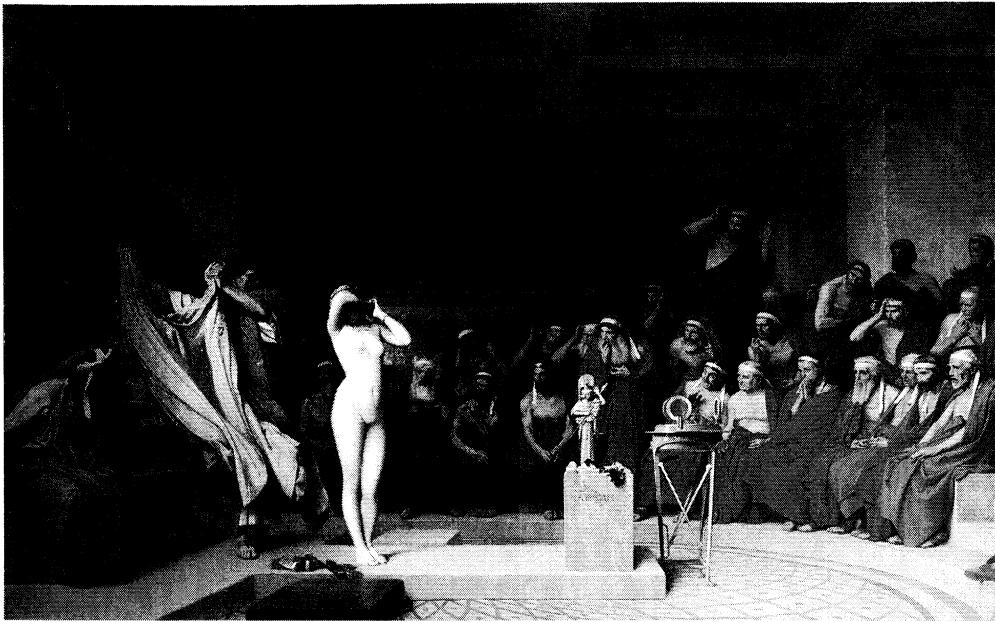


# Funny Words in Plautine Comedy

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Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Phryné devant l'Aréopage* (*Phryne before the Areopagus*). 1861. Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, Germany. Photo: Elke Walford. © Bildarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz/Art Resource.

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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)

## 4

### 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.<sup>1</sup>

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*.

1. Cf. Moore (1998).

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).<sup>2</sup> The speaker then pauses to offer us a puzzling challenge (91–92):

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

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

Because prologues in Roman comedy divulge the names of characters in the drama that follows only in exceptional circumstances (Phrynesium 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 *Rud.* 612, this and similar language refers to dream interpretation. As we saw at the end of chapter 3, at *Trin.* 921 the phrase *coniecturā 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 *εικάζειν*: The speaker gives us the *anguillast* half of the conundrum (‘he’s an eel,’ *Ps.* 747) but not the *elabatur* (‘he slips away’).<sup>3</sup>

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) *λύκος* 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. Gratwick has pointed out, it is only half correct.<sup>4</sup>

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,  
huc in Calydonem commigravit hau diu,  
sui quaesti caussa.

95

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

95

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 *λάβραξ* or *ἀκαρνάν*, and in Latin, *lupus*.<sup>5</sup>

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 adduces 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.<sup>6</sup> This detail implies that the prologue speaker’s unstated point is scatological, for quite unlike the corresponding land animal, the *lupus* fish was a “bottom dweller,” that is, a fish that feeds on feces. Macrobius quotes Lucilius to show that *hunc piscem . . . quasi ligurritorem catillonem appellat, scilicet qui proxime ripas stercus insectaretur* (‘Lucilius) calls this fish a “scrounger, lick-plate” as if it were a licker-up of leavings because it would root out excrement (*stercus*) all along the riverbanks.’<sup>7</sup>

The insinuation that Lycus is a scatophage, 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

4. Cf. Gratwick (1990, 306).

5. On the Greek fish, see Athenaeus *Deipn.* 8.356b and Thompson (1947, 6–7 s.v. *ἀκαρνάξ*, 140–142 s.v. *λάβραξ*); on the Latin name, cf. Varro *Ling.* 5.77.

6. *Sat.* 3.16.11–18, quoting Varro and Lucilius; cf. Thompson (1947, 141–147).

7. Lucilius frs. 1174–1176 Marx = 601–603 ROL.

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.

3. On the *εικάζειν*, see Pelliccia (2002, 200–217), refining Fraenkel (2007, 42, 114–119) and Monaco (1963).



*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*, *suppellex non superlex*, *terebrā non telebrā*, *clatri non cracli*, and *frustum non frustrum* (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*.<sup>12</sup> 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 *lōra* (*lūra*), *lolarius* may actually have been the usual pronunciation and spelling of the word in common discourse.<sup>13</sup> These patterns (*l-r-r* to *l-l-r*, etc.) accordingly suggest that Romans might easily mispronounce *Aulularia* as \**Aurularia*, thereby creating the meaning ‘The Tale (-ia, sc. *fabula*) of the Golden (*aur-*) 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 *λάβραξ* is the Greek name for the *lupus* fish, as I noted earlier, this pimp’s speaking name (*Λάβραξ*) is as inherently suspicious as that of Lycus in *Poenulus*.

*Labrax’s Riddle*

At *Rudens* 1303, Labrax has overheard Gripus 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 Gripus’ 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):

- LABR. ut vales?  
 GRIP. quid tu? num **medicus**, quaeso, es?  
 LABR. immo edepol una littera plus sum quam **medicus**.  
 GRIP. tum tu 1305  
**medicus** es?  
 LABR. tetigisti acu.  
 LABR. How are you?  
 GRIP. What’s that? You aren’t a **medicus** (doctor), are you?  
 LABR. Lord, no! I’m one letter more than a **medicus** (doctor).  
 GRIP. Then you’re 1305  
 a **medicus** (beggar)?  
 LABR. (dryly) *Touché*.

As far as I can determine, no one has ever wondered whether Gripus’ solution *medicus* ‘beggar,’ what with its change of accent from *médicus* ‘doctor,’ may actually be the *wrong* answer to the pimp’s riddle that he is “one letter more than *medicus*.”<sup>14</sup> The solution *medicus* does, of course, hark back to Labrax’s mendicancy in v. 485, but circumstantial evidence suggests that what Gripus 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 *merdicus*, ‘shitty.’

The word *merdicus*, 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 *medicus* as well. Since our lexica seem to be virtually unaware of the word and since the consistency of the wordplay *medicus* ~ *merdicus* (~ *medicus*) in its cumulative effect is so striking, I set forth here the examples

12. LHS 1, 230–232 §§231–232 gives other examples.

13. Cf. Schoell in Ritschl’s preface to *Captivi*, xii–xiii.

14. Contrast, for example, Fay (1969, 168n ad loc.): “In the next line Gripus guesses the riddle”; Vogt-Spira (1995, 232): “As sharp as a razor, the slave concludes that he is then a *medicus*, a beggar” (“Der Sklave messerschärf schließt, dann sei er *medicus*, Bettler”); likewise Wilson (1998, 53): “Gripus solves that riddle for the whole audience in the clearest of terms.”

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 Merdicus, et Medicus* (‘But, because you wish to be called *cynicus* and *clinicus* at one and the same time, you can be *merdicus* 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’): *nunquid pro medico merdicus esse cupis?* (‘You don’t want to be *merdicus* 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 culo merdam aegrotante cacatam, non ementito merdicus ore vocor* (‘When I say that shit’s been crapped out of a fevered asshole, it’s fair to call me *merdicus*’).

