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Lost in barbarian translation: The anchoring function of the Greek models in Plautine comedy

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CHAPTER 2. *BARBARIAN TRANSLATION*

VERTERE AND GREEK MODELS: STARTING A REASSESSMENT FROM PLAUTUS' *ASINARIA*

1. INTRODUCTION

Working with fragments proves to be a slippery operation, for it often—if not always—implies a high degree of theoretical speculation. It is therefore time to take into consideration the 'safer' evidence provided by the comedies of the Umbrian playwright Plautus, which form the oldest extant corpus of Latin literature. In order to introduce my peculiar approach to Plautine drama and its difference from previous approaches,[1] I will start with a concrete case study, namely the *Asinaria*, (one of) Plautus' oldest extant play(s).[2] Thus, this chapter will first provide a more extensive application of the kind of reading I applied to Latin archaic fragments in the previous chapter, and afterwards make more general considerations on the role of Greek models in Latin so-called 'translations' at large, as well as in other Plautine plays.

2. "BARBARIAN" TRANSLATION IN CONTEXT. REASSESSING THE POET-AUDIENCE RELATIONSHIP IN THE PROLOGUE TO THE *ASINARIA*

The *Asinaria* is prefaced with a short prologue of only fifteen lines that, unlike other Plautine prologues,[3] does not outline the essentials of the plot but concentrates instead on the presentation of the nature of the comedy itself. These lines are delivered by an anonymous prologue-speaker who takes the floor on Plautus' behalf acting as his poetological mouthpiece. After asking for the audience's attention and turning to a herald's help for such a task (lines 1-5), the prologue-speaker addresses the spectators directly as follows:

> *nunc quid processerim huc et quid mihi voluerim*
> *dicam: ut sciretis nomen huius fabulae;*

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[1] See the *status quaestionis* in the Introduction, pp. 17ff.

[2] For the dating of Plautus' *Asinaria*, see the excellent commentary of Hurka 2010, 27-28, who suggests a timespan going from the traditional *terminus post quem* of 212 BC up to years 206-205 BC.

[3] See, for example, the prologues to *Amphitruo* (Chapter 5) and *Casina* (Chapter 6).

nam quod ad argumentum attinet, sane brevest.
nunc quod me dixi velle vobis dicere,
dicam: huic nomen Graece Onagrost[4] *fabulae;* 10
Demophilus scripsit, Maccus vortit barbare;
Asinariam volt esse, si per vos licet.
inest lepos ludusque in hac comoedia,
ridicula res est. date benigne operam mihi,
ut vos, ut alias, pariter nunc Mars adiuvet. (*Asin.* 6-15)

Now I'll tell you why I've come here, and what I had in mind: letting you know the title of this play. For there is not much to say about the plot. Now I'll tell you what I said I wanted to tell you: the title of this play is *The Ass* in Greek. Demophilus wrote it, Maccus turned it into a barbarian language. With your permission, he wants it to be called *The Comedy of the Asses*. There is grace and jest in this comedy, it is a funny thing! Please, grant me your attention, and may Mars help you in the same way now, just as he did other times.

By telling the spectators that the summary of plot (*argumentum*) of the current drama has a very short (*sane breve*) length, the prologue-speaker seems to suggest that the backstory of the play is very simple and perhaps is already familiar to the audience, for the lack of need to provide preliminary explanations might anticipate a recurrent and basic plot. Instead, what might not be as much obvious for the audience is the comedy's title, or more properly, its "name" (*nomen*), whose disclosure becomes a pretext for outlining the story of the play's origin, which is as brief as the *argumentum*. In a famous chiastic statement of only three lines (10-12), the audience is told that there was originally a Greek comedy entitled *Onagros* ('The Ass'), written by some Demophilus, and that Plautus translated it "into a barbarian language" (i.e. Latin, his own language), renaming it '*Asinaria*' ('The Comedy of the Asses'), if the spectators allow for such a change.

The core of this statement, namely the expression *Maccus vortit barbare*, is universally acknowledged as the σφραγίς, the artistic signature of Plautus, here called *Maccus* after one of the stock characters of the Oscan *fabula Atellana*. Traditionally, the act of "translating into a barbarian language" mentioned in this signature[5] is considered the most peculiar aspect of Plautus' artistic profile, and the poet is portrayed in current scholarship accordingly, namely as a translator or as an adapter of some original plays written by the three canonical authors of Greek New Comedy Menander, Diphilus and Philemo (Demophilus is a very particular, extra-canonical, case, as we will see below).[6] According to such a portrait, Plautus therefore

[4] Unlike Lindsay, who—as most editors do—prints the form *Onagost* (= *onagos est*, from ὀναγός, the Doric version of the Attic word ὀνηγός, 'ass-driver'), I prefer the reading *Onagrost* (=*onagros est*, from ὄναγρος, which means 'wild ass' and is an Attic word) attested in manuscripts B and D (see Linday's *sigla codicum*). Linday does not seem aware of the existence of this reading (see his *apparatus*), unlike Danese (see the *apparatus* of his *editio Plautina Sarsinatis* of 2004). Traina 1954, 177-181 provides an overview of previous attempts to restore the reading *onagrost* in *Asinaria* 10, and of the reasons supporting such a choice.

[5] The prologue to the *Trinummus*, at l. 19, features almost the same formula. For the difference between the two prologues and their implications, see pp. 68ff.

[6] Plautus mentions two anonymous Greek models as models for his *Miles gloriosus* (l. 86) and *Poenulus* (l. 53), namely some *Alazon* and *Carchedonios* respectively (Kassel and Austin quote the passage from the *Miles* as a

proves to be in line with the tradition of the very first Roman poets-translators-philologists seen above. The nature of his *fabulae palliatae*—so called after the *pallium*, the typical Greek cloak worn by the actors—would support this view, since the Greek setting of these comedies in which the actors perform can be seen as a direct inheritance from the Greek models.

Concerning the "barbarian" character of Plautus' translation, the expression *vortit barbare* is unanimously interpreted as an ironic statement whereby Plautus, as he reflects on his own plays, adopts the point of view of the Greeks, so as to make fun of their famously snobbish prejudice against speakers of foreign languages, who sounded to them as stuttering, thus deserving the onomatopoeic title of '*bar-bar*-ians.' In fact, Plautus is not making fun of the Greeks, but of part of the Roman audience: by ironically apologising for disappointing (some) Roman spectators with the performance of a play in Latin, he pretends to go against their assumed philhellenic expectations, thus disappointing their 'refined' literary taste. The irony is made sharper by the author's use of the name *Maccus*, which reminds the audience of the Atellan plays, an Italic kind of improvisatory farce that was extremely popular in Rome,[7] and which was performed alongside the Hellenising—and literary—genre of the *palliata*.

The audience and their presumed literary expectations play a central role in the prologue-speaker's elucidation of Plautine art. He presents the spectators' consent (*si per vos licet*) as the inevitable precondition for the poet to change the Greek, Demophilean, title *Onagros* into the barbarian title *Asinaria*. At the time of this performance, Plautus was already a popular playwright:[8] he did not really need to ask for the audience's authorisation to perform Hellenising plays instead of natively influenced comedies. Therefore, thinking that Plautus wants his mouthpiece to utter this statement for the sake of a mere *captatio benevolentiae* is not a satisfactory explanation.

Rather, it seems more productive to think that here too Plautus is lampooning the expectations of an audience potentially concerned with the Greekness of dramas—and of literature in general. In the testimonies seen in the previous chapter, Cicero indirectly hinted at this kind of audience when presenting his own supposedly contested versions of Greek speeches and philosophical works, stating that when it comes to Latin "versions" of Greek comedies, by contrast, that very same audience do not voice any sort of criticism. A century

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testimonium of a lost *adespoton*, see *PCG* 8 Ἀλαζών, T3 K.-A., and mention Bergk's hypothesis that the *Poenulus* could be an adaptation of Alexis' Καρχηδόνιος, see *PCG* 2 s.v. Καρχηδόνιος). Plautus says also that Philemon's *Emporos* and *Thensauros* are the models of the *Mercator* (l. 9) and *Trinummus* (ll. 18-19), and that Diphilus' *Kleroumenoi* inspired his *Casina* (l. 31-32). Diphilus is said to have been responsible for the setting of the *Rudens* (l. 32, the title of the original is not mentioned). Finally, Diphilus and Philemon are mentioned together in the *Mostellaria* (l. 1149) as familiar authors. Other Plautine models are inferred from indirect *testimonia* (e.g. Terence's prologues). Traina 1954, 197-200 thought that Demophilus was a post-Menandrean playwright, and even tried to reconstruct his profile and establish his relation with Plautus' *Asinaria*. Sixty years later (see Traina 2014, 2), Traina has denied his own conjectures.

[7] See Traina 2013.

[8] Plautus had already become familiar to the Roman audience after a career as an Atellan performer, see Della Corte 1967[2], 30-43.

before Cicero, Plautus seems to have faced similar problems, because in his times there must have been still some recalcitrance over the 'barbarisation' of drama (more on the level of literary discussions than in terms of concrete appreciation of the performance), otherwise his sarcasm would not aim at any target, and thus not make sense.

In the light of these contextual reconsiderations, the Plautine σφραγίς too needs some reappraisal, especially for what concerns how the whole process of *vertere* is presented. Let us break up the message conveyed by Plautus' spokesperson in smaller bits of information: 1. "the play has a name in Greek," namely *Onagros*, a word meaning 'ass' (l. 10); 2. some—otherwise unknown[9]—"Demophilus wrote" (it) (l. 11a); 3. "Maccus turned (it) into a barbarian language" (l. 11b); 4. "he wants (it) to be (called\renamed) *Asinaria* ('The Comedy about the Asses'), if the spectators give their consent" (l. 12).

Two aspects deserve particular attention. The first is the fact that the connection between these four bits of information is left syntactically implicit, since the verbs in line 11 do not have any expressed object, such as a pronoun like *eam* confirming that both *scripsit* and *vortit* refer to *huic fabulae*, and something similar is absent in line 12 too, where it would confirm that *Asinaria* is just the new name of the very same *fabula*. Of course, the reason for this absence can be explained, for example, as a matter of metrical constraint. However, there is a neat stylistic difference between this statement and the immediately preceding lines (ll. 6-9 above). There, for example, the logic relations between each sentence are consistently made explicit by adverbs, pronouns and conjunctions (*nunc quid… quid…dicam… ut sciretis*; *nam quod…est*; *nunc quod… dicam*). By contrast, the σφραγίς is marked by a conspicuous paratactic style, which seems to be a stylistic device whereby Plautus conveys the idea that *vertere*, according to him, allows the same play (*huic…hac*) to have two parallel, and yet different, identities, each one identified by its own specific *nomen*.

Therefore, in Greek the play "is called" (*nomen* [*est*], plus dative) 'The Ass,' whereas in Latin it "is" (*esse*, auxiliary verb of the subject in accusative) 'The Comedy of the Asses,' or 'The Comedy about [Demophilus'] *The Ass*.'[10] What has been turned into the barbarian language is first of all the "name"—something stronger than just the title—of the play. The fact that the central topic of lines 10 and 12 is the play's *nomen*, and that in line 11 there is no explicit object forcing us to refer the verbs *scribere* and *vertere* to *fabula*, leaves the possibility open that the *nomen* of the comedy can be alternatively taken as the object of Demophilus' writing and of Plautus' translation. Moreover, in line 11 two other names play a crucial role: those of the Greek and barbarian poets respectively. The two halves of the line in which the names appear revolve around the same dichotomy of sameness and otherness noted above for the play's two *nomina*. From these observations we could conclude that the non-barbarian poet

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[9] In the collection of Kassel and Austin (*PCG* 5), the only item in the lemma *Demophilus* is this Plautine passage, which is quoted as the only existing *testimonium* about the Greek playwright.

[10] Cf. Henderson 2006, xii. The ending —*aria* typical of several titles of Latin *palliatae* expresses derivation. Does the *asinus* from which the title *Asinaria* derives refer to the asses mentioned in the play, or is it the Latin translation of the Greek title *Onagros* (*Asinus*), thus being a title deriving from another title?

Demophilus ('The One who Loves the People') is introduced first of all as the author of the title, whereas Maccus ('The Silly Guy,' an Atellan mask) is identified with the title changer.

However, this does not imply that the title changer lacks in originality. In the *Amphitruo*, as we will see, Plautus uses the very verb *vertere* to describe Jupiter's metamorphosis into a human character (cf. *Amph.* 121: *in Amphitruonis vertit sese imaginem*). Jupiter's *vertere* implies the adoption of several new aspects (literally, of several 'skins,' cf. *Amph.* 123: *ita versipellem se facit quando lubet*), and the simultaneous retention of his own deep nature, which does not change in spite of his exterior transformation.[11] Provided that Plautus' understanding of the concept of *vertere* in the prologues to *Asinaria* and *Amphitruo* is not different, we should assume that a similar retention of the previous nature is implied also in the σφραγίς of the *Asinaria*. Lines 13-14, where the prologue-speaker says that some *lepos* and *ludus* lie at the core of the play, which is thus a *ridicula res*, announce the play's farcical nature. There is little doubt that this statement is an ontological definition of the *Asinaria* (note the sense of concreteness conveyed by the word *res* appearing in l. 2 too, where it is a synonym of *fabula/comoedia*), and that the words *lepos ludusque* and *ridicula* hint at the farcical spirit peculiar of Plautine drama—as it will appear clearly in our analysis of the *Casina*[12]—and inherited from the Italic tradition, as Plautus' Atellan name *Maccus* also suggests.

Therefore, if *vertere* implies a change in one's identity and a simultaneous preservation of one's deepest nature, and if the *Asinaria* features the typical ridicule of Italic dramatic tradition, it follows that the elusive Greek poet Demophilus cannot have really composed a *ridicula res* full of Plautine *lepos* and *ludus*, and, ultimately, that *vertere* is for Plautus an ironic way to claim that his comedy fulfils the established generic conventions nevertheless and in such a way that fans of Hellenising literature might (mis)take the *Asinaria* for a translation of one of the canonical Greek plays. In this regard, Plautus must have not chosen Demophilus as a model by chance, namely a non-canonical author by the speaking name 'The One who Loves the People'.' Plautus seems to have met thus—ironically—the expectations of the recipients who want Roman drama to follow some Greek 'models.'

Before speculating further on this passage and on the relation between Plautus and Demophilus, I must leave the Plauto-Demophilean question and its poetological implications open. I first need to consider through the following in-depth analysis whether the play's content supports any kind of meta-literary reading of the prologue. Therefore, after providing some possible evidence for the meta-poetic interpretation of the complex formulation of the prologue to the *Asinaria*, I will settle the question at the end of section 3.4 in this chapter.

3. *ASINARIA*, OR HOW TO WRITE A *PALLIATA*

[11] See Bettini 2012, 37-49.

[12] For the meaning of *ludus* as *ludificatio* (a public 'mockery') in Plautus see pp. 206ff. in Chapter 6.

After the prologue, the play begins with a dialogue between the slave Libanus and his old master Demaenetus. It becomes immediately clear from the dialogue that Demaenetus summoned Libanus without telling him the reason of the call. The slave is therefore afraid that the master wants to punish him[13] for having hidden and supported (ll. 57-58) his son's love affair with the young prostitute Philaenium, which Demaenetus has eventually discovered (ll. 52-54). To his surprise, however, the slave finds out that his master is not furious at him at all (ll. 46-48), but needs instead his assistance in helping Argyrippus to find the money that a procuress asked in exchange for Philaenium for one year—namely the canonical twenty *minae* needed by most *adulescentes amatores* to ransom their lovers from a pimp. If Argyrippus does not manage to find the money in time, the madam will whore the prostitute out to his rival, who, by contrast, has the money in hand.

