Funny Words in Plautine Comedy

MICHAEL FONTAINE


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[It is generally assumed that] any struggle against the abuse of language is a sentimental archaism, like preferring candles to electric light or hansom cabs to aeroplanes. Underneath this lies the half-conscious belief that language is a natural growth and not an instrument which we shape for our own purposes.

—George Orwell, Politics and the English Language (1946)
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Innuendo and the Audience

A striking feature of Plautine drama is the extent to which the characters try to draw us into the play, competing with one another for our sympathies. They frequently make use of asides, monologues, and other nonillusory techniques of direct address in the hopes of getting us to see things their way.  

But who is “us”? Who was in Plautus’ audience, and how can we tell? How well educated were its members? How familiar with Greek language or literature were they, and from what sources did their familiarity derive? These are inveterate questions, and they have received surprisingly varied answers in the past. Since most previous attempts to discuss these issues rely essentially on the same common set of data, such as the quantity or quality of untranslated Greek words that we find in Plautus’ texts, I hope to break some fresh ground here by reorienting discussion around what Plautus does not say; that is, I propose to enlarge the data set by examining the style, the quality, and the content of his innuendo.

Because words and deeds are often at odds with one another, what Plautus’ characters leave unsaid may sometimes carry as much meaning as what they do say. Moreover, as we have seen, even when they appear to be speaking in earnest, we cannot necessarily trust what his characters say or seem to be saying. A fresh look at some familiar passages in his plays, then, may not only suggest new interpretations of those individual passages, it may also throw light on the composition and the character of Plautus’ audience.

An excellent starting point for this investigation is a riddle that appears near the start of Poenulus.

A Wolfish Pimp in Poenulus: The Setup

In the prologue to Poenulus, the speaker recounts the backstory of the play, explaining that once upon a time, not so long ago, two girls and their nurse were kidnapped. As he goes on adding detail to his narrative, the speaker elaborates on one point in particular: "The kidnapper sells all three of them, cash down, to a man—if a pimp is a man—who is the most consummate scoundrel that the earth sustains" (88–90). The speaker then pauses to offer us a puzzling challenge (91–92):

vosmet nunc facite coniecturam ceterum
quid id sit hominis, quoi Lyco nomen sit?

Now you yourselves analyze
what sort of man in general is one whose name is “Aíkos.”

Because prologues in Roman comedy divulge the names of characters in the drama that follows only in exceptional circumstances (Phrynnesium in Truculentus, as we saw in chapter 1, is one of those exceptions), this speaker’s challenge looks like a real invitation for our participation.

Another reason for thinking that the challenge is not merely rhetorical but actual is that elsewhere in Plautus the expression coniecturam facere means ‘to subject to analysis, to interpret, to elucidate’ or ‘to submit to free association on a topic’ rather than simply ‘to guess.’ At Curc. 246–253 and Rad. 612, this and similar language refers to dream interpretation. As we saw at the end of chapter 3, at Trin. 921 the phrase coniecturare reperire ‘to discover through conjecture’ introduces the Imposter’s seven reminiscences of the name “Charmides.” Furthermore, a coniector in Plautus indicates one who solves riddles or divines hidden meanings: Oedipus is a coniector at Poen. 443–444, and Tiresias is one at Amph. 1128. Hence the prologue speaker’s directive here is apparently an invitation for us to elucidate or divine the allegorical or riddling meaning of the name “Lycus.” This means we are being challenged to a game of eiváξειν: The speaker gives us the anguillast half of the comundrum (‘he’s an eel,’ Ps. 747) but not the elabitur (‘he slips away’).3

The obvious answer here, of course, is “wolf”; indeed, Nixon predictably inserts a footnote in his translation remarking, “Lycus, ‘wolf’.” The reasoning is simple enough, for (i) Aíkos means “wolf” in Greek; (ii) wolves are predators; (iii) Lycus, as a Plautine pimp, is by nature predatory and will probably use wolfish language (cf., e.g., Ps. 1124–1126); and (iv) prostitutes in Latin are called lupae ‘she-wolves’ (e.g., Truc. 657, a pun). If our answer does not seem especially novel, then, it certainly seems at least unobjectionable. And yet, as A. S. Gratwic arrives has pointed out, it is only half correct.4

That is because in the lines immediately following, the prologue speaker goes on to add the seemingly gratuitous information that Lycus has recently relocated here from Anactorium (93–95):

is ex Anactorio, ubi prius habitaverat,
hec in Calydonem commigravit hau diu,
sui quaesti causae.

He left Anactorium, where he had been living before, and immigrated here to Calydon not long ago to ply his trade.

Though it may seem unnecessary, this point of detail does not merely add color to the backstory. As Gratwick has explained, the information is actually a clue to help us refine our conjecture about the meaning of the pimp’s name. By mentioning the district of Anactorium in Acarnania, the prologue speaker directs our thoughts to the predacious wolf-fish (probably the bass), which in Greek was variously called λίβρας or ἀκαμήνας, and in Latin, lupus.5

What is the point? Is the prologue speaker implying that this pimp will “swallow the hook,” that is, fall for the entrapment (a Plautine metaphor: cf. Curc. 431, Most. 1070, Truc. 42)? Or, since (much later) Isidore (Orig. 12.6.5) identifies improba voracitas ‘awful voracity’ and aviditas ‘greed’ (12.6.24) as the characteristics common to the land lupus and the water lupus, is the prologue speaker alluding to Lycus’ aggressive and voracious characteristics?

These are, of course, not mutually exclusive alternatives, and there are probably still more. As Gratwick has also pointed out, Macrobius addsuce ancient testimony that the best lupi were caught inter duos pontes ‘between the two bridges,’ a phrase that denotes the waters in Rome near Tiber Island into which the cloaca maxima debouched.6 This detail implies that the prologue speaker’s unstated point is scatological, for quite unlike the corresponding land animal, the lupus was a “bottom dweller,” that is, a fish that feeds on feces. Macrobius quotes Lucullus to show that hunc piscem ... quasi liquiritorem castillonem appellat, scilicet qui proxime ripas sternus insectaretur (Lucullus) calls this fish a “scourenger, lick-plate” as if it were a lick-er-up of leavings because it would root out excrement (stercus) all along the riverbanks.7

The insinuation that Lycus is a scatophagen, then, is probably one of the other points that the prologue speaker means to convey. We can certainly find parallels for this sort of allusion in Greek comedy. Characters or individuals are abusively

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2. I am heavily indebted in this discussion of Poen. 91–92 to Gratwick (1990), whose work identifies the problem, assembles all of the earlier testimony quoted here, and briefly alludes to the more important implications of its solution.


7. Lucullus frs. 1174–1176 Marx = 601-603 ROL.
charged with eating excrement not only in Aristophanes (Pax 45–48, Plutus 706), but even in Menander, who in his Κόλπα uses the expression βοῦς Κύπριος ‘Cypriot bull’ as a veiled euphemism for οκατοφάγος ‘excrement eater, scatophagie.’ Scatological terms of abuse, though rare in general in Latin, are even applied to pimps elsewhere in the pulliata. The insult (ex) sterculino ecfossus ‘dung from the dung heap’ at Cas. 114 is said to the rustic Olympio, and the epithet stercoreus ‘crappy’ refers to the braggart solider at Mil. 90. However, it is pimps who constitute the special target of abuse at Persa 406–407 (oh, lutum lenonium, commixtum caeno sterculum publicum ‘Ah, there, you pimpish filth, you mixture of mire and public dung pit’) and at Ph. 526 (sterculum ‘dung pit’). Similarly Labrax, the pimp in Rudens whose speaking name (λιβηρας) is another name for the lupius, is called an inpurata belua ‘filthified animal’ (Rud. 543; see below). James N. Adams, among others, states that “feces” and “filth” are closely associated in Latin. If this is true, later lines in Poeninius suggest that a gag is running throughout the play that continually alludes to Lycus’ unclean disposition. In vv. 157–158 we hear lenone istoc Lyco...non lutumst lutulentius ‘mud isn’t muddier than that pimp Lycus.’ And in vv. 825–826, which echo and hark back to v. 90, we hear neque peiurior neque peior (an obvious pun) alter usquam est gentium, quae erus meus est, neque tam luteus neque tam caeno conlitus ‘a worse liar or worse rascal than that master of mine [he means Lycus] can’t be found on earth,/or one so foul and caked with crap.’ So much for one aspect of the prologue speaker’s game of elicitation.

However, what is of potentially greater interest is that the prologue speaker’s riddle and the various associations that it conjures up prepare us for a pun later in the play that has not heretofore attracted any notice. This time, though, instead of any of the characters onstage making the pun, the play on words requires the participation of those of us out in the audience to achieve. Let us have a look.

A Wolfish Pimp: The Sequel

Just before the plot to entrap Lycus is set in motion, the Witnesses and Milphio conspire to disguise the bailiff, Collybiscus, as a foreigner. The bailiff is to bring Lycus money in the hopes that the pimp will agree to sell prostitutes in his possession who are actually freeborn citizens—an illegal act. Agorastocles then explains to the Witnesses that Collybiscus is holding three hundred “dollars” (nummi) in cash. The Witnesses suggest that they have a look at the money so that they can give appropriate testimony in court later on. This request leads to a curiously extended break in the dramatic illusion in which the Witnesses make a strange remark (594–599, with my dash in v. 597):

\[\text{AGOR. hic trecentos nummos numeratos habet.}\]
\[\text{ADV. ergo nos inspiciere oporet titus aurum, Agorastocles, ut sciamus quid dicamus mox pro testimonio.}\]
\[\text{COLL. agite, inspicite.}\]
\[\text{ADV. aurum est profecto hoc, spectatores—comicum! macerato hoc pingues fiant auro in barbaria boves; verum ad hanc rem agandum Philipum est: ita nos admisimurabimus.}\]
\[\text{AGOR. This man (indicating Collybiscus) has in his possession three hundred dollars in cash.}\]
\[\text{WITNESSES Then we ought to inspect that money, Agorastocles, so as to give intelligent testimony later on.}\]
\[\text{COLL. (opening his wallet) All right, inspect.}\]
\[\text{WITNESSES (looking, then, to audience) This (pulling out a handful of the fake money in the purse) is certainly money, spectators—stage money, that is! Foreigners soak this money and use it to fatten oxen. But for present purposes it’s coin of the realm—so we’ll pretend.}\]

Since we are supposed to be able to see what they are holding, the Witnesses do not bother to tell us what it is. Nevertheless, from other sources we are able to piece together the conclusion that their stage money consists of the golden yellow beans of the lupine, a plant that in Latin is called lupinus or lupinum;[11] This is the missing connection that we need.

For when the Witnesses pull out a handful of the aurum comicum to show it to us (if hoc in v. 597 is correct, it is certainly deictic), they are inviting us to make a pun: That is because, alongside the noun lupinum ‘lupine’, Latin also has the homonymous adjective lupinus ‘wolf-, wolfish’ (e.g., Cas. 971). These lupina will serve, then, not only as money, which would attract the interest of any pimp in any comedy, but also as irresistible ‘wolf-stuff’ (i.e., sucker bait or wolf nip, specially formulated for the palate of a homo cui nomen Lyco est and guaranteed to induce salivation).

In other words, Plautus has planted a pun in his play that is activated by a visual cue, but he leaves it up to us to make it; that is, he encourages us to cry out “lupina!—Aha! I get it—see, those are lupines, and they’re trying to entrap a lupus!” This is essentially the same ironic procedure that we saw in chapter 2 on Scapinno’s words corpus subaquilum, where the convergence of the visual cue of Ampelica’s hydria, prominently displayed upon her head, and the repeated verbal cues of aqua invited us to make the translation connection for ourselves. This technique can be seen elsewhere in Plautus, too, and an analysis of its operations might help us draw some inferences about the nature of his audience.

10. 597 hoc Geppert: kic (i.e., hic) A : om. P; Lindsay prints hic ‘here,’ but hoc, which Leo prefers, seems certainly right.
Aulularia

One such pun, for instance, that we are invited but not required to notice lies in the title Aulularia ‘The Tale (-aria, sc. fabula) of the Little Crock (aulula).’ This title ostensibly derives from the crock of gold hidden within Euclio’s house. Throughout the play, however, the crock is always called an aula (390, 392, 580, 583, 611, 614, 617, 709, 763, 765, 809, 821); the diminutive form *aulula that the title presupposes never appears. Why does the title come from the diminutive form?

Formally, of course, the title of this play does parallel titles like Cistell-aria, Mostell-aria, and Poen-ulus, all of which also involve diminutives. However, another and not necessarily mutually exclusive explanation for it could be Plautus’ desire to create a tongue twister—which is, in a sense, really only a mechanism for causing us to make a slip of the tongue, and which, like a slip, often therefore results in us making a pun for ourselves.

The reason the title is a tongue twister is that when the contiguous sounds l and r cluster in Latin, they are prone to assimilation or dissimilation, and in fairly predictable patterns. The Proban Appendix prescribes, for example, the pronunciations flagellum non fragellum, suppexel non superlex, terebra non telebra, clatri non craci, and frustum non frustum (a pun that we saw Plautus make in Mil. 1422), and this tendency toward assimilation or dissimilation also explains why, for example, Latin peregrinus becomes Italian pellegrino, English pilgrim.12 The variation of lorarius with lolarius is so commonly attested in the Plautine MSS, as well as at Gellius N.A. 9.3.19, that, despite the word’s evident etymology from lara (lāra), lolarius may actually have been the usual pronunciation and spelling of the word in common discourse.13 These patterns (l-r-r to l-l-r, etc.) accordingly suggest that Romans might easily mispronounce Aulularia as *Aurlaria, thereby creating the meaning ‘The Tale (-ia, sc. fabula) of the Golden Guardian Angel’ (-Lar-). This may seem only accidental, but Plautus positively seems to encourage the pun by having the lar familiaris enter at the start of the play and deliver the prologue speech in which he reveals the existence of Euclio’s gold to us (auri 7, aurum 15, aurum 39).

The ironic riddling technique that this and the puns examined above involve may shed new light on some familiar passages, and they may suggest that the usual interpretations are not quite correct. Let me give an example from Rudens that again involves an actual riddle and the pimp Labrax. Since λάαιρας is the Greek name for the lupus fish, as I noted earlier, this pimp’s speaking name (λάαιρας) is as inherently suspicious as that of Lycus in Poenulus.

Labrax’s Riddle

At Rudens 1303, Labrax has overheard Griacus bitterly soliloquizing on his misfortune. The fisherman has been deprived of the vidulus ‘trunk’ that he had found in the sea, and he believes he has been ill treated. The interest of the pimp, who is eavesdropping, is awakened and attracted by Griacus’ mention of the vidulus, and he approaches the fisherman. After they exchange the customary greetings, the pimp makes a polite inquiry, but he receives a frosty reply (Rud. 1304–1306):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LABR.</th>
<th>ut vales?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GRIP.</td>
<td>quid tu? num medicus, quaeo, es?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LABR.</td>
<td>immo edepol una littera plus sum quam medicus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRIP.</td>
<td>mendicus es?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LABR.</td>
<td>tum tu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Labrax’s (dryly) Touché.

As far as I can determine, no one has ever wondered whether Griacus’ solution mendicus ‘beggar,’ what with its change of accent from medicus ‘doctor,’ may actually be the wrong answer to the pimp’s riddle that he is “one letter more than medicus.”14 The solution mendicus does, of course, hark back to Labrax’s mendicity in v. 485, but circumstantial evidence suggests that what Griacus actually does here is explain the riddle away, and that the real answer, which is left unsaid, is ironic. The simple experiment of adding one Latin letter to medicus in all possible combinations reveals that one other, and only one other, solution to the riddle is possible. That answer is mirdicus, ‘shitty.’