(4) *Merdicus* 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 Placido Adriani’s *Zibaldone* of 1739 (III.9a = Thérault [1965, 122]), the buffoon Pulcinella, dressed as a doctor, cries *ego sum merdicus* (‘I am a *merdicus*!’) in a *para prosdokian* for *medicus*.

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

(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 = Previt -Orton [1932], 50) makes an *adulescens* cry out *en merdicum!* (‘Now *that’s* shitty!’), which is apparently the earliest attested nonface-tious usage of the word.<sup>15</sup>

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 *merdicus* is not itself attested in classical Latin. Perhaps it existed in subliterate 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 *merdicus* 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 *Μολοσσοικοί/moloss-ici*, *odioss-ici*, *incommodes-tici* *Capt.* 86–87), and *sicil-ic-issitat* (*Men.* 12). Indeed, the prologue speaker himself in *Poenulus* coins the term *imperator \*histr-icus* (*Poen.* 4; cf. *imperio historico* 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 *vīl(l)-icus* (from *villa*) puns on *vīl-is* ‘cheap.’ In addition, at *Eun.* 264 Terence coins the adjective *gnathon-icus* ‘Gnathonite, devotee of Gnatho’ from the parasite name *Gnatho*.<sup>16</sup>

Whether or not this alternate solution to Labrax’s riddle alludes specifically to the excrement-eating tendencies of the *λάβραξ* 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 *merdicus* 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.<sup>17</sup> 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. An instance in Plautus that I have already cited is *Capt.* 888, *Boius 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

16. On the suffix *-icus*, see LHS 1, 336–338 §303.I.

17. Legman (1968, 184) mentions examples only from the Renaissance, but Katz (2006, 166–167n28, 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.* 58.8–9 have the obscene solution “phallus,” as well as the respectable ones of (presumably) “foot,” “eye,” and “hair.”

15. Emphasis in bold typeface added in every case.

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 Penicylus’ rationale for his name in *Menaechmi*), 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 *merdicus* 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 Trachalio will be manumitted and will marry Ampelisca. 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 inspicietis vivom nisi vidulus mihi redditur. . . .  
cubitum hercle longis litteris signabo iam usquequaque,  
si quis perdiderit vidulum cum auro atque argento multo, 1295  
ad Gripum ut veniat. non feretis istum, ut postulatis. . . .
- LA. adeundus mihi illic est homo. di, quaeso, subvenite.
- GR. quid me intro revocas? hoc volo hic ante ostium extergere.  
nam hoc quidem pol e robigine, non est e ferro factum, 1300  
ita quanto magis extergeo rutilum, atque tenuius fit.  
nam quidem hoc venenatumst 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, 1295  
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! 1300  
The more I rub it, the redder and thinner it gets!  
Why, this cursed spit’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.<sup>18</sup> (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 (*venenatumst* Bothe: *venatust* B: *venenatust* CD) and instead returning to Turnebus’ once-popular *vere natum* ‘born in the springtime.’ The reason (though Turnebus 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).<sup>19</sup> In fearful response, Gripus has hastily picked up the first available object—one of the cattails littering the stage<sup>20</sup>—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 effrontery has gone too far and fears a

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 *veni! te . . .* offstage over Labrax’s word *subvenite* in 1298, with suggested aposiopesis of *volo conloqui* ‘I want to have a word with you’ (cf. *Amph.* 898, *Ps.* 245, *Ps.* 252; *Ep.* 23–24); voices from within a house are heard at *Hec.* 318 and *Most.* 515 (as corrected by Rost [1836, 136]), 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 (*harundinem*), 294 (*harundines*), 523 (*scirpus*), perhaps *tegillum* at 576 (see von S. Bradshaw [1973]), 732 (*iunci*), 1109 (*caudeam*), and 1133 (*caudeam*).





Greek nouns ἄκανθα 'thorn' or ἀκανθίων 'hedgehog.' In *Trinummus* Megaronides' name is presumably derived from Megara, but his prominent interest in the house (cf., e.g., *Trin.* 124–125) suggests a pun on μέγαρον 'house, shrine, aedes' + -ωνιδης, 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 Grip(h)us in *Rudens*. As a fisherman, Γρίφος or Γρίπος is an appropriate name: γρίφος means *rete* 'net,' and γρίπος 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 aspirated 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 Σκεπαρνίων '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*.<sup>23</sup> 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 nonscientific 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 Sceparnio, 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 *Poenulus* prologue speaker's allusion earlier of *Lycus* ~ *lupus* '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 ἐλκύδριον '(slight) sore.' Dionysius uses this word in the sense κάδος 'well bucket' because it looks as if it were a compound of ἔλκειν 'to draw (water)' and ὕδωρ 'water.' Another is βάλαντιον (βαλλάντιον) 'bag, pouch, purse' used in the meaning 'javelin, spear' because it seems to combine βάλλειν '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 μένει τὸν ἄνδρα 'awaits a husband.' Dionysius

also uses σκέπαρνον 'adze' as if it meant 'sheepskin' because it seems to blend σκεπᾶν 'to cover, protect' and ἀρῆν (gen. ἀρνός) 'sheep.'<sup>24</sup>

It is, of course, not 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 κεντεῖ ὄρρον 'pricks the rump.'<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, Plautus may well have known Dionysius' puns after all, since he seemingly alludes to a similar analysis of σκέπαρνον via Sceparnio'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 Σκεπαρν-ίων as a portmanteau of σκέπ-η 'covering' and ἀρν-εῖσθαι 'to refuse,' in the sense 'shelter denier.'<sup>26</sup>

### 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.<sup>27</sup> 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 Sceparnio's pun on *subaquilum* or Tranio's pun on *conivent* (in chapter 2), are hardly so; the way these puns are set up and delivered suggests that, so far from being obscurantist or private ironies, they are painfully obvious "rim-shot" jokes that everyone would laugh at. Both of these two jokes, which are

24. TrGF fr. 12.

25. Fr. *adesp.* 221.

26. *Rud.* 573–577; for Sceparnio's offer of a *tegillum* (which, *pace* Festus, is probably a roof tile or thatching, not a raincoat), cf. von S. Bradshaw (1973).

27. For bibliography, see Jocelyn (1999, 172n17).

23. Gellius, *N.A.* 12.6.1.

stylistically and *qualitatively* 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 *lucrum* 'financial gain, profit, advantage.' To some extent, references to *lucrum* are natural enough in context; it is Mercury himself who in his very first lines onstage points out the association of his name, *Merc-urius*, with *merc-imonium* 'merchandise' (1–3):

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

When shortly afterward the god says (19) *Iovis 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 *lucrum* (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 amplo auctare perpetuo lucro  
with a good and great profit forevermore . . .

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 forevermore." In 11–14 Mercury returns to the theme:

(nam vos quidem id iam scitis concessum et datum  
mi esse ab dis aliis, nuntiis praesim et lucro):  
haec ut me voltis adprobare, adnitier,  
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 amplo*, 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 *lucrum* than any other groups of people were.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, we saw in chapter 2 that in *Persa* Plautus likes to *pun* repeatedly on the word *lucrum* (*lucrifera* ~ *lucifera*, *Λοκρίς* ~ *lucrum*, 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 at 496–498, where he announces the entrance of Jupiter and Alcumena with a strange phrase whose oddity is highlighted by a double hiatus:

orationem comprimam: crepuit foris.  
Amphitryo subditivos eccum exit foras  
cum | Alcumena | —uxore usuraria.