3.1. CONFLICTING MODELS: SLAVE VS. MASTER

Up to this point, the play's backstory suggests that the plot of the *Asinaria* will be one of the most typical and recurrent plots of Roman comedy. We thus understand the prologue-speaker's anticipation about the shortness of the play's *argumentum* (l. 8 above). For the sake of clarity, here follows a brief summary of the 'simple' plot of the comedy that we just started to analyse:

> The young man Argyrippus, Demaenetus' son, needs twenty *minae* in order to ransom the young prostitute Philaenium, who works in the brothel run by the procuress Cleareta. As often in a *palliata*, the penniless Argyrippus turned to his (and his father's) slave Libanus, hoping that his cleverness will help him find the money before the procuress lets the girl for one year to Argyrippus' rival, the rich man Diabolus. After discovering his son's love affair, Demaenetus, who is as broke as Argyrippus, decides to help his son by advising Libanus on how to find the money, namely by robbing his rich wife Artemona. Her rich dowry (for which Demaenetus hates Artemona) is managed by a slave who is waiting for some intermediary to bring him the money coming from the selling of some asses belonging to Artemona. Libanus decides to deceive the intermediary by disguising a third person as Artemona's administrator, thus succeeding in getting the money. However, before giving the amount to Argyrippus, Libanus makes him bend down on all fours and rides him, as if he were an ass. In addition, Demaenetus tells his son that he wants sleep with his girlfriend first, laying claim to his *ius primae noctis*. This explains why the old man was so willing to support his son's affair: he just wanted to fulfil his lecherous desire. Argyrippus accepts this second humiliation, but Diabolus' parasite, who discovered Demaenetus' intention, informed Artemona on his intentions. She therefore appears on stage before Demaenetus manages to put his hands over the girl, and the comedy finally ends with the old man's public mockery.

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[13] By sending him to forced-labour in a mill (see ll. 31-39), a kind punishment of which other slaves of Greek and Roman comedy are afraid. Munari 1947, 27-29 gives a detailed analysis of ll. 16-39 showing Libanus' increasing worries up to the moment when Demaenetus reassures Libanus that he will not send him to the *pistrinum*. See more on this aspect at pp. 71ff.

Although the summary features many details, the plot is really simple and standard: a young man loves a young woman, he needs the money in order to get her, thus his slave helps him with a deceit against the richest character in the play. Also the old man's lust for a young girl is a recurrent feature, as well as his hate for the rich *uxor dotata* (Artemona). In fact, there is one—seeming—surprising exception, as Libanus' astonishment suggested (l. 50b: *quid istuc novi est?*),[14] namely Demaenetus' initial tolerance of his son's love affair with a prostitute, and his willingness to help him find the money for that. These two aspects make Demaenetus differ from the typical fathers of comedy, as he acknowledges himself (l. 50: *patres ut faciunt ceteri*). With *patres ceteri*, Demaenetus refers to the typical fathers of Greek comedy,[15] generally portrayed as strict characters with a tendency to correct their sons' misbehaviour (including having an affair with a prostitute), namely the so-called *pater durus*. By contrast, Demaenetus rejects this comic prototype declaring his affiliation with a different race of comic fathers represented by his own father:

volo me patris mei similem, qui causa mea
nauclerico ipse ornatu per fallaciam
quam amabam abduxit ab lenone mulierem; 70
neque puduit eum id aetatis sycophantias
struere et beneficiis me emere gnatum suom sibi.
eos me decretumst persequi mores patris.
nam me hodie oravit Argyrippus filius,
uti sibi amanti facerem argenti copiam; 75
et id ego percupio obsequi gnato meo.
volo amori obsecutum illius, volo amet me patrem.
quamquam illum mater arte contenteque habet,
patres ut consueverunt: ego mitto omnia haec. (*Asin*. 68-79)

I want to be like my father, who for my benefit disguised himself as a ship-master and by means of a deceit took away from the pimp the woman I loved. He did not feel ashamed to use trickeries at his age, and gain with his favours the esteem of his son, me. I decided to follow my father's habit. Today my son Argyrippus begged me to get some money for his love affair, and I really want to satisfy my son's request. I want him to pursue his love for her, I want him to love me, his father. Although his mother treats him firmly and severely, just as fathers used to do, I dismiss all these things.

The last line of this passage is a strong statement of Demaenetus' intention to break with the tradition of the austere fathers typical of Greek comedy, becoming for his son Argyrippus a friend rather than a father. Moreover, Demaenetus goes simultaneously against his wife

[14] Wonder as an intended feeling aiming to stress the novelty of a certain feature in the play is a device particularly exploited in the *Amphitruo* (see Chapter 5, pp. 164ff.).

[15] "Meint Demaenetus, was er sagt? Dass der Vater weder dem liebenden Jüngling noch den mit ihm verbündeten Sklaven (dazu siehe 57-8) zürnt, verkehrt die komischen Konventionen: Menan. *Cith.* (vgl. Sherberg 1995, 36), Ter. *Adelph*. 81ff. u.ä." (Hurka 2010, 82 *ad loc.*, see *ibid*. also the referenced bibliography on Plautus' awareness of diverging from the conventions of the *Nea*).

Artemona (*quamquam illum mater*), the typical Plautine *uxor dotata* whose rich dowry makes her the real authoritative member of the family, contrary to Roman everyday life. Therefore Demaenetus targets his detested[16] wife's dowry with a twofold aim: firstly, getting the money his son Argyrippus needs, and secondly taking revenge on Artemona's prevarication. There is however a third secret goal, as we saw in the plot summary: spending a night with his son's lover. Fathers competing with their own sons for the same girl—the so-called *senes amatores*—are recurrent characters in Plautine comedy, and are generally doomed to being caught by their wives right before the accomplishment of their lecherous plans, as it happens in the *Asinaria* too. Therefore, to what extent is Demaenetus' behaviour new, as he declares himself?

The acting troupe delivering the closing lines of the play states that, eventually, Demaenetus did not do anything new and astonishing, because his lecherous and deceitful behaviour mirrors exactly what "the others" do: *hic senex si quid clam uxorem suo animo fecit volup,/neque novom neque mirum fecit nec secus quam alii solent* (ll. 942-943). At first, this statement seems to undermine what Demaenetus said at the beginning of the play, when he announced his intention to break with the current paradigm embodied by "all the other fathers" of comedy (l. 50: *patres ut faciunt ceteri*). By the end of the play, Demaenetus shows that he fully belongs to the ancestry of the ridiculous *senes amatores* of the *palliata*,[17] lecherous old men who make a fool of themselves by disastrously failing to seduce much younger women. This latter category of characters[18] is presented at the end of the *Asinaria* as established and well known, an aspect that seems to clash with Demaenetus' initial refusal to belong to an established category of conventional characters.

This seeming incongruity can be solved by contextualising the two different perspectives from which originality and tradition can be claimed respectively. On the one hand, the slave Libanus, a Greek character pretending to act in a Greek play, expects his master to be a typical master of Greek comedy. On the other hand, the troupe, which is not bound to the dramatic illusion of a Greek setting and thus can afford to comment on the performance itself, tells the audience that Demaenetus is just one of those *senes amatores* they saw several other times on the Roman stage, certainly in the *palliatae*,[19] and, possibly, in the more 'indigenous' *Atellanae* too.[20] Within the play Demaenetus (and Libanus, who wonders at his behaviour) really believes, as an alleged Greek character, that by behaving as a *senex amator* of Roman *palliatae*

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[16] In the *Asinaria*, the husband's typical hate for his rich and arrogant wife is the topic of the initial dialogue between Libanus and Demaenetus (see ll. 42-43, and 60-62). The comedy that best features the theme of the *uxor dotata*'s power on her husband (with a peculiar carnivalesque inversion of man's and woman's social roles, hinted in *Asinaria* 78-79 above) is the *Casina*, on which Chapter 6 (pp. 202ff) focuses.
[17] See Sherberg 1995, 165-166.
[18] For this meta-theatrical reading of the troupe's valediction, see also Henderson 2006, 215 *ad loc*.
[19] A confirmation of this interpretation is provided in the epilogue of the *Bacchides*, where the very same behaviour is explicitly attributed to the *senes amatores*: *hi senes nisi fuissent nihili iam inde ab adulescentia,/non hodie hoc tantum flagitium facerent canis capitibus;/neque adeo haec faceremus, ni antehac vidissemus fieri,/ut apud lenones rivales filiis fierent patres* (*Bacch*. 1207-1210).
[20] The Atellan character of the *pappus* seems to be the Italic counterpart (or forerunner?) of the *senex amator*. On the influence of the *fabula Atellana* on the father-son relationship in the *palliata* see Sherberg 1995, 173-184. See also Chapter 6, pp. 219ff.

or a *pappus* of Atellan plays he breaks with the tradition of the *Nea*. Demaenetus' point of reference is therefore Greek New Comedy, whereas the troupe takes into account a different tradition as a point of reference.

It is already clear that the *Asinaria* can be read meta-theatrically as a play about the conflict between two different traditions, the old *Nea* and the new *palliata* respectively, and most of all as a play about the possible solution of such a conflict by means of anchoring. Demaenetus himself gave an example of this practice by presenting his self-perceived innovative behaviour as already deriving from a tradition, however recent: namely the one coming from his father. By recalling an episode from his own adolescence in which his father, rather than his slave, helped him find the money in order to free the prostitute with whom he fell in love, Demaentus creates a precedent in which he can anchor his own innovative—with respect to Greek storylines—paternal behaviour towards his son. Therefore, he can give the impression that his innovative attitude is not radically new.

3.2. Need a poet? Hire a professional!

As anticipated above, Demaenetus' declaration that he must support his son and become like a friend to him instead of disapproving of his love affair with a prostitute is just a deceitful pretext aiming to fulfil his own lust for that very prostitute. Demaenetus gives a hint of this mendacious inclination while disclosing his paternal parentage. In this occasion, after saying that his father helped him by taking his lover away from the pimp *per fallaciam* (l. 69) on his behalf, Demaenetus reveals that he does not mind telling *sycophantias* himself despite his advanced age (*neque puduit eum id aetatis*, l. 71), which would rather suggest a wise behaviour. These very *patris mores* (l. 73), Demaenetus openly states, will inform his behaviour in the rest of the play. Therefore, it turns out that at the beginning of the *Asinaria* he called the slave Libanus, a liar by nature, in order to pursue his own deceitful and lecherous plan. However, Demaenetus pretends to want Libanus to develop a deceit whereby Artemona can be deprived of the money (i.e. twenty *minae*) to his son's benefit, namely for Philaenium's release:

> DEM. *viginti iam usust filio argenti minis:*
> *face id ut paratum iam sit*. LIB. *unde gentium?* (*Asin*. 89-90)
> ….
> DEM. *Qua me, qua uxorem, qua tu servom Sauream*
> *potes, circumduce, aufer; promitto tibi*
> *non offuturum, si id hodie effeceris*. (*Asin*. 96-98)
>
> DEM. My son needs twenty *minae* soon: make sure the money will be ready soon. LIB. Where should I get it? [...] DEM. Do your best to cheat and rob me, my wife, the slave Saurea. I promise that I won't hinder you, if you'll do it today.

Demaenetus himself, who is extremely poor,[21] suggests Libanus how to find the money: on Artemona's behalf, a slave has recently sold to a merchant from Pella some Arcadian (i.e. very expensive) assess (ll. 333-336)—hence, at least formally, the title of the play. An *adulescens* is in charge of handing in the earnings from the selling to Saurea, the administrator of Artemona's rich dowry. After being reassured that, should the plan fail, he will not be punished (ll. 105-113), Libanus decides to help his old and young masters, and withdraws from the stage in order to devise a trickery against Artemona's *servus dotalis* Saurea (l. 115: *pergam quo occepi atque ibi consilia exordiar*[22]). The impression is that Libanus has no idea (yet) of how to concretely perform his deception, and thus that the progress of the play's plot depends on his improvisatory skills. In order to counterbalance this excess of uncertainty and suspense, Demaenetus, after being left alone on the stage, praises Libanus' virtues, thus reassuring the audience that his slave is so cunning and obedient that he will definitely carry out his task:

non esse servos peior hoc quisquam potest
nec magi' vorsutus nec quo ab caveas aegrius.
eidem homini, si quid recte curatum velis, 120
mandes: moriri sese misere mavolet,
quam non perfectum reddat quod promiserit.
nam ego illud[23] *argentum tam paratum filio*
scio esse quam me hunc scipionem contui. (*Asin.* 118-124)

Nobody can be a worse slave than this one, nor more cunning, nor worthier of mistrust. If you want a task to be carried out in the right way, trust it to this person: he'll prefer to die miserably, rather than leaving what he promised halfway through. For I know that the money is already prepared for my son as much as I know that I'm looking at this staff.

Demaenetus shows himself pretty confident in his slave's ability to carry out his duties (he says that the money is already *paratum*[24]), for he knows his natural inclination to fulfil the master's orders at any cost, even dying (*moriri mavolet*). For this very reason Demaenetus declares that his faithful wily slave Libanus is "the worst" (*non…peior quisquam*) kind of person, and as such the best person who can find a way to get the money for his son. In addition, he also says that Libanus is the most "cunning" (*vorsutus*,[25] the well-known adjective Andronicus used to translate Homer's πολύτροπον in the opening of his *Odusia*, as seen

[21] To Libanus' question *unde gentium?* (l. 90), Demaenetus replies: *me defrudato* ('rip me off,' l. 91a), to which Libanus replies in turn: *maxumas nugas agis:/nudo detrahere vestimenta me iubes* ('you talk nonsense: you order me to rip the clothes from a naked person,' ll. 91b-92).
[22] Note that Libanus does not openly speak of a deceit yet, unlike Demaenetus in the passages above.
[23] I prefer the reading of the manuscripts *illud* to Lindsay's *illuc*.
[24] Here Demaenetus quotes from himself at line 90: *face id ut paratum iam sit* ('make sure it [i.e. the money] will be immediately ready').
[25] Also Pseudolus is defined by his master *vorsutus* (*Pseud.* 1243), see Chapter 4, p. 146.

above at p. 38) person for whom one should watch out. Although it is clear that Demaenetus is talking about Libanus' skilfulness at lying—especially to the detriment of the master—he keeps his discourse on a rather general level.

The content of Demaenetus' portrait of Libanus is clarified later on in a monologue by the slave himself where he seems to bring back the sense of suspense that his master tried to dissolve by praising his skilfulness. By contrast, Libanus questions it again together with the play's overall successful outcome, which depends on the slave's ability to develop a deceit against the agent Saurea:

hercle vero, Libane, nunc te meliust expergiscier
atque argento comparando fingere fallaciam 250
iam diu est factum quom discesti ab ero atque abiisti ad forum,
[*igitur inveniundo argento ut fingeres fallaciam.*][26]
ibi tu ad hoc diei tempus dormitasti in otio.
quin tu abs te socordiam omnem reice et segnitiem amove
atque ad ingenium vetus vorsutum te recipis tuom? 255
serva erum, cave tu idem faxis alii quod servi solent,
qui ad eri fraudationem callidum ingenium gerunt.
unde sumam? quem intervortam? quo hanc celocem conferam? (*Asin.* 249-258)

By Heracles, come on Libanus! You better wake up now, and come up with a deceit whereby you can find the money. You have departed from your master and went to the forum already long ago [so that you could invent a lie in order to find the money]. There, however, you slept until now without doing anything. Why don't you shake off all the laziness, put away your inactivity, and go back to your old cunning nature? Spare you master, make sure you'll avoid doing what other slaves normally do, using cunning cleverness to fraud the masters, that is. From where will I take the money? Whom will I trick? To where will I navigate this ship?

After leaving for the forum to develop his *consilia* (l. 115 above), Libanus in fact has fallen asleep without coming up with any *fallacia* at all. In addition, he specifies that a quite long time has passed ever since, casting doubt on the prospective success of the men's plan against Artemona, thus contributing to the increase of the audience's feeling of suspense.[27] The word *fallacia* (l. 250) appears here for the second time after Demaenetus used it to describe the deceit whereby his father managed to redeem his girlfriend (l. 69 above), and discloses for the first time in the *Asinaria* that Libanus will get the money by means of a deceit. It is also eventually clarified why it is Libanus who must carry out such a task: after inviting himself to awake from his slumber (l. 254), the slave says that it is time to go back to his *ingenium vorsutum*. The slave's cunningness Demaenetus hinted at in his praise receives now a better

[26] I agree with Guyet (see Linday's apparatus) on the opportunity to delete this line, which is a repetition of line 250.
[27] This device is exploited particularly well in the *Pseudolus* (see Chapter 4, pp. 123ff.).

connotation, for he presents it as inherent to Libanus' nature, and as such, as an infallible attitude that can reassure the audience on the play's successful outcome.

More importantly, it is specified that the slave's *ingenium* is *vetus*, a detail that from a meta-theatrical point of view suggests a conventional and recurrent characterisation of the slave. This impression is confirmed by Libanus' following words on the habit of other slaves, who allegedly make use of their *callidum ingenium* to cheat and rob their masters (l. 257) regularly. However, Libanus decides to spare Demaenetus, thus rejecting the customary target of his fellow slaves. Libanus really proves to be loyal towards Demaenetus, as Demaenetus himself anticipated in his praise of the slave. Such a loyalty, however, represents an obstacle for Libanus, because by ruling out the possibility of swindling his master he comes at odds with his own nature, which would rather incline him to trick Demaenetus. Hence Libanus' uncertainty, for he cannot figure out how else he can look for the money. In fact, we saw above that Demaenetus had already suggested him to defraud the slave Saurea, but Libanus seems to have forgotten about that. His puzzlement is therefore once more instrumental in keeping the audience in suspense through the haunting threat of a failure that could compromise the development of the plot up to the end.

