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A Rough Guide to Insult in Plautus

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

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in Classics

by

Hans Spencer Bork

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

A Rough Guide to Insult in Plautus

by

Hans Spencer Bork

Doctor of Philosophy in Classics

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Amy Ellen Richlin, Chair

This dissertation examines how abuse-language and insults function in the plays of Plautus.
Existing work on insults in Plautus is largely taxonomic, with small attention to the dynamics of
insult among characters or to how insults are construed within the plays. Plautus is one of the
most important Latin authors, and insult is a bedrock feature of his comic style. Moreover, every
type of character in Plautus' plays—from slaves to gods—uses insult freely regardless of status and
generic type, but characters do not all react to insults in the same way. Some will react calmly to
extreme abuse, and others will become distraught over mild critique. This suggests that the
"valence" of insult words is not stable; indeed, supposedly neutral or even positive terms can be
insulting if used in certain situations. Moreover, Plautus' plays were designed to be realized
through live, physical performance, and thus to understand the insult scenes they contain, we
must consider not just the textual evidence of insult usage, but also how performance details—
delivery, occasion, audience—also could have influenced or even altered surface meanings found
in the text. Abuse scenes and their aftermath drive much of the dramatic action and humor in

Plautus' plays; the various ways that participants in these scenes deploy and respond to insults are thus crucial evidence for in-text themes, as well as the social culture of 3rd- and 2nd-century Rome. To understand Plautus' comedy, we must also understand his insults.

My project takes a "3D" view of insults in Plautus: I apply a theoretical method that combines performance theory and sociolinguistic theory—especially work on linguistic (im)politeness—to consider how insults function across and within social boundaries. I place special emphasis on the idea that "social intimacy" is the defining factor for determining how potential insult meanings are resolved; how characters react to insult is the result of interpersonal relationships, and not of pure lexical semantics. Intimacy and rapport are major aspects of scripted character interactions, but they also can develop between audience and actors during the theatrical event, and this relationship ultimately mediates the semantic valence of insult terms. I begin my study with a narrow analysis of a single, widespread insult (*fur*, "thief"), and then apply the generalized conclusions of that study to an analysis of multiple terms that occur in two-person scenes, with attention to how these affect (and are affected by) interpersonal relationships. I then widen my scope and consider how the realities of ancient performance, as well as the perspective(s) of a heterogeneous audience, would have affected these relationships. Lastly, I consider how insults can become humorous, a development guided by the tension between two opposing modes of expression: one that produces pleasure, and the other pain. Between these, the dynamics of insult play out on a large scale in the arc of plot development.

The dissertation of Hans Spencer Bork is approved.

Brent Harmon Vine

Dorota Dutsch

Amy Ellen Richlin, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2018

For Dana.

… wish you were here.

Figures:

Tables:

For convenience, the Latin text used throughout this dissertation is from the Oxford Classical Text edition of Plautus by W. M. Lindsay. I also occasionally refer to text or notes in the Loeb edition by Wolfgang de Melo (de Melo 2011b, 2011c, 2011d, 2012, 2013). All translations are my own.

In 2009, Hans Bork received dual B.A. degrees in Classics and English from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, graduating *summa cum laude*. Hans was then accepted to the terminal M.A. program in Classics at Washington University in St. Louis, from which he graduated in 2011. Hans entered the doctoral program in Classics at UCLA in 2011, where he specialized in Roman Comedy and Early Latin, the sociolinguistics of Latin and Ancient Greek, and Indo-European linguistics. In 2018, Hans expects to receive his Ph.D. in Classics, as well as a graduate certificate from the UCLA Program in Indo-European Studies.

1. Lexicon and Theory: Insults, Politeness, and Intimacy

1.1. Introduction

Novice public speakers are often advised to "start off with a joke." The idea is that a joke will loosen up an audience and make listeners more receptive to whatever the speaker has to say. This in turn will presumably make the speaker more comfortable, and better able to perform—an echo of the classical *captatio beneuolentiae*. Of course, the tactic also brings some danger since it assumes that the audience will laugh at and enjoy whatever joke the speaker tells, and anyone who has ever tried to tell a joke knows just how hard getting a laugh can be. Not everyone will find any given joke funny, and some may even find it offensive or insulting; the chance of this increases as the size of the audience increases and as the speaker's first-hand knowledge of individuals in the audience declines. Humor is subjective then, but so too, it seems, is insult.

In fact, most speakers implicitly understand the close relationship between humor and insult. Consider how sensitive speakers are to the positive or negative spin that verbal intonation can put on an utterance. For example, the phrase "Good job!" is notionally complimentary, but can easily be made to sound insulting or abusive if spoken in an ironic way, and in a situation that does not merit compliment—say, after someone has made a mistake at work. In the same way, a word or phrase that is negative on the surface can be interpreted positively: saying "You are *such* a jerk!" sounds like an insult, but it could be banter between friends—even a joke in the right context. Intonational nuance is itself just a marker of a speaker's attitude, and this attitude, in combination with the attitudes of other speakers in a conversation, is what truly determines the valence of a potential insult term. This holds even for very strong language such as racial slurs, of which the so-called "N-word" is a famous example. Most Caucasian speakers avoid this term except as a deeply offensive, strong insult. However, the same word is common in certain registers of African

American Vernacular English, where it can carry positive, in-group meaning. Insults cannot be a pure matter of lexicon if terms that are generally considered obscene or rude can seem bantering or otherwise nonthreatening in particular situations, especially ritual contexts, conventional contexts, or within a speech community where this language is a regular marker of group identity.[1]

The ambiguous nature of insult language is an immediate concern for scholars of Roman comedy, a genre where insult is freely used to elicit laughter in joke routines, as well as to highlight and incite conflict between characters, and so drive the plot. Nevertheless, this flexibility has been overlooked in much traditional scholarship on Latin insults, most of which is explicitly taxonomic: an approach that inherently obscures context. My project concerns the language of insult and abuse in the plays of Plautus: the how, why, and when of the insults and jibes spoken by characters in Plautus' plays. More specifically, I want to consider *how* Plautine insult functions, rather than focusing on what it *looks like*: that is, not to define the lexicon of Plautine insult, as has been done in prior scholarship, but to examine the structural arrangement, function, and social context of insults and abuse language in Plautus' plays. So far as I can find, the question of how insults are used in Plautus has not been addressed with any depth in the extant scholarship. In fact, surprisingly little scholarly work has been done on Plautine (or indeed, comic) insult generally, and what has been done gives little attention to the contexts in which insults are used by speakers in the plays. For example, the most recent work to discuss Plautine insults in any depth is a chapter from Dickey (2002: 163–85, Ch.5), in a discussion of Latin insults *as a whole*, and with a

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[1] This proposition is counter-intuitive, and a critic might offer examples of extremely "radioactive" words that are deeply objectionable to most speakers (e.g., items from George Carlin's list of "7 Words You Can't Say on Television," such as *motherfucker*, *cocksucker*, and *cunt*). However, while these terms may be obscene and thus potentially insulting in standard varieties of English, they are nevertheless used in neutral or positive ways in certain speech communities or sociolects. For example, in Australian "Bogan English," some sociolects of Scottish English, and some varieties of urban Hiberno-English, the word *cunt* is regularly used by male and female speakers to address one another in a neutral or bantering way; similarly, *motherfucker* has long carried a positive meaning in some registers of African American Vernacular English, a usage that has spread outside that dialect. See Dalzell and Partridge (2008) *s.v.* for examples and discussion of the English words cited above, and Allan and Burridge (2006: 1–89) for a discussion of how "forbidden words" are configured according to cultural norms.

restriction to items that appear in the vocative (i.e., "Terms of Address").[2] The gap in coverage is surprising given the current boom in scholarship on various sociolinguistic issues in Roman comedy, including "politeness," the general cover topic under which insult and abuse language fall in modern Linguistic studies (discussed further below). My own study is a gesture toward correcting the gap, and though it surely does not cover every aspect of the problem, I hope that it will demonstrate the value of research on insults, while also pointing the way for further dialogue and research on the topic.

1.2. Latin Scholarship on Insults, Comedy, and Insults in Comedy

The total pool of scholarship on insult in Latin literature specifically is not large, and from that pool the most important studies are certainly those of Ilona Opelt and Saara Lilja, both published in 1965 but without reference to one another.[3] Since its publication, Opelt's book in many ways has become (and still remains) the authoritative treatment of Latin insults ("Schimpfwörter"), insofar as it is the longest and most exhaustive study of the topic undertaken to date. It is a taxonomic analysis, and focuses more on insults as lexical entities than as speech acts—thus the title, *Die lateinischen Schimpfwörter und verwandte sprachliche Erscheinungen: Eine Typologie*. Opelt categorizes insults according to the rubric of "das Schimpfen im Bereich der Liebe," and subheadings include "Vater und Sohn," "Herr und Sklave," and "Politische Polemik." This format is useful as a taxonomic organizer, but it necessarily treats insults discretely rather than holistically, and individual terms can appear dozens of times and in multiple subsections. In choosing what words to include, Opelt applies a somewhat tendentious criterion: "Schimpfwörter," she believes, are "der

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[2] I discuss below (and further in Chapter 2) certain problems that Dickey's lexicographical approach poses, but the major virtue of that study for my project is its comprehensive overview of the scholarship on Latin insults up to 2002 (the date of publication), as well as an index of individual insult terms (though again, however, only those that occur in vocative expressions.)

[3] Opelt (1965) and Lilja (1965), respectively.

nichtaffektivischen Prädikation negativer Eigenschaften," which manifest as verbal aggression for

"die Erregung des Schimpfenden." That is, she sees insults as innately aggressive and hostile, and

as substitutes for hostile physical behavior ("Handlungsersatz").[4] This is a position that is no longer

considered valid in descriptive lexicography, generally, and it is something that I will contest on

behalf of the contextual model just outlined in the preceding section. Nevertheless, Opelt's book

remains a valuable reference, especially for looking at how specific insult terms are used Latin as a

whole. Moreover, Opelt's emphasis on the use of insults in specific situations was an important

innovation in Latin philological scholarship, even if the implementation is problematic in light of

modern sociolinguistic theory, which favors contextual definition and spectra of usage over binary

taxonomies.

Lilja's study, *Terms of Abuse in Roman Comedy*, is in many ways the mirror image of Opelt's: it is

quite short (barely a third of the length of Opelt's study), it is specific to Roman comedy (with most

discussion devoted to a single author, Plautus), and it is organized according to the semantic field

of the terms discussed, rather than situations in which they appear. Lilja's subheadings include

"Names of Animals," "Crime," "Concrete Nouns", and "Abstract Nouns," all placed under three main

headings: "Linguistic Aspects of Terms of Abuse," "Social References of Terms of Abuse," and

"Conclusions with Regard to Greek Comedy." The last subheading is especially interesting, and

although most of Lilja's material is drawn from Plautus and Terence, she does give some attention

to possible Greek exemplars. Indeed, one of her express purposes is to determine how abuse terms

are used in Plautus and Terence in comparison to their (potential) counterparts in Greek comedy.

The brevity of Lilja's study prevents much depth in this analysis, but she does ultimately conclude

that Terence "followed the Greek original…more faithfully than Plautus did." This position follows

the ongoing trend in literary scholarship to see Terence as more faithful to his "Greek originals"

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[4] Opelt (1965: 18).

than Plautus was.[5] What makes Lilja's study especially important, and distinguishes it from Opelt's in usefulness, is both its specific focus on Roman comedy, and its recognition that contextual factors can affect the meanings of various insults. Significantly, Lilja acknowledges that sociological factors influence meaning,[6] an idea that is fundamental to modern understandings of language,[7] and which are essential to the method of my own study. Lilja remains a valuable resource for discussion and citation of specific insult terms, especially as a source of data. Nevertheless, as with Opelt, Lilja's overriding "insult/not-insult" taxonomic methodology undermines her claims about how insult *as a kind of speech* functions, since she more often than not assumes insult terms can be inherently classified as such, and gives relatively little space to discussing insult in use.

Several earlier studies inform both Opelt and Lilja's work, and of these the two that are most relevant for my project are by Pierre-Jean Miniconi and Albert Müller, both of which are specific to Roman comedy.[8] Miniconi's taxonomy and discussion of insult semantics influenced the studies of Opelt and Lilja, though as Lilja points out, Miniconi's insistence that the meaning of insults is not socially determined severely curtails the usefulness of his conclusions.[9] On the one hand, Miniconi's study provides a compact stylistic and lexical comparison of specific insult terms and

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[5] See briefly Lilja (1965: 6), and fuller comments at Lilja (1965: 78–94). For Terence as "more Greek" than Plautus, see e.g. sample remarks in Wright (1974: 183–96) and Karakasis (2005: 145–246).

[6] "Moreover, I cannot agree with Miniconi that the sociological classification of the terms of abuse...is of no value...the consequences of abuse, at any rate, belong to the social sphere, since the victim is inevitably a member of society" (Lilja 1965: 7).

[7] That is, to the principles of Variationist Sociolinguistics, which looks at how variations in linguistic usage correspond to a speaker's social background, education, race, choice of register, and so on. The first formal studies of such issues are usually ascribed to William Labov in the mid-20th century, and Labov's methods and conclusions are still dominant in the field. See for example his seminal study of the relationship between social class and the pronunciation of /r/ in Labov (1966). For broader methodological remarks on sociolinguistics as a formal subdiscipline of Lnguistics proper, see Downes (1998).

[8] Miniconi (1958) and A. Müller (1913b).

[9] Lilja's comments are at Lilja (1965: 7), and Miniconi's at Miniconi (1958: 162). Dickey echoes Lilja's sentiments, and largely dismisses Miniconi's article (Dickey 2002: 165).

collocations in both Plautus and Terence. Miniconi comments on the composition of certain

lexical items, and his remarks on *ironique* insults are prescient in their sensitivity to the

polyvalence of the insult lexicon.[10] On the other, while Miniconi's study was influential for its

discussion of insults as stylistic features, and thus was an advance over Müller's 1913 article

(essentially a catalog of purported insult-terms and the scenes in which they appear, with little to

no commentary), Miniconi's explicit rejection of social aspects as factors of usage is even less in

keeping with current understandings of language than it was for Lilja in 1965. Ultimately,

Miniconi's essay is a useful expansion of Müller's article on Latin insult, which in turn was a

companion to a different article on Greek.[11] Both of these articles are little more than bare catalogs

of individual terms, and include only sparse remarks on usage. The major innovation of Müller's

studies is his focus on insults in comedy specifically, but his insistence on a list format continues

the essentially lexicographic method used by earlier scholarship on insult; these catalogues are

valuable references, but offers little new insight over previous catalogues on the topic.[12] Opelt's

study obviated all three of these publications,[13] and so my practice throughout the subsequent

chapters will be to cite solely from Lilja, Opelt, and Dickey when discussing specific lexical items,

while also bringing in their comments (if any) as is appropriate.

    The studies discussed above comprise the majority of published work on Latin insult language

in comedy, but there are several additional works that, while not about insult specifically, have

contributed to the scholarly conversation around abuse language in Latin comedy. Foremost

among these is J. B. Hofmann's *Lateinische Umgangssprache*,[14] which continues to cast a long shadow

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[10] Miniconi (1958: 168–75).

[11] That is, A. Müller (1913b) and A. Müller (1913a), respectively.

[12] Namely Hoffmann (1892) and Meisner (1752).

[13] I.e., Miniconi (1958), A. Müller (1913a), and A. Müller (1913b).

[14] Hofmann (1951).

over literary and philological discussions of "colloquial" Latin, a nebulous category of discourse under which insult and other kinds of expressive language are sometimes classed. Hofmann's study has been especially popular with scholars who work outside of current linguistic methodologies; his approach, which separates literary genres and linguistic elements according to "affektiv" and "intellektuell" axes, easily squares with literary analyses that highlight motivation, emotion, and characterization in a text.[15] Hofmann is explicitly cited by both Opelt and Lilja as an influence, and both scholars apply his conclusions and taxonomy in their studies of insult.[16] This is unfortunate, because most of Hofmann's conclusions are now at variance—and even retrograde— to current thinking about language in everyday use. The disagreement is philosophical, and originates in Hofmann's belief in a fundamental distinction between "intellectual" and "emotional" expression, a bias that translates to favor for high-prestige literature, and disparagement of perceived "common" speech.[17] His definitions are inadequate because they rely on purely psychological and stylistic criteria, and thus reveal more about Hofmann's cultural biases than they do about the language he studies. Hofmann's erudition is impressive, and his comments can be valuable, but as constructed his theory cannot be applied in a systematic way. I will not, then, use Hofmann's methodology or conclusions in my project, and instead will adopt the descriptive sociolinguistic approach found in the work of scholars such as J. N. Adams and others (discussed

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[15] In fact, Hofmann's monograph is regarded well enough that it was re-edited, translated, and expanded in 2003 by Licinia Ricottilli (Hofmann 2003). Though this new edition is more up-to date and useful than the original, my critiques of the original German edition still apply.

[16] Hofmann is cited at Opelt (1965: 9) and Lilja (1965: 5), respectively.

[17] That is, an essentially classist distinction based on a Humanist fantasy about the refined character of educated speech. See the strong critique of Hofmann's method in Chahoud (2010) for specifics.

below).[18] Nevertheless, Hofmann's influence in the field as a whole needs to be acknowledged, and his book, though badly dated, remains a rich resource for citations and philological commentary.

Beyond what has been discussed above, there has been a smattering of work on insult in specific genres and aspects of Latin literature, particularly oratory and epistle; examples are R. G. M. Nisbet's discussion of invective in Cicero's orations, Jon Hall's study of "politeness" in Cicero's letters, and Donald Lateiner's study of gendered insults in the Latin novel.[19] Interesting as they are, incorporating these works into my study poses specific challenges, as the deployment of insult in literature is conditioned by the conventions of the genre in which it appears, and so comparison across genres would require a contextual excursus on whatever *comparanda* I might choose to pull from. Moreover, the majority of extant Latin literature postdates Plautus and the *palliata* tradition, and thus insult terms or usages that occur in both comedy and, say, later oratory or satire would necessarily need to be considered not just as co-occurrences of an item, but as possible artifacts of the *palliata* in reception. Even more significantly, insults in the *palliata* were meant to be performed onstage—unlike the insults in other genres, such as lyric or satire—and (as I discuss in Chapter 4), the expressive power of comic insults is tied to the performance context of comedy. Other genre-specific studies on Latin insult might be useful in a more expansive project (i.e., one on Latin insult generally), where one could argue, for example, that the conservatism of the oratorical tradition allows for comparison between the *palliata* texts and the fragments of archaic oratory. From this

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[18] That is, the variationist or "distributive" sociolinguistic model, wherein certain features become significant through their association with specific groups or demographics, and not the other way around. This approach treats language as an arbitrary marker, equivalent to other arbitrary social markers such as clothing or diet.

[19] Nisbet (1961), Hall (2009), and Lateiner (2013), respectively. Lateiner's study is especially interesting, as it applies a context-based politeness framework similar to my own, and goes into the implications of how insult utterances function within a specific semantic sphere. See also Dickey (2002: 163–66) for references to several incidental pieces that I have passed over. One item she mentions that *would* be useful and which I have not yet read is Reimers (1957), reportedly the most comprehensive study of Plautine insults available, but frustratingly difficult to get a copy of, as is remarked on by Dickey (2002: 165), who managed to get one, as well as Lilja (1965: 8), who did not. The WorldCat database lists only two physical copies within the United States, but my efforts to acquire either of these have been fruitless.

comparison it might then be possible to consider rhetorical invective from the Republican and

Imperial periods in relation to Plautine insult.[20] Though a tantalizing prospect, this goes well

beyond the ambitions of the present study.

One other work that considers Latin insults, as mentioned above, is Eleanor Dickey's study of

Latin address-forms.[21] The book has many merits and is a valuable contribution to the study of

Latin sociolinguistics, and is especially useful for its thoughtful discussion of methodology, and

for its generous survey of prior scholarship on types of Latin speech (including insult).

Nevertheless, I have largely abstained from borrowing any of Dickey's method or conclusions in

my own exploration of insults, for reasons that I discuss fully in Chapter 2.[22] Dickey's study is

influential and well-regarded, however, and deserves to be mentioned in any survey of work on

Latin insult.

In addition to Latin-specific work on insult, there has been a recent surge in more

philosophically-oriented work on insults as speech phenomena, especially in semi-popular

formats.[23] Works of this type do provide some interesting thoughts on the nature of insults in

living discourse, but I nevertheless feel that the framework developed by Jonathan Culpeper

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[20] The value of such comparison is demonstrated in Richlin (1992) (not mentioned by Dickey), a study of Latin sexual invective that draws on material from different time-periods and genres. By using a similar method, it might be possible for me to triangulate insults between, say, Plautus, the fragments of Cato's speeches, Catullus, and Cicero.

[21] Dickey (2002: 163–185).

[22] Important to note is that Dickey herself does not think her methodology is suited to analyzing insults as such: "A study of forms of address is not a good context in which to undertake an examination of Latin insults; insults form a large subject and deserve books of their own. Moreover, while in many areas of the Latin language a real distinction between vocative and non-vocative usage can be observed, making it profitable to study vocatives as isolated from other uses of the same words, such a distinction is much less apparent for Latin insults: I cannot find any difference in meaning between, for example, *sceleste* and *scelestus es*. In this area, therefore, my address data are not adequate, and all conclusions based on them must be regarded as tentative" (Dickey 2002: 166).

[23] For example, Neu (2008), Conley (2010), and Irvine (2017).

(discussed below) is more powerful and more immediately applicable to the texts of Roman comedy, and so in my own study I do not use any purely philosophical approaches.

1.3. Plautine Language and Plautine Insult

The preceding summary makes clear that there is ample room for further study of insults in Roman comedy, and in addition, that the sporadic, largely taxonomic approaches predominant in the scholarship thus far imperfectly describe insult as a linguistic and stylistic feature. I say this because internal evidence from the Plautine texts unambiguously shows that contextual (i.e., sociolinguistic) factors determine how insult is spoken and interpreted by Plautine characters, and a number of scholars have argued that language in Plautus' plays to some degree reflects contemporary Latin speech.[24] Of course, the often overlooked complication here is that the language used by Plautine characters is not unvarnished "everyday speech," but rather is an artistic product developed over time by teams of trained actors and playwrights; moreover, this language was common to the *palliata* genre as a whole, and is not unique to Plautus.[25] I am somewhat agnostic on the question of whether Plautus was a real figure who actually wrote the plays attributed to him, and the plays provide clear evidence of re-performance, as in e.g. the famous

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[24] Important works on characterization and speech in the *palliata* are Shipp (1954), Happ (1967), Maltby (1979), Maltby (1985), Maltby (1995), Jocelyn (1993), Karakasis (2005), and de Melo (2011a), though this list is hardly exhaustive. Broader comments can be found in work on Latin sociolinguistics, such as Adams (2003) and Adams (2007). For the linguistic characterization of female characters, Adams (1984) and Dutsch (2008) are essential. Adams (2013) provides, among much else, an exhaustive overview of the problems associated with indexing written *exempla* to social status, and Part 1 provides an excellent overview of various methodologies; commentary on various aspects of Plautine language is found *passim*. Lastly, Fraenkel ([1922] 2007), though not a linguistic study *per se*, by demonstrating that Plautus was not a derivative copy of Greek authors, nevertheless has effectively promoted the idea that Plautine characters were to some degree based on social archetypes familiar to contemporary audiences.

[25] The essential premise of Wright (1974), and in general the current scholarly *communis opinio*.

prologue to *Casina*,[26] or the joke about *Epidicus* in *Bacchides* 213–15.[27] I find C.W. Marshall's idea that our texts are compiled from performance transcripts compelling,[28] but whatever the reality of Plautine authorship, it does not significantly affect insult usage as a macro-phenomenon. My assumption is that Plautine language reflects a living performance tradition that was, in turn, informed by contemporary speech.[29] The question of performance and linguistic identity are the two stars by which I steer the argument of my dissertation, as both shine down on every aspect of Plautine language, and so must play a significant role in shaping the ways that Plautine insult was used.

While the degree to which Plautine speech reflected actual, contemporary speech is a disputed issue, we can assume that the audiences for Plautus' comedies would have at least recognized and responded to the *conventions* used onstage, and thus would have understood these conventions as cues that were intended to elicit specific responses.[30] Given that comedy is intended, at heart, to be funny, one can imagine that most of these linguistic cues would be comedic; nevertheless, the plays are clearly more than a collection of one-liners, and much of Plautine humor is driven by the insertion of specific types of comic routine (i.e., "shtick") into a dramatic narrative. Within this

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[26] In which the prologue-speaker remarks that they are staging an "old play" of Plautus' (*antiquam eius… comoediam*, 13), which older people may have seen, but younger folks would not (14–15).

[27] *Non res, sed actor mihi cor odio sauciat. / etiam Epidicum, quam ego fabulam aeque ac me ipsum amo, / nullam aeque inuitus specto, si agit Pellio,* "It's not the story but the actor that hurts my heart. Even *Epidicus*, a play that I love as much as I love myself, there's nothing I'm less willing to watch if Pellio's performing."

[28] Marshall (2006: 245–79).

[29] See Petrides (2014) for discussion of various approaches to this problem, and Lefèvre, Stärk, and Vogt-Spira (1991) for in-depth studies of Plautine comedy as a "living" native tradition.

[30] How we as scholars reconstruct these responses depends very much on what we imagine the audience of the *palliata* to be, and this very question has been a flashpoint in recent scholarship on Roman comedy. See for example the contrasting positions in Fontaine (2009) and Richlin (2014): Michael Fontaine argues that Plautine language could only have been fully decoded by well-educated societal elites, while Amy Richlin argues, pace Fontaine, that Roman comedy was in general produced by and for slaves and former slaves, an argument that I personally find compelling. Fontaine's analysis, though inventive, has several crucial historical and linguistic flaws, as discussed in e.g. Goldberg (2011), Dutsch (2011), and Richlin (2014: 217). I consider the question more fully in Chapter 4.

structure, if we accept that the language playwrights and actors used was understood by an audience to be at least generally parallel to contemporary, spoken language, then it should be possible to track variations in how it was used. Indeed, I believe that it is in the interstices of these variations that insult-meaning was built in Latin, and that these very differences make unique tropes that would otherwise have been clichéd or conventional.[31] Yes, as displayed by catalogs like Müller's and Opelt's, insulting and abusive language is itself, for the most part, conventional and idiomatic; therefore, however, as I will argue, it is largely meaningless until located in actual discourse. That is, insult terms become insulting only in specific contexts; to be discussed and examined, that guiding context must be as well.

An example of a term with meanings that are shaped by discourse context is *fur*, "thief," which in some exchanges is used by characters in an apparently literal way (i.e., as a reference to actual thieves), whereas at other times it functions as an insult (a usage that is metaphorical rather than literal).[32] Similarly, throughout Plautus' plays it is clear that some obviously abusive terms are generally applied only to characters of a specific status,[33] whereas other apparent insults can be used horizontally between characters of equal social status, as well as vertically by characters of different statuses.[34] Because extant scholarship on Latin (and Plautine insults) has tended to operate on the premise that insults can be positively identified based on lexicon alone, it provides little indication of the definitional and contextual factors that shape the reception(s) of putative

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[31] This same process is still observable in in living languages, including English.

[32] An instance of the literal use is Euclio to Staphyla in *Aul.* 97, and of the abusive use, Argyrippus calling Libanus a *fur* at *Asin.* 681.

[33] E.g., the compositional "X of Y" type insults often applied to slaves, such as *stimulorum loculi*, "cabinet of cattleprods" at *Cas.* 447, spoken by Chalinus to Olympio (both slaves), and discussed at Lilja (1965: 52–57).

[34] A notable example is *stultus*, which is "horizontally" applied at e.g. *Cas.* 204, Myrrhina to Cleostrata (two free women), but is "vertically" applied at *Ep.* 652, when Epidicus (a slave) says to his owner, *stultu's, tace!*, "Shut up, stupid!"

insults.[35] For example, in the case of *fur*, the extant taxonomies hardly discuss how non-insult uses affect the sense of the term as a piece of abuse, and vice versa.[36] The question then is how to draw the line between the two semantic domains: in Dickey's study, the vocative case demarcates the two categories, but this is a formal concern that originates in her focus on "forms of address."[37] If we allow that non-vocative nouns and adjectives can be used as insults, which I think is fair to do, then the problem of distinguishing meaning becomes more difficult, and to judge by the discussions in Lilja and Opelt, the boundary that separates a descriptive (or otherwise literal) usage of the word from an instance when it is used as an insult is largely a matter of personal judgment.[38]

In this dissertation, I take an alternative tack, and rather than argue the issue absolutely (i.e., from a purely taxonomic perspective), I will accept as a given that the various definitional shades of this word would have interacted, and more importantly, that Plautus purposefully exploited for humorous effect the fungibility of meaning inherent in this and other terms.[39] Since my analysis proceeds from the idea that contextual variation very much *would have* been apparent to an ancient audience, and thus should be recognized as meaningful by modern readers as well, I plan to examine Plautine insult both as a sociolinguistic and as a performance phenomenon, in an

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[35] In discourse-pragmatic terms, extant scholarship on insults considers only lexical or sentential meaning, but does not consider "utterance meaning" or "speaker meaning," which are contextually bound. See e.g. Birner (2013: 9–36) for more on this distinction.

[36] The word is extensively cited in the indices of Opelt (1965: 271), Lilja (1965: 117), and Dickey (2002: 396), each of whom acknowledges the possibility of a "neutral" usage (Dickey's term, equivalent to "non-marked"), though Dickey is the only one to establish how she separates insult usages from descriptive, putatively neutral usages.

[37] Dickey (2002: 6).

[38] Lilja actually does discuss instances where the valence of a term is largely contextual (Lilja 1965: 12–16), but the discussion is presented as a contrast with other, more positively identifiable terms.

[39] So at *Aul.* 769, when Lyconides tells Euclio, *Sanus tu non es qui furem me uoces* ("You're crazy to call me a thief!"). The joke here is that Euclio has been acting *non sanus* throughout the play, in the course of which his paranoid fear about being robbed has driven him to accuse virtually every person he meets of theft. Is this an insult, as we sometimes see, or a literal description? Or both?

attempt to move the conversation away from the mostly lexicographic and taxonomic approaches that have been typical in the scholarship on insult (and Plautine language generally) thus far. In sum, I aim to produce a kind of "rough guide" to insult in the natural (or un-natural?) world of Plautine discourse.

1.4. Sociolinguistics and Insult

The value of my project, aside from the innate virtue of providing greater insight into the textual mechanics of one of the most important authors in Latin, is the potential insight it provides into the reception of Plautus' comedies by their contemporary audiences, and thereby to our picture of late-3rd- and early-2nd-century Roman social history. Since it is the "socio-" element that is missing from extant scholarship on the topic, the major emphasis of my dissertation is the reinsertion of exactly this feature, particularly through the application of current sociolinguistic and performance methodologies to the Plautine texts. In the last forty years, both "sociolinguistics" as a field and "performance studies" as a methodology have matured and developed to the point that they have become tools essential to the analysis of on-stage language in use. Though working linguists tend to favor living languages for study, sociolinguistic theory can nevertheless be profitably applied to ancient (i.e., text-based) languages as well, but only if guided by an understanding of dramaturgical methodology and an awareness of theatrical convention. So too, although Classicists as a bloc have been relatively slow to formally embrace sociolinguistic methodology (or at least, modern sociolinguistic theory), use of formal sociolinguistic models in the scholarship has been increasing, often with very good results.[40] Performance studies has fared

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[40] J. N. Adams is a true pioneer in this area, as he has produced dozens of publications on Latin sociolinguistics, and has almost single-handedly elevated the subfield to its current position. His most recent work (Adams 2013), already cited above, serves as a kind of summary of his most significant research. A number of other scholars have branched off from Adams' work, either through inspiration by or reaction to it, as showcased by various articles in e.g. Chahoud and Dickey (2010) and Clackson (2011), but there has still been surprisingly little work that uses sociolinguistic methods in literary analysis; Dutsch (2008) is a notable, important exception.

somewhat better among both Hellenists and Latinists, as scholars like Mary-Kay Gamel, Sander Goldberg, Sharon James, C. W. Marhsall, Timothy Moore, Niall Slater, Martin Revermann, and Oliver Taplin have increasingly advocated for a performance-forward understanding of dramatic and comic texts.[41]

The central methodological problem in discussing insult in Roman comedy is how to track differences in usage that occur among abusive terms and speakers, and then to account for these differences in a cogent way, according to an analytical structure that will reveal interesting trends, and with a method flexibile enough to be generalized across plays and scenes. The need for a generalized model is paramount, since the major impediment to any study of Plautine insult is scale: the sheer number of *lexical* items involved is vast,[42] and there is no way that a bird's eye study of the type that I want to conduct can account for insult and abuse terms on a granular level, while remaining readable and of an appropriate length. I believe that I have found a suitable workaround to the problem in the subfield of Pragmatics that has to do with *politeness research*, and in particular the branch that deals with *impoliteness*: living instances of insult and abuse.[43]

1.5. Impoliteness and Intimacy

The modern linguistic study of politeness goes back at least to H. P. Grice's work on implicature and meaning,[44] which he first began to publish in the 1950s, but the subfield only emerged as a

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[41] E.g., Gamel (1999), Goldberg (1998) and Goldberg (2018), James (2015), Marshall (2006), Moore (1998) and Moore (2012), Slater ([1985] 2000), Revermann (2006) and Taplin (1977). See also Schechner ([1976] 2004) for performance theory more generally.