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

Since assonances like *Ps.* 1107 *luxantur lustrantur* 'they go carousing, whorehousing' imply that *uxor* in certain registers of Latin might be pronounced *ussor*, Mercury may be punning on *usur-arius* as if it were itself derived from *uxor* (*ussor*), and he may thus mean to suggest that an *uxor usuraria* is a "wifely wife, a goody." Perhaps so, but as Mercury goes on to repeat this very same riddling phrase at vv. 980–981, he 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 unambiguous. For unlike the expression *mutuom sumere* (*rogare, quaerere*), which means 'to borrow unconditionally, to borrow interest-free' and as such forms the holy grail of Plautine *adulescentes* (*Ps.* 80, *Curc.* 68, etc.), the adjective *usurarius*, 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 *lucrum*, equivalent to *faenus*, the Greek equivalent of which is *τόκος*.<sup>29</sup> 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.'" Christenson (2000, 133–134n on 1–16) likewise speaks of a "typically Roman love of *lucrum*." Is the profit motive typically or even stereotypically Roman?

29. Note the equivalences recorded in glosses (*CGL* 4, 518.16 and 5, 410.54), *FENUS usura lucrum*.

word *τόκος* 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 *merdicus* or *lupinum* in *Poenulus*, the solution here harks back to those “eternal profit” clues (*lucrum perpetuum*, *lucrum perenne*) that Mercury established in his prologue: Jupiter is borrowing Alcmena, but he will give her back with a “*τόκος* 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 ocepit Alcumenam clam virum  
*usuram*que eiuis corporis cepit sibi,  
 et *gravidam* fecit is 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.’<sup>30</sup>

In addition, lest we miss it, the phrase *perenne lucrum* (= *Herculem*) 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 Alcumena*e* *usuram* corporis 1135  
 cepi, et concubitu *gravidam* feci filio. . . .  
 (sc. *is filius*) suis factis te inmortal*i* *adficiet* gloria. 1140

First of all, then, I borrowed the body of Alcumena 1135  
 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. 1140

In exchange for his having lent Alcumena’s body to Jupiter, Amphitryo will now obtain a *perenne lucrum*, a son (*filius* ~ *τόκος* ~ *lucrum*), who by his deeds will confer immortal (*immortal*i** ~ *perenne*, *perpetuo*) 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*, *perenne*) apply equally to Hercules himself. Ovid uses *perennis* of himself living eternally, appropriately enough in this context, in catasterized form (*Met.* 15.875). Moreover,

*perpetuus* is doubly appropriate for Hercules because Roman folk etymology connected *perpetuus* with *perpeti* ‘to endure much, suffer greatly.’<sup>31</sup> There were other hints, too: *Auctare* in v. 6 can in solemn language mean ‘to bless with a child’ (*Truc.* 516), and *suppetat* ‘be available’ in 14 may hint at *suppetiae* ‘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, *τόκος*, 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* ~ *ἰδρία* in *Rudens*.

Such is the riddle as I understand it, but it is worth considering the Latin phrasing a little more. In fact, *uxor 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 *ūsūr-ārius* ‘on loan (with interest required)’ exists the separate but semantically similar word *ūsū-ārius* ‘that which can be used, though is owned by another.’ The reason, then, for suspecting *uxor us-uraria* is *para prosdokian* for *uxor us-uararia* 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 *uxor usu-aria* would be a wife who spends an unnaturally “long night” with Jupiter (cf. *Amph.* 113, 279).<sup>32</sup> The final words of Mercury’s line (498) would thus run out, like Arcturus’ pun on *caelitum* (*Caeritum*) in *Rud.* 2, with a surprising echo of a familiar Roman legal institution; a compromise pronunciation such as *uxor \*ūsūrārīa* would assist his equivocation of the two words.

One might object that this further argument about *usuararia* is unnecessary for the riddle on *τόκος* 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 Encolpius inquires of his neighbor in Petronius’ *Satyricon* what the point of Trimalchio’s puzzling repetition of *carpe*, *carpe* is (cf. chapter 1).

31. Cf. Maltby (1991) s.v. *perpetuitas* (Nigidius).

32. On *usus* marriage, see *Lex XII* 6.4 (= Gaius *Inst.* 1.111 = *ROL* 3, 462) and Manigk in *RE* 14.2 cols. 1390–1392 s.v. ‘Manus.’

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 *usura corporis*.” Does he?

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 remind 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? equi poscit—**prandio?**  
hercle aestumavi **prandio cenatili.**  
ehem abnuistin? nemo **meliores** dabit,  
nulli **meliores** esse parasito sinam. 225

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!**  
(*silence*)

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! 225

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* (ἀριστον) which turns into *cena* (δείπνον) followed by an all-night *conuiuium*.”<sup>33</sup> Gelasimus’ expression *prandium cenatile* is thus not only intelligible in itself, though it is that too, but it is also, and more importantly, a transparent calque of ἀριστόδειπνον. And although the word may well have already appeared in the Menandrian 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, Trimalchio-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: *adnuistin* MSS), Plautus invites us to analyze the compound word in a different way: For if no one will give *better dinners* (*meliores cenas*) 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 ἄριστος ‘best’ rather than ἄριστον ‘breakfast’; the parasite is thus implying that he gives τὰ ἄριστα δείπνα ‘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.<sup>34</sup> We have seen some of the simpler ones already. One colorful designation for a parasite, for example, is κόλαξ ‘fawner, flatterer,’ which in chapter 1 I argue Terence puns on with the Latin word (possibly his own coinage) *colax*. The parasite in Greek comedy is often called ἀκκλητος ‘uninvited’: Plautus, translating this as *invocatus*, takes it as the basis for a pun (*Capt.* 70).<sup>35</sup> In *Ph.* 339 Terence even leaves untranslated the common parasite-tag ἀσύμβολος ‘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. 296, Menander fr. 625. The quote is from Gratwick (1993, 155n on 174–175).

34. Ribbeck (1883, 93–96) lists a number of them.

35. Cf. pp. 230–231 below.

language was not at all as tolerant of noun compounding as Greek was, might a priori develop a special interest in these words. We will return to this theme shortly.

One example is the word *παράσιτος* itself. As is well known, this word originally meant ‘companion of the feast.’ It was a title for religious dignitaries who received free board in exchange for performing certain cult duties. In Alexis’ comedy *Parasite*, this title was facetiously applied to a professional sponger, apparently for the first time, who had theretofore been known only as a *κόλαξ*. In the play, the name was facetiously reanalyzed to mean ‘side-feeder,’ and the felicitous catachresis eventually became a nickname for spongers in Greek generally.<sup>36</sup> That is the conclusion we draw from Alexis fr. 183.1–2 (*Παράσιτος*), where somebody says of a sponger:

καλοῦσι δ’ αὐτὸν πάντες οἱ νεώτεροι  
Παράσιτον ὑποκόρισμα· τῷ δ’ οὐδὲν μέλει.

All the young men call him  
“Parasite” as a nickname. But it doesn’t bother him.