The word mirdicus, which is the source of French merdique ‘shitty,’ is not attested in Latin before the Humanist period (fifteenth century and later). However, there it appears repeatedly, and it is almost always found as a pun on medicus, and sometimes even on mendicus as well. Since our lexiaca seem to be virtually unaware of the word and since the consistency of the wordplay medicus ~ mendicus (~ mirdicus) in its cumulative effect is so striking, I set forth here the examples

12. LHS 1, 230–232 §§331–332 gives other examples.
that I have collected, a collection to which professional Neo-Latin scholars will undoubtedly be able to add:

(1) Jacopo Sannazaro, Epigramma 2.40.3–4 Putnam (2009) ‘in Picentem medicum’ (‘Against the Doctor Picente’): sed quia tu Cynicus vis dici, et Clinicus idem, Esse idem poteris Merdicos, et Medicus (‘But, because you wish to be called cynicus and clinicus at one and the same time, you can be merdicos and medicus wrapped into one.’) (tr. Putnam, modified)

(2) Johan van der Does (i.e., Janus Dousa ‘pater’) Epigramma 32.4 (ed. Heesakkers [1976, 82]) ‘in medicum quendam’ (‘Against a Doctor’): nun- quid pro medico merdicos esse cupis? (‘You don’t want to be merdicos instead of medicus, do you?’)

(3) Guillaume Bouchet, Serées 1.10 ‘Des médecins & de la médecine (ed. Roybet [1873, 203]) (a doctor speaks): quum dicam culum mediam aegrotante cactam, non eumenito merdicos ore vocor (‘When I say that shit’s been crapped out of a fevered asshole, it’s fair to call me merdicos’).

(4) Merdicos also appears in vv. 91 and 142 of G. G. Bartolotti’s Macharonea Medicinalis (ed. Schupbach [1978, 171, 173]), where the pun on medicus is implicit throughout the poem.

(5) In a Commedia dell’Arte scenario titled Pulcinella medico a forza in Placidio Adriani’s Zibaldone of 1739 (III.9a = Théâult [1965, 122]), the buffoon Pulcinella, dressed as a doctor, cries ego sum merdicos (‘I am a merdicos’) in a para prostoniae for medicus.

(6) In J. H. Alsted’s 1630 Encyclopedia (Alsted [1630, 4, 1293 (= 1990) 3, 76] col. 2, 36–40), the pun medicus ~ merdicos is merdicos is offered as a stock example of urbaastic: Joci captantur ex permutatione syllabarum, & vocum: ut... pro medicus, merdicos & merdicos.] (‘Jokes can be generated by changing syllables and sounds, as, for instance, in place of medicus, one could say mendicos and merdicos.’)

(7) In addition to these puns, Tito Livio Frulovisi in his thoroughly Plautine Neo-Latin comedy Claudi Duo (c. AD 1433, scene 7, line 16 = Previté-Orton [1932], 50) makes an adolescens cry out en merdicum! (‘Now that’s shitty!’), which is apparently the earliest attested nonfacetious usage of the word.15

No evidence suggests that any of these authors (including Dousa, who later published excellent conjectures on Plautus) understood that Plautus was making the same pun in Rudens. What is more, it remains true that the word merdicos is not itself attested in classical Latin. Perhaps it existed in subliterary registers of Latin all along, or perhaps not, and Plautus merely expected us to coin the word ourselves by the same analogy that these later authors did; given the limits and rules of Latin word building and coinage, a word such as merdicos is almost certain to have been coined as a distortion of medicus anyway. Either way, as we have seen, Plautus freely coins or puns on adjectives in -icus, including his puns on Μολωνάκι/molossi-ici, odiess-ici, incommodes-ici Capt. 86–87), and sicilicissitatis (Men. 12). Indeed, the prologue speaker himself in Poenulus coins the term imperator ‘histricus’ (Poen. 4; cf. imperio histrically in v. 44) to pun on Istricus ‘Istrian’ and (h)istrio ‘actor.’ At Cas. 98, Olympio, the bailiff, is insulted with the words vilice hau magni preti ‘you worthless villa keeper,’ where vil(l)-icus (from villa) puns on vil-is ‘cheap.’ In addition, at Eun. 264 Terence coins the adjective gnatho-icus ‘Gnathonite, devotee of Gnatho’ from the parasite name Gnatho.16

Whether or not this alternate solution to Labrax’s riddle alludes specifically to the excrement-eating tendencies of the λασπας fish (cf. Rud. 544), or whether the joke is meant merely as a one-time pun with no wider application beyond the moment, it cannot technically rise beyond the level of hypothesis: that is, we cannot prove that the ironic answer medicus is the “real” answer precisely because the text does not certify it. Does that mean the answer is wrong and simply illusory? Reasonable people will disagree. However, we should at least note that riddles with two solutions, one of them usually a deniable ambiguity, form a well-established class of jokes found in many European cultures, and perhaps beyond. More can be said about this particular amusement.

Two-Solution Riddles and Two-Interpretation Passages

Riddles that have two simultaneous solutions, one of them innocent, the other dirty, are widely attested in literature. A familiar example in English is the trick of saying of a woman “I can’t say it, but what she is rhymes with rich.” The answer is obviously—witch (not bitch). Similar is the joke of the four-letter word for a woman that ends in -unt: The answer is aunt, of course. In joke in Plautus that I have already cited is Capt. 888, Bovis est: boiam terit ‘He’s a Bohemian: He terit a boiam.’ This man is called a Bohemian both because he “chafes at a malefactor’s collar” and because he “humps a Bohemienne.” (Misogyny is not intrinsic to the form of these jokes, but it does turn up with startling frequency in them.) Because these riddles tend to involve an inherently deniable ambiguity, the

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15. Emphasis in bold typeface added in every case.


17. Legeman (1968, 134) mentions examples only from the Renaissance, but Katz (2006, 166–167), 178–185, esp. 184, with nn. 73 and 74 finds Greek examples from antiquity, including a pederastic solution to the riddle of the Sphinx. Gurlitt (1924, 39–40) argues that the riddles at Petronius Sat. 98.8–9 have the obscene solution “phallos,” as well as the respectable ones of (presumably) “foot,” “eye,” and “hair.”
existence of the second solution is usually impossible to prove, even when we all know what the “real” answer is.

The question of unfalsifiability of an interpretation brings us back to the general problem of trusting what Plautus’ characters say. Sometimes when characters supply their own explanation for things (such as with Peniculus’ rationale for his name in Menæchmi), or they tell another character that they are doing something, there are good grounds for disbelieving them, even though a literal reading of the text seems to confirm the “obvious” answer.

Let me give a bolder demonstration of where I think an overreliance on characters’ own statements has led us to underestimate very effective dramatic irony. I take it from the same context in which the mercidicus joke appears.

Gripus’ Magic Spit?

At Rud. 1288, Gripus had entered the stage after having failed in his bid to retain the vidulus. For everyone else, as we saw earlier, there is unbridled joy: Daemones and his wife have found their long-lost daughter, Palaestra, who will wed Plesidippus, while Trachalius will be manumitted and will marry Ampelas. An animal sacrifice will be held to celebrate the happy turn of events. But Daemones has assured Gripus, who found the trunk in the first place, that he will receive nothing. In bitter resentment, the fisherman utters an impertinent wish that everything inside the vidulus be it gold or be it silver, turn to ash (1256–1257), and with that imprecation, he exits into the villa.

Labrax, meanwhile, enters the stage at v. 1281, soliloquizing on the misfortune of his unsuccessful court case and his concomitant loss of Palaestra. Labrax interrupts his soliloquy when he spots Gripus re-entering. Burning with frustration, the fisherman, in a supremely interesting portrait of psychology that warrants further study, is threatening to kill himself (1288–1302, with omissions):

**GR.** numquam edepol hodie ad vesperum Gripum inspicies vivom nisi vidulus mihi redditur, . . .

cubitum hercle longis litteris signabo iam usquequeaque, si quis perdiderit vidulum cum auro atque argento multo, ad Gripum ut veniat. non feretis istum, ut postulatis . . .

**LA.** adeundus mihi illic est homo. di, quaeo, subvenite.

**GR.** quid me intro revocas? hoc volo hic ante ostium extergere, nam hoc quidem pol e robigine, non est e ferro factum, ita quanto magis extergeo rutillum, atque tenuius fit, nam quidem hoc venenatun sem verum: ita in manibus consenescit.

**GR.** (soliloquizing bitterly) No, sir, by Jove! You folks will not set eyes this night on Gripus alive, unless I’m given back that trunk. . .

By heaven, I’ll post notices everywhere now, in letters a foot and a half high, that if anyone has lost a trunk full of gold and silver, he’s to apply to Gripus. You folks won’t get it, as you count on doing . . .

**LA.** (aside) I must approach him! (walks up) Now Heaven be with me!

**GR.** (thinking he hears a summons from the house) What are you calling me in for? (polishing vigorously) I want to clean this up out in front here.

Good Lord! Why, this thing’s made of rust instead of iron!
The more I rub it, the redder and thinner it gets!

Why, this cursed spít’s bewitched: See how it’s wasting away in my hands!

If Gripus really is polishing a spit and not merely manipulating something else that he is only calling a spit, it is very hard to conceive of the onstage action. What makes the spit “bewitched” (venenatum)? And what on earth is happening to it as he plies it before our eyes?

Commentaries are mostly silent here, or they suggest, as does Nixon in the translation above, that the fisherman is merely doing precisely what he says he is doing—that is, polishing a spit. Indeed, the only alternate suggestion that I have found at all is Gurlitt’s exceedingly implausible idea that the verum ‘spit’ and acus ‘needle’ refer to Gripus’ erect penis and that the fisherman is actually masturbating onstage.18 (I say “exceedingly” implausible because in addition to the complete lack of parallels for such an unambiguous display of sexual behavior on the Roman stage, to say nothing of dramatic propriety or lack thereof, masturbation is not commonly known to cause one’s penis to thin or age.)

In my view, the correct solution can be reached by jettisoning the conjecture venenatum ‘bewitched’ in v. 1302 that has been favored by the modern vulgate (venenatunm Boeth: venenatus B: venenatist CD) and instead returning to Turenbus’ once-popular vere naturum ‘born in the springtime.’ The reason (though Turenbus himself did not see this) is that what Gripus is actually holding must be a cattail.

Why? Consider first of all the psychology: In response to Gripus’ impudence and threats (1256–1257, 1288–1289, 1294–1295), Daemones has menacingly summoned the fisherman back inside (before 1299).19 In fearful response, Gripus has hastily picked up the first available object—one of the cattails littering the stage20—and used the excuse of “polishing” it as a reason to remain outside. This explains his word volo when he says, “I want to (stay out here and) clean this off.” Like a naughty child who realizes his efferontery has gone too far and fears a

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18. Gurlitt (1921, 110). I discuss Gurlitt’s other interpretations of Plautus in chapter 5.

19. Daemones’ words are not indicated in the text; only Gripus’ response to them is. Various resolutions are proposed to this oddity. I tentatively suggest that Daemones doubles venci te . . . offstage over Labrax’s word subvenire in 1258, with suggested apoioponos of volo conloqui ‘I want to have a word with you’ (cf. Amph. 848, Ps. 249, Ps. 252, Ep. 23–24); voices from within a house are heard at Hec. 318 and Most. 515 (as corrected by Rost [1896, 156]), and though I admittedly find no parallel for offstage voices doubling other characters’ speech, this is at least a feasible solution to the problem.

20. Cattails or bulrushes (these botanically imprecise terms refer to various but similar reeds) are mentioned at vv. 122 (harundinari), 294 (harundine), 523 (uripus), perhaps sigillum at 376 (see von S. Brudshau 1975), 732 (urini), 1109 (caudatam), and 1133 (caudatam).
mendicant, then? (poking Labrax with the stalk in triumph as he “solves” the riddle)

LA. (dryly) touché / You hit me with a needle!
GR. (looking at Labrax; then looking at the stalk) You look it. / It does look like a needle.

Verum extergur repeats the earlier pun, and with tetigisti acu (which, pace the OLD s.v. acus, no other evidence indicates is a proverbial expression), Labrax means “you hit (me) with your acus.” Like aculeus, this word variously indicates a ‘sting’ or ‘barb’ and the ‘point of a plant.’ This is perhaps also a pun, for acus (gen. acus) ‘(large) hair needle’ suggests acus (gen. acueris or acus) ‘chaff,’ alluding to the seed fluff of the cattail. I take videtur digna forma as referring first to Labrax, then to the suitability of calling the denuded stalk a “needle.”

To reiterate my larger point: We were never supposed to think that Gripos was really holding a spig here any more than at Poem. 597–599 we were supposed to believe that what the characters call aurum is anything other than lupina, or that at Persa 312 Toxilus really believes Sagaristio has a tumor on his neck when, seeing the wallet bulging under Sagaristio’s cloak, he asks quid hoc hic in collo tibi tumet? ‘What’s this swelling here on your neck?’ and Sagaristio replies, vomicast, pressare parce! ‘It’s a tumor—don’t touch it!’ Without spelling out the verbal double meanings, Plautus expected us to use visual cues to make them for ourselves.

As with the puns suggested earlier on merdicus and *Auraria, the interpretation of Gripos’ “magic spig” above is not, of course, certifiable by the text. Nevertheless, it does at least present a clear, self-consistent, and manageable interpretation of an otherwise troublesome passage, and, if correct, it shows that innuendo and audience participation go hand in hand in creating some of Plautus’ humor.

Plautine Name Games

Nowhere are punning connections and hidden similarities hinted at more strongly in Plautine comedy than in the character names of the dramatis personae. It has, of course, been standard lore since antiquity that many of Plautus’ characters bear “speaking” names, and that these names allude variously by etymology, ironic contraries, or puns to leading traits that the characters who bear them manifest. Today it is equally well known that Plautus invented these names himself or took over the names that he found in his models, retaining them in some cases, at least, to make a pun. I have already quoted the pun on Lydus (Aidos ‘Lydian’) in Bacchides, a name taken from Menander’s Δίος Εξαρατών, and Latin ludus ‘school.’ Likewise, Acanthio (Ακανθιός), the former pedagogue in Mercator, is probably an ethnic name derived from the Macedonian town of Ακανθός (many slaves bear ethnic names), but the slave’s prickly temperament suggests an association with the
Greek nouns ἄκανθα ‘thorn’ or ἄκανθεια ‘hedgehog,’ in *Trinumnum Megaronides,* name is presumably derived from Megara, but its prominent interest in the house (cf., e.g., *Trin.* 124–125) suggests a pun on μέγαρον ‘house, shrine, aedes’ + -ον/δος, a suffix that Plautus uses elsewhere to coin fictitious names (*Persa* 702–704, *Men.* 210, and *Truc.* 485).

In fact, Plautus’ name games sometimes extend outward in strange ways, serving in effect as two-solution riddles in miniature. One such instance is the name of Griph(ί)us in *Rudens.* As a fisherman, Γρίφος or Γρίφος is an appropriate name: γρίφος means rete ‘net,’ and γρίφος is a ‘haul of fish.’ (Plautus’ archaic spelling prevents us from knowing whether the name that he would have necessarily spelled Gripus was intended to represent the aspired or unaspirated form. The former is more likely since it is the more familiar word, and for the instrument turned into a proper name, we can compare σκεπαρίων ‘adze [man],’ also in *Rudens;* I accordingly spell the name Griphus.) However, in Greek γρίφος also means ‘riddle,’ and the corresponding Latin word for “riddle” is scirpus.23 To the Roman, in other words, “Griphus” is the “scirpus man,” an identity that has a double point: As the scirpus man, Griphus (i) is the one who solves Labrax’ riddle in v. 1306 (he is the “riddle man”) and (ii) is also the “scirpus man,” both because his fishing pole is made of reeds (cf. v. 294), which to the non-scientific are identical to scirpi, and because he “polishes” a scirpus in the later sight gag (ex hypothesi). Indeed, if the same actor doubled the roles of Griphus and Scepannio, as seems likely, we might recognize the voice behind Griphus’ mask as the same man whom we saw early on in the play thatching the roof with *harundines* (122–123). This nexus of name associations “works” for the Latin speaker, for whom rete ‘net’ = γρίφος = scirpus = *hirundo,* but not of course for the original Greek audience that watched the play of Diphilus that Plautus took as his model for *Rudens.* Like the *Poeni* prologue speaker’s allusion earlier of *Lycaeus ∼ lupa* ‘wolf’ ∼ *lupus* ‘fish,’ then, the joke depends on false equivalences, associations, and verbal slippages in translation between the two languages. However, the essential point to stress here is that the grounds of this comparison in *Rudens* are primarily Greek.