[42] For example, Lilja's short study of abuse terms in Roman comedy includes sixteen pages of lexical indices, and these do not fully account for complex insults of the "X of Y" type, let alone longer and more complicated pieces of abuse. By my count, she catalogs 738 forms. This number would be far higher if less marked terms were included, and would be impossibly high if it accounted for whole utterances.

[43] By "insults and abuse" here I include instances of staged insult, as research on both politeness and impoliteness has been profitably applied to politeness phenomena in literature and dramatic performance. See e.g. the sample studies in Culpeper (1998).

[44] Originally formulated in Grice and White (1961).

distinct discipline with the landmark study of Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson.[45] Brown and

Levinson's major innovation was in establishing the concept of "face" as the organizing domain of

sociolinguistic interactions between speakers, in a system whereby "politeness" is defined as the

collected verbal and behavioral strategies that people use to preserve face during personal

communication.[46] As speakers interact, they naturally strive to maintain face through various

"politeness strategies," especially the use of different hedging mechanisms in order to reduce "face

threats" (speech that potentially damages face) to themselves and their interlocutor.[47] Face is

conventionally defined along two major axes: *positive face* and *negative face*. Positive face concerns

the desire to be socially accepted, to be part of a group, and to have a connection with others;

negative face concerns the desire for personal autonomy and independence. Actions—including

speech—that threaten face are termed "face-threatening acts," and can affect either negative or

positive face. Similarly, politeness strategies are specified as either negative politeness or positive

politeness, depending on what aspect of personality they target.[48]

Brown and Levinson's study made accessible a rich new field, and in the ensuing three decades

or so there has been a remarkable surge in scholarly work on all aspects of linguistic politeness, in

every language, living or not. Most subsequent studies of politeness are built on the Brown-

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[45] The edition usually referred to is Brown and Levinson (1987), but the first edition was published in 1978.

[46] Note however that the idea of face originated in the work of sociologist Erving Goffman, who first advanced the term in Goffman (1955). Face is a complex concept, but it can be essentially defined as the "positive self-image" that fills out an adult person's personality (Brown and Levinson 1987: 62).

[47] More generally, attempts to "redress face" are known as "facework," and are not restricted to linguistic behaviors. See e.g. discussion in Goffman (1955), the seminal study of this concept. The hedging strategies for spoken facework include use of request formulae (e.g., "Would you be so kind…"), indirect requests (e.g., "I have never tried X…"), attention to apology (e.g., "I'm sorry to trouble you…"), and so on.

[48] Though partially borrowed from other sources, all of the preceding terminology was codified in Brown and Levinson (1987), and since the publication of that work has become standardized in the scholarly literature of Politeness theory. See Culpeper (2012) for an overview of work that informed the Brown and Levinson model, as well as introductions to Politeness models built (partially or wholly) on different principles. See also Eelen (2001) for a holistic critque of various Politeness theory models.

Levinson model (at least partially), keeping in place the basic terminology established in their work, and applying "face" as the organizing principle for concepts of politeness. Despite this, a significant portion of Brown and Levinson's conclusions have subsequently been disputed or flatly rejected by scholars critical of their assumptions. In particular, most linguists now working on politeness reject Brown and Levinson's claim that their study describes "universals in language usage."[49] The idea that politeness norms are universal across languages has been disputed on both typological and anthropological grounds, and as with other mid-20th century claims about the viability of linguistic "universals," there is little to support the claim that politeness strategies apply to all societies equally.[50] Much of the controversy has to do with the issue of "face" itself, and several scholars working on non-Western languages specifically have noted that the concepts of positive and negative face are inherently individualistic, and thus not appropriate to the social structures of certain non-Western societies.[51] Despite these issues, Politeness theory itself remains a robust area of research, and the methodologies associated with the subfield have become increasingly mainstream in disciplines well outside of Linguistics and Anthropology. Indeed, Politeness theory has become especially popular in literary circles, to the point that it has even made its way to Classics—a field ever resistant to change and new ideas—in studies on a variety of authors and subjects.[52] The theory has become especially popular with Classics scholars who

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[49] The subtitle of their 1987 monograph.

[50] See Culpeper (2011: 19–47) and Culpeper (2012) for specifics and additional references to the various theoretical issues at stake.

[51] E.g., to societies that prize social obligation over autonomy, or societies defined by clan-family relations. For more, see especially Helen Spencer-Oatey's critiques of face theory in Spencer-Oatey (2002) and Spencer-Oatey (2008). In both, she suggests alternative proposals and approaches.

[52] For example Dickey (2012), Dickey (2015), Hall (2009), and Kruschwitz and Cleary-Venables (2013). See also Risselada (1993), a groundbreaking study that while not on politeness *per se*, was nevertheless one of the first to apply formal Pragmatic theory to Latin, and thus specifically addresses the methodological problems inherent to such a program.

specialize in comedy, and a number of recent works on the politeness strategies in comic language have opened up interesting new avenues of inquiry.[53]

One of the most important developments in the study of linguistic politeness subsequent to Brown and Levinson has been the advent of "impoliteness studies" as a distinct branch of research. Jonathan Culpeper is the scholar who has been at the forefront of this subject, beginning with his seminal article "Towards an Anatomy of Impoliteness," in which he lays out a framework for considering impoliteness as a phenomenon separate from politeness.[54] Culpeper's fundamental critique of the "politeness program" is the tendency of scholars working in the field to present impolite, abusive, or hostile speech as little more than a kind of "reverse politeness." That is, they want to establish a class of impolite language that is inherently and unarguably a threat to face of an interlocutor.[55] Culpeper points out that the Brown-Levinson model of politeness, with its emphasis on language universals, presupposes a situation wherein certain kinds of language or speech are necessarily "impolite," that is, they are inherently threatening to face. This assumption is obviously similar (though without reference to politeness theory *per se*) to those found in the scholarship on Latin insults and terms of abuse surveyed above.

Culpeper points out that the idea flatly contradicts real-life experience of insult-terms in discourse, the meanings of which are contextually determined and not at all absolute.[56] The actual

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[53] See in particular Ferri (2009) for programmatic remarks, as well as Unceta Gómez (2016) and Berger (2018) for studies on specific aspects of comic politeness. Peter Barrios-Lech recently published a book-length study of comic politeness and (Barrios-Lech 2016), which includes valuable analysis and thoughtful remarks on methodology. Lastly, politeness as a determining factor in verbal syntax has been briefly discussed in de Melo (2007: 107–11).

[54] Culpeper (1996). This theory is fully realized in Culpeper (2011), his book-length proposal for a taxonomy of "impoliteness strategies," which was preceded by Culpeper, Bousfield, and Wichmann (2003), and is summarized in Culpeper (2012). I should note too that Culpeper is hardly the only researcher working in the field, though his work is quite influential; for recent work by other scholars of impoliteness, see the various articles in Bousfield and Locher (2008).

[55] My summary here and in the following paragraph is based on comments in Culpeper (1996: 350–54).

[56] See again my comments at the start of this chapter, and the brief example I use there.

valence of speech or behavior regularly considered insulting is in fact determined by a personal

relationship between the speakers in question, which results in a continuum between what

Culpeper describes as "true insult" and "banter."[57] A somewhat broad example of this is the use of

the word "bitch" in current American English: the term, which as recently as the 1980s was used

largely by men as a hostile, derogatory slur against women, has in the last 20 years or so become

much more widespread, and in certain circumstances can be used by both men and women in

neutral, or even affectionate and bantering discourse.[58] While there are conversational contexts in

which the term would be *more likely* to be interpreted as abusive, and perhaps even contexts where

it would almost certainly be interpreted in this way (say, the difference between chatting with a

friend at the bar, versus addressing Congress), the potential of the insult is only realized when the

relationship between speaker and auditor is not strong enough or familiar enough to deflect the

default, culturally dominant meaning of the term.[59]

Culpeper's model for describing impoliteness and abuse language preserves Brown and

Levinson's insistence that face is the mediator of linguistic politeness, as well as their essential

distinctions between "positive" and "negative" types of face.[60] His most significant departure from

the model is in assuming that impolite expressions (linguistic, gestural, or otherwise) are related to

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[57] As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, such a claim seems counter-intuitive in application to extremely offensive language that is widely considered to be inherently rude by speakers. Regardless, while such terms may be strongly dispreferred and thus insulting in standard speech varieties—or even in most speech varieties—there is clear evidence that they are not absolutely so across all speech varieties and in all contexts. Culpeper's claims are based on cross-linguistic (and within English, cross-dialectal) comparisons.

[58] This is to say nothing of its marked use in the gay community, as well as its notorious history in Rap music. See e.g. Dalzell and Partridge (2008: 78–79) for an overview of the term's remarkable semantic range.

[59] The relationship between an "insult" and an "obscenity" should be clarified here, as the categories are not equivalent, though they do overlap. As with the *fur* example above, an insulting term need not be a taboo or obscene word. See for example Conley's discussion, using a rhetorical framework, of whether insults are ever intrinsically offensive, at the end of which he concludes that while intrinsic offensiveness is illusory, some terms may overwhelmingly tend to be offensive or insulting *to specific groups, or in specific situations* (Conley 2010: 25–29).

[60] He does reconfigure the terms to fit the impoliteness framework, e.g. preferring the terms "negative impoliteness" and "positive impoliteness."

context, not internal quality, and to account for this Culpeper reconfigures the way that face-threats are assessed by proposing "intimacy" as a determining factor in social relationships. According to this schema, the degree of familiarity and emotional bond between two (or more) speakers can either sharpen or blunt a potential insult.[61] "Intimacy" is an abstract concept, and Culpeper himself concedes that the degree of intimacy in a relationship is difficult to quantify, at least in an absolute sense, but he points out that intimacy is observably crucial in modulating between "surface impoliteness"—i.e., banter—and "genuine impoliteness," or insult. That is, you can use banter with friends that, if said to a stranger, would be deeply offensive—the different outcomes originates in the closeness of the relationship you share.

The "bantering" aspect of Culpeper's model is key, because it fits with more general linguistic (and sociological) work on the relationship between social context and the tendency of someone to take offense at another person's behavior. In fact, Culpeper's claims agree broadly with observations found in some anthropological work on humor, such as that of Alfred Radcliffe-Brown, Mary Douglas, and Robert Parkin, all of whom have studied how "joking relationships" function within a society.[62] In essence, a joking relationship is an established social connection—whether ritual or familial—that licenses those who share the connection to engage in certain kinds of humorous, mocking, or abusive behavior, which would otherwise be considered offensive, hostile, or rude. It is the intimate relationship between participants—established through some sort of ritual bond—that licenses behavior otherwise taboo.[63]

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[61] This and the following are discussed in Culpeper (1996: 352–56).

[62] See for example Radcliffe-Brown (1940), Douglas (1968), and Parkin (1993) for representative work.

[63] Note however that Culpeper's idea is in some sense superordinate to the anthropological theory, since he is studying pragmatic factors in language as a system, rather than social behaviors *per se*. Moreover, Culpeper's notion of intimacy can be applied to a broader range of social and situational relationships than is typically allowed in anthropological studies of joking, which tend to emphasize socially stable and clearly defined roles shared by two or more people.

Culpeper's theories about how insult can be neutralized by intimate relationships also meshes with sociological and linguistic work on "jocular mockery," a cover term for different behaviors that sanction the use of insulting, taboo or abusive speech, if performed in specific circumstances.[64] One particular type of jocular mockery, verbal dueling (or *uerbiuelitatio*, "word war") has been explored by several scholars of Latin comedy, most notably Amy Richlin and Beatrix Wallochny.[65] Richlin in particular has argued that verbal dueling scenes in Plautus should be read against broader historical issues, as she believes that these scenes encode contemporary anxieties about social unrest, debt, and mass enslavement. The relevance of the intimacy criterion to such a reading is obvious, and in Chapter 3 I apply Culpeper's ideas to different types of insult interaction in order to unpack how Plautine insult matches work as compositional elements of comedy. It is often suggested that insult and abuse are fundamental to the comic mode, and this is the stylistic linkage that many scholars use to connect comedy with allied genres, such as satire or iambus.[66] Culpeper points out that these kinds of speech-events are "well organized" in how they conform to specific, formal rules that serve to subvert the face-damaging power of the insults used in the duel. The result is that the duel-event becomes a cooperative activity, which rather than causing offense actually serves to solidify in-group relationships.[67] However, as I point out in my later discussion,

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[64] A number of different phenomena fall under this label, all fundamentally related but differing in degree of hostility involved and the formality of the context: e.g., "ritual insult," "teasing," "bantering," "jocular mockery," "verbal dueling," "flyting," "sounding," and so on. I discuss the topic at length in Chapter 3, and survey important bibliography there.

[65] Major studies of *uerbiuelitatio* in Plautus are Wallochny (1992) and Richlin (2017a: 151–70). Richlin connects Plautine examples with cross-cultural anthropological work on the phenomenon, such as Pagliai (2009) and Gossen (1976). Significant examples of *uerbiuelitatio* in Plautus include the insult-match between the slaves Libanus and Leonida in *Asinaria* (297–330), the reciprocal abusive speeches of Toxilus and Dordalus in *Persa* (201–250), and the short but brutal verbal assault against the pimp Ballio in *Pseudolus* (357–69).

[66] See for example Wallochny's prefatory comments about the fundamentally "aggressiver Ton" of ancient comedy (Wallochny 1992: 13–21), or Lilja's introduction in which she comments that she could "equally well have examined satire" as a wellspring of Latin abuse terms (Lilja 1965: 5–8). Ralph Rosen has used the same criterion to compare the rhetorical strategies of ancient abuse poetry and modern Rap music (Rosen and Marks 1999).

[67] Culpeper (1996: 353).

not all formalized insult-exchanges end up positive for the insult-slingers themselves; some

exchanges may give joy or entertainment to the audience while still being hostile and

differentially harmful to the participating characters, if considered from the "interior" perspective

of the play's narrative.[68] As I discuss in Chapter 4, the perspective of an audience fundamentally

changes the nature of the insult experience, since the triangulation of social intimacy must involve

a large, heterogeneous group of strangers. Ultimately, any intimacy that will mediate the insult

experience must grow up between actors and audience, as part of the theatrical experience.

The value of Culpeper's model for Plautine insult is significant: by overlaying his concept of

"social intimacy" on extant scholarship about the demographic groups that underlie Plautine

character types (in particular slaves, women, and the poor), as well as scholarship on the

dramaturgical mechanics of Plautine comedy, we can track variations in how insult and abuse

terms are used within the plays, and then use these trends to make further claims about the

meaning of the texts, their style of composition, and perhaps even the social context in which they

were written. Culpeper summarizes his theory by pointing out the truism that "the more people

like each other, the more concern they are likely to have for each other's face…thus insults are more

likely to be interpreted as banter when directed at targets liked by the speaker."[69] In my dissertation

I take a generalized approach to this idea, and rather than produce an atomistic analysis of various

insult terms, as some scholars have previously done, I use Culpeper's theory to look at specific

situations of insults in use, especially those that vary along horizontal-vertical axes of social status,

and according to different degrees of intimacy between speakers. In this system, by way of

example, a term like *stultus*, which has a largely negative connotation, could nevertheless be read as

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[68] For example, the insult-match between Toxilus and Dordalus in *Per.* 405–27, which within the narrative of the play is meant to be a hostile encounter. Nevertheless, and as I will discuss below, in the *palliata* intimacy is a complex issue that is negotiated between the characters onstage, the actors playing those characters, and the audience watching.

[69] Culpeper (1996: 353).

a marker of *social intimacy* (rather than aggression), when used between speakers of equivalent

social status.[70]

If, as Culpeper says, "real" insult is designed to diminish someone's social standing and self-

regard, then it is antithetical to laughter, the defining physical effect of comedy. Whatever the

biological or anthropological purpose of laughter, the result is usually pleasurable and affirming.

So here we butt up against the question of how insult scenes and insult comedy can be funny to an

audience, when the intended effect of insult is, on its surface, asocial and corrosive. The best way

around the issue that I can see is in assuming that, during a Plautine performance, the audience in

fact enjoyed a kind of intimacy with the actors on stage, to the degree that the insults used by

those actors—sometimes even against the audience itself—were defused and transmuted into

jokes. The idea that the audience and performers develop an emotional bond is not new, of course,

and has been a cornerstone of performance theory for decades.[71] Performance criticism has been

widely applied to Greek tragedy,[72] but Martin Revermann, in his performance-based study of

Greek comedy, points out that comic performance entails a different audience dynamic from

tragedy, and so cannot be understood without accounting for the particular staging and style of

interaction unique to it.[73] Unlike tragedy, which expects the quiet attention of an audience,

performed comedy of all types requires active audience participation, at the very least in the form

of laughter, but often in the form of more direct interaction, a relationship that Revermann

triangulates with the concepts of "reciprocity" and "collaboration:" the audience of a comic

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[70] And conversely, as a particularly daring verbal assault, if used by e.g. a slave against an owner—unless there is evidence that the slave enjoys a particularly close relationship with that owner.

[71] See in particular Moore (1998) and Schechner ([1976] 2004) for an introduction to the field, as well as the bibliography surveyed in Revermann (2006: 8–31) for an overview of important scholarship, both in and out of Classics.

[72] Most famously by Oliver Taplin, as in Taplin (1977), which transformed critical approaches to Greek tragedy.

[73] Revermann (2006: 14).

performance willingly suspends disbelief and engages in the comic reality set up by the performers; this suspension allows the performers to fully invest their energy in the performance; the audience invigorates the same performance (and the "comic reality") by their laughter, attention, and participation; this feeds back to the performers, who then work even harder to engage the audience, and so on in a self-sustaining loop until the performance finishes.[74] Although Revermann does not apply his model to Roman comedy specifically, his arguments fit well with performance scholarship on Plautine comedy, for example, the studies of Niall Slater, Timothy Moore, and C. W. Marshall, all of whom agree in the particulars of their conclusions even though they apply frameworks that differ somewhat in their details.[75] Particularly in their discussions of Plautine metatheatricality, these performance-minded scholars suggest that the social intimacy between actors and audience during a performance must have been apparent to everyone involved, and that by manipulating it Plautus and his actors were able to make their comic performances more engaging, more fun—and more provocative.

1.6. Chapter Breakdown and Overview

In order to give every aspect of Plautine insult its equal due, my dissertation chapters progress from the narrow to the specific, so as to provide a "3D" view:

- Chapter 2: An analysis of the "deep background" that complicates any language's insult lexicon, via a focused case-study of a specific Latin insult-term (*fur*). A number of Plautine insults are rather mild on their surface, or have ambiguous usages, and this chapter looks at one of those terms in-depth and then considers how the cultural background of that term can be realized within the social furniture of the play to determine reception of the insult's "valence." The

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[74] Revermann (2006: 31–33).

[75] See e.g. Marshall (1999), and the opening remarks in Moore (1998) and Slater ([1985] 2000).

results of this study can then be generalized when thinking about other potential insult expressions (the number of which is virtually infinite).

- Chapter 3: Examines a number of Plautine insult-scenes according to the "intimacy framework" outlined in Chapter 2, but from an "in-play" perspective that focuses on textual dynamics, and not dramaturgical context. That is, I look at insults and their effects purely from the perspective of the characters, and do not account for audience reaction or extra-narrative mechanics (staging, music, costume, etc.). The chapter focuses on 2-person insult-exchanges, with examples that reflect a mix of horizontal and vertical social relationships. Because such exchanges were originally performed by skilled comedians and actors, part of my goal in this chapter is also to examine how shtick and joke cues set up and modulate insult exchanges.

- Chapter 4: Both expands on Chapter 3 and subverts it, insofar as here I consider what complications occur when accounting not just for in-text insult cues, but *also* for dramaturgical elements and for possible audience reaction(s) to insults. The *palliata* was a performed genre that relied on a significant amount of dramaturgical machinery, and so in this chapter I begin by re-examining two scenes already analyzed in Chapter 3, but with new attention to staging and audience reaction, in order to determine to what degree performative elements could change or otherwise affect how insults are deployed and received on-stage. After this, I examine scenes where characters explicitly address the audience (either in asides or in soliloquy) while using insults, with attention to how the actor-audience relationship—an intimate rapport—affects the outcome(s) of performed insult. A major component of both discussions is analysis of what effect(s) structural aspects of the theater—e.g., music, costume, audience position, and staging—could have on how insults were used and received.

- Chapter 5: Synthesizes the results of the foregoing three chapters in order to consider what is particularly comic about how Plautus used insult in constructing plays. Plautus has a reputation for favoring humorous expansions over plotting and consistent characterization, an

approach that is often contrasted to the "refined" style of Terence. The emphasis in this chapter is thus on how Plautus' distinctive humor and use of jokes intertwine with his use of insult—a pressing question because the positive emotions usually associated with humor are at variance to the negative emotional effects usually associated with insult insult. However, both humor and insult are fundamental to Plautine style, and so to understand the nature of Plautine comedy, such a synthesis is essential. To achieve this, I analyze Plautine insult-scenes that seem features insults as a key part of their joke, and track the various ways these jokes could have been received by a viewing audience.

2. The Cultural Grammar of Insults: a Case Study on Theft

2.1. Insults in Use

As seen in the Introduction, any word, phrase, or gesture is potentially insulting, and any ostensible insult term can be neutral or even positive: the resolution and valence of these depends on the context in which they are used, and the sum of these cues is what speakers use when evaluating the relative "politeness" of an interlocutor.[1] Speakers in conversation recognize politeness cues automatically and reacted to them dynamically. The same cues are of course incorporated into artistic representations of natural speech, as in Plautus; the insults he incorporates as a playwright were, presumably, recognizable to his audience as such, whether through their subject matter, how they were delivered by an actor, or by the way that other characters react to them. Nevertheless, dramatic action is an imposture of reality—really, a temporary sub-reality—the conventions and rules of which are based upon the conventions and rules of the parent reality from which the performance originates.[2] This is modified uniquely in each instantiation of a performance, and the use of polite or impolite speech in a play is managed, specific, and deliberate, even in highly improvisational dramatic events. Similarly, the reactions to this language are staged. Still, whatever form an insult takes in a play—lexical, intonational, or gestural—it must still be considered a meta-cue that points to some "living" element of the culture and discourse familiar to the viewing audience. So, the insult grammar that Plautus used was derived from a larger Latin (or even Italic and Mediterranean) cultural milieu, and included not just a basic lexicon of potential abuse terms, but also an interconnected system of gestural,

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[1] For the linguistic background, see Birner (2013: 175–206). Epiphenomena such as physical gesture, social context, sociological dynamics, and so on are also significant, and I will examine these features to greater or lesser degree in subsequent chapters.

[2] The tension between on-stage and "real" versions of reality is fundamental to the theatrical experience. See discussion in Short (1998) and Revermann (2006: 107–59).

intonational, performative, and syntactic signs—a basic "grammar" of insult. This underwent the same funhouse-mirror changes and deformations that we see in other genuine cultural material that Plautus incorporates into his plays,[3] which makes the significance of these changes or distortions difficult to assess without an understanding of the background against which they were made.

To decode a potentially insulting speech-act, then, is a complicated maneuver that (in 200 BC) required a bystander to evaluate a number of different factors (and today requires a reader try to do so): most importantly, the lexical background of a word or phrase, the context of the conversation or discourse in which it occurs, the personal relationship between a speaker and auditor in that context, and any metalinguistic signs or cues used by that same speaker. The chance for error during interpretation is high, even for a native speaker, which is one of the reasons that speech acts tend to fall into basic patterns or clichés, depending on situation. Predictable norms are necessary for social communication to occur smoothly, since circumscribed patterns help speakers to a common understanding of what different combinations of signs mean in particular contexts.[4]

This naturally leads to the problem of working with insults in Latin *texts*. Whatever competency we as scholars or readers of Latin might develop, we can never develop the same

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[3] For example, the unusual focalization (by literary standards) of slave and owner relationships, along with the prominence of low-status characters (e.g., pimps, prostitutes, and parasites) are widely cited as defining features of Plautine style. They inform Eric Segal's famous "Saturnalian" theory of Plautine comedy, first promoted in Segal ([1968] 1987), but see again Richlin (2017a) (in particular, the Introduction) for a rebuttal of this view, and for a comprehensive survey of various other critical responses to the same issues. In addition to Richlin's critique, see also Mary Beard's discussion of the many historical inaccuracies assumed by "Saturnalian" readings at Beard (2014: 62–65). Finally, see Petrides (2014) for a pocket history of the question.

[4] Roughly, this is related to the "Cooperative Principle" of H. P. Grice, which proposes that most speakers necessarily *want* to be understood when communicating verbally, and so all productive speech actions, even hostile ones, are essentially cooperative insofar as speakers voluntarily adhere to mutually agreed-upon speech norms (Grice 1975). The theories of "speech implicature" that Grice developed in support of this principle are a major part of linguistic Pragmatics, as are the resulting counter-theories. See Birner (2013: 40–109) for extensive discussion and additional bibliography.

innate level that native speakers of the language had. In the same way, we can never develop a

sure sense of cultural taboos, the conventions of everyday gestures, or the exact inflections of

ancient speech; and, even with performance texts, we cannot be present at a Roman performance.

It is a challenge to record and interpret these elements in living languages with native speakers.

For a language like Latin, which is preserved primarily in texts that were produced by a narrow

band of its total speaker population, the situation is much more dire. As a result, we have a limited

sense of what terms or phrases are potentially insulting or offensive, and of how non-lexical

speech features would have affected insult exchanges. A secondary competency can be developed

by inference and systematic study of texts that regularly feature apparent insults (plus comparison

with insults in living languages), but the resulting knowledge will still be at arm's length—at best—

in comparison to that of first-order speakers.[5] Encoding natural speech as text strips it of the

performance elements that would have allowed a native speaker to determine the valence of a

possibly insulting remark. When reading a text, native speakers of a language (including Latin, at

one time) mentally reinstate this missing information more or less accurately via analogy with

their own conversational experience, but these reconstructions will vary, depending on disposition

and a person's background.[6] But again, this option is not available to modern readers of Latin, and

anyone who attempts it can become trapped in a circular process: e.g., prospective insults are

adduced as evidence for a hostile tone or intent, which is used in turn to justify identifying the

initial terms as insults. The problem is particularly acute when reading Plautus' plays, since in

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[5] This distance also greatly complicates evaluation of obscenity and disgust. I do not spend much time discussing obscene language, since (as mentioned in Chapter 1) obscenity is related to but separate from insult. For broad discussion of linguistic obscenity, again see Allan and Burridge (2006) and Ljung (2011). For obscenity in an ancient context, see Adams (1982), Richlin (1992), and the various articles in Dutsch and Suter (2015), especially Jeppesen (2015) for non-linguistic obscenity. For methodological discussion of how to reconstruct the Pragmatics of ancient languages, see in particular the early chapters of Risselada (1993), Dickey (2002), Dutsch (2008), and Barrios-Lech (2016).

[6] Just ask a dozen speakers of English for an interpretive reading of any one literary text, for proof of this.

performance crucial contextual information would have been reinstated by actors, whose choices and delivery would have changed from show to show; not only were insult-meanings unstable on the page, they were unstable off of it.

In addition, Plautus' style is fundamentally playful and his meaning often ambiguous,[7] which muddies already turbid waters. Plautine comedy is unapologetically self-aware (i.e., "metatheatrical"), and I take it as fundamental that the very *ambiguity* of insult is something that Plautus and his fellow comedians were aware of and, moreover, specifically exploited for comic effect.[8] Every extant Plautine play involves significant personal conflict between two or more characters, and Plautus often illustrates this conflict—or even exacerbates it—via scenes where characters insult each other. If personal strife is the engine of comedy, then insult is the fuel of that engine, a metaphor that I think also suits the inherent volatility of abuse language. Insult creates narrative tension because it lurks—potentially—in every statement, not just in obvious "insult terms." Insult can appear with a twist of the voice, or a single suggestive gesture. The dynamics of performance are such that each instantiation of a play makes possible new interpretations of potential insults; depending on the performers on the playbill, their moods, the performance context, and the mood of the audience, any scene from a Plautine comedy could have bristled with insults—or not.

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[7] The playfulness and ambiguity of Plautine wordplay is extensively demonstrated in Fontaine (2009), though sometimes well beyond credibility, in that his view of Plautine humor involves hyper-detailed nuance. Note too that "Plautine" ambiguity may not be specifically Plautine at all, but rather generically comic, as discussed in e.g. Wright (1974). The takeaway for us is that wordplay complicates meaning and intent.

[8] The self-awareness of Plautus is influentially discussed in Slater ([1985] 2000), and has become mainstream in modern Plautine criticism. Other crucial discussions are Benz, Stärk, and Vogt-Spira (1995), Frangoulidis (1997), and Moore (1998). See Petrides (2014) for an overview of scholarship of this subfield.

2.2. The Ambiguous Insult "fur"

It is easiest to see this in example. Among the many putative abuse terms that Plautus used, most

are not exotic, and common words like *stultus*, *impudens*, and *malus* dominate the indices of Lilja

and Opelt's studies. Among these everyday terms, the word *fur*, "thief," stands out both for its

ubiquity in the plays, and for its everyday character. The noun *fur* occurs over 40 times in the

Plautine corpus, and derived terms such as *furtum*, *furax*, and *furari* are also common. However, *fur*

itself is unevenly distributed in the individual plays, appearing for example some 13 times in

Aulularia[9] but only once in *Amphitruo*,[10] a play that is some 300 lines longer. This uneven

distribution is surprising given that most, if not all, of Plautus's plays include themes of theft to

greater or lesser degree,[11] as in the plays just cited: the major plot of *Aulularia* turns on the concern

of the *senex* Euclio over whether his buried gold will be found and stolen, which it eventually is; in

Amphitruo, the main conflict of the play begins when Jupiter steals the identity of the title

character, as well as an important *patera* that Amphitruo had brought back from campaign. To

these we can add other examples such as Tranio's fake sale of a neighbor's house in *Mostellaria*,

Curculio's swindling appropriation of the soldier's ring in *Curculio*, the many small thefts that

Sosicles perpetrates in *Menaechmi*, and so on. The visibility of thieves and stealing in Plautus is

notable for anyone studying *fur* as an insult since, in addition to the term and its derivatives,

Plautus used many synonyms and periphrases for "thief" and "theft," for example *trifur*, "triple

thief" (*Aul.* 633); *perfossor parietum*, "digger of walls" (*Pseud.* 979); *bustirapus*, "grave robber" (*Pseud.*

361); and, delightfully, *homo trium litterarum*, "man of three letters"—that is, *f-u-r* (*Aul.* 325). Such

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[9] At *Aul.* 83, 97, 322, 326x2, 395, 469, 552, 633, 717, 768, 769, and 775.

[10] At *Amph.* 1034.