It looks as if Plautus translates this buffoonish misuse in *Persa* when Satyrio greets Toxilus, from whom he hopes to obtain a meal, with these words (99–100; Woytek’s text):

o mi Iuppiter!  
terrestris te *coepulonus* compellat tuos. 100  
(*stepping up*) Ah, my Jupiter!  
Thy terrestrial *coepulonus* doth accost thee! 100

Satyrio’s jest hinges on the ambiguity of the word *epulo* (formerly *epolonus*, says Festus, 68 L, unless that is merely a scholium to this passage), which in Latin denotes both a “banqueter” and a Roman religious dignitary who supervised public feasts given in honor of various gods.<sup>37</sup> With *co-epulonus* (*hapax legomenon*, or Plautine coinage?), then, Satyrio apparently creates a calque of *παρά-σιτος*, thereby capturing the word’s religious denotation as well as drawing attention to the same etymological analysis of “eating with” that we find preserved in a scholium on *Eun.* 228, *PARASITUS sonat mecum cibatus vel apud me, quia παρά apud, σίτος cibus dictus est* “*παράσιτος*” means “one eating with me” or “at my house,” because *παρά* means “at my house,” and *σίτος* means “food.”<sup>38</sup> This definition, of course, completely misses the denotation ‘sponger,’ which the word usually means in ordinary discourse, but it incidentally demonstrates that Romans, quite naturally and as we would expect, sought to analyze Greek compound words according to their constituent parts.

36. So Arnott (1996, 542–544).

37. So Damon (1997, 49–50n30); on the *epulones*, cf. Woytek (1982, 86, 197n on v. 100), though he interprets vv. 99–100 differently.

38. For the scholium see Schlee (1893, 98). Since the scholiast was ignorant of Greek, the definition he preserves is much older (so Rand [1909, 383]).

Another colorful nickname that is frequently applied to hungry men in Greek comedy is *κεστρεύς* ‘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 *κεστρεύς* is thus naturally given to, among others, hungry parasites.<sup>39</sup> An allusion to this nickname seems to explain Satyrio’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 edacitate eos quisquam poterat vincere,  
neque eis cognomentum erat *viris capitonibus*. 60

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.” 60

*Viris capitonibus* is Woytek’s ingenious correction for the vexed paradox *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 *cognomentum* is not a surname but a sobriquet.<sup>40</sup> 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, Satyrio is giving us a fish riddle to puzzle over, but unlike that riddle, the solution here requires us to see the Greek word *κεστρεύς* (also called *κεφαλών*) behind the Latin word *capito*. The odd and unnatural agglutination of *virī-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 *άνήρ*, which idiomatically accepts an appositional noun to indicate a title or profession, such as *στρατιώτης άνήρ* ‘soldier boy’ (cf. LSJ s.v. *άνήρ* VI.1). Given, then, that “we” are in “Athens,” a Roman in the audience who knew Greek would probably therefore recognize *virī capitonēs* as a Greekish translationese rendering of *άνδρες κεστρεῖς*, a phrase that appears in Aristophanes fr. 159 (*Γηρυτάδης*); the prefix of *co-gnomentum*, if literally analyzed, like *co-epulonus*, 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):

39. Ribbeck (1883, 39); cf. Hunter (1983, 159) on Eubulus fr. 68 KA (*Ναυσικάα*).

40. See Woytek (1973) on the history of the passage, to which I am also indebted for the parallels.

You kindly come out of the kitchen (*culina*), you rogue! 1  
 Showing me that silver tongue of yours amongst your saucepans! (*patinas*) . . . 2  
 Come out, come out, I say, you aroma greedling (*nidoricupi*). What the  
 hell are you skulking for? 5

Ritschl's emendation *nidoricupi*, here rendered 'aroma greedling' to show that it is a nonce coinage from *nidor* + *cupere*, is not certain (*nidore cupinam* BCFZ : *culinē* B<sup>2</sup> : 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 *κνισός* 'fatty aroma of roasted meat' (~ *nidor* 'savory aroma, smell of roasted meat') that later attracted Athenaeus' attention, such as *κνισολιχός* 'aroma licker, gourmand,' *κνισοτηρητής* 'aroma chaser' (*com. adesp.* 622), or *κνισοκόλαξ* 'aroma flatterer' (in the elegies of Asius of Samos, referring to a parasite).<sup>41</sup>

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 *Menaechmi*

In his entrance monologue in *Menaechmi*, Penicylus describes his young patron with these words (100):

ita est **adulēscens**; ipso *éscae* maxumae 100  
 Here's the sort of **young fellow** he is: a splendid **trencherman** himself 100

Penicylus' assonance creates an association of *adulēscens* 'young man' and *esca* 'food.' Since in the preceding lines he had just advised us that *esca* and *vincla escaria* 'food chains' constitute the surest way of chaining up a man (vv. 88, 94), since he mentions *esca* again in his monologue at v. 457 (*qui-escas* 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 *esca* 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 Penicylus finally spots Menaechmus entering the stage. Although Menaechmus 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 Penicylus, 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 Menaechmus makes the following replies (with Penicylus' rejoinders):

1. (494) MEN. **adulēscens**, quaeso, quid tibi mecum est rei . . . ?  
 MEN. (*with dignity*) **Sir**, what have you to do with me, pray . . . ?
2. (498–499) MEN. responde, **adulēscens**, 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. tuom **parasitum** non novisti?  
 MEN. non tibi 505  
 sanum est, **adulēscens**, sinciput, intellego.  
 PEN. You don't know your own **parasite**?  
 MEN. **Sir**, your 505  
 headpiece is out of order, I perceive.

These three repetitions of the word *adulēscens* in short succession arouse some suspicion. It is of course true that Menaechmus really does not know the parasite's name, and any unfamiliar man not deemed a *senex* can in Plautus be addressed as *adulēscens*.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, it is also true that as a parasite, Penicylus is primarily a *γελωτοποιός*, like Gelasimus in *Stichus*, rather than a flatterer like Artotrogus in *Miles Gloriosus* or Gnatho in Terence's *Eunuchus*. However, Messenio has already warned Menaechmus that cheats and flatterers 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 Penicylus willingly resorts to flattery (138, 148–150, 157, 162), and (iii) Menaechmus' increasingly irritated repetition of *adulēscens*, collectively suggests that Menaechmus is punning on *ādūlēscens* in the third instance as if it were a portmanteau of *ādūl-ātor* (properly *ādūlātor*, but with iambic shortening, as in *volūptātem*) and *esc-a*, meaning 'one who abjectly fawns or flatters for food.' This disparaging term in turn, I suggest, forms a calque of *ψωμοκόλαξ* '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 *ψωμοκολακείειν* 'to flatter for food' from comedies of Aristophanes (fr. 172),

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

42. Dickey (2002, 254–255).

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	~	ψωμός
ADULESCENS	~	ψωμοκόλαξ

The ironic point of the portmanteau is that Menaechmus is thus simultaneously saying in vv. 505–506 “I know, sir/you ψωμοκόλαξ, that 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.’<sup>43</sup>

### 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 λοχῶν ‘to lurk, loiter.’<sup>44</sup> (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*):

κάπειθ' ἵνα μὴ πρὸς τοῖσι βωμοῖς πανταχοῦ  
 ἀεὶ λοχῶντες βωμολόχοι καλώμεθα,  
 ἐποίησεν ὁ Ζεὺς καπνοδόκην μεγάλην πάνυ.

