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## Plautus and Terence in Performance

Erica M. Bexley

Performance is a crucial element of drama. The appearance of the set, the audience's mood, how an actor chooses to deliver a particular line: each of these factors will affect not just a play's success but its very meaning. Studying theater in textual form often leaves us with a false impression of its stability, as if every enactment rendered characters and dialogue in precisely the same way. Of course this is never the case, but it is also difficult – some would say impossible – to recapture that fleeting moment in which a dramatic script is presented, live, before a group of spectators.

The last forty years of scholarship on Plautus and Terence has seen a growth in performance criticism. Plautine drama has proved especially fruitful, with many scholars analysing its theatrically self-conscious style ('metatheater': Slater 1985; Moore 1998), or addressing issues of stagecraft and production (Beacham 1991; Marshall 2006; Manuwald 2011). The latter approach is as fraught with problems as it is important: scant and/or ambiguous evidence, combined with any performance's ephemeral nature means that scholars of Roman stagecraft must engage in a degree of speculation and deductive reasoning accompanied, in some instances, by analogies drawn from practical experience. This essay faces the same limitations and addresses them in much the same way. Part 1 ("Production") examines whether and how performances of *comoedia palliata* were affected by the conditions of theater production prevailing c.210-160 B.C.E. Part 2 ("Performance") interprets the specific dramatic qualities of four individual scenes and describes aspects of their enactment by combining textual evidence with the author's own empirical knowledge of staging ancient drama.

## Part 1: Production

More than most other artistic media, drama depends on and is shaped by the very real, physical components of its presentation. Each aspect of the production process and setting will influence a play's appearance, so that *Hamlet* staged in a black box studio is quite distinct from *Hamlet* at the reconstructed Globe. For the theater of Plautus and Terence, however, we have much less evidence than we do for Shakespeare. Even though towns in central and southern Italy had built permanent stone theaters as early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.E., Rome itself relied on temporary structures until 55 B.C.E., when Pompey unveiled a temple-theater in honour of Venus.<sup>1</sup> Nothing therefore remains of the stages that supported Plautus' and Terence's plays, and any attempt to understand what these performances looked like must employ vestigial and sometimes questionable evidence.

To begin with, some basic facts may be gleaned from the plays themselves. *Palliata* plots always take place in front of one, two, or three dwellings; it is therefore assumed that a typical *scaenae frons* consisted of three doors, any one of which could represent the house of a citizen, the house of a courtesan, or a temple (see Vitruvius 5.6.8 and Pollux 4.19.125-27). Further, *Bacchides* 832 implies that these doors were separated by a distance of three adult paces. On either side of this simple backdrop were the wings, which dramatic convention imagined as two roads, one leading to a rural area and the other to a civic location (Beare 1964: 248-55; Duckworth 1952: 85-88). Usually, performers used the same route for any given sequence of entry and exit, and for rare instances in which this did not occur, *palliata* employed the further convention of the *angiportum*, an alleyway invisible to the audience and supposed to connect the back doors of all three houses (e.g. *Persa* 678-79). That the *scaenae*

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<sup>1</sup> Combining theaters with temples was not Pompey's innovation, but an established Italic custom: see Hanson 1959 and Goldberg 1998. Following this custom enabled Pompey to sidestep senatorial criticism regarding permanent theaters in Rome: he claimed he had built merely a temple (cf. Gellius *NA* 10.1.7 and Tertullian *De Spec.* 10.5).

*frons* also supported some kind of basic roof is suggested by *Amphitruo* (1021-34 and *frag.* 1-6), where Mercury ascends to the house's gables with the intention of emptying pots on Amphitryon's head.

The texts themselves also give the impression of a crowded and noisy performance space. Plautus' prologues often call on a herald to make the audience pay attention (e.g. *Asinaria* 4; *Poenulus* 11), and the prologue to *Poenulus* (17-18) expressly forbids spectators from sitting on the stage. Similarly, Plautus' and Terence's habit of addressing the audience directly implies a degree of proximity and intimacy probably not experienced in permanent theater buildings, especially those of Greek design (see Manuwald 2011: 66-68).

More detailed description is virtually unattainable, and we must be wary of extrapolations from Southern Italian *phlyax* vases (4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.), or from Pompeian wall-paintings (1<sup>st</sup> century C.E.). Recent work by Goldberg (1998, see also Franko in this volume) has demonstrated how temporary Roman theaters were adapted to the urban space around them, for instance using pre-existing structures such as temple steps in place of a separate, purpose-built *cavea*. Taken further, Goldberg's argument could imply that Rome's theaters had no one, uniform shape; that they changed according to whether a performance was held on the Palatine (*Pseudolus*), or in the forum (*Curculio*), or at an aristocratic funeral (*Hecyra*). These adjustments most likely affected the audience's space more than they affected the actual stage, which needed a consistent layout in order to accommodate plays of the same genre.