[11] This claim depends of course on how one defines theft. I take a fundamentalist view and consider theft to be any act where property—itself a problematically broad concept—is transferred illicitly (or without consent) from one person to another. Note too that this definition includes living property such as slaves, and broadly extends to specialized crimes such as swindles, grifts, and various confidence schemes.

alternative terms are often playful or riddling, as with *homo trium litterarum*, and may allude to more widespread cultural practices, as with *perfossor parietum*, which echoes a verbal phrase the slave Palaestrio uses in *Miles Gloriosus*: *in eo conclaui ego perfodi parietem, / qua commeatus clam esset hinc huc mulieri*, "In that room I dug a hole in the wall so that the woman could have a way from here to there in secret" (142–3). That is, he has committed literal house-breaking in order that his former owner can "steal"—i.e., have sex with—his neighbor's *concubina*.[12]

Despite this ubiquity, treatment of *fur* in the taxonomic scholarship on Latin insult is limited. Müller mentions it only briefly, as part of a discussion of "reciprocal" insults between slaves, and Lilja has a slightly longer but still brief discussion of it in her section on "crime" insults, which is a sub-heading of her chapter on "Social references of terms of abuse."[13] Lilja's comments on the term are essentially diagnostic; a prototypical statement is, for example, "[s]tealing, in its various forms, is most often alluded to in the 'criminal' terms of abuse, *fur* being the most common of these terms."[14] Lilja does also note Plautus' occasional periphrases for "thief," and she makes the significant point that Terence does not use any of these same constructions. In discussing one of specific example, *suppositrix puerum* ("child abductress", *Truc.* 763), Lilja comments that the collocation "illustrates a methodical [sic] difficulty, caused by uncertainty whether a term which denotes a criminal is to be regarded as a real accusation of a crime committed or as a mere term of

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[12] Such literal house-breaking may actually have been common in the ancient world, but the use of it here is specific to the "row-house" style, where two dwellings share a single wall. Interestingly, the collocation "wall digger/wall digging" seems also to have become a conventional synonym for thieves and theft of all kinds. The practice is mentioned elsewhere by Plautus (e.g., *Asin.* 563, *ubi parietes perfoderis*, "whenever you tunnel through the walls") as well as by later authors such as Cicero (*parietes…perfoderis*, *Vat.* 11.3). The phrase might have originated as a calque on Greek τοιχωρύχος, "wall digger; burglar." For remarks on this and other crime-related epithets in comedy, see Lilja (1965: 58–61).

[13] At A. Müller (1913b: 492) and Lilja (1965: 57–60).

[14] Lilja (1965: 58).

abuse."[15] As in so much scholarship on insult, Lilja's concern is with classifying lexicon along a clear, binary axis of usage, where a term is either "insult" or "not-insult."

Pursuing a similar aim, Opelt identifies *fur* as an insult a number of times, though the expanded coverage compared to Lilja is expected given that Opelt's study includes all of Latin literature, and not just comedy.[16] Opelt's citations of the form serve her larger thematic concerns, which have to do with identifying particular discourse situations or events in Latin writing where abuse terms ("Schimpfwörter") tend to occur. Examples for *fur* include: "Meddling and Defense of Annoying Outsiders,"[17], where she cites Lucilius 773/775 (*confectores cardinum, fures*); "The Master Abuses His Own Slaves,"[18], where she cites Plautus *Asin.* 681 (*fur*); or "Teachers and Students,"[19] where she cites (among other sources) *CIL* IV 4776, *Lacticula fur est*, which is a useful peek into the cultural background of the term.[20] Opelt catalogs the same *fur*-related periphrases and circumlocutions that Lilja does, albeit with a methodology identical to what she uses for evaluating citations of *fur* itself. The result is an impressive amount of data and discussion organized around specific thematic nodes, but very little that discusses the specific semantics of *fur* as an apparent insult-term. Like Lilja, Opelt assumes that the insulting quality of the word is distinct from its technical or descriptive use, and her criterion for determining between the two is,

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[15] Lilja (1965: 60).

[16] There are 36 citations of *fur* in the index of her study; see Opelt (1965: 271).

[17] "Einmischung und Abwehr lästiger Dritter" (Opelt 1965: 49).

[18] "Der Herr beschimpft seinen eigenen Sklaven" (Opelt 1965: 61).

[19] "Lehrer und Schüler" (Opelt 1965: 122).

[20] In fact, *fur* is fairly well attested in the inscriptional record as a whole, with 10 instances of the nominative singular in *CIL* IV alone (and over 30 in the full *CIL*), most of the "X *fur* (est)" type. Such attestations are important, as they suggest the word was not restricted to a specifically literary register—but, significantly, the term is not attested in early or archaic Latin inscriptions, appearing only once in the *ILLRP* corpus (*CIL* I² 1680/*ILLRP* 1122). Compare this to a term like *stultus*, which is attested only 7 times in the Latin epigraphic corpus, but is very common in Latin literature (e.g., 24 instances of just the nominative form in Plautus alone).

as she says at the beginning of her study, whether a term is deployed for "the arousal of of insult."[21]

Beyond the methodological objections to this argument already made, I reject the idea that the intent of a speech-act, let alone of a speaker or author, can be so transparently classified. Opelt's reasoning in cataloging terms as she does is the circular logic already discussed: *fur* is an insult because it is used in a context where insults are exchanged, and this context is hostile…because insults are being used there. It is an eternal methodological loop.

The most recent exploration of *fur* as an insult term is in Dickey (2002), as part of a larger study of vocative-like constructions or asides.[22] As seen in Chapter 1, Dickey is careful to point out that her interest is not in insults specifically, but rather insults in direct address, which necessarily restricts the number of tokens she considers, as well as the contexts in which they will be found.[23] By restricting her analysis to "forms of address," Dickey is able to avoid the methodological circularity that undercuts conclusions in Opelt and Lilja's studies, since she demarcates firmly between the "lexical meaning" and "address meaning" of any given address term, with the latter being specialized and exclusive to vocative expressions.[24] This emphasis also limits the textual contexts in which such terms are found, and by emphasizing this narrow band of usage Dickey is able to claim that the appearance of a term *ipso facto* indicates a specific kind of speech. This approach works well for the type of study Dickey undertakes, but is not suitable for my purposes, because it posits a semantic distinction that goes against the observable behavior of insult terms. For example: unlike genuine address-specific terms, such as English "dear" or "ma'am," insults can be used both as terms of address (e.g., "Hey, asshole!") and as non-vocative predicates that are still

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[21] "[D]ie Erregung des Schimpfenden" (Opelt 1965: 18).

[22] See Dickey (2002: 163–85) in particular for the discussion of insults, and the Index *s.v.* for remarks on *fur*.

[23] See again the discussion of Dickey in Chapter 1.2.

[24] Dickey (2002: 11–13).

addressed directly to a person (e.g., "Hey, you're an asshole!") without a noticeable difference in meaning.[25] Compare to this address-specific terms, such as "ma'am" or "sir": i.e., "Hey, sir!" vs. *"Hey, you're a sir!" The second construction is ungrammatical in standard English, and the evidence suggests that a similar difference existed in Latin.[26] As such, the "address meaning" of insults must be flexible, and at least in some cases, it must be largely identical with the lexical meaning.[27]

As a result of this methodological quirk, Dickey's survey of insult terms is far from complete, and gives limited insight into insults even within the system of direct address. For example, in all of Latin literature she records only 11 instances where *fur* is used with a specific insult meaning.[28] About these instances, she comments that the term is a "[s]trong insult often applied to men

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[25] Crucially, Dickey points out this very issue in the course of her own analysis ("I cannot find any difference in meaning between, for example, *sceleste* and *scelestus es*"), and calls her own results "tentative." However, she nevertheless suggests that insults as address items can be separately treated, a position generally reject (Dickey 2002: 166).

[26] E.g., at *Aul.* 325, where the cooks Anthrax and Congrio call each other *fur* in the vocative. The meaning here, in my opinion, is in no way any more pointed than when Euclio at 717 claims that there are *fures…compluris* attending the play itself.

[27] An additional, more fatal problem with Dickey's method is the scope of her study (as indicated in the subtitle of the book, "Plautus to Apuleius"), which draws on data from almost the whole of Latin literature, but does not account for the fact that lexical tokens in this corpus do not correspond diachronically or generically. This complicates study of an author like Plautus, whose plays are the oldest intact corpus of literary Latin, and whose work has no intact contemporary comparanda from the same genre. (Terence's comedies were all produced decades after Plautus died.) Some help can be found in the form of fragmentary authors and works, but these pose their own problems, not least the peculiar criteria that led ancient scholars to excerpt and quote other works. (See in particular Olson (2015) for discussion of the issues and pitfalls; though his discussion is for Greek comedy specifically, it transfers perfectly to the Latin situation.) Similarly, grammatical commentary by Republican or Imperial authors such as Cicero or Quintilian, whom Dickey occasionally cites, is inherently problematic since it reflects concerns about Latin usages contemporary to the writers in question; this usage may or may not be appropriate for the Latin of Plautus' period. (For extensive discussion of this issue see Müller (2001) and chapters 1–5 of Chahoud and Dickey (2010).)

[28] I.e., as a term of address (Dickey 2002: 174). Tokens occur in Plautus, Lucilius, Tibullus, the *Priapea*, Martial, and graffiti. In Plautus specifically, vocative forms are far outnumbered by non-vocatives. Dickey counts five instances where *fur* is used as an insulting form of address in Plautus' plays (namely: *Aul.* 326, 633, 768; *Cas.* 720; *Pseud.* 365), but by my count there are at least 40 *total* tokens of this word in the Plautine corpus. (My token-counts here and elsewhere are via the search tools provided in the online 'Classical Latin Texts' database, which is published by the Packard Humanities Institute: http://latin.packhum.org). Note too that Dickey's count ignores compounds and derivatives such as *trifur* (*Aul.* 633) or *furax* (*Per.* 421, *Poen.* 1386), as well as the circumlocutions (e.g., *trium litterarum homo*) that other scholars note, and which I discussed above.

suspected of theft," but is also a "[n]eutral address to unspecified thieves," a distinction that is no

doubt true, but difficult to make much of, given the large span of time and range of genres

involved.[29] Even if we discount the contextual dynamics that shape the way insults are deployed

and received in conversation, we have to remember that Roman comedy was meant to be

performed, and so represents an entirely different type of textual evidence from the other, non-

performed texts used in her corpus. Although fascinating on its own, I think that Dickey's model is

no more helpful in its conclusions about *fur* as an insult than are the models of Opelt and Lilja, and

that a new approach is merited.

2.3. "Thief" as Insult, "Theft" as Humor

In order to develop such a new approach, I will, as they say, begin at the beginning: namely, the

social realia that allowed *fur* to develop as an insult. The visibility of theft and thieves in Plautine

comedy is unsurprising given how omnipresent theft as a social concern was in ancient Italy, as is

attested in numerous inscriptions. The archaic Latin laws of the XII Tables were famously harsh

toward thieves, even allowing for a homeowner to kill a burglar *si nox furtum faxit*, "if he commits

theft at night," and if the robber was caught *in furto manifesto*, "red-handed."[30] Echoes of this legal

language show up in Plautus, as in *Trinummus* 864, *quo mox furatum ueniat speculatur loca*, "he's

scouting places where he can soon come to steal" (and old man observing a stranger in a shady

disguise). Scaliger and later Skutsch emended this line to *quo NOX furatum*, to better match the XII

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[29] Especially so for comedy due to the radical changes the genre underwent from its efflorescence in the late 3rd and early 2nd centuries BC to its decline and eventual transmutation into the various popular "mime" genres of the Late Republic and Imperial periods (Manuwald 2011: 187–278).

[30] The full line runs *si nox furtum fa<x>it, <ast> im occissit, iure caesus esto*. The law on theft is traditionally assigned to Tab. VIII, 11–13 but Crawford (1996), the text of which I follow here, assigns it to Tab. I, 17–19. The burglar was to be caught literally by one's hand, if we apply a strict etymological reading to *manifestus* (< *manū* + *festus*); see comments at e.g. Ernout and Meillet ([1959] 1985: 385) and de Vaan (2008: 303). Notably, later Roman jurists used physical "handling" (*contrectatio*) of a stolen good as a benchmark when establishing what constituted the delict of *furtum*, "theft" (Frier (1989): 150–52). For discussion of Roman laws against theft, see Nicholas (1962: 211–15), Frier (1989: 150–76), and Du Plessis and Borkowski (2015: 329–37).

Tables formula, and the same collocation (and possible corruption?) occurs at *Rudens* 111, *quon furatum mox venias, uestigas loca?*, "Are you hunting spots so you can soon come to steal?" (a rude slave to a well-dressed stranger). A different echo of the *furtum manufestum* formula occurs in *Asinaria* when the slave Libanus reminds his friend and fellow slave Leonida about *ubi prensus in furto sies manifesto* ("when you were caught red-handed stealing," 569), a fitting reminder given the felonious shenanigans both slaves get up to in the play. Variations of the phrase also occur in other plays, such as *Poenulus* (*manifesto fur es mihi*, "To me, you're a thief caught red-handed!", 785) and *Pseudolus* (*furtificas manus*, "thieving hands," 887). Whether these Plautine echoes are direct references to the XII Tables is unclear; as with laws in modern society, everyday citizens can "know" the law, and even have a sense of general legal diction, without taking formal legal training.[31] The XII Tables predate Plautus by centuries, but the exact status of the laws *as laws* during Plautus' time is uncertain.[32] Such language could simply have been "in the air" at the time, though there is also strong evidence that the XII Tables laws themselves continue a much older, widespread Italic and Indo-European legal tradition, and Plautus' plays may just as well reflect this earlier, commonly shared material. We also have abundant textual evidence suggesting that Plautus was interested in legal matters, and legal concepts are often central both to his larger comic plots (e.g., in *Trinummus* and *Rudens*) and to his passing jokes and gags (as in Mercury's speech about the *aediles* in the prologue to *Amphitruo*).[33] Whether in direct reference to the XII

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[31] Comparable perhaps in American English is the widespread tendency, even among non-religious (or non-Christian) speakers, to make jokes based on the Ten Commandments. E.g., "Thou shalt not drink the last beer in a man's fridge!"

[32] See Crawford (1996: 555–723), Watson (1971), and Watson (1975b) for philological and historical discussion of the XII Tables statutes and their role in archaic Roman society.

[33] The Italic and Indo-European background of the XII Tables theft laws is discussed in Watkins (1970). See Karakasis (2003) and Gaertner (2014) for discussion and additional bibliography on Plautus's use of contemporary legal language and concepts.

Tables or not, this wording is evidence of Plautus' sensitivity toward theft as a basis for comedy, and for his interest in making legal matters a central feature of his comic style.

Further evidence of this cultural engagement is found in the way that Plautus quotes (or echoes) attested anti-theft formulae that occur in hundreds of private inscriptions from all over Italy. Most of these are found on small personal goods, and are *tituli loquentes* ("speaking inscriptions") of the "I BELONG TO X—DON'T STEAL ME!" type. They are written not just in Latin, but also Sabellic (Oscan, Umbrian, South Picene), Venetic, Messapic, Etruscan, and Greek. One of the oldest known Latin texts, the 6th-century BC "Duenos Inscription," is an example of the genre, and it ends with the warning, "A good man made me as a fine gift for a good man—don't let a bad man steal me!"[34] Private anti-theft inscriptions of this type are continuous in the material record from the Archaic to the Late Antique period, and their way of "speaking" through first-person address seems designed to form a personal, intimate connection between the (presumably absent) owner of an item and the thief who takes it. At the very least, the inscription warns the thief that the inscribed object is valued and actively owned, and thus covered by normal laws against theft. Such is the case in *Rudens* when the slave Sceparnio frets that he will be punished after he takes a jug from the slave-woman Ampelisca (*nam haec litterata est, eapse cantat quoia sit*, "For it is inscribed, it calls out whose it is!", 478).[35] Sceparnio does not directly quote the text written on the jug, but the

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[34] *CIL* I² 4. Interpretation and transcription of the Latin in this text are controversial, especially the second line, which continues to evade satisfactory reading. The version I follow here (which I find convincing) transcribes the final line as: DVENOS MED FECED EN MANO(M) MEINOM DVENOI NE MED MALOS (S)TATOD. This is based on the version in Vine (1999), which is adapted from the interpretation and translation established in Rix (1985). In addition, see Wachter (1987: 70–74) and Hartmann (2005: 109-122) for extensive discussion on the background of this inscription, and Agostiniani (1982) for a general study of *tituli loquentes* from Italy.

[35] My thanks to Amy Richlin for directing me to this example. For *litteratus* as "inscribed," compare *Poenulus* 836: *ibi tu uideas litteratas fictiles epistulas*, "There you will see inscribed clay letters...", i.e., amphorae. The idiom occurs again later in *Rudens* when Palaestra is describing the tokens that prove her free birth: *Ensiculust aureolus primum litteratus*, "First, there's a small, inscribed gold sword..." (1156).

ubiquity (and formulary) of anti-theft speaking inscriptions on everyday objects must have made

the reference understandable and credible to the audience.[36]

Clearly, theft and thieves were a persistent problem in ancient Italy, a cultural concern at both

the state and individual level. Given this, the word *fur* must have carried a strong potential for

insult, insofar as the behavior it entails was widely despised. We might question, then, why in the

various plays every type of Plautine character commits theft: free, slave, high status, low status,

male, female—even gods—they all steal. These acts of theft (and those implied by the term *fur*) can

elicit strong reactions from characters. Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in *Aulularia*, the plot

of which turns on the efforts of Euclio, a *senex* and the main character of the play, to protect his pot

of gold from thieves real and imagined.[37] Euclio becomes increasingly paranoid throughout the

play and obsessively moves his treasure from place to place, while accusing every other character

he meets of plotting to steal it from him.[38] Character reactions to these accusations are generally

negative, as for example when Euclio accosts the nameless slave of the *adulescens* Lyconides (633–

43):

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[36] See the final section in this chapter (Chapter Appendix, §2.7) for additional discussion of these inscriptions and their background in the Italic 'Cultural Koine.' There is of course an additional, darker layer to consider here, in that both Sceparnio the character and (most likely) the actor playing him were themselves property—i.e., slaves—under Roman law. As with other objects, the ownership of slave property could be marked with an "inscription" (tattooing or a brand (Bradley 2015)), or a "label," such as a metal collar inscribed with a *titulus loquens* that instructed passerby to return the slave to his owner if found (Trimble 2016). Chillingly, slave-collar inscriptions like other anti-theft inscriptions "speak" in the first person. For example: "I have run away; hold me. When you have brought me back to my master Zoninus, you will receive a gold coin" (Trimble 2016: 447). The slave's identity is suborned and the owner's is supplanted, just as if the slave were a jug or a pot. The evidence for such bodily labeling in Plautus specifically is unclear (Richlin 2017a: 409–11), but the practice itself could have been familiar to contemporary Romans in the audience.

[37] The overarching irony of this plot is that Euclio has not earned the money himself, but simply found it buried in the hearth of his house, and not by accident. The household *lar familiaris* reveals in the prologue of the play that he has allowed Euclio to find the gold only because Euclio's daughter *mihi… / ture aut uino aut aliqui semper supplicat*, "always prays to me with incense or wine or something" (23–24). As such, the *lar* has revealed the treasure *illam facilius nuptum…daret*, "so that he [Euclio] can more easily marry her off" (27).

[38] Examples of Euclio accusing others of theft: his neighbors (97); a bunch of cooks (395); the cooks again and his rich friend Megadorus (469); his rich friend again (552); the slave of Lyconides (633); the audience (717); the *adulescens* Lyconides (768). And these are just instances when he uses the word *fur*.

EUC. uerberabilissime, etiam rogitas, non fur, sed trifur?
L. S. quid tibi surrupui? EUC. redde huc sis. L. S. quid tibi uis reddam? EUC. rogas?
L. S. nil equidem tibi apstuli. EUC. at illud quod tibi apstuleras cedo.   635
ecquid agis? L. S. quid agam? EUC. auferre non potes. L. S. quid uis tibi?
EUC. pone. L. S. id quidem pol te datare credo consuetum, senex.
EUC. pone hoc sis, aufer cavillam, non ego nunc nugas ago.
L. S. quid ego ponam? quin tu eloquere quidquid est suo nomine.
non hercle equidem quicquam sumpsi nec tetigi. EUC. ostende huc manus.   640
L. S. em tibi, ostendi, eccas. EUC. uideo. age ostende etiam tertiam.
L. S. laruae hunc atque intemperiae insaniaeque agitant senem.
facine iniuriam mi [an non]? EUC. fateor, quia non pendes, maxumam.

EUC. You, most worth a beating, do you even keep asking? You're not a thief, you're a triple
                                                                          thief!
L. S. What'd I steal from you? EUC. C'mon, give it back! L. S. What do you want me to return?
                                                            EUC. You're asking?!
L. S. I didn't take anything from you! EUC. Then give back what you took for
                                                            yourself!   635
What are you doing? L. S. What should I be doing? EUC. You can't take it away. L. S. What do
                                                            you want?
EUC. Give it up. L. S. By god, I know you're in the habit of "giving it up," old man.
EUC. Stop joking: give it here. I'm not horsing around now.
L. S. What should I give up? Why don't you call whatever it is by name?
Dammit, I didn't take anything or touch anything! EUC. Show your hands.   640
L. S. Here, look, I'm showing. EUC. I see. Go on and show me the third one.
L. S. Evil spirits, madness, and insanity are driving the old man…
Aren't you abusing me? L. S. Sure I am, very much, because you aren't strung up!

The context for Euclio's calling the slave *non fur, sed trifur* is his (somewhat) unfounded

suspicion that someone has stolen his gold. At this point in the play Euclio is worn out from

fretting over his treasure, and so he has opted to conceal it for safekeeping in the temple of Fides,

which sets up a typically Plautine gag (608–616): until this point the gold has been completely safe

since no other character *except for Euclio* even knows it exists, a situation that changes once the

slave overhears Euclio boasting about the gold as he conceals it in the temple (607–27). As is

natural in the Plautine world, the slave immediately decides to steal it, but when Euclio verbally

abuses the slave the gold is still intact, and no one but the audience knows the slave's intention. The slave is outraged at Euclio's accusation, and objects *non hercle equidem quicquam sumpsi nec tetigi* ("Dammit, I didn't take or touch anything!"); as proof, Euclio demands that the slave show his hands (*ostende manus*), a demand he will repeat as the scene develops. Here again we find Plautus echoing contemporary language about theft, where the slave's remark about "touching" (*tetigi*) directly continues the anti-theft inscriptional formula, "I BELONG TO X—DON'T TOUCH ME!" Inscriptions of this kind tend to use words for "touching" and "lifting" to describe theft, just as the slave does (*non…sumpsi nec tetigi*).[39] Although Plautus frequently uses the term *fur*, it occurs only once in the corpus of extant early Latin inscriptions,[40] and so the slave's idiom here reflects the usual language of personal, theft-related inscriptions from this period. In contrast, Euclio's language alludes to the legal formulae of the XII Tables: the word *fur*, of course, but more importantly his insistence that the slave *ostende manus*, which appears to quote a provision that allows a wronged party to search the home of a suspected thief.[41] The reference to *manus* also suggests that Euclio thinks he has caught the slave *in furto manufesto*, the consequences for which, as discussed above, are severe. We can imagine that the staging of this scene may even have punned on this formula, with Euclio holding the slave character *in manu*, while the actor playing the slave demonstrates his outrage with an exaggerated show of empty hands.

Euclio's behavior is provocative, and in response the slave suggests that Euclio is driven by *laruae*, *intemperiae*, and *insaniae* ("evil ghosts, madness, and insanity"). He is angry at Euclio, and seems to interpret the accusation that he is a *fur* as a strong insult. In response he asks Euclio, a

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[39] As in e.g.: *CIL* I[2] 501, SOTAE SUM NOLI ME TANGER[E], "I belong to Sota—don't touch me!"; *CIL* I[2] 2376 NOLI ME TOLLERE HELVETI SUM, "Don't take me! I belong to Helvetius."

[40] At *CIL* I[2] 1680 (= *CIL* IV 64, *ILLRP* 1122).

[41] Discussed at Tab. VII, 14 (I, 20 in Crawford's edition). The exact conditions for the search require the famously obscure *lanx et licium* ("plate and thread"). See discussion in Watkins (1970), Crawford (1996, 2:615–17), and McDonald and Zair (2012: 40–43) for specifics and problems.

free *senex*, *facisne iniuriam mi* (literally, "Aren't you doing *iniuria* to me?"). In general, *iniuria* can mean

"injustice" or "harm," but it is also a term of art for another legal delict mentioned in the XII Tables:

si iniuriam faxsit…, "If someone commits *iniuria*."[42] A charge of *iniuria* covers, among other things,

the loss of public reputation; one might even say the loss of face, or insult—a translation that

squares with both the legal usage and modern theories of insult and (im)politeness.[43] Thus in this

scene, the *senex* Euclio invokes formal legal provisions to assert his property rights, and the implied

capital consequences of these provisions make explicit his contempt for the slave.[44] The formula

for the *iniuria* provision in the XII Tables (i.e., form of *facere* + *iniuriam* + dative noun) is identical to

the formula the slave uses here, which suggests he is making a formal counterclaim in response to

Euclio's charge. This legal posture focuses the viewer's attention, since the idea of a slave bringing

legal action against a free man for "loss of reputation" is a typically outrageous Plautine inversion

of norms, one that on a certain level further demonstrates the chilliness of the relationship and the

lack of intimacy, and on another level works as an arresting gag.[45] In reality, the question of

whether Roman slaves could suffer *iniuria* was more complicated: slaves were a type of "animate

property," and thus damage—including ethical or spiritual damage—to them would lessen their

worth. The *owner* of a slave could therefore make a charge of *iniuria* for this damage.[46] By claiming

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[42] XII Tab. VIII, 4 (I, 15 in Crawford): *si iniuriam ?alteri? faxsit.*

[43] "[I]n its widest sense…[*iniuria*] denotes simply unlawfulness or the absence of a right… If it is to be translated by a single English word, 'insult' or 'outrage' may serve, but neither suggests the full width of the Roman idea, which embraced any contumelious disregard of another's rights or personality" (Nicholas 1962: 215–16). This is broad enough to fall under the rubric of both *Negative Impoliteness* (reduction of personal autonomy) and *Positive Impoliteness* (loss of social inclusion) according to Culpeper's classification of insult types (Culpeper 2005: 41–44). Either way, the translation "insult" is apt.

[44] Especially so, given that the slave is, by his very legal status, already vulnerable to physical abuse against which he can take no legal recourse.

[45] Note too that this is not the only instance where Plautus has a slave claim *iniuria* against an owner; in addition to this scene, see e.g. *Epid.* 715, *Rud.* 669–70, and *Truc.* 836, as well as discussion in Richlin (2017a), Chapter 2 and *passim*, of such scenes.

[46] See Perry (2015) for specifics.

iniuria here, the slave of Lyconides not only undermines the expected power relationship between himself and Euclio, but through this action tacitly asserts to the audience that he is not a slave at all.[47]

This assertion potentially sets up a further metatheatrical joke that intertwines the in-play and out-play identities of the actors and their characters. A possible consequence for delictal actions, which include both theft (*furtum*) and insult (*iniuria*), is *infamia*, a legal status that precludes the affected person from certain important civic rights. In particular, an *infamis* person loses the right to bring lawsuits and the right to participate in legal proceedings.[48] Thus the mutual accusations Euclio and the slave level, if carried through according to actual Roman law, would strip both characters of their right to *make* these same legal claims—assuming they in fact had these rights in the first place. The slave of course does not, which adds some extra absurdity—and dark irony—to the scene, and probably tickled a few more laughs out of the crowd during performance. We can perhaps take the joke even further, since according to later Roman law, simply acting on the stage could incur *infamia*.[49] It is unclear whether this was true of stage acting during the period when Plautus was writing and producing his plays, but if so then the actors performing this scene would themselves have been miming legal claims that they were ineligible for in the "real" world.[50] This

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[47] The scholarship on *iniuria* in Roman law is extensive. For damage to slaves, see Prieto (1997), Fusco (2009), Du Plessis (2013), and Perry (2015). For *iniuria* generally in early Roman law, see Birks (1969), Watson (1975a) and De Francesco (2005).

[48] The consequences of *iniuria* are summarized in Crook (1967: 83–85).

[49] Du Plessis and Borkowski (2015: 105–6). Specifically, acting *for pay* was enough to incur *infamia* according to later law. See Lebek (1996: 36–43) for discussion.

[50] Some scholars have argued that acting incurred *infamia* even at this period, but there is no hard evidence to support such a claim. See Richlin (2017a: 41–42) for a summary of the evidence and further bibliography. Richlin herself is in the "no" camp, but with the corollary that actors who were not Roman citizens were not subject to *infamia* because they were outside the system altogether. The basic mechanics of the joke as I describe it would still work with this reading.

was likely true regardless, given that actors were mostly slaves or *peregrini*,[51] and so the question of whether the slave can "really" bring a charge against Euclio gets tangled up in layers of muddled—and often contradictory—reality, which the audience has little choice but to accept if they want to keep up with the narrative fun.

2.4. Sympathy for a Thief

Already we can see the complex machinery behind Euclio's use of *fur* as an insult: the slave, in his initial meeting with Euclio, is still technically innocent of theft and so flips the script to retaliate against Euclio's legal-charge-as-insult with one of his own. Since both *furtum* and *iniuria* were *delicta* in the Roman legal system of the period, they are private—that is, personal—crimes, and would be understood as such by a viewer.[52] The personal aspect reinforces and defines the insult at play when Euclio calls the slave a *fur* —the crime is a personal crime, the insult a personal attack—and in response the slave invokes a similarly personal legal threat to recoup his loss of face (*iniuria*). It is worth considering at more length how surprising this counter-claim is, though, since it has been widely asserted in Latin scholarship that slaves in Roman culture had no honor (that is, face) and so could not, in either a sociological or linguistic sense, have their sense of honor diminished.[53]

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[51] Evidence for the status of actors is surveyed in Marshall (2006: 83–94).

[52] Nicholas (1962: 207–17). We can only speculate on whether an "average audience member" watching the play would have understood this legal material. Plautus does refer to legal procedures and concepts frequently, and it seems unlikely that he would have done so if audiences did not find it funny. We might also keep in mind J. A. Crook's point that since law structures society and touches persons of every class and status, it would not be surprising for normal citizens to know about legal matters, just as they do in modern societies (Crook 1967: 7–8). There is also a difference between knowing general aspects of civic law and knowing The Law as a technical practitioner; Plautus's references to legal material tend to be more the former than the latter, as discussed in e.g. Karakasis (2003).

[53] E.g., "No slave is ever described as experiencing *uerecundia*, presumably because slaves—at least according to the ideology of Roman slavery—have no autonomous volition, hence no actual self, hence no face to maintain or lose: there is, accordingly, no need for an emotion to draw a line that the nonexistent self ought not cross" (Kaster 2010: 23). While the term *uerecundia* is fairly rare in Plautus, situations where slaves evince shame or regret are not, and the idea that slaves and other marginalized persons could not feel these emotions presumes that the social views of a few elite individuals, as represented in literary texts, fully and accurately describe Roman society from top to bottom.

By this argument, a slave character in Plautus cannot "really" be insulted, and so the absurdity of this scene would originate not in the slave invoking an inaccessible legal right, but an inaccessible emotion; the idea seems bizarre from a psychological perspective, but it has nonetheless been asserted in a recent discussion of linguistic politeness.[54] This line of argument is troubling for many reasons, not least because it compels us to interpret instances of slave distress as either empty pageantry meant to entertain a callous audience, or as moments of social inversion that are merely ridiculous.[55]

Several scholars have already pointed out that this idea does not stand up to factual scrutiny,[56] but I would add to these a performative argument: the logic of insults in Plautus's plays simply does not work if we assume that a substantial portion of his major characters do not feel emotions that the audience can identify as genuine, and thus become sympathetic toward. This sympathy and identification are essential to the analyses of Revermann and Moore, whose ideas of audience "complicity" and "rapport" specifically require an audience that is emotionally invested in the characters onstage.[57] In discussing his theory of impoliteness, Jonathan Culpeper points out that

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[54] "Slave friends are the least polite of all three groups studied… Slaves are abrupt and rude with each other because they have no face to save or maintain" (Barrios-Lech 2016: 213).

[55] I.e., in the "Saturnalian" mode advocated in Segal ([1968] 1987) and, rather differently, in McCarthy (2000). Barrios-Lech (2016) invokes a generic version of this model to explain many oddities of Plautine language (e.g., at p. 60, when discussing inversions of male and female dialog features). Note also the misunderstood historical evidence mentioned in Beard (2014: 62–65), as well as primary texts such as Seneca *Epid.* 47, and Horace *Sat.* 2.7, which do not support actual role-reversal during Saturnalia (though, perhaps the cruelty of slave circumstances was lessened at this time). Without this widespread cultural paradigm to work against, Plautine instances of reversal must be considered in their own contexts, and with the presumption that they have specific individual functions.

[56] Most recently, Richlin (2017a, 199–201, and *passim* in Chapter 4), which provides abundant evidence and argument for slave emotions, including friendship and honor, as well as discussion of pertinent bibliography. See also discussion in Barton (2001: 11).

[57] For example: "…Plautus created characters who conspicuously desire that the audience sympathize with them and view the action onstage through their eyes. This desire of characters for rapport with the audience contributes much to the humor of Plautus's plays, as characters complete with one another for rapport, and many characters fail to gain that rapport in spite of their efforts" (Moore 1998: 4). Such interaction would be impossible if slave characters—some of the most visible and notable in the *palliata* tradition—were exempt from audience sympathy.

part of the difficulty in analyzing insult language is the irrelevance of a speaker's intention.[58]

Children and disingenuous speakers will sometimes try to get around this fact and excuse an obvious insult or other provocative statement by claiming they "didn't mean to hurt anyone's feelings." Perhaps not, but as Culpeper has shown, insults are perceptual: if someone *feels* that a statement is insulting, then it is—at least to them. An audience watching one of Plautus' comedies was the final arbiter of what constituted insult, since the play was, at the end of the day, performed for them. If we eliminate the opportunities for emotional rapport that insult-interactions can create, then we cut out an essential element of the theatrical experience. This simply won't do.