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

*Pace* Harpocration (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

43. *Decl. min.* 296.1.6. The parasite in Alciphron *Epist.* 3.27.2 considers the name κόλαξ an insult (ὄνειδος) to himself. For the equation of κόλαξ and *adulator* (a strong and insulting word that Plautus' parasites eschew), cf. L. Cassius Hemina (*fl.* c. 150 BC) fr. 43 Santini = 40 Peter<sup>2</sup> *adulatique erant ab amicis atque adhortati* ‘they had been flattered and exhorted by their friends,’ quoted by Priscian, who glosses *adulati* (here passive) as *κολακευθέντες* ‘having been flattered’ (*Inst. Gramm.* 8.15 = *GL* 2, 380.1–2; Santini [1995, 198]). At *Cist.* 93 *blanditiis* translates Menander's word *κολακεύων* (fr. 337.4, from *Συναριστώσαι* [= fr. 1.4 Arnott]), but the context there is not disparaging.

44. On the βωμολόχος in general, see Frontisi-Ducroux (1984, 30–49, esp. 30–35); in Aristophanes, Süß (1905, 55–101, esp. 56–58); in later comedy, Haile (1913).

(*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 βωμολόχος 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. 490

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.<sup>45</sup> 490

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 discomfiture*) 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. 1095  
 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 occupassis... aram*), for heaven's sake!

The repetition of *aram occupare* in quick succession seems to suggest that at least in the Greek *Φάσμα* (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. *scurra* ‘buffoon,’ referring to Tranio, in v. 15).<sup>46</sup>

45. See Costa Ramalho (1959–1960).

46. So E. W. Fay (1903, 260), who notes on p. 253 that Horace calls a jackdaw a *cornicula*, a diminutive of *cornix* (*Epist.* 1.3.29). Fay further suggests (254–255, 259), perhaps rightly, that at v. 839 (Theopropides speaks) *nullam pictam conspicio hic avem* ‘no picture of a bird at all do I perceive here,’ *pictam avem*, which refers to Tranio, puns on *pīcam* ‘magpie,’ which is also a bird of the crow 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 *βωμολόχος* 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 *scurra* 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 *βωμολοχία* in *Rudens* and *Stichus*

In Catullus c. 66.29–30, the lock 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 ullum  
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 her "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."<sup>47</sup> 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! 115

(calling) Hey there, wait, Astaphium, before you go! 115

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.<sup>48</sup> 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 adsiste!*, and Pacuvius fr. 202 R<sup>3</sup> (*Iliona*) = 211 ROL 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 bilingually on the name *Ἀστάφιον* ('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*.<sup>49</sup>

47. Fodor and Inoue (1998, 101). Seneca says that in Sallust's acme *anputatae sententiae et verba ante expectatum cadentia et obscura brevitatis fuere 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.* 765, *As.* 229, *Aul.* 655, *Men.* 179–180, *Merc.* 474, 928, *Ps.* 240; Terence *Ad.* 264, *Haut.* 613, 736, and *Hec.* 495–496; the doubled command is often found near *abire*. To judge from Wartena (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 *conigeram* 'cone bearing' to *cornigeram* '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 βωμολόχος. 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, 140  
iubere meliust prandium ornari domi.

I say, you—hanging around shrines for the sake of your belly— 140  
Better let 'em get up a lunch for you at home.

Sceparnio's phrase *fana ventris caussa circumis* evidently translates the analyzed etymology of βωμολόχος.<sup>50</sup> 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.<sup>51</sup> 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 *fanum 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 fanum*)—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 fanum* 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. 95

The expression *Veneris fanum* 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 *fanum Veneris* qui mulierculas  
duas secum adduxit, quique adornaret sibi  
ut rem divinam faciat, aut hodie aut heri. 130

Here, I mean—to the *shrine of Venus*, a fellow  
that brought along two girls, and was preparing  
to offer sacrifice—today or yesterday? 130

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 coughs over an insult, and pronouncing *fana ven-tris* as *fana vēn'tēris* to echo and counter on Plesidippus' *fanum Ven-eris*. 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 fanum Veneris caussa circumis*. And this equivocate is very much based on the pronunciation of the words *ventris* and *veneris*, which sound almost identical."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>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 vēn'tēris* and then pauses against the syntax, and perhaps with a gesture toward the shrine (as in v. 61), the slave encourages us to construe *vē n'tēris* with *fanum*, and that mistake then forces us to construe *caussā* as absolute, in anticipation of an *ut* (cf. *eā 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 vēn'tēris . . . 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 βωμολόχος. The joke is then ironic, and we are left to make the connection for ourselves.

50. Acidalius (1607, 435).

51. For example, Marx (1928, 82n on 140–147): "[T]he verse [sc. 140] seems like an infelicitous attempt to render the Greek word βωμολόχος in Latin" ("daß der Vers den Eindruck eines wenig glücklichen Versuchs macht, das griechische Wort βωμολόχος ins Lateinische zu übersetzen").

52. Le Fèvre (1691, vol. 2, 275n on 52): "Plesidippe [sic] n'y répond point, parce qu'il ne l'a pas entendu, & que Sceparnion a prononcé ces paroles, comme s'il av<a>it dit, *qui fanum Veneris caussa circumis*. Et cette equivoque [sic, for é-] est fort bien fondée sur la prononciation des mots *ventris* & *veneris*, qui font presque le mesme 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.<sup>53</sup> 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*, Astaphium in *Truculentus*). 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

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.

had contained the keyword *aqua*, which set up the pun on *subaquilum*, so had Panegyris here in *Stichus* instructed Crocotium to fetch the parasite using the same word, *arcessito* (v. 150), which recurs in v. 196 in the form *arcessitum*.

The other reason that suspicion falls on *arcessitum* 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> 1065  
lenonem extrusisti

that pimp you ran out of the temple 1065  
a while ago

(3) (*Bacch.* 214):

etiam Epidicum, quam ego fabulam aequae ac me ipsum amo

Even the *Epidicus*—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.<sup>54</sup> 155

He himself is coming out. This is that delightful old gentleman I was  
speaking of. 155

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 (*arcessitum*)

54. *SENEM* A and Lindsay: *senex est* 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: Crocotium'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 *arcessitus*..." Plautus uses this equivocal supine-as-a-noun trick at *Cas.* 853, too, where a pun is made on *cubitum* (supine of *cubare*) and *cubito* (ablative of *cubitum* 'elbow'). Crocotium then says *missa sum*, which she might have followed with *ut arcesserem*, 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?

Crocotium'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-calque of βωμ-ο-λόχος 'buffoon, jester':

ARA	~	βωμός
CESSARE	~	λοχᾶν
ARCESSITUS	~	βωμολόχος

The compound *ar-cess-itus* (= *qui in ara/apud aram cessat*), which is morphologically like *fun-ambulus* '(tight)rope walker' (= *qui per funem ambulat*) (*Hec.* 4), thus resembles a number of other humorous coinages found in Plautus, such as *bustirapus* 'tomb robber' (*Ps.* 361), *Virgines-vend-onides* 'girl seller' (*Persa* 702), *plagipatida* 'buffet bearer' (*Capt.* 472, *Most.* 356), *loculiripidae* 'purse snatchers'<sup>55</sup> and *cruricrepidae* 'rattleshins' (*Trin.* 1021), and so on, most of which are, like \**arcessitus* 'altar loiterer,' colorful terms of abuse.<sup>56</sup> Even the omission of the compositional vowel *i* (i.e., \**aricessitus*) 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 *arcessere* from *arceo cessare*.<sup>57</sup> The obvious difference with these latter words, of course, is that they are unmistakably comical coinages, whereas *arcessitus* is a real word that I am arguing is misused in a facetious way, much as *infelicet* in *Rud.* 1225 is comically used to mean 'put an end to him saying *licet*.' What then would lead us to interpret Crocotium's word this way?