Another potential source of evidence is the remains of stone theaters used in southern Italy during Plautus' and Terence's lifetime. Although the fact of their permanence resulted in a more uniform style and imposing *scaenae frons*, their stage dimensions needed to approximate those of Roman theaters if they were to host similar performances or even repeat

performances of plays that had premiered at major Roman festivals.<sup>2</sup> These structures are characterized by deep stages that could hold a potentially large group of actors. Such an arrangement makes sense for performances of *palliata*, which allowed up to 10 performers to appear on stage simultaneously (see section 2.1, below). Plautus and Terence frequently script conversations between four or five individuals (Franko 2004), and many of their scenes require mute extras as well. Rome's temporary stages must therefore have been deep enough to contain these crowded scenes, and to provide room for the frenetic movement that typifies Plautine comedy in particular.

Our knowledge regarding stage decoration is equally speculative. As Beacham (2007: 216) points out, the provisional nature of early Roman theater buildings need not preclude their having had sumptuous decor. In 58 B.C.E., for instance, L. Aemilius Scaurus erected an elaborate temporary theater comprising three stories (the first was marble!), 360 columns, and more than a thousand bronze statues (Pliny *N.H.* 36.11-15). Forty years earlier, Claudius Pulcher is said to have commissioned lavishly realistic scene-painting (*skenographia*) for the backdrop of a temporary stage (Pliny *N.H.* 35.23). We should not, however, place undue emphasis on these examples, since they pertain to the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.E., an era in which ambitious Roman aristocrats wooed the populace via increasingly competitive demonstrations of 'conspicuous consumption'. Theaters of the late 3<sup>rd</sup> and early 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries B.C.E. were much smaller by comparison, and sponsoring public shows in this period was not as likely to influence the outcome of elections (Goldberg 1998: 13-14). With less impetus and less space for splendid decoration, it is probable that the theaters used by Plautus and Terence were also less lavish than their counterparts in the late republic.

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<sup>2</sup> What happened to plays after they had premiered in Rome is, unfortunately, a mystery. Presumably, the troupes of actors that performed at festivals in Rome then toured regional Italy, giving repeat performances. This is the most reasonable hypothesis, but even it depends on yet another unknowable fact: whether playwrights sold or retained the rights to their compositions. Lebek 1996, 33-34 and Marshall 2006, 22 discuss the issue.

Likewise, dramatic sets were relatively simple. Beare (1964: 275-78) argues convincingly that *palliata* employed neither naturalistic scenery nor scene-changes, both of which modern theater audiences accept as givens. The prologue to Plautus' *Menaechmi* implies that the specific elements of any set were left to the audience's imagination, so that nothing material distinguished the location of one story from that of another: *haec urbs Epidamnus est, dum agitur fabula / quando alia agetur, aliud fiet oppidum* ("this city is Epidamnus – while this play is being performed; / when another is performed, it will become a different town", 72-73). Since the stories of most *palliata* are set on an urban street, few if any changes would have been required from play to play. Though Plautus' *Rudens* furnishes a notable exception to this trend by opening with a description of rocks and rugged coastline (72-78), it is unlikely that even its stage setting tried to replicate the story's physical location in more than a rudimentary manner. Instead, the geographic detail in Arcturus' prologue suggests that the audience had to conceptualize what the backdrop did not depict.

A further argument for *palliata* being staged in relatively plain theaters is the fact that these structures appear to have hosted other kinds of entertainment as well. The prologue to Terence's *Hecyra* complains that the play's second performance, which occurred at the funeral games of L. Aemilius Paullus (160 B.C.E.), had to be aborted because of a raucous mob that surged in, expecting to see a display of gladiators (*Hec.* 39-42). The passage implies that these two events were scheduled either back-to-back or on subsequent days, and that spectators for the second show arrived early owing to a misunderstanding in the program (Parker 1996: 597). In the imperial period, when theaters and amphitheaters were distinct structures designed for specific purposes, this would have been a difficult mistake to make; but in 2<sup>nd</sup>-century B.C.E. Rome, gladiatorial duels, like plays, were generally held in makeshift venues. That a rival group of spectators could invade Terence's performance and

not hesitate in assuming that gladiators were about to be presented (*datum iri gladiators*, *Hec.* 40) suggests that both events used similar, and similarly neutral settings.