The argument against slave honor and shame in Plautus' plays imports the top-down assumptions of other, exterior texts to explain social interactions in the *palliata*, and so assumes that the remarks of, say, Cato or Aristotle on slavery are inherently more valid for the social universe of Plautine comedy than the Plautine texts themselves are.[59] If we privilege the plays instead, it is easy to see Plautine slaves responding to insult with anger, shame, and annoyance. Consider the reaction of Lyconides' slave in the scene following the one just discussed, as Euclio continues to degrade him and threaten violence (645–54):

> EUC. quid apstulisti hinc? L. S. di me perdant, si ego tui quicquam apstuli...   645
> niue adeo abstulisse uellem. EUC. agedum, excutedum pallium.
> L. S. tuo arbitratu. EUC. ne inter tunicas habeas. L. S. tempta qua lubet.
> EUC. uah, scelestus quam benigne: ut ne abstulisse intellegam.
> noui sycophantias. age rursum ostende huc manum
> dexteram. L. S. em. EUC. nunc laeuam ostende. L. S. quin equidem ambas profero.   650
> EUC. iam scrutari mitto. redde huc. L. S. quid reddam? EUC. a, nugas agis,

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[58] "Impoliteness comes about when: 1) the speaker communicates face-attack intentionally, or 2) the hearer perceives and constructs behavior as intentionally face-attack, or a combination of (1) and (2)" (Culpeper 2005: 38).

[59] Such comments are of course important for Roman social history, but the habit of using them as first-order evidence to illuminate slavery in Plautus originates in the assumption that elite, top-down perspectives are more insightful than non-elite perspectives. It is important to keep in mind that top-down literary texts do not constitute material evidence, or even epigraphical evidence, and that how living people experienced "Roman culture" differed across space, time, and status.

certe habes. L. S. habeo ego? quid habeo? EUC. non dico, audire expetis.
id meum, quidquid habes, redde. L. S. insanis: perscrutatus es
tuo arbitratu, neque tui me quicquam inuenisti penes.

EUC. What did you take from here? L. S. Gods kill me if I stole anything of yours... 645
or if I didn't want to. L. S. Go on: shake out your cloak!
L. S. Look all you want. EUC. You might have it in your undershirt! L. S. Touch
                                            where you want.
EUC. Argh, how pleasantly the criminal acts: so that I don't realize he's taken it!
I understand his tricks. Go on: show me your right hand again.
L. S. Here. EUC. Now show the left. L. S. But I'm showing both!   650
EUC. I'm done looking. Give it back! L. S. What should I give back? EUC. Ah,
                                            you're fooling around:
you definitely have it! L. S. I have something? What do I have? EUC. I'm not saying;
                                            you're waiting to hear.
It's mine, whatever you have. Give it back! L. S. You're insane. You've searched
as you wanted and you didn't find anything of yours on me.

As Euclio continues to accuse him of theft, Lyconides's slave slyly acknowledges to the audience that, although innocent, he does *want* to steal the gold (*niue adeo apstulisse uellem*). This is a laugh-line aside that Euclio the character is not intended to hear, though of course the actor playing him does, since he waits for the line—and, presumably, the audience laughter it elicits—to finish before continuing with his own dialog. Although brief, the moment is important: by breaking from the narrative frame to address the audience directly, the actor-as-slave makes the audience complicit in his performance, which further advances their mutual emotional bond. That is, it strengthens the collaboration-reciprocity cycle discussed earlier, and fortifies the emotional rapport between audience and actor identified by Moore. In contrast, Euclio doubles down on his formal charge against the slave by forcing him to shake out his cloak (*excutedum pallium*), by frisking him (*ne inter tunicas habeas*), and by ordering him again to show that his hands are empty (*age rursum ostende huc manum dexteram*). Nevertheless, the slave is innocent and the search yields no evidence of a crime, which only makes Euclio more frantic and enraged. His legal gambit has

failed, and the slave's claim of *iniuria*, whatever its validity in the larger context of his servile status, is technically correct in its particular application to this situation. The audience understands this, and due to the intimacy already established, sympathizes with him. If the slave has no genuine honor to lose, the complex delictal allusions to *furtum* and *iniuria* are mere surface cleverness. If we recognize Euclio's anger and frustration, however humorous they seem, then we must also recognize the slave's outrage and expression of damaged esteem. The entire scene is constructed around mirror-images, as every action and insult Euclio offers is answered with a reaction and rejoinder by the slave.

If this were not already clear, the slave character himself quickly reiterates the point. In their earlier exchange, discussed above, Euclio demands that the slave stop joking around (*aufer cauillam*, 638), just before the slave invokes *iniuria*. When his second search of the slave finds nothing, Euclio again accuses him of joking (*nugas agis*), a strange remark given the slave's relative cooperation. Both lines are throwaway metatheatrical jokes—after all, *agere nugas* is the express job of the actors —and these comments about horsing around would be better directed at people in the audience, many of whom at this point in the play must have been crying with laughter as they watched a free *senex* get bested in an informal legal proceeding with a slave whom he does not know.[60] The joke has a hard edge, however: any comic victory the slave wins against Euclio is undercut by his very real lack of power against the *senex*.[61] Since the slave has no social intimacy with Euclio, and thus has already interpreted his accusation of theft as a hostile insult, the insult becomes only more pointed when Euclio continues his search despite repeatedly coming up empty. Euclio

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[60] As a piece of humor, I think my reading of this joke works for both the social inversion model of Segal ([1968] 1987) and for the slaves-as-audience model proposed in Richlin (2014). The difference would be in *why* the audience was laughing, and this would of course have varied from person to person. Audiences are not homogeneous, after all. Heterogeneous audience response is addressed in Chapters 4 and 5.

[61] A joke good enough that Plautus re-uses it several times elsewhere in the same play when the slave cook Congrio suggests that he can seek damages from Euclio after the old man has abused him (*pro uapulando hercle ego aps te mercedem petam*, "Dammit, I'm going to sue you for the beating!", 456).

eventually boils over with frustration and orders the slave away (*fugin hinc ab oculis? abin an non?*, "Get out of my sight, yeah? Won't you go away?!", 660). He then rushes off to hunt down someone else who he imagines has stolen the gold (655–59). However humorous this development is, once Euclio has left the stage the slave again reminds the audience of the insult(s) he has endured (661–66):

> emortuom ego me mauelim leto malo
> quam non ego illi dem hodie insidias seni.
> nam hic iam non audebit aurum apstrudere:
> credo efferet iam secum et mutabit locum.
> attat, fori' crepuit. senex eccum aurum effert foras.   665
> tantisper huc ego ad ianuam concessero.

> I would rather be dead of a horrible death
> than that I don't ambush that old man today.
> But he won't risk hiding his gold here any longer:
> I think now he'll take it out with him and change its hiding place.
> Wait! The doors are creaking. Look, the old guy's bringing the gold outdoors.   665
> Meanwhile I'll slip over here to the doorway.

The slave's anger (*emortuom ego me mauelim leto malo*) and desire for revenge (*quam non ego illi dem hodie insidias seni*) are unambiguous evidence that Euclio's insults (and insulting behavior) sting, and the sense of outrage is only magnified by the slave's earlier asides directly to the audience. We sympathize with him rather than the *senex*, despite the fact that Euclio will end up the victim of a crime if the slave goes through with his intended revenge. Euclio's own waspish behavior throughout the play has also predisposed the audience to feel sympathy toward the slave, as the old man has berated, badmouthed, and abused every person to cross his path. This is not even the first time another character has claimed to prefer death over Euclio's company.[62] And yet,

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[62] E.g., the *anus* Staphyla exclaims at 50–51, *utinam me diui adaxint ad suspendium / potius quidem quam hoc pacto apud te seruiam*, "I'd prefer the gods would make me hang myself instead of my serving you like this!", a sentiment she repeats at 77–78.

stealing the gold would immediately undercut the slave's claim to *iniuria* insofar as Euclio's earlier charge of *furtum* would then be valid, an ironic twist that only increases the audience's complicity. By sympathizing with the slave character, and by rooting for him as he plots revenge against Euclio, the audience effectively grants the slave the very legal rights that he boldly claims, and so justifies his (apparently) extra-legal act of revenge.[63] It is a clever ending to a joking exchange built around dubious legal accusations, but again, the logic of these only works if we assume that the anger and frustration the slave character evinces is genuine within the world of the play. Anyone who has been insulted could (and still can) sympathize with the slave's frustration, and whatever his earlier intentions, his desire to steal is now coupled to a desire for revenge. If the audience did not think the slave had the capacity to lose face, his lines here are pointless; without legitimate loss of esteem, why bother with retribution? Without a genuine sympathy between the character and the audience, why bother with the elaborate ironic change-up? The simplest reading is that individuals in the audience do feel sympathy, and that this sympathy originates when the anger and resentment expressed by the slave rings out and triggers in them resonant memories of the emotions they themselves felt after being insulted.

2.5. An Audience of Thieves

Audience sympathy develops from a shared intimacy, but the nature of this intimacy in performance is complex. The range and power of the actor-audience relationship emerges in a remarkable comic set piece near the end of *Aulularia* Act IV. After Euclio orders Lyconides' slave to go away, the old man decides to move his gold from the temple of Fides to a grove of Silvanus some ways away (673–76). True to his plan for revenge, the slave of Lyconides steals the gold (while offstage), and then briefly reappears to boast about his hiding in a tree and spying on Euclio while

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[63] Especially since acts of revenge were often explicitly mandated in early Roman law. See e.g. Tuori (2007).

the old man moved the treasure (702–12). The slave then runs home with the money, and when

Euclio discovers this theft the old man becomes unhinged. His paranoia has been validated, as has

his previous accusation against the slave, though at this point only viewers in the audience (and, of

course, the slave himself) know who stole the gold. Euclio begins to break down on stage, and in

desperation he turns to the audience and begs for their help, singing in anapests (713–720):[64]

> Perii, interii, occidi. quo curram? quo non curram? tene, tene. quem? quis?
> nescio, nil uideo, caecus eo atque equidem quo eam aut ubi sim aut qui sim
> nequeo cum animo certum inuestigare. opsecro ego uos, mi auxilio,   715
> oro optestor, sitis et hominem demonstretis, quis eam apstulerit.
> quid ais tu? tibi credere certum est, nam esse bonum ex uoltu cognosco.
> quid est? quid ridetis? noui omnes, scio fures esse hic compluris,
> qui uestitu et creta occultant sese atque sedent quasi sint frugi.
> hem, nemo habet horum? occidisti. dic igitur, quis habet? nescis?   720

> I'm dead, done, finished! Where should I run to? Where shouldn't I run to? Grab—
>   grab him! Him? Who?
> I dunno, I don't see anything, running blind, just like I can't get it straight in my mind
> where I'm going or where I am or who I am… I'm begging you,   715
> praying, pleading—help me and show me the man who took it!
> What do *you* say? I've decided to trust you, 'cause I see from your face you are a good man.
> What is it? Why are you all laughing? Oh, I know you all—I know there's plenty
>   of thieves here,
> who cover themselves with fancy white clothes and sit like they're honest people!
> What? None of them has it? You've ruined me. C'mon, tell me—who has it? You
>   don't know?   720

If read in isolation, this speech hardly seems like comedy.[65] It begins with Euclio's apparent

mental breakdown as he loses all sense of himself (*quo eam aut ubi sim aut qui sim*), a loss of bearings

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[64] In addition to singing this passage, the actor playing Euclio was probably dancing as he entered the stage; see commentary at Moore (2012: 120–21).

[65] The *quo curram? quo non curram?* line in particular evokes various "To where should I go?" speeches of tragedy and epic; e.g., *quo nunc me uortam? quod iter incipiam ingredi?* ("To where should I turn myself now? On what path should I set out?") in fragment CIV of Ennius' *Medea*. Euclio's reaction is exceptional in the Plautine corpus; other Plautine characters will show similar distress, and even address the audience (e.g., *Cist.* 678–9, *Men.* 879–80), but the outbursts are usually quite short, and do not puncture the dramatic illusion anywhere as fully as Euclio does.

that allows the *senex* to puncture the simulated reality of the play and to ask the audience for aid (*obsecro ego uos*). His distress seems genuine and affecting, though Dorota Dutsch has pointed out that old men in comedy in often weep over the loss of money,[66] and a tonal mismatch with the ridiculous scene just before this no doubt signaled the audience that something outrageous was coming up. When the audience doesn't help Euclio,[67] he lashes out and accuses everyone watching of the same crime he has suspected others of throughout the play: *noui omnes, scio fures esse hic compluris* ("I know *you all*, I know this places is full of thieves!"). His paranoia has reached such a pitch that, after accusing virtually every other character in the play of theft, he elides the notional boundary between performer and viewer and draws the audience in to the onstage reality. The interchange is funny not despite but because of Euclio's insult, one that he slams home by calling the audience shifty frauds who do not merit the fine clothes some of them wear (*qui uestitu et creta occultant sese atque sedent quasi sint frugi*). Euclio's mental distress darkens the tone of the scene, but it is not difficult to imagine a skilled comic performer presenting his outburst in a funny way. Mock outrage is perennial comic shtick,[68] and while Euclio's disorientation and distress are not necessarily funny, his vulnerability at the beginning of the scene would allow the actor playing him to start with a quieter performance and then "go big" once he begins addressing the audience, leading to a classic comic reversal at the scene's climax, from plea for help to angry abuse. Less

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[66] As they also do when they are physically threatened; see Dutsch (2008: 110).

[67] In actual performance, it is entirely likely that audience members *did* shout out help at this point. After all, Euclio invites comment (*quid ais tu?*), and he shifts from second person plural (*uos, sitis*) to second person singular (*ais*), a performance clue suggesting that the actor performing Euclio in this scene would have picked out and addressed at least one member of the audience individually. It must have required great sensitivity and comic timing to be successful, and Sander Goldberg has suggested that Plautus (or a troupe mounting this play) may have put a shill in the audience to engage Euclio in repartee, and to ensure the gag was successful (Goldberg 2018).

[68] In modern comedy, it is a particular favorite of male actors and stand up comics; e.g., Louis Black, Denis Leary, Bill Hicks, and Marc Maron all use(d) anger as a tentpole characteristic of their respective standup personas, whereas comic actors like Jason Alexander (as George Costanza in *Seinfeld*), Will Ferrell (in a variety of roles), Larry David (as "himself" in *Curb Your Enthusiasm*), and Nick Offerman (as Ron Swanson in *Parks and Recreation*) all use abrupt, angry outbursts as a humorous character-defining device.

clear is how Euclio insulting the audience works as comedy. Existing scholarship on Latin abuse unambiguously considers *fur* to be a "strong insult,"[69] and, as already discussed, its use in the play can elicit vigorous reactions from characters to whom it is applied. Yet for this scene to be funny, the audience not only must not take offense, but must also *enjoy* the abuse enough to laugh. If spoken by a "real" angry man to a crowd of strangers, Euclio's remarks would be grounds for retaliatory legal action, as in the earlier scene, but the circumstances of theatrical production should rule out any such claim.[70] Everyone watching the play is primed not to be insulted; strangers or not, those in the audience have an existing, intimate relationship with Euclio—or at least, the actor portraying him—which deflects his abuse. This is Culpeper's intimacy principle in transparent operation: far from being stable and easily identified, the semantic "valence" of *fur* and other Plautine insults varies according to the degree of social intimacy present between the character who speaks it and the character(s) who receive it.

It may seem far-fetched to claim that Euclio and the audience enjoy enough social intimacy to deflect his insults, but as we have already seen, their connection originates in the basic mechanism of comic theater. In his earlier interaction with the slave of Lyconides, Euclio's limited intimacy with that character permits all of the negative cultural concepts associated with *fur* to shine through, and the slave's reaction amply demonstrates the level of insult he felt. The slave's outrage is palpable, and easily passes to a sympathetic audience. In his interaction with the audience,

[69] E.g., Lilja (1965: 58–60), Opelt (1965: 49, 61, 122), and Dickey (2002: 174, 327). In linguistic terms, accusing someone of being a *fur* is a face-threatening act, and in this situation could be considered both a type of negative impoliteness (disregard for conventional power structures) and positive impoliteness (an attempt to exclude someone from group acceptance).

[70] Cf. other instances of audience "callouts," such as *Amph.* 287, *ubi sunt isti scortatores...?* ("Where are those horndogs...?") These interactions also create an audience bond. Nevertheless, we must keep in mind the story of Naevius and his supposed punishment by the Metelli, in retribution for mocking the family in one of his plays. The factuality of the story is doubtful, but as is discussed in Mattingly (1960), the rumor could have gained legitimacy and power in reception, especially in the late Republican and early Imperial periods, when onstage political discourse became increasingly fraught. Would Euclio's abuse of the audience have been as harmless in later periods, when the theaters were larger, the audience was farther away, and the politics were more volatile? Perhaps not, especially since insult is more about perceived intent than it is about actual intent.

Euclio's accusation is just as genuine—*scio fures esse hic compluris*, "I know that *this place* is full of thieves!"—but the reaction of those whom he attempts to insult is completely different. The slave shows anger, the audience amusement. In both instances, Euclio is angry and desperate. The only obvious difference between the two situations is the nature of the relationship between Euclio and his addressees; the slave is a stranger, but Euclio "knows" the audience, and the audience knows him. In his study of Plautine stage dynamics, Timothy Moore suggests that although this scene is the first instance when Euclio speaks directly to the audience, throughout the play he has nevertheless developed a close relationship with them due to their constant "presence" at his various misadventures.[71] Euclio's anger results when the audience offers no help, only laughter, a reaction that Euclio interprets as betrayal.[72] As previously discussed, Moore calls the relationship between actor and audience "rapport," a term that I think is entirely interchangeable with Culpepper's "intimacy" and Revermann's "collaboration." It is the natural condition of the actor-audience relationship that develops in comedy: the outcome of the mutual attention between performers and audience that is necessary for live comedy to elicit laughter.

This relationship is fragile, and its existence and longevity require not just the deliberate suspension of disbelief but an active *revision* of belief originating in a mutual understanding of theatrical conventions.[73] One aspect of this shared revision is the understanding that onstage actions do not incur the usual real-world consequences—thus any deceptions, thefts, betrayals, and, apparently, insults, that are enacted within the context of the play are not subject to "real" legal repercussions. This point is widely recognized in literary analysis, but its fundamental

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[71] Moore (1998: 45).

[72] Moore (1998: 46).

[73] "In theatrical performances actors and audience purposely and consciously convene, usually at a set place and a designated time, to collaborate in making 'it' happen. During this collaboration the consciousness of 'being a performer' or 'being a spectator' may not always be manifest" (Revermann 2006: 29).

strangeness is easy to overlook. When Euclio accuses the audience of being made up of thieves, he (and the actor playing him) can get away with the insult because of their shared understanding that what he says in performance is separate from "real" behavior. If this is true, however, at this point we simply cannot view the audience as outside the action of the play, just as Euclio has not stepped into the "real" world of the audience. If either situation were true, then his insult would be similarly "real," and so liable to real-world consequences. Rather, the audience must now be part of the play itself, at least notionally, in a space where the standards of action are adjacent to but not convergent with reality. In this place, the relationship between the audience and the actor is leveled, and they become, effectively, colleagues: members of the audience, collectively and individually, now have a role in the play; they recognize this and respond not to an insult, but to the friendly banter with a co-performer. Their intimacy with the actor-as-character drains the potential insult *fur* of its power, making it innocuous fun. Euclio the *character* does not recognize this rapport, and his later despondency is due to his feeling that he has been betrayed; in contrast, the *actor* playing Euclio could only be ecstatic at the success of his comic gambit—as a result of which both he and the audience phase between different planes of reality, one real, one staged, both sustained by cooperation and a mutual sense of play.[74]

This joking dynamic is exactly parallel to that found in modern stand-up "insult comedy," a format wherein a comedian at a show picks out audience members to mock, often in the crudest ways, and then builds an entire performance around them.[75] Insult humor trades in stereotypes and is often overtly prejudiced, but people who attend insult-comedy shows do so with the

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[74] Cf. C. W. Marshall's schema of a "four-layer reality" in which the "audience continually negotiates…so that a kind of blurriness develops" (Marshall 1999: 110). The key here is that the audience willingly and deliberately engages in this "blurriness."

[75] Well-known modern insult-comics include Don Rickles, Lisa Lampanelli, and Jeff Ross. Rickles in particular attests to the popularity of the insult-comedy format: he began performing in 1943 (Rickles 2008: 21–23), and continued full time until his death in 2017.

knowledge that they may be brutally insulted in public.[76] Most reasonable people would not

tolerate being spontaneously, publicly mocked by a stranger, let alone by someone to whom they

had paid money, regardless of how funny the insult was. Nevertheless, insult-comedy as a format

is quite popular,[77] which would be true only if audience members found it funny and validating. If

members of the audience felt that they were being genuinely insulted during the performance the

sense of validation and enjoyment would vanish; it must be that the sense of intimacy they feel

with the comic neutralizes the insult and allows the insulted person to think the jokes are "all in

good fun." As with ancient comedy, the abuse is shared and is presented in a known, conventional

setting. Like insult comedy, ancient comic theater was highly conventional in format and

presentation, and though the norms of comic plays were notionally derived from contemporary

culture, the comic "sub reality" of a play was moderated by genre, plot, and performative context:

elements that an attending audience could predict. The performance was shared with others, and

the insult "experience" was similarly mutual—all elements to reinforce collective intimacy. And, as

with insult comedy, there was a danger in this process, a kind of titillation that is distinctive of

Plautine style, and which we as modern readers, like an ancient audience, can still sense and be

thrilled by.

2.6. The Cook, the Thief, the Goddess Laverna, and Some General Conclusions

Evidence for the rapport-reciprocity relationship between actor and audience is easy to see in the

scene where Euclio insults his audience, but the full power and breadth of this relationship may

not be as obvious. Insults, perhaps more than other types of language, are often opaque to anyone

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[76] A sample groaner from Don Rickles: "Italians are fantastic people, really. They can work you over in an alley while singing an opera." And one from Lisa Lampanelli: "He was so fat, he used Twinkies for suppositories." These examples are fairly mild, but many insult comics specialize in material that is hair-curlingly obscene.

[77] To the degree that big-budget, televised celebrity roasts have recently made a comeback, and live, competitive "roast battles" have become popular both on television and on the stand-up comedy circuit.

from outside the culture in which they grow. Insult language tends to percolate up from a mixture of culture-specific taboos and linguistic conventions, ephemeral stuff that decays when shifted into a new context. In Latin, the term *fur* invoked a complex series of relationships, but was fundamentally derived from local concepts of property. We might assume that thieves and theft are despised in every culture equally, and that terms for the same would evoke the same reactions across cultures. The reality is more complex, for many reasons, but the most significant factor is the fact that no culture or speech community is homogeneous, and thus no culture or speech community has a homogeneous understanding of words and concepts. The instances of *fur* that we find in Plautus' plays are not only interpreted variably when used as insults, but also have different intentional meanings according to those who use them. Just as in English the word "thief" can be used with different intent (and fundamental definition) by, say, a policeman and an actual professional thief, in Roman comedy the meaning of *fur* and other insults can fluctuate with the speaker.

For example: within Roman culture, we find special religious consideration made for thieves in the figure of Laverna, an underworld goddess who is rarely attested in the material and historical record, but who was prominent enough to have both a shrine and a gate dedicated to her in Rome.[78] We also have at least one dedication to Laverna in the form of a small cup bearing the inscription LAVERNAI POCOLOM ("Laverna's cup"), found in an Etrurian tomb, and dating to the 3rd or 2nd centuries BC.[79] These material remains offer a complex cultural picture, which on the one hand includes broad distate for theft and thieves, and on the other generates a patron goddess for the same. The incongruity seems to have fascinated Roman poets, as several mention Laverna

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[78] The *Porta Lauernalis*, near which her shrine was situated. The most comprehensive discussion of extant evidence for Laverna is Canu (2002).

[79] *CIL* I[2] 446. The cup was found near Orte, and is one of 17 or so *pocula deorum*, all addressed to various gods. Discussed in Canu (2002: 37–41) and Wachter (1987: 465–66).

in her guise as a patron deity for thieves.[80] Indeed, in no less a play than *Aulularia*, Plautus has the cook Congrio invoke Laverna while bickering with Euclio, who—as he does with many other characters in the play—has accused the cook of being a thief trying to steal the windfall of gold (391–97, 437–44). Congrio and other slaves have been ordered to Euclio's house by Megadorus to prepare a wedding feast; when Euclio finds the cooks inside his home he suspects them and ejects them from the house. Congrio is incensed and vows, *ita me bene amet Lauerna, te iam, nisi reddi / mihi uasa iubes, pipulo hic differam ante aedis* ("Laverna help me, if you don't order my pots to be returned to me, I'll tear you apart with squawking in front of your house!", 445–46).[81]

The humor in this scene has several levels. On the surface, it is yet another conflict incited by Euclio's growing paranoia; repetition is a fundamental comic technique, and the unifying comic thread of *Aulularia* is the sequence of verbal fights that Euclio starts. Below this running gag is a more specific joke to do with the cook as a character. Euclio accuses him and his colleagues of being thieves, and though they are technically innocent here, cooks in both Greek and Latin comedy are proverbially untrustworthy and light-fingered.[82] Earlier in the play Congrio and his colleague Anthrax invoke this same reputation by accusing one another of being thieves,[83] and Congrio later reiterates the connection himself when he swears to Laverna—the patron goddess of

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[80] Specifically: Plautus (*Aul.* 445, *Cornicularia* frg. 4, *Frivolaria* frg. 3), Lucilius (509M), Novius (*Atellanae* 105), and, most famously, Horace (*Epist.* I.16.60). Festus also associates Laverna with thieves, saying *Lauerniones fures antiqui dicebant quod sub tutela deae Lauernae essent* (105L, 117M).

[81] An example of *flagitatio*, a type of folk justice in which a creditor or other aggrieved party publicly demands restitution from someone who has wronged them. See Richlin (2017a: 173) for this scene specifically, and p.171–83 for *flagitatio* generally; in addition, see Usener (1901), the classic treatment of this behavior.

[82] The fundamental discussion of Plautine cooks is Lowe (1985), but see also Wilkins (2001: 369–414) for in-depth discussion of the "the comic cook," with an emphasis on Greek comedy and culture. The thievishness of cooks in Latin comedy was a theme inherited from Greek New Comedy and the figure of the *mageiros*. However, Lowe stresses that the Roman *coquus* had a fundamentally different social role from his Greek counterpart, and that Plautine cooks have variable identities. Constant features are their servile status, and their reputation for larceny.

[83] *Congrio: Tun, trium litterarum homo, me uituperas? fur. Anthrax: Etiam fur, trifurcifer,* (Congrio: "Are you criticizing me, you man of three letters? Thief (f-u-r)!" Anthrax: "You're also a thief—you criminal!", 325–26).

thieves. Almost two centuries later, Horace will joke that when praying to Apollo or Jupiter one speaks clearly, so that others may approve, but when praying to Laverna *labra mouet metuens audiri* ("one moves the lips, fearing to be overheard", *Epist.* 1.16.1). Perversely, Congrio swears openly to Laverna in order to threaten Euclio with public shaming if Euclio does not return Congrio's property (currently locked up inside Euclio's house). Of all the gods available to aid him, Congrio chooses the one most associated with the crime of which he is being accused. As a character, he seems to embrace his generic association with theft—even to shine on a light on it—which suggests that it is not being called a thief that bothers him so much as what Euclio *intends* by making the accusation.

The fight escalates, and Congrio eventually threatens Euclio with legal action (*pro uapulando hercle ego aps te mercedem petam*, "Dammit, I'm going to sue you for the beating!", 456), to which Euclio replies, *lege agito mecum* ("So sue me!", 458). Again we find Euclio fighting with a slave who as a result of the old man's abuse threatens to pursue legal action against him. And, once again, Euclio is clearly in the wrong: the cook is not there to steal anything, but instead has been instructed by Megadorus to prepare a feast for the wedding of Euclio's daughter. By barring the cook from his house Euclio himself commits a kind of theft, in that he has taken Congrio's pots and pans (*uasa*, 446). The scene between Euclio and the cook is a miniature of the much longer interaction that plays out several hundred lines later when Euclio abuses the slave of Lyconides. In both instances, low-status characters who are outwardly marked as thievish play against type and are presented as the victims of insult. In Congrio's case, the cook takes unexpected offense at a label (*fur*) that is generically associated with him—one that another character of the same status had previously applied to him—and he himself confirms the connection by invoking a goddess associated with that term. He nevertheless feels the insult because he has no relationship with the person who uses it, and because Euclio—so far as we can tell—legitimately intends for the word to be insulting.

The exchange is unambiguously hostile, and satisfies both of Culpeper's impoliteness conditions: Euclio intends the accusation to be an insult, and Congrio interprets it as an insult.

The complexity and cultural variability of a term like *fur* is well illustrated by these scenes. Euclio's use of the word is enough to incite two different low-status characters to threaten legal action against a social superior, despite the fact that those same characters also, to greater or lesser degrees, act in a way that invites the use of the term itself: Congrio through his generic status, and by allying himself with the goddess of thieves; the slave of Lyconides by his plan, eventually realized, to steal Euclio's gold. As a "neutral" descriptor, the word *fur* can be accurately applied to both characters, something that each—and Plautus himself—seem to acknowledge in moments of metatextual commentary. Plautus is playing with us and his audience, setting up an apparently stock situation (thieves, a man with gold) and twisting our expectations about. The insult itself provides a fulcrum for the twist. Such self-awareness was purpose-built into the flow of the comedy, and was something that the audience must have enjoyed for the way it brought them closer to the joke and made them part of the onstage action. Strictly speaking, it makes little sense to classify *fur* as an insult in these scenes because rather than the bare semantic content of the term, what Congrio and the slave of Lyconides react to is Euclio's intent in using it. Congrio's own, differing reactions to the word confirm this: he is mildly annoyed when Anthrax calls him *fur* (326), but the reaction is brief and humorous, and not at all like his interaction with Euclio a short time later. This latter response occurs over dozens of lines, and as was just discussed, is deeply hostile. If we take *fur* as a model for how insult terms are used in the plays of Plautus, and for the kinds of social dynamics they can entail, we see that far from being innate carriers of abusive meaning, they are simply tools that work to focus and specify intent.

The distinction between meaning, perception, and intent is essential, and it provides a template for how to think about insult interactions throughout Plautus' plays. Taxonomic

approaches and interpretations based on the definitions of individual insult terms imply that

characters in the plays react to insults as they do because of lexical semantics. This is the

proverbial explanation that confuses causation with correlation. Terms that speakers widely

consider insulting may statistically elicit strong reactions more readily if used in "everyday"

conversation—depending on register and speaker—but this is only because those particular terms

have over time become associated with hostile intent. Nevertheless, no words are inherently

hostile, just as no words are inherently obscene. A sense of hostility can accrue to a word through

association with political and social trends, just as obscenity can accrue through association with

specific social taboos.[84] The association is arbitrary, however, and will not apply evenly to all words

of the same general semantic field; as a result, speakers will feel that some insults are "milder" and

others "stronger," regardless of the semantic overlap.[85] If this were not the case, then euphemism

creep would not occur—and indeed, euphemism itself would be unknown.[86] The societal

relationships that determine which words are polite, which impolite, are based on prestige, class,

race, and gender—the axes of social power.[87] The insults that elite, high-status speakers use in

conversation with one another will differ in significant ways from the insults that lower-status,

less educated people use; so too those used by speech-communities defined by race, gender,

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[84] The relationship between insult, offensiveness, and taboo is thoughtfully examined in Allan and Burridge (2006: 1–89), and, with an emphasis on obscenity, in Ljung (2011: 114–42).

[85] For example, American English "jerk" and "asshole" both roughly mean "a rude [male] person." But they vary greatly in their social acceptability and relative politeness. Many similar examples exist.

[86] Euphemism creep: the steady remaking of euphemisms as speakers replace old forms that have become unacceptable. Cf. American English "go to the John" vs. "go to the toilet" vs. "use the toilet" vs. "go to the bathroom" vs. "go to the restroom" vs. "use the facilities." These phrases are all euphemisms for "excrete," and all are (or were) considered polite in different sociolects and registers.