Is this example an isolated anomaly in Plautus? Perhaps not. A fragment patched together from the lost tragedies of Dionysius I of Syracuse (*fl.* 400–367 BC) gathers some examples of the tyrant-playwright’s bizarre penchant for reanalyzing regular words and treating them as portmanteaux of other words. Among the eleven examples collected in the fragment, for instance, is ἔλκετέραιον ‘(slight) sore.’ Dionysius uses this word in the sense κάδος ‘well bucket’ because it looks as if it were a compound of ἔλκεω ‘to draw (water)’ and ἑπάρ ‘water.’ Another is βαλάντιον (βαλλάντιον) ‘bag, pouch, purse’ used in the meaning ‘javelin, spear’ because it seems to combine βάλλεω ‘throw, hit’ and ἀκόντιον ‘javelin, spear.’ Dionysius treats the name Μένανδρος ‘Menander’ as if it meant ‘virgin’ because the name seems to denote one who μενεῖ τῶν ἄνδρα ‘awaits a husband.’ Dionysius also uses σκεπαρίον ‘adze’ as if it meant ‘sheepskin’ because it seems to blend σκεπάν ‘to cover, protect’ and ἄρισ (gen. ἄριός) ‘sheep.’24

It is, of course, necessary to insist in strict logic that Plautus knew any of Dionysius’ puns directly. It is true that in an unattributed fragment of Greek comedy, the same analytical procedure produces a pun on κένταυρος ‘centaur’ in the sense ‘pederast,’ because the centaur putatively κοτεί ὀρνον ‘pricks the rump.’25 Nevertheless, Plautus may well have known Dionysius’ puns after all, since he seemingly alludes to a similar analysis of σκεπαρίον via Scepannio’s name in *Rudens* when he has the surly slave effectively refuse Labrax’s request for shelter by offering the pimp no more than a roof tile for protection from the elements; Plautus thus invites us to analyze the slave’s name *Σκεπαρίων* as a portmanteau of *σκέπ-* ‘covering’ and ἀριόν ‘to refuse,’ in the sense ‘shelter denier.’26

The Greek Connection and Plautus’ Audience

By now it will be clear that, in my view, Plautus expected at least some members of his audience to know Greek extremely well. Only knowledge of Greek reveals even the single significances of Plautus’ character names, and only a good knowledge of Greek reveals the multiple significances. The obvious question to ask is how many members of the audience knew Greek well enough to understand any of these puns and allusions.

Scholars have vigorously debated this question. The usual method they adopt in attempting to answer it, however, amounts to counting up all of the Greek words in Plautus’ texts, calculating their proportionate distribution among the Latin words or determining the various registers to which the words belong, and then arguing over whether the words would be intrinsically intelligible to a Roman audience.27 Results from this procedure and the larger conclusions extrapolated from them have not led to any consensus. However, since there seems to be no other means of deciding the question, apart from personal prejudices, scholars have reached an impasse.

Here is where our investigation of the style and character of Plautine innuendo may offer a way out. Some of the innuendo, like the unadvertised play on proper names, is arguably subtle. Other examples of bilingual wordplay, however, such as Scepannio’s pun on *subaquum* or Traniol’s pun on *conventum* (in chapter 2), are hardly so; the way these puns are set up and delivered suggests that, so far from being Obscurealist or private ironies, they are painfully obvious “rim-shot” jokes that everyone would laugh at. Both of these two jokes, which are

25. Fr. adesp. 221.
26. *Rud.* 573–575; for Scepannio’s offer of a tegillium (which, pace Festus, is probably a roof tile or thatching, not a raincoat), cf. von S. Bradshaw (1973).
27. For bibliography, see Jocelyn (1999, 12812).
stytically and quantitatively the same, presuppose knowledge of Greek words. If, then, we can find other qualitatively similar examples of innuendo jokes that involve exclusively Greek grounds, we may be inclined to believe that a larger rather than a smaller proportion of the audience understood Greek.

I believe that we can find at least a few examples of these jokes in Plautus, as the following running gag in Amphitryo demonstrates. In this next example, although the phrasing in which it is offered to us looks decidedly Roman, the wordplay that it seems to elicit from us is possible only in Greek.

Follow the Money

Mercury’s prologue speech in Amphitryo opens with a mystifying set of references to lucrump ‘financial gain, profit, advantage.’ To some extent, references to lucrump are natural enough in context; it is Mercury himself who in his very first lines on stage points out the association of his name, Merc-urius, with merc-imonium ‘merchandise’ (1:3):

Just as you all here, in your mercantile adventures (mercimonii)
and investments, want me propitiously to bless you with profits (lucris)
and to assist (adjuvare) you in all your affairs . . .

When shortly afterward the god says (19) iouis iussu venio, nomen Mercurio est
mihi ‘Jupiter bade me come. My name is Mercury,’ we are thus given to understand
a nomen-omen connection: Mercury is the bringer of lucrump (v. 2), a topic
with which most of his monologue is concerned. He promises, for instance, that in
exchange for our good behavior, he will bless us with ‘lucrum that lasts forever.’ In
v. 6 he says:

bonoque atque ample auctare perpetuo lucro

with a good and great profit for evermore . . .

The translation attempts to sustain the ambiguity of perpetuo, which is both an
adjective in asyndeton “with great (and) perpetual profit,” as well as an adverb
“with great profit for evermore.” In 11–14 Mercury returns to the theme:

(nam vos quidem id iam scitis concessum et datum
mi esse ab dis alici, nuntius praesim et lucro):
aeict ut me voltis adprobare, admitter,
lucrum ut perenne vobis semper suppetat . . .

For you certainly already know that it is to me that the other gods
have yielded and granted plenipotence over messages and profit;
according as you all would have me approve your wishes and exert myself on
your behalf,
so that you will forever have profit everlasting . . .

Mercury’s mysterious phrases seem calculated to tease us. Why, we wonder, does
he twice make us the almost unbelievably good offer of “profit everlasting”—profit
that is good and great (bonoque atque ample, 6) and that we will have forever
(semper suppetat, 14)—in exchange for us merely giving his play a fair hearing?

This is an extraordinary deal, and it would be arbitrary to claim, absent any
evidence, that Romans in Plautus’ day were actually or even stereotypically more
interested in lucrump than any other groups of people were. On the other hand,
we saw in chapter 2 that in Persa Plautus likes to pun repeatedly on the word
lucrum (lucifer = lucifer, Λωκρίσ = lucrump, etc.). What is more, although the
catchword lucrum itself appears only here in the play, Mercury returns to the
general theme of loans and profit with the final words of his capping couplet
496–498, where he announces the entrance of Jupiter and Alcmena with a strange
phrase whose oddity is highlighted by a double hiatus:

orationem comprimam: crepituit foris.
Amphitryo subditivus eccum exit foras
cum | | Alcumenae | —uxore usuaria.

(listening) Enough of this: There goes the door.
Ah, the counterfeit Amphitryo comes out
With Alcmena, his—wife on loan! (steps aside)

Since assonances like Ps. 1107 luxantur luissantur ‘they go carousing, whoreshousing’
immly that uxors in certain registers of Latin might be pronounced usors, Mercury
may be punning on usors-usurias as if it were itself derived from uxor (usors), and he
may thus mean to suggest that an usors usurarias is a “wifey wife, a goodwife.” Perhaps
so, but as Mercury goes on to repeat this very same riddling phrase at vv. 980–981,
his evidently wants us to reflect on it further. What could it mean?

In my view, though it does not seem to have been noticed before, the specific and
essential point to which Mercury’s phrase alludes should nevertheless be unambigu-
ous. Unlike for the expression mutuum sumere (rogare, quaerere), which means ‘to
borrow unconditionally, to borrow interest-free’ and as such forms the holy grail of
Plautine adolescents (Ps. 80, Carc. 68, etc.), the adjective usuarius, like the phrase
usuram capere, refers specifically to a loan taken out at interest (Truc. 72; OLD s.v.).
There is a world of difference between those two concepts, and Mercury is inviting us
to draw the further deduction that a loan such as Jupiter has taken out requires the
payment of interest. That is the keystone of the whole arch.

For one of the words in Latin for “interest” is lucrump, equivalent to faenus, the
Greek equivalent of which is tókous. However, in addition to “interest,” the Greek

28. Contrast Segal (1987, 174–175): “‘[T]here is no more effective way to capture a Roman ear and entice them
[sc. a Roman audience] to keep still than the sound of money…Plautus knew his audience. And the Roman
character hardly changed between his own day and that of Tacitus, who remarked . . . ‘I would more easily believe
quality was lacking in [sc. British] pearls than avarice in the Romans.” Christensen (2000, 333–334 on 1:16) likewise
speaks of a “typically Roman love of lucrump.” Is the profit motive typically or even stereotypically Roman?

29. Note the equivalences recorded in glosses (CGL. 4, 518.16 and 5, 409.34), hexas usura lucrump.
word τόξος also means ‘child,’ the two senses of which Aristophanes puns on in Thesm. 845. That ambiguity is, I think, the solution to Mercury’s teasing riddle.

As with the jokes on merdeus or lupinus in Poenulus, the solution here harks back to those “eternal profit” clues (lucrum perpetuum, lucrum perene) that Mercury established in his prologue: Jupiter is borrowing Alcmena, but he will give her back with a “τόξος that lasts forever.” This must mean, then, that Mercury is alluding to the infant Hercules and his future immortality. That is why in his prologue Mercury stressed the fact that Jupiter, in “borrowing” Alcmena’s body, will make her pregnant (107–109):

is amare accepti Alcmenam clam virum
usuramque eius corporis cepit sibi,
et gravidam fecit eam compressu suo.

Well, Alcmena caught his [Jupiter’s] fancy, without her husband knowing it, And he had himself the usuram [enjoyment, loan] of her body And got her pregnant by sleeping with her.

The phrase usuram capere means not just ‘to enjoy’ but also ‘to borrow,’ again with the accessory idea of ‘at interest.’

In addition, lest we miss it, the phrase perenne lucrum (= Herculenum) anticipates the conclusion of the play, where Jupiter reveals the future to Amphitryo. Here Jupiter cannot resist making a final allusion to the riddle running through the play (1135–1136, 1140):

primum omnium Alcmenae usuram corporis
cepi, et concubitu gravidam feci filio. . .
(sc. is filius) suis factis te immortalis adficit gloria.

First of all, then, I borrowed the body of Alcmena And by my embrace I made her pregnant with a son. . .

[The one begotten of my seed] shall win thee undying glory by his works.

In exchange for his having lent Alcmena’s body to Jupiter, Amphitryo will now obtain a perenne lucrum, a son (filius ~ τόξος ~ lucrum). who by his deeds will confer immortal (immortali ~ perenne, perpetuum) glory on Amphitryo, just as “we” spectators and the rest of all humankind will benefit from the exploits of this immortal child. In retrospect, too, it is clear that all the epithets applied to the lucrum in Mercury’s prologue (bonum, amplum, perpetuum, perene) apply equally to Hercules himself. Ovid uses perennis of himself living eternally, appropriately enough in this context, in cataphractized form (Met. 15.875). Moreover, perpetuus is doubly appropriate for Hercules because Roman folk etymology connected perpetuus with perpeti ‘to endure much, suffer greatly.’ There were other hints, too: Auctare in v. 6 can in solemn language mean ‘to bless with a child’ (Truc. 516), and suppedita ‘be available’ in 14 may hint at suppeditae ‘that which comes to aid one, aid, assistance, succor’ in 1106. Even Mercury’s word adficiet from v. 3 recurs here.

The conclusion we seem compelled to acknowledge is that Plautus expects us to solve a conundrum that is presented in elaborate Latin phrasing, but one whose solution, τόξος, works only in Greek. Plautus wants us to perceive the Greek pun lying behind these characters’ Latin utterances, just as (I have argued) we are meant to pick up via different catchwords the pun on sub-aquilum ~ ָּם בְּאֵר in Rudens.

Such is the riddle as I understand it, but it is worth considering the Latin phrasing a little more. In fact, usor usuraria in Amph. 498, which is generally interpreted as “straight,” looks like it may be intended as a para prosdokian for something else.

For alongside the word ἀστήριας ‘on loan (with interest required)’ exists the separate but semantically similar word ἀστήριας ‘that which can be used, though is owned by another.’ The reason, then, for suspecting usor us-usaria is para prosdokian for usor us-usaria is that the latter word would evoke the Roman institution of marriage contracted “by usus.” Unlike other types of Roman marriage in manum, which involved elaborate ceremonies, Roman marriage contracted by usus came into legal effect merely following a year-long period of cohabitation. By the logic of comedy, then, an usor us-usaria would be a wife who spends an unnaturally “long night” with Jupiter (cf. Amph. 113, 279). The final words of Mercury’s line 498 would thus run out, like Arcturus’ pun on caelatum (Caeritum) in Rud. 2, with a surprising echo of a familiar Roman legal institution; a compromise pronunciation such as usor ‘tisitšt’a would assist his equivocation of the two words.

One might object that this further argument about usuraria is unnecessary for the riddle on τόξος referring to Hercules, and indeed it is. The reason I suggest it is that, if accepted, the interpretation all but proves that (i) the solution to Plautus’ riddle is Greek, but (ii) the riddle depends on an exclusively Roman institution whose one-year “long night” underpins the joke.

Does this mean that everyone in Plautus’ audience would be expected to catch the riddle? Of course not. One can always take refuge in the suggestion that less experienced spectators could inquire of their more experienced neighbors what the point of Mercury’s riddling phrase is, just as Enolpius inquires of his neighbor in Petronius’ Satyricon what the point of Trimalchio’s puzzling repetition of carpe, carpe is (cf. chapter 1).

30. Contrast Segal (1987, 178): “It would seem that Mercury considers Alcmena a mere prostitute—except that Jupiter does not even pay her for his amusa corporis.” Does he?


32. On usor marriage, see Lex XII 6.4 (= Galat Inst. 1.111 = ROL 3, 462) and Manigk in RE 14.2 cols. 1390–1392 s.v. ‘Manus’.
However, against this idea should be set yet another example in which a fantastic and riddling Plautine phrase, though understandable in itself, also forms a calque (loan translation) of a Greek word. This next example appears in Stichus, a play in which the eponymous slave takes unusual pains to break the dramatic illusion and reminds us that everything we see is happening in “Athens” (446–448). This time, the speaker’s calque also allows him to set up a pun that he invites us to make for ourselves, but the pun is once again possible only in Greek.

A Parasite’s Jests

In Gelasimus’ introductory monologue in Stichus, the parasite hosts an auction of his services and possessions. He begins by announcing the following items up for bid (St. 222–225; text and interpretation follow Gratwick [2000, 334–336], who first elucidated this passage):

- qui cena poscit? ecqui poscit—prandio?
- hercle aetumavi prandio cenatili.
- ehem abnuistin? nemo meliores dabit,
- nulli meliores esse parasito sinam.

Who bids a dinner? (silence—no bids) Does no one bid—just a lunch? (again silence)

But, ladies and gentlemen), the merchandise is worth at least a dinner-lunch!

Humph! What’s that—you refuse? But no one will give you better ones, I won’t let any parasite have better ones than me!

