

Chapter 14.1: Plautus

Early Roman Literary Drama

- beginning of Latin literature: **Livius Andronicus** translated Homer's *Odyssey* into Latin (**240 BCE**)
 - Livius Andronicus: Greek-speaking slave living in the house of the Livii (Roman *gens*)
 - also translated Greek tragedies and comedies into Latin and had these dramas produced on stage

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Early Roman Literary Drama

- Why do Romans translate Greek drama?
Why don't they write their own?
 - because they can! No copyright laws!!
 - also, Greek drama brings with it complex but coherent plots, especially New Comedy
- n.b. Greek comedies also imported native Athenian customs which made no sense to Romans, so some adaptation was necessary to make Greek comedy viable in Rome

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Early Roman Literary Drama

- these early Roman literary dramas were produced at festivals, e.g. ***Ludi Romani***
- one of the first famous playwrights of the Roman stage was **Gnaeus Naevius**
 - produced tragedies and comedies
 - also injected current events into his drama and made powerful enemies among the elite
- n.b. early tendency toward “Romanization”

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Titus Maccius Plautus

- first real “star” of the Roman stage was **Titus Maccius Plautus**
 - a joke name based on aristocratic nomenclature
 - “Dick Bozo Flatfoot”
- little is known about Plautus’ life
 - probably from the lower classes
 - first known professional playwright!
- highly successful dramatist

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Plautine Comedy

- same milieu as New Comedy: mostly, suburban middle-class “characters”
- but Plautus’ characters are more stereotypical than Menander’s
 - but this is NOT a step backward!
 - in fact, it is a step forward in producing theatrically effective world-class comedy
 - maybe not great art, but always great theatre!

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Plautine Comedy

<http://www.usu.edu/markdamen/ClasDram/chapters/142reading7miles.htm>

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Plautine Comedy

- Plautus utilized his unique position between philosophical Greece and fun-loving Rome to shape a new “multicultural” form of drama
 - thus his drama still works well today
- this opportunity helps clarify why he didn’t write his own plays
 - he saw the advantage in this formula: Atellan farce (***saturae***) + Menandrian New Comedy

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Greek Originals

- those Greek plays underlying Plautus' comedies are called "**Greek originals**"
- important question: how did Plautus adapt these Greek originals?
- and didn't he have to change different playwrights' work in different ways?
 - e.g. Menandrian subtle comedy vs. Diphilus' knockabout farce

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Greek Originals

- Plautine changes:
 - besides including stereotypes, added music
 - also, punctuated action (with four act-breaks) > continuous action (no act-breaks)
- but no direct evidence, until the discovery of the *Dis Exapaton* fragment
 - ca. 100 lines of Menander's Greek original underlying Plautus' *Bacchides*

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Greek Originals

<http://www.usu.edu/markdamen/ClasDram/chapters/141plautus.htm#disexapaton>

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Amphitryo

- Amphitryo and Alcmena are a happily married and faithful couple
- until Jupiter decides to disguise himself as Amphitryo and impregnate Alcmena
 - from that union is born Hercules
- when the real Amphitryo returns, confusion ensues over whether or not Alcmena has slept with another man

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Amphitryo

- a “twins” comedy—of sorts
- a spoof of mythology
 - from a Middle Comedy original?
- best scene: Mercury disguises himself as Sosia (Amphitryo’s servant) and beats up the real Sosia
- warning: the play is fragmentary!

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***Aulularia* (“The Pot of Gold”)**

- from an original by Menander?
- an irascible old man named Euclio lives with his daughter in poverty and distrusts the whole world
- when he discovers a pot of gold hidden in his house, he goes insane with suspicion, convinced that everyone is trying to steal it

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***Aulularia* (“The Pot of Gold”)**

- his daughter has been impregnated by a rich young man who wants to marry her but is afraid to ask her father for her hand
- the young man’s uncle also wants to marry the girl and Euclio agrees
- but a slave finds and steals the gold
- when the girl gives birth, Euclio lets the young man marry his daughter

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***Aulularia* (“The Pot of Gold”)**

- best scene: the young man admits the “truth” to Euclio who thinks he’s confessing that he’s stolen the gold
 - the Latin word *aula* (“pot”) is feminine gender, so “she” can be taken as the gold or the girl
 - a wonderful commentary on what fathers ought to value more: daughters or dowries?
- warning: the end of the play is missing!