Lack of permanent performance spaces also meant that troupes had few if any opportunities to rehearse on site. Crucial to the modern production process, rehearsals ‘in the space’ enable actors to adjust their performance so that it fits their physical surroundings. Since actors of *palliata* had little chance to make such adjustments, they presumably developed a flexible style and were capable of modifying a play’s blocking at a moment’s notice. Rehearsal timeframes likewise demanded flexibility: Marshall (2006: 22-23) estimates a mere three weeks of preparation time between the *aediles* entering office on March 15<sup>th</sup> and the *ludi Megalenses* taking place in early April. Other festivals may have had a longer lead-up, and evidence in Terence (*Eunuchus* 20-22) suggests that playwrights were allowed to stage preliminary performances, perhaps with a view to testing audience reactions. Overall, though, the troupes that were performing *palliata* appear to have rehearsed to a tight schedule, with hardly any time spent in the actual theater prior to the play’s first showing.

How, if at all, did these various conditions affect Plautus’ and Terence’s dramaturgy? Scholars writing about *palliata* tend to draw a sharp distinction between the two playwrights, and to argue that Plautus enjoyed greater success because he tailored his dramatic style to the circumstances of theater production prevailing in his era.<sup>3</sup> According to this reasoning, Rome’s temporary stage buildings and variable performance spaces, coupled with brief rehearsal times and sparse sets encouraged the kind of improvisatory, slapstick comedy of which Plautus was the master (a major premise in Marshall 2006; see also Goldberg 1998).

Yet, as Parker (1996) has shown, Plautus’ reputation for unmitigated success is just as

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<sup>3</sup> The view comes in many forms, and its proponents are many. To cite a few: Marshall 2006 regards Plautus’ dramatic style as a direct result of production conditions c. 210-160 B.C.E; Gratwick 1982, 121, Goldberg 1986, 97-105, and Segal 1987, 1 assume that Terence was less successful because he did not follow Plautus in playing to popular tastes. Parker 1996, 608-13 summarizes the various versions of this hypothesis, and refutes them admirably.

erroneous as Terence's supposed failure to win his audience's attention, let alone its love: both playwrights were popular, and the difference between their styles probably owes more to individual choice than to production processes *per se*. Although scholars are right to emphasize that the nature and dimensions of any theatrical space will affect what audiences expect and how they react, we should refrain from enshrining this as the sole criterion of dramatic form. If Terence's plays are less physical and less raucous than Plautus', this need not mean that they failed to fit contemporary theatrical conditions. After all, it is easier to rehearse dialogue in a variety of spaces than it is to rehearse movement; and in a small theater, Terence's restrained, Menandrian style could generate just as much audience rapport as Plautus' ribaldry is supposed to have done.

## **Part 2: Performance**

Reading a play and watching a play are two very different experiences: enactment uncovers elements latent within a dramatic text, rendering them more noticeable, significant, or emotive. What is more, every performance is itself a fresh act of interpretation that brings new meaning to a dramatic script or alters how an audience regards the work. To illustrate these potential effects of performance, the following section considers four scenes – two from Plautus, two from Terence – and discusses what they could look like when staged. It is of course difficult to reconstruct Plautus' or Terence's original manner of staging, and while my analysis attempts this task on occasions, the bulk of it is *ex hypothesi*, focusing less on how these scenes *were* performed than on how they *could be*.

### **Plautus**

#### 2.1 *Pseudolus* 129-229 (“Act 1 Scene 2”)

Plautus' *Pseudolus* premiered at the *Ludi Megalenses* in 191 B.C.E. Held to celebrate the dedication of a new temple to the Magna Mater on the Palatine Hill, the games on this occasion were particularly lavish (Fraenkel 2007: 101) – a fact that may explain why *Pseudolus* 129-229 is one of the most spectacular scenes in extant Roman comedy. On paper, it is impressive mainly because of its elaborate verbosity. The pimp, Ballio, enters at 133 and delivers a show-stopping *canticum* of polysyllabic abuse. When we think about this scene as a performance, however, we realize that Plautus' stagecraft creates an effect equally as impressive as Ballio's lyrics. Using a full cast, numerous props, rapid movement, and self-consciously theatrical style, the dramaturgy of *Pseudolus* 129-229 helps to focus the audience's attention on Ballio and to present him as the ultimate performer.

From its outset, *Pseudolus* 129-229 displays the sort of striking visual quality that marks it out as a showpiece. It is a physically crowded scene. Pseudolus and Calidorus are already on stage prior to Ballio's entrance; when the pimp's door creaks in warning of his approach (130), they stay to eavesdrop. There are three actors visible to the audience at this point and, given that Ballio will sing, a flute-player (*tibicen*) is probably present as well. From four individuals on stage, the number quickly rises to ten, possibly eleven, as Ballio calls out from his house a group of slaves, to each of whom he delivers a beating and assigns a specific task. Ballio's direct addresses (157-62) name five individuals and his further command at 166 may indicate a sixth. Besides these, there must be one more slave who remains with Ballio (170) once all of the others have returned indoors. With so many bodies, the scene gives the impression of busyness and speed.