Gratwick’s splendid restoration of the hypothetical adjective *cenatili ‘dinner’—modifying prandio (prandio, cena tibi MSS and editors, though suspect in itself and entailing wide divergences at verse-head) shows that Gelasimus is offering us the all-day-long party that in Greek is called an ἀριστόδειπνον, a ‘breakfast-dinner’ or dinner-lunch: that is, as Gratwick puts it, a “prandium (ἀριστος) which turns into cena (δείπνον) followed by an all-night comitium.” Gelasimus’ expression prandium cenatile is thus not only intelligible in itself, though it is too, but it is also, and more importantly, a transparent calque of ἀριστόδειπνον. And although the word may well have already appeared in the Menander Greek original that Plautus turned into his Stichus, a clue that the Roman comedian expected his own audience to understand that prandium cenatile is a calque comes from the lines with which Gelasimus follows it up.

For with the seemingly gratuitous word meliores ‘better ones,’ on which the parasite insists in both vv. 224 and 225, Gelasimus is evidently hamming it up and pointing out the calque, Trimakchio-style, by means of a pun that he intends for us to make ourselves. When, by its collective failure to respond aloud the audience refuses Gelasimus’ offer of the prandium cenatile in v. 224 (abnuistin Gratwick, considering this = abnuistis, plural: abnuistis MSS), Plautus invites us to analyze the compound word in a different way: For if no one will give better dinners (meliores cenus) than Gelasimus, then this parasite must, by logical conclusion, give the best dinners of all. This means that Gelasimus is allusively inviting us to interpret the first component of ἀριστόδειπνον as if it were from ἀριστος ‘best’ rather than ἀριστον ‘breakfast’; the parasite is thus implying that he gives τα ἀριστα δειπνα ‘the best dinners.’

As with uxor usuraria, then, Plautus once again uses a colorful and somewhat mysterious expression (prandium cenatile) to advertise an ironic riddle, and again, the solution to the riddle involves a pun that is possible only in Greek. Before presenting the conclusions that I draw from these riddles, let me add to my argument with some further examples.

Funny Words for Comedic Parasites

The vocabulary of Greek comedy is full of imaginative kennings, metaphors, and nicknames. Many of the most colorful labels are often applied to parasites; some of them are reserved for parasites exclusively. We have seen some of the simpler ones already. One colorful designation for a parasite, for example, is κόλαξ ‘fool, flatterer,’ which in chapter I I argue Terence puns on with the Latin word (possibly his own coinage) colax. The parasite in Greek comedy is often called ἀγλητος ‘uninvited’: Plautus, translating this as invocatus, takes it as the basis for a pun (Capt. 70). In Ph. 339 Terence even leaves untranslated the common parasite-tag ἀφιέμβολος ‘freeloading, as a freeloader’; as the word does not appear again in Latin literature (though symbola ‘contribution to a meal’ is well attested in Roman comedy [Curc. 474, St. 432, 438, etc.]), the playwright evidently expected his audience would be familiar with its meaning.

Among the more interesting appellatives for parasites that we find in Greek comedy are compound words. Some of these would be especially memorable because, like ἀριστόδειπνον, they are rare, exotic, or seem inherently absurd, and indeed we find, predictably enough, that Athenaeus later evinces an interest in them. Other compounds (especially terms of abuse) are memorable because they are “opaque,” meaning that their apparent etymology and their everyday meaning in ordinary discourse diverge (one might compare, for instance, German Hochzeit ‘wedding,’ which looks like it means ‘high time’). Foreigners are especially liable to misanalyze or mistranslate opaque compounds etymologically or component by component; it is therefore reasonable to suppose that Romans, whose own

33. See Alexis fr. 396, Menander fr. 625. The quote is from Gratwick (1993, 155 on 174–175).
34. Ribbeck (1888, 93–96) lists a number of them.
Another colorful nickname that is frequently applied to hungry men in Greek comedy is κεστρέως ‘mullet’ (the fish). Greeks considered the mullet a gluttonous and insatiable creature that (as we think of camels) was able to go for long periods of time without food. In comedy the nickname κεστρεσίς is thus naturally given to, among others, hungry parasites. An allusion to this nickname seems to explain Satyrus’s point in his entrance monologue in Persa, when he tells us that he comes from a distinguished line of parasites. Going back six generations, he says, his forefathers... (58–60, Woytek’s text):

 quasi mures semper edere alienum cibum,
 neque edacidate eos quisquam poterat vincere,
 neque eis cognomentum erat viris capitonibus.

always ate other folks’ food, just like mice, and not a soul could beat ‘em at edacity, and they never got the sobriquet “mullet men.”

Viris capitonibus is Woytek’s ingenious correction for the vexed paradigm duris capitonibus ‘hard Capitos’ (?) or ‘hard Bigheads’ (?), neither of which interpretations makes sense; an allusion to these parasites’ capacity to suffer abuse is not in point here, and the cognomen is not a surname but a sobriquet. Since available evidence indicates that in Greek (but not in Latin) the mullet was proverbially hungry, Woytek himself doubts that the Roman audience would understand the allusion. However, the parallels with passages we have already seen in this chapter make it hard to see why: As in Poen. 91–95, Satyrus is giving us a fish riddle to puzzle over, but unlike that riddle, the solution here requires us to see the Greek word κεστρευς (also called κεφαλίων) behind the Latin word capita. The odd and unnatural agglutination of viri-capitones is probably the very sign that helps to emphasize that the words are a transparent calque of Greek: For while neither Latin nor Greek generally tolerates noun agglutination of this type, Greek famously does so with the word ἄνηρ, which idiomatically accepts an appositional noun to indicate a title or profession, such as στρατιώτης ἄνηρ ‘soldier boy’ (cf. LSJ s.v. ἄνηρ VI.1). Given, then, that “we” are in “Athens,” a Roman in the audience who knew Greek would probably therefore recognize viri capitones as a Greekish translationese rendering of ἄρρες κεστρες, a phrase that appears in Aristophanes fr. 159 (Γυναικάδως); the prefix of co-gnomen, if literally analyzed, like co-epulon, in the sense ‘together,’ may also help draw attention to the agglutination.

A similar calque of a Greek term of abuse probably also lies behind a textual corruption in Most. 5. The play begins with the enraged Grymio yelling abuse at Tranio, who is lurking offstage in the kitchen (1–2, 5):

38. For the scholiast see Schlee (1893, 98). Since the scholiast was ignorant of Greek, the definition he preserves is much older (see Rand [1909, 383]).
You kindly come out of the kitchen (culina), you rogue!
Showing me that silver tongue of yours amongst your saucepans! (patinas) ... Come out, come out, I say, you aroma greedling (nidoricupi). What the hell are you skulking for?

Ritschl’s emendation nidoricupi, here rendered ‘aroma greedling’ to show that it is a nonce coinage from nidör + cupere, is not certain (nidore cupinam BCFZ : culing B² : alii alia). However, if it is even approximately right (the ending -ius is suspect), it represents a Latin calque of one of the comical compounds of κνισος ‘fatty aroma of roasted meat’ (~ nidör savoury aroma, smell of roasted meat’) that later attracted Athenaeus’ attention, such as κνισολοχία ‘aroma licker, gourmand’, κνισολοχίης ‘aroma chaser’ (com. adesp. 622), or κνισοκόλαξ ‘aroma flatterer’ (in the elegies of Asius of Samos, referring to a parasite). 41

These three passages from Persa and Mostellaria, all of which have been discussed before, collectively suggest that Plautus is alluding to two similar parasite tags in a couple of passages that have not heretofore attracted much attention from scholars. In each of the following cases, I suggest that Plautus’ characters use context to temporarily transform familiar words into portmanteau coinages that calque and allude to one of these colorful Greek words. Asius’ parasite tag κνισοκόλαξ ‘aroma flatterer’ offers an appropriate starting point for building up my argument.

Food and Flattery in Menæchmi

In his entrance monologue in Menæchmi, Peniculus describes his young patron with these words (100):

ita est aduléscens; ipsus éscæ maxumæ

Here’s the sort of young fellow he is: a splendid trencherman himself

Peniculus’ assonance creates an association of aduléscens ‘young man’ and escæ ‘food.’ Since in the preceding lines he had just advised us that escæ and vincla escaria ‘food chains’ constitute the surest way of chaining up a man (vv. 88, 94), since he mentions escæ again in his monologue at v. 457 (qui-escæ in 466 is probably a pun meant to make him wince, too: cf. licet at Rud. 1227 for the trick), and since cibus is the word more commonly used than escæ to denote “food” in Plautus (forty-six vs. thirteen appearances respectively, with three of the latter meaning ‘bait,’ not ‘food’), it looks as if this catchword is preparing the way for a pun later in the play.

The point of it emerges, I suggest, when Peniculus finally spots Menæchmus entering the stage. Although Menæchmus has been repeatedly alerted that a parasite is on the lookout for him (281–285, 321–322, 389–395, 422–424), he is nevertheless caught unawares when Peniculus, who is angry at having been cheated out of lunch at Erotium’s, approaches him and in a jealous rage proceeds to heap abuse upon the man who he believes is his patron. To his torrent of insults Menæchmus makes the following replies (with Peniculus’ rejoinders):

1. (494) MEN. aduléscens, quaeso, quid tibi mecum est rei...?
MEN. (with dignity) Sir, what have you to do with me, pray...?

2. (498–499) MEN. responde, aduléscens, quaeso, quid nomen tibist?
PEN. etiam derides quasi nomen non gnoveris?
MEN. Pray answer me, sir, what is your name?
PEN. What? Making fun of me, as if you didn’t know my name?

3. (505–506) PEN. tuum parasitum non novisti?
MEN. non tibi sanum est, aduléscens, sinciput, intelligo.
PEN. You don’t know your own parasite?
MEN. Sir, your headpiece is out of order, I perceive.

These three repetitions of the word aduléscens in short succession arouse some suspicion. It is of course true that Menæchmus really does not know the parasite’s name, and any unfamiliar man not deemed a senes can in Plautus be addressed as aduléscens. 42 Furthermore, it is also true that as a parasite, Peniculus is primarily a γελοιοποιω, like Gelasimus in Stichus, rather than a flatterer like Aritropgus in Miles Gloriosus or Gnatho in Terence’s Eunuchus. However, Messenio has already warned Menæchmus that cheats and flatters abound in this town (cf. palpatores ‘cunning flatterers,’ 260). This clue, taken together with (i) the verbal and conceptual signal of parasitum in 505, (ii) our observations earlier that Peniculus willingly resorts to flattery (138, 148–150, 157, 162), and (iii) Menæchmus’ increasingly irritated repetition of aduléscens, collectively suggests that Menæchmus is punning on ãdíléscens in the third instance as if it were a portmanteau of ãdíl-átor (properly ãdílátor, but with iambic shortening, as in volúptátem) and esc-a, meaning ‘one who abjectly fawns or flatters for food.’ This disparaging term in turn, I suggest, forms a calque of φλούκολαξ ‘flatterer for morsels of food,’ a ‘food flatterer,’ which is itself a colorful and disparaging label that is reserved in Greek comedy exclusively for parasites. Athenaeus (Deipn. 6.80) quotes examples of this word and the related verb φλούκολακείν ‘to flatter for food’ from comedies of Aristophanes (fr. 172),

41. Cf. Deipn. 3.125b, d–e, and LSJ in the vicinity for others.

Sannyrion (fr. 11), Philemon (fr. 7), and Philippides (fr. 8). The portmanteau and its translation can be illustrated with the following pictogram:

**ADULATOR** ~ κόλαξ
**ESCA** ~ ψωμίς
**ADULESCENS** ~ ψωμοκόλαξ

The ironic point of the portmanteau is that Menachmus is thus simultaneously saying in vv. 505–506 "I know, sir, your headpiece (brain? toupee?) is out of order!" Appropriately enough in the context, the tone is disparaging, and the insult exactly suits the belief, as Ps.-Quintilian puts it much later, that a parasite is a *homo in adulationem natus*—a 'man born to flatter.'

**βωμολόχοι** in Plautus

Support for this interpretation of *adulescens* as a facetious portmanteau and calque of ψωμοκόλαξ may come from a similarly colorful term of abuse found in Greek comedy. The Greek word βωμολόχος means 'buffoon,' but its etymology is (or seems to be) 'altar lurker,' a compound of βωμός 'altar' and λοχεύς 'to lurk, loiter.' (The sense 'buffoon' was probably taken over from the jackdaw, a scavenger bird, which in Greek was also called βωμολόχος.) The comical potential of the word was recognized early on. Already in its earliest attestation, the Greek comedian Pherecrates (mid-fifth century bc) plays on the divergent usage ("buffoon") and etymology ("altar lurker") of the word (fr. 150, from *Τυραννίς*):

κάπεσθ᾽ ἐνα μὴ πρὸς τοῖς βωμοῖς πατοῦχοι
αἷοι λοχωτὲς βωμολόχοι καλόμεθα,
ἔστείσθ᾽ ὦ Ζεὺς καπνοθῆκῃ μεγάλην πάνω.

And then, so we don't get called βωμολόχοι (?buffoons/?jackdaws?) because we're always constantly hanging around (λοχωτές) the altars (βωμοί), Zeus has built a giant chimney.

**Pace** Harpocrates (ad second century or later), the grammarian who quotes this fragment, this speaker's statement should certainly be regarded as a readily apparent pun, not a serious lexical definition; as we saw in chapter 1, Plautus ironically uses "etymological" language to make an obvious pun in precisely this fashion

(Men. 263–264, *Bacch. 284–285, Truc. 77–78a; cf. *Curc. 413–416*), and that makes it likely that the speaker's purpose in Pherecrates' comedy is to do so as well.

The word βωμολόχοι is not found in the extant remains of Greek New Comedy, but traces of wordplay like Pherecrates' on the divergent etymology and meaning of βωμολόχος are perceptible in a few places in Roman comedy. At *Eun.* 489–491 Parmeno abuses Gnatho, the *parasitus colax*; with words that seem to connect the parasite's flattery with altar lurking:

'tace tu, quem ego esse infra infumos omnis puto homines. nam qui huic animum assentari induxeris, e flamma petere te cibum posse arbitror.

You shut up! I judge you to be the lowest of the low.

If you can bring yourself to flatter someone like him, I reckon you could steal food from a funeral pyre.

In addition, midway through Plautus' *Mostellaria*, Tranio associates himself with a crow (cornix) deceiving two vultures (= the two old men). Since the slave labors the allusion, telling us no fewer than five times in six lines that he is a *cornix* (vv. 832–837), the Greek model may have contained a pun later in the play when Tranio perches himself conspicuously on top of an altar (1094–1097):

TR. (with a knowing grin) Meanwhile, I'll just occupy this altar (hanc aram occupabo). (seats himself upon it jauntily)

TH. (trying to hide his discomfort) Why so?

TR. You have no sense, sir. Why, so that the slaves he gives you to cross-examine can't take refuge at it. I'll keep guard for you here and prevent the examination from falling through.

TH. (as gently as possible) Get up!

TR. Oh no, sir!

TH. Don't occupy the altar (ne occupasis ... aram), for heaven's sake!

The repetition of *aran occupare* in quick succession seems to suggest that at least in the Greek Φάῦσα (the model of Plautus' play), if not in Plautus' *Mostellaria* itself, by "occupying the altar" Tranio becomes a literal "altar loiterer," that is, a βωμολόχος in the double sense of 'jackdaw' (a bird of the *cornix* family) and 'buffoon' (cf. scurr 'buffoon,' referring to Tranio, in v. 15).

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43. *Decl. min.* 296.1.6. The parasite in Alciphron *Epist.* 3.272 considers the name κόλαξ an insult (διότι) to himself. For the equation of κόλαξ and adulator (a strong and insulting word that Plautus' parasites echo), cf. L. Cassius Hennia (*L.c.c.* 100 bc) fr. 43 Santini = 40 Peter *adulatorque erant ab amici atque adiutariet 'they had been flattered and exhorted by their friends,' quoted by Priscian, who glosses adulator (here passive) as κολαξιθετής 'having been flattered' (*Inst. Gramm.* 3.15 = *G.L.* 2.1.380-12; Santini [1995, 198]). At Cist. 93 blandiatus translates Menander's word κολαξιθετής (fr. 337.4, from *Συνταφθίσαι* [= fr. 1.4 Arnot]), but the context there is not disparaging.