Verbal cues alone might prompt us to equate Gelasimus with a βωμολόχος. Gelasimus repeatedly uses the word *ridiculus* (171, 175,<sup>58</sup> 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 γελωτοποιός, but also to βωμολόχος.<sup>59</sup> What is more, there is arguably a visual cue to direct our thoughts toward the word βωμολόχος. The typical Greek family customarily maintained an altar in front of its house; in Greek, this domestic altar is called the ἀγνιεύς βωμός; in Latin, it is simply called an *ara*.<sup>60</sup> These altars often appear onstage in other Plautine comedies. Although no explicit mention of an altar is made in *Stichus*, the stagefront of *Stichus* does feature 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 Crocotium's announcement an ironic pun on *ar-cess-itus* as a hyperliteral translation of βωμ-ο-λόχος.<sup>61</sup>

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 *palliata*. 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."<sup>62</sup> 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:

59. See Ribbeck (1883, 36); cf. Petersmann (1973, 122n on v. 171), quoting Ritschl (1866–1879, vol. 2, 411).

60. Pollux *Onom.* 4.123, with Saunders (1911, 93–95, 103).

61. I append here a note on the parasite's name. Fraenkel (2007, 26, 297n24) argues that Γελάσιμος was almost certainly not the parasite's name in Menander's play. Perhaps, then, Menander's parasite was named Γεράσιμος (*Gerasimus*); this suggestion is necessarily speculative, but apart from the obvious pun on γελάσιμος that Γεράσιμος would make (for the confusion of lambda and rho, cf., e.g., Aristophanes *Vesp.* 44–46 and Plautus' *Rud.* 2), the name, which means 'venerable, majestic, aged, signore, don,' is a real name (attested in Priene before 135 BC; Rumscheid [2006, 214–215, 384]); it is richly suggestive of γέρας 'priest's portion of meat at sacrifice' (LSJ s.v. 3); and in Greek the religious connection between a priestly παράσιτος and his γέρας would be clearer (cf. Timocles fr. 8.16–19).

62. Scafoglio (2005, 635), an extremist view; for a wealth of counterevidence, see Handley (1975).

55. So Gratwick (1981, 346): *oculicrepidae* MSS.

56. For these and similar object-verb compounds, see LHS 1, 394 §336.2; with borrowed Greek endings, LHS 1, 458 §365.E. For *cessare* 'delay, loiter,' cf. esp. *Eun.* 265 (Gnatho's monologue) and the parallels gathered by Barsby (1999, 134n ad loc.).

57. See Maltby (1991, 47) s.v. *arcesso* ('Sergius'). LHS 1, 390–391 §334.1.c. lists other verbs lacking the compositional vowel.

58. *St.* 175 is numbered 176 in Lindsay's text; see pp. 239–240 below.

[I]t 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.<sup>63</sup> 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.<sup>64</sup>

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.<sup>65</sup> 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.<sup>66</sup> 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.<sup>67</sup> Meanwhile, Rome's urban population in the time of Plautus has recently been estimated at about 350,000 persons.<sup>68</sup> 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

63. By *technitai* Gentili here refers to "the Technicians of Dionysus" (οἱ περὶ τὸν Διόνυσον τεχνῖται), the itinerant Greek-speaking dramatists in whose service Varro claimed Plautus had begun his career outside of Rome (Gellius N.A. 3.3.14, with N.A. 20.4). On the τεχνῖται, see Le Guen (2001) and Aneziri (2003).

64. Gentili (1979, 31–32). Csapo (1987, 406n12) dismisses Gentili's idea without argument.

65. See Moore (1998, 9–10), with references.

66. Wilson (1998, 7–53, esp. 18–36).

67. Goldberg (1998, 14).

68. MacMullen (1991, 420–421); Moore (1998, 204) rejects these estimates, but without argument or counter-estimates.

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 BC, 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.<sup>69</sup> 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,<sup>70</sup> 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 leisured 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.<sup>71</sup> 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

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. 663 and 686.

71. Goldberg (2005, 44; cf. 43).

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.<sup>72</sup> 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 *palliata* 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.<sup>73</sup> 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 *Menaechmi* 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 nativize the evaluative terms *graecissare* (ἐλληνίζειν) and *atticissare* (ἄττικίζειν), 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 ἄττικίζειν, is *Attice loqui* ‘to speak the Attic dialect of Greek,’ a term which implies a contrast with *graecissare*/ἐλληνίζειν ‘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 no doubt explains 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 *Menaechmi*: *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 ulla 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 (Cyrene was a Greek colony), he proudly replies, *immo Athenis natus altusque educatusque Atticis* ‘Not I. I was born and bred and reared in Attic Athens.’ Indirectly, then, the joke in *Menaechmi* 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 *oecumene*, and since this syllabus was probably already used in Rome for educational purposes before the end of the Second Punic War (218–201 BC),<sup>74</sup> 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 (Athenian) 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 (1972, *passim*).

74. On the Hellenistic syllabus, see Criboire (2001, 192–205, esp. 199–201 [on Menander] and 201–202 [on Callimachus and Sappho]) and Marrou (1956, 162–164); *contra*, T. Morgan (1998), but see Criboire (2001). On its use in Rome before the end of the Second Punic War, see Dunsch (1999, 119–124, esp. 121). I discuss Menander, Sappho, and Callimachus at greater length below.

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 Ἰσοκράτους μαθητῶν*).<sup>75</sup> 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.<sup>76</sup> The authors included on the Hellenistic syllabus for oratory were reasonably standard, and along with Demosthenes, one commonly studied school author was Hyperides.<sup>77</sup> 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* (*Ἔπερ Φρύνης ἀσεβείας*, 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.<sup>78</sup>

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, ensnaring 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.<sup>79</sup>

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

75. Bollansée (1999b, 15). For the fragment, cf. Hermippus fr. 46 Bollansée (1999a).

76. Leeman (1963, 1, 25, and *passim*).

77. Cf. Criboire (2001, 234–235).

78. Ps.-Longinus *De subl.* 34.3; Quintilian *Inst.* 2.15.9; 10.5.2, 1.5.61 = *ORF* 1, 533 frs. 21–22 (Messalla Corvinus).

79. On the affair, see Livy 39.8–19 and, among many others, Pailler (1988) and Gruen (1990, 34–78). On the eerie resemblance of Livy's account to the plots of New Comedy, see Scafuro (1989).

plausibly suggested.<sup>80</sup> 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 Annia 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.<sup>81</sup>

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 Phrynesium. We recall that Phryne, for whom Phrynesium is named, was put on trial specifically for *ἀσεβεία* (impiety). She was charged with importing to Athens the worship of Isodaites, 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 *κωμάσασαν ἀναιδῶς, καινοῦ θεοῦ εἰσηγήτριαν, θιάσους ἀνδρῶν ἐκθέσμοις καὶ γυναικῶν συναγαγοῦσαν* 'reveled shamelessly, introduced a new god, and had led illegal revel-bands (*thiasoi*) of men and women.'<sup>82</sup> This final charge of gender mixing in the revel (*θιάσους ἀνδρῶν ἐκθέσμοις 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

80. 189: Enk (1953, vol. 1, 28–30) and Musso (1969); 186: Kruse (1974, 23) and others quoted in Enk (1953, vol. 1, 28–30).

81. *CIL* 1<sup>2</sup> 581 (= *ROL* 4, 2.26 [pp. 254–259]), line 7. On the centrality of gender mixing, see Dutsch (2008, 170–171).