[87] This explains why "medical" terms for the body in English and other languages (e.g., penis, breast, anus) are considered neutral, or at worst vaguely embarrassing, but "colloquial" terms for the same entities (e.g., cock, tit, butthole) are widely considered impolite. The semantics are the same, but the polite terms are associated with a prestige profession.

education, and other divisive axes. What remains constant is the intent to insult: to diminish face and lessen esteem in the eyes of others.

The consequence is that one simply cannot understand insult in Plautus through lexical studies alone, and insult scenes cannot be tracked by mechanically charting insult. The *fur* that Euclio throws in the teeth of Congrio and the slave of Lyconides is far different from the *fur* that Anthrax glibly slips in when bickering with his fellow cook. The insult term each character uses is a potential friction point, an indicator of possible conflict in the future, but the degree of hostility it bears always depends on the motives of the character using it, and their relationship with whoever receives it. Considering insult scenes in this way allows us to focus on character dynamics and the nuances of character interactions, rather than simple points of lexical usage. These might have some additional relevance, as in the case of certain gender- or slave-specific terms, but such restrictions only circumscribe the contexts in which specific terms can occur, and do not necessarily provide any useful information about the valence and meaning of those terms in those contexts.

I will also point out that my own discussion of theft and *fur* has been exceedingly narrow, in that it has relied on a very specific conception of the term based on the notion of physical property. In practice, the term *fur*, even during Plautus' time, carried a number of meanings, and had undergone metaphorical broadening to include (among other things) the appropriation (i.e., "theft") of intellectual goods, including the texts of comic plays. This is the sense that the poet Terence, writing shortly after the death of Plautus, uses in the prologues to his plays *Adelphoe* and *Eunuchus* when he characterizes plagiarism as *furtum*.[88] The satirist Lucilius takes the concept even further and invokes the goddess Laverna as a shorthand for plagiarism (*si messes facis <et> Musas si*

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[88] E.g., *pernoscite / furtumne factum existumetis an locum / reprehensum qui praeteritu' neglegentiast* ("Determine whether you think a theft's occurred, or a passage ignored from carelessness has been discovered", *Ad.* 12–14). On Terence and accusations of plagiarism: Novokhatko (2010: 417–21) and McGill (2013: 115–45).

uendis Lauernae, "If you harvest [another's] fields, and if you sell the muses to Laverna").[89] The equation of plagiarist and *fur* is understandable, but the metaphoric extension is not so natural as to be inevitable. As already discussed, Roman (and Italian) concepts of theft and property originated in a metaphor of physical control, such as the impression of an owner's name into the physical material of an item, and the capturing of thieves in one's hand. To apply these physical concepts to fundamentally incorporeal entities—writing, poetic brand—and then have this conception become widespread enough that it could be casually discussed in the prologue of a festival comedy implies a major shift in cultural ideology. Such a shift would necessarily have deepened and complicated the older, more strictly physical definition of theft, but the nature of this change is difficult to see at so far a remove. Regardless, the subtleties would have affected how the term *fur* and its derivatives were understood by Plautus, the actors performing his plays, and the various audiences for those plays. At least with *fur* we can infer the presence of such echoes, due to the rich evidence left to us; this is sadly not the case with every Plautine insult—some of which are frustratingly obscure—though we must assume that even the most banal or opaque terms had were capable, in principle, of conjuring associations of equal complexity.

2.7. Chapter Appendix: Theft Terminology and the Italic 'Cultural Koine'

Clearly, the concepts of theft and thieves were rich sources for insult in Plautus' plays and elsewhere, but it is interesting to consider just how *widespread* references to theft were in ancient Italy, as this has consequences for how we understand literature from this period, including Plautus.[90] As is mentioned above, the "Duenos Inscription" is one of the oldest extant inscriptions

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[89] Lucilius 549M; see discussion in Novokhatko (2010: 422–23).

[90] I would like to extend many thanks to Brent Vine for suggesting to me several key ideas that I discuss in this section, and for his comprehensive advice on scholarship related to the issue.

in Latin, and ends with the injunction, NE()MED()MALOS()TATOD, "don't let a bad man steal me."[91] The admonition about a *malos* (Classical *malus*) man committing theft reveals an interesting concern with the morality of theft as a behavior, particularly as the epithet bookends another term in the line, which begins DUENOS()MED()FECED (Classical *bonus mē fēcit*), "a good man made me." Here again the pot refers to itself in the first person (*med*), while also making a moral judgment about someone. The contrasting terms *duenos* (Classical *bonus*) and *malos* create a compact summary of the moral system at play: bad people steal, good people do not. The opposition is reinforced by the phrase EN()MANO(M)()MEINOM()DVENOI, found in the middle of the line and of previously disputed meaning, but which Brent Vine has shown should be translated "as a gift for a good man."[92] The noun MEINOM ("[exchange-] gift") is from the same root as the verb MITAT ("to give"), found in the first line of this text,[93] but no longer attested in Classical Latin.[94] As a collocation, *meinom mitat* ("to give a [exchange-]gift"), the words form a suggestive *figura etymologica*.[95] The artfulness of this device implies literary intention, and supports reading *malos* and *duenos* as purposeful contrasts. The attention to detail required by such careful composition argues that the "I belong to X—don't steal me!" template was well known and well established in the culture of the time to the degree that craftsmen or individuals—whoever inscribed the Duenos

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[91] The *med* equals Classical acc. sg. *mē*, and notionally indicates the pot, speaking of itself. This conceit is widespread in Latin and Greek *tituli loquentes*, "speaking inscriptions," and is found in our earliest extant inscriptions. See for example the "Praenestine Fibula," which is perhaps even older than the Duenos text, and has the inscribed item refer to itself in the first person ("Manios made me"); for discussion, see Hartmann (2005: 67–106). The "speaking objects" trope itself seems to have originated in Greece, as is discussed in Wachter (2010) and Agostiniani (1982). See also Zanker (2016: 123–145, Chapter 6, "The metaphor of TEXT = PERSON") for analysis of the cognitive metaphors that underpin the speaking objects trope.

[92] Vine (1999): 298–301. The full line: "A good man made me as a fine (exchange-)gift for a good man. Do not let an evil man steal me!"

[93] QOI()MED()MITAT, "He who gives me…"

[94] Though it is found in another archaic Latin inscription, *CIL* I² 2658 (the "Tibur Pedestal Inscription").

[95] Vine (1999: 302).

pot—felt free to modify and play with the formula in novel ways. This license may have originated

in the manufacturing history of the pot itself, which is of an unusual shape: a rough triangle with

individual hollow "lobes" at each vertex, and with each lobe connected to the others by a ceramic

bridge. The pot must have been a costly item, and so may have merited a suitably ornate

inscription.

I have already discussed further evidence for the "do not steal me!" template in early Latin

epigraphic and literary texts (see section §2.2, above), but the same compositional pattern is

attested throughout Italy in a number of other languages, as well. For example, it is found in

Etruscan inscriptions of the type, "I am the cup/bowl/item of So-and-So. Don't take me!"[96] We also

have a Greek inscription, originally found at Cumae,[97] that is in a Euboean alphabet and dates to

the 6th century—roughly contemporary with the Deunos inscription. This too is "spoken" by the

item on which it appears, and in terms even more colorful than those of the Duenos text: "I am the

lekythos of Tataia. Whoever steals me will go blind!"[98] Like the Duenos text, this inscription also

posits a clear moral system in how it proposes a punishment for anyone who violates the named

owner's rights to the cup. Further examples in a number of languages exist, but the point is that

the earliest examples of written language in Italy—Latin, Italic, and otherwise—are *tituli loquentes*

that employ similar compositional formulae to assert persona ownership of small, portable goods.

The purpose of these inscriptions is to warn a reader against stealing that item; the ubiquity of

these warnings and the relative uniformity of their composition suggests a well-developed sense

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[96] For example *ET* Cm 2.13: "I (am) the vessel of Cupe Althrnas. Don't take me. *θanu* me." For the translation, see Wallace (2008: 113), and for Etruscan inscriptional formulae generally, Agostiniani (1982: 60–146). Note that the speaking object, by effectively posing as a person, frames theft of itself as a kind of abduction—not a property crime, but a personal violation.

[97] *IG* XIV 865. See also discussion in Buck (1955: 192, §105) and Colvin (2007: 124, §26).

[98] ΤΑΤΑΙΕϹ()ΕΜΙ()ΛΕΥΘΟΣ()ΗΟΣ()Δ()ΑΝ()ΜΕ()ΚΛΕΦΣΕΙ()ΘΥΦΛΟΣ()ΕΣΤΑΙ = Ταταίες ἐμὶ λέϙυθος· ὸς δ' ἄν με κλέφσει, θυφλὸς ἔσται. Sinistroverse and *scriptio continua*.

of personal property throughout the various Italian communities, as well as some kind of shared textual culture that enabled the same basic formulae for expressing possession to become widespread not just in multiple speech communities, but multiple languages and cultures of different backgrounds and history.

The Latin text on the Duenos cup predates Plautus and other contemporary Latin writers by several centuries at least, but we have more (and more elaborate) inscriptional commentary on theft that date to that intermediary period. Formal injunctions against theft are found in several early Sabellic inscriptions, including a 3rd-century bronze dedicatory plaque from Velletri that is inscribed in the Latin alphabet, but which is written in the Volscian language.[99] Some terms in the text are unclear, but the inscription's first line contains the phrase *sepis : atahus*, which is conventionally translated, "If anyone shall have taken [it]," and is roughly equivalent to Latin *si quis attigerit*. The "taking" mentioned apparently refers to gift offerings that were placed in the holy precinct where the plaque was originally displayed; the text mentions the goddess Decluna (*deve: declune: statom*), and subsequent lines prescribe the steps potential (or actual) thieves would have needed to take in order to expiate their crime: namely, to provide an ox, food, and wine. The verb *atahus* is a clear reference to theft, and while this text is not a *titulus loquens* of the type discussed above, it is still thematically connected to the anti-theft inscriptions found on domestic items by its injunction against stealing movable property owned by a specific entity. In addition, the term *atahus* has an etymological connection with the Duenos inscription, since its verbal root is ultimately the same as that of TATOD, the final word of the Duenos text. This same root may also be connected to a form *taa*, found in a Marrucinian legal inscription from the middle-late 3rd

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99 *ST* VM 2, "Velitrae 1" in Crawford (2011: 340–43). Here and elsewhere, "*ST*" refers to Rix (2002).

century; this also forbids theft from a sacred precinct.[100] A connection with the Volscian inscription is tantalizing given that both are religious documents, are not in Latin, and post-date the Duenos inscription by several centuries. In all likelihood, the verbs *atahus* and *taa* were the regular verbs meaning "to steal" in their respective Italic dialects during this time; the appearance of both reflexes in parallel ritual-legal contexts may even be evidence of a specialized verb denoting theft from sacred precincts. Although the Latin verb behind TATOD is not attested in later Latin texts, whether Archaic or Classical, it may be that these archaic terms represent a much older tradition of usage, in which verbs built to the *teh_2- root were the norm when discussing theft.[101] This gives additional credibility to the idea that cultural anxiety about thieves and theft was significant and persistent even during the very early archaic period, and the fact that this anxiety outlasted specific terms for that very activity is intriguing evidence that cultural semantics are greater than the sum of the lexicon by which they are expressed.

If the above evidence were not already suggestive enough, we have a number of other inscriptional proscriptions against—and official pronouncements on—theft, in Latin and other Italic languages, from a period more or less contemporary to when Plautus was writing. To give one more example from a non-Latin source: the fragmentary "Roccagloriosa Law Tablet" is an Oscan legal text from the early-mid 3rd century, which recently has been shown to contain a

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[100] The Marrucinian text is *ST* MV 1 and *Imagines* Marrucini / Teate Marrucinorum 2 (Crawford 2011: 229–233). The expiatory goods are portions of meat, and the text is somewhat unclear as to what should not be stolen. The Indo-European root behind TATOD, *atahus,* and *taa* is *teh_2; the *atahus* etymology with this root is discussed in Vine (1993: 371–81), which also includes full discussion of the Volscian text as a whole and its many interpretive difficulties. See also Untermann (2000: 131–32) for further lexicographical remarks, and discussion of relevant bibliography, as well as Untermann (2000: 729–30) for the possible Marrucinian reflex.

[101] It is also useful to note that the PIE *teh_2- root behind these verbs was productive in other language families, and yielded for example Hittite *tāyezzi*, "s/he steals," Greek τητάομαι, and Vedic *stená-*, "thief." (In the last example, the root shows a secondary s-mobile.) See Rix and Kümmel (2001: 616) for citations, and Beekes (2010: 1480) for the Greek form specifically.

provision for a formal "finding procedure" directed towards property that has been stolen.[102]

Specifically, a new etymology for ϝουρουστ, a previously obscure word found in the text, has been

proposed by Katherine McDonald and Nicholas Zair, who argue that the entire Roccagloriosa text

is a "legal procedure in a case of theft."[103] Although the text is fragmentary, McDonald and Zair

point out that the ϝουρουστ "finding" term follows closely (2 short lines) after the word κλοπουστ,

which they, following previous scholarship, connect with the root behind Greek κλέπτω and Latin

clepo, "I steal."[104] Although forms of *clepere* are not attested in Latin inscriptional texts of any period,

the word is reasonably well attested in literary works by Early Latin writers.[105]

    Here too, as with the Volscian example above, we have a situation where an early, apparently

pan-Italic term for theft is attested in a non-Latin text from a geographically and culturally adjunct

region. Even more interestingly, the "finding" provision that McDonald and Zair propose echoes a

provision for the discovery of stolen property that is found in the reconstructed Latin text of the

archaic XII Tables law code.[106] The XII Tables were originally inscribed texts, a set of codified laws

related to public and private civic life, of which the laws of theft were just a small part.[107] In

drawing parallels between the Oscan Roccagloriosa law and the Latin XII Tables, McDonald and

Zair are careful to point out that the Roccagloriosa text was similarly diverse, and that any

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[102] *ST* Lu 62, "Buxentum 1" in Crawford (2011: 1328–31).

[103] McDonald and Zair (2012: 39). The Greek script used to write the Oscan text is regular for the area and period. The etymological solution McDonald and Zair provide connects the term with the root **wreh₁-*, which among other things yields Greek εὑρίσκω, "to find." See McDonald and Zair (2012: 33–35) for full details and a history of previous scholarship on the problem.

[104] McDonald and Zair (2012: 36). The root is **klep-*; see *s. v.* in Rix and Kümmel (2001: 362).

[105] E.g., Lucilius 1118M, Pacuvius *tragoediae* 185, Plautus *Pseudolus* 138 and *Truculentus* 102, and Accius *tragoediae* 212. Unfortunately, the Roccagloriosa text was discovered too recently for inclusion in Untermann (2000).

[106] McDonald and Zair (2012: 40–41).

[107] Cornell (1995: 278–79).

provisions about the recovery of stolen property appear to have been only a small part of the

whole, which ran to as much as 100 lines.[108] They also admit that their adduced parallels with the

XII Tables theft laws are fairly broad, and at least in the current state of the Oscan text, do not have

even the minimal level of detail that is found in the property-finding provisions of the XII Tables.

These are famously obscure (due in no small part to the fragmentary nature of the text), and seem

to stipulate that a search for stolen property can be conducted *cum lance licioque*, with the "finding"

intended to distinguish between *furtum manufestum* and *furtum conceptum* (roughly, "observed

theft" and "suspected theft").[109] The identities of the actual *lanx et licium* implements are disputed,[110]

and this portion follows the more notorious line, *si nox furtum fa<x>it, <ast> im occissit, iure caesus

esto*, "If someone commits theft at night, and someone kills him, he is to be lawfully killed."[111] This

line is also missing from the Oscan text, which in combination with the above might prompt one

to wonder whether the parallels adduced by McDonald and Zair are genuine. The authors

themselves acknowledge that the correspondences they see may be the result of coincidence, or

even the result of parallel influence from Greek law, which had similar provisions for search and

discovery.[112] For my purposes, however, these objections are immaterial: even if completely

coincidental, or the result of outside influence, the parallel legal procedures for investigating theft

that occur in ancient Oscan and Roman legal codes indicate a concerted, organized effort by civic

authorities to address the problem of theft. Here again we have evidence that theft and thieves

were widespread and pernicious issues across Italy, a conclusion that is strengthened by the fact

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[108] McDonald and Zair (2012: 42–43).

[109] This section is traditionally assigned to Table VIII, 14, but I here am following Crawford (1996), which assigns it to Table I, 20.

[110] See Crawford (1996: 615–17), McDonald and Zair (2012: 40–43), Nicholas (1962: 207–15), and Watkins (1970) for discussion.

[111] Tab. VIII, 11, but I, 17 in Crawford (1996). My translation is adapted from Crawford's.

[112] McDonald and Zair (2012: 41): as discussed at e.g. Plato *Laws* XII.954a-b, and Aristophanes *Clouds* 497–99.

that the original XII Tables statutes are thought to date to the middle of the 5th century BC, thus predating the Oscan Roccagloriosa text by several hundred years at least—although there is nothing to suggest that the *law* recorded by the Roccagloriosa text cannot be much older.

In fact, Calvert Watkins has made the case that several aspects of Roman law, including the specific law of theft and finding described in the XII Tables, originated in an ancient, specifically Indo-European cultural context.[113] In his discussion of the Latin evidence, Watkins describes various features of the Roman theft-law, especially those to do with the *lanx et licium* search, the distinction between daytime and nighttime crime, and the commission of crime within a person's home, as "marked" features.[114] He connects these with parallel provisions in Hindu (i.e., Sanskrit) and Greek legal codes. If the background of the XII Tables property laws is indeed this deep, then it is entirely credible to triangulate common features in the Latin (i.e., Roman), Volscian, Marrucinian, and Oscan legal texts that I have discussed, since all of these language and cultural groups are descended from PIE and so could have inherited certain legal features from a common source. In addition, the pan-Italic inscriptional evidence that I surveyed above includes texts from *non*-Indo-European cultures, such as Etruscan, which suggests a widespread local anxiety about theft among the peoples of archaic Italy, as well as shared responses to the same. Anxiety about theft is attested at all cultural levels—personal and official—and the relatively uniform expressions of this anxiety among the various culture groups active during the Archaic period must have been part of the region's "cultural koine."[115] Furthermore, as shown by the wide range of values among

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[113] Watkins (1970).

[114] Watkins (1970: 340).

[115] The Italian "cultural koine" is discussed in Cornell (1995: 48–172).

objects with *tituli loquentes*, this concern spanned all who had property, including slaves, who strictly speaking could not legally *own* property.[116]

It is easy to imagine how such a widespread fear could become fuel for insult terms, especially when so many anti-theft inscriptions depict theft as a fundamentally personal crime. The *titulus loquens* type is explicit in referring to inscribed object as "I" or "me," and one variation of the genre uses the pattern, "I [this object] am the [property] of so-and-so."[117] This formula too is found in Latin, Etruscan, and Sabellian inscriptions, as well as more fragmentary languages such as Elymnian and Messapic.[118] The earliest Latin example is the "Tita Vendia" vase inscription (6th c.): ECO()URNA()TITAS()VENDIAS, "I am the jar of Tita Vendia."[119] Although there is no explicit prescription against theft, a moral system is still implied. The first-person perspective of the writing presents the inscribed object as a proxy for its owner. The use of "I" and "me" pronouns establishes a kind of intimacy between the speaking object and whoever was reading the text inscribed on it,[120] which makes an implicit appeal to the empathy of whoever is reading the text: *ego urna Titae Vendiae*, "*I* am the urn of Tita Vendia." The unexpressed but obvious corollary is,

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[116] See for example *CIL* I² 488, PILOTIMEI LUCRETEI L(UCI) S(ERVI), "[The property] of Philotimus, slave of Lucius Lucretius."

[117] The syntax used to express this formula typically follows the schema 'Genitive-NP + 1st-sg-copula.' Less commonly, the NP can be in the dative (i.e., the "dative of possession"), though again with the 1st singular form of the verb "to be." Importantly, transitive "have" verbs are not used, which attests to the antiquity of the formula itself, since Indo-European and its daughter languages famously were "be possessive" and not "have possessive" languages. This is variously discussed in Meillet (1923), Benveniste (1966), and Bauer (2000: 151–95). See Agostiniani (1982: 45–265) for examples of inscriptional possessive formulae.

[118] Agostiniani (1982: 263–64).

[119] There are several controversies surrounding this text. The most notable is the question of whether the language of the inscription is Latin or Faliscan, and whether the final "s" of genitive singular TITAS is present or not. My point about the relevance of the "I am the X of Y" trope in Latin-speaking (or speaking-adjacent) areas stands regardless of these, but see Hartmann (2005: 29–34) for full discussion.

[120] A connection that is not restricted to anti-theft texts specifically, but which could potentially occur with all "speaking objects" and *tituli loquentes*. Cf. for example the many sepulchral inscriptions that use similar formulae, in order to elicit sympathy from the reader. E.g., *CIL* I² 1915, QUI PROPERAS RE[S]ISTE ET PERLEGE…, "You who hurry by, stand still and read…"

"please don't take me." The inscription feigns a kind of animacy, and forces a viewer (or potential

thief) to consider the person whom they will harm if the object is taken. The connection is

indelible, because such warnings were physically inscribed or scratched into the objects on which

they appear, perhaps even by the very owner who is named in the text. The inscription served as an

intermediary between the owner and unknowable future circumstances.[121]

This connection is sometimes made more explicit, as in *CIL* I[2] 499, NE ATIGAS NON SUM TUA

MARCI SUM, "Don't touch! I'm not yours; I belong to Marcus." Here, the verb for steal, *atigas*, is

related directly to the Latin word *tango*, "to touch." Theft verbs often have similar etymological

connections, as in Latin, where a number of "theft" words relate etymologically to verbal roots that

denote movement, touching, or control; for example, *tangere*, *tollere*, *auferre*. Even *fur* is ultimately

related to the root behind *ferō*, "to carry," a sensible connection given that a thief is, essentially,

someone who just carries property away. Possession at its heart is a matter of physical (or

metaphysical) control, of having and holding, to the degree that most transitive "to have" verbs in

the Indo-European daughter languages originate from terms that mean "to grasp" or "to grab."[122]

The power of the metaphor continued well into the later Roman period, when jurists used physical

"handling" (*contrectatio*) of a stolen good as a criterion for establishing what constituted *furtum*,

"theft."[123] Roman concepts of property originate in the metaphor, and we can understand "I am the

property of so-and-so" inscriptions as an attempt to extend physical control—possession—of an

item into occasions when the named owner is not, in fact, holding or touching the item. If the

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[121] My thinking here owes a great deal to Susan Stewart's ideas about the evocative materiality of objects, in particular her discussion of "souvenir" items, intimacy, and the capacity of portable items to guide memory and narrative. See in particular Stewart (1993: 132–50).

[122] For example, Latin *habeō* is from the PIE root $*g^heHb$-, "to grasp," which also yielded Umbrian **habe**. Similarly, English *have* and German *haben* are from PIE $*keh_2p$-, "to take," a root that also yielded Latin *capiō* ("seize, hold") and Greek κάπτω ("gulp down"). For discussion and further examples, see Baldi and Cuzzolin (2005).

[123] Frier (1989: 150–52).

gambit failed and the thief still took the object, then immediate possession of the item was transferred to the new "toucher." The inscription would nevertheless remain, an impression of the original owner, a physical remnant of their touch cut into the material of the item itself.

Theft, then, is fundamentally a *personal* crime, in that it is an outrage against the sanctity of another person's extended body, as delimited by the physical possessions associated with that body. We can begin to see why accusations of theft, merited or not, would be considered insulting, and why the semantics of the insult would have many layers of meaning. Attested Roman laws on theft reflect the personal quality of the crime, insofar as the earliest legal statements on theft from the XII Tables treat theft and thieves with incredible severity, going so far (as already discussed) to grant a victim of theft the right to murder a thief found *in flagrante delicto* and in the person's home.[124] In his introduction to Roman law, Barry Nicholas dryly remarks:[125]

> The law of theft is one of the least commendable parts of the mature Roman law, both because many archaic features were allowed to survive, and because the delict was at times given so wide a scope as to defy definition. The archaic survivals are of great interest to the student of anthropology and primitive law but are strangely out of place in a system as sophisticated as the classical Roman law; and it is obviously unsatisfactory that the law should penalize an act which it cannot define. The reason for both defects may be, in part at least, the same: that the law of theft was of little practical importance. A thief in any society will not usually be solvent, or at least not provably solvent, and the multiple penalties of the Roman law must therefore usually have been illusory...

We thus have a situation whereby during the period when Plautus was producing plays, theft appears to have been a widespread and persistent social problem that elicited correspondingly widespread social anxiety, but the legal consequences of theft were relatively tame and required significant trouble for the victim realize them. This is even supposing that the thief was able to be found, and that the offended party had the resources and time to prosecute someone before the

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[124] See Crawford (1996: 609-620) for extensive treatment of the fragments and testimonia related to remarks on theft in the XII Tables.

[125] Nicholas (1962: 211).

praetor. As an insult, *fur* took its power from such personal experience. It seems probable that nearly everyone in ancient Italy understood the feeling of being robbed. The variety of attested terms for "thief" and "theft" are evidence that the concept was fungible, and its specific packaging did not matter much (or perhaps was simply conventional to the genre or register in which theft was being discussed). Plautus' preference for *fur* may simply be based on common usage, literary convention, or some other motivating factor. Regardless, the specific term *fur* in Plautus' plays cannot be neatly categorized, pace earlier taxonomies, as either an "insult" or a "neutral" descriptor. The cultural complex that informed the term was too deep, and too deeply felt, for such categories to exist separately; one would necessarily inform the other, but situations in the plays themselves demonstrate that, however much negative baggage the term carried, it could still be neutralized through intimacy and rapport.

3. Actors + Words: Insult Dynamics in Comic Scenes

3.1. Insults on the Page

While not every insult term in Plautus necessarily has as rich a background as *fur*, we can assume that all Plautine insults had the potential to evoke significant meaning beyond their bare lexical definitions. Around every potential insult orbited a system of complicating associations, and while the density of this cloud would have varied according to the background of each term at its center, in general more common terms would have entailed a greater range of secondary associations than rare or novel terms. Words in common usage have more opportunity to pick up detritus through handling, after all, whereas novel word maintain a narrower experience; in the case of hapax coinages, they show only the playwright's own fingerprints.[1] The result is an interesting situation for critics who want to analyze Plautus' use of insults, since literary—especially philological—practice is to see extra significance in rare or marked usages. Plautus' novel coinages are of course important literary features, and the deployment of clever neologisms, insulting or otherwise, is a basic features of his style, and one that deserves attention.[2] Regardless, as markers of insult *patterns*, these kinds of terms are often less useful and less interesting than more common terms such as *fur*, *stultus*, or *inpudens* are, since the very rarity of novel coinages keeps them from occurring in a variety of dramatic situations. Although more common insult terms are, on the surface, more banal due to their ubiquity, in return the marks of handling enrich them, and each instance of an insult term in a play is a chance for some of this material to emerge. Every instantiation of a "banal" insult is thus also unique to some degree, with a shape and character

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[1] Plautus was a prolific neologist, and many of the insults he (or his actors; see Marshall (2006: 245–79)) put in the mouths of various characters seem partly or wholly original. For example, the compounds *inanilogista* ("babbler," *Pseud.* 255), *ulmitriba* ("flog-fodder," *Per.* 279), and *bustirapus* ("grave-robber," *Pseud.* 361) are all hapax terms used in insult-exchanges.

[2] See e.g. Fontaine (2009: 3–46) for a demonstration of what can be done.

specific to the scene, play, and performance in which it occurs; the more often an insult term (or phrase) is used in Plautus' plays, the more opportunity we have to consider fine shades of meaning and variation. An impressionistic "scatter plot" of these can give shape to the cloud of meanings, and thus help develop a schema to explain how insult and abuse function more broadly.

In the last chapter I discussed how the valence of insult and abuse language is determined by social relationships—that is, social intimacy—between speakers in a conversation. In "real," extemporaneous conversation, speakers and listeners determine the valence of insults on the fly, via a calculus that accounts for pragmatic factors such as delivery and tone, as well as contextual factors such as social status, existing social relationship, and the venue of the conversation. Even in conventionalized settings where certain kinds of formulaic language are the norm, the valence of any potential insult is determined by speakers themselves via the filter of social intimacy.[3] At a schematic level, however, the same is not true in performed, theatrical speech. Here, all of the context—social background, interaction, and conversational cues that animate regular speech—is the product of a script produced by an external author (or in an actor's improvisation, which is still anchored to a script). Though arguably based on actual conversational norms, the speech used in stage conversations is predetermined, and the reactions that actors adopt in performance are similarly cued; the background and context of these conversations have only as much depth as the skill of the playwright affords. They must be comprehensible to a viewing audience, and so are based on recognizable norms from the culture in which the play originates, but the artificiality of scripted speech requires a different kind of analytical apparatus. Evaluating language in scripted theater entails (at minimum) three different points of view: 1) that of the playwright, and the playwright's design for what ought to happen on stage; 2) that of the actors on stage, through whom the scripted material is actually realized; 3) that of the audience, which they bring with

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[3] E.g., the language of law and religious ritual, which is largely repetitive and formally circumscribed.

them into the theater and assemble uniquely at each performance, in combination with external

factors (e.g., venue, attendance, cultural and historicl context).[4]

   We as modern readers of Roman comedy *texts* have limited access to these various

perspectives. The question of authorial intent is mired in issues of textual and cultural history, but

we know there were actors and we know that they wound up with a complex set of metrical lines

full of wordplay, songs, and stage movements, as well as formulaic shtick. Moreover, although the

characters are stock characters, they often act against type.[5] A speaker's intention is a key factor in

determining the valence of an insult in use; as I will show in this chapter, insults themselves play a

key role in character development. First, however, we need to consider the corpus of texts

themselves: though the exact "actor's perspective" is not on view in these, we know from clues in

the plays themselves that the choice of actor could significantly affect reception of a play.[6] In

addition, we can use pragmatic factors embedded in the language to reconstruct how insult and

abuse language on the page would have shaped an actor's choices in performance; performance-

minded comedy scholars refer to these as "embedded stage directions," and by using a

sociolinguistic lens, we can see other kinds of embedded outlines for character development.[7]

Although Plautus' comedies were designed to be performed, at some point they nevertheless

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[4] And, as I will discuss in the next chapter, there is a potential fourth position, which is specific to comedy: the recursive reception of *audience reaction* by the performers, and the changes to delivery or even script that can result from this reception. This aspect of the theatergoing experience is discussed at length by e.g. Moore (1998) (on Roman comedy), Revermann (2006) (on Greek comedy), and Schechner ([1976] 2004) (on theatrical performance in general).

[5] For just a sample of the many issues involved in the "authorship debate," see e.g. Gratwick (1973), Lowe (1992), Parker (1996), and Richlin (2017a: 1–68).

[6] See again the famous lines from Chrysalus in *Bacchides*: *Non res, sed actor mihi cor odio sauciat. / etiam Epidicum, quam ego fabulam aeque ac me ipsum amo, / nullam aeque invitus specto, si agit Pellio* ("It's not the story but the actor that hurts my heart. Even Epidicus, a play that I love as much as I love myself, there's nothing I'm less willing to watch if Pellio's performing," 213–15).

[7] For evidence for, and the dramatic possibilities of, gesture and non-verbal interaction in Roman comedy, see Panayotakis (2005) and Jeppesen (2015).

existed as some variety of text. What exactly we think this was depends on how one reconstructs

the process of textual composition and transmission. There is some evidence for literacy among

the actors (and the audience), as in jokes about orthography, such as the gag from *Truculentus* that

involves confusion over how the words *ira* ("anger") and *era* ("female owner") were pronounced at

Praeneste.[8] C. W. Marshall has argued that in actual production, there would not have been any

one unitary script, but rather that actors would be assigned scripts with their individual parts, and

the texts that we have now are performance transcripts made after the fact.[9] Plautus was not

working outside of the dominant literary culture, and though he may have been the first Latin poet

we know to *specialize* in comedy, he wasn't the first to write it—his predecessors (e.g., Naevius,

Livius Andronicus) were just as actively engaged in both the textual and performance culture(s) of

the period. If there really was a "stylistic unity" to the Palliata, as John Wright has argued,[10] a

common style and vocabulary of approach, then Plautus' choices in how to frame insults (and even

what insult terms to use) must be grounded in this shared approach. Yet even if comic shtick itself

was a largely oral phenomenon passed on through a living performance tradition,[11] the only

evidence of this that remains is textual, and all theories of Plautine performance begin, ultimately,

with his texts. In any case these are too verbally and metrically complex to have been composed off

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[8] *Truculentus* 262–4. See Adams (2007: 52–53) for discussion of a discussion of the linguistic background to the joke. For discussion of possible oral elements in Plautus, see especially work associated with the "Freiburg School" of scholarship, an overview of which is in Petrides (2014). Seminal articles from Freiburg scholars are found in Lefèvre, Stärk, and Vogt-Spira (1991) and Benz, Stärk, and Vogt-Spira (1995). See also Dunkel (1996) for the metrical evidence for orality in Plautus' language.