46. So E. W. Fay (1903, 260), who notes on p. 253 that Horace calls a jackdaw a *corniciula*, a diminutive of *cornix* (*Epist.* 1.3.29). Fay further suggests (254-255, 259), perhaps rightly, that at v. 839 (Theopropides speaks) *nullum pictam conspicio hic avem* 'no picture of a bird at all do I perceive here,' *pictam avem*, which refers to Tranio, puns on *pictum 'magis*, which is also a bird of the *cornix* family. The rest of Fay's suggested associations of Tranio with bird imagery are however illusory; cf. Mendelsohn (1907, 58-60).
It is not clear whether the Roman audience would perceive the point of the term βερομολόχος in these cases, or whether we are detecting vestiges of wordplay that featured in the Greek originals. In this latter instance, the visual cue of Tranio, the scura perched on the altar, may suggest that Plautus wanted his audience to translate aram occupare and make the pun for themselves. Whether they would or not, two interesting possibilities in Rudens and Stichus invite a more definitive interpretation along these lines, but this interpretation is best approached by first considering some structural ambiguities in Latin.

Garden Path Sentences and βερομολόχος in Rudens and Stichus

In Catullus c. 66.29–30, the lack of hair recalls the queen’s changing mood upon the departure of her new bridegroom for Syria, and apostrophizes her with this exclamation (29–30):

sed tum maesta virum mittens quae verba locuta es!
    Iuppiter, ut tristi lumina saepe manu!

But then, in your grief as you parted from your husband, what words you uttered!

Jupiter, how often did you rub your eyes with your hand!

The pentameter line contains a characteristically Hellenistic surprise: Because maesta appears in the previous line, and because the two halves of the pentameter line of an elegiac couplet are frequently filled by a noun and an adjective that modifies it, most readers initially try to construe tristi as the ablative of tristis, modifying manu in the sense ‘with a sad hand’ as it does, for instance, in Ovid, Trist. 3.14.31–32:

    inque tot adversis carmen mirabitur ulla
        ducere me tristi sustinuisse manu

and amid so many adverse circumstances he will be amazed

    I could endure to write any poem with sorrowing hand.

Since the chorus in Seneca’s Troades 79–80 likewise exhorts Queen Hecuba to raise the “anguished hand” (miseramque leva, regina, manum), this initial parse would have been quite reasonable. However, when we reach the exclamation point at the close of Catullus’ couplet and realize that there was no verb to govern lumina, we are forced to backtrack and look for a different syntactic structure. At this point we realize that tristi is in fact a contraction of the verb trivisti ‘you rubbed.’

Psycholinguists today call this captious structural ambiguity a “garden path sentence.” A garden path sentence “occurs when the parser selects the wrong analysis at a point of ambiguity in an input sentence and discovers later that subsequent words of the input do not fit into the structure it has been building.”

Stock examples include the following:

(1) The cotton clothing is made of grows in Mississippi.

and

(2) The horse raced past the barn fell.

In the first instance, the correct interpretation is that “the cotton that clothing is made of grows in Mississippi,” and in the second instance, the correct structure is that “the horse that was raced past the barn fell.”

Plautus arguably has a simple instance of this phenomenon early in Truculentus. When Astaphium turns to exit the stage, Diniarchus, who has been eavesdropping on her, suddenly emerges from his hiding place and exclaims (115):

    heus! manedum, Astaphium, priu’ quam abis!

(calling) Hey there, wait, Astaphium, before you go!

Elsewhere in Plautus or Terence, when calling out for another person to wait, a character often doubles the command for emphasis. The combination mane, mane! ‘wait, wait!’ is frequently found. In a number of other cases, a single mane! is followed by the roughly synonymous word asta! ‘stop!’ Thus we find Cas. 737 mane atque asta; Persa 272–273 mane . . . asta; Men. 696–697 mane . . . etiamne astas?; Most. 885 mane tu atque adiste!, and Pacuvius fr. 202 R² (Ilion) = 211 ROI, has age, adsta: mane audi. Collectively these latter passages provide grounds for supposing that Diniarchus is to pause over the second syllable of Astaphium’s name and say:

    heus! manedum! asta—phium, prius quam abis!

(calling) Hey there, wait, stop! (asta) . . . (Asta)phium, before you go!

Cues both visual (Astaphium’s departure) and verbal (manedum!) thus lead us to expect asta- will be the imperative of astare, but upon reflection—however quickly this happens—we realize that Diniarchus is punning lingually on the name Ασταφιος (‘Raisinette’) and the Latin verb. Indeed, the copyist of MS B even exposes the pun and thereby furnishes an interesting “proof” of the ambiguity by writing adstaphius, where the -d- can only result from psychological contamination with adstare, the later and more familiar spelling of astare.

47. Fodor and Inoue (1998, 101). Seneca says that in Stilicus’ scena arsputatiae sententiae et verba ante expectatum cadentia et obscura brevitas famus pro cultu ‘broken-off sentences and expressions ending before you expect and obscure brevity were all the rage’ (Epist. 114.17). Was he referring to this phenomenon?
48. Cf. Plautus Amph. 265, As. 239, As. 655, Men. 179–180, Merc. 474, 928, Pl. 240; Terence Ad. 264, Hae. 613, 736, and Hec. 495–496; the doubled command is often found near ahe. To judge from Wartenf (1915, passim), the imperative mane is the most commonly doubled word in extant Roman comedy.
49. This type of corruption is no doubt widespread, and we will see more examples of it later. A related case is Catullus 64.106, where the MSS alter congerem ‘cone bearing’ to corongaram ‘horn bearing,’ the word Catullus intended to evoke; cf. Hunter (2006, 100).
A similar but more complex case is a passage of *Rudens* in which the slave Sceparnio cheekily calls Plesidippus, an *adulescens*, something tantamount to a βουμολόχος. In this passage, Sceparnio turns on Plesidippus, who is standing beside an altar of Venus in anticipation of a sacrifice (cf. 94–95), and says (140–141):

heus tu qui fana ventris caussa circumis,  
iubere meliust prandium ornari domi.  
140

I say, you—hanging around shrines for the sake of your belly—  
Better let ‘em get up a lunch for you at home.

Sceparnio’s phrase *fana ventris caussa circumis* evidently translates the analyzed etymology of βουμολόχος. What is more surprising, as scholars have often noted, is that Plesidippus makes no reply to the insult. Does the young man really just let this remark pass without comment? If so, why?

Nineteenth-century editors of Plautus tried to palliate the problem of Plesidippus’ silence by their usual expedient of shuffling verses. Others have supposed that Plautus simply mistranslated his model. However, context and earlier verbal cues suggest a simpler and more interesting solution. It has not been sufficiently appreciated that earlier in the play, the words *fana Veneris* are established as a catchphrase in connection with the sacrificial lunch. The phrase first appears in Arcturus’ prologue, when he points out Venus’ shrine onstage to us (61–62):

(id hic est Veneris fanaum)—et eo ad prandium vocavit adulescentem huc.

—this is Venus’ shrine here—(pointing) and accordingly he invited the young man here to lunch.

Soon after, at vv. 94–95, we find (Plesidippus speaks to his companions and again points to the shrine):

nunc huc ad Veneris fanaum venio visere,  
ubi rem divinam se facturum dixerat.  
95

Now I’m coming for a look at the shrine of Venus here where he said he was going to offer sacrifice.

The expression *Veneris fanaum* then appears fifteen more times in the play (vv. 284, 308, 331, 386, 560, 564, 570, 586, 613, 622, 644, 689–690, 822, 865, and 1286).

A variation of the catchphrase also appears just a moment before Sceparnio’s sassy quip. In vv. 128–130, Plesidippus for some reason reverses the word order when he tells Daemones:

hic dico, in fana Veneris qui mulierculas duas secum adduxit, quique adornaret sibi ut rem divinam faciat, aut hodie aut heri.

Here, I mean—to the shrine of Venus, a fellow that brought along two girls, and was preparing to offer sacrifice—today or yesterday?

Plesidippus’ reversal of the catchphrase here suggests that, with the collocation *fana ventris* in v. 140, Sceparnio is not brazenly and unambiguously insulting Plesidippus; the slave is rather equivocating ironically, much as a modern comedian coaxes over an insult, and pronouncing *fana ven-tris* as *fana vén’érís* to echo and counter on Plesidippus’ *fana Veneris*. As far as I can discover, the only scholar to have noticed this point is Anne Le Fèvre, who remarks: “Plesidippus makes no reply because he did not hear him and because Sceparnio pronounced these words as if he had said *qui fana Veneris caussa circumis*. And this equivoke is very much based on the pronunciation of the words *ventris* and *veneris*, which sound almost identical.”

Whether *ventris* and *Veneris* always sound similar, as Le Fèvre supposes, or whether it is specifically Sceparnio who makes them sound similar in this one instance is, of course, open to debate. One indication that Sceparnio’s equivocation is intentional rather than accidental, however, is that some of the MSS even corrupt (or correct?) *ventris* in v. 140 to *veneris* (veneris D’FZ); here again the lection is surely due to psychological contamination from the catchphrase that the scribe or scribes had already written several times in the course of copying the text. But what about Plesidippus’ failure to respond?

Although Le Fèvre thinks the answer is that Plesidippus did not hear Sceparnio, word order suggests a different solution. If Sceparnio equivocates on *fana vén’érís* and then pauses against the syntax, and perhaps with a gesture toward the shrine (as in v. 61), the slave encourages us to construe *vé n’érís with fanaum*, and that mistake then forces us to construe causā as absolute, in anticipation of an *ut* (cf. *à causā... ut* ‘in order... to’ at Men. 892, Ps. 55, 92, St. 312; note eo in Rud. 61). On this interpretation, Plesidippus then assumes the slave is making an innocent enough remark, such as this:

heus tu, qui *fana vén’érís*... caussa circumis... (sc., e.g., ut)

I say, you who are going around shrines of Venus so as (to)...

However, when the slave goes on to the next verse and changes thoughts, we realize that he has used an equivocation and a garden path sentence to insult the *adulescens* as a βουμολόχος. The joke is then ironic, and we are left to make the connection for ourselves.

50. Acidalian (1607, 435).
51. For example, Marx (1926, 822 on 140–147): “[T]he verse [sc. 140] seems like an infelicitous attempt to render the Greek word βουμολόχος in Latin” (“daß der Vers den Eindruck eines wenig glücklichen Versuchs macht, das griechische Wort βουμολόχος ins Lateinische zu übersetzen”).
52. Le Fèvre (1694, vol. 2, 275 on 53): “Plesidipppe [sic] n’y répond point, parce qu’il ne l’a pas entendu, & que Sceparnio a prononcé ces paroles, comme s’il av-cea: il dit, quia *fana Veneris caussa circumis*. Et cette equivoque [sic, for é-] est fort bien fondée sur la prononciation des mots *ventris* & *veneris*, qui font presque le même son.”
A passage early in *Stichus* lends some support to this interpretation. The second scene of that play concludes with Panegyris instructing Crocotium, her handmaid, to go and fetch the parasite Gelasimus (150–151):

> eho, Crocotium, i, parasitum Gelasimum huc arcessito, 150
tecum adduce;

> Ahem, Crocotium, go and summon the parasite Gelasimus, 150
bring him here with you.

Panegyris hereupon exits, and so too, evidently, does Crocotium, in search of him.53 Quite independently, meanwhile, the parasite himself happens to enter of his own accord, and turning to face us, he launches into a long opening monologue. For forty uninterrupted lines, like a modern standup comedian, Gelasimus fires off jokes and one-liners about poverty and its concomitant hunger. His straits are so dire, he explains, he has even decided to auction himself off (155–195). At this announcement, Crocotium, who has in the interim returned, finally breaks her silence. She turns to us and makes what is, from our perspective, an absurdly otiose announcement (196–197):

> hic illest parasitus quem arcessitum missa sum.
> quae loquitur auscultabo priu' quam conloquar.
>
> Here’s that parasite I was sent to fetch.
I’ll just catch what he’s saying before I speak to him.

If Crocotium did indeed leave the stage in search of the parasite, from her perspective the comment may seem quite natural. From our perspective, however, her announcement is otiose, and not only because all of Gelasimus’ jokes about hunger and dinner invitations have made it quite clear to us that this man is the parasite she was sent to fetch; her comment is also unnecessary because in v. 150 Panegyris had told us that this *parasitus* was named Gelasimus, and a few moments before, in v. 174, Gelasimus himself told us his name. Could there then be an ironic point to Crocotium’s comment?

Plautus’ *ancillae* tend to be highly ironical characters in general (Pardalisca in *Casina*, Milphidippa in *Miles, Astophium* in *Truculentum*). For that reason, and because Crocotium is speaking directly to us when she makes her comment, several factors suggest that she may be making a pun based on a "funny" word. For two reasons, then, suspicion here falls on the accusative supine *arcessitum* ‘to summon.’ The dramatic circumstances leading up to Sceparnio’s slip of the tongue in *Rudens* suggest the first reason, which is (as we saw in chapter 2) that just as Ampelisca’s announcement of the purpose of her mission in similar circumstances had contained the keyword *aqua*, which set up the pun on *subaquillum*, so had Panegyris here in *Stichus* instructed Crocotium to fetch the parasite using the same word, *arcessitum* (v. 150), which recurs in v. 196 in the form *arcessitus*.

The other reason that suspicion falls on *arcessitus* is that the word order that Crocotium uses in her announcement may facilitate a structural ambiguity. In Plautine idiom, an antecedent or a noun in apposition to an antecedent is sometimes attracted into a relative clause and made to agree with or stand in apposition to the relative pronoun. In these cases, the attracted antecedent tends to follow the relative pronoun fairly closely. Examples include the following:

1. (Ep. 448–449):

> sed istum quem quaeris Periphanem Platenium
> ego sum.

> But as to *that* Periphanes Platenius you’re looking for,
I am he.

2. (Rud. 1065–1066):

> illum quem dudum <e fano foras>
> lenonem extrusisti

> that pimp you ran out of the temple
a while ago

3. (Bacch. 214):

> etiam Epidicum, quam ego fabulam aequum ac me ipsum amo

> Even the *Epicus*—a comedy I love as well as my own self

In addition to these examples, especially close to Crocotium’s announcement in St. 196 is the wording of an entrance announcement that Palaestrio makes in *Miles Gloriosus*:

4. (Mil. 155):

> ipse exit; hic illest lepidus quem dixi senem.54 155

> He himself is coming out. This is that delightful old gentleman I was speaking of.

These considerations collectively suggest that Crocotium should deliver her own announcement with a pause after the keyword, thus (196):

> hic illest parasitus quem arcessitum . . . missa sum.

> This is that parasite, the *arcessitus* . . . I was sent to go and get (arcessitus)

53. It is hard to believe that Crocotium remains onstage at this point and maintains her silence for an extraordinarily long time before making the announcement that she does (see below). If she does remain onstage, her announcement merely becomes all the more peculiar and thus offers even stronger support for my proposal below.

54. *Senex* A and Lindsay: *senex* or P. Leo and others print *senex*, but Sonnenschein (1893, 9) explains P’s reading as an abbreviated correction that a scribe misinterpreted and expanded incorrectly.
The reason why, I suggest, is that the suspense that her pause creates momentarily produces a garden path ambiguity: Crociotium’s word order tricks or invites us to construe the supine _arcessitum_ as if it were a noun or an adjective modifying _parasitus_, attracted into the relative clause, as if she were saying “This is that parasite, the _arcessitum_. . . .” Plautus uses this equivocal supine-as-a-noun trick at Cas. 853, too, where a pun is made on _cubitum_ (supine of _cubare_ and _cubitum_ (ablative of _cubitum_ ‘elbow’). Crociotium then says _missa sum_, which she might have followed with _ut arisserem_, for example (cf. Most. 1043); when she instead proceeds to say _quae loquitur_ in the next line, we realize that we got the syntax wrong. Why?