In this passage Libanus also proves to be aware of his own theatrical role. Not only does he realise that he must alter the typical cunning slave's *ingenium vorsutum* by introducing such an innovation as ruling out the canonical *eri fraudatio* (l. 257), but he also shows the audience how much pressure he feels about the fact that the development of the plot—and thus the accomplishment of the play itself—depends on his ability to carry out the deceit. However, as often in Plautus, in the scene that immediately follows (ll. 266-380) Libanus has a stroke of luck: his fellow slave and accomplice Leonida suddenly appears bringing him the good news that he has seen an *adulescens* (l. 336) who was looking for Saurea, to whom he would have given the twenty *minae* coming from the selling of the asses, had he only found him at home. Libanus has therefore a brilliant idea: after hearing from Leonida that the *adulescens* is ignorant of what Saurea actually looks like, but knows Demaenetus' face (ll. 347-349), he decides to disguise Leonida as Saurea (ll. 367-368),[28] involving Demaenetus as their accomplice so as to persuade the young man to give the money to the fake Saurea under Demenetus' reassurance.[29]

The money is thereby obtained. More importantly, the play can be brought to an end: Libanus has succeeded in the mission that his master had entrusted to him at the beginning of the comedy. In the light of this meta-theatrical reading of the *Asinaria*, it has turned out that Libanus' mission featured not only the development of a *fallacia*, but also the staging of the

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[28] Actually, it is not a real disguise: when the merchant asks Libanus how Saurea looks like, Libanus simply describes Leonida's complexion (see ll. 399-402), which corresponds to the typical description of a slave's aspect, especially concerning the red hair (l. 400: *rufulus aliquantum*), a stereotypical physical trait of comic slaves (see for example Pseudolus' portrait in *Pseud.* 1218-120).

[29] The account of the dynamics of the deception is provided in the form of the 'messenger speech' at lines 580-584.

play itself.[30] This is particularly evident in the kind of trick that Libanus comes up with, which consisted in making two of his fellow characters play a role in the masquerade he orchestrated (i.e. directed) against the merchant's go-between.

At this point, the question arises why Demaenetus did not develop the trick himself, since his real aim is not to help his son, but to steal his lover instead. The answer is quite simple: Demaenetus cannot do that himself because, unlike Libanus, he lacks in poetic skill. If the deceit takes the shape of a masquerade that resembles the composition and the performance of a play within the play, Demaenetus needs a 'professional' who can write down the plot of the *fallacia* on his behalf. This explains why at the outset of the play Demaenetus summoned his slave: he knew that Libanus was the right person for this task because of his well-known *ingenium vetus vorsutum* (l. 255). Last but not least, Libanus' theatrical skilfulness is such that Demaenetus is persuaded to act in the farce directed by his slave.

3.3. Greek and slaves, yet the best poets. The Roman approach to Greek culture between ethnic disdain and cultural admiration

Libanus and Demaenetus are not the only couple in the play characterised by such a meta-theatrical relationship. Overall, the *Asinaria* revolves around three pairs of characters, each consisting of one member portrayed as well versed in literary practice and aware of characters' conventional roles, and a second member who conversely proves to be a rather culturally uneducated person. Besides Libanus and Demaenetus, the 'poetic slave' and the 'unlettered master' respectively, it is possible to identify a similar relationship between the procuress Cleareta[31] and Demaenetus' son Argyrippus, and between Argyrippus' love rival Diabolus and his parasite. The analysis of these couples will first provide the analytical tools for understanding some aspects of Roman literary production, which seem to be mirrored in the theatrical representation, and afterwards will allow for more general conclusions on Plautus' own understanding of a literature based on Greek models and on his relationship with the Greek poet Demophilus in particular.[32]

With regard to Cleareta and Argyrippus, their meta-theatrical characterisation and mutual literary relationship emerge clearly in the former's reply to the latter's accusation of being insatiable as to her demand for money in exchange for her prostitute Philaenium's services:

> ARG. *male agis mecum*. CL. *quid me accusas, si facio officium meum?*

[30] See Petrone 1983a, 46-47.

[31] *Cleareta* is Lindsay's spelling. In fact, the manuscripts feature several other readings (see Danese's *editio Sarsinatis* of the *Asinaria* for a complete overview).

[32] The following meta-theatrical analysis coincides only in small part with that of Slater 2000^2, 45-56. While according to Slater almost all characters in the *Asinaria* act as poets competing with each other for the best script, I restrict such a meta-theatrical role to the cunning slave Libanus and Diabolus' anonymous parasite, both servile figures. More importantly, my conclusions differ from Slater's.

nam neque fictum usquamst neque pictum neque scriptum in poematis
ubi lena bene agat cum quiquam amante quae frugi esse volt. (*Asin*. 173-175)

ARG. You are treating me badly. CL. Why do you accuse me, if I do my duty? For there has never been a statue made, nor a picture painted, nor a poem written in which a procuress treats well some lover by being generous to him.

In order to show Argyrippus that her behaviour is unsurprising and totally conventional, Cleareta brandishes her knowledge of the three domains of art (sculpture, painting, and poetry),[33] none of which features the case of a procuress behaving differently from her. In particular, her reference to poetry (*in poematis*) alludes most likely to comic poetry, the only genre where a *lena* can fit, and where no single case of a *lena frugi* can be actually found. Therefore Cleareta, just as Libanus, proves to be aware of her counterparts' behaviour in other comedies, and tries to act accordingly. What is more, not only does she prove to know the literary motifs of a particular poetic genre, but shortly after she also displays her ability to deploy poetic features herself, as in her use of a hunting metaphor while explaning to Argyrippus that it was her plan to rip him off up to his last cent:

CL. *itidem hic apud nos: aedes nobis area est, auceps sum ego,* 219-220
esca est meretrix, lectus inlex est, amatores aves;
bene salutando consuescunt, compellando blanditer,
osculando, oratione vinnula, venustula.
si papillam pertractavit, haud est ab re<d> aucupis;
savium si sumpsit, sumere eum licet sine retibus. 225
haecine te esse oblitum in ludo qui fuisti tam diu!
ARG. tua ista culpa est, quae discipulum semidoctum aps te amoves. (*Asin*. 219-227)

CL. The same (i.e. as in bird-hunting) goes here with us. Our house is the fowling-floor, I am the bird-catcher, the prostitute is the bait, the bed is the trap, the lovers are the birds: they become accustomed to nice greetings, flattering invitations, kisses, delightful and lovely speeches. If [a client] has touched the [prostitute's] nipple, he's not far from the hunter's target. If he has received a kiss, it is possible to catch him without nets. You forgot these things, you, after being in my school for so long! ARG. It's your fault! You send away from your school a student still in the middle of his training!

Therefore Cleareta shows not only that she is a reader of *poemata*, but also that she can express herself by means of a 'poetic' diction characterised by highly metaphoric imagery, and other elaborate stylistic features such as the chiasmus (in l. 222: adverb-gerund-main verb-gerund-adverb), the *climax* of the three gerunds, and the use of diminutives.[34] This elaborate

[33] This is not the only case in Roman comedy of a prostitute being portrayed as an educated character.
[34] About these and other features of Cleareta's elaborate language see Hurka 2010, 124-125 *ad loc*.

diction is instrumental in portraying Argyrippus as a pupil in the *lena*'s erotic school (*in ludo*). Cleareta's learned way of teaching, consisting firstly in using a metaphoric speech (see also ll. 215-218, right before the passage quoted above), and secondly in clarifying the metaphor through a thorough explanation of the analogies between hunting and running a brothel, makes Cleareta look like a literary scholar who, by instructing Argyrippus in the art of love, shows him how to act as a typical *adulescens amator* of comedy.[35]

As Hurka has shown,[36] by using the metaphor of bird hunting, the madam recalls the topical imagery used in Greek literature to represent the prostitute's job. Therefore, by outlining her own conventional role, Cleareta invites Argyrippus to occupy his place in their role-play game. At the end of her lecture, however, Cleareta manifests her disappointment for her student's poor learning: Argyrippus forgets Cleareta's teachings immediately, since he turns out to be still unaware of what his role exactly entails. He cannot behave, as he still tries to do, as an *amans frugi*, because the typical comic lover of comedy is supposed to squander all his money in the brothel. If earlier Argyrippus scolded Cleareta for misbehaving with him (*male agis mecum*, l. 173 above), now the procuress scolds him in turn complaining about his attempt to rebel against his conventional role and his persistent ignorance of comical roles in general. Eventually, after being shown by his teacher how poor his literary knowledge is, Argyrippus eventually calls himself *semidoctus*.

The second couple characterised by a similar meta-literary relationship is that of Argyrippus' love rival Diabolus and his anonymous parasite. While Argyrippus—in fact Libanus on his behalf—struggles to find the twenty *minae* Cleareta asked him for Philaenium, Diabolus instead can count on cash money, and can therefore stipulate with the procuress a one year long lease of the girl (see ll. 751-754). Diabolus asked his parasite to write down on a *syngraphus*[37] the agreement between himself, the madam, and the prostitute. Diabolus himself states the reason for commissioning such a task to his parasite:

> *agedum istum ostende quem conscripsti syngraphum*
> *inter me et amicam et lenam. leges pellege.*
> *nam tu poeta es prorsus ad eam rem unicus.* (*Asin.* 746-748)
>
> Come on! Show me the contract you wrote between me, my lover, and the madam. Read the agreements. For you are the only suitable poet for such a thing.

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[35] Hallett 2011, 174-191 has noticed a similar relationship between Phoenicium, the educated prostitute of the *Pseudolus*, and the eponymous cunning slave Pseudolus, who imitates the elaborate style—after criticising it—of her letter (which he is asked to read out loud at the opening of the play), thus acting as a pupil in her 'school.'

[36] Hurka 2010, 123 *ad loc.*

[37] For the kind of conclusions I will draw on this passage, it is important to stress that the content of the *syngraphus* is most likely Plautus' original creation (i.e. it is not taken from any Greek original). See the analysis of this passage and the conclusions of Scafuro 2003/04, 9-19.

Diabolus turned to his parasite because he thinks that he is the perfect "poet" for the composition of his contract. At first, it might be thought that the attribution of the label *poeta* to a character who is asked to write such a practical document as a contract is perhaps an exaggeration. A number of scholars argued that the word *poeta* in this context is in fact a synonym of *scriba*, and that as such it has no literary dimension.[38] However, the parasite's *syngraphus* features some elements that to some extent deserve to be called 'poetic.' Among the many obligations that Philaenium must fulfil, the parasite includes in the contract the following:

> *alienum hominem intro mittat neminem.*
> *quod illa aut amicum aut patronum nominet,*
> *aut quod illa amicai <eum> amatorem praedicet,*
> *fores occlusae omnibus sint nisi tibi.* (*Asin.* 756-759)
>
> Let her not let any other man in. Whether she calls him "a friend" or "a patron," or claims that "he's just a colleague's lover," let her doors be closed for everyone but you.

The main target of Diabolus' injunction to Philaenium's to receive no other guest than himself is of course the poor Argyrippus, with whom the girl is genuinely in love, as she declares herself to her mother and madam Cleareta at lines 504-544. In fact, Cleareta closed the doors of her brothel to Argyrippus at lines 127-152[39] already (just before her lecture on the actors' *officia* seen above), thus performing a typically scene of παρακλαυσίθυρον where the lover sang[40] his complaint to the mistress for shutting her doors down to him. Argyrippus recounts this scene of exclusion to his slave Libanus, adding that the procuress is about to lease Philaenium to Diabolus, because he can pay immediately, unlike himself.[41] Diabolus' parasite knows very well both that Philaenium really loves Argyrippus, and that Argyrippus is suffering a good deal for being torn away from his lover. This is why he expects Philaenium to try to deceive Diabolus by letting Argyrippus in her house under the guise of "a friend, or a patron, or some colleague's lover." By evoking at line 759 of his *syngraphus* the scenario of another παρακλαυσίθυρον, Diabolus wants therefore to hit Argyrippus by planning an alternative ending for the play according to which the current state of the plot, namely Argyrippus' suffering and exclusion, is perpetuated.

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[38] See Knapp 1917, 149 n. 2. Instead, Petrone 1978, 226 argues for a literal understanding of the word *poeta* recalling the parallel of Pseudolus (see Chapter 4, pp. 133ff.), the best Plautine embodiment of the comical and meta-theatrical figure of the *servus-poeta*.

[39] Havet 1905 and others (most recently Danese 2004) argued that in this scene Diabolus is acting, instead of Argyrippus. Against this attribution see the arguments of Lowe 1992, 159-163 and Marshall 2016.

[40] This is the only *canticum* of the play, and for this very reason scholars debated its attribution.

[41] *Asin.* 632-635: *hinc med amantem ex aedibus eiecit huiius mater./argenti viginti minae med ad mortem appulerunt,/quas hodie adulescens Diabolus ipsi daturus dixit,/ut hanc ne quoquam mitteret nisi ad se hunc annum totum* (Her [i.e. Philaenium's] mother sent me, her daughter's lover, away from the house. I was sentenced to death by twenty silver *minae*, which Diabolus, as he said, will give to the procuress today, so that she will whore out her daughter exclusively to him for this whole year').

The parasite and his master are the temporary winners of the play[42] thanks to the latter's availability of money. This enables the parasite to take over Libanus' meta-theatrical task of writing the plot of the play, and while re-writing the new (or alternative) continuation of the story, the parasite not only proves to be very knowledgeable about previous developments in the *Asinaria*, but also plans to keep its continuation consistent with the first part by extending the length of the παρακλαυσίθυρον scene, which, as we have just seen, has contributed to one of the most enjoyable episodes in the play. All this makes the parasite a somewhat poetological character.

Moreover, in the *syngraphus* the parasite displays not only his literary knowledge, but also his ability to craft verses himself. When Diabolus asks him to add one more condition to the document, the *poeta* does not hesitate to insert an extra line into the already written text, thus showing his poetic skill.[43] Strikingly enough, the parasite models the poetic diction of his *syngraphus* on that of the roughly contemporary poet Naevius. As it has been long recognised,[44] lines 775-784 of the contract echo a well-known fragment (fr. 2 Ribbeck[2]) of a Naevian *palliata*, the *Tarentilla*:[45]

neque illaec ulli pede pedem homini premat, 775
[*alii pervellit pedem*]
quom surgat, neque <quom> in lectum inscendat proxumum,
neque quom descendat inde, det quoiquam manum:
[*alibi manus est occupata*]
spectandum ne quoii anulum det neque roget.

[42] Argyrippus seems to (erroneously) acknowledge his own defeat by claiming that the twenty silver *minae* have led him to death (l. 633). However, his slave manages to provide him with the money before Diabolus can hire Philaenium. Diabolus is eventually a victim of παρακλαυσίθυρον himself. Conversely his parasite, as Damon 1997, 38-39 writes, manages to share Libanus' success by telling Demaenetus' wife that the *senex* plans to sleep with their son's girlfriend (the parasite comments on his own victory at ll. 820-827 and 911-919 of *Asinaria*). Artemona appears therefore on stage to stop her lecherous husband.

[43] *Asin.* 755-757: PAR. '*…hunc annum totum.*' DIAB. *neque cum quiquam alio quidem.*/PAR. *addone?* DIAB. *adde, et scribas vide plane et probe*/PAR. '*alienum hominem…*' (PAR. '…for this whole year.' DIAB. And with nobody else. PAR. Should I add it? DIAB. Add it, and make sure you'll write it clearly and properly. PAR. 'Let her not …').

[44] Since Scaliger's time, see Petrone 1978, 221-223.