[9] See discussion at Marshall (2006: 276–78). For full background of the written, literary tradition by which Plautus' plays have been transmitted, see especially Deufert (2002), as well as additional comments in Stockert (2014) and Petrides (2014).

[10] See Wright (1974), *passim*.

[11] On the transmission of shtick and jokes in the ancient world, see Richlin (2017b), and more broadly, Beard (2014: 185–210).

the cuff, although the range of ways to play the lines would have emerged from the text in rehearsal, as the *Advocati* in *Poenulus* say (550–54):

> omnia istaec scimus iam nos, si hi spectatores sciant;   550
> horunc hic nunc caussa haec agitur spectatorum fabula:
> hos te satius est docere, ut, quando agas, quod agas sciant.
> nos tu ne curassis: scimus rem omnem, quippe omnes simul
> dedicimus tecum una, ut respondere possimus tibi.

> We know all all this stuff already, if these spectators know it.   550
> This play is being performed here for their sakes:
> it's better for you to teach them, so that they know what you're doing, when you do it.
> You should ignore us: we know everything, because we all
> learned it at the same time as you, so that we could respond to you

We cannot imagine Plautine performance without reference to the text, and so, to consider performative insult, it is important to think about how "insults on the page" would have looked, and how they could have functioned as bare, lexical signifiers—without the sights, sounds, context, and other physical sensation that all animate a text in performance, but with cues like *em tibi* (which often indicates a slap), or the offended response of the cook discussed in Chapter 2.5. In a discussion of how in-text pragmatic cues relate performed speech in contemporary drama, the linguist Mick Short remarks,

> [I]f you pay close attention to the linguistic form of (parts of) dramatic texts you can infer a huge amount of information about an appropriate way to perform them. This comes about because we carry with us a large amount of information about how to interpret utterances, and hence how they will be said, what gestures and actions will be appropriate, and so on... Interestingly, it is the same process of inference concerning characterization, theme and so on which allows us to predict appropriate behaviour, and hence performance.[12]

Because the meaning of insult and abuse language is determined by social relationships, my interest in this chapter will be primarily with Plautine scenes involving two or more people, where

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[12] Short (1998: 16).

the social relationships between characters are the most obvious. Social status was highly marked

in *palliata* comedy, as it was in contemporary life, and most comic characters in Plautus's plays are

built from a finite number of broad character templates: wealthy citizens, poor citizens, *matronae*

and *senes*, slaves, pimps, prostitutes, and so on.[13] The nature of these roles was established via

dialogue and on-stage action, but roles were also marked by the conventional physical features of

their associated masks and costumes.[14] As a result of these distinctions, every Plautine play can be

considered a kind of "testing laboratory" for different social interactions. How much such

interactions can tell us about actual Roman—or really, ancient Italian—life is disputed,[15] but they

must have at least been comprehensible to those in the audience, and so must relates to some

element of reality. As such, I assume that how characters react to insult language—with anger,

laughter, or otherwise—plays off genuine cultural and linguistic patterns of the time. Given this,

two-person insult scenes can by extension be viewed as individual test-cases for how insult is

realized along horizontal and vertical social axes. By examining a variety of these scenes in

isolation, we can develop a general understanding of how insult functioned in Plautus as a

compositional element.

3.2. Status, Intimacy, and Insult: a Horizontal Test Case in *Casina*

The outcome of any linguistic analysis indexed to status will always depend on how "status" is

defined as a marked feature. Roughly speaking, the relationships between Plautine characters can

be thought of as being "horizontal" or "vertical:" horizontal relationships are those between

characters of the same (or roughly the same) social status or class; so, slaves of various types will

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[13] The literature on this is massive, but see in particular Duckworth ([1952] 1994: 236–71), Lowe (2007), and Marshall (2006: 83–125) for basic overviews and recommendations for further discussion.

[14] On masks and costume: Duckworth ([1952] 1994: 88–93), Wiles (1991), Marshall (2006: 83–158).

[15] The most current and comprehensive overview of the issues in play is in Richlin (2017a: 1–68).

be horizontal with other slaves, and pimps and prostitutes may be horizontal with other "low"

characters, such as soldiers or *parasiti*. Vertical relationships are those between characters of

clearly mismatched status or class, such as an *erus* and a *servus*, or even a *parasitus* (free) and a

servus. Although the social categories of comic characters are clearly, if broadly, defined through

costume and generic category, specific characters can be finely drawn in a play, and behave in ways

that complicate or even undermine the larger template on which that character is based.[16] Such

gradations are what the improv-theater scholar and director Keith Johnstone thinks distinguish a

dynamic character from a flat character, as they represent the unique traits and behaviors of real,

living people.[17] In his system of improvisational theater, Johnstone uses "status" as a cover-term to

describe personal deportment, temper, and attitude: "Status is a confusing term unless it's

understood as something one does. You may be low in social status, but play high, and vice versa."[18]

In Johnstone's view, personal conceptions of status are a type of attitude, and the competition or

friction this attitude creates when characters interact is essential to creating a believable dramatic

sub-reality.

   According to Johnstone, the exact nature of each character's personal status—attitude—is

revealed during interactions with other characters, in what he calls "status transactions"—

competitive interactions—that tie character motive to narrative development.[19] In his book on the

staging of Roman comedy, C. W. Marshall is careful to distinguish Johnstone's idea of "status"

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[16] For example, slave characters who defy their owners or mock free citizens; *senex* characters who act subservient to their sons, or even stranger, their slaves.

[17] "When I returned to the studio I set the first of my status exercises. 'Try to get your status just a little above or below your partner's,' I said, and I insisted that the gap should be minimal. The actors seemed to know exactly what I meant and the work was transformed. The scenes became 'authentic', and actors seemed marvellously observant" (Johnstone 1987: 33). Johnstone discusses the idea extensively (Johnstone 1987: 33–76), but see also Marshall (2006: 160–74) for its application to ancient theater.

[18] Johnstone (1987: 36). See his comments for examples and analysis.

[19] Johnstone (1987: 37–8).

from dramaturgical "focus," or how a playwright (and in performance, the director and actors)

direct audience attention. As Marshall points out, not all characters of high status—social or

otherwise—will be the main focus of a scene:

> Status is a useful analytical device for actors and directors, but I introduce it here to emphasise
> the way that status differs from focus. The audience does not need to focus on the character
> with the highest status: more often than not, it is the actions of the lowest status character that
> are expected to be the point of audience attention.[20]

Crucially, stage status (unlike social status) is fluid, determined by the vagaries of the narrative. A

character's status can change and adapt to different narrative developments, as Marshall (echoing

Johnstone) points out:

> A status dynamic exists whenever a character is onstage: when two characters interact, at any
> point one has higher status than the other. This can change over the course of a scene, where a
> character starts high status and ends low status: it can be argued that such transitions are a
> necessary part of interesting theatre. Status dynamics are at work even when characters are
> alone onstage, as they relate to the space they are in, or to the audience.[21]

The concept of "stage status" is hugely useful for an analysis of comic insult, since it is directly

parallel, at least in the abstract, to the concept of "face" found in linguistic discussions of

politeness.[22] Both concepts are based on the appraisal of an observer, and result in competition or

antagonism between speakers. I would go so far as to call Johnstone's "status" a type of "stage face:"

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[20] Marshall (2006: 171); here "status" indicates Johnstone's "stage status," and not social prestige or similar. As an example, consider the interaction between Mercury and Sosia in *Amph*. 153–462. Although Mercury is a literal god in the world of play, Sosia gets equal (or more) attention from the audience, and as the butt of the identity-theft "joke" Mercury plays on him, is very much the focus of audience attention.

[21] Marshall (2006: 170).

[22] Note though that the definition of "face" varies somewhat in the literature, and is somewhat controversial among some scholars, who point out (as noted in Chapter 1.5) that it relies on Western ideas of individual autonomy, and so is not well suited to cultures defined by social obligation (or other concepts). In my discussion, I understand face as it has been broadly described in Goffman (1955), Brown and Levinson (1987), and the subsequent linguistic literature based on these works (including previously cited work by Jonathan Culpeper). I.e., it is a "positive social value" that one establishes through social interaction. See however discussion in Culpeper (2005: 39–40) and Spencer-Oatey (2002) for an overview of the problems with this definition, along with possible alternative schema.

because dramatic characters are not real, the motivations and traits that a playwright (and, in performance, an actor) gives them will reflect a specific thematic or narrative goal.[23] "Face" and "status" describe the same essential idea, with one seen from the inside position of actors and playwright creating a reality ("status"), and the other from the outside position of an audience watching a onstage reality ("face"). The equivalence is useful when thinking about insult interactions, which are parallel to Johnstone's "status transactions" and Goffman's "facework." Insult exchanges can range from the cooperative and playful to the truly antagonistic; onstage and in reality, the shape and outcome of each exchange depend on the status/face and social position of the people or characters involved.[24] By restricting the discussion to the text alone—as I do in this chapter—we can examine the interaction of stage status and social position from a dramaturgical viewpoint, via insult exchanges.[25]

The dynamic relationship between stage status, social position, and insult is perfectly illustrated by *Casina* 165–216, in an interaction between the *matronae* characters Cleostrata and Myrrhina. The two women are neighbors, and their meeting here and elsewhere in the play is driven by the scheming of Lysidamus, Cleostrata's *senex* husband, who is trying to expropriate Casina, Cleostrata's *ancilla*, in order to have sex with her. This scene is the first time the women meet in the play; Cleostrata is upset about her husband's behavior, and Myrrhina picks up on this (171–184):

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[23] So the breakdown of character into function-based types (protagonist, antagonist, "blocking characters," etc.) that follow a specific narrative purpose.

[24] Jonathan Culpeper has advanced a similar idea, albeit based on a different framework, in several articles devoted to how impoliteness affects the perception of character by a reader. As he says, "Conflict in dialogue not only has the general potential to be entertaining, but, more importantly, can play a key role in furthering characterization and plot" Culpeper (1998: 93). See also his discussion of similar ideas in Culpeper and McIntyre (2010).

[25] A note on terminology: to avoid confusion, I will not use the "status" terminology of either Johnstone or Marshall, but rather use "stage status" or "stage face" to indicate the concept dealing with character motivation, and "social position" to indicate the concept of a character's place in a societal hierarchy.

CL. Myrrhina, salue.
MY. salue mecastor. sed quid tu es tristis, amabo?
CL. ita solent omnes quae sunt male nuptae: 174–75
domi et foris aegre quod siet, sati' semper est.
nam ego ibam ad te. MY. Et pol ego isto ad te.
sed quid est quod tuo nunc animo aegrest?
nam quod tibi est aegre, idem mi est diuidiae.   180–81
CL. credo ecastor, nam uicinam neminem amo merito magi' quam te
nec qua in plura sunt
mihi quae ego uelim.
MY. amo te, atque istuc expeto scire quid sit.

CL. Hello, Myrrhina!
MY. Goodness, hello! Why on earth are you so upset, though?
CL. That's the way things go for people in bad marriages: 174–75
at home and outside, there's always enough to go badly.
Actually, I was coming to visit you. MY. Goodness—and I was coming to you!
But what's on your mind?
Whatever bothers you bothers me too.   180–81
CL. You know, I believe you, since I don't love any neighbor lady more than you—
                                                                and rightly so!
There's no one with more qualities
that I would wish for myself.
MY. I love you, and I want to know what's going on.

The women greet each other in a friendly way (*salue*), while also using conventional language

(*amabo* and *mecastor*) that in Plautus is specifically associated with "female speech."[26] These

pleasantries indicate that the two women respect each other enough to be polite, and reinforce the

visual cues that would have marked them as *matronae* characters.[27] The pleasant greetings also

establish a basic sense of respect and intimacy, and this is made overt when Myrrhina assures

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[26] See Adams (1984: 61–63) and Dutsch (2008: 50–53) for "female speech," and Barrios-Lech (2016: 177–93) for the pragmatics of conversational openings and closings. We should keep in mind that the association is with *characters* that present as female; as with all comic characters, on stage these would have been played by men.

[27] A distinction that, though perhaps redundant to a modern *reader*, was important to an ancient viewer given that comic actors of the period were male. See Dutsch (2008: 31–32) for discussion of gender roles in this scene specifically.

Cleostrata that *quod tibi est aegre, idem mi is diuidiae* ("What troubles you is a worry for me," 180–81). Cleostrata reciprocates this sentiment, stating that "There's no one with more qualities / that I would wish for myself" (*nec qua in plura sunt/mihi quae ego uelim*, 183–183a). This chumminess is further reinforced by the reciprocal use of *amo* by each woman (*uicinam neminem amo...magis quam te*; *amo te*). In a few lines, we know that the women are friends, are on good terms, and are comfortable sharing their problems with one another.

The tenor of the conversation abruptly shifts once Cleostrata explains that she is upset because "[my] husband disrespects me at home in the worst ways" (*uir me habet pessumis despicatam modis*, 189), repeating what she has just said to Myrrhina (185-86), who asks her to do so (187-88). Myrrhina tries to make a joke when Cleostrata remarks that she has no chance to "get her right" (*ius meum optinendi optio est*, 190), by turning the phrase around and pointing out that it is usually husbands who cannot obtain their "right" from their wives (*ius suom ad mulieres optinere hau queunt*, 192). Myrrhina tries to share the joke, but Cleostrata is not having it, and redoubles her complaint against her husband (193–195). After Cleostrata explains to Myrrhina the situation with Casina, her friend unexpectedly rejects Cleostrata's complaint, and frames the argument with a moralizing slant-insult (199–201):

> nam peculi probam nil habere addecet
> clam uirum, et quae habet, partum ei hau commode est,
> quin uiro aut suptrahat aut stupro inuenerit.
>
> A decent woman shouldn't have her own property,
> secret from her husband. One who does hasn't gotten it properly,
> but has either stolen it from her husband, or gotten it by being a slut.

Myrrhina then declares *hoc uiri censeo esse omne quicquid tuom est* ("Whatever is yours I think belongs to your husband," 202), and effectively shuts down Cleostrata's line of argument. The terms Myrrhina uses (*suptrahat*, *stupro*) are provocative, and clearly moralizing; we have already seen in

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Chapter 2 how volatile theft-terminology was in Latin, and how much potential for insult it had.

The reference to *stuprum* has even more potential to insult, as it directly attacks Cleostrata's

position as a *matrona*. Myrrhina's homily derails the earlier pleasantries (203–212):

> CL. tu quidem aduorsum tuam amicam omnia loqueris.
> MY. tace sis, stulta, et mi ausculta. noli sis tu illi aduorsari,
> sine amet, sine quod libet id faciat, quando tibi nil domi delicuom est.   206–7
> CL. satin sana es? nam tu quidem aduorsus tuam istaec rem loquere. MY. insipiens,
> semper tu huic uerbo uitato abs tuo uiro. CL. Quoi uerbo? MY. I foras, mulier.

> CL. Everything you're saying is against your friend.
> MY. Be quiet, stupid, and listen to me! You shouldn't fight him:
> let him be in love, let him do whatever he wants, since there's nothing wrong
>   at home.   206–7
> CL. Are you nuts? Because you're really not supporting your own cause. MY. Idiot,
> you need to avoid that line from your husband— CL. What line? MY. —"Get out of
>   my house, woman!"

Cleostrata takes her friend's advice personally, although still obliquely, referring to herself in

the third person (*tu quidem advorsum tuam amicam omnia loqueris*); this, however, prompts a blunt

response: "Shut up, stupid!" (*Tace sis, stulta*). The term *stultus* is classed as an insult in the major

taxonomies,[28] and Myrrhina's use of it here, and her demand that Cleostrata should "let [her

husband] do what he likes" (*sine quod libet id faciat*, 206-7) push Cleostrata to wonder, *satin sana es?*

("Are you totally nuts?!", 208–9). Questioning an interlocutor's mental abilities is a favorite insult

technique of Plautine characters,[29] Myrrhina lobs the same insult back by calling Cleostrata

insipiens ("idiot," 208–9), and closes the exchange with a rimshot groaner of a joke: "You always

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[28] I.e., Opelt (1965: 281 *ad loc.*), Lilja (1965: 25, 65), and Dickey (2002: 360).

[29] See e.g. the Tyndarus' repeated assertions that Aristophontes is *insanus* in *Captivi* 533–653. The adjectives *insanus* and *insipiens* are favored rebuttals during Plautine insult matches, although rarer terms such as *deliro*, *rabiosus*, *amens*, and similar also appear.

need to avoid this line from your husband—" "What line?" "Leave my house, woman!" (212): the formula for divorce.[30]

There is a clear escalation from politeness to hostility in this scene, as the women lob insults and denigrate whatever opinion the other holds. Myrrhina in particular attacks Cleostrata's decision to fight her husband, a move that in the formal terms of (im)politeness theory is a blend of "positive impoliteness" and "negative impoliteness."[31] When Myrrhina lectures Cleostrata on her desire to take action against her husband she restricts Cleostrata's autonomy, which is a kind of negative impoliteness. The insult exchange starts with some slantwise insult (*suptrahat*, *stupro*), terms not aimed directly at Cleostrata, though not away from her either—they are instead framed as a package with the normative advice Myrrhina gives as she advises Cleostrata to let her husband do what he wants (199–202). Myrrhina claims to speak with moral authority, and presents deviance from that authority as exceptional. Thus Cleostrata *interprets* the comments as insults (negative impoliteness), because they go against her wishes and frame her as morally corrupt. The question of whether this is a "real" insult is ambiguous, since, as Culpeper remarks, a speaker only needs to perceive something as insulting for it to be truly so…at least to them.[32] This perceived insult is especially offensive to Cleostrata because it carries a secondary implication of positive impoliteness, in that it strips her of the companionship she thought she shared with Myrrhina. Her response to Myrrhina's advice (*tu quidem advorsum tuam amicam omnia loqueris*, 203)

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[30] See Richlin (2017a: 320 n11) on "that one word" joke setups, the type used here.

[31] See again Chapter 1 for a review of these and other terms related to (Im)politeness Theory. The terms as I use them are via the schema suggested in Culpeper (1996), Culpeper, Bousfield, and Wichmann (2003), Culpeper (2005), and Culpeper (2011). To briefly recap: "positive impoliteness" = an attack on a person's desire to be respected, approved, and included; "negative impoliteness" = an attack on person's desire to be autonomous, independent, and self-possessed.

[32] "Impoliteness comes about when: (1) the speaker communicates face-attack intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives and/or constructs behavior as intentionally face-attacking, or a combination of (1) and (2)," Culpeper (2005: 38).

specifically invokes *amicitia*, and so brings us back to her earlier compliment to Myrrhina as someone whom she loves "deservedly" (*merito*) more than anyone else. This appeal to their friendship and previously established personal connection sets up her subsequent feeling of betrayal.

The appeal must touch a nerve, because Myrrhina's response shifts tone again and uses an abusive term and command (*tace sis, stulta!*, 204–), that again attacks Cleostrata's autonomy (*tace*) and sense of friendship (*stulta*). Myrrhina does seem to soften the insult by embedding it in some advice—"Don't fight your husband, let him do what he wants!"—which implies that she does mean well for Cleostrata, and is using bluntness to get Cleostrata's attention. Regardless, Cleostrata is insulted, and responds in kind. As a result, the situation degenerates to a quick back-and-forth of insults, right up to Myrrhina's warning about divorce. The aggression both women show is surprising given the apparently genuine affection they both displayed at the beginning of the scene. Even more interesting is how quickly their hostility dissolves: immediately after Myrrhina's divorce comment Cleostrata sees Lysidamus approaching, says *tace* in her turn (213), and tells Myrrhina to exit, saying *intro abi, appropera, age amabo!* ("Quick, get inside, go on, please!", 214). Here again we find the *amabo* "female" politeness marker that appeared at the beginning of this scene, a courtesy that Myrrhina echoes as she begins to leave, saying, *impetras, abeo* ("You're getting what you want, and I'm going!", 214–216). Cleostrata assures her that *mox magis quom otium <et> mihi et tibi erit / igitur tecum loquar. nunc uale.* ("As soon as both you and I have more time, I'll talk with you again. Now goodbye!" 215–16). Myrrhina replies "Goodbye!" (*ualeas*, 216), and the scene ends as it started, in fond language and polite chumminess, without any clear trace of the jarring hostility that has just occurred. There is no reason for the two women to part on friendly terms, and the scene could just as easily end with Cleostrata sulking and saying something cutting to her friend. The resumption of friendly language is purposeful, and carries meaning.

The shifts in tone can be explained in several ways. From a craft perspective, rapid movement between politeness and hostility is classic comic shtick, a feature that Plautus uses often, and one which is still common in modern comic performances.[33] Insult is a dependable engine of laughter, because, as Amy Richlin and others have pointed out, anger can be funny—comedy often *originates* in anger—and so watching people argue as they get angry can be entertaining.[34] The readiness of two ostensibly proper onstage *matronae* characters to mock each other during a debate about how women should behave no doubt elicited a few chuckles from the audience. (The concluding joke about divorce is the comic "stinger" that closes out the joke-exchange, and brings the point home in a pretty on-the-nose way; it is marked by *huic uerbo*, "this line," a stock joke cue in Plautus.[35]) If we consider the exchange from an interior perspective, however, as a pattern of human behavior that a contemporary audience would have recognized, the scene offers some interesting insights into the dynamics of status (both kinds), intimacy, and insult. The friendly interaction that leads the scene makes the shift to insult jarring, but before the insults begin that interaction primes the viewer to see the women as genuine friends. This intimacy, though quickly established, makes the insults surprising, but also blunts their force. After the main insult exchange finishes, this same language resumes, and the hurried but friendly pleasantries that close the scene reinvoke that

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[33] In fact, abrupt tonal shifts have become such a hallmark feature of modern cinematic comedies that the trope can be an ironic meta-joke, as in the movie *Anchorman* (2004): after an argument among rival television news crews degenerates into a murderous street brawl, Will Ferrell's character, Ron Burgundy, remarks to his fellow newsmen, "Boy...that really escalated quickly. I mean, that got out of hand fast!" Steve Carell's character closes the loop by remarking, "Yeah, I stabbed a man in the heart...I killed a guy with a trident!" A different take is found in vaudeville bits like the notorious "Who's on first?" routine, most famously associated with the comedy team of Abbott and Costello. The humor here comes as much from the confusion and anger of the straight man as it does from the silly wordplay of the funny man. (See Davis (2011: 1–16) for analysis of the routine's structure and performance.) We can compare this to Euclio's escalating series of confrontations in *Aulularia*, which end with him screaming at and threatening the play's audience; comparable scenes are found throughout Plautus' plays, and must have been a stock gag of the *palliata*.

[34] "Plautine characters...love to argue. Evidently this was fun to watch. And fun to hear" Richlin (2017a: 160). Exactly why this is so is less clear; in Chapter 5 I look in depth at the relationship between insult and laughter.

[35] Joke-ending cues of this kind are typical. See for example discussion in Wallochny (1992: 72–77), Marshall (1999), Fontaine (2009: 41–45, 255–56), Richlin (2017b), and on *hoc verbum* as a cue, Richlin (2017a: 320 n11).

initial feeling of friendship. The result is that we—and no doubt, the original Roman audience—perceive the dispute as a momentary disagreement that is essentially friendly (or at least, which has no lasting effect). Indeed, when next we hear of Myrrhina (769), she is in Cleostrata's house, deep in cahoots with her, and her next words are *acceptae bene*, "well entertained" (855). Although the insults the woman use are pointed, they fail to land in any meaningful way, and their friendship appears intact at the end of the scene. The same cannot be said of their respective stage statuses, however.

Although the insults occur between two characters of the same generic type (i.e., *matronae*), the responses and behavior of each character in the exchange individuate the two women and afford them distinct personalities—that is, different stage statuses. Myrrhina at first seems like the more assertive figure, as she makes a misogynistic joke in response to her friend's complaint of mistreatment (191-92), then rejects Cleostrata's right to have private property, with a string of oblique insults (197-201), then provides the stern advice that Cleostrata rejects (204–07). This rejection in turn initiates a more direct insult exchange, throughout which Myrrhina is consistently more aggressive than Cleostrata, in that she twice denigrates Cleostrata's intelligence (*stulta*, *inpudens*), tells her to shut up (*tace*), and warns—as a semi-serious joke—by that she is heading toward a divorce. All of this strength is put behind a message of appeasement, however: *noli / sis tu illic aduorsari* ("Don't fight against him!", 204–05). Dorota Dutsch suggests that Myrrhina here is arguing "from the point of view of a man," which by extension makes Myrrhina a proxy for Cleostrata's husband, Lysidamus.[36] Her opinion reflects dominant social attitudes (i.e., women are secondary to men), and is thematically appropriate since Myrrhina's husband, Alcesimus, is assisting Lysidamus with his scheme (which by the "transitive property" implicates Myrrhina as well). Regardless, Cleostrata isn't having it—although bested by Myrrhina in the insult exchange

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[36] Dutsch (2008: 32).

(Myrrhina gets the last word with her divorce joke, which closes out the insult routine), she counters with her own *tace* and balances Myrrhina's *i foras* with her own *intro abi* (214).[37] Cleostrata ultimately rejects her friend's advice, and it is Cleostrata and her proxy, the slave Chalinus, who work throughout the rest of play to undermine her husband's lechery.

Cleostrata's resistance to Myrrhina's advice makes us expect similar resistance to her husband, and indeed, this is exactly what we get when Lysidamus enters (217a) and the two of them first exchange words (229–234):

> LY. uxor mea meaque amoenitas, quid tu agis? CL. abi atque abstine manum.
> LY. heia, mea Iuno, non decet esse te tam tristem tuo Iovi.   230
> quo nunc abis? CL. mitte me. LY. mane. CL. non maneo. LY. at pol ego te sequar.
> CL. obsecro, sanun est? LY. sanus. quam ted amo!
> CL. nolo ames. LY. non potes impetrare. CL. enicas.
> LY. uera dicas uelim. CL. credo ego istuc tibi.

> LY. My wife and my delight, what are you doing? CLY. Go away—get your
>   hand off me!
> LY. Oh, my Juno, it is not right that you be so angry at your Jove!   230
> Where are you going now? CLY. Let me go! LY. Wait— CLY. I'm not waiting. LY. Then
>   by god I'll follow you.
> CLY. I swear—are you crazy? LY. I feel fine. How I love you!
> CLY. I don't *want* your loving. LY. You can't stop me. CLY. You're killing me.
> LY. (aside) I *wish*. CLY. (hearing) Yes, I bet you do.

Lysidamus appeals to Cleostrata in a variety of ways, invoking duty (*non decet*), flattery (*meaque amoenitas*), and romance (*ted amo*), but nothing softens her anger. She orders Lysidamus to get away from her and not to touch her, both affronts to his authority as the male head of the household,[38] and she stymies his every effort to mollify her. Frustrated by his unctuous and

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[37] Cf. that in earlier interaction with her *ancilla* Pardalisca, Cleostrata also says *st! tace atque abi* (148–50). This is then followed by a short soliloquy where she resolves to verbally abuse and oppose Lysidamus: *maledictis, malefactis amatorem ulciscar* ("I'm going to maul him with insults and abuse!", 156).

[38] Face-threatening strategies that impinge on his personal autonomy and hierarchical power, and so are types of negative impoliteness.

obviously false flattery, she eventually insults him outright (*sanun est?*), using the same term she

used when bickering with Myrrhina.[39] Cleostrata knows that Lysidamus is cooking up an unsavory

scheme—as does the audience, since it is discussed in the prologue and he goes over his plans

aloud in the lines between his entrance and their dialogue—and she refuses to help him. This

behavior fits with the attitude she demonstrated when arguing with Myrrhina, and in both scenes,

it is a readiness to respond to insult *with* insult that defines key aspects of Cleostrata's character.

The essential difference between Cleostrata's two insult-encounters (with Myrrhina and then

Lysidamus) is tone: the fight with Myrrhina features terms that have real potential to insult, and

both women use rhetorical strategies capable of damaging face. Nevertheless, they part as

apparent friends. Not so with Lysidamus, who in an offhand response to Cleostrata's *enicas*

comment mutters that he wishes that she were telling the truth (*uera dicas uelim*, 234)—because

then she would not be there to block his scheme. This is not the first time he has wished her dead,

and indeed does so just before he greets her (227). If the point were not already obvious, as soon as

Cleostrata leaves the stage—after an extended exchange in which she continues to needle and

abuse Lysidamus—he shouts out, "I hope Hercules and the gods destroy her!" (*Hercules dique istam*

perdant, 275). But we know where the power lies in the family, because Lysidamus then lamely

follows up by saying he can say this only because Cleostrata is no longer around to hear it (*quod*

nunc liceat dicere, 275).

In formal terms, the insults that Cleostrata and Myrrhina use against each another are

"neutralized," whereas those in the fight with Lysidamus are not. In general, insult utterances can

fail to damage face either by being *neutralized* (via intimacy or similar), or by being *sanctioned* (as

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39 Whom Cleostrata asked, *Satin sana es?*, 208–9.

part of a ritual insult matches, verbal duels, or similar).[40] It is unclear whether the two women "really" intend to harm each other, but Cleostrata's reactions to Myrrhina certainly suggest that she has taken offense. The intimacy they share blunts the force of the insults, and ultimately keeps their friendship intact. In contrast, the hostility with Lysidamus is real, and the opposition it reveals is fuel for narrative conflict throughout the rest of the play. After a spectacular sung entrance to open Act II, full of vitriol towards Lysidamus, the way Cleostrata behaves in both insult exchanges—how she handles and deploys insult—significantly advances her stage status. She moves from being one character among many in the prologue to a primary antagonist of Lysidamus, a position that one would not necessarily expect from a character of her social position. The stock characters of comedy are taken from a limited array, and on the page can, to some degree, be expected to behave in certain circumscribed ways.[41] Throughout the play Cleostrata shows remarkable initiative, and as Niall Slater has remarked, her initiative differentiates her from other Plautine *matronae*,[42] and in both of the above insult scenes she quickly distinguishes herself from a character of the same generic type, and from a character of a socially superior type. In her exchanges with both characters, Cleostrata emerges as the one with higher stage status—with greater orverall face—which significantly affects how the play's narrative develops. The independence and essential toughness she shows make her a genuine adversary to Lysidamus, and make the ending of the play—in which she dupes and publicly humiliates him—plausible and satisfying.[43]

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[40] Sanctioned insults are discussed in the next section, but see also Culpeper (2005: 63–65) for discussion and additional bibliography.

[41] "…[C]haracters interact (by speech and behavior) according to audience expectations based on probability. These audience expectations include those based on knowledge of a character's stock type" (Slater [1985] 2000: 7–8).

[42] Slater ([1985] 2000: 62ff).

[43] Cleostrata gets her revenge on Lysidamus by arranging for him to kiss and attempt intercourse with Chalinus, who is in drag as the *ancilla* Casina (855–1018).

3.3. Slave Characters, Horizontal Insult, and "Jocular Mockery"

Mutual insult-scenes of the kinds just discussed are not uncommon in Plautus's plays, and reciprocal insult exchanges involving two or more characters—*uerbiuelitatio*, "word skirmishing"— are a fundamental part of his style.[44] These interactions resemble various real-world language behaviors that occur cross-linguistically in different cultural contexts. Such behavior goes by different names, depending on context and who is describing the interaction, but it is commonly referred to as teasing, banter, "jocular mockery," "verbal dueling," "ritual insult," or similar. The behavior is, as one specialist puts it, "easier to recognize than to define," and the various categories tend to blend into one another.[45] The essential taxonomic distinctions, though interesting, are not relevant to my discussion here, excepting a few key features, most importantly: 1) Teasing/banter involves an attempt to insult someone, 2) this attempt most always invites a response from the target, and 3) the insults used can plausibly be considered "non-*bona fide*," that is, playful and (in theory), benign.[46]

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[44] For examples and discussion, the comments in Wallochny (1992: 59–88), Richlin (1992: 74–76), and Richlin (2017a: 138–98) are essential. See also the discussion of mutal slave insult ("Sklaven untereinander") in Opelt (1965: 80–89).