After dismissing his domestic chattel (168), Ballio turns to matters of finance (173-229). His second harangue names four courtesans - Hedylium (188); Aeschrodora (196); Xystilis (210); Phoenicium (227) – which leads us to assume one of two performance options: either the prostitutes are played by four additional actors (so Fraenkel 2007: 99), or

four of the performers recently appearing as slaves must re-emerge on stage following a rapid costume change (so Marshall 2006: 103-104). Either option is practicable, though acting troupes in Plautus' day probably chose the latter because it made fewer demands on their resources. Performance groups in 2<sup>nd</sup>-century B.C.E. Rome generally comprised 4-6 members, with additional roles filled by hired extras (Manuwald 2011: 85-86). The logical result is that crowd scenes were more costly than those featuring only one or two actors. At its minimum, *Pseudolus* 129-229 requires 9-10 performers, more than any other scene in extant Plautine comedy (Marshall 2006: 109-11 with comparisons). Adding another four may well have broken the budget, and it is likely that the courtesans' roles were doubled in an effort to minimize expense.

Such doubling has the further effect of increasing the scene's pace. Five lines is a very brief space of time, even for the simplest of costume changes: Ballio's slaves will have to exit briskly and his courtesans may arrive out of breath. This rapid movement, which takes place around Ballio and on his orders, serves to emphasize the pimp's pivotal role as both impresario and director.

If we shift our attention from actors to props, it is clear that *Pseudolus* 129-229 requires many of these as well: Ballio wields a whip (*lorum*, 145), which he employs with vicious liberality (135; 154-55); one slave carries an urn (*tu qui urnam habes*, 156); another, an axe (*te cum securi*, 157); and when Ballio warns a third slave about cutpurses (170), we are probably safe in assuming the *puer* is holding a purse (*crumina*). Like performers, these objects crowd the stage and so increase the scene's visual density. On a separate plane, they also function as complex symbols of the kind that Robert Ketterer analyses in his series of articles about Plautine stage properties (1986a; 1986b; 1986c). Ballio's whip indicates the pimp's power and violent irascibility; it designates him as the main performer in this scene. In contrast to Ballio's dominant prop, the slaves carry domestic instruments, physical

symbols of their inferiority. Whenever Ballio uses his whip, he reinforces this dynamic, as, for instance, in the curious exchange at *Pseudolus* 158-59:

**Ballio:** te cum securi caudicali praeficio provinciae

**Servus:** at haec retunsast. **Ballio:** Sine siet; itidem vos plagis omnes.

**Ballio:** You with the axe, I appoint you to the duty of wood-splitting

**Slave:** But the axe is blunt. **Ballio:** So what? You're all blunt too, from the lash.

As a text, this banter is unremarkable, even superfluous. But in performance, stage properties enhance the exchange's meaning. Significantly, the only slave who dares to talk back to Ballio is the one holding an axe. His implement of domestic servitude therefore acquires a momentarily aggressive aspect: the axe rivals Ballio's whip just as the slave's response challenges his master's orders. The irony is that the slave complains about a blunt axe; in other words, the instrument really *does* symbolize the slave's impotence. And in reply, Ballio draws attention to his lash, which is in perfect working order. The scene's properties therefore affirm Ballio's power and ensure that he is the focal point of the audience's gaze.

As a final touch, Plautus makes the scene self-consciously dramatic or 'metatheatrical'. By eavesdropping on the pimp's performance, Pseudolus and Calidorus take up the position of spectators and become an internal audience for Ballio's bravura display (Slater 1985: 122-23; Moore 1998: 34). They even evaluate his acting style: an arch-performer himself, Pseudolus admires the pimp as 'grand' (*magnificus*, 194); Calidorus demurs: *atque etiam malificus* ("and he's a rascal, too", 195).<sup>4</sup> As Moore (1998: 98) points out, Ballio can be both *magnificus* and *malificus*: a really good pimp *is* a rascal. Pseudolus' and Calidorus' comments therefore confirm Ballio in his role. At the same time, they remind the play's real audience that this scene is something special. By drawing attention to Ballio's

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<sup>4</sup> There is some confusion about the attribution of these lines: Willcock 1987 gives 194 to Pseudolus and 195 to Calidorus while Moore 1998, 97-98 reverses Willcock's arrangement. I have used the former option because it seems to fit the characters' personalities better.

performance, Pseudolus and Calidorus (and behind them, Plautus) make sure that spectators recognize and appreciate its spectacular quality.