[45] The edition of this fragment, which is a conflation of two quotations made by Festus and Isidore of Seville respectively (see Ribbeck's apparatus), is extremely complicated. For a remarkably detailed overview of the ecdotic issues and a new reconstruction of the fragment—which is turned into a *canticum*, while editors generally scan it as a series of trochaic septenarii—see Barchiesi 1978, 143-150. However, for the sake of simplicity I have interpolated in the Plautine passage above the following standard version of fr. 2 Ribbeck[2] (with the adjustments of Traina 2000[5], 34-35, reproduced in the commentary by Spaltenstein 2014, 230-238), and I provide its translation here: *quasi pila/in choro ludens datatim dat se et communem facit./alii adnutat, alii adnictat, alium amat, alium tenet;/alibi manus est occupata, alii pervellit pedem;/anulum dat alii spectandum, a labris alium invocat;/cum alio cantat, attamen alii suo dat digito litteras* ('As if she were playing ball in a team, she gives herself to everybody, turning from one to another. She nods to somebody, but she winks at somebody else, she caresses someone, but she hugs someone else; while her hands are busy with some activity, she plays footsie with somebody; while showing her ring to someone, she whispers someone else's name; she sings along with somebody, but with her finger she draws letters for somebody else').

[*anulum dat alii [ex]spectandum*]
talos ne quoiiquam homini admoveat nisi tibi.
cum iaciat, 'te' ne dicat: nomen nominet. 780
deam invocet sibi quam libebit propitiam,
deum nullum; si magi' religiosa fuerit,
tibi dicat: tu pro illa ores ut sit propitius.
neque illa ulli homini nutet, nictet, adnuat. (*Asin.* 775-784)
[*alii adnutat, alii adnictat, alium amat, alium tenet*]

She won't touch anybody's foot with her own foot when getting up. She won't give her hand to anybody neither when getting on the triclinium, nor when getting down from it. She won't show her ring to anybody, nor will she ask to see someone else's ring. She won't cast dice to anyone else but you. When throwing them, she won't say 'you:' let her call you by your name. She can invoke any propitious goddess, but no gods. If her devotion will require more than this, let her tell you: you will pray to the god on her behalf, so as to make him well disposed to her. She won't nod, blink, or wink at no one.

As Petrone suggested,[46] the parasite's—and Plautus'—poetic skilfulness is displayed not only in his ability to rework and expand Naevius' poetic diction, but also, perhaps more importantly, in his use of a literary prototype in order to make more understandable the way the parasite conceives Philaenium's character in his potentially new plot written in the *syngraphus*. The Naevian portrait of the flirty coquette—Tarentilla, after whom the play is named—must have become a popular model of style and typecasting both among Roman poets and audience immediately after the performance of the homonymous play.[47] By modelling his portrayal of Philaenium after that of Tarentilla, the parasite accomplishes a sophisticated operation of literary allusion, exploiting the Naevian picture in order to make the audience understand immediately the peculiar characterisation he has (re)assigned to the prostitute Philaenium in his *syngraphus*/script. To put it in other words, the parasite—thus, again, Plautus—anchors his alternative script of the *Asinaria* in the recent, and yet already established, tradition of Roman *palliatae* inaugurated by Livius Andronicus and developed by his successor Naevius.

It must not be forgotten that, according to the fiction of the play, the parasite considers himself a Greek character. Therefore, it is remarkable that, as a Greek *poeta*, the parasite chooses as a model a *poeta barbarus*, as Naevius is famously called in the *Miles gloriosus*.[48]

[46] Petrone 1978, 226-228. See Hurka 2010, 249-251 *ad loc.* (esp. l. 778). For a detailed structural comparison between the fragment of the *Tarentilla* and the parasite's *syngraphus* see Barchiesi 1978, 113-123, or, alternatively, the briefer comparison of Petrone 1978, 230-232.

[47] Naevius' fragment survived because it was still a paradigmatic portrayal of the *impudica* for Isidore, who quotes it in *orig.* 1.26.2 (attributing the passage to Ennius). Plautus echoes the same fragment also in *Merc.* 406-407. Moreover, this Naevian passage informed several τόποι of Latin elegy (see Petrone 1978, 233-235).

[48] *Mil.* 211-212: *nam os columnatum poetae esse indaudivi barbaro,/cui bini custodes semper totis horis occubant* ('I have heard that a barbarian poet is being pilloried,/and that two guards are standing at his sides watching him day and night'). These lines are part of the *senex* Periplectomenus' commentary on the slave Palaestrio's act of thinking. Scholars traditionally consider this section of Periplectomenus' description as a reference to Naevius' imprisonment for having composed (offensive) *mala carmina*, which were punished with stocks (that is what *os columnatus* hints at) by the Laws of the Twelve Tables. Gellius 3.3.15 too recalls this episode when he deals with

This is striking because the authorial relation between the translating and the translated poet outlined in the σφραγίς of the prologue is now inverted. If at the very beginning of the *Asinaria* the prologue-speaker claimed that Maccus translated a Greek original into a barbarian language (i.e. Latin), by contrast now, in the middle of the same play, the spectators witness a Greek *poeta unicus* such as the parasite 'translating' a barbarian mini-play such as the Naevian *syngraphus* into Attic (although the characters of a *palliata* obviously speak Latin,[49] they call their own language 'Greek' in accordance to the dramatic illusion). In fact, the paradox becomes less astounding if one keeps in mind that in the σφραγίς the process of Atticisation is presented as being superior to the opposite process of barbarisation.[50] Conversely, in the *syngraphus* the parasite Atticises the Naevian text thus 'perfecting' it in some way: *pulchre scripsti: scitum syngraphum!* (l. 802: 'You wrote excellently: what an elegant document!').

Now we can understand why earlier Diabolus called his parasite *poeta unicus*: he knew his literary skills, and he knew that he could turn to him as a professional writer. In this light, we must conclude that Diabolus' parasite must have been at his patron's service as a 'poet' already for a while, and consequently that poetic activity is his source for a living as long as the patron satisfies his parasite's proverbial gluttony in exchange for this very service. In general, Plautine parasites working for patrons as literary professionals are often presented as somewhat learned characters who rely on books as a source of inspiration for their jokes or for the development of the plot of the play in which they are acting. What is interesting is the fact that Greekness is often stressed as the hallmark of their literary and bookish service, as the following examples well illustrate.

Gelasimus in the *Stichus*

One of the most notable examples is that of Gelasimus, the parasite of the *Stichus* who is forced to auction his own *Witze* because his patron, being far away from home for business, does not provide him with regular and abundant meals anymore:

> *nunc auctionem facere decretumst mihi:* (*Stich.* 218)
> …
> *logos ridiculos vendo. age licemini.* (*ibid.* 221)

Plautus' alleged imprisonment in a mill, about which see below in this chapter. Although a great amount of scholarship has been written on this debated topic, see in particular Marmorale 1950², 53-116.

[49] Among the obligations that Philaenium must fulfil, the parasite includes in the contract the duty to speak only Attic (l. 793: *neque ulla lingua sciat loqui nisi Attica*). Of course, Philaenium speaks Latin on stage. Moreover, the parasite's contract is called with a Greek name, namely *syngraphus*, a calque of the Greek word σύγγραφος.

[50] See the analysis by Pérez Gómez 2002 of the consistent use of the adjective *barbarus* and of its meaning in the middle as well as in the prologues of Plautine comedies (especially pp. 192-198), where it conveys a poetics of "libertad creadora" (p. 1980).

…
cavillationes, adsentatiunculas
ac perieratiunculas parasiticas. (*ibid.* 228-229)

I've decided to do an auction now: (…) I'm selling my funny jokes. Come on, make a bid! (…) jokes, jests, and perjuries typical of parasites.

Before starting the auction, Gelasimus advertised all the services listed above as his *ornamenta*,[51] namely the professional equipment with which he managed to earn a living from his patron. Poverty, he says,[52] taught him to exploit his only talent, namely making witty jokes (hence the name Gelasimus, from γελάω, 'to laugh'), in order to survive. Therefore, his experience works as an assurance for the people who will buy his jokes that they will earn a free meal too,[53] just as he did many times. Gelasimus calls his own activity *ars*,[54] thus regarding the composition of jokes—a somewhat literary activity[55]—as a waged profession. When the threat of the arrival of new wittier parasites as part of his patron's commercial deal looms over him,[56] Gelasimus feels prompted to go back to his library and learn better jokes than those of his rivals: *ibo intro ad libros et discam de dictis melioribus;/nam ni illos homines expello, ego occidi planissume* (400-401: 'I'll go to my library inside, and learn some better jokes. For if I don't drive those men away, I'm most certainly ruined'). Eventually, books turn out to be a reliable source for Gelasimus, who can now feel more confident in his own ability to outplay the enemy: *libros inspexi; tam confido quam potis,/me meum optenturum regem ridiculis meis* (454-455: 'I took a look at my books: I am confident that, as long as I can, with my witticisms I'll keep my patron').

Saturio in the *Persa*

Witze and books, which in Plautine comedy form part of the parasite's typical professional equipment,[57] are repeatedly presented as Greek objects. For example, this emerges clearly in a statement made by the parasite of the *Persa* Saturio:

[51] *Stich.* 172: *venalis ego sum cum ornamentis omnibus* ('I am on sale with all my equipment').
[52] See *Stich.* 174-178.
[53] On humour as the parasite's compensation for his patron's provision of food, see Bettini 2000, 472-474.
[54] *Stich.* 178: *nam illa artis omnis perdocet, ubi quem attigit* ('For she [i.e. poverty] teaches the person she touches any kind of trade'). Ergasilus, the parasite of the *Captivi*, explicitly speaks of an *ars parasitica* (l. 469), a calque of the Greek expression τέχνη παρασιτική.
[55] Petrone 1977, 54-58 thinks that Plautus is actually hiding behind the character of Gelasimus, who thus would be his alter ego on stage. Poverty, hunger, the selling of *logi ridiculi* (like those of his comedies?), and the use of books (i.e. the Greek models) as a source of witticism would hint at the poet's own biography (see pp. 71ff. below). Chiarini applies the same meta-theatrical reading to lines 390-396 of the *Persa* (see the next passage analysed above).
[56] See *Stich.* 388-389.
[57] The rest is listed by the parasite Saturio in *Persa* 123-126: *cynicum esse egentem oportet parasitum probe:/ampullam, strigilem, scaphium, soccos, pallium,/marsuppium habeat, inibi paullum praesidi/qui familiarem*

pol deum virtute dicam et maiorum meum, 390
ne te indotatam dicas, quoi dos sit domi:
librorum eccillum habeo plenum soracum.
si hoc adcurassis lepide, cui rei operam damus,
dabuntur dotis tibi inde sescenti logi,
atque Attici omnes; nullum Siculum acceperis: 395
cum hac dote poteris vel mendico nubere. (*Persa* 390-396)

By Pollux! By the aid of the gods and of my ancestors, I can tell you "Don't say that you are a girl without a dowry!," for you have a dowry indeed at home. Look, I have a trunk full of books! If you'll accomplish well the task into which we are putting effort, I'll give you back a dowry of six hundred jokes, and they will be all Attic, not a single one will be Sicilian. With such a dowry you'll be able to marry none but … a beggar!

Saturio's daughter is afraid that her father will not provide her with any dowry given his poverty, and consequently that nobody will propose to her. Therefore, the parasite Saturio reassures the girl by telling her that he has dowry for her indeed, namely his library. His books, the parasite says, can be for the bride-to-be a source of innumerable[58] jokes (named with the Graecism *logi*/λόγοι) that will grant her such a prosperous future that she will have no other choice but to (*aut*) [59] marry…a beggar. Most likely, Saturio's joke is an allusion to the proverbial poverty of the man of letters, to which the parasite's daughter too will be doomed, given that the selling of *logi* does not appear to be a rewarding activity.

Some scholars[60] have read in between these lines a biographical reference to Plautus, who according to a famous *testimonium* (see below) was 'imprisoned' for unsettled debts. Another possible biographical and meta-literary reference has been assumed for Saturio's remark on the Attic origin of the *logi*. Scholars[61] have conjectured that the *librorum plenum soracum* is an allusion to the chest containing the scrolls of Greek drama that Roman playwrights, including Plautus, accessed in order to write their plays.[62] For now, I will not discuss the feasibility of such a biographical identification with Plautus' practice of *vertere* any further. What matters now is rather Saturio's claim that his *logi* are particularly valuable not just because they are all Greek, but because they are all Attic, with the consequent exclusion of a different kind of Greekness such as Sicilian Greekness (i.e. Doric).[63]

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suam vitam oblectet modo. For an extremely detailed explanation of what each of these accessories could mean to a Roman spectator, see Tylawsky 2002, 107-117.

[58] This is the actual meaning of "six hundred."

[59] Woytek 1982, 298 *ad loc.*, provides the reason for this interpretation of Saturio's joke.

[60] E.g. Chiarini 1979, 112.

[61] E.g. Chiarini 1979, 113 n. 131, and Bettini 1981, 263 *ad loc.*

[62] See in particular Pecere 2010, 7 and the further referenced bibliography.

[63] According to Fontaine 2011, 34-37 *Siculum* is yet another "funny word" (see title of his book in the bibliography) in Plautus, that is a wordplay punning on *siclum* (with an anaptyctic vowel -*u*-), namely the Punic

At this point, it may be thought that here Saturio is alluding to a linguistic issue, namely to the canonised superiority of the Attic dialect over other varieties of Greek. Woytek[64] warned against such a mistake, reminding that this claim must be understood in the light of Sicilian jokes' old fame for their excellent wittiness, which in antiquity was proverbial.[65] The same proverbial tradition, however, recognised that Attic sagacity was still the finest. Therefore, by choosing his jokes only from the Attic tradition, Saturio conveys the message that the humour of the comedy—to which his jokes contribute—is eventually modelled after the best acknowledged tradition, namely the Attic. A selection between two possible kinds of Greekness, the Attic and the Sicilian, is therefore accomplished. The Romans were more familiar with the latter, since it was through Sicily and, more in general, the whole Magna Graecia that they mostly came into contact with Greek culture. Nevertheless, with his choice of Attic *ridiculi logi*, Saturio dismisses this familiar type of Greekness in favour of the more distant, yet more prestigious, Attic Greekness. In conclusion, literary prestige matters more than cultural familiarity.

Curculio in the *Curculio*

Another Plautine association between book culture and Greekness is made by the parasite Curculio in the homonymous play. Taking over the typical attitude of a *servus currens*, Curculio threatens as follows all those Greeks who might happen to stand in his way and thus hinder him while being in haste:

> *tum isti Graeci palliati, capite operto qui ambulant,*
> *qui incedunt suffarcinati cum libris, cum sportulis,*
> *constant, conferunt sermones inter se drapetae,* 290
> *opstant, opsistunt, incedunt cum suis sententiis.* (*Curc.* 288-291)

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coin *siclus* (see his article for a full explanation of the joke). As always, Fontaine's ability to detect jokes that might be hidden or lost in Plautus' text for orthographic reasons is astonishing. Personally, I am extremely cautious about non-transparent jokes because the risk of identifying jokes that were in fact not meant by the author is very high. I think that Fontaine's explanation of the joke here is too tortuous (it is certainly a masterpiece of philological and archaeological guesswork), while a joke needs to be somewhat immediate (and I do not think that it is our lack of information—supplied by Fontaine—to make the joke obscure to modern readers). Why should Plautus, for the sake of a joke, pair Attic *logi* and Punic coins, even more so at a stage of the Latin language for which there is no attestation of the word *siclus*, as Fontaine himself admits (the first attestation is in Hirenaeus, second half of the second century AD)? Yes, in Plautus' time Punics were the Romans' bitterest enemy, nevertheless I do not regard this explanation convincing. Rather, it is perhaps better to remember that in proverbs Attic and Sicilian jokes, as I say above, were often paired as the two best kinds of jokes (Attic jokes were better than Sicilian jokes). Fontaine seems to ignore this proverbial tradition, which provides actual and sounder evidence than philological and archaeological speculation.

[64] See Woytek 1982, 297-298 *ad loc.*, and the referenced ancient testimonies.

[65] See Otto 1890, 44.

> These cloaked Greeks wandering around with their head covered and moving forward burdened with books and wallets: they stand in group talking to each other, these runaway slaves, they stand in the middle of the way and clutter it, coming forward with their sentences.

As if Curculio forgot to pretend to be a Greek character acting in Greece, his tirade against other Greeks breaks the dramatic illusion in order to embrace the Roman anti-Hellenic stereotype that portrays the Greeks as morally corrupt people indulging all the time in deplorable pleasures such as drinking at the tavern, stealing things at the thermal baths, and walking drunk around the city.[66] As Pasetti notes,[67] this is a perfect example of the typically Roman derogatory portrait of the Greeks as *Graeculi*. In the passage above, culture too contributes to the negative representation of the 'Greekies,' whose ceaseless philosophical debates (*sermones* and *sententiae*) taking place in the streets hamper the mission of Curculio, who, unlike them, must accomplish serious tasks and thus has no time to waste in such useless activities.