[45] From Partington (2006: 144). Partington devotes a long chapter to teasing and other kinds of "jocular mockery" (Partington 2006: 144–81), and his discussion is well worth reading. The secondary literature on this topic in all its incarnations is extensive, and the following are merely points of introduction: for teasing in a politeness framework, see Haugh (2010), Haugh (2016), and Haugh (2017), as well as the fundamental discussion in Slugoski and Turnbull (1988); for anthropological discussion of the behavior, especially related to jokes, see Radcliffe-Brown (1940), Douglas (1968), and Parkin (1993); for verbal dueling as a ritual phenomenon in different cultures, see Gossen (1976) and Pagliai (2009); for a sociolinguistic analysis of "ritual insult" in a modern, urban setting, the study of Labov (1972) is essential. Note that here and elsewhere, "ritual insult" is Labov's technical coinage, where "ritual" is used in the anthropological and linguistic sense, and does not necessarily indicate religious practice (though strictly religious ritual could also fall under its scope).

[46] This analysis follows Partington, who defines teasing thusly: "A tease, then, in terms of the laughter-talk theories developed in this work, is a face-threatening act performed (apparently) in non-*bona fide*-mode. It is non-*bona fide* because it violates the maxim of sincerity. It is insincere in that it is (supposedly) not meant to really threaten…face. It is (apparently) a fictional attack. Typically, but not necessarily, the 'victim' will be a single individual and the tease will take place before an audience" (Partington 2006: 149). Important to note are Partington's repeated "apparently" hedges; we should keep in mind that someone needs only to perceive something as insulting for it to be so.

Applying empirical work on insult-exchanges to similar events in comic *texts* leads to interesting problems. Most obvious is an issue already discussed, namely the problem of intent: ultimately, all insults in a comic play are non-*bona fide*, since the purpose of comedy is to elicit laughter in the audience, and actors playing a part perform insults for the sake of this laughter. In this way, all Plautine insult-matches are a type of teasing or "jocular mockery," at least from the viewpoint of an audience. However, we can sidestep the issue and force a different perspective by thinking about insult-exchanges hermetically and solely from the "in-play" perspective of the text —that is, as though interactions and relationships between characters represent a sub-reality that can be interpreted and analyzed without reference to performance and reception by an audience. Considered this way, we see that some insult interactions are essentially benign—they present no real face-harm to the participants—but others are genuinely hostile, because they damage face and cause offense (just as we saw in the different interactions involving Cleostrata). Both types can give insight into a character, but they serve different narrative purposes: interactions of the second type (genuinely face-damaging) have a greater dramatic and thematic impact, because they can advance our understanding of a character, and also create narrative momentum through conflict. The difference between the two types, as we saw in the scenes involving Cleostrata, turns on whether the insults are neutralized or not.

For example, in the opening scene of *Casina*, the slave characters Chalinus and Olympio have a vicious verbal altercation that echoes the hostility shown by their respective patrons.[47] The narrative purpose of the scene is similar to the altercation between Lysidamus and Cleostrata, too, in that the exchange clearly and immediately differentiates the two slave characters beyond their generic types, while also establishing the narrative stakes of their relationship. This exchange is

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[47] Lysidamus owns both slaves, but Chalinus is aligned with—and takes orders from—Cleostrata, while Olympio is a partisan of Lysidamus.

the first dialogue to occur after the prologue, a position that makes it programmatic for the rest of

the play—to the degree that anything in Plautus can be considered "programmatic" (89–103):

OL. Non mihi licere meam rem me solum, ut uolo,
loqui atque cogitare sine ted arbitro?   90
quid tu, malum, me sequere? CH. quia certum est mihi,
quasi umbra, quoquo tu ibis, te semper sequi;
quin edepol etiam si in crucem uis pergere,
sequi decretumst. dehinc conicito ceterum,
possisne necne clam me sutelis tuis   95
praeripere Casinam uxorem, proinde ut postulas.
OL. quid tibi negotist mecum? CH. quid ais, impudens?
quid in urbe reptas, uilice haud magni preti?
OL. lubet. CH. quin ruri es in praefectura tua?
quin potius quod legatum est tibi negotium,   100
id curas atque urbanis rebus te apstines?
huc mihi uenisti sponsam praereptum meam:
abi rus, abi dierectus tuam in prouinciam.

OL. Can't I go about my business alone, as I'd like,
talking and thinking, without you standing by watching?   90
Why are you following me around, dammit? CH. Because I've decided
to follow you like a shadow, always, wherever you go.
In fact, even if you want to get crucified,
I'll have to follow. So count up the rest,
whether or not with your tricks you'll be able   95
to take Casina away from me behind my back, like you want.
OL. What do you want with me? CH. What are you saying, jerk?
Why are you creeping around town, you two-bit farm foreman?
OL. I want to. CH. Why aren't you in the country—in *your* country?
Instead, why don't you look after the business that's   100
assigned to you, and keep away from city business?
You've come here to take my fiancée away from me:
Go back to the country! Go the hell back to your territory!

We know from the prologue that Olympio is a proxy of the *senex* Lysidamus; he is the old man's

uilicus and the tool by which he hopes to take Casina from his wife.[48] Chalinus is Cleostrata's proxy,

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[48] By giving her as a sham wife to Olympio out in the country (52–54), where Lysidamus can visit her.

and works with her as she sides with her son, on whose behalf she is manuevering against

Lysidamus (59). As with the scene between Cleostrata and Myrrhina just discussed, this encounter

between Chalinus and Olympio is the first time in the play that two central characters who oppose

each other interact. As will be the case in the subsequent scene between Cleostrata and Myrrhina,

their greeting sets the tone for the relationship. Olympio is the first to speak, and instead of the

polite greeting the *matronae* give each other, he complains about Chalinus following him around

(89–90). This our first view of Olympio, and without any pleasantries as a buffer his hostility is

obvious. The antagonism is returned by Chalinus, who retorts that, *quasi umbra* ("like a shadow,"

92) he will follow Olympio everywhere, *etiam si in crucem vis pergere* ("even if you want to go get

crucified," 93). The phrase *in crucem...pergere* is heavily marked, being a variant of the maledictory

formula *i in malam crucem*, "Go to hell!", which occurs throughout Plautus's plays.[49] The phrase is

specific to slave characters, as it evokes the crucifixion or torture (*crux*) that real life Roman slaves

were subject to as punishment.[50] The command *i in malam crucem* is common enough that any

audience member who had previously seen a Roman comedy would have recognized the potential

insult in Chalinus' *in crucem...pergere* remark, as would (presumably) Olympio the character, who

lives within the "universe" of the play. Both men try to damage face through positive impoliteness,

denying the other *amicitia* or any other kind of social connection—indeed, Olympio specifically

demands that Chalinus leave him alone, a pointed insult to his *conservus*. There is no sense of

intimacy to neutralize any of these insults, and while the exchange could be considered banter

according to how each actor reads the lines, their attempts at face-damage seem real, and elicit

equally hostile responses. In just five lines of opening insult dialogue, Plautus introduces us to two

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[49] E.g., *Bacch.* 902; *Cas.* 611, 977; *Cur.* 611, 693; *Men.* 328, 915, 1017; *Mos.* 849; *Per.* 352; *Poen.* 271, 347, 495, 496, 511, 799; *Pseud.* 839, 846, 1182, 1294; *Rud.* 176, 518, 1162; *Trin.* 598.

[50] Discussed in Allen (1896: 40).

of the play's major characters, while also sketching out the personal relationship that will drive

their conflict to the end of the play.[51]

The subsequent back and forth between the two slaves confirms this hostility: after a bit of

exposition (94–102), Chalinus aggressively tells Olympio, *abi rus, abi dierectus tuam in prouinciam*

("Go back to the country! Go the hell back to your territory!", 103). Here again, we have marked

language that is largely specific to slaves, this time in the collocation *abi dierectus*. The phrase is

almost exclusive to Plautus,[52] and though of uncertain etymology it is conventionally translated as

being roughly equivalent to *ī in malam crucem*.[53] Its use here reinvokes Chalinus' first insult (93), but

this new instantiation provides additional character details and further individualizes the two

slaves according to their generic types: city and country. This divide is first alluded to when

Chalinus calls Olympio *uilice hau magni preti* (98), since *uilicus* is by definition the job of a country

slave in Plautus' plays. When Chalinus tells Olympio to *abi rus*, "go back to the country," he invokes

the country-city divide that drives several Plautine comic plots, and was a dependable metaphor in

Roman literature for contrasting moral systems.[54] In addition to being allied to opposing powers—

respectively, Cleostrata and Lysidamus, wife and husband—Chalinus and Olympio represent

different grades of slave, city and country (*urbanus et rusticus*), with all the obvious comic and

cultural freight that this division implies. Chalinus himself draws out the point by asking, *quid in*

urbe reptas, uilice hau magni preti? /…quin ruri es in praefectura tua? ("Why are you creeping around

town, you two-bit farm foreman? …why aren't you in the country—in your country?"). Each slave's

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[51] In addition, the ending of their exchange (131–40), as discussed below, prefigures the ending of the play in which Olympio tries to have sex with Chalinus, who is disguised as Casina, after which Chalinus abuses and beats up Olympio (875-91).

[52] The single non-Plautine instance is Var. *Men.* 133.1, *apage in dierectum.*

[53] See comments at Ernout and Meillet ([1959] 1985: 174).

[54] The device is most obvious in e.g. *Casina*, the opening scene of *Mostellaria*, *Truculentus*, and *Vidularia*. This trope was of course not unique to Plautus' work, but is widespread in Latin literature as a whole. For illuminating discussion coupled with historical analysis, see especially Leigh (2004: 98–157).

respective local affiliations represent a different moral attitude; usually, the country is straight-laced and proper, the city corrupt, but that convention is reversed here, as country Olympio—working for Lysidamus, the lecher—is the corrupt, corrupting influence. Each slave invokes the divide, and deliberately excludes the other. It is a voluntary expression of mutual disregard, based on positive impoliteness: the rejection of a person's need for approval and community.

Through a few insults the two slave characters distinguish their respective personalities and so position themselves as opposing forces. This technique—and the country-town division in particular—was such a rich source of conflict that Plautus uses an almost identical piece of insult-scene exposition between two slaves at the beginning of *Mostellaria* (1–8):

> GR. Exi e culina sis foras, mastigia,
> qui mi inter patinas exhibes argutias.
> egredere, erilis permities, ex aedibus.
> ego pol te ruri, si uiuam, ulciscar probe.
> <exi>, exi, inquam, nidoricupi, nam quid lates?   5
> TR. quid tibi, malum, hic ante aedis clamitatiost?
> an ruri censes te esse? apscede ab aedibus.
> abi rus, abi dierecte, apscede ab ianua.

> GR. Please, come out of the kitchen, *mastigia*,
> you're showing off your cleverness among the pots.
> Get out of the house, you disease on our owner!
> Goddammit, so help me, I'll punish you good back at the farm.
> Get out of the kitchen I said, stinklover! Why are you waiting?   5
> TR. Why are you yelling at me here in front of the house, dammit?
> Do you think you're back at the farm? Get away from the house.
> Go back to your farm, go to hell, get away from the door!

As Chalinus and Olympio do, in conversation Grumio and Tranio use slave-specific language (*mastigia*, *erilis*) that reinforces their identities as servile characters. They also engage in the same exclusionary positive impoliteness that Chalinus and Olympio do, each telling the other multiple times to "get away" and "get out," rhetoric designed to damage face and to deny the connection or

friendship that would soften any insults. Both men also bring up their respective identities as town or country slaves, and Grumio even suggests that if he were at home in the country he would be able to properly punish Tranio (*ego pol te ruri...ulciscar probe*, 4), an insult designed to position Tranio as subordinate to Grumio. Typically, the right of punishment belongs to an owner, and not a slave, and as such, this is also an instance of negative impoliteness, since it is designed to further restrict Tranio's autonomy. (However, Grumio, like Olympio, may be a *ilicus*, in which cuase he would have this power in the country, as discussed below.) Tranio responds with a phrase nearly identical to what Chalinus says to Olympio: *abi rus, abi dierecte...!* ("Go back to the country! Go to hell!").[55] The remarkable similarity between these two scenes has often been noted; in particular, John Wright uses them as a springboard for his claims about the unity of comic style in the *palliata* tradition, and Amy Richlin sees the exchange as paradigmatic of the formally structured verbal duels that typify Plautine slave characters.[56]

Indeed, the lexical and thematic overlap between these scenes illustrates a larger thematic parallel wherein "country slaves" (e.g., Olympio and Grumio), embrace their respective positions and so present *rus* as a place of moral correction and personal power. For example, in the scene from *Mostellaria*, Tranio mocks Grumio's rustic character by calling him *frutex* (13), literally "shrub" or "stalk," but used here as an apparent insult that riffs on Grumio's country pedigree.[57] The use of

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[55] The variation between the adjectival *dierectus* in *Casina* and the adverbial *dierecte* in *Mostellaria* is part of normal Latin syntactic variation (i.e., nom. adj. = adv). Both forms occur in nearly identical directive collocations, and originate from the same unclear lexical base.

[56] Specifically: (Wright 1974: 1–10) and (Richlin 2017a: 177–78). See also the discussion at Leigh (2004: 102–3, 110), on the scene as evidence of Roman anxiety about wealth and moral probity. Such an anxiety, if genuine, no doubt informs all such type-scenes.

[57] For *frutex* as "shrub" and similar, see e.g. Columella *de Arb.* 1.2.3, or Ovid *Ars Am.* 3.250. As a translation of the insult term, the *OLD* suggests "blockhead," a term not current in most modern English usage, and which misses the vegetable specificity of *frutex*.

frutex as a term of abuse is a one-off for both Plautus and Latin literature generally,[58] and even here the term is, on the surface, innocuous; it is a technical-sounding word with low insult potential, and having none of the marking found in the abusive language at the beginning of the scene (*mastigia, erilis permities, abi directe*). Only the obvious hostility between the two slaves paints the term as an insult, and even then, the meaning is relatively abstract and relies on knowledge of the *rus/urbs* opposition around which the two slaves align themselves. The town-country conflict is, on one hand, a dispute over social status—with city and country respectively claiming a type of authority—but by appealing to these specific roles, the two slaves are jockeying for stage status. Characters in both dyads (especially Chalinus, Olympio, and Tranio) work to distinguish themselves beyond their generic types, and their respective character traits are steadily roughed in by how they use and respond to insults.

The distinctions revealed in this process re-occur throughout the play, albeit without the continued presence of Grumio, who disappears after this scene (at line 83). Plautus thus necessarily handles the *rus/urbs* arc in *Mostellaria* differently than he does in *Casina*. In the initial scene from *Mostellaria*, it is interesting to note that Grumio *the character* chooses not to accept *frutex* as an insult, but instead embraces the comment and so us his pride in *res rusticae* to flip the insult back on Tranio (15–19):

> tu urbanus uero scurra, deliciae popli,   15
> rus mihi tu obiectas? sane hoc, credo, Tranio,
> quod te in pistrinum scis actutum tradier.
> cis hercle paucas tempestates, Tranio,
> augebis ruri numerum, genu' ferratile.

> Really? You, the fashionable clown, everybody's sweetheart,   15
> you're mocking the country to me? Tranio, I absolutely believe

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[58] The only parallel instance is at Apuleius *Apol.* 66.29, and as is often the case with Apuleius, is likely a deliberate allusion to Plautine usage.

that very shortly you'll be thrown in the mill.
Jesus, in no time at all, Tranio,
you'll add to the country population...in a chain gang!

Grumio's strategy is to reappropriate Tranio's attempted insults; he advances his stage status by accepting and being proud of the very country background that Tranio finds insulting. The insult-exchange here is built around the *par pari respondere* shtick, whereby characters go back and forth (*par pari*, "tit for tat") with insults and quick responses, as opposed to a tirade by one character against another.[59] Here, Grumio parries Tranio's *frutex* by calling the city slave an *urbanus...scurra* ("fashionable clown, buffoon"), thereby accusing Tranio of the triviality and lack of substance that are proverbially associated with city life. A *scurra* is a professional entertainer or joker, someone allied to (but separate from) the comic *parasitus* character: both are fixtures at banquets and dinners, and are specific to an urban setting.[60] Grumio subsequently makes his contempt for this behavior explicit as he chastises Tranio, the city slave, for "corrupting his owner's young man" (i.e., Philolaches, an *adulescens*) through too much drinking and high living (20–33). Tranio responds with abuse, again mocking Grumio's rusticity (*an ruri, quaeso, non sunt quos cures boues?*, "I wonder, don't you have any cows to look after back at the farm?", 35), saying he stinks of garlic (39), calling him filth, a hick, a goat, a pigpen, dirt mixed with manure (40–41). Grumio replies with insinuations that Tranio smells *too* good and has been "lying down with his betters" (*superiores accumbere*, 42–43). Tranio then suggests that Grumio covets the "urban" life that Tranio leads (*quasi inuidere mihi hoc uidere, Grumio*, "You almost seem to envy me for this, Grumio," 51). Grumio again objects, and there are 35 or so lines more of *par pari* bickering between the two slaves after this, at the end of which Tranio storms off in a huff (75). Grumio remains onstage for a little while longer

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59 This feature has been described as the defining formal characteristic of comic *Streitszenen*: "Bei der *uerbiuelitatio* kommt es darauf an, eine als Herausforderung gedachte freche Bemerkung nicht auf sich sitzen zu lassen, sondern Kontra zu geben. *respondere* ist das Prinzip dieses Spiels" (Wallochny 1992: 65).

60 My reading here is based on Corbett (1986: 27-43).

to give a short moralizing speech in which he once again deplores Tranio's behavior, and prays that

his and Tranio's owner will return *prius quam omnia / periere, et aedes et ager* ("before everything falls

apart—house and farm", 79–80). Grumio then departs (*nunc rus abibo*, "I'm going back to the farm",

82), never to be seen again in the play.[61] To all appearances, Tranio's attempts to insult Grumio have

failed, and though Grumio comes off as a bit fusty, the insult exchange paints him as the more

trustworthy character. Grumio's moral certainty and willingness to sail into the winds of Tranio's

insults provide a different view of Plautine insult than we have seen before.[62] Tranio's insults are

clearly intended to offend, as are Grumio's; both are angry, and there is no sense of playfulness or

friendship to neutralize their mutual abuse. And yet, Grumio manages to hold his ground by

embracing rather than rejecting the premises of Tranio's insults.

Olympio takes nearly the same position in *Casina*, and like Grumio, is the first to speak in his

exchange with another slave (Chalinus, in this case). Like Grumio, Olympio also clearly despises

his city counterpart, and is also not ashamed of his country background.[63] Olympio configures his

rustic *praefectura* as a place where he has all the powers of a *dominus*, and as a place where he can

carry out an elaborate revenge fantasy that he concocts in conversation with Chalinus. Indeed,

Olympio delights in the idea that the city slave will have to serve him once Olympio has returned

ad uillam with his new wife, Casina (120)—an insult similar to Grumio's fantasy about a subordinate

Tranio. In addition, Olympio describes how he will torture Chalinus: by having the other slave fill

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[61] In his place we get Theopropides, his and Tranio's *senex* owner, who arrives in Act II and as Grumio had hoped, does all he can to *try* punish Tranio. Unfortunately for Grumio, Theopropides is unsuccessful, and Tranio repeatedly thwarts his efforts.

[62] Note that Grumio appropriates the other slave's insults several times, as when in response to Tranio's mockery that he "stinks of garlic" (*oboluisti alium*, 39), Grumio gamely replies, *non omnes possunt olere unguenta exotica* ("not everyone can smell with fancy perfumes," 42). As with the *frutex* gibe, this insult is not defused by intimacy, but by how Grumio accepts and embraces his *rusticitas* due to the moral stance that he associates with it.

[63] Cf. his mild reaction to Chalinus when the city slave addresses him as *ex stercolino ecfosse* ("You shovelful of shit," 114), or his proud assertion that he has "left someone in charge" after Chalinus suggests Olympio is neglecting his duties as *uilicus* (99–105).

large water jars with a small pail (121–22), with beatings (123), by starvation, and by wretched food (126–29). As a final indignity, once Chalinus is "exhausted and hungry," Olympio will allow him to sleep "firmly stuck through the window" so that he can watch Olympio smooch and cuddle with Casina, whom Chalinus also desires (130–39). All the things Olympio fantasizes about are not only within his reach as u*ilicus*, but also the prerogatives of a free slaveowner—to own and punish slaves, to marry—and, in imposing a vision of these privileges on Chalinus, Olympio is attempting a negative impoliteness strategy of the most extreme sort. He wants to eliminate completeley the autonomy of Chalinus, his fellow slave, and then elevate himself. It is the ultimate stage-status power move, a way of advancing stage-face to be nearly equal to that of an owner.[64]

Olympio's fantasy ends the scene—as well as the first act—and Chalinus has no rebuttal except his single-line promise to continue following (and annoying) the other slave. Both exit into the house at the end of the scene. It is difficult to determine whether Chalinus is truly insulted here, though there is no doubt that Olympio intends to insult him. Olympio's remarks share a similar premise to Grumio's prophecy about Tranio's eventual comeuppance,[65] since both imagine the country as a place where an deviant opponent is punished, and a new order is established. However, whereas Grumio's interest is in restoring the corrupted *eri…rem et filium* ("son and property of…the owner," *Mos.* 28), Olympio's motive is not moral, but rather a personal grudge against Chalinus, one that centers on the possession of Casina. Olympio tells Chalinus that he has come to the city *uxorem ut istam ducam quam tu deperis* ("so that I can carry off the wife you pine for,"

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[64] Indeed, in Olympio's case, it will be superior to that of his owner, Lysidamus, who while trying to wheedle a favor from Olympio, is compelled to first promise the *uilicus* freedom (736), and then to state that he, Lysidamus, is the slave (*seruos sum tuos*, 738).

[65] Something that does not occur in the play, since at the end of *Mostellaria* it seems that Callidamates successfully convinces Theopropides not to punish Tranio (1181, *abi impune*). Though, note that Tranio himself isn't convinced, as he points out *quasi non cras iam commeream aliam noxiam*, "It's not is if tomorrow I won't commit some other crime…" (1178).

107), and his imagined punishments end with a picture of Chalinus, stuck in a window frame, and literally powerless to prevent Chalinus from sharing an intimate moment with Casina (134–140):

> quom mi illa dicet "mi animule, mi Olympio,
> mea uita, mea mellilla, mea festiuitas,   135
> sine tuos ocellos deosculer, uoluptas mea,
> sine amabo ted amari, meus festus dies,
> meu' pullus passer, mea columba, mi lepus,"
> quom mihi haec dicentur dicta, tum tu, furcifer,
> quasi mus, in medio pariete uorsabere.   140

> When she will say to me, "Oh, my sweetheart, my Olympio,
> my life, my sweet-bee, my joyous day,   135
> let me kiss your sweet eyes, baby,
> please let yourself be loved by me, my holiday,
> my baby bird, my dove, my little bunny"—
> when these words are said to me, then you, *furcifer*,
> like a mouse, you'll be stuck in the middle of the wall!   140

The blandishments that Olympio imagines Casina speaking are conventional bits of affection, most of which appear elsewhere in Plautus' work.[66] It is not their content that is notable here, but their abundance, as Olympio takes a full five lines of dialogue to set out this little fantasy play for Chalinus. It is a performance in miniature, and Olympio's recital in a way instantiates the scene he describes, as he forces Chalinus to imagine and be silent—that is, to "view"—his amorous encounter with Casina. On the surface, the words that Olympio puts in Casina's mouth are pleasant, and if framed by another context, they could very well be read as genuine (albeit extravagant) terms of affection. In Olympio's fantasy, they are literal instruments of torture. His hostility towards Chalinus is so strong that he manages to transmute compliments and loving blandishments into insult, purely through his intent.[67] Just in case these insults don't land,

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[66] See discussion for example in Arnott (1995) and Dutsch (2008: 75–79).

[67] In performance, the actor's movement and tone of voice also would have been essential to making these lines seem abusive.

Olympio winds everything up with something a bit more conventional, saying, "*furcifer*, like a mouse you'll be stuck in the middle of the wall" (139–40). The word *furcifer* ("fork-carrier"") is another slave-specific term,[68] and Olympio's decision to use it here at the climax of his power fantasy is jolting. Unlike Grumio, who is also called *furcifer* (*Mos.* 69), and whose concern for the"corrupted" family and affairs of his owner motivates his dispute with another slave, Olympio for the most part presents *himself* as the effective master of his realm. He boasts that he has "put someone in charge" of things at the villa (105), so that he can come to the city and take a wife (106). As a *uilicus*, Olympio was eligible to take a wife, though in the prologue to *Casina*, the speaker also pointedly suggests that slave weddings (*seruiles nuptiae*) are fantastical (68–70).[69] Olympio's boasting about it here, combined with his other prerogatives as a *uilicus*, paints him as a quasi-*dominus*. (So too when he threatens to beat, starve, and confine Chalinus, as discussed above.) Adopting the owner's attributes—business, marriage, punishment—is frequent theme in Plautus, and Olympio embraces his role as the proxy of Lysidamus to the point that he seems to envision himself *as* Lysidamus.[70] Unlike Grumio, who trusts in the ability of his owner to check Tranio's behavior, Olympio attempts to dominate Chalinus as if he were his owner. Were Chalinus in the

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[68] Etymologically, it refers to the practice of tying someone to a *furca* ("fork"), the piece timber that holds a wagon's axle; the timber is removed and attached to the slave as a weight (Allen 1896: 42). A *furcifer* is then a slave who has been sentenced to this particular punishment, and the insult-potential comes from the threat of violence it contains, and from the implication that a slave that has been punished is untrustworthy or criminal. (Cf. other moralizing insult terms such as *scelestus*.) Related terms like *mastigia* and *uerbero* are similar, and are derived from words meaning "whip" and "flog." The use of *furcifer* as a slave-specific term is noted in Opelt (1965: 91–100), Lilja (1965: 51–54), and Dickey (2002: 171, 177–83, 328), among others. Interestingly, the word is one of the few Plautine insult-terms that are widely attested outside of comedy. In addition to several appearances in Terence (*And.* 618, *Eun.* 798, 862, 989), Cicero uses it (e.g., *In Pis.* 14.9), as does Horace (*Ser.* 2.7.22), Petronius (*Sat.* 132.8.8), Seneca the Elder (e.g., *Cont.* 7.6.4.4, 7.6.9.3, 7.6.15.11), and Apuleius (e.g. *Met.* 10.4.27, 10.9.1, 10.16.24). The term must have taken on a different connotation when used outside of comedy (i.e., by non-servile writers/speakers). Compare this to other marked slave terms, such as *mastigia*, which appears only once outside the *palliata* (at Lucilius 669M).

[69] For the role of slave-weddings in this scene, and the significance of this for the background of the *palliata* generally, see Richlin (2017a: 241–43).

[70] See Richlin (2017a: 43–44, and *passim*) for discussion of slaves "playing the owner." This reversal comes up elsewhere in the play through Lysidamus' reciprocal adoption of servile qualities, and by his increasing subservience to Olympio. It culminates when he tells Olympio, *seruos tuos sum* ("I'm your slave!", *Cas.* 738), so that the slave will grant access to the girl Casina. See e.g. Dutsch (2008: 78–79) for discussion.

rus as Olympio imagines him to be and where Olympio is overseer, Olympio's revenge fantasy would have some potential to be true. Here in the city, it does not. The power differential thus makes his torture fantasy seem especially unsettling, and makes his recontextualized blandishments into a particularly sinister type of abuse.

3.4. Sanctioned Insults and Verbal Play

The insult-exchanges discussed in the preceding sections all involve different kinds of *par pari* insult-routines. (That is, quick, tit-for-tat exchanges of insult.) However, each scene differs in how the various participants employ and react to insult, as well as in the general level of hostility each character employs. For example:

1) *Cleostrata and Myrrhina:* insults neutralized by mutual intimacy; Cleostrata emerges with higher stage-status.

2) *Cleostrata and Lysidamus:* inuslts not neutralized (genuine hostility); Cleostrata emerges with equal (or possibly higher?) stage-status.

3) *Chalinus and Olympio:* insults not neutralized (genuine hostility); final stage-status unclear, though Olympio strives for higher position.

4) *Grumio and Tranio:* genuine hostility; insults against Grumio neutralized (reappropriation)?; final stage-status unclear—Grumio seems higher, but disappears.

Even without accounting for the kinds of insult strategies used, we can see that each interaction results in a unique blend of changes in stage status, levels of hostility, and strategies used for neutralizing (or not) insulting speech. Significantly, none of the scenes surveyed so far quite fit with the definitions of teasing/jocular mockery discussed above (at least, if considered from the "in-play" perspective of the characters involved), even though they use the responsive insults that characterize verbal dueling. The key feature for teasing and verbal dueling is the "non-*bona fide*"

insult, that is, an apparent face-damaging utterance that is not intended to offend. Culpeper refers to these as *sanctioned* insults—insults that speakers consider non-threatening because they are expected in or essential to a certain situation.[71] Situations where insults are expected include, for example, basic training in the American military, certain kinds of comedy acts (e.g., roasts, insult comedy), sports contests ("trash talk"), male-centric bonding activities ("locker-room talk"), and so on. The linguistic and anthropological work that has been done on jocular mockery and ritual insult suggests that situations where insults are sanctioned tend to be:[72]

- circumscribed, often ritualistic circumstances,
- where participants usually know each other, and are usually friends or relatives,
- where face-damage is still possible, but the risk is reduced,
- and where insults are performed for an audience, to increase social prestige.[73]

An essential addendum is that jocular mockery of all types—from teasing to formal verbal dueling —exists in a spectrum of circumstance and human behavior, and every instance risks genuine face-damage to one or both of the participants.[74] At one end, teasing entails a cooperative suspension of politeness rules that can be used to establish rapport, build trust, or demonstrate romantic interest.[75] The strategy is risky, however, since even a slight misstep can turn a sanctioned insult into something that genuinely damages face. Similarly, in verbal duels and ritual insult contests ("playing the dozens," "flyting," "sounding"), participants engage in a strictly

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[71] The essential distinction is discussed in Culpeper (2005: 63–65), with reference to additional work on the topic.

[72] Note again that "ritual" here is used according to Labov's technical coinage, and implies an anthropological and linguistic understanding of the word, and not a strictly religious or sacral practice.

[73] This formulation is distilled largely from Labov (1972), but with reference to Partington (2006) and Pagliai (2009).

[74] Discussed efficiently in Haugh (2017).

[75] See for example the case-studies outlined in Haugh and Pillet-Shore (2017).

regulated back-and forth of insults, sometimes of absolutely paint-stripping obscenity.[76] Even these conform to certain rules, however, such as being about a specific topic (e.g., mothers, personal looks, sexual prowess) or built on a specific template (e.g., rhyming couplets, "X is so Y that Z"). Straying outside an expected template or otherwise violating expectations of the ritual can make it collapse, thus creating a chance for real and lasting face damage.[77]

If we re-think some of the scenes already discussed in terms of jocular mockery, then the interaction between Cleostrata and Myrrhina could be seen as a kind of teasing between two friends who have a strong enough bond to sanction fairly blunt insults. The scenes between slaves (Chalinus and Olympio, Tranio and Grumio) have some teasing elements—the insults are mutual and elicit reciprocal responses—but in both cases, the insults are ultimately hostile, and do not seem sanctioned. So, they might be better thought of as genuine disputes that follow a teasing-like template, without the benign aspect, at least within the in-play narrative reality. This adaptation of real-world rules is made possible by the conventions of staged comedy, which play off but do not fully reflect real-world behaviors. There are a few Plautine insult interactions that follow the sanctioned insult template more exactly however, none more spectacular than the extended insult-exchange between the slaves Libanus and Leonida in *Asinaria* 267–307.[78] This scene is famous both

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[76] E.g., one of the insults documented in Labov (1972: 473): "I hate to talk about your mother, she's a good old soul / She got a ten-ton pussy and a rubber asshole."

[77] "The rules given above for sounding, and the development of sounds in bizarre and whimsical direction [sic], all have the effect of preserving this ritual status. As we have seen, the ritual convention can break down with younger speakers or in strange situations - and the dangers of such a collapse of ritual safeguards are very great" (Labov 1972: 486).