## 2.2 *Menaechmi* 1050-1162 (“Act 5, Scenes 8-9”)

Having examined several different aspects of staging Plautus, let us now focus on one: role-division. Though rarely necessary in contemporary performances, dividing roles was fundamental for much of ancient Greek drama, and probably persisted in *comoedia palliata*, albeit to a lesser degree. We have seen, for example, how *Pseudolus* 133-229 may require four actors to double as slaves and courtesans. Plautus’ *Menaechmi* does not face the same restraints: role-doubling here is optional rather than necessary, and the point to be stressed is that Plautus’ dramaturgy *allows for* a doubled role in this play regardless of how the work was staged originally. My suggestion, therefore, is purely hypothetical: one actor can play both Menaechmus brothers right up until the final scene, when the twin’s reunion naturally calls for a second performer. As the result of such staging, the final two scenes of Plautus’ *Menaechmi* will encourage the audience to participate more fully in the characters’ confusion.

Since misidentification easily gives rise to farcical situations, stories featuring twins, doubles, or simply two people who share the same name are stock material in Greek New Comedy (e.g. Menander’s *Dis Exapaton*); *palliata* (e.g. *Menaechmi*; *Bacchides*; *Amphitruo*); and Atellan farce (*Duo Dosseni*; *Macci Gemini*). In his *Miles Gloriosus*, Plautus takes this motif a step further and creates two identities from one character by having Philocomasium appear as both herself and her make-believe twin sister (*Miles* 150-52). Damen (1989) and Marshall (2006: 105-106) suggest that the same technique could apply in Plautus’ *Menaechmi*, where it would increase the play’s level of farce by augmenting the audience’s perplexity: if the role is doubled, both Menaechmi will have the same voice, be the same

height and, in the case of performance without masks, exhibit the same facial features.<sup>5</sup> The upshot is a self-consciously theatrical final scene in which Messenio and Menaechmus of Epidamnus struggle to recognize a familiar character precisely because he is represented by a new actor.

At *Menaechmi* 1049, the actor who has until now played both roles (henceforth M) exits into Erotium's house. While he is inside, a different performer (henceforth S) enters as Menaechmus of Syracuse (1050). S engages in a brief dialogue with Messenio, in which he assures his confused servant that he has certainly not granted any manumission (1050-59). The audience may well share Messenio's confusion at this point, since it is the first time that Menaechmus of Syracuse has been represented by a separate actor and, as a result, he really is *not the same person* whom Messenio has performed alongside for most of the narrative. When M returns to the stage at 1060, he too is slow to comprehend S's identity. Cleverly, this casting method will conspire with the play's storyline, so that M, the familiar actor, embodies the genuine Menaechmus (of Epidamnus), while S, the new performer, represents the 'imposter' Menaechmus whose name is actually Sosicles.

The bewilderment that ensues therefore takes place at both an intra- and extra-dramatic level. For instance, when Messenio tries to work out which of the two individuals is his master (1070-77), he draws ironic attention to the recent role-division and demonstrates that there are real, performance-based reasons for his perplexity. He even alludes to the staged nature of Menaechmus' double identity by remarking to S: *illic homo aut sycophanta aut geminus est frater tuos!* ("that man is either a fraud/actor or he's your twin brother!" 1087). Role-doubling also compels audience members to participate in the process of

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<sup>5</sup> A performance without masks would necessarily be a modern interpretation, because actors in Plautus and Terence's era probably wore them. This, at least, is the current scholarly consensus after decades of debate about whether *comedia palliata* used masks at all. For a summary of this debate, its permutations, strengths, and weaknesses, see Wiles 1991, 132-33 and, more substantially, Petrides' chapter in this volume.

recognition. Uncovering a character's true identity is a common motif in *palliata* and Greek New Comedy, where physical tokens often prompt fortuitous revelations (as, for instance, in Menander's *Epitrepontes*, or Terence's *Hecyra*). If Plautus' *Menaechmi* is staged with one actor in two roles, recognition becomes a crucial issue not just within the plot, but also for the people watching its performance: audience members will need some means of distinguishing between two characters that are literally identical. In *Amphitruo*, another Plautine double-comedy, Mercury assures spectators that a feather in his hat will differentiate him from Sosia, while Jupiter will identify himself by means of a gold knot (*Amphitruo*, 142-47). *Menaechmi* achieves a similar effect by using one entirely separate piece of apparel: the mantle (*palla*) that Menaechmus of Epidamnus steals from his wife at the beginning of the play. For the drama's first half, this mantle signifies Menaechmus of Epidamnus; for the second half, it identifies Menaechmus of Syracuse, who takes it from Erotium's house at 466 and keeps it in his possession until the play's last lines. The upshot is that the audience must pay careful attention to this prop. Like characters in one of New Comedy's recognition scenes, they must use a significant object to aid their judgement of an individual's true identity.

