We do not hear of foreigners in Plautus’ audience directly, and consequently the absence of any positive indications of their presence serves to reinforce the cultural unity of the audience. There are no known restrictions banning them from the ludi, and I suspect that they must have been in attendance. This adds a fascinating reflexivity to Curculio’s initial entrance, when he pushes his way through the crowd and rails against isti Graeci palliati (Curculio 288: ‘these cloaked Greeks’, continuing his deprecations at lines 288–95). On one level Curculio refers to Phaedemus and Palinurus, the two characters in a fabula palliata standing on the stage; and an appropriate gesture could make this clear. On another level, though, Curculio could refer to the actual Greeks in the audience wearing pallia; this too could be clarified with an appropriate gesture. The detail of Curculio’s harangue goes well beyond what the play has established for the stage characters, and this encourages the latter interpretation: the Curculio actor is physically making his way through the audience during this speech, and, on finding a cluster of Greeks, or a single individual who happens to be carrying a book satchel (289; suffarciati cum libris, ‘bulging with books’), focuses the character’s venom on a single spectator. A clear gesture could exclude either interpretation, but an imprecise movement could equally allow for both interpretations simultaneously. Plautus blends the stage world with the world of the audience, creating the rapport that Moore has thoroughly documented.

Plautus sought to take the diverse individuals in the audience and treat them as a corporate whole, perhaps at the expense of a scapegoat or two, such as a reluctant spectator (Miles Gloriosus 81–2), a Greek slave or tourist (Curculio 288), or the praeco (Asinaria 4–5, Poenulus 11–15). The magistrates in charge of the festivals had different motivations. They wished to emphasize Roman social stratification. In 154, they deliberately introduced segregation, separating the audience between the senatorial orders and others. Livy 34.54.3–4, 6–2 is passionate about the change:

Megaleia ludos saecnicos A. Atilius Serranus, L. Scribonius Libo aediles curules primi fecerunt, horum aedilitum ludos Romanos primum senatus a populo secretus spectavit praebuitque sermones, sic omnis nositas soles... ad quingentesimum quinquagesimum octavum annum promiscuo spectacle esse, quid repente factum cur immisceri siti in cavea patres plehem nolens? cur dives pauperem consensos fastidire? novam, superbam libidinem, ab nullius ante gentis senatu neque desi-deratum neque institutum, postremo ipsum quoque Africannum, quod consul auctor eiis rei fuit, paenultima furent, adeo nihil motum ex antiquo probabilis est; veteribus, nisi quae usu evidenter arguis, stari malum.

At the Megaleian Games dramatic performances were for the first time introduced by the aediles Aulus Atilius Serranus and Lucius Scribonius Libo [in 154 bc]. At the Roman Games given by these same aediles, the senate for the first time looked on segregated from the common people, and this caused gossip, as every novelty usually does... For 558 years, they said, people had looked on from seats chosen at random; what had suddenly happened to make the Fathers unwilling to have the plebeians mingle in the crowd, or the rich man scorn the poor man as his neighbour at the show? This was a novel and arrogant caprice, never desired nor practised by the senate of any other people. It is reported that in the end even [Scipio] Africanus had repented that in his consulship he had suggested this innovation. So difficult is it to prove the need of any variation from ancient custom; people always prefer to stand by the old ways, unless experience convincingly proves them bad.

216 Moore (1988b). Here is a representative citation: ‘Through monologues and other elements, Plautus encagorizes in his plays a hierarchy of rapport, as some characters are more successful than others in their attempts to “form a bond with the spectators”’ (p. 33).

217 Text and translation, Sage (1933) 135–7. See also Valerius Maximus 2.4.1 and 4.5.1. For discrepancies between this and other sources, see Lenaghan (1969) 122–23. Gruen (1992) 204 suggests that the counterfeit is invented by the later historians. Vitruvius 5.5.2 attests to separate seats for senators in later theatres.

---

215 The word order is unusual and perhaps conceals a subtle joke. The prologue fears the sinqar will produce not terva ('words') but terva ('blows'); compare Epidicus 25–8, but the humour seems very compressed.

216 The clamor multorum ('racket of women') is also identified at Hecuba 35.

217 Zwierlein (1990) 106–24 provides the most recent discussion of the textual issues surrounding the prologue. Mauhach (1988) does not impugn any of the lines mentioned here. The passage remains valuable even if it is interpolated, since it would still describe second-century practice.

218 Slaes (1991) 135: 'The message of order is made palatable by being directed ostensibly at everyone except the majority of the audience.'

The change came three years before the inauguration of the temple of the Magna Mater and the performance of *Pseudolus*, a time when Plautus was evidently at the peak of his career. The effect of such a division is not slight, but the way Plautus has his actors relate to the audience draws attention away from any such divisions. Plautus reminds them that all may sit — even, at times, the slaves (*Poenulus* 23–4). Plautus encourages the audience to put aside differences and unite behind the action of the play.