This section of Curculio's tirade must be understood (obviously, from a Roman perspective) as a stereotypical depiction of those Greeks who served the Romans as cultural professionals. The derogatory term *drapetae* (calque from δραπέται),[68] together with their book equipment, stands for professional figures such as the teacher or the parasite, which in Rome were Greek slaves in the service of wealthy families.[69] Therefore, Curculio, who as a parasite is a cultural professional himself,[70] by means of self-irony[71] reminds the audience that, notwithstanding their inferior social status, the Greeks are still indispensable as bearers of written culture, literature above all.[72]

This digression on Plautine literate parasites aimed to provide a frame in which the figure of Diabolus' parasite/*poeta* can be contextualised. The anonymous parasite of the *Asinaria* belongs to a category of characters who in Plautine comedy are portrayed as Greek professionals recruited for their literary skills. Although the fiction of the *palliata* forces the playwright to keep the ethnic identity of the employers implicit, it is clear enough from the way these characters are portrayed and addressed—especially in the *Curculio* passage—that they are to be seen from a Roman perspective. This standpoint is marked, as we have just seen, by the clash between ethnic disdain and cultural appreciation (however downplayed as a mere matter of literacy) typical of the Roman approach to the Greeks, which in Plautus proves to be well attested.

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[66] See the continuation of this passage in *Curc*. 292-293.

[67] Pasetti 2011, 15-16.

[68] Fitzgerald 2000, 25 notes that in Plautine comedy slaves and servants are a privileged vehicles of Greekness.

[69] See Grilli 1996, 78. As Pasetti 2011, 15 observes, the reference to the *sportulae* informs the audience that the *Graeci palliati* are earning money from a master/patron.

[70] At ll. 591-592 he shows his knowledge of tragic poetry (which he quotes as a source of wisdom): *antiquom poetam audivi scripsisse in tragoedia,/mulieres duas peiores esse quam unam. res itast.*

[71] Bettini 2002, 243-249.

[72] See the (historical) exegesis of this passage by Gentili 2006^2, 92.

By pretending to Atticise a barbarian text such as the Naevian *syngraphus* in conformity with the prerogatives of the Plautine literate parasite (obviously only in the fiction of the drama, for the text is still in Latin), Diabolus' parasite accomplishes an *Attice vertere*[73] that looks to be the opposite of Plautus' *barbare vertere* mentioned in the prologue to the *Asinaria* only in part. Both sections of the comedy, in fact, aim to convey at different levels (within and outside the dramatic illusion respectively) the message that the poet has ultimately attached a Greek (or even better an Attic) 'anchor' to his texts, thus complying with the current understanding of literature, which cannot dismiss the authority of Greek models.

3.4. *What's in a name?* Greek model and barbarian translator between theatricalisation and legitimisation

This brief excursus allows me to focus on the relationship between the cunning slave Libanus and his old master Demaenetus and thus complete my analysis of the couples in the *Asinaria* featuring a lettered and an unlettered member. As I said, at the beginning of the play Demaenetus turned to Libanus because he knew that, as a Greek literate slave at his service, Libanus would feel obliged to fulfil his request to compose an innovative play in which the old master, in the role of the winning protagonist, supports his son's love affair taking vengeance on his wife for having deprived him of his *imperium* as *pater familias* on the grounds of her rich dowry (l. 87). Therefore, Libanus too is for Demaenetus a *poeta unicus*, just as the parasite was for Diabolus.

However, there is an important difference between Diabolus' parasite and Libanus: the former shows his ability to write down his plot—in a Naevian style—in public, whereas the latter's composition is oral and simulates the improvisatory technique by casting some shadow on his ability to bring the play to an end due to his lack of inspiration on how to find the twenty *minae*. Therefore, Libanus is a *poeta* only implicitly, and his meta-theatrical role can be only inferred from his description of his own activity with the conventional meta-poetic metaphors of 'weaving' and 'shaping deceits' (*consilia exordiar* l. 115, *fingere fallaciam* l. 250).[74]

Eventually, Libanus' poetic skills are demonstrated in the successful way he involves his partners in crime in the deceitful masquerade he orchestrated against the merchant bringing the money to the agent Saurea. Libanus participate in his own play-within-the-play, mocking his younger master Argyrippus by riding him like a horse, or better, like a proverbially silly mule (hence not only Argyrippus' name [ἀργύριον=*argentum*, i.e. the twenty *minae* + ἵππος],[75] but also the play's title *Asin-aria*). In order to do this, he first had to force himself to

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[73] This expression is inspired by the title of Vogt-Spira 1991: "*Asinaria* oder *Maccus vortit Attice*."

[74] A more detailed analysis of Plautus' meta-poetical language is offered in Chapter 4, pp. 130ff. (see also the referenced bibliography).

[75] Sergi 1999, 22-27 interprets Libanus' mockery and Argyrippus' name as a parodic allusion to the ἐραστής-ἐρώμενος relationship.

reverse his habit of deceiving the old master and helping his son, according to the typical *fraudatio eri* of comedic slaves (see ll. 256-257 above). As we have seen, this is not the only change that Libanus needs to implement in his play, since he first had to make Demaenetus act not as a severe educator, but as a compliant father, a request that came from Demaenetus himself and which made Libanus exclaim *quid istuc novi est?* (l. 50).

These two anomalies disclose Libanus' understanding of comic plots and motifs in compliance to the standards of the Greek *Nea*. And yet, despite this, Libanus proves to be flexible enough to arrange a play featuring at its end improvisation and farce, two elements that are closer to the Italic tradition of the *Atellanae* than to Greek comedy. Therefore, the *Asinaria* shows that two things are needed in order to write a *palliata*: a farcical story and a poet who can give it a literary shape. Such shaping does not seem possible without referring to a Greek model.

In this light, it is now possible to complete the reading of the prologue of the *Asinaria* and solve the 'Diphilean question' introduced above by looking at it as a theatricalised presentation of the author's understanding of comedy. It is a convention of Plautine prologues to introduce the characters not by name, but by mentioning their conventional role instead for the sake of a more straightforward communication with the audience.[76] However, in the prologue to the *Asinaria* no character is mentioned, because, as the prologue-speaker says, the plot is simple, and the audience is informed only about the Greek model adapted and adopted by Plautus. At this point, one may wonder whether, while introducing the Greek and barbarian poets, the prologue-speaker applies the conventions he would apply if he had to introduce the play's characters. On the surface, he does not, because the poets are introduced by their respective proper names. However, things might prove to be different from what they look like.

There is a second onomastic convention generally applied by Plautus within his plays. Petrone has shown[77] that he never gives his characters random names, but creates for them specific speaking names instead (mostly in Greek) that epitomise the personage's overall characterisation in one word. The peculiar nature of prologues, which fluctuates between reality and dramatic illusion, allows for the application in the prologue to the *Asinaria* of both Plautine onomastic conventions to Demophilus' and Plautus' names.

According to its etymology, Demophilus' name, namely Δημό-φιλος, means 'the people's friend' (δῆμος + φίλος).[78] In the prologue to the *Asinaria* Plautus is mentioned not just by his

[76] As noticed by Questa 1984, 15-17.

[77] See Petrone 2009, in particular pp. 19-22 (about Plautus' application of ancient theories on proper names similar to those formulated in Plato's *Cratylus* and Donatus' commentary on Terence), and pp. 34-35 (on the coherence between a character's *nomen* and his *officium*).

[78] Demaenetus' name can represent the intra-dramatic parallel (or even alter ego?) of Demophilus' name. According to Plautus' onomastic conventions mentioned above, and as Bertini 1968, 133 says, according to its etymology *Dem-aenetus*' name, means 'the one praised by the people' (i.e. Δημ-αίνετος, δῆμος + αἰνετός), a meaning that finds support in Demaenetus' own words (see l. 67: *atque ego me id facere studeo, volo amari a meis*).

(artistic?) derivative name *Maccius*, used elsewhere in his oeuvre, but with the original word *Maccus*, which refers to an Atellan stock-character ('the silly guy'). By mentioning directly the name of this mask rather than the derivative form *Maccius* that became part of Plautus' full name, the prologue-speaker must have wanted to address the fondness of part of the audience for the popular theatre of the *Atellana* making one of its characters appear, even though just for an instant, in the prologue to the *Asinaria*. A similar sympathy for spectators seems to be inferred from Demophilus' name, or better from his role as the 'the audience's friend,' which likely addresses that part of the audience fond of Hellenising theatre.

In conclusion, if we reflect on Plautus' use of characters' names and functions, the prologue to the *Asinaria* can be read as a theatricalised σφραγίς. Both Greek and Roman poets are introduced by proper names that are simultaneously, or alternatively, descriptions of their functions as flatterers of the audience. Whether they write in Greek or translate into Latin, both authors aim at the satisfaction of the Roman audience. The prologue to the *Asinaria* can therefore be read as mini-play about playwriting in which the authors participate as characters.

A final consideration on Demophilus, whom no (literary) source attests as a playwright.[79] His unique indication as the Greek model for such a profoundly Roman comedy as the *Asinaria* which ends, in Segal's terms,[80] with a double Saturnalian inversion (namely the two public mockeries of Argyrippus ridden by Libanus, and Demaenetus humiliated by his wife), allows for the possibility that his mention is a rhetorical device meant to convey in a dramatised—and ironic—way the message that this comedy adheres nevertheless to the literary conventions established by the Greek tradition in such a way that it can be thought that it follows a Greek model, which some spectators among the audience (those 'loved' by Demophilus) expected, as Cicero and Horace report.

In other words, Vogt-Spira's idea that there was no such a model as Demophilus' *Onag(r)os* should be taken into due consideration, contrary to the response it received from scholars.[81] For a confirmation, we can contrast the σφραγίς of the *Asinaria* with that of the *Trinummus*: *Philemo scripsit, Plautus vertit barbare* (l. 19). Here, conversely, Plautus calls himself by his real *nomen* (which, however artistic, was the official name Plautus used, unlike *Maccus*), and mentions as his model a real poet whose work and activity as a playwright are by contrast well attested. Therefore, the two prologues seem to feature an internal coherence in the association

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[79] *Pace* Havet 1925, xxxvi-xxxvii, who tried to restore Demophilus' name in a lacuna of an inscription from the Piraeus displaying the names of the playwrights of the *Nea*. Similarly, some philologists tried to emend the reading *Demophilus* in the *Asinaria* prologue (on which the entire manuscript tradition agrees) by replacing it with the name of a more familiar playwright such as *Diphilus* (this wrong solution was proposed by Ritschl). The last attempt was that of Della Corte 1951, 303-304, who argued that *Demophilus* is a paleographic corruption of *Deinolochus*, the name a Doric playwright whose work is entirely lost (we know only some titles). Della Corte's evidence is too weak to be taken seriously.

[80] Segal 1987[2], 8-9.

[81] Vogt-Spira 1991 (see esp. pp. 34 and 64-66) is famous article from the circle of the Freiburg School that received severe criticism (e.g. Lowe 1993 in *JRS* 196-197, Stockert 1994 in *AAHG* 47, 45-48, and Brown 1995 in *Gnomon* 8, 676-683).

of the authors' names: in the *Asinaria* the association is farcical and dramatised, while in the *Trinummus* the two names do not carry any double meaning, but are real poets' real names.

4. *Plautum ex Plauto*. The question of Plautus' Greek models between ancient reception and modern scholarship

So far, we have come to the conclusion that given the treatment of Demophilus and Maccus as impersonations of two literary traditions competing for the audience's approval, the prologue to the *Asinaria* does not try to provide objective and trustworthy information, but to shape a peculiar meta-literary narrative about the nature and genesis of the drama itself. As the testimonies by Cicero and Horace suggested in the previous chapter, there must have been in the Roman audience some spectators who deemed Greek writings as being superior to their Latin counterparts. Consequently, these members of the audience expected Latin writings to conform to certain Greek models in order to be acceptable. In the previous chapter we have also seen that one of the very first Latin poems, Andronicus' *Odusia*, probably stressed its own status as a translation from Greek, a phenomenon that is a quite unfamiliar to our literary culture, in which translated works generally do not declare their nature as translations (at least not in the body of the text). We have also seen the case of non-translated early Latin writings featuring clear references to Greek works that were not their direct models, such as Naevius' *Bellum Poenicum* did with Hesiod (and Homer). All these phenomena can be explained as a manifestation of the "derivative status"—as Gunderson calls it[82]—that marks the identity of Roman literature at its beginnings.

The processes of self-fashioning and deliberate selection seen above disclose a process of ostentation of this derivative status that implies the use of rhetoric and manipulation. The prologue to the *Asinaria* seems to parody its own derivative status by overemphasising derivation—the *palliata* is a derivative genre by definition, for "it transforms the stage into a site for meditating upon literary inventiveness, repetition, and cultural transcoding."[83] This parodic rhetoric makes the *Asinaria* prologue differ from informative paratextual segments such as the *didascaliae*[84] or Terence's prologues, which can be defined as pre-textual informative sections due to their clear-cut detachment from the body of the drama (i.e. the 'real' text) and their expository nature, which somewhat resembles that of a literary treatise both in tone and content.[85]

The seeming informative nature of Plautine prologues reveals that ancient scholars' autoschediastic inference of biographical information on Plautus' life and work from his

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[82] Gunderson 2015, 49, who refers to Sharrock 2009, 26.

[83] Telò 2019, 47-48.

[84] For Plautus, only two *didascaliae* survive thanks to the Ambrosian palimpsest, which inform us about the dates of both *Pseudolus* and *Stichus* (191 and 200 B.C. respectively), and the Greek model of the *Stichus* (Menander's *Ἀδελφοί*). Questa-Raffaelli 1990, 188 call the *didascaliae* "extra-textual" sections.

[85] See Papaioannou 2014, 25 on the nature of Terence's prologues, and n. 1 on the application of Genette's theoretical definition of 'paratext' to Terentian prologues.

dramas was not accidental.[86] Plautus himself encouraged this exegetical approach, as the self-reflexive prologue to the *Asinaria* suggests. By introducing himself as Maccus, or perhaps as a *maccus*, Plautus makes his recipients wonder whether the play they watch(ed) has been composed directly by a real poet or by an Atellan character who claims to be the translator of the very same play in which he is acting, thus making himself recognisable as the poet's alter ego.[87]

The best-known aspect of this *Plautum-ex-Plauto* approach, which is still applied to some extent in modern times,[88] is the inference of Plautus' biographical information and poetological identity from that of the *servus callidus*. As we have already seen and will see in the following chapters, Plautus' most original and outstanding character is endowed with the meta-theatrical ability to make the performance of his machinations coincide with the development of the plot of the play where he belongs. This role makes him impersonate Plautus' alter ego on stage.

At the outset of the *Asinaria* the slave Libanus manifests his fear of being condemned by his master Demaenetus to forced labour in a mill (l. 31: *num me illuc ducis, ubi lapis lapidem terit?*). In the light of the *servus callidus*' meta-theatrical role,[89] it is not surprising that an ancient biographical anecdote was developed according to which at some point in his life Plautus was forced to work in a mill in order to pay off his debts. According to Aulus Gellius (second century AD), who reports the anecdote[90] and to whom we owe a good deal of information on Plautus' life and works, during this period the playwright wrote three (non-canonical, thus non-extant) plays:

> *sed enim Saturionem et Addictum et tertiam quandam, cuius nunc mihi nomen non subpetit, in pistrino eum scripsisse Varro et plerique alii memoriae tradiderunt, cum pecunia omni, quam in operis artificum scaenicorum pepererat, in mercatibus perdita inops Romam redisset et ob quaerendum victum ad circumagendas molas, quae trusatiles appellantur, operam pistori locasset. sicuti de Naevio quoque accepimus fabulas eum in carcere duas scripsisse…* (Gell. 3.3.14-15)
>
> But Varro and many others report that [Plautus] wrote the *Saturio* and the *Addictus* in a mill, as well as a third play whose title I can't recall now. After losing in the course of trading all the money he had earned working as a professional impresario, he came back to Rome broke, and forced by the need to make a living, he worked for a miller who

[86] To my knowledge, the most comprehensive collection of ancient *testimonia* on Plautus' life and works is still that by Goetz and Schoell (1912). The history of the formation of Plautus' biography is retraced by Deufert 2002, 65-71.
[87] On Plautus' intended forgetting of himself see Gunderson 2015, 19-54.
[88] In modern scholarship, the identification of the *servus callidus* as the alter ego of Plautus was already theorised by Barchiesi in his pioneering essay on ancient meta-theatre (Barchiesi 1981, 163-174). See also par. 4.1 in this chapter. This identification has been further developed by Petrone 1983a, 5-98 and Sharrock 2009, 131-140.
[89] On the slave's meta-theatrical role and on his identification with the playwright (i.e. the poet as the audience's servant) see Fitzgerald 2000, 44-47.
[90] See Richlin 2017, 5-7 for a historical contextualisation of Gellius' information about Plautus' life.