Further, delaying the division of Menaechmus' role lends the play's final, recognition scene an ironic twist. Although the *palla* has constituted a kind of 'recognition token' for the audience throughout most of the performance, it is personal information, not physical objects, that defines the brothers' identity at the play's end. This change from material to immaterial methods of recognition makes sense at an extra-dramatic level: once Menaechmus' role has been split between two actors, the audience can see the difference and thus, no longer needs to rely on stage properties. One, simple casting decision therefore affects the entire tenor of *Menaechmi*'s final scene, enhancing its playful self-consciousness and encouraging audience members to make up their own minds regarding the twins' identities.

## Terence

### 2.3 *Eunuchus* 46-206 (“Act 1, Scenes 1-2”)

Ancient posterity valued Terence for his rhetoric. Caesar praised his “pure diction” (*purus sermo*, Suet. *Vita Ter.* 7); Cicero quoted him frequently (e.g. *De Or.* 2.172 and 326); and Quintilian used passages from his plays to illustrate points of rhetorical technique (e.g. *I.O.* 9.2.58). Though in essence complimentary, such opinions have helped generate the erroneous yet dominant modern hypothesis that, in the words of Goldberg (1986: 169): “Terence won his lasting fame as a stylist, not a playwright, and his dramatic tradition did not long survive so bookish an achievement.” Not so: Terence’s plays were restaged at intervals throughout the late republic (Varro *RR* 2.11.11) and empire (Horace *Ep.* 2.1.56-61; Quint. *I.O.* 11.3.178-82). The *didascaliae* on manuscripts of Terence frequently mention revival productions (*relata est*; see also Tansey 2001), and if scholars persist in regarding these plays as predominantly literary creations, it may be because Terence, unlike Plautus, was canonized as a school text (Parker 1996: 590). Contemporary scholarship is therefore mistaken in its neglect of Terence’s stagecraft. These plays were written to be performed, and it is in performance that many of their most distinctive qualities emerge.

For example, in the second scene of *Eunuchus* (81-206), the courtesan Thais explains at length why on the preceding day she locked her young paramour, Phaedria, out of her house: the soldier who is also one of her clients has bought her a present, a young girl whom Thais suspects is her own long-lost adoptive sister; in order to get her hands on the girl, Thais must indulge the soldier for a few days, so she asks Phaedria to let his rival “play the leading role” (*sine illum priores partis hosce aliquot dies / apud me habere*, 151-52). Phaedria responds angrily:

aut ego nescibam quorsum tu ires? ‘parvola  
hinc est abrepta; eduxit mater pro sua;  
soror dictast; cupio abducere, ut reddam suis.’

nempe omnia haec nunc verba huc redeunt denique:  
ego excludor, ille recipitur.

Did you think I didn't know where you were going?  
'A tiny little girl was abducted from this place;  
Mother raised her as her own; people call her my sister;  
I want to get hold of her, so that I can return her to her own family.'  
To be sure, all of these words come down to one thing in the end:  
I am shut out; *he* is let in.

(*Eunuchus* 155-59)

When Phaedria summarizes Thais' narrative (155-57), he employs the dramatic technique of "speech within speech", a style that Terence favors and appears to have inherited from Menander (Handley 2002: 179-86; see also Scafuro on Menander and Fontaine on Plautus in this volume). Its effect is *ethopoiia* or 'character study' (cf. Quint. *I.O.* 9.2.58), which gives actors the opportunity to impersonate each others' performances. Menander uses it primarily to provide expository material (e.g. *Epit.* 878-900) and to introduce a character prior to his or her actual appearance on stage (e.g. *Dys.* 103-16; see also Nünlist 2002). Moreover, if it is possible to generalize from such fragmentary remains, Menandrian "speech within speech" occurs most frequently in monologues (e.g. Demeas in *Samia* 236-61), or at least, in situations where the quoted individuals are not present (e.g. Getas in *Misoumenos* 297-322). In Terence, however, Phaedria imitates Thais while she is standing right beside him. The result is a harsher kind of *ethopoiia*, not gentle imitation as much as mockery and sarcasm; Phaedria's speech recapitulates the expository material that Thais has already provided (107-43) and as a consequence, it invites the audience to reassess the courtesan's veracity. At the same time, the actor playing Phaedria can jeer at Thais by mimicking her tone of voice and physical mannerisms. We know from Quintilian (*I.O.* 11.3.910) that those performing 1<sup>st</sup>-century C.E. revivals of Menander would often alter their voices when reporting another character's words. It seems reasonable to suppose that the same was happening in Terence's

day, and that passages like *Eunuchus* 155-57 were composed with a view to such playful impersonation.

