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
Chapter 14.1: Plautus

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
Chapter 14.1: Plautus

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”
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
Chapter 14.1: Plautus

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!
Chapter 14.1: Plautus

Plautine Comedy

http://www.usu.edu/markdamen/ClasDram/chapters/142reading7miles.htm
Chapter 14.1: Plautus

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*) + Menandrean New Comedy
Chapter 14.1: Plautus

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. Menandrean 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*
Chapter 14.1: Plautus

Greek Originals

http://www.usu.edu/markdamen/ClasDram/chapters/141plautus.htm#disexapaton
Chapter 14.1: Plautus

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
Chapter 14.1: Plautus

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
Chapter 14.1: Plautus

*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
Chapter 14.1: Plautus

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!
Chapter 14.1: Plautus

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 Mnesilocheus to have his slave Chrysalus swindle the money needed out of Mnesilocheus’ father
Chapter 14.1: Plautus

*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")
**Chapter 14.1: Plautus**

*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!
Chapter 14.1: Plautus

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
Chapter 14.1: Plautus

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*
Chapter 14.1: Plautus

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!!
Chapter 14.1: Plautus

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
Chapter 14.1: Plautus

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
Chapter 14.1: Plautus

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
Chapter 14.1: Plautus

**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!
Chapter 14.1: Plautus

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!
Chapter 14.1: Plautus

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
Chapter 14.1: Plautus

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”
Chapter 14.1: Plautus

**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!
Chapter 14.1: Plautus

*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