Crociotium’s purpose in pausing, I again suggest, is to invite us to understand _arcessitum_ as the accusative of the “funny” word _ar-cess-itus_ ‘one who loiters around the altar, an altar loiterer.’ This facetious coinage combines the _ar_- of _ara_ ‘altar’ and the _cess_- of _cessare_ ‘to tarry, delay, loiter’ into a portmanteau-cake of _bou_– _o– _ _loχος_ ‘buffoon, jester’:

**ARA**

**CESSARE**

**ARCESSITUS**

The compound _ar-cess-itus_ (= _qui in ara lapud aram cessat_), which is morphologically like _fun-ambulus_ (‘tide’) _rope walker’ (= _qui per funem ambulat_) (Hec. 4), thus resembles a number of other humorous coinages found in Plautus, such as _bustiraps_ ‘tomb robber’ (Ps. 361), _Virginex-vend-oides_ ‘girl seller’ (Persa 702), _plagipatida_ ‘buffet bearer’ (Capt. 472, Most. 356), _localiripads_ ‘purse snatchers’ and _rectiripads_ ‘rattleshins’ (Trin. 1021), and so on, most of which are, like _arcessitum_ ‘altar loiterer,’ colorful terms of abuse.65 Even the omission of the compositional vowel _i_ (i.e., _aricesitum_) can be occasionally paralleled in compounds (e.g., _nomenclator_); besides, Roman etymologists regularly gloss over inconsistencies like this in analyzing polysyllabic words, which is why, for instance, one late authority tries to derive _arcesse_ from _arceo_ _cessare_.66 The obvious difference with these latter words, of course, is that they are unmistakably comical coinages, whereas _arcessitum_ is a real word that I am arguing is misused in a facetious way, much as _infliceti_ in _Rud._1225 is commonly used to mean ‘put an end to him saying _licit_’. What then would lead us to interpret Crociotium’s word this way?

Verbal cues alone might prompt us to equate Gelasimus with a _bou_– _o– _ _loχος_. Gelasimus repeatedly uses the word _ridiculus_ (171, 175, 177), which is normally a passive adjective in Latin meaning ‘ridiculous, foolish,’ in the active sense of ‘a funny man, a jester, a buffoon.’ In this latter sense _ridiculus_ corresponds exactly, as some commentators have already pointed out, not only to the Greek word _gelosopœos_ but also to _bou_– _o– _ _loχος_.67 What is more, there is arguably a visual cue to direct our thoughts toward the word _bou_– _o– _ _loχος_. The typical Greek family customarily maintained an altar in front of its house; in Greek, this domestic altar is called the _daios_ _bou_– _o– _ _loχος_; in Latin, it is simply called an _ara_.68 These altars often appear on stage in other Plautine comedies. Although no explicit mention of an altar is made in _Stichus_, the stagefront of _Stichus_ does features three Greek houses, the characters are definitely in “Athens,” as they insist (cf. _St._ 446–448), and Gelasimus goes on to evince an unusual interest in a sacrifice (cf. 251–253 and 396–397). These clues suggest (but cannot of course prove) that if an altar (_ara_) did appear onstage in this play and Gelasimus were to loiter beside it (_cessare_) while delivering his long monologue, then these visual cues would reinforce the verbal ones, and they would accordingly invite us to notice in Crociotium’s announcement an ironic pun on _ar-cess-itus_ as a hyperliteral translation of _bou_– _o– _ _loχος_.

Now that we have seen a number of puns that, as I have been arguing, presuppose knowledge of Greek words, it is time to return to the questions of how many members of the audience knew Greek, how much Greek language and literature they knew, and from what sources they might have learned the Greek that they did know. These questions are all closely tied to the question of who precisely attended performances of the _pallia_. Since my own conclusions about these matters are starkly at odds with the views of many other scholars, here is perhaps the best place to offer systematic support for them.

**Plautus’ Audience and Its Knowledge of Greek**

If we ask who was in Plautus’ audience and how familiar with Greek its members were, we find that answers to the second question have run the gamut in recent years. One scholar envisions a “rough and uncultured Roman public, who were equally ignorant of the Greek language and of Hellenistic drama.”69 Bruno Gentili, on the other hand, takes it for granted that Plautus’ Roman audience both knew Greek and could even follow performances of Greek drama in the original language:

55. See Gratwick (1981, 346) _aeuciripads_ _MS_.
56. For these and similar object-verb compounds, see LHS 1, 394 533b-2; with borrowed Greek endings, LHS 1, 458 565-6. For _cessare_ ‘delay, loiter,’ cf. esp. _Eum. 265_ (Gnathe’s monologue) and the parallels gathered by Barsby (1999. 1341 ad loc.).
57. See Malby (1991, 47) _sv._ _arcen_ (‘Sergius’) _LHS_ 1, 390–391 534-1.c. lists other verbs lacking the compositional vowel.
58. _St._ 175 is numbered 176 in Lindsay’s text; see pp. 239–240 below.
61. I append here a note on the parasite’s name. Frankel (2007, 26, 29724) argues that _Gelasimus_ was almost certainly not the parasite’s name in Menander’s play. Perhaps, then, Menander’s parasite was named _Gelasimius_ ( _Gerasimus_ ); this suggestion is necessarily speculative, but apart from the obvious pun on _yênì_ that _Gelasimius_ would make (for the confusion of _lambda_ and _rho_, cf. e.g., Aristophanes _Vep._ 44–46 and Plautus _Rud._ 2), the name, which means ‘venerable, majestic, aged, signore, don,’ is a real name (attributed in _Ag._ before 135 ac; Rumscheid [2006, 214–215, 184]); it is richly suggestive of _yênì_ ‘priest’s portion of meat at sacrifice’ (LS s.v. 5); and in Greek the religious connection between a priestly _episkopos_ and his _yênì_ would be clearer (cf. Timod. fr. 8.16–19).
62. Scafoglio (2005, 635), an extremist view; for a wealth of counter-evidence, see Handy (1975).
It is natural that poets like Livius Andronicus who came from Tarentum, the Campanian Naevius and Ennius, a native of Apulia, should have had occasion to attend the Greek theatrical representations of the period. It is also natural that the Roman public itself should have attended such representations. This is proved by the presence of Greek technitai in Rome from the 2nd century B.C. The objection that the public of the city of Rome was not able to follow performances in Greek is not valid. The abundant evidence which we have of the Greek presence in Latium from very ancient times shows the problem to be unreal. As for the 3rd century B.C.—that is the period of the first great influx of Greek slaves into Rome after the capture of Tarentum and after the first Punic war—it is clear that the Roman public and especially the ruling classes knew Greek.

Other scholars adopt a more agnostic view. Timothy J. Moore, for instance, argues that Plautus’ audience must have contained many connoisseurs of the theater. He implies that Plautus’ use of the Greek language is one index of this, but Moore says nothing about how much Greek the audience may have known or from what sources they learned it. Which of these views is closest to the truth?

The answer to the question of how much “they” knew depends, of course, on who “they” were. The most recent study of this difficult question concludes that Plautus’ audience was characterized by “a basic social and intellectual diversity,” meaning that its members came from many walks of life and from many different educational backgrounds. On the internal evidence of the plays themselves, with which the survey is alone concerned, this conclusion can seem plausible. However, for chronological reasons, that survey could not take into account new research that suggests that the internal evidence is giving us a very false impression of the reality.

Recent archaeological investigations suggest that physical restrictions of space permitted only 1,300–2,000 persons to attend a Plautine performance; an average audience was probably made up of about 1,600 spectators. Meanwhile, Rome’s urban population in the time of Plautus has recently been estimated at about 350,000 persons. A total of 1,600 out of 350,000 persons amounts to less than one-half of one percent of the entire Roman populace. Even if the demographic estimates are wrong by a factor of ten, which seems unlikely, the conclusion is inescapable: Whether measured in absolute or relative terms, Plautus’ audience was very small. And if it was small, it was exclusive; if it was exclusive, it was predominately elite.

The reason we know that it was predominately elite is that in 194 B.C., a year that falls in the center of Plautus’ heyday, the Roman senate passed legislation that reserved the best seats at performances of the palliata for themselves. This extraordinary action—a law, no less—reveals that enthusiasm among the ruling classes for the Roman versions of Greek plays was strong. Since there were 300 senators in Plautus’ time, we can also make some further deductions about the proportionate character of the audience. We do not know whether every senator was entitled to a legally reserved seat, but if so, a group of 300 persons out of a total of 1,600 suggests that these senatorial elites formed a core component of Plautus’ audience. Furthermore, these are just the senators; to say nothing of wives, slaves, mistresses, and the rest of such retinues as might attend a senator at his leisure, pursuits, there were, of course, other elites in Rome who did not belong to the senatorial class. Even if we double or triple or quadruple the total number of spectators a few times to account for the repeat performances of a play that were sometimes granted (but never guaranteed), notional comparisons of Plautus’ audience with the crowds that would later fill the Colosseum, with the great theater at Epidaurus, or even with the smaller Hellenistic theaters known from around the Mediterranean are wrong by several orders of magnitude.

I therefore conclude that Plautine comedy was performed for a small and predominately aristocratic audience, an audience that was ipso facto interested in theater. If this aristocratic core of the audience did not constitute an absolute majority or plurality, then it certainly served as the focal point and constituency to whom Plautus would cater and whom he would strive to please. I accordingly disagree with the recent statement of Sander Goldberg that “[t]he plays of Plautus were not written...for the same audience as [Ennius’] Annales,” a poem that Goldberg believes was written for the educated Roman elite. In my view, the converse is true: Plautus and Ennius, like Naevius and Livius Andronicus before them, were all catering to essentially the same sophisticated, interested, and educated Roman elites. What, then, about their knowledge of Greek?

The fact that Plautus’ core audience was predominately aristocratic suggests not only that it knew some Greek but also that the bilingual puns, riddles, proper names, and other jokes were addressed to it. It further suggests some of the sources from which these elites learned the language. In the extract quoted above, Gentili suggests that it was through performances that the audience knew the Greek plays. Whether the Roman public as a whole or even whether individual Roman elites ever attended performances of the Greek-speaking technitai, as Gentili suggests, I do not know. In fact, that very question distracts us from considering a far more

63. By technitai Gentili here refers to “the Technicians of Dionysus” (οἱ τεχνητοὶ Διονυσίου τεχνίται), the itinerant Greek-speaking dramatists in whose service Varro claimed Plautus had begun his career outside of Rome (Gellius N.A. 3.34, with N.A. 3.4). On the technitai, see Le Guen (2001) and Anetiri (2003).
65. See Moore (1998, 9-10), with references.
68. MacMullen (1999, 410-421); Moore (1998, 204) rejects these estimates, but without argument or counter-estimates.
69. Livy 34.44 and 54 and Valerius Maximus 2.4.3, from a common source.
70. For sources on this number, see O’Brien Moore in RE Supp. 6 cols. 665 and 686.
obvious channel for the transmission of Greek language and literature to members of the Roman elite in Plautus’ day: education.

The reason we should look to language education is the philhellenic character of Plautus’ audience. Ever since the Pyrrhic War in the early 270s BC and all throughout the years in which Plautus’ career was flourishing, certain segments of the Roman aristocracy were in the thrall of a cultural philhellenism so sweeping in its allure that even the elder Cato, whom we often think of as its most prominent opponent, eventually yielded to it. A major component of this philhellenism was naturally a cultured and active interest in Greek language and letters; indeed, the very existence of the palliata is itself ipso facto evidence of Roman philhellenism. Enthusiasm for Greek literature and culture is presumably part of the reason that scholar-poets like Livius Andronicus and Ennius, who had come to Rome and who, in addition to writing palliatae as Plautus did, also gave instruction in Greek and Latin, ended up flourishing in their professions. Considered thematically, moreover, the internal evidence of the pallaia may support this contention: The education of one’s children is a theme that Terence would explore with great sensitivity in Adelphoe and that is repeatedly touched on in various other Roman comedies. This may be one reason why Lydus, the paedagogus in Bacchides, can be presented on the Roman stage as a figure whose occupation and status need not be explained.

In this connection we may press a point that the prologue speaker makes explicit in Menaelchmi 7–9. As we saw in chapter 1, he tells us that poetae are always claiming that the scene of action is Athens so that the audience will think the play is Graecum magis “More Greek,” he claims, was the aesthetic ideal in Rome. Although the speaker follows up this programmatic statement about “more Greek” with the announcement that hoc argumentum graecissat, tamen non atticissat ‘this plot Hellenizes, but it doesn’t Atticize,’ which is partly the setup for the joke on sicilicissat, the preparation is of at least as much interest as the joke itself. For if we ask where in the first place did Romans encounter and nativise the evaluative terms graecissare (ἐλληνικῶς) and atticissare (ἄττικῆς), which generally refer to prestige dialects, the answer must be that it was in their study of the Greek language. As we saw from Festus’ gloss (cf. p. 9), the regular meaning of atticissare, like ἄττικῆς, is Attice loqui ‘to speak the Attic dialect of Greek,’ a term which implies a contrast with graecissare ἐλληνικῶς ‘to speak the Hellenistic Koine.’ Although Plautus has adapted these words for his joke, they are primarily classroom terms that he has borrowed from the vocabulary of language study. Assessed on their own merits, then, and apart from the joke on sicilicissat that follows, these terms furnish some internal evidence that quality language instruction in Greek was a matter of some concern to the Roman audience of Plautine comedy.

If we may press the argument, the fact that the Greek terms atticissare and graecissare show by their morphology that they are nativized terms also seems to reflect a bourgeois cultural concern among those who were formally outside the Hellenic cultural sphere, but who were eager or anxious to enter it. That concern is doubtless the reason the decision of the senator-historians Fabius Pictor and Cincius Alimentus, who were contemporaries of Plautus and who were therefore legally entitled to a privileged seat in his theater, to compose and publish their Annals of Rome in Greek. The same concern is apparent today in certain parts of continental Europe, where there is a decided preference for having one’s children learn the British rather than the American variety of English; hence, once again, the point of magis in the prologue speaker’s declaration in Menaelchmi Graecum magis means “more (authentically) Greek.” The preference for Atticism over “Hellenism” arguably explains why in As. 793 one of the items in the contract for the courtesan’s services specifies that Philaenium neque illa lingua sciat loqui nisi Attica ‘must know how to speak no language but Attic.’ The preference also arguably explains Daemones’ expansive answer at Rud. 741, where, when asked whether he is a Cyrenian (Cyrrene was a Greek colony), he proudly replies, immo Athenis natus atusque educatusque Atticus ‘Not I. I was born and bred and reared in Attic Athens.’ Indirectly, then, the joke in Menaelchmi attests to an early obsession with Atticism, the prestige variant of the Koine, which would have been a concern of the aristocracy in the education of their children in Rome.

Furthermore, advanced education for senatorial elites throughout Rome’s history consisted primarily of training in oratory. Since papyrus evidence indicates that the syllabus for Greek learning was fairly standard throughout the Hellenistic occumere, and since this syllabus was probably used in Rome for educational purposes before the end of the Second Punic War (218–201 BC), we have cause once more to reconsider the name of the courtesan in Plautus’ Truculentus and how it may shed light on Greek education in Plautine Rome.

Phrynesium, Phryne, and Paculla Annia

In chapter 1 I briefly raise the questions of how lore and legend about the historical courtesan Phryne might have reached a Roman audience and of what connotations of fame or glamour the name Phrynesium might have had for a Roman audience. The various Hellenistic treatises titled On Athenien Courtesans are one possible line of transmission that I mention there, and any one of them might have brought knowledge or rumor about Phryne to Roman attention in Plautus’ time. However, there are several other possibilities. Apart from her occasional appearances in Greek

72. Gruen (1986, 250–260) collects other suggestive anecdotes of Roman philhellenism at this time.
73. See Schmitter (1973, passim).
comedy, which a Roman audience may or may not have seen, a sensationalist account of Phryne's trial had been published relatively recently in Greek by Hermippus of Smyrna, a pupil of Callimachus and an older contemporary of Plautus (fl. second half of the third century BC), as part of a biography of Hyperides included in Hermippus' work On the Pupils of Isocrates (Περὶ τῶν ἱσοκράτους μαθητῶν). Many of the legends of Phryne were evidently canonized in it, and it forms the source of Athenaeus' and others' information about her.