In fact, “speech within speech” is Terence’s way of focusing our attention on how characters represent themselves and how they expect others to behave. When Phaedria mimics Thais’ narrative, he implies that she is bluffing. He does so again at *Eunuchus* 176, this time quoting Thais directly (*‘potius quam te inimicum habeam’*). Ironically enough, the more faithfully Phaedria repeats the courtesan’s words, the more he manages to insinuate that she is *not* speaking the truth. This effect becomes even more apparent on stage: if another actor replicates Thais’ role, albeit for just one line, he can quite literally expose it as a performance. Of course, the play’s events will prove that Thais is not lying and further, that she does not fit the comic stereotype of the wicked prostitute (cf. *Eunuchus* 37). But Terence wants to keep his audience guessing at this early point in the drama, and *ethopoiia* enables him to stereotype characters while also encouraging spectators to concentrate on issues of identity.

Nor is Thais’ character the only one subject to mimetic mockery. In the play’s first scene, the slave Parmeno imitates his master, Phaedria, in a teasing attempt to make the lovesick *adulescens* see sense. *Eunuchus* opens with Phaedria pacing up and down, agonizing over how he should respond to Thais’ recent behaviour; Parmeno points out that in matters of the heart deliberation is futile:

et quod nunc tute tecum iratus cogitas  
‘egon illam, quae illum, quae me, quae non...! sine modo  
mori me malim, sentiet qui vir siem’  
haec verba una mehercle falsa lacrimula,  
quam oculos terendo misere vix vi expresserit  
restinguet

And whatever you now think to yourself in anger:  
‘Shall I? When she – him – me – and she didn’t...! Just wait...  
I’d rather die: then she’ll know what kind of man I am’  
One tiny false tear will quench all these words,

One she's scarcely squeezed out by rubbing her eyes.

Parmeno exaggerates his impersonation and so invites the audience to laugh at Phaedria's despair. The slave's elliptical sequence of pronouns (*egon illam, quae illum, quae me, quae non*) not only reproduces Phaedria's staccato anger, but also parodies the plays' famous opening lines, where Terence employs a choppy style to evoke Phaedria's distress (46-56). At the same time, Parmeno's "speech within speech" insinuates that Phaedria is merely playing a role; that his 'Wretched Lover' act will dissolve as quickly as Thais' tears.

Lastly, Parmeno's *ethopoiia* puts him in a momentary position of power, and not just because it lets him jest at his master's expense. In performance, the actor playing Parmeno may choose to appropriate Phaedria's voice and therefore, to usurp his master's role. The result is the sort of subversive, "Saturnalian" behaviour generally regarded as typical of Plautus, not Terence (Segal 1987; see also Fontaine on Plautus, and Petrides in this volume), and it is tempting to think that we might find more examples of the same if only we manage to treat Terence as drama rather than simply text.

#### 2.4 *Hecyra* 623-726 ("Act 4, Scene 4")

This scene from Terence's *Hecyra* marks the climax of the play's multiple misunderstandings. The final act will unravel each of the plot's complex threads, but at this point neither the audience nor any of the characters on stage know the full story. Moreover, the characters who appear at 623-726 are unaware of their own ignorance; each makes assumptions from the evidence available to him: Phidippus thinks that his wife has behaved like a hostile mother-in-law; Laches thinks that *his* wife has done the same; both old men assume that Pamphilus is the father of Pilumena's child; Pamphilus believes he is *not* the father. Because spectators share Pamphilus' knowledge, they will assume throughout the

course of the scene that his version is the correct one. To reinforce allegiance between Pamphilus and the audience, Terence scripts a series of asides, which evoke feelings of secretive complicity (on asides, see Slater 1985: 158-60). The asides also characterize Pamphilus – incorrectly, it turns out – as someone in possession of superior knowledge. Subsequent scenes will, of course, reveal that Pamphilus is wrong and the old men right: the child *is* his. But, for this scene, Terence’s dramaturgy tricks the audience into adopting a view that is just as misguided as Pamphilus’.