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***Bacchides* (“The Bacchises”)**

- based on an original by Menander
- there are two prostitutes who are sisters and have the same name (Bacchis)
- one needs money to buy the other from a soldier who has her on contract
- she convinces her boyfriend Mnesilochus to have his slave Chrysalus swindle the money needed out of Mnesilochus' father

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***Bacchides* (“The Bacchises”)**

- Chrysalus does, but Mnesilochus overhears someone talking about Bacchis kissing Pistoclerus (Mnesilochus’ friend)
- Mnesilochus returns the money to his father, and then realizes his mistake
- Chrysalus has to dupe his master again
 - hence, the title of Menander’s original *Dis Exapaton* (“The Double Deceiver”)

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***Bacchides* (“The Bacchises”)**

- best scene: the prudish pedagogue Lydus follows Pistoclerus into Bacchis’ house, and then runs outside in horror at what he’s seen inside there
- later, Lydus drags Pistoclerus’ father to the “den of iniquity” but Mnesilochus defends his friend until he hears about the kissing!
- warning: the opening of the play is missing!

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***Captivi* (“The Captives”)**

- a “serious” comedy, or so Plautus claims
- two captives exchange identities, and the master is sent home, not the slave
- when their captor discovers the ruse, he threatens the hapless slave who is eventually recognized as his son
- best scene: the fond farewell of master and slave who are really praising themselves

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***Casina* (“Cinnamon”)**

- based on Diphilus’ *Cleroumenoi* (“The Lot-Casters”)
- an old man lusts after his wife’s maid and tries to marry her off to a man who will let him have the *ius primae noctis*
 - cf. Beaumarchais’ *The Marriage of Figaro*

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***Casina* (“Cinnamon”)**

- nothing but best scenes!
 - the lot-casting scene between husband and wife over who gets to pick a groom for Casina
 - Pardalisca’s false tragic report that Casina has gone mad and “has a knife”!
 - the male-bride wedding!!
 - and its aftermath!!!

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***Mercator* (“The Merchant”)**

- from an original by Philemon
- a old man and his adult son are in love with the same girl
- best scene: father and son try to make sure their “clients” get the girl

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Menaechmi

- the prototype of twins comedy
 - adapted by Shakespeare, *Comedy of Errors*
- twins are separated as boys and one is renamed Menaechmus for the other
- ultimately, they're confused with each other because of their appearance
 - later their actions are also confused

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Menaechmi

- a very mechanical plot, with little character development
 - some characters do not even have names
 - e.g. Matrona (“Wife”), Senex (“Old Man”)
- best scene: one of the twins has to feign insanity to escape his “father-in-law”
 - pretends to be riding in a chariot and tries to run the Senex over

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***Mostellaria* (“*The Haunted House*”)**

- features Plautus’ most daring and amoral *servus callidus* (“clever slave”), Tranio
- Tranio has led his young master into such debauchery he’s had to sell his father’s house while he was away on business
- when the old man returns, Tranio pretends it’s haunted to keep him out
 - the “noises off” are really a *komos* in progress!

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Mostellaria (“The Haunted House”)

- of course, the man who bought the house is one of the father’s old friends and returns it
- the father is convinced to forgive his son, but is determined to punish Tranio
 - Tranio flees to an altar and refuses to get off it
 - the play ends with this stalemate!
- best scene: Tranio tricks the old man and a loan shark—at the same time!

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***Persa* (“*The Persian Man*”)**

- has no upper-class characters
 - slaves, a *hetaira*, a parasite, a pimp and the most loquacious virgin in all of Roman Comedy
- a slave in love with a *hetaira* has to swindle money out of a pimp to buy her contract
- best scene: the parasite forces his virgin daughter to act like a Persian and she lectures him on morality, but tricks the pimp

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Pseudolus

- famous now because it is the basis of *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*
- features Ballio, the prototype of evil pimps
- the slave Pseudolus dupes him out of the girl whom Pseudolus' young master loves
- best scene: Ballio parades his “wares”

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***Rudens* (“Rope”)**

- from an original by Diphilus (cf. *Casina*)
- another “evil pimp” play, in this case the devious Labrax (“Sea Bass”) who tries to abscond with a girl and her maid after a young man has paid for them
- the gods protect the girls and shipwreck the pimp
- lots of wet people and flotsam!

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***Rudens* (“Rope”)**

- in the end, one of the girls discovers her father and marries her lover
- unique setting: a seashore in North Africa
 - cf. Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*
 - Gripus = Caliban
- best scene: a tug-of-war over the pimp’s trunk which Gripus hauls ashore in a fishing net, full of money and trinkets