Among Roman senators in Plautus' time, however, the most likely source of knowledge about Phryne is probably different. It has been established that Greek rhetoric was being studied in elite Roman circles, presumably in Greek, by at least c. 200 BC. The authors included on the Hellenistic syllabus for oratory were reasonably standard, and along with Demosthenes, one commonly studied school author was Hyperides. As Hyperides was one of the canonical Attic orators, it is reasonable to conjecture that some Roman pupils of Greek oratory studied Hyperides' speech In Defense of Phryne (Ὑπὲρ Φρύνης ἀποθεσίας, frs. 171–180 Jensen). This was the very speech in which the orator successfully defended the courtesan and thereby immortalized her in literature ever after. Greek and Roman thinkers alike considered it his oratorical masterpiece: Ps.-Longinus says the quality of this speech surpasses even Demosthenes' skill, and centuries later Quintilian was still citing it. The fact that Messalla Corvinus translated the speech into Latin—and to great acclaim—suggests that it was perennially a favorite among teachers of rhetoric.

I stress the likelihood that some elite members of Plautus' audience knew this speech because I now suggest it sheds light on the so-called Bacchanalian affair, which is virtually the only historical episode in Plautus' lifetime whose particulars are unambiguously confirmed by archaeological evidence. This scandal famously swept over Rome in the early 180s BC, enraging a number of young men and culminating in a Salem-style witch hunt. The matter ended only with the official, legal suppression of the Bacchic cult in Rome in 186 BC. An extant inscription preserves the senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus banning the cult, and it thus offers independent documentation for the senate's actions and concerns in this strange episode in Rome's history.

With the exception of Stichus (200 BC) and of Pseudylus (191 BC), whose dates are independently established by production notices, the dates of Plautus' plays rely on internal evidence and inference. Most are little more than guesswork, but Truculentus is one of the plays that can be dated with some confidence. Scholars usually place it near the end of Plautus' career; both 189 and 186 BC have been plausibly suggested. These dates are fortunate for our study, since it was precisely during these years that the scandal was brewing in Rome, and also because we can be sure that Roman senators—who we know had less than a decade before legally reserved the best seats for themselves—formed an eager and enthusiastic component of Plautus' audience at the time.

It is difficult to determine what exactly triggered the senate's unprecedented hysteria about the cult. Among any plurality of people, individuals' motives for action are likely to differ, but a central offense that we know irritated the senate was gender mixing in the Bacchic rites; this, Livy tells us, was a recent innovation when the scandal broke. According to an informant in Livy's account, the rites were originally held infrequently, in the daytime, and they were the exclusive province of women. But then—Livy does not specify when—a woman named Paculla Anna began initiating men into the rites as well (et viros eam primam . . . initiasse). From this point on, men and women began performing the rites together (ex quo in promiscuo sacra sint et permixti viri feminis). Paculla also began holding the rites much more frequently and in the dark of night, and from here, things deteriorate into sinful and sexual excess between men and women. When we find, then, that the senatorial inscription specifically forbids men from joining the women bacchantes (bacas vir nequis adiese velet), the prohibition suggests that it was the recent gender mixing in the bacchanalia that played a key part in persuading some senators to ban the cult.

This point of agreement between Livy's account of the affair and the inscription directs our attention back to Plautus' Truculentus, and in particular to the starring role occupied by the cunning and evil courtesan Phrynes. We recall that Phryne, for whom Phrynesium is named, was put on trial specifically for ἀποθεσία (impiety). She was charged with importing to Athens the worship of Isoainties, a foreign god of Dionysiac type, and an anonymous rhetorical treatise happens to preserve the specific charges of the trial. These charges allege that Phryne κομάσασαν ἀνάδως, καὶ ὤν θεῖον ἔστησαν, ἰδίῳς ἄνδρῳ ἐκθέασαν καὶ γυναῖκας αὐτοκρατοῦσιν 'revealed shamelessly, introduced a new god, and had led illegal revel-bands (thiasoi) of men and women.' This final charge of gender mixing in the revel (θαυμασάς ἄνδρων κατολογίαν καὶ γυναικῶν ~ Livy's permixti viri feminis, the inscription's bacas vir nequis adiese velet), I suggest, is more than coincidental.

For if Truculentus dates to late in 186 BC, Plautus' manipulative courtesan Phrynesium forms in both name and character a thinly veiled and politically conservative allegory for Paculla and her involvement in the scandal. In support of this view, we note that Plautus evidently alludes to Rome's suppression of the Bacchic cult at Cas. 979–980. Allusions to women's involvement in the Bacchanalia also appear in Mil. 1016 (Milphidippa), Amph. 703–704 (Alcumena), and, most

76. Leeman (1965, 1, 35, and passim).
78. Ps.-Longinus De subl. 34.3, Quintilian Inst. 2.25.5; 10.5.2, 1.5.61 = ORS 533 frs. 21–22 (Messalla Corvinus).
82. Anon. Seg. 525 (= Patillon [2005, 42]).
Menander's comedies occupied a large part of the Hellenistic syllabus of Greek learning, and, as Gentili amply documents, Greek plays were already being anthologized and circulating in written form in the Hellenistic world; likewise, the pervasive and free use of Greek or latinized Greek terms of literary criticism in the prologues of Roman comedy (comoedia and tragodia in Plautus and Terence; ars musica, prólogus, stataria, and perhaps duplex comoedia and argumentum simplex in Terence) seems to indicate familiarity among Roman audiences with the standard terms of Hellenistic literary criticism. An audience whose own enthusiasm for comedy drew them to performances of the palliata would, then, perhaps naturally be drawn to study texts of Greek comedy in their acquisition of the language, and this would in turn explain how Romans came to be familiar with some of the parasite tags and other colorful coinages known from comedy that I have discussed in this chapter.

However, none of this necessarily constitutes evidence; one could as easily argue that all of these mentions of Greek authors merely replicate what Plautus found in his Greek models, and that they remained unintelligible to a Roman audience. The same goes for paratragedy and for the numerous references in Plautus to Greek tragedy (Poen. 1–4, Ps. 702–707, etc.), and all of these can alternatively be explained as allusions to the Latin reworkings of Greek plays that Ennius and Plautus' other contemporaries were writing. It could also be objected that evidence from the time of Terence is not necessarily applicable to that of Plautus. Hence, internal allusions to Greek comedy and tragedy in Plautine comedy are not going to tell us much, so we must look for other ways to throw light on our question.

Since Plautus' plays are at least nominally translations of Greek material, the internal evidence, as far as I see, offers only two ways for us to proceed. One of them involves the familiar task of examining Plautus' use of nonattested Greek words in code switching. Since Terence eschews code switching, all of these words must be idiosyncratically Plautine, and we can ask what prompts the poet to make use of them. The other way is to examine, as we have just done with Phrynesium, the names of Plautus' characters, for the one thing that we do know for certain is that Plautus deliberately chose these independently of his models. We can then ask why he chose those names.

As we have repeatedly noted, for instance, in Bacchides Plautus retains the name Lydus (Λυδός), which was Menander's original name for the paedagogus, at least in part to make a bilingual pun on the Latin word lūdus 'school' (Bach. 129). This is a fairly simple example. However, the more complicated, subtler puns on proper names involving riddles and ironic multiple significances that we saw earlier seem to belong on a continuum with an Alexandrian aesthetic. I suggest, then, that we look beyond dramatic texts for allusions to other works of Greek

83. Gentili (1972, 15–41); on the authors of the syllabus, see n. 74 above; on Hellenistic terms of literary criticism in Roman Comedy, see Dunck (1999, 119–124).

84. Plautus frs. 17–21 Monda (Baccharia). Rinchl (1866–1879, vol. 3, 198–202), followed by subsequent editors, alters Baccharia, the title transmitted by Macrobius (Sat. 3.16.5–2), to Bacaria 'The Comedy of the Berry.' Rinchl derives this title from Latin bacca 'berry,' and thinks it might refer to a pear or pears used as a token of recognition. His arguments are not persuasive: While the comedian himself certainly wrote Bacaria, it is Baccharia, not Bacaria, that is the lectio difficilior, since it indicates that someone familiar with the contents of the play updated the archaic spelling; hence the title must have referred to Greek bacchantes, as do the comedies titled Blasyes by Diocles (frs. 1–5), Lysippus (frs. 1–7), both of Old comedy, and Antiphanes (fr. 58).
Nondramatic Literary Parody in Plautus?

Reminiscences of Sappho

Sappho was a famous figure in the Hellenistic period. She was celebrated in epigrams by Posidippus and others, tradition held that she had spent a period of exile in Sicily (Parian Marble Ep. 36, p. 12 Jacoby), and a fourth-century statue of her by Silanor, probably commissioned in commemoration of that tradition, was proudly displayed in the Prytaneum of Syracuse (Cic. Verr. 2.4.126–127). She was spoofed repeatedly in Greek New Comedy, including in Menander’s Λευκάδια (fr. 1.11–14 Arnot), a famous play that recounts the story of Sappho’s suicidal leap. Statius Sil. 5.155, which also alludes to her suicide, indicates that her literary works still formed part of the Greek syllabus studied in Naples a few centuries later.

What make Sappho’s poetry valuable for our investigation is the fact that no evidence indicates that any of it was translated into Latin prior to the reworkings of her φαινεται μοι ode by the first-century authors Valerius Aedilitus, Lucretius, and Catullus.85 On the other hand, Theocritus (fl. third century BC) imitates the ode in Greek (Idyll 2.82), and this imitation suggests the poem was famous at least in the Greek communities of southern Italy, perhaps in an Alexandrian edition, shortly before Plautus’ time. Allusions to Sappho’s famous love-triangle poem that appear in Plautine comedy could, then, arguably suggest firsthand knowledge among his audience, especially if external criteria, such as characters’ names, certify the allusion.

As it happens, recent research suggests that not merely one but two separate allusions to this famous poem appear in Plautus. Two scholars have noticed the prior allusion. It appears in Mil. 1239–1274, a passage too long to quote in its entirety here.86 In it, a character’s explicit comparison of the amorous soldier to Phaon, the man loved by Sappho, sets the tone. This induces the crafty courtesan Acroteleutium to feign a fainting spell, and from here we are unmistakably led to equate Acroteleutium with the speaker in Sappho’s φαινεται μοι poem.

What makes the allusion unmistakable is precisely the name Ακροτελεύτιον ‘hemistich, verse-end.’ Apart from incidentally showing that Plautus’ audience knew the terminology of Greek versification, the name is puzzling. Although the courtesan does speak disproportionately in hemistichs, the ostensible point of her name is otherwise quite unclear. However, we do get a clue that a subtler meaning is hinted at when she announces that if that man over there (ilio), the Soldier, refuses to marry her, she will kill herself (consciscam letum, 1241). At this threat of suicide, Palaestrio quips (1246–1247):

(aside to Soldier) For I am sure that no mortal man save two—yourself and Phaon of Lesbos (Phaoni Lesbio)—has had the fortune to be so loved by women (mulieres).

Since Phaon’s mulier is Sappho, Plautus is inviting us to reanalyze “Acroteleutium” as if meant ‘Little Miss Cliff-Death,’ a name formed from άκρον ‘height, peak,’ τελυτή ‘death,’ and the hypocopistic suffix -iav. The name thus ironically alludes to Sappho’s legendary suicide.87

With the mood thus established and the proper name to direct us, allusions to Sappho’s poem are developed by a repetition of the distancing pronoun illum (the Soldier) in 1248, which correspond to κύριοι in Sappho’s poem, and the panic attack that Acroteleutium feigns when she catches sight of the Soldier (1260–1262):

ACR. (catching sight of the soldier) Hold me, hold me, for heaven’s sake! (about to swoon) 1260

MILPH. (supporting her) Why?

ACR. (weakly) Or I’ll fall!

MILPH. What for?

ACR. Because I cannot stand—so do my senses fail me by reason of my eyes! (ita animus per oculos meas <meu> défìt)

MILPH. (after a moment of mystification) Heavens! You’ve spied the soldier! (míliem pol tu aspexisti.)

ACR. Yes!

A moment later, Milphidippa, playing the go-between, approaches the Soldier and announces (1270–1273):

MILPH. verbūm edepol facere non potis, si accesserit prope ad te.

dum te obtuetur, interim linguam oculi praeciderunt…

ut tremit! atque extimit,

1270

1271

1272

85. Sappho fr. 31 Campbell (printed below); Aedilitus FLP fr. 1 = Gellius N.A. 19.9.11; Lucretius DRN 3.132–158, Catullus c. 51.

86. The allusion was first spotted by Marzullo (1994, 234n2), who believes Plautus’ audience would have recognized it, and again, independently, by Traill (2005, 532), who assumes the audience would not. I follow Marzullo’s suggestion to read non mulieres at amarent in v. 1247. Traill has already pointed out many of the correspondences I note below; although I disagree with her conclusions about Plautus’ audience, my own discussion is very much indebted to her important article.
postquam te aspexit.

MILPH. (to Soldier) Dear me, sir, she won’t be able to utter a single word if she once comes near you. While she gazes upon you, sir, her eyes have meanwhile cut off her tongue…. How tremulous and terror stricken she was when she beheld you!

The symptoms of Acroteleutium’s attack replicate those in Sappho’s poem. Here is fr. 31.1–16 Campbell, whose text, if not certainly what Sappho wrote, seems at least to represent a vulgar text current in Hellenistic times (see below); I liberally adapt his translation:

οὐσινεὶ μην ἔσος θέοιαν
ἐμεν’ ὅπη, ὅτις ἐναντιός σου ἰδάναι καὶ πλάσσαι ἄν ὄνειρος ὑπάκουει
καὶ γελασάς ἑμέρες τῷ μ’ ἢ μάν
καὶ ἄνερ τῇ στήβειν ἐπτάσαις
ὡς γὰρ ἐσ’ ἴδω βρόχει, ὡς με φονεῖκ’
ἐν ἵκει,

ἀλλὰ κάρα μὲν γλώσσα <μ’> ἐγείρει, λέπτον
δ’ αὐτικά χρώ πῦρ ὑπαδερόηκεν,

δ’ οὐδ’ ἐν ἄρημ’, ἐπεριφέροις
καὶ δὲ μ’ ἴδρος κακέεται, τρόμος δὲ
πάσαν ἁγείρει, χλωροτέρα δὲ ποίας
ἐμμ’ τε θεανκ’ ὧν ἄλγων ’πειδαῖς
ναιν’ ἐρ’ αὐτη.

He seems to me to be equal to the gods, that man who sits facing you and listens nearby to you sweetly speaking and your lovely laughter. That is a thing that sets my heart trembling in my breast. For as soon as I look at you a moment, immediately it is no longer possible for me to speak; my tongue has snapped, and at once a delicate fire has raced underneath my skin, I see nothing with my eyes, my ears hum, and sweat pours down upon me, trembling seizes me completely, I am greener than grass, and I think I am little short of dying.

In addition to the thematic parallels, some of the verbal echoes of Sappho’s poem are even closer than Catullus’ well-known translation of it. A side-by-side comparison of Plautus’ and Sappho’s language is revealing:

One might assume, as Traill does, that Plautus’ model travestied Sappho’s poem, that Plautus has merely translated this model with consummate skill, and that a Roman audience was effectively blind to these allusions to Sappho’s poem. What prevents us from embracing this assumption, however, is precisely the name Acroteleutium: It is not only significant that this name, like all of Plautus’ characters’ names, is the Roman poet’s own deliberate and artistic choice; what is even more significant is that the name Acroteleutium is not attested in Greek comedy at all. This suggests that Plautus invented the name himself; whether or not, then, the Greek model for Miles Gloriosus also parodied Sappho’s poem (which is, of course, a likely possibility), the name thus forms Plautus’ own clue for us to detect the allusions. The obvious implication is that he expected at least some members of his audience to be familiar with Sappho’s poem.