Like a split screen in a movie, a dramatic aside provides two (roughly) simultaneous views. Unlike a split screen, it tends to privilege one view over the other, since the character making asides generally does so from an informed position that enables him or her to comment on the situation at hand. *Hecyra* 623-726 illustrates this inequality via the characters’ contrasting reactions: Laches is overjoyed to know he has a grandson (642-43, 651-53), but the news only makes Pamphilus despair (653); when Laches encourages his son not to worry, all the *adulescens* can do is worry more (650-51). Each of Pamphilus’ asides separates him from the conversation, emphasizing his emotional isolation and inviting audience members to regard him differently from the way they view the others. Since an aside is essentially a means of analyzing concurrent onstage action, Pamphilus’ comments place him momentarily above and beyond the drama’s events.

His isolation is, however, merely figurative. On stage, Pamphilus stands beside Laches and Phidippus, who nonetheless cannot hear the young man’s desperate exclamations. Such physical proximity makes the asides challenging to perform, and of the three main options available for staging *Hecyra* 623-726, each will affect how the audience perceives both Pamphilus’ character and the nature of his dilemma.

The simplest way for any actor to perform Pamphilus’ asides is to cup his hand around the side of his mouth and pretend to whisper, all the while projecting his voice at

regular volume. This method will not only separate him from the other characters' conversation, but also create an immediate and close rapport with the play's audience. Spectators will feel that Pamphilus is addressing his problems directly to them, and they will identify with him as a result. Further, the more spectators identify with Pamphilus, the more they will be tricked into believing his version of events.

The second and slightly more complex performance method involves all three actors. For each of Pamphilus' asides, the two old men can freeze their movements in a stylized tableau, a technique that places Pamphilus momentarily beyond the story's temporality. While Laches and Phidippus maintain a state of suspended animation, the actor playing Pamphilus can voice his asides in any way he pleases. With this kind of staging, however, his comments will seem more like thoughts than utterances; they will appear even more private and removed than the 'whispered' asides, and as such, they will not involve the audience to the same degree.

The third option takes this isolation a step further. Impossible on the Roman stage but standard in modern theaters, lighting can be used to focus spectators' attention on particular characters. In *Hecyra* 623-726, Pamphilus can speak his asides underneath a spotlight, while the rest of the stage is dimmed or even darkened. Like the second performance method, this arrangement suspends the play's action and makes Pamphilus' asides resemble thoughts. Since a darkened stage also tends to cut ties between actors and audience, this kind of performance leaves Pamphilus very much on his own. The performer in this role need not, therefore, direct his comments towards those watching, but can speak them to himself instead. As a result, spectators will feel no particular allegiance to Pamphilus, though they may still regard his knowledge as superior to that of other characters.

All three scenarios can generate laughter easily. In the first, the actor's behaviour is un-naturalistic to the point of being ludicrous. The second and third performance options

differ slightly in that they make Pamphilus' comments seem more serious. But the manner in which they achieve this effect will rapidly become a source of laughter, as eight asides in fewer than 100 lines will cause tableaux or lighting changes to occur with ridiculous frequency.

The most basic tenet of performance criticism is that we need to think about drama as both textual and physical, as something that is done (δράω) as well as read. Since performance is fleeting, this approach is always a challenge, more so for anyone studying *comoedia palliata*, where textual evidence far outweighs anything else. Nevertheless, the task is not completely impossible. We may never know *exactly* what Plautus' and Terence's plays looked like in performance, but with a little imagination, a little deduction, and some careful sifting of evidence, we can at least begin to move these works off the page and onto the stage.

### Further Reading

For general information on the stagecraft and production of Roman comedy, Duckworth (1952) and Beare (3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 1964) remain valuable and reliable resources. Recent work on the topic includes Manuwald's comprehensive survey of republican drama (2011) and the performance-based studies by Beacham (1991) and Marshall (2006), both of which focus primarily on Plautus.

Scholarship about more specific elements of performance can be found in Kurrelmeyer (1932: roles and role-division); Ketterer (1986a, 1986b, 1986c: stage properties); Saunders (1909: costume); and Wiles (1991: masks). Again, Plautine drama is by far the preferred topic; Terence's stagecraft awaits fuller study. Another way of discussing performance is to analyze it at the internal level of 'metatheater', for which approach Slater (1985) and Moore (1998) constitute the two most fundamental examples.

On the whole, Terence has received less scholarly attention than Plautus. Büchner (1974) and Goldberg (1986) are standard book-length treatments, while chapters in Manuwald (2011) and Lowe (2007) provide useful overviews of the playwright's life and work. Parker (1996) takes a refreshingly positive view of Terence, and questions scholars' willingness to rank him as a second-rate playwright. Though Büchner (1974) touches on issues of performance, most studies approach Terence's plays as literary rather than dramatic pieces.