> employed him as a millstone rotator (those were particular millstones called 'hand-movable'). Similarly, we learnt that Naevius too wrote two plays in jail…

With the comparison to Naevius' similar case, Gellius not only supports Varro's alleged information by framing the anecdote in a recurrent biographical narrative on early playwrights' life, but also adds an extra detail characterising Plautus' stay in the mill as an imprisonment, as the reference to Naevius' case (*in carcere*) would suggest. This device allows Gellius to bring Plautus closer to his theatrical alter ego, namely the cunning slave, who in Plautine comedy is recurrently afraid of being sent to forced labours in a mill. The Gellian biographic addition seems to be a concrete example of how the ancients inferred information on Plautus' life from his plays.[91] What is more, the nature of these readings proves to be not only biographical, but also exegetical, because reading traces of Plautus' life in between the lines of his plays is not (just) a historiographical process, but an act of interpretation.

4.1. Recursive Plautine readings. Old and new comparisons, and beyond

In antiquity, both Gellius and many other scholars approached the 'Plautine question'[92] in the inferential way seen above because Plautus intentionally hides himself behind the mask of his *servi callidi* thus casting uncertainty over his own identity, starting from the name.[93] This approach turned out to be very productive in antiquity with regard to the reconstruction of Plautus' biography and poetological persona, but was not applied to the question of his use of Greek models. Ancient scholars did not seem content with taking at face value what Plautus says, and most of all does *not* say, about his Greek models and how he uses them.

For example, in the *Stichus* Plautus never mentions or make any kind of indirect allusion to a possible Greek model for that comedy. And yet, the author of the *didascalia* of the *Stichus* surviving in the Ambrosian palimpsest attributed the play to Menander's *Ἀδελφοί*. If we did not have such information—let alone the fact that the reliability of the *didascalia* cannot be

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[91] Reading the collection of Goetz and Schoell several other examples could be found, above all the inference of Plautus' birthplace (i.e. the Umbrian city of Sarsina) from a pun made in line 770 of the *Mostellaria* (*quid, Sarsinatis ecqua est, si Umbram non habes?*). Jerome contributed to the canonisation of this inferred information as a tenet of Plautus' biography (see Goetz-Schoell 1912, xxiv, (test. n. xxii).

[92] For the expression "Plautus question" see Gunderson 2015, 20-21. Here Gunderson also notes that as early as fifty years after Plautus' death, scholars were already debating about the genuineness of the works under his name, and about other questions related to Plautus' style, and biography.

[93] "The playwright is strictly anonymous" (Gratwick 1973, 83). We cannot be sure about the exact form of any of the components of Plautus' full name attested both in the Plautine corpus and beyond. Plautus seems to be the soundest form, although its version in the genitive puzzled Varro, who thought that it might be the genitive of *Plautius* (who was thought to be another playwright), just as *Macci* could be the genitive of both *Maccus* and *Maccius*. Plautus himself might be held responsible for such a confusion (see Gratwick's discussion). The same puzzlement about Plautus' name affected also modern scholars. In his edition of the *Asinaria*, Havet came to the conclusion that Maccus must have been a different poet from Plautus (Havet 1925, v-x), and accordingly printed hid edition under the title *Pseudo-Plaute, Le Prix des Anes*.

assessed[94]—we would hardly believe that the (seemingly) loose and tripartite structure of the Plautine play can be ascribed to a specific Greek model. Perhaps we would even believe that the *Stichus* has no Greek model at all. After all, Plautus keeps silent about the model, here as well as in other plays, and probably our job as both audience and scholars would be better fulfilled if we accepted Plautus' silences or statements letting the plays speak by themselves, namely by respecting his authorial will.

The relevance given to the *didascalia* betrays the ultimate goal of ancient and modern comparative approaches to Plautus' plays, namely finding a Greek connection. As we will see more in depth at the beginning of the next chapter, it was by chance that in 1968 Eric Handley, who was working on some papyrus scraps, identified those anonymous Greek lines as fragments of Menander's *Dis exapaton* (*Δὶς ἐξαπατῶν,* 'The Double Deceiver'). Handley realised that they (partly) matched a section of Plautus' *Bacchides*, whose model had been long identified in Menander's *Δὶς ἐξαπατῶν* because the Plautine comedy puns on the title of that very Menandrean play. This discovery was welcomed as *the* discovery because it finally provided the ground for putting to the test the analytical approach begun by Friederich Leo (*Plautinische Forschungen*, 1895) and canonised by Eduard Fraenkel (*Plautinisches im Plautus*, 1922), which aimed at discerning the elements deriving directly from the Greek models (the so-called *Attisches*, after Jachmann[95]) from Plautus' original contributions (the Fraenkelian *Plautinisches*). However, this discovery did not in fact prove to provide new ground-breaking knowledge about Plautus' poetic workmanship, but was responsible for a wave of Menander-centrism in the study of Roman comedy, also in the wake of the discovery of several of Menandrean papyri that took place in the first half of the past century.

This brought about a reluctance to acknowledge that Plautus, at least as far as we can tell from the extant Varronian plays, never mentions, or purposely silences, Menander. For example, after the discovery of the *Dis exapaton* papyrus, it has been neglected that what Plautus actually says about his Menandrean model in the *Bacchides* is that his slave is not a double, but a triple deceiver instead, and that his name is not Syrus, as in the model, but Chrysalus (see the next chapter). Moreover, Plautine scholarship has neglected that in the extant plays Plautus never mentions Menander as his model, but cites twice Philemon (*Mercator* 9, and *Trinummus* 19) and Diphilus (*Casina* 32, and *Rudens* 32) respectively, besides the dubious case of Demophilus seen above. These two poets are also mentioned together in the *Mostellaria,* where they are presented as familiar models ("friends") of staged trickeries, and whom the Plautine cunning slave, similarly to what Chrysalus does in the *Bacchides*, outdoes:[96]

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[94] Mattingly 1957 tried to question the reliability of the information provided in the *didascaliae*, but his attempt was not welcomed by scholars.

[95] Jachmann 1931 (*Plautinisches und Attisches*).

[96] Anderson 1993, 31-32 is probably the only one to have noticed Plautus' intended "reticence" about Menander and his repeated mention of Menander's rivals Diphilus and Philemon. See ibid. 32-33 on the passage of the *Mostellaria* quoted above. See ibid. 34-59 for Anderson's analysis of how Tranio might have actually surpassed

> TH. *quid ego nunc faciam?* TR. *si amicus Diphilo aut Philemoni es,*[97]
> *dicito eis, quo pacto tuos te servos ludificaverit:* 1150
> *optumas frustrationes dederis in comoediis.* (*Most.* 1149-1151)
>
> THEOPROPIDES (old father): What should I do now? TRANIO (slave): If you are Diphilus' or Philemo's friend, tell the spectators how your slave tricked you. You will provide an example of excellent comic deceits!

Therefore, it seems that Plautus wants to persuade his audience that his canon of Greek models excludes Menander, the leading component of the *Nea* triad[98] and the most revered comic playwright both by Roman dramatists (especially Caecilius Statius and Terence, see below) and by scholars up to modern times. Menander is present in Plautus' work indeed, and scholars did their best to dig Menandrean traces out of his text, but while doing so they missed the point of Plautus' discourse on the Greek models and their function. Plautus did not write his plays for an audience of philologists working on the desks of a library (like Gellius and his friends in the following section), but for an immediate reception by an audience sitting (or standing) in the theatre. As we will see in Chapter 4, however implicit, Menander's presence in the *Pseudolus* is indisputable. Even so, Plautus makes the eponymous cunning slave claim that he will perform something completely new, which is possible only as long as there is no Greek model. The audience must have realised that the play was somewhat Menandrean (the plot is very similar to that of the *Aspis*, for example). Nevertheless, the spectators were also asked to believe Pseudolus' words on the play's absolute novelty.

4.2. Messing with the models. Some oddities in the ancient reception of Roman comedy and its Greek models

4.2.1. Terence's reception of Plautus

Already a generation after Plautus, the prologues to Terence's *palliatae* testify to two conflicting receptions of Plautus and Plautus' Greek models. As anticipated above, Terence's prologues differ from Plautus' in that the former are independent literary manifestos, set aside from the body of the comedy, whereas the latter are to some extent part of the drama, and sometimes are even embedded in the body of the play, as the so-called 'belated prologues' of

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Diphilus' and Philemon's dramatic poetry. On Tranio taking on the role of poet and devising his own poetry in order to best the Greek models see Frangoulidis 1997, 21-75.

[97] This line is the result of Bücheler and Leo's emendation of the manuscript tradition, which reads *si amicus dephilo aut philomontes*.

[98] On the process of canonisation of Menander (and of formation of the New Comedy triad) see Nervegna 2013, 11-62, esp. pp. 45-60.

Cistellaria and *Miles*. Plautus' prologues can introduce the backstory of the plot without focussing necessarily on literary issues. Conversely, Terence devotes the space of the prologue to the theoretical discussion of the constitutive features of his plays,[99] among which the question of his use of the Greek (and Roman) models plays a central role. The pretext for the discussion is often provided by Terence's need to defend himself against the allegations of a *malevolus vetus poeta* (*Heautontimorumenos* 22), whom Donatus identifies with some Luscius Lanuvinus, who allegedly accused Terence of "contaminating" (e.g. *Andria* 15-16) the plot of a Greek model with that of another Greek play, of writing some comedies with somebody else's help (*Adelphoe* 16-17, *Heautontimorumenos* 22-26), and of "stealing" the Greek models already used by other Roman playwrights (*Eunuchus* 23-26).[100]

Terence says that the last allegation was made during the preview for the magistrates in charge of organising the theatrical performance for the *ludi Megalenses* in 160 BC. After watching that performance, the aged poet Luscius accused Terence of being not a poet, but a thief (*Eun.* 23), because in his *Eunuchus* he took the characters of the parasite and the braggart soldier from Menander's *Colax*, a comedy that allegedly Naevius and Plautus had already adapted (*Eun.* 25-26). Therefore, Terence defends himself as follows:

Colax Menandrist: in east parasitus Colax 30
et miles gloriosus: <ea>s se non negat
personas transtulisse in Eunuchum suam
ex Graeca; sed eas fabulas factas prius
Latinas scisse sese id vero pernegat. (*Eun.* 30-34)

There's a *Colax* by Menander: the parasite Colax and a braggart soldier act in this play. Terence doesn't deny that he took these characters from the Greek original and put them in his *Eunuchus*, but he does deny that he knew that those two Latin plays were staged before.

Terence's defensive strategy revolves around his declared ignorance of the existence of Naevius' and Plautus' *Colaces*. In the following lines (35-40), Terence develops his defence further by adding that given the small repertoire of stock characters and situations of the *Nea*[101]—and thus of the *palliata*—the recurrence of the same *dramatis personae* in multiple plays is an unavoidable consequence. This brings Terence to the gnomic conclusion that *nullumst iam dictum quod non dictum sit prius* (l. 41: 'there's nothing said now that hasn't been said before'). Terence seems therefore to imply that Luscius could have made the same

[99] On the "defensive poetics" and function of Terence's prologues see Ferriss-Hill 2015, 128-134.

[100] An up-to-date analysis of the accusations of *contaminatio* and *furtum* made against Terence is that of Papaioannou 2014, 30-43.

[101] Terence makes a similar point about the plots of Greek plays. In the prologue to his *Andria*, he legitimises the *contaminatio* of the plots of Menander's *Andria* and *Perinthia* both because essentially they look the same (l.10), and because Naevius, Plautus, and Ennius already contaminated different stories (l. 18). On the constraints of the comedic repertoire see Fontaine 2013, 198 with footnotes.

allegation even by referring to a different Greek play from Menander's *Κόλαξ* as Terence's model, for the limited and recurrent repertoire of stock characters available might insinuate the suspicion of a 'theft' from every Greek model sharing those very same motifs and characters.[102]

This episode provides us with an interesting example of the fact that the reception of a Roman *palliata* and of its Greek models was all but a straightforward process. Luscius reproaches Terence for having stolen his characters from Naevius' and Plautus' *Colaces*, thus ultimately of having stolen their Menandrean model. We do not know whether Luscius accepted the fact (or really believed) that Plautus adapted a Greek model that Naevius already adapted—Menander's *Κόλαξ*. This would have gone against a custom (not applied to tragedy) that prevented to make more Latin adaptations from a single Greek comedy, which is exactly what Luscius reproaches Terence for. As the following chapters will show, Plautus proves to be knowledgeable about and respectful of the established literary conventions. Therefore, it is quite hard to believe that he really violated this principle.[103]

Also Terence's ignorance of a comedy by Plautus sounds strange.[104] How can we interpret the claim that he was unaware of these previous adaptations? In order to attempt an answer, it is necessary to look first a bit more in depth at Terence's reception of Plautus' text and of his Greek models, which seems to be all but a superficial one. In the prologue to the *Adelphoe*, Terence pre-emptively defends himself against the charge of stealing material from Plautus's plays by stating the following:

> *Synapothnescontes Diphili comoediast:*
> *eam Commorientes Plautu' fecit fabulam.*
> *in Graeca adulescens est, qui lenoni eripit*
> *meretricem in prima fabula: eum Plautus locum*
> *reliquit integrum. eum hic locum sumpsit sibi* 10
> *in Adelphos, verbum de verbo expressum extulit.*
> *eam nos acturi sumu' novam: pernoscite*
> *furtumne factum existumetis an locum*
> *reprehensum, qui praeteritu' neglegentiast.* (*Ad.* 6-14)

> *Synapothnescontes* is a comedy by Diphilus: Plautus turned this play into his *Commorientes*. In the first part of the Greek model there is a young man who takes a prostitute away from a pimp: Plautus did not adapt this section. Our poet Terence took over this section into his *Adelphoe*, and made his words correspond to those of the model.

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[102] Cf. Papaioannou 2014, 40: "Any character in a given play may spontaneously elicit memories of performances of his counterpart in more than one different play, without necessarily drawing deliberately on them." Fontaine 2013, 200 calls the 'models' identified by the recipient by means of such analogies "unwanted intertexts" (i.e. the author did not mean to make his audience recall the 'models' they identify in his work).

[103] "Given that it was inappropriate to subject the same Greek comedy to the *vortere/vertere* process twice, it follows that Plautus and Naevius ought to have used different Greek models which nonetheless bore the same title" (Papaioannou 2014, 39).

[104] On Terence's reliability see Fontaine 2013, 199.

> We are about to perform a new version of this play: make an effort to figure out whether you think that a theft took place, or if a section that was neglected with carelessness has been retrieved.

If we were to compare Terence's reading of Plautus to modern approaches, we would define him as a forerunner of the analytical approach. Terence knows the texts both of the Greek model and of Plautus, and can tell precisely what Plautus took from Diphilus and what he left "untouched" (*integrum*). This knowledge enables him to exploit in his *Adelphoe* the section from the Diphilean model that Plautus did not adapt, thus complying with the—unwritten—principle that forbids multiple Latin adaptations from the same Greek comedy. However, the *didascalia* of Terence's *Adelphoe* does not mention Diphilus' *Συναποθνῄσκοντες* as its model, but a homonymous play by Menander. Therefore, the *didascalia* shows that the attribution of a Greek model to a *palliata* is an arbitrary operation (already in antiquity!), since the author of the *didascalia* (presumably a scholar, thus a particular kind of recipient) and Terence (the author) acknowledge different Greek plays as models of the *Adelphoe*.

According to the author of the *didascalia*, Terence's model is Menander, but Terence himself makes his mouthpiece stress the role played by Diphilus' *Συναποθνῄσκοντες* in the composition of his *Adelphoe*. The prologue-speaker's emphasis is such that he points out that Terence took into his play Diphilus' *integer locus* "word by word."[105] However, after making such a statement, he claims also that the comedy that the troupe will perform is "new." Eventually, it does not matter if the *Adelphoe* is adapted from one or two existing plays, more or less faithfully. What is crucial for Terence is his own personal contribution, which can turn the model into something original.[106] Consequently, if Terence's understanding of the playwright's role applies to Plautus' work too, the claim he made in the *Eunuchus* that he overlooked that Plautus employed Menander's *Κόλαξ* as a model for his *Colax* can be now understood. Plautus' *Colax* was for Terence a "new" comedy, and as such its relation with the Menandrean model must have not been so apparent to him (as well as to less careful recipients than Luscius), all the more so if in his *Colax* Plautus did not disclose the model.