There were, to be sure, other ways individuals sought the best seats for themselves. Apart from the reservation of senatorial seats after 194, spectators took their places on a first-come, first-served basis, although Moore may be correct that there were some self-regulating mechanisms prior to this whereby slaves and social inferiors would normally not take seats at the front. The front seats were the most desirable, in part because of audibility (*Captivi* 11–14 are addressed to a spectator in the back row who cannot hear). There exists a tension between the solidarity created when a group of spectators become an audience and the genuine diversity of experience that the spectators possess. While Plautus treats the audience as a unit, he knows that spectators possess an intellectual diversity that makes them crave different types of humour. He caters to this diversity by producing comedy which itself is pluralistic in its humour. Heterogeneous appreciation characterizes the audience's engagement and arises directly from its diversity.

Rome produced many audiences, and while the Roman playwright clearly aimed at drawing a diverse crowd, the experience of *Hecyra* demonstrates that the audience for Terentian comedy was different from the audience for gladiatorial fights. Contrary pressures also inform

---

118 Despite many of the passages cited above, it remained a question for some time as to whether the second-century Roman audiences stood or sat. The matter is settled by Beare (1964) 170–2, 144–7, and see *Pseudolus* 122: *iustitiae qui sedent* (those sitting [i.e. the audience] are thirные); *Pseudolus* 1–2, *Epistulae* 733, etc. The audience sat in the *catena* (Livy 34.54.6, Cicero, *Laws* 7.58) on subellae ('benches'; see *Amphitriteo* 64–8).
119 Beare (1964) 174.
120 Moore (1994) 122, arguing generally for an intense competition for available seating.
121 Other prestige locations apart from the senatorial seats had been used since the fourth century, but these were for the *ludi* generally and not specifically for theatre. *Forus*, s.v. *Mamonia*, describes the galleries which were first built by Mammius, the censor (318 B. C.), over the shops in the forum, that from them the spectators of the market-place might be witnessed (Saunders 1913 94). *Vitr. MM 1:1–2* describes balconies (*maeniana superiores*) rested out for *view* or *Ps. Asconius, ad Cicero, *De Oratore* 16.50 the construction to the Basilica Porcia, built in 184. Such balconies would not be available for every performance venue.

---

The Experience of Roman Comedy

audience composition. It is misleading to think of a theatre audience as a cross-section of the population: the ratios are necessarily wrong. 'There is always a diversity of publics', and that of the *palliata* was for the most part urban, with the level of sophistication that entailed. There was a worldview and ideology defined by class, material situation, education, levels of culture, age, sex, attitude to the arts, previous experience with the theatre, etc., which pre-existed whatever happened on stage. All of these factors help to unify an audience, and necessarily temper claims of heterogeneous appreciation. The Roman audience brings to the performance common interpretative strategies, some of which are created by the experience of comedy itself:

[A play] promises the audience two performances: one of the show itself and the other is the experience of being in the theatre. To both performances is attached the expectation of pleasure.

Both of these are at work in the imaginations of each spectator. The distinction is important, because one can enjoy the experience of attending the theatre without necessarily liking the play. Ovid hints at these dual motivations (allusively and in an erotic context) when he describes the women at the theatre: *spectatrum venient, veniunt spectantur ut ipse (Ars Amatoria* 1.99: 'They come to watch, they come to be watched themselves').

The size of an audience is difficult to determine. Goldberg calculated that the seating at the *ludi Megalenses* allowed for fewer than two thousand spectators, leading him to ask, 'Is it possible that the audience was in fact so small?' For almost any live performance tradition other than Athenian drama, an audience of one or two thousand would be considered substantial. Larger audiences attended Roman circus events (as they do at modern rock concerts and sporting events), but there is no reason to deprecate a crowd size of one or two thousand spectators. And modern notions of 'mass entertainment' (conditioned particularly in a world of cinema and television broadcasts) must be put aside. Roman comedy makes claim to elite cultural values, and, whatever the truth of the claim, it did not appeal to everyone, despite the playwright's best

---

123 Bennett (1997) 94.
125 Bennett (1997) 118, and see 82–3, where she cites Ellis (1981) 26, who distinguishes going to the cinema (the whole experience) and seeing a film (the projected narrative).
The Experience of Roman Comedy

Efforts. The weather also is a factor, and the lack of a regularised calendar means that many festivals occur at colder parts of the year.\(^{27}\)

Since venues were temporary, it is difficult to get a clear sense of their sizes. Previously we saw that Welch believes a temporary wooden amphitheatre built in the forum could hold 10,000 spectators,\(^{28}\) and I suggested less than a third of this space would probably be available for a theatrical performance, yielding a maximum audience of c. 3,400 in the largest of the temporary performance venues available to republican Rome.\(^{29}\) In comparison, the roughly contemporary stone theatre at Pompeii seats 5,000.\(^{30}\) Any calculation assumes ideal seating arrangements, without regard for varying concerns for personal space, individuals holding seats for friends who may or may not appear, the gradual influx of spectators to a partially filled venue, etc. Seats were not assigned (it would be difficult to do so without entry tickets), and I suspect that these factors would further diminish the seated audience size by more than 10 per cent, and it is unlikely those standing would recover this amount. Different performance spaces would have different seating capacities and conventions. While all elements of society were represented in the audience, attendance was not universal, and an audience of a few thousand spectators probably represents an extreme upper limit range.