82. *Anon. Seg.* §215 (= Patillon [2005, 41]).

prominently, *Bacch.* 53, 56, and 371–372, in a pun on the name Bacchis, but none of these references unambiguously refers to the Roman rather than the Greek cult of Bacchus. (Plautus' *Baccharia* 'The Comedy of the Bacchant[s]' presumably portrayed Greek bacchantes and must have touched on similar themes, but the four lines of a hungry parasite's monologue of which the sole surviving fragment is comprised give no indication of the contents or themes of the rest of the play.<sup>83</sup>)

If, on the other hand, *Truculentus* dates to a few years earlier, which seems on balance likely, we face the rather more disturbing possibility that we have cause and effect backward, and that life imitated art: That is to say, that Plautus' evil courtesan bears some responsibility for bringing the cultic activities of her historical namesake to new or renewed attention among the senatorial members of Plautus' audience and for catalyzing their fears to action. Just as Plato's Socrates plausibly claims in the *Apology* that Aristophanes' *Clouds* had prejudiced the jury's opinion of his character and activities (*Apol.* 19c), I think it likely that Plautus' portrayal of Phrynesium in *Truculentus* induced some segments of the Roman senate to investigate allegations that Paculla Annia's innovations in the Bacchic cult were ensnaring the young men of Rome in licentious activities, and was responsible for triggering the moral panic that ensued.

This argument cannot, of course, rise above the level of hypothesis; the coincidence of *tympanorum pulsus* in Livy's account (39.10) and *tympanotribam* (that is, Diniarchus) in Plautus' (*Truc.* 611) is striking, but hardly conclusive. Yet this hypothesis accords in all respects with our given information about Paculla, with Livy's account of the senatorial action, and with the epigraphic record. Moreover, if it is correct, then the senatorial prohibition of gender mixing in the Bacchic rites in Rome suggests that Hyperides' speech itself is the most likely source for the knowledge among Roman senatorial circles of the charges made in Phryne's trial for ἀσέβεια.

Apart from the *senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus* inscription, there is hardly any independent evidence to illuminate historical events in Plautus' time. When, then, we attempt to assess what other Greek literary works the members of Plautus' audience may or may not have known, we come up against a wall of silence. We are thus forced to consider the internal evidence of the comedies themselves, but most of it is highly ambiguous. Plautus' plays do contain direct references to famous authors of Greek New Comedy (e.g., *Most.* 1149–1151) and to Euripides (*Rud.* 86). These references might be taken as evidence that his audience was intimately familiar with Hellenistic culture and its drama from having studied texts in school:

83. Plautus frs. 17–21 Monda (*Baccharia*). Ritschl (1866–1879, vol. 3, 198–202), followed by subsequent editors, alters *Baccharia*, the title transmitted by Macrobius (*Sat.* 3.16.1–2), to *Bacaria* 'The Comedy of the Berry.' Ritschl derives this title from Latin *bacca* 'berry,' and thinks it might refer to a pearl or pearls used as a token of recognition. His arguments are not persuasive: While the comedian himself certainly wrote *Baccharia*, 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 Βάκχαι by Diocles (frs. 1–5), Lysippus (frs. 1–7), both of Old comedy, and Antiphanes (fr. 58).

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 *tragoedia* in Plautus and Terence; *ars musica*, *prölogus*, *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.<sup>84</sup> 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 nonnativized 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' (*Bacch.* 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

84. Gentili (1979, 15–41); on the authors of the syllabus, see n. 74 above; on Hellenistic terms of literary criticism in Roman Comedy, see Dunsch (1999, 119–124).



literature, to works that are not often discussed in connection with Plautus but which formed part of the standard syllabus of Greek learning in the Hellenistic world. If certain Greek words seem to allude via multiple significances to Greek literature *and* if Plautine innovations seem to certify the allusion, we might be able to throw light on the intellectual climate among Plautus' ideal audience.

The following discussions, which merely extend some observations that other scholars have already made, are offered as a step in this direction. I begin with Greek names.

### 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 Silanon, 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 *Λευκαδία* (fr. 1.11–14 Arnott), 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 *φαίνεται μοι* ode by the first-century authors Valerius Aedituus, Lucretius, and Catullus.<sup>85</sup> 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.<sup>86</sup> In it, a character's explicit comparison of the amorous soldier to

85. Sappho fr. 31 Campbell (printed below); Aedituus *FLP* fr. 1 = Gellius *N.A.* 19.9.11; Lucretius *DRN* 3.152–158, Catullus c. 51.

86. The allusion was first spotted by Marzullo (1994, 234n4), 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 *tam mulieres ut 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.

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 *φαίνεται μοι* poem.

What makes the allusion unmistakable is precisely the name *Ἀκροτελεύτιον* '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 (*illo*), 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 *ἄκρον* 'height, peak,' *τελευτή* 'death,' and the hypocoristic suffix *-ιον*. The name thus ironically alludes to Sappho's legendary suicide.<sup>87</sup>

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 *κῆνος* 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 meos <meu> defit*)
- MILPH. (*after a moment of mystification*) Heavens! You've spied the soldier!  
(*militem pol tu aspexisti.*)
- ACR. Yes!

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

- MILPH. verbum edepol facere non potis, si accesserit prope ad te. 1270  
dum te obtuetur, interim linguam oculi praeciderunt. . . . 1271  
ut tremit! atque extimuit, 1272

87. This point, which in my view is the key to the interpretation, was noted by M. Parca (reported in Traill [2005, 531n52]).

	postquam te aspexit.	1273
MILPH.	(to Soldier) Dear me, sir, she won't be able to utter a single word if she once comes near you.	1270
	While she gazes upon you, sir, her eyes have meanwhile cut off her tongue. . . .	1271
	How tremulous and terror stricken she was	1272
	when she beheld you!	1273

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 vulgate text current in Hellenistic times (see below); I liberally adapt his translation:

	φαίνεται μοι κῆνος ἴσος θεοῖσιν ἔμμεν' ὄνηρ, ὅττις ἐναντίος τοι ἰσδάνει καὶ πλάσιον ἄδου φωνεί- σας ὑπακούει	
	καὶ γελαίσας ἰμέροεν, τό μ' ἦ μὰν καρδίαν ἐν στήθεσιν ἐπτόαισεν· ὡς γὰρ ἔς σ' ἴδω βρόχε', ὡς με φώναι- σ' οὐδ' ἐν ἔτ' εἴκει,	5
	ἀλλὰ κάμ μὲν γλῶσσά <μ' > ἔαγε, λέπτον δ' αὐτικά χρῶ πῦρ ὑπαδεδρόμηκεν, ὀππάτεσσι δ' οὐδ' ἐν ὄρημμ', ἐπιρρόμ- βεισι δ' ἄκουαι,	10
	καὶ δέ μ' ἴδρωσ κακχέεται, τρόμος δὲ παῖσαν ἄγρει, χλωροτέρα δὲ ποίας ἔμμι, τεθνάκην δ' ὀλίγω 'πιδεύης φαίνομ' ἔμ' αὐτ[α].	15

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:

(1)	postquam te aspexit	~	ὡς γὰρ ἔς σ' ἴδω
(2)	tremat atque extimuit	~	τρόμος δὲ παῖσαν ἄγρει, χλωροτέρα δὲ ποίας ἔμμι <sup>88</sup>
(3)	dum te obtuetur, linguam oculi praeciderunt	~	ὡς γὰρ ἔς σ' ἴδω . . . γλῶσσα <μ' > ἔαγε <sup>89</sup>
(4)	verbum facere non potis	~	φώναισ' οὐδ' ἐν ἔτ' εἴκει
(5)	ita animus per oculos meos <meū > defit	~	ὀππάτεσσι δ' οὐδ' ἐν ὄρημμ'
(6)	si accesserit prope ad te	~	ἐναντίος τοι ἰσδάνει καὶ πλάσιον

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 *Gorgylia*, which I tentatively outline here. At *Curc.* 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 Veneriis vadimoniis?  
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 (*vadimoniis, sisto; abalienaverit*, 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, Lesbia, aspexi nihil est super mi <vocis in ore>* etc. (51.6–8).