4.2.2. Gellius' schizophrenic reading of *palliata*

Gellius' famous σύγκρισις ('comparison,' *consultatio diiudicatioque locorum* the Gellian title goes)[107] of Caecilius Statius' *Plocium* and Menander's *Πλόκιον* (*Noctes Atticae* 2.23, both titles mean 'The Necklace') is another example of a controversial reception in antiquity of a *palliata* and of its Greek model. Gellius' comparison has received much attention by scholars as a

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[105] As Bettini 2012, 71-72 warns, the expression *verbum de verbo (exprimere)* does not necessarily mean that Terence accomplished a literal translation. Rather, Terence's point here is that he took his text directly from Diphilus, without using Plautus as a go-between.
[106] On Terence's poetics of innovation see Papaioannou 2014, 43-50. See also Papaioannou 2014, 101-103.
[107] Vardi 1996 (esp. pp. 502-509) is an inescapable introduction to comparison as a peculiar approach of ancient literary criticism up to the Antonine age.

precious testimony for Roman playwrights' practice of *vertere*[108] because it provided the only chance to compare a section of a *palliata* with its Greek original until the discovery of the *Dis exapaton* papyrus mentioned above. However, Gellius' reception of the Caecilian text both independently and in relation to its Greek model has an intriguing aspect that still requires some more in-depth analysis. Before comparing some corresponding passages of Caecilius' and Menander's texts, Gellius first outlines the context of the readings in which he and his friends participate:

> *comoedias lectitamus nostrorum poetarum sumptas ac versas de Graecis Menandro aut Posidippo aut Apollodoro aut Alexide et quibusdam item aliis comicis. Neque, cum legimus eas, nimium sane displicent, quin lepide quoque et venuste scriptae videantur, prorsus ut melius posse fieri nihil censeas. Sed enim si conferas et componas Graeca ipsa, unde illa venerunt, ac singula considerate atque apte iunctis et alternis lectionibus committas, oppido quam iacere atque sordere incipiunt, quae Latina sunt; ita Graecarum, quas aemulari nequiverunt, facetiis atque luminibus obsolescunt.* (Gell. 2.23.1-3)
>
> We read on a regular basis (*lectitamus*) the comedies that our poets took and translated from Greek comic poets such as Menander, Posidippus, Apollodorus, or Alexis and some others. As we read them, they do not disappoint us at all, actually they seem to us to be so elegantly and nicely written that they could not be improved further. But if you contrast and compare with these plays the Greek originals from which those plays have been derived, and if you carefully and closely read them individually, side by side, and in turn, how dull and worthless the Latin versions immediately start appearing! They lose the humour and the splendour of the Greek originals, which they failed to emulate.

The customary act of reading stressed by the frequentative form *lectitamus* suggests that in this case the reception of the dramatic text does not take place among the audience in a theatre—at which dramas primarily aimed—but in a circle of erudite people who discuss the *palliatae* and compare them with their Greek models. Such an analysis requires the availability of books, and Gellius mentions the two books he is consulting,[109] namely the scrolls containing Menander's and Caecilius' works. Therefore the discussion obviously took place in a place that did not look very different from a library.

Gellius' reception of Roman comedy proves to be paradoxical if not schizophrenic: he and his friends enjoy reading the *palliatae* as long as they do not consider their Greek models. Taken

[108] See Bettini 2012, 47-48 and the bibliographical references he lists in n. 36 at p. 47. See also McElduff 2013, 176-185. A more complete analysis of the Gellian passage can be found in Gamberale 1969, 38-46 and 75-90.

[109] Gell. 2.23.11: *in duobus libris*. It is not clear whether Gellius himself read the books or not, for he says that he gave orders to extract the Greek and Latin passages from the scrolls in order to do the comparison (2.23.8: *versus utrimque eximi iussi*). Some scholars (see McElduff 2013, 236 n. 48) even questioned Gellius' claim that he accessed the two books (i.e. that he could read both plays entirely), arguing that it is more likely that he took the extracts from an already existing σύγκρισις, perhaps composed as a school exercise or as part of a treatise on translation.

alone, Latin comedies look to them like the best masterpieces ever accomplished, and their style and diction, they think, could not be improved any further. However, this aesthetic experience is completely undermined when these readers turn to the Greek originals, which are—unsurprisingly—praised as the paradigm of perfection. Gellius experiences the same feeling when he reads Caecilius Statius' *Plocium* and its Menandrean model:

> *Caecili Plocium legebamus; hautquaquam mihi et, qui aderant, displicebat. Libitum et Menandri quoque Plocium legere, a quo istam comoediam verterat. Sed enim postquam in manus Menander venit, a principio statim, di boni, quantum stupere atque frigere quantumque mutare a Menandro Caecilius visus est! Diomedis hercle arma et Glauci non dispari magis pretio existimata sunt.* (Gell. 2.23.5-7)
>
> We were reading Caecilius' *Plocium*: it did not disappoint neither me nor those who were attending at all. It was agreed to read Menander's *Plocium* too, from which Caecilius translated his play. But, after we got Menander's play in our hands, from the very beginning—oh gods!—how much did Caecilius appear stiffened and cold, and very different from Menander! By Heracles, Glaucus' exchange of his golden armour for Diomedes' bronze weapons was not a greater loss!

At the end of the σύγκρισις, Gellius stresses his point: "therefore, as I said above, when I read these lines by Caecilius independently (*seorsum*), they do not sound unpleasant or sluggish at all, but when I contrast and correspond (*comparo et contendo*) the Greek original with them, I don't think that Caecilius should have tried to follow what he couldn't even reach."[110] In short, Gellius admits that there are two ways of reading Roman comedy, namely an independent and a comparative way, each of one triggers a positive and a negative judgement respectively.

These Gellian passages are a precious testimony of the impact of the Greek models on the Roman audience. When a play is considered *per se*—the kind of reception taking place in a theatre—the presence of the Greek model, be it explicitly mentioned by the author or just presumed by the audience (at the beginning of the σύγκρισις Gellius takes as a given that all *palliatae* are *sumptae ac versae de Graecis*), works as an assurance that the presumed quality of the Greek model is somehow transferred to the 'translation.' This applies not only to those parts taken from the original, but also to the sections that Roman playwrights freely composed by themselves.[111] But as soon as the model is made actually available, which is not an option during a theatrical performance, all the intrinsic characteristics and peculiarities of Roman drama suddenly emerge. Gellius brands them as *nescio quae mimica* (2.23.11), and *pigra…et a rerum dignitate atque gratia vacua* (2.23.19), thus stressing that for him the most regrettable flaws of the *Plocium* are the features inherited from the Italic theatrical background (mime in

[110] Gell. 2.23.22: *itaque, ut supra dixi, cum haec Caecilii seorsum lego, neutiquam videntur ingrata ignavaque, cum autem Graeca comparo et contendo, non puto Caecilium sequi debuisse, quod assequi nequiret.*

[111] When at some point in his analysis Gellius focuses on a specific passage, he specifies that that passage is placed in both (i.e. Menander's and Caecilius') plays (2.23.14: *quid de illo loco in utraque comoedia posito existimari debeat*). Therefore, do we have to infer that there are other *loci* that are not *in utraque comoedia positi*?

particular), which before inspecting the model he did not noticed, or could have regarded even as belonging to the 'perfect' Greek model.

Scholars deemed Gellius' judgement of Caecilius' *Plocium* unduly harsh.[112] However extreme, his concern with the Greek models sheds some light on the pressure that urged Roman playwrights to state their adherence, either directly or indirectly, to a Greek model, whose presence was expected or presumed by the audience in every *palliata*. Therefore mentioning or implying a Greek model in a *palliata* reassures (part of) the audience that the play has a fully literary status, unlike the improvisatory forms of the Italic repertoire, from which Roman comedy did inherit some elements (Gellius' *mimica*, *pigra*, and *vacua*), as the case of the *Asinaria* and of its multiple references to *Atellana* showed (more examples will follow in the next chapters).

That the mention of Greek models in the *palliata* carried out the peculiar function of anchoring the relatively new comedy of Rome in the established (Hellenising) idea of literary comedy, is suggested by the inconsistencies and the paradoxes shown in this chapter. The model declared by the playwright is not always the model he actually employed, or the most relevant among the multiple models he might have exploited. This could sometimes cause conflicting receptions of a play, as the debate between Terence and Luscius, which took place only a few years after Plautus' death, showed. Gellius' ambivalent reception of Roman comedy points in the same direction. If a Roman comedy is taken alone, it gains the public's approval because of the intrinsic qualities attributed to its declared or presumed Greek model. Conversely, if the actual Greek model (when available) is put next to its translation and a close comparison is done,[113] severe criticism arises.

However, this latter case is not exactly what a playwright expected to happen, because the original performance context for plays were theatres, not libraries. During the performance, there would be no way for the more educated spectators to read over the play script, thus they would have little choice but to trust the poet's claims on his alleged faithfulness to a Greek model, which is exactly what the mention of, or the allusion to, the presence of a Greek model aims at. When a σύγκρισις took place (often much later, as in the Antonine erudite circles in which Gellius participated), readers could no longer let the poet know their change of mind and their belated disappointment.

4.3. Plautus' own representation of the function of the Greek models

This last paragraph is an attempt to reach a different understanding of the function of the Greek models in Plautine comedy through a non-comparative analysis. I will focus on the model's independent discursive function within a single comedy by looking at the narrative

[112] See e.g. Traina 1970, 47-48 and ibid. 48 n. 1.

[113] Traina 1970, 44 (and n. 2) suggests that the passages that Gellius compares in his σύγκρισις might have had different positions in Menander's and Caecilius' plays, because Caecilius might have moved the passages to a different position from the original.

revolving around it and by considering its attempt to persuade the audience of Plautus' 'literary orthodoxy' (according to the Greek perspective). This approach, which represents an extension of the *Plautum-ex-Plauto* principle to the intra-textual discourse on the models, allows me to overcome the circular reasoning typical of current comparative approaches to Plautine texts.

In the Plautine text itself we find an explicit claim about the impossibility for comic poets to circumvent the *lex generis* of the *palliata* that prescribes to set the comedy somewhere in Greece, preferably in Athens, as would naturally happen in every Greek comedy. The prologue to the *Menaechmi* in particular states[114] that comic poets must set their plays in Athens, and that this is required not only by the generic conventions of the *palliata*, but also by the playwrights' need to display the Greekness of their plays to the spectators (*vobis*), who are portrayed as expecting Greekness to emerge:

> *atque hoc poetae faciunt in comoediis:*
> *omnis res gestas esse Athenis autumant,*
> *quo illud vobis Graecum videatur magis;*
> *ego nusquam dicam nisi ubi factum dicitur.* 10
> *atque adeo hoc argumentum graecissat, tamen*
> *non atticissat, verum sicilicissitat.* (*Men*. 7-12)
>
> And this is what poets do in their comedies: they think that if every action takes place in Athens, so the plot [*illud*, scil. *argumentum*] will look more Greek to you. However, I'll mention no other city but the one where this story is said to take place. And this plot has a Greek taste indeed, however not Attic-Greek but Sicilian-Greek.

Although Plautus hints at the rule generally followed by his colleagues— thus showing to know it—he eventually does not fully comply with it, for he announces that the *Menaechmi* will in fact not take place in Athens but in Epidamnus, and therefore that the setting will not be Attic, the universally recognised quintessence of Greekness,[115] but Albanian. The Sicilian taste of the plot depends therefore only on the Syracusan origins of the eponymous twins, as also Fontaine (2009, 8-11) underlined. Moreover, according to Fontaine *sicilicissitat* is a Greek sounding word that puns on *graecissat* and *atticissat*, thus a word that Plautus created from the Latin word *sicilicus*, the name of the symbol that ancient authors put on consonants in order to mark gemination. The gemination Plautus alludes to would refer to the twin protagonists.

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[114] It is worth noting how in the *Menaechmi* the figure of the prologue-speaker explicitly presents himself as Plautus' mouthpiece: *apporto vobis Plautum, lingua non manu* (*Men*. 3).

[115] This aspect is recurrently stressed elsewhere in Plautine comedies with the pleonastic expression "Attic Athens" (see e.g. *Mil.* 100: *is amabat meretricem *** matre Athenis Atticis*; 451: *domicilium est, Athenis domus est Atticis…*).

Although it is unquestionable that Sicilianness does not play almost any role in the *Menaechmi*, the very mechanism on which the pun is based is meant to recall the hierarchy between the different kinds of Greekness, and thus claim Plautus' (virtually) unconventional choice (the setting is actually not Attic). As we have seen earlier, the same dichotomy Attic versus Sicilian Greekness occurs also in the *Persa*, where Saturio boasts of his daughter's dowry consisting of Attic rather than Sicilian *logi*. Therefore, with his pun in the *Menaechmi* Plautus must have wanted to make fun first of all of a literary convention that privileges Attic Greekness over other varieties, and consequently of those among the audience who endorsed such a vision.

Line 10 in the passage quoted above is crucial in Plautus' argument because it contributes to portraying the poet as an 'honest playwright' who is not willing to lie—unlike other poets, so he seems to imply—about the place where the story actually took place by replacing Epidamnus with Athens merely for the sake of making the plot of the *Menaechmi* appear more Hellenised. In fact, what Plautus presents as an exception to a general rule is not an exception at all, because there are indeed Greek comedies and other plays by himself that do not feature an Athenian setting. Plautus himself recalls this very aspect elsewhere in his plays, especially in the prologue to the *Rudens*, where at some point he attributes to Diphilus (thus to his alleged Greek model) the choice of the non-Athenian setting of the play, namely Cyrene (*Rud.* 32-33: *primumdum huic esse nomen urbi Diphilus/Cyrenas voluit*).

By introducing a seeming violation of a literary convention, Plautus creates the pretext for talking about the boundaries within which his creativity is constrained, and about the need to make the expected Greekness be visible in his comedy. On the one hand, Plautus' 'honesty' in keeping the alleged original setting of the story instead of replacing it with an Attic one can be taken as a pretext for making a veiled claim to artistic freedom. On the other hand, by presenting his choice as due to his alleged fidelity to a Greek model (*dicitur* in the *Menaechmi* is comparable to *voluit* [scil. *Diphilus*] in the *Rudens*), Plautus tones his own creative audacity down. His claim might sound a bit paradoxical: going Sicilian is an exception within Greek comic tradition, even so, since Greeks themselves sometimes go Sicilian, Plautus' choice is legitimate and in line with the generic conventions of comedy (let alone the fact that Sicilianness is still a kind of Greekness, however non-Attic).

In conclusion, this passage betrays Plautus' attempt to legitimise his personal choices. Stärk audaciously claimed that the *Menaechmi* do not have any Greek model:[116] if he is correct, Plautus' need to look for an anchor into the Greek tradition would be even stronger. Therefore Plautus' anchoring strategy would entail the creation of a narrative on the existence of two kinds of Greekness in the Greek comic tradition, of which one is better than the

[116] "Die" *Menaechmi* besitzen kein griechisches Original, sie sind insgesamt eine Schöpfung des Plautus" (Stärk 1989, 132).

other.[117] Such a narrative allows Plautus to create an *ad hoc* canon to which he can refer, and in which he can anchor his 'Sicilian choice' thus legitimising it.

It is important also to stress that setting a play in "Attic Athens"[118] can imply for Plautus the transformation of the Roman setting—the theatrical space and its surroundings—into an Athenian space for the time being, or to put it in Plautine words, the translation of a 'barbarian' setting into a Greek scenery. This is what the prologue to the *Truculentus* seems to convey:

> *perparvam partem postulat Plautus loci*
> *de vestris magnis atque amoenis moenibus,*
> *Athenas quo sine architectis conferat.*
> …
> *Athenis mutabo ita ut hoc est proscaenium* 10
> *tantisper dum transigimus hanc comoediam.* (*Truc.* 1-3, 10-11)
>
> Plautus asks you a very small part of space from your big and sumptuous walls, to where he can bring Athens without the need of architects.
>
> …
>
> I will transform this stage, as it is, into Athens just for the time of this theatrical performance.