This was not the total size of the audience, however, because games had more than one day of ludi scaenici, and this means Roman plays were presented with a limited run. Leaving aside the issue of instauratio (which for example affected Stichus in 200; see Livy 31.50.3), we know that troupes would perform on more than one of the days available for performance. The envoi at the end of Pseudolus tells the audience, 

\[\text{serum si volitis adplaudere atque adprobare hunc gregem, et fabulam in crastinum vos vocabo (Pseudolus 1334–5; 'Still, if you applaud and cheer this troupe and play, I'll invite you back tomorrow').}\]

It is inconceivable that such an invitation would be offered unless the same troupe were performing the next day. We know Pseudolus was performed at the ludi Megaleses, which was the festival that placed the greatest restrictions on rehearsal time for the troupe. The natural inference, when we consider the enjoyment of the audience, the practical demands upon the theatrical troupe, and the economic limits of the magistrates funding the ludi scaenici, is that each troupe would present a single play at a festival, and the same play would run for its length, which at times could be extended by instauratio. Terence provides the only known exception, when Hecyra, the previously unsuccessful play, was remounted with Adelphoe at the privately funded ludi funebres of L. Aemilius Paulus in 160.\(^{31}\)

Audience psychology is difficult to fathom, and individuals at ludi probably behaved differently than they otherwise would. While we may be able to get some sense of the audience, in the end we only know that there were individuals who enjoyed Plautus' plays, then as now. Staging Roman comedy in modern performance contexts can reveal questions that otherwise would never occur. Often, these concern the play, and how it creates its theatrical effects. At times, though, the practice can also yield new understandings for how an audience might respond. As I discovered from my productions, there is an unexpected consequence when plays are presented in a run and admission is free and largely unregulated: the plays attract repeat attendees. Spectators come on multiple days, bringing different people with them as they do. Others come late to one performance, stay to the end, and then watch the beginning of the play on the next day, or on the day after that. When we consider the experience of Roman comedy, in all its dimensions, this seems to be a natural result, and has implications for the actors and for the playwright. For the actors, their job is clear: whatever the venue, their obligation is to attract and keep as substantial a crowd as they can. The troupe's economic relationship with the magistrates and its chance for future contracts depends on this success. Any means to secure repeat viewers, even those as obvious as Pseudolus 1334–5, work towards this end. For the playwright, the structure of the plays must make some allowances for these drifting spectators. This impacts upon characterisation, narrative development, and emotional engagement with the play, and constitutes another way in which the troupe depends on the active cooperation of the audience at all times.

The plays of Plautus have had many audiences over the years. Cicero watching Roscius act Ballio in Pseudolus in the first century BC witnessed theatre differently from how spectators did in 191, and, differently from how we experience it today, whether reading it or seeing it in

\(^{27}\) Goldberg (1998) 15. Vitruvius 5.9 discusses the effects of adverse weather; Ovid, Fasti 4.385–6, mentions rain during the ludi Megaleses; Martial 4.2 envisages snow covering spectators.

\(^{28}\) Welch (1994) 76.

\(^{29}\) The Circus Maximus was of course larger, but there were no indications that it was used as a theatrical venue in the early second century.


\(^{31}\) Goldberg (1998) 15–16 and 16 n. 51 understands the second performance of Eunuchus in 165 to be an encore. I suspect rather that this is additional evidence that in the early second century there were only two ludi scaenici at the Megaleses.
performance. We lack the necessary 'levels of cultural competence'\textsuperscript{335} to appreciate all that transpired on the stage. We have the words (or many of them, allowing for issues of textual transmission), but we have lost all traces of vocal inflection, mask, gesture, body movement, posture, costume properties, stage design, the effects of natural light, music, the use of noise and silence, etc. Reading the play, we miss the experience of being in an audience, being pressed on the sides, hearing laughs, smelling the odours of food and people, and observing the stage from a fixed point in the \textit{casea} with perhaps a limited field of vision.\textsuperscript{333} We have not walked through the festival crowd, arrived early in hopes of a good seat (close to the stage or near to our friends), waited in expectation for our favourite actor to appear, looked at the other spectators assembled, or selected this from among other festival entertainments. All of these factors also contributed to the original experience of Roman comedy, and were part of what it meant to be part of Plautus' audience.

\textsuperscript{335} Bennett (1997) 68. \textsuperscript{333} Bennett (1997) 65.