89. Whatever Sappho wrote, Plautus' text obviously had *ἔαγε* 'shattered, is broken,' as did Lucretius, who renders it *infringi* (3.155); for *praecidere* 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 ὄννηρ ὅστις ἐναντιός τοι ἰσδάνει. This time, however, it is Phaedromus who is Sappho's ὄννηρ, 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 ἴσος θεοῖσιν 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 *ipsu' se excruciat 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.* 10.1–3), singles out αἰ ἐρωτικαὶ μανίαι '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 (*παῖσαν* ~ *totum*) and specious (*dum licet* ~ ἔτ' εἴκει), as well as etymologically related sound correspondences (*lepida* ~ λέπτον; *sistas* ~ ἰσδάνει) 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.<sup>90</sup> 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 ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα in *Odyssey* 1.1 as *virum mihi, Camena, insece*, in which Andronicus replicates the word order almost exactly and renders ἔννεπε by *insece* (i.e., *in-seque* 'pursue [the narration]'), since he connects ἔννεπε with the active form of ἐν-επέσθαι '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 μῆνιν 'rage,' the first word of Homer's *Iliad* (1.1).<sup>91</sup> Virgil's *ar-ma virumque* 'Arms and the man' at the start of the *Aeneid* similarly alludes to the first syllable of Apollonius' *Argonautica*, ἀρ-χόμενος σέο 'Beginning with you.'<sup>92</sup> Accordingly, in Plautus' *Gorgylion* the name Phaedromus (*Φαίδρομος*, ?haplology of *Φαίδρ-ό-δρομος* 'splendid colonnade?'), if pronounced *Phae-dromus* with a pause after the first syllable, evokes the *φαί-νεται* that begins Sappho's poem, just as in a subtler way *-dromus* might pick up Sappho's ὑπα-δεδρόμηκεν (v. 10). Astral connotations of the name Planēsium (*Πλαν-ήσιον* 'Little Miss Wanderer,' better so analyzed than *Πλανήσιον*) 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 *φαίνεταί 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 *Λευκαδία* 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' *Pseudylus* is in order.

### Pseudylus as Callimachus

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

90. Radif (2005) sees in Phaedromus' priamel at *Curc.* 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).

91. Andronicus *Odys.* fr. 1 = *ROL* fr. 1; Virgil *Aen.* 1.37, with Levitan (1993); on the evocative power of poetic "incipits," see especially Conte (1986, 35n5, 70ff).

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 (*Ps.* 401–405):

sed quasi poeta, tabulas quom cepit sibi,  
quaerit quod nusquam gentiumst, reperit tamen,  
facit illud veri simile quod mendacium est,  
nunc ego poeta fiam: viginti minas,  
quae nunc nusquam sunt gentium, inveniam tamen. 405

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 mnas,  
which are nowhere on this earth now, yet I'll discover them. 405

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 Pseudylus speaks, is Plautus, and that the slave is therefore becoming "Pseudolus-Plautus."<sup>93</sup> 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 *ψεύδεα ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα* 'lies that look true.'<sup>94</sup>

This is wrong; Pseudylus 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 Pseudylus instead evokes a famous passage in Callimachus' *Aetia*,<sup>95</sup> in which the poet recounts the following experience (fr. 1.1.21–24 Pfeiffer):

καὶ γὰρ ὅτ' ἐπερλώτιστον ἐμοῖς ἐπὶ δέλτον ἔθηκα  
γούνασιν, Ἀ[πό]λλων εἶπεν ὁ μοι Λύκιος  
".....]... ἀοιδέ, τὸ μὲν θύος ὅττι πάχιστον  
θρέψαι, τῆ]ν Μοῦσαν δ' ὠγαθὲ λεπταλέην"

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, slender."

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

93. Hunter (2006, 82).

94. *Theog.* 27.

95. Farrell (1991, 298), who also notes the influence of the passage on Ennius.

96. Hunter (2006, 82n6).

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.<sup>97</sup> 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 *Pseudylus* was staged (191 BC). Moreover, as Farrell points out, apart from the correspondence between Plautus' *tabulas* and Callimachus' δέλτοι, the stress in Plautus' passage is on Pseudylus' *becoming* a poet.

The convergence of these ideas suggests that Pseudylus' 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):

ψευδοίμην αἰόντος ἃ κεν πεπίθοιεν ἀκούην.

May I lie in such a way as persuades the listener's ear!

This sentiment seems eminently suitable for Plautus' slave *Ψευδύλος*, and not only because in his name the idea of lying (*ψεῦδος*) predominates. The primary reason for thinking so is that it bears on Pseudylus' equivocations on *ναὶ γάρ/negar(e)* 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 Pseudylus exclaims:

ὦ Ζεῦ, quam pauci estis homines commodi!<sup>98</sup>

(*aside*) ὦ Ζεῦ! [*Greek*: O Zeus!] How few you are, you men with the proper spirit!

Characters in Greek drama frequently exclaim (ὦ) Ζεῦ. In Roman comedy, however, this exclamation is highly irregular: As a rule, Plautine characters, Pseudylus 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 words ὦ Ζεῦ pun on ὄζειν 'to smell (badly).'<sup>99</sup> Although Plautus probably found this pun in *Casina* 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 ὦ 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 Pseudylus to switch codes here. Certainly the switch suddenly brings the Greekness of this slave, whose name

97. Criore (2001, 201–202).

98. Willcock (1987)'s text, who admits hiatus before *estis* and moves the MSS' *em* at line-end to the start of the next line; Lindsay retains *em* and writes ὦ 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):

Ζεῦ, σὲ μὲν Ἰδαίοισιν ἐν οὔρεσσι φασὶ γενέσθαι,  
Ζεῦ, σὲ δ' ἐν Ἀρκαδίῃ· πότεροι, πάτερ, ἐψεύσαντο;

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 ὦ Ζεῦ to add an Alexandrian *σφραγίς* 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.

## 5

### Double Entendre

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 *cacemphaton* (κακέμφατον), and Cicero and Quintilian give interesting treatments of it.<sup>1</sup> 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,<sup>2</sup> 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

1. For the restricted use of the term, cf. Freud (1960a, 40) and many authors since. On *cacemphaton*, cf. Cicero *Fam.* 9.22 (= 189 Shackleton Bailey) with Wendt (1929) and Quintilian *Inst.* 8.3.44–47. Ritter (1835) remains the most valuable modern discussion of it.

2. Gurlitt (1913, 1920–1922, 1921) finds double entendre and verbal obscenity everywhere in Plautus. With the two exceptions noted below, I do not accept any of his suggestions, many of which involve puns that (to my ear) do not sound very much alike and some of which do not construe syntactically. Brinkhoff (1935, 14–16) discusses these and some of the other problems with Gurlitt's work.