As elsewhere in Plautus' oeuvre,[119] the prologue-speaker exploits the performative power of his words (note the remark *sine architectis*) in order to build up the dramatic illusion and virtually bring the audience to the place where the plot takes place. However, building the dramatic illusion is not the only aim of this *mutatio*. Feeney claimed[120] that the performance of a drama such as the *palliata* was meant also to make a show of the Greeks. This show enabled the Romans to learn more about their culture and habits by means of a "game of transcultural identification"[121] that promoted among them a feeling of mutual solidarity that Anderson called "the Roman connection."[122] Plautus identifies Athens as the city where all the actions deplored by Roman morality take place. In this regard, it is meaningful what the eponymous slave of the *Stichus* tells the audience momentarily breaking the dramatic illusion:

[117] We saw a similar device in the passage from the *Persa* (390-396) analysed above, where the parasite Saturio offered his daughter a dowry consisting of *logi Attici* instead of *logi Siculi*. There the choice was for Attic Greekness, whereas in the prologue to the *Menaechmi* Plautus opts for Sicilian Greekness.

[118] This expression occurs multiple times in Plautus' oeuvre: *Epid.* 502: *hominum esse Athenis Atticis minimi preti*; *Mil.* 100: *is amabat meretricem †matre† Athenis Atticis*; *Pseud.* 416: *dictator fiat nunc Athenis Atticis*; *Truc.* 497: *nunc ad amicam decumo mense post Athenas Atticas*.

[119] E.g. *Amph.* 97: *haec urbs est Thebae*; *Men.* 72: *haec urbs Epidamnus est, dum haec agitur fabula* (cf. *Truc.* 10-11).

[120] Feeney 2016, 140-146.

[121] Feeney 2016, 141.

[122] Anderson 1997, 133-151.

> *atque id ne vos miremini, hominis servolos*
> *potare, amare atque ad cenam condicere:*
> *licet haec Athenis nobis.* (*Stich.* 446-448)
>
> But don't be surprised if we, the slaves of a man, drink, make love, and invite ourselves to dinner: in Athens we can do this indeed!

The slave's invitation *ne miremini* is not meant to actually calm the spectators' indignation down. Rather, it reminds them that if what they see were real, they should really feel outraged by the characters' behaviour. However, Stichus is also reminding the audience that the Athens displayed on that stage is not real Athens, and that it is possible to bring 'immoral Greece' into a "small part of the Romans' walls" because the occasion provided by the theatrical festival allows for a temporary reversal of Roman everyday morality on the stage. The theatrical Athens of the *palliata* therefore turns out to be an artefact, a literary product devised in order to show the Romans how the Greeks are.[123] In this regard, there is even a peculiar Plautine word that epitomises the Greeks' alleged immorality on stage, namely the verb *congraecare*,[124] or *pergraecari*, as we read in the *Mostellaria*:[125]

> *dies noctesque bibite, pergraecamini,*
> *amicas emite liberate, pascite*
> *parasitos, obsonate pollucibiliter.*
> *haecine mandavit tibi, quom peregre hinc it, senex?* (*Most.* 22-25)
>
> Keep drinking day and night, behave like Greeks! Keep buying and delivering from the pimp your girlfriends, keep feeding your parasites and banqueting sumptuously! Are these the orders that our old master, who is wandering far away from home, gave you?

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[123] Another Plautine description of Athens as an immoral city is given by the parasite's daughter in the *Persa* (554-560). After being asked by the slave Sagaristio whether she has seen how strong the city walls are (l. 553), the *virgo* replies stating that the citizens' moral integrity must be the first and strongest wall of a city: *si incolae bene sunt morati, pulchre munitum arbitror./perfidia et peculatus ex urbe et avaritia si exulant,/quarta invidia, quinta ambitio, sexta obtrectatio,/septimum periurium,* TOX. *euge.* VIR. *octava indiligentia,/nona iniuria, decimum, quod pessimum adgressust, scelus:/haec unde aberunt, ea urbs moenita muro sat erit simplici;/ubi ea aderunt, centumplex murus rebus servandis parumst* ('VIR. If citizens are well behaved, I think that the city is wonderfully protected. If treachery, peculation, and greed are banished from the city, and envy in the fourth place, ambition in the fifth, disparagement in the sixth, perjury in the seventh…TOX. Well done!... negligence in the eighth, injustice in the ninth, and crime, which is the worst, in the tenth: where these things will be kept off, the city will be sufficiently protected by a simple wall; but where these misconducts are present, a hundred times thicker wall won't be enough to protect things').

[124] The only *occurrence* of the verb *pergraecari* is in *Bacch.* 742: *quod dem scortis quodque in lustris comedim [et] congraecem, pater.*

[125] Unlike *pergraecari*, Plautus uses *congraecare* multiple times: *Bacch.* 812; *Most.* 63, 959: *Poen.* 601.

These reproaches are addressed by the slave Grumio to his fellow slave Tranio, who profits from their old master's absence in order to party with his son, their young master, inviting him to indulge in any kind of pleasure. Although according to the dramatic illusion Tranio is a Greek character, he reprimands his fellow slave by adopting the Romans' point of view and by embracing their austere morality. The actions that are here labelled as 'Greek (mis)behaviour' are almost the same as those presented as Athenian regular (mis)conduct in the previous extract from the *Stichus*: drinking, making love with prostitutes, eating.[126] This is a recurrent repertoire of habits that, together with the representation of Greek intellectuals as idlers (as in the passage from the *Curculio* discussed above[127]) complete the Roman negative stereotype of the *Graeculus*,[128] the target of Romans moral tirades from Plautus onwards (Cato the Elder is obviously the most renowned critic of Hellenic morals in the contemporary setting).

What is surprising in our overall discussion is the clash between Plautus' homage, however ironic,[129] to Greek literary models and such "traces of Hellenophobia"[130] as those we have just seen. Therefore, there seems to be a dichotomy in Plautus' approach to Greek literary culture and moral attitude. In order to shed some light on this seeming paradox, it is necessary to recall first some historical details framing Plautus' life and activity.

During Plautus' lifespan (254-184 BC ca.), Rome defeats her bitterest enemy Carthage twice (in 241 and 202 BC, the end of the first and second Punic wars respectively), imposing her hegemony over the southern Mediterranean region. Moreover, with the first two Macedonian wars,[131] the Romans progressively limit the power of the Macedonian kingdom led by Philip V, of which Greece is an integral part. Most scholars agree on dating Plautus' theatrical activity between the years 212 BC (i.e. the date of the *Asinaria*) and 186 BC (i.e. the date of the *Casina*). In historical terms, this means that Plautus wrote his *palliatae* during the Hannibalic war (218-202 BC), and Cato's *cursus honorum* (he started as a quaestor in 204 BC and completed his political career becoming censor in 184 BC).

Pierre Grimal claimed[132] that these historical events are crucial because they mark a turning point in the Roman approach to Greek culture that Plautus' works mirror. Before the

[126] These actions were already anticipated in the two lines preceding this passage from the *Mostellaria*: *nunc, dum tibi lubet licetque, pota, perde rem,/corrumpe erilem adulescentem optimum* (20-21).
[127] For a detailed analysis of the anti-Hellenic elements featured in Curculio's tirade see Taurino 2006, 255-267.
[128] The very word *Graeculus* does not appear in any extant Plautine text, but it is first attested in Cicero (*Pro Milone*, *De oratore*, *Tuscolanae*, *Ad familiares*).
[129] Despite the ironic presentation of *palliatae* as "barbarian translations" if compared with the 'perfect' Greek models, in his works Plautus does stick to the Greek literary conventions.
[130] Taurino 2006.
[131] Respectively fought between 215-205 B.C. (ending with the treaty of Phoenice), and 200-196 B.C. (ending with the treaty of Tempe, after Philip's defeat at Cynoscephalae by Titus Quinctius Flamininus, who presented Roman intervention as an act of liberation of the Greeks from the Macedonian tyranny). The most open act of submission of Greece will take place at the end of the third Macedonian war in 168 B.C., when Lucius Aemilius Paullus will defeat Philip's son, Perseus, and Macedonia will be ruled directly by the Romans.
[132] Grimal 1981, 154-157.

Hannibalic War, the interest in Hellenism was not exclusively Roman, but Italic.[133] The works by Andronicus and Naevius feature aspects of a Hellenistic culture that can be understood not only by Greeks and Romans, but also by Oscans, Etruscans, and Sicilians. Therefore, those works are the product of a Mediterranean cultural *koine* that springs from a wide web of reciprocal exchanges, with no strong hegemonic power ruling over the other civilisations yet. Initially Roman comedy, Naevius' comedy in particular, is the best literary embodiment of this *koine*.[134] Conversely, with the advent of Hannibal and Rome's progressive transformation into a hegemonic power during the Macedonian wars, the Romans adopt a more nationalistic approach to their interaction with other cultures, Hellenism in particular. After this moment, the *mos maiorum* is deemed superior to foreign cultures, as also Plautine comedy shows.[135]

Coming from the Umbrian city of Sarsina and speaking Umbrian as first language, Plautus himself would have been considered a foreigner, to some extent, by the Romans—as most of early Roman poets. This means that Latin and Greek were his second and third languages. As we have seen earlier in this chapter, Plautus' works and biographical tradition (starting from his name) hint at a theatrical apprenticeship in the Atellan farce, which was originally in Oscan, a language very close to Umbrian. After coming to Rome, Plautus must have had to cope with quite different tastes and expectations from those of his predecessors' audience, also in the light of the historical turns that had taken place meanwhile. Therefore, Plautus had to accomplish a coherent synthesis of local (i.e. Atellan) and international (i.e. Greek/Hellenistic) elements in his theatre, so as to satisfy both the 'nationalistic' taste for more autochthonous artistic expressions, and the established philhellenic taste.

The presence of Greek models allows first of all Roman literature to speak the conventional meta-literary language. This enables the Romans to create the cultural counterpart to their military primacy, which they managed to secure in those years. More importantly, Plautus himself seems willing to take on the role as the leader of this cultural battle as part of the wider military war that in his time was being fought against that great enemy of Rome, namely Carthage. We can infer all this from a couple of Plautine passages, the first of which is the farewell placed at the end of the belated prologue of the *Cistellaria*:

> *bene valete et vincite*
> *virtute vera, quod fecistis antidhac;*
> *servate vostros socios, veteres et novos,*
> *augete auxilia vostra iustis legibus,* 200
> *perdite perduelles, parite laudem et lauream,*
> *ut vobis victi Poeni poenas sufferant.* (*Cist.* 197-202)

> Be strong and win with real virtue, as you did before; keep your allies, both the old and the new ones; increase your auxiliary troops by means of fair laws; vanquish your

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[133] Grimal 1981, 135.
[134] Grimal 1981, 79-82.
[135] Grimal 1981, 149-157.

enemies; gain esteem and glory so that you will defeat the Punics and make them pay the price for the sufferance.

The first wish expressed by the speaker (the god *Auxilium*) suggests the way the Romans should gain victory over their *perduelles*, namely by means of *vera virtus*,[136] something they already proved to be capable of. At the very end of the prologue, it becomes clear that the speaker is referring to a war that the spectators are currently fighting against the Punics, whose fraudulence was proverbial in the Roman world.[137] It is therefore possible to understand what Auxilium means when referring "true virtue" to the Romans' way of fighting: as Leigh has shown,[138] Plautus refers to the virtue the Romans proudly credited to themselves of confronting their enemies hand-to-hand during a battle, unlike the Carthaginians, who conversely were said to make use of deceitful tactical techniques such as ambushes.

By doing so, Plautus is presenting the Romans' hegemonic agenda not just as a military enterprise, but also as a cultural campaign aiming at spreading Roman civilisation among rival populations. Therefore, the central lines of this passage can be read not only as an exhortation to the audience to keep on being virtuous as they did until then, but also as a praise of their *virtus*, which manifests especially in their relation with the allies, in their good laws, and in the esteem due to them.

In the prologue to the *Amphitruo*, another divine speaker, Mercury, develops the discourse on the *virtus* claiming that this is a moral value that must be fulfilled not only by the "best man," but also by the actor, who must avoid victories as the best actor through dishonourable trickeries such as claques. The *summus vir* must rely on his own natural qualities instead:

virtute dixit vos victores vivere, 75
non ambitione neque perfidia: qui minus
eadem histrioni sit lex quae summo viro?
virtute ambire oportet, non favitoribus. (*Amph.* 75-78)

Jupiter said that you must live as victors, with real virtue, not with ambition or treachery: why should the actor be a less law-abiding citizen than the excellent man? You must be ambitious by means of virtue, not of claqueurs.

With this claim, Mercury conveys to the audience the idea that victory is for the soldier as well as for the actor a matter of honesty, the value lying at the core of the Roman idea of *virtus*. More importantly, Mercury draws a parallel between the Roman victorious soldier and the

[136] The same wish is expressed at the end of the prologue to the *Casina*: *tantumst. valete, belle rem gerite et vincite/virtute vera, quod fecistis antidhac* (87-88).
[137] Leigh 2004, 28-37 provides an overview of the presence of this stereotype in Plautus' plays.
[138] Leigh 2004, 37-45.

comic actor, showing how their respective engagements with victory, however different, are aiming at the same goal, namely serving the Roman people in the name of the one *virtus* to which both of them are called.

The 'martial' portrayal of the actor's role is made explicit at the end of the prologue to the *Asinaria*, which we have already seen above (ll. 14-15: *date benigne operam mihi,/ut vos, ut alias, pariter nunc Mars adiuvet*). The anonymous prologue-speaker presents the audience's attention as instrumental in disposing the god of war Mars to favour their victories. Again, the actor's (the playwright's, in this case) and the soldier's victories are brought together, as if they were different sides of the same enterprise. Perhaps, in the *Asinaria* the poet's victory is even presented as more important, for it seems that if the poet fails following the audience's lack of attention and approval, the soldiers sitting among the public will fail to win the enemy once on the battlefield, having lost Mars' favour in the theatre.

Through the mediation of his mouthpieces, Plautus presents himself and his own work as a cultural enterprise that complements the military campaigns that are being carried out in the meantime. In this self-portrayal, Plautus evidently endorses the new nationalistic approach to other civilisations that marks Roman culture starting from the time of the second Punic war. This explains the seeming clash between the not always positive portrayal of the Greeks that emerges quite often in Plautus' works, and the simultaneous adoption of the Greek generic conventions in his plays that frame these negative portrayals.[139] The cultural and literary experience of the 'first generation' of Roman poets established a Greek meta-language for the new-born Latin literature. This informed the taste of the first poets and recipients of the 'new' Roman literature, forcing the following authors, including Plautus, to adhere to that Hellenising literary common ground.

5. CONCLUSION

Plautus could not dismiss this system when proposing to the Roman audience his own show of the Greeks—and, by implication, of the Romans themselves. Conversely, he had to adopt the meta-language founded by his (few) predecessors. With such an act of foundation there came to be two literatures sharing the same Hellenic idea of literature, namely the Greek and Roman literatures. This contributed to the establishment of Greek generic conventions as an unavoidable feature for every literary work that aimed at being received as 'official,' that is to say not bound to certain local traditions but open to the Hellenistic cultural *koine*.

[139] In the *Tusculanae disputationes*, Cicero too exploits a military imagery to describe his own enterprise in creating a Latin counterpart of Greek philosophy by means of adaptation/translation. Here he claims that the Greeks managed to reach the supremacy in all literary genres just because they did not have competitors. However, the Romans now aim to conquer their literary heritage: *doctrina Graecia nos et omni litterarum genere superabat; in quo erat facile vincere non repugnantes. nam cum apud Graecos antiquissimum e doctis genus sit poetarum, siquidem Homerus fuit et Hesiodus ante Romam conditam, Archilochus regnante Romulo, serius poeticam nos accepimus* (*Tusc.* 1.3), and *quare si aliquid oratoriae laudis nostra attulimus industria, multo studiosius philosophiae fontis aperiemus, e quibus etiam illa manabant* (*Tusc.* 1.6). Moreover, also Cicero, just as Plautus, sees "literary translation as a necessary follow-up to military conquest" (McElduff 2013, 103).

Plautus' need to respect this code emerges clearly in his engagement with Greek models, or better in his presentation of their adoption as nothing else but a duty he must fulfil as a poet. This chapter has shown that the discourse on the models carries out a persuasive function that aims to demonstrate the alleged continuity between Plautus' *palliatae* and his Roman predecessors' literary works based on Greek models. The function of (mentioning) Greek models in Plautine comedy consists therefore in anchoring his new works, marked by the new Roman culture, in the current and established understanding of Roman literature as a derivative product, which claimed a direct connection with the more prestigious Greek literature.

The discrepancies pointed out both in this and in the previous chapters between what the plays themselves tell us about their own models and how ancient (and modern) readers reacted to these claims show how important it is to consider the presence of the Greek models in Plautine comedy beyond any comparative approach, focussing instead on their discursive anchoring function.