The second allusion to Sappho’s poem appears in Gorgylo, which I tentatively outline here. At Curr. 158 Planesium, Phaedromus’ ladylove, emerges from the house. She summons Phaedromus, who has been longing to see her, with these words (162–163):

ubi tu’s qui me convadatu’s Vereinii vadimonii?
sisto ego tibi me et mihi contra itidem ut sistas suadeo.

(softly, looking about) Where are you, you who have cited me to the court of Venus?

I produce myself in answer to the summons and beg you likewise to produce yourself.

As commentators note, Planesium is using Roman legalese for erotic metaphor (vadimonii, sisto, abalimaverit, 174). Closer attention to the shifting addressees in this passage, however, suggest that Phaedromus seizes on the literal meaning of her words in v. 163, ‘I bring myself to you (sisto ego tibi me), and I ask that you likewise stand facing (sistas contra me), for a different purpose. Like si accesserit prope ad te

88. Catullus writes nam simul te. Lethia, aspexi nihil est super mi <voeis in ore> etc. (51.6–8).
89. Whatever Sappho wrote, Plautus’ text obviously had died ‘shattered, is broken,’ as did Lucaninus, who renders it infringi (3.155); for praecladere means not only ‘to cut (the tip) off of’ but also ‘to break off,’ that is, ‘to cut short.’
in Mil. 1270, the words literally interpreted enact and evoke roughly the scenario of Sappho’s ὀνῆρ ἢττες ἐκάττος τοι λαθάνει. This time, however, it is Phaedromus who is Sappho’s ὀνῆρ, the man opposite the ladylove. He accordingly turns to Palinurus, the third member of Sappho’s love triangle, and gushes (167–168; I add the dash and the stage directions):

**PHAED.** est lepida.

**PAL.** nimi’ lepida.

**PHAED.** sum deus.

**PAL.** immo homo—haud magni preti.

**PHAED.** quid vidisti aut quid videbis magi’ dis aequiparabile?

**PHAED.** She’s delicious!

**PAL.** (sour) Too delicious.

**PHAED.** I’m a god!

**PAL.** No, a man (turns to us)—and a worthless one at that!

**PHAED.** (indignant) What have you ever seen or will see that is more comparable to the gods?

Virtually everything here echoes the first stanza of Sappho’s poem. Most conspicuous is *dis aequiparabile* ‘considered exactly equal to the gods,’ a phrase that is closer to Sappho’s ἀτοι θέσων than Catullus’ own rendering *deo ‘a god.’ These preliminary verbal echoes give way in the following lines to thematic coincidences of infatuation, total madness, life, and death, where other echoes of Sappho’s poem appear (169, 170, 172, 177, 187, etc.). All of them suggest that Phaedromus, who now shifts roles to that of the speaker in Sappho’s poem, is suffering a panic attack. Meanwhile Palinurus is playing the buffoon by interrupting Phaedromus with jokes: He deliberately misinterprets *dis aequiparabile* ‘comparable to the gods’ as "disaequiparabile ‘incomparable’ (cf. dispar), that is, ‘worse, unworthy, undignified’ (cf. impar, iniquus), and so he replies male valere te ‘You’re in a bad way, I see that’ (169). Furthermore, Palinurus, who appears to manifest some characteristics of a paedagogus, partly explicates the themes of Sappho’s text. In v. 170, for instance, he says ipsis se exercesat qui homo quod amat videt nec potitur dum licet ‘a chap that sees his sweetheart and doesn’t have her while it’s possible is a self-tormentor.’ Just as the Greek literary critic Ps.-Longinus, who quotes Sappho’s poem (De subl. 1.10.3), singles out αἱ ἐπιρρωγαὶ μανή ‘love’s madness’ as its major theme, so too does Palinurus speak of totum insanum amare ‘to go absolutely insane in a love affair’ (177). In these lines we can also pick out translation correspondences both real (παῖσαι ~ totum) and specious (dum licet ~ ἤτε ἐκεῖ), as well as etymologically related sound correspondences (lepida ~ λέπτως; sistas ~ ὅδανει) that conjure up Sappho’s poem.

What is more, the characters’ names also seem to set a seal upon the allusion, but in a fashion that we usually associate with Alexandrian poets. By Hellenistic times, the first word or two of a poem, which tended to serve as the title of a work, was considered especially memorable and evocative. Later poets reworking a text allude to the first word of their intertext prominently. As is well known, this tendency is clear already in Andronicus’ calque-based translation of Homer’s words ἄνδρα μοι ἐννέες, Μέονα in Odyssey 1.1 as *virum mihi, Camena, insec* in which Andronicus replicates the word order almost exactly and renders ἐννέες by *insec* (i.e., *in-seque ‘pursue [the narration]’), since he connects *insec* with the active form of ἐν-επεβαίνει ‘pursue.’ More impressively, Virgil makes the first words that Juno utters in the Aeneid, *men(e) incepto desistere... ‘Me desist from my undertaking’ replicate the sound of μῆν ὥρα ‘rage,’ the first word of Homer’s Iliad (1.1). Virgil’s *ar-ma virumque ‘Arms and the man’ at the start of the Aeneid similarly alludes to the first syllable of Apollonius’ Argonautica, ἄρα-χόμενος σέο ‘Beginning with you.’ Accordingly, in Plautus’ Gorgylo the name Phaedromus (Φαῖδρομος, ἡ παθολογία ὧν Φαῖδρ-ό-δρομος ‘splendid colomnade’?), if pronounced *Phae-dromus* with a pause after the first syllable, evokes the ϕαι-νεταί that begins Sappho’s poem, just as in a subter way *dromus* might pick up Sappho’s υἱὰ-δρόμωτεν (v. 10). Astral connotations of the name Planētium (Πλαν-ήταιον ‘Little Miss Wanderer,’ better so analyzed than Πλανήτη-ον) conjure up themes in other Sapphic poems; Theocritus was thinking along similar lines when he named the speaker Selana (‘Moon’) in his own imitation of ϕαι-νεταί μοι in Idyll 2. It is, of course, possible, even likely, that Plautus’ audience also knew parodies of Sappho’s poem from Greek comedy (Menander’s Λευκάδε is a likely candidate). However, the multiple significances of his characters’ names also suggest that Plautus’ audience knew the poem reasonably well, and probably at first hand.

As I mentioned earlier, another way to assess what Greek literature Plautus’ audience may or may not have read is to examine his use of nonnativized Greek words. In this connection, a return to Plautus’ *Pseudolus* is in order.

**Pseudolus as Callimachus**

In chapter 3 I suggest that *Pseudolus’* pun on ναι γάρ ~ negare in the inquisition scene of *Pseudolus* shares a conceit with a famous epigram of Callimachus. It is possible that the parallel is more than accidental. Recall that *Pseudolus* had

90. Radif (2005) sees in Phaedromus’ ‘priam’ at Carc. 178–180 an evocation of Sappho 16 Campbell (“Some say an army”). The terms of comparison are rather different, but the context seems suitable for a further travesty of Sapphic poetry (see, too, vv. 152, 181).


92. For an even more sophisticated allusion to Aratus at the start of Virgil’s Georgics, see Katz (2008).
dispatched Calidorus with confident assurances of a plan, and then, having informed us that he in fact has no idea how to get started, the slave announces (P. 401–405):

sed quasi poeta, tabulas quom cepit sibi,  
quaruit quod nusquam gentiumt, reperit tamen,  
facit illud veri simile quod mendacium est,  
nunc ego poeta fiam: viginti minus,  
qua e nusquam sunt gentium, inveniam tamen.

But the same as a poet, once he's taken his tablets in hand, hunts for what is nowhere on this earth, yet finds it, and makes a lie look like the truth, now I'll become a poet: Those twenty minas, which are nowhere on this earth now, yet I'll discover them.

So the slave declares, playing in the last instance on the two meanings of inveniam—'find, discover' and 'invent, make up.' Richard Hunter thinks that poeta, "the poet" rather than "a poet," of whom Pseudolus speaks, is Plautus, and that the slave is therefore becoming "Pseudolus-Plautus."93 Hunter also brings up some of the familiar passages in Greek literature in which "truthlike lies" are mentioned, including Hesiod's muses, who, in the passage that commentators most frequently adduce here, tell ἑνδέκα ἔτιμον ὑμῖν 'lies that look true.'

This is wrong; Pseudolus himself stresses that it is a poet, not a muse, that he will channel, and that rules Hesiod's muses out as relevant here. (Plautus certainly could have written Camena 'muse' rather than poeta here had he wanted.) Joseph Farrell has made the more attractive suggestion that Pseudolus instead evokes a famous passage in Callimachus' Aetia,94 in which the poet recounts the following experience (fr. 1.1.21–24 Pfeiffer):

καὶ γὰρ ὅτε προελάπτετον ἠμῶς ἐπὶ δέλτων ἔθικα  
γοῦσινειν, ἢ[πό]λλοι καὶ ἑπταν ὅ μοι Λύκιος:  
"......[...] οὐδὲ, τι μὲν θὺς ὅτι πάγοντο  
τρέβαι, τῇ τῷ Μοῦςον ὅ ὄναθε λεπταλὲν"

For when I first put a tablet on my knees, Lycian Apollo said to me:  
"... Singer, rear your sacrifice as fat as possible,  
but your Muse, my good man, slanders."

Hunter dismisses Farrell's idea that Callimachus has directly influenced Plautus—Hunter says nothing of Plautus' model—as a priori improbable.96 But is it?

The works of Callimachus, who died in Plautus' teenage years, had quickly become part of the standard Greek syllabus throughout the Hellenistic world; they were probably read at more advanced stages in the curriculum.97 It is well known that Virgil later reworked this passage from the Aetia in the beginning of his sixth Eclogue (3–5). Moreover, there is indirect evidence that Callimachus' Aetia was already known in the Rome of Plautus' time: Ennius alludes to the prologue of the poem in the dream sequence in the proem to his own Annales, and Ennius was writing a mere seven years or so after Pseudolus was staged (191 BC). Moreover, as Farrell points out, apart from the correspondence between Plautus' tabulas and Callimachus' δέλτων, the stress in Plautus' passage is on Pseudolus' becoming a poet.

The convergence of these ideas suggests that Pseudolus' intervening remarks about the veri simile mendacium evoke not Hesiod or any other literary commonplace, but specifically Callimachus. In a programmatic passage of his Hymn to Zeus, the Alexandrian poet makes this particular prayer (Hymn 1.65):

ψευδόμην δίοντος ἄν τε κεν πεπώλμον ἄκουν.  
May I lie in such a way as persuades the listener's ear!

This sentiment seems eminently suitable for Plautus' slave Ἐρείδωλος, and not only because in his name the idea of lying (ψεύδος) predominates. The primary reason for thinking so is that it bears on Pseudolus' equivocations on ναὶ γαρ μην εἰρθεὶς in the interrogation scene that shortly follows, which (as I have tentatively suggested) is also a Callimachean trick.

It may also be significant, then, when at v. 443 Pseudolus exclaims:

ἀδί Ζεῦ, quam pauci estis homines commodi!  
(aside) ἄδί Ζεῦ! [Greek: O Zeus!] How few you are, you men with the proper spirit!

Characters in Greek drama frequently exclaim (ἄδί) Ζεῦ. In Roman comedy, however, this exclamation is highly irregular: As a rule, Plautine characters, Pseudolus included, invariably invoke Iuppiter (Ps. 13, 335, 574, 934, etc.). In the only other exception to this rule (Cas. 731), the switch of codes is probably explained by the fact that the word ᾧ Ζεῦ pun on ἂδειον to smell (badly).99 Although Plautus probably found this pun in Cassia already in his model—the very same pun is found as the punch line of joke number 232 in the Philogelos collection—he must have written ᾧ Ζεῦ rather than Iuppiter there because he expected that some members of his audience would perceive the pun.

By contrast, it is difficult to guess what prompts Pseudolus to switch codes here. Certainly the switch suddenly brings the Greekness of this slave, whose name

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94. Theog. 27.
95. Farrell (1991, 108), who also notes the influence of the passage on Ennius.
98. Wilcock (1967) saw this as hedias before estis and the MSS' em at line-end to the start of the next line; Lindsay retains em and writes ἄδί Ζεῦ, <Ζεῦ>.
99. See Hough (1940, 190n8), who first spotted the pun.
means ‘liar, deceiver,’ to the forefront of our minds. Since (i) the earlier monologue had led us to begin seeing (ex hypothesi) Pseudylus as a conduit for Callimachus, an inherently equivocal and tricksterish poet, and since (ii) this very aside, when it is overheard, is what sets the interrogation scene in motion, I suggest that the slave’s words direct our thoughts to several lines of Callimachus’ Hymn to Zeus, the source of Callimachus’ famous “truthlike lies” statement, which early on feature a prominent invocation of Zeus (Hymn 1.6–7; cf. 43 and 46):

Zeô, σε μέν Ἰδαίων ἐν οὐραία φαίη γενέσθαι,
Zeô, σε δ’ ἐν Ἀρκαδίᾳ πότερον, πάτερ, ἐφεύσαις;

Zeus, some say that you were born on the hills of Ida;
Zeus, others say in Arcadia; which, o Father, lied?

Whether or not Plautus got these Callimachean reminiscences mediated through Greek comedy, I would suggest that he retains the words ὅ Zeô to add an Alexandrian ἀφφαγίς or signature, a subtle symbolum, to his work.

Summary

In the foregoing discussion, I have sought to situate Plautus more fully in with his Hellenistic contemporaries. I have been arguing for a Plautine aesthetic that is less isolated from the poetic currents and developments of the Greek world than one that is in tune with them and that exists along a continuum with them. I have also argued that Plautus primarily catered not to an unruly mob whose attention he had to work hard to retain, but to an enthusiastic, philhellenic, and aristocratic audience, and that this ideal audience was more sophisticated, alert, and familiar with Greek language and literature than it is often believed to have been.

By arguing as I have that the setting of Plautus’ comedy remains fundamentally Greek rather than an anything-goes hybrid world of Greek and Roman elements, I have also tried to show that his audience might have approached his poetry as a fundamentally Greek construct. The arguments that I have presented cannot be settled decisively; it is only through puns, multiple significances of words, and competing hypotheses of probability that we attempt to assess what knowledge he expected his audience to come equipped with. I am well aware that arguments based on innuendo and partial-word allusions are fragile. However, such is the nature of literary criticism in general and of Alexandrian poetry in particular, and we can at least say that Ennius, Plautus’ contemporary, was experimenting with Alexandrian aesthetics and techniques for Roman audiences in the various forms of poetry that he was writing around the same time. Perhaps, then, a Roman audience would not be entirely surprised every now and then to find similar sophistication in Plautus’ poetry as well.

The subject of innuendo naturally leads to us to consider double entendre, a term that is usefully restricted to jokes or puns that involve a specifically sexual element. The corresponding term in Latin is cacemphanton (κακέμφαρον), and Cicero and Quintilian give interesting treatments of it. Since this subject is bound to provoke more disagreement than most others and since the last major effort to discuss Plautus’ double entendre failed on the grounds of propriety and probability, it has seemed best to keep my own discussion of it separate from the textual arguments and interpretations offered in earlier chapters, since all of these can be accepted or rejected somewhat more dispassionately.

Surprisingly enough, there is much less double entendre in Plautus than one might expect. However, because some readers see it everywhere and because others do not see it anywhere, it seems appropriate to survey the subject as a whole. In this chapter I collect some familiar examples that illustrate the methods that the playwright employs to construct sexual jokes and puns, and to these I add a few new instances that are often overlooked in scholarship.

In discovering and interpreting double entendre in Plautus, I adopt a threefold approach that derives from the stylistic techniques elaborated in the prior chapters of this book. First, I insist on as exact a phoneme