[78] See especially the discussion of "verbal dueling" in Richlin (2017a: 151–70), which examine the phenomenon as a feature of Roman culture generally, with special consideration of its social significance as a compositional feature of Roman comedy.

for the variety of insults that the two slaves use against each other, and for how vividly it

demonstrates the *par pari* shtick that is a hallmark of Plautus' comic style (297–305):[79]

> LE. gymnasium flagri, salueto. LI. quid agis, custos carceris?
> LE. o catenarum colone. LI. o uirgarum lasciuia.
> LE. quot pondo ted esse censes nudum? LI. non edepol scio.
> LE. scibam ego te nescire, at pol ego, qui ted expendi, scio: 300
> nudus uinctus centum pondo es, quando pendes per pedes.
> LI. quo argumento istuc? LE. ego dicam, quo argumento et quo modo.
> ad pedes quando adligatumst aequom centumpondium,
> ubi manus manicae complexae sunt atque adductae ad trabem,
> nec dependes nec propendes—quin malus nequamque sis.   305

> LE. Hi, you whip's playground! LI. What are you doing, dungeon warden?
> LE. Chain-farmer! LI. Rod's lust!
> LE. How much do you think you weigh naked? LI. Hell if I know…
> LE. I knew that you didn't know, but by god, I know, because I weighed you.   300
> Naked and bound, you weigh a hundred pounds…when weigh-t-ed by your feet.
> LI. How's that? LE. I'll tell you how it is.
> When an even hundred-pound weight is tied to your feet,
> when your hands are cuffed and raised to a beam,
> you don't hang high or hang low—to keep you from being bad and worthless!   305

The two slaves refer to each other using the kind of slave-specific, marked language that we

have seen elsewhere, with particular emphasis on various forms of torture. Especially marked are

the "X of Y" insult compounds each slave uses as they greet each other (*gymnasium flagri*, *custos*

carceris, *catenarum colone*, *uirgarum lasciuia*, 297–98). The capper joke of this scene is Leonida's play

on words based on the *pend-* root (301 and 305), which generates verbs that mean both "to hang"

and "to weigh," depending on the conjugational class. The punchline of Leonida's gag is his

concluding vision of Libanus manacled, strung up, and naked, like the weight on a scale (304–305);

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79 For more on comic (and Plautine) shtick as a fundamental feature of the genre, see Marshall (1999) and Richlin (2017b); for improvisation and shtick as part of comic performance, see Marshall (2006: 245–79). For discussions of the Libanus-Leonida duel specifically, see e.g. Wallochny (1992: 59–61), Lowe (1992), Moore (1998: 34–5), Stewart (2012: 104–116), and Richlin (2014: 189–92), as well as references throughout Richlin (2017a). The term *uerbiuelitatio* actually originates in this scene, as a coinage of Libanus' that he uses to describe his insult-exchange with Leonida (*Asin.* 307).

extant scale weights include some in the form of a human head. The image is strikingly similar to Olympio's fantasy about Chalinus—both involve an immobile slave being punished for the amusement of a fellow-slave—but the tenor of this scene is less overtly hostile, as Leonida is not trying to assert a role as a *dominus* in the way that Olympio does. Libanus responds to Leonida's gag with the phrase *uae tibi* ("Go to hell!", 306), an exclamation that characters often use to signal the end of a joke run.[80] This is an additional signal that the scene is humorous, despite the violent compound epithets with which each slave greets the other (*gymnasium flagri* and *custos carceris*, 297). Though potentially insulting, these are paired with the conventional conversational openers *salueto* and *quid agis*, both of which are typical of friendly or otherwise polite interactions.[81] The juxtaposition of such conventional language with novel insults flags the latter as jokes, and immediately suggests that the two slaves are friends engaging in banter—jocular mockery—rather than genuine enemies, as was the case in the other scenes I have examined. Libanus himself clarifies this relationship at the end of the bit when he tells Leonida, *uerbiuelitationem fieri compendi uolo* ("I want to cut out the word-skirmishing," 307), and his friend complies, after which the two characters immediately begin a new dialogue topic. The insults the two slaves use are sanctioned— essentially non-hostile—because they are friends, and the encounter is formally circumscribed.[82]

The "jocular mockery" insult exchange between Libanus and Leonida is a wonderful bit of comedy, but as a dramaturgical element it functions differently from the other insult exchanges already discussed. Whereas those develop by advancing or reducing a character's stage status and

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[80] In this usage, it could be considered equivalent to similar expressions used by straight men in modern joke routines, e.g. Moe's grumpy "Why I oughta…" catchphrase from the *Three Stooges* shorts, or Ralph Kramden's "One of these days…" from *The Honeymooners*.

[81] See again Barrios-Lech (2016: 177–93) for discussion of the valence implied by these and other conversational openings.

[82] Such a friendly tone squares with anthropological theories of verbal dueling as a cooperative socializing behavior. Anthropologists tend to emphasize the communal, ritualizing aspects of verbal duels. See for example Culpeper (1996: 352–54) and Pagliai (2009: 61–64) for comment and additional bibliography.

by refining the motivations of the characters involved, so as to advance aspects of the plot, the exchange of sanctioned insults appears to sit outside of the play's narrative. The insult exchange Libanus and Leonida engage in does not reveal information essential to the play's narrative (we already know they are friends, 58), nor generate any lasting conflict, and both characters emerge with the same apparent stage status as they had going in. While both kinds of scene (cooperative and antagonistic) are, ultimately, meant to be funny, the cooperative type (i.e., where insults are sanctioned) does not complicate the plot of the play so much as embroider it.[83] Information essential to the thematic faultlines of the play as a whole is instead revealed in an expository dialogue between the characters after the duel itself (*Asin.* 309-380). The duel ends abruptly, as soon as one of the participants decides that he wants it to be over, and the transition between insult-contest and exposition is quite abrupt (a matter of a few lines). As such, the exchange can be seen as a joke-filled set-piece that reveals a great deal about the nature and conditions of slavery at the time,[84] but it is fundamentally different from other, more antagonistic insult exchanges found elsewhere.

3.5. Speaking Insult to Power: Vertical Insult Interactions

All of Plautus' plots are, for the most part, constructed from modular units wherein conventional character types are deployed around conventional plot elements, in order to achieve dramatic arcs and plot resolutions of a generally predictable shape. Of course, details matter, and although horizontal interactions (like those previously discussed) occur across different character types and throughout Plautus' plays, it is clear that these scenes all resolve differently, depending on their

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[83] Leonida and Libanus' duel does reveal essential information about their friendship, and this can be read into their later scheming and naughty behavior, as in the following scene when they mock and physically abuse a merchant character (381–503), or later in the play when they force their *adulescens* owner to act like *their* slave (591–745).

[84] As well as about the attitudes and feelings of slave-actors playing these slave characters, as demonstrated in Richlin (2014).

particulars. The same thing must hold for *vertical* insult interactions, then, which is perhaps

counterintuitive. We might expect on-stage relationships between characters of different type and

social status by their nature to preserve a general "downhill" power dynamic, wherein characters

of subordinate social statuses take the brunt of any insult exchange. Exchanges that look like this

on the surface can indeed happen, as in another scene from *Casina*, when Lysidamus, the play's

senex amator and legal owner of the two main slave characters, squabbles with Chalinus, the slave

who within the play is aligned with Lysidamus' wife, Cleostrata. At 279, Lysidamus sees Chalinus

approaching, and remarks, *qui illum di omnes deaeque perdant!*, "Let all the gods and goddesses

destroy him!", which echoes the sentiment Lysidamus expresses four lines earlier in which he

wished the same destruction on Cleostrata, for whom Chalinus is a proxy.[85] This initial malediction

sets the tone of the exchange, and reifies the mutual hostility that has already been established in

earlier scenes (as in those involving Cleostrata and Olympio, both previously discussed), while also

providing and establishing shot for the short exchange that follows (279–94):

> LY. Qui illum di omnes deaeque perdant! CH. te uxor aiebat tua
> me uocare. LY. Ego enim uocari iussi. CH. eloquere quid uelis.   280
> LY. primum ego te porrectiore fronte uolo mecum loqui;
> stultitia est ei te esse tristem, quoius potestas plus potest.
> probum et frugi hominem iam pridem esse arbitror. CH. intellego.
> quin, si ita arbitrare, emittis me manu? LY. quin id uolo.
> sed nihil est me cupere factum, nisi tu factis adiuuas.   285
> CH. quid uelis modo id uelim me scire. LY. ausculta, ego eloquar.
> Casinam ego uxorem promisi uilico nostro dare.
> CH. at tua uxor filiusque promiserunt mihi. LY. scio.
> sed utrum nunc tu caelibem te esse mauis liberum
> an maritum seruom aetatem degere et gnatos tuos?   290
> optio haec tua est: utram harum uis condicionem accipe.
> CH. liber si sim, meo periclo uiuam; nunc uiuo tuo.
> de Casina certum est concedere homini nato nemini.

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[85] *Hercules dique istam perdant, quod nunc liceat dicere*, "I hope Hercules and the gods destroy her! …which I can say
now [that she is gone]," 275.

LY. I hope all the gods and goddesses destroy him! CH. Your wife was saying that you
were calling for me. LY. Yes, I *ordered* you to be called. CH. Tell me what you want.   280
LY. First, I want you to speak to me with a smoother forehead!
It's stupid for you to be surly to the person who has more power over you.
I've always thought your were good and honest. CH. Sure.
Why don't you free me, if you think so? LY. Really, I want to!
But me wanting it done doesn't matter, unless you help me with your behavior.   285
CH. I'd just like to know what it is you want. LY. Listen, and I'll tell you:
I promised to give Casina as a wife to our farm foreman.
CH. But you wife and son promised her to me. LY. I know.
But would you rather be a free unmarried man *now*, or
to live your life as a married slave, and your children too?   290
This is your choice: choose either of those options.
CH. If I become free, I will live at my own expense...*now*, I live at yours.
As for Casina, I've decided not to give up her to any man born.

The most striking element in this exchange is Lysidamus' repeated effort to assert his

authority over Chalinus. This is the same negative impoliteness strategy that Olympio, Lysidamus'

proxy, used against Chalinus as well; in that exchange it is understandable as a means of

establishing dominance over a person of equivalent social status. Here, its purpose must be

different, since Lysidamus is already of much higher position that Chalinus, but, by choosing to

initiate a conversation with Chalinus, and by asking something of the slave (instead of simply

ordering it), Lysidamus begins the interaction with a stage status lower than what his character

template would suggest. The face he presents seems pre-diminished. Lysidamus himself appears

to understand this, and his first remark to the slave is a correction of who ordered Chalinus to

appear[86]: *ego enim uocari iussi* (280), "I ordered you to be called," with the pleonastic *ego* fronted and

making clear that Lysidamus delegated the ordering—not Cleostrata, as Chalinus has said. This is a

transparent effort at facework; Lysidamus is trying to repair his own sense of face by reminding

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[86] The "may the gods destroy him" line is said, presumably, as an aside, although Chalinus picks up on it.

Chalinus of the slave's subordinate status.[87] Moreover, in response to the slave's surprisingly curt imperative (*eloquere quid uelis*), Lysidamus gives him—and the audience—a pocket lesson in proper behavior: "Speak politely and don't challenge those in power" is a gnomic statement or proverb, and the use of it here adds an additional false note to Lysidamus' already thin assurance that he thinks Chalinus is a *frugi hominem* (283).[88] This rebuke and correction of Chalinus is not a conventional, discrete insult, at least in the way typically defined by taxonomic scholarship, but it is nevertheless *insulting*, since the comment is clearly intended to diminish face.[89] In fact, Lysidamus is trying to reduce Chalinus' stage status—his stage face—by reminding him of the hierarchical position of his generic type. Lysidamus' demand that Chalinus speak with a *porrectiore fronte* is very like an angry parent telling a smug child to "Wipe that smile off your face!" On the surface, the command seems milder than the physical tortures Olympio dreams up, but Lysidamus' manifest hostility and his genuine control over Chalinus—as made clear when he later promises to "take revenge" on the slave and his allies (*ulciscar*, 299)—make the insult especially menacing. Nevertheless, Chalinus responds with a joke about manumission (284–5), a move that would not be out of place in the *par pari* duels just examined, and indeed, throughout this exchange Chalinus laughs and treats Lysidamus as though the *dominus* were the straight man in a two-person joke routine. This is not a jocula exchange, however, and the insults are not sanctioned. Chalinus' joke-insults pose a legitimate threat to both the stage status and social position of Lysidamus, whose position as *dominus* is ensured only through obedience, and the power to

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[87] As an insult, the reminder is both positive impoliteness and negative impolitess: positive, because it rejects any intimacy with Chalinus; negative, because it reminds Chalinus of his servitude, and consequent lack of autonomy.

[88] This proverb template is widespread in Latin. A basic corpus search for the formula *stultitia est* + <infinitive phrase> yields similarly gnomic sounding statements from Cicero (*de In.* 1.91.16, *de Div.* 2.55.16), Publilius Syrus (*Sent.* S.40), Livy (22.14.14), and the younger Seneca (*Ep. Mor.* 70.8.3).

[89] Cf. Culpeper's remarks about insult as language that in context is designed to threaten face (Culpeper 2011: 350–55).

enforce that obedience. After Lysidamus attempts to make Chalinus "an offer he can't refuse" (viz., to be an unmarried freeman, rather than a married slave with slave children, 290–92), the slave responds with the crack that he prefers slavery, because it is cheaper than freedom (293, with a double meaning in *periclo*). As Grumio does in the argument with Tranio, Chalinus appropriates the face-threat made against him and embraces it, in order to neutralize the insult. The joke ends the insult-match, as happens in other insult-joke exchanges, but Lysidamus isn't playing along.

The *par pari* delivery in this encounter and the series of jokes about enslavement echo the dueling-shtick typical of slave characters. Lysidamus is not a slave, however, nor is he going along with the gag; instead, he takes Chalinus' joke badly, which prompts us to wonder about the valence of the insults in this scene. Lysidamus all but accuses Chalinus of *stultitia* ("stupidity"), but the slave hardly reacts. In contrast, the *dominus* becomes enraged by Chalinus' mild (but subversive) jokes. Lysidamus' several references to the power and control he has over Chalinus reinforce the social disparity inherent to the generic types from which each character is drawn, and make the vertical relationship perfectly clear, at least schematically. But would a "real" Roman owner have needed to assert himself in this way? By putting a spotlight on the issue Plautus makes Lysidamus look relatively powerless, particularly when, as soon as Chalinus turns down his offer, he suddenly decides to let the two slaves cast lots for Casina, and calls for *sortes* and a *sitella* (295–96). At the end of the scene Lysidamus calls himself *miser*, "pathetic" (303).[90] However much he may bluster, Lysidamus never orders Chalinus nor Cleostrata—the actual source of Chalinus' power—to give in, though it is technically within his right as a *paterfamilias* to do so. Instead, he abrogates his authority in favor of random chances (i.e., the *sortes*) and also permits Chalinus, as the slave is departing, to boast, *inuitus me uides, uiuam tamen* ("You see me grudgingly, but I will keep living!", 302). This mockery looks ahead to the climactic ending of the play, when "Casinus" (i.e., Chalinus in

[90] See Lowe (2003) on the narrative complexity of this scene, and for thoughts on its strangeness.

drag), after a mock-wedding and the disastrous start to a wedding night, then publicly humiliates both Olympio and Lysidamus and forces them to apologize for acting so shamefully (840–54, 875–1011). The flow of insult in the encounter is complex, and though Lysidamus works to exercise his legal authority over Chalinus, the slave, by slyly undermining his owner's efforts at authority, and dodging his insults, emerges with the greater stage status.

The power relationships apparent in all of the scenes just discussed are not as clear-cut as the generic statuses of the characters involved suggest, a situation that repeats throughout Plautus's plays. This is hardly a novel claim, and is the basic observation behind much of the literary criticism on Plautus.[91] What I think is notable, however, and is less discussed, is the fundamental role of insult and abuse-language in signaling and defining these inversions. I have already discussed how insult scenes work to define character roles in horizontal interactions, but it is apparent even in the brief example above that the same is true of vertical interactions, and as there, it seems clear that scenes involving non-sanctioned insults (i.e., hostile according to the universe of the individual play) are primary drivers not just of laughter, but of character and plot. Plautus himself seems to have recognized this, as he often has characters comment on the fact that they are insulting someone, or when they themselves are being insulted.[92] Predictably, this metacommentary extends beyond reactions to specific lexical items and includes behaviors or actions that in context could be interpreted as insults, as illustrated for example at *Asinaria* 646–57, in a scene between Leonida, Libanus, and the *adulescens* Argyrippus, an *erus* of both slaves:

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[91] Perhaps most famously in Segal ([1968] 1987), which considers the "inversion" of social roles to be the defining feature of the *palliata* style.

[92] Plautus uses a number of idioms to describe the act of verbal abuse. The most notable are *male loqui* (and parallel forms such as *maledicere*), *deludere*, *deridere*, and *ludificare*.

LE. uin erum deludi? LI. dignust sane.
LE. uin faciam ut me Philaenium praesente hoc amplexetur?
LI. cupio hercle. LE. sequere hac. ARG. ecquid est salutis? satis locuti.
LE. auscultate atque operam date et mea dicta deuorate.
primum omnium seruos tuos nos esse non negamus;   650
sed tibi si uiginti minae argenti proferentur,
quo nos uocabis nomine? ARG. libertos. LE. non patronos?
ARG. id potius. LE. uiginti minae hic insunt in crumina,
has ego, si uis, tibi dabo. ARG. di te seruassint semper,
custos erilis, decus popli, thensaurus copiarum,   655
salus interior corporis amorisque imperator.
hic pone, hic istam colloca cruminam in collo plane.

LE. Do you want our owner to made fun of? LI. He obviously deserves it.
LE. Do you want me to make it so that Philaenium cuddles me while he's around?
LI. I *do*! LE. Come over this way. ARG. Is there any hope? You've talked enough.
LE. Listen up, and pay attention, and absorb what I'm saying:
first of all, we don't deny that we're your slaves,   650
but if twenty silver minae were brought your way...
what would you call us? ARG. Freedmen! LE. Not...your own *patroni*?
ARG. That's even better! LE. Twenty silver minae are here, in this purse.
I'll give them to you, if you'd like. ARG. I hope the gods always watch over you—
you guardian of your owner, you credit to the people, you treasure of good things,   655
you inner prosperity the body, and commander-in-chief of love!
Put it here: put that purse right here on my neck.

This exchange prefaces a critical plot development when the *adulescens* Argyrippus finally gets

the twenty *minae* he needs in order to secure an exclusive "contract" for the *meretrix* Philaenium.

The play involves two major subplots, namely the efforts of Argyrippus and his father Demaenetus

to steal the money for Philaenium, and the subsequent efforts of Diabolus and Argyrippus to

prevent Demaenetus from taking Philaenium for himself. The dialogue above thus introduces a

major transition in the structure of the play, the pivot point between the two narrative halves.

However, the scene itself has little narrative weight except as a transition point, since the only

major event that occurs in it is the transfer of the stolen money from the slaves to Argyrippus. As

such, there is no obvious reason for the segment to be introduced by (or to develop as) an abuse scene, or to last as long as it does. If we count some earlier material, the entire scene between Libanus, Leonida, Argyrippus, and Philaenium is 160 lines long (585–745), or almost seventeen percent of the play's total length (947 lines); moreover, the slave characters explicitly conspire to make it into an insult scene, as Leonida asks, *uin erum deludi?* ("Do you want our master to be mocked?", 645), to which Libanus replies, "He's got it coming" (*dignust sane*). He doesn't, in fact, except to the degree that comic expediency demands; Libanus has earlier agreed that the two are Argyrippus' *adiutores* (58), and the result is a series of gags that we can see in other insult-focused scenes, though here Plautus pushes the boundary between insult and humor. The boundary-pushing continues throughout the exchange, and becomes increasingly obvious just in the way that insults are deployed; the transgression could have been even more apparent onstage, when amplified by gesture and delivery.

Exactly how the scene develops is unusual: Libanus and Leonida, as we have seen, are friends who engage in jocular mockery, and seem to be recalling that relationship here, but at their owner's expense. Insults used as part of jocular mockery are sanctioned because they are expected, but the inclusion of Argyrippus changes the dynamic; he is not in on the joke, and so the insults are only partially sanctioned. (From his perspective, none are.) This development is similar in the other slave-owner insult inversions, for example the exchange between Chalinus and Lysidamus discussed above.[93] Leonida and Libanus deliberately challenge their owner's authority, and highlight the challenge by referring to him as their *erus*. The authority carried by the title is immediately subverted, however, when they (by withholding the money he wants) coerce Argyrippus into calling them first *libertos*, and then *patronos*, a joke based on another escalating

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[93] Note however that this theme is widespread, and occurs in a number of plays, perhaps most notably *Epidicus*, when the titular character tricks his owner into begging the slave to let himself be manumitted.

reversal of power: whether you call someone *libertus* rather than *patronus* depends on whether you are looking up or down the hill of social status.[94] This is especially so, since the *patronus* relationship is between a freedman/-woman and his/her former owner; Argyrippus here thus offers to become a virtual freedman of his own two slaves. The *adulescens* uses the term only when prompted by Leonida (*quo...nomine? ...non patronos?*), and the implications of the joke should not be lost on us, since the logic of the scene elides the fact that Argyrippus could by rights simply *order* the slaves to hand over the money. Argyrippus is shown to be too weak to consider this. The potential insult at play here is, again, based on negative impoliteness, as Argyrippus has his social position undermined and his stage status diminished. The subversion is doubly humorous (and doubly insulting) then because it is, essentially, voluntary. As an *erus*, he has a legal right to compel obedience by physically punishing the slaves. But like Lysidamus, who eventually declares himself to be the "slave" of Olympio in order to get something he wants, Argyrippus' lust has made him foolish, a fact that the slaves already know and have previously commented on (*uti miser est homo qui amat!*, "A man in love is so pathetic!", 616). The slaves effectively begin a type of verbal duel, but then turn the insults on someone who has not explicitly agreed to participate. They *compel* his participation by promising the money he wants, and so ultimately achieve an exchange of "force-sanctioned" insults.

Their lever is so effective that Libanus and Leonida further humiliate Argyrippus, as when Leonida declares that he will make a fool of the *adulescens*, and, by implication, make Argyrippus watch while Philaenium embraces Leonida (646). This echoes Olympio's imagined torture of Chalinus, down to how Leonida coaches Philaenium in how she should speak (666–673):

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[94] That is, whether you are the one offering privilege, or receiving it.

LE. dic me igitur tuom passerculum, gallinam, coturnicem,
agnellum, haedillum me tuom dic esse uel uitellum,
prehende auriculis, compara labella cum labellis.
ARG. ten osculetur, uerbero? LE. quam uero indignum uisum est?
at qui pol hodie non feres, ni genua confricantur.   670
ARG. quiduis egestas imperat: fricentur. dan quod oro?
PH. age, mi Leonida, obsecro, fer amanti ero salutem,
redime istoc beneficio te ab hoc, et tibi eme hunc isto argento.

LE. So, say that I am your little sparrowkins, your hen, your quail,
your lamby; say that I am your little goat, or your calf.
Grab me by the ears—press your lips on mine!
ARG. Should she kiss you, *uerbero*?! LE. Does it really seem so inappropriate?
Well, dammit, you won't get the money today unless…I get my knees rubbed.   670
ARG. Well, needs must. They'll get rubbed. Are you giving what I want?
PH. Please, Leonida, baby, I'm begging: help your owner, he's in love.
Buy your freedom with your kindness…and buy him for yourself with that money!

The sweet-talk that Leonida imagines for Philaenium is very similar to what Olympio

imagined for Casina,[95] especially in lines like *tuom passerculum, gallinam, coturnicem* (660) and *meus*

pullus passer, mea columba, mi lepus (*Cas.* 138). Leonida demands a kiss (*compara labella cum labellis*,

Asin. 668), while Olympio ventriloquize Casina, demanding she be allowed to give one (*sine tuos*

ocellos deosculer, *Cas.* 136). In *Asinaria* this particular detail emerges as the most inflammatory

comment—that is, the most insulting—for Argyrippus, who is being forced to "view" the scene as it

is described. Olympio of course *wants* his fantasy scene to cause Chalinus pain ("be stuck like a

mouse in the wall," *Cas.* 140), a result that is also fantasy, but Leonida's comments above prompt a

vigorous, non-imagined response from Argyrippus. The young *erus* is shocked that Leonida would

ask Philaenium to kiss him, and in his retort he calls Leonida *uerbero*. This term, as already

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[95] I.e., in the scene where he verbally tortures Chalinus (*Cas.* 134–40).

discussed, is specific to slave characters,[96] and its appearance here implies that Argyrippus is trying to reassert authority (and social superiority) over slaves whose joking has become genuinely transgressive: a type of aggressive facework, in order to reestablish face (i.e., stage status) and realign their respective social positions. Leonida himself also seems to view the term as an insult and not as banter (*quam uero indignum uisum est?*, 669), since he replies not with a joke but with a demand that Argyrippus should debase himself physically if he wants the money he needs (*atqui pol hodie non feres, ni genua conficantur*, 670). This is a threat dressed up as a request for supplication, a possible double-entendre, but the result is clearly insulting to Argyrippus, since it diminishes his negative face wants, and makes him effectively subservient to the slave. In combination with Argyrippus' *uerbero*, we now can sense a palpable, low-level hostility between the two men; the "force sanctioned" insults found earlier are beginning to wear thin, and there is nothing else to neutralize them. The subversion here is not a matter of resistance against a hostile force, but rather full transgression: Leonida is working to insult Argyrippus on a fundamental level—to damage his face and social standing in front of the person whom Argyrippus most wants to impress and maintain face with: Philaenium.

Exactly how Leonida and Libanus can do this is another question. In his confrontation with Lysidamus, Chalinus' apparent bravery was propped up by his relationship with Cleostrata, who was acting against type in order to oppose her husband's schemes. His face and stage status were, in a way, borrowed from her. Here, the slaves are technically proxies of Demaenetus, Argyrippus' father, who has asked them to procure the money they are carrying so that his son will have the money for Philaenium's contract (*Asin.* 51-83, 89-99, 362-66), although he eventually has to play the

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[96] See for example the discussion at Lilja (1965: 54) about its distribution. This is another insult term that, at least according to our extant sources, was almost exclusive to the *palliata*. It is rarely attested in later literature, appearing once in Cicero (*ad Att.* 14.6.1) and several times in Apuleius (*Met.* 8.21, 10.7, 10.9, 10.10, 10.11). The instances in Apuleius could are very likely inspired by Plautine (or general comic) usage, as much of Apuleius' language is. Curiously, Gellius also uses the term twice (*NA* 1.26.8.2, 17.8.8.1), in instances where he puts it in the mouth of L. Calvenus Taurus, once when Taurus is ventriloquizing Plutarch.

trickster himself to get the money (579–84). In their treatment of Argyrippus the slaves certainly

behave as though they enjoy the same privileges as a *paterfamilias*, insofar as they verbally and

physically abuse Argyrippus. Nevertheless, their behavior is already over the line even for the

outrageous world of Plautine comedy; Philaenium recognizes as much, and attempts to remind

Leonida of his actual social position when she says, *age, mi Leonida, opsecro, fer amanti ero salutem*

(672). This request incorporates the style of speech that Leonida has recently imagined for

Philaenium, one marked by the use of a request formula (*opsecro* + imperative) that is often

associated with female characters in comedy, along with the *mi* vocative address that is typical of

intimate or amorous speech.[97] This intimacy is tempered by Philaenium's reference to Argyrippus

as *ero* and her use of an imperative (*fer*), both elements that remind Leonida of his actual, in-play

social position—and thus, his lack of claim to her. The reminder doesn't take, however, and for the

rest of the scene the slaves escalate their demands, with a corresponding escalation of insult

against Argyrippus.[98] The stage status both slaves adopt is far higher than that of the free

characters they insult, and the extortionate control they hold over Argyrippus and Philaenium

forces the insults used to seem sanctioned.

There is much that could be—and indeed, that has been—said about this scene, not least the

sexual overtones of the jokes involved,[99] but in considering the scene as a demonstration of

physicalized *insult*, it is useful to read Libanus' comment literally: *sic isti solent superbi subdomari,*

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[97] Barrios-Lech (2016: 210–11), Dickey (2002: 341), Dutsch (2008: 53–55).

[98] For example, at 687, Libanus once more compels Philaenium to say that she will give kisses (*amandone exorarier uis ted an osculando?*, "Do you want to be asked by petting, or by kissing?"). Then, like Leonida, he coaches her in the lovey-dovey talk he wants her to say (693–96), and this once again draws an angry response from Argyrippus. This leads directly to a climactic moment when the *adulescens* agrees to carry Libanus on his back (699–707), while Libanus calls his owner a "clever horse" (*equos...sapiens*, 704). Argyrippus comments on the indignity of the situation (*si...decorum erum uehere seruom*, "...if it's right for an owner to carry a slave", 701), to which Libanus replies, *sic isti solent superbi subdomari*, "So the proud are tamed" (702). And then, he rides the *adulescens* around the stage.

[99] Cf. Libanus' leering remark, *asta igitur, ut consuetus es puer olim*, "Go on, get ready, like you did when you were a boy", 703.

"thus the proud are tamed" (702), that is, diminished, made to lose face, insulted. This is a physical demonstration of how stage status can overcome generic social position in a comedy; in dealing with his two slaves, Argyrippus has followed the logic of insult to a startling conclusion, from mockery and figurative domination to literal, physical domination and abuse. He seems to realize this, and immediately after carrying Libanus around the stage, he finally attempts to end it by pleading, *amabo, Libane, iam sat est* ("Please, Libanus, that's enough!", 707). The phrase *sat(is) est* is a shtick-ending formula,[100] but here it is atypically used with the polite address term *amabo*, which as already noted, is almost exclusive to the speech of *female* characters.[101] The incongruity is a joke, and an unsubtle one, which implies that Argyrippus has lost so much face as now to identify as an entirely different—and schematically subordinate—character type. It also makes clear how great the status disparity between him and his slaves has become. Unlike what happens in the earlier cooperative verbal duel, where Libanus demands (and receives) an end to the joke routine, Argyrippus here cannot get the same result even when pleading, despite his notionally superior social position. Libanus tells him as much, saying *numquam hercle hodie exorabis* ("By god, you'll never persuade me today!", 707), and then digs in his "spurs" for more riding (709). As Argyrippus begs to be let free, the two slaves escalate things again, demanding that he worship them as gods (*ut deo mi immolas bouem*, "You should sacrifice a bull to me, as though a god", 713). They finally relent and promise to give him the money (*impetrasti*, "You've done it!", 721), but then still they keep teasing Argyrippus, who says, *nec quid dicatis scire nec me qur ludatis possum* ("I can't understand what you're saying, or why you're abusing me" 730). At last Libanus says *sati' iam delusum censeo* ("I think

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[100] The same phrase occurs during the first insult-duel between Libanus and Leonida as well (329), and parallel usages occur in other plays, e.g. *Bacch.* 834, *Stich.* 692, and *Trin.* 814.

[101] See in comments in Dutsch (2008: 52–53), who points out that this is the only instance in all of Roman comedy where a man addresses another man with *amabo*. Adams (1984: 61 n73) discusses the same usage.

he's had enough abuse now," 731), and then—finally—they hand over the money, but with strings attached (734-45)—the first we hear of Demaenetus' desire to take Philaenium for himself.

By this point, the stage statuses of the various characters have been radically flipped relative to their social statuses, but for what purpose? The entire segment is a wonderful bit of comedy, and is unforgettable for its zaniness, but its narrative role not totally clear. The only significant narrative development in this scene is the delivery of Demaenetus' stolen money, and that the path to get to this is rather long. The question, of course, is *why* Argyrippus accepts the abuse that he does, given that the notional rules of in-play sub-reality permit him to just order the slaves to hand it over.[102] If we accept that the play has a narrative logic, and if we do not dismiss the scene as "mere" comic embroidery, then I can see two possible explanations. The first is that Argyrippus shares a genuine intimacy, even a kind of friendship with the slaves, and this connection defuses the very demeaning insults that they aim at him. This is suggested by the slaves calling themselves *adiutores*, and according to this reading, Argyrippus' interaction with Libanus and Leonida *would* be a verbal duel based on sanctioned insults—an idea with some supporting evidence. For example, the reoccurring series of gags mentioned above elicit a parallel set of responses from Argyrippus, and these are formally similar: *ten osculetur, uerbero?*, "She should kiss you, *uerbero*?" (to Leonida, 669); *ten complectatur, carnufex?*, "She should hug you, *carnufex*?" (to Libanus, 697); *ten ego ueham?*, "*I should carry you*?" (to Libanus, 700). The repeated *te + ne + subjunctive* phrases are compositionally similar, and each instance stands at the beginning of its respective line. The outrage expressed by these outbursts is similar to that of the *uae tibi* shtick-ending response, a scene-type that I have already discussed, and so the use of these phrases in combination with the other recurring joke

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[102] The question of how (or even why) slaves get away with so many shenanigans in Plautine comedy is complicated, but at the very least, internal evidence from the extant plays supports the idea that even in "Plautinopolis" slaves could, in fact, get in serious trouble and be punished. For example, Tyndarus in *Captivi*, who is sentenced to the quarry; also, the two slave-women in *Truculentus* who are interrogated onstage while bound (775–836).

elements could indicate that the scene is a non-*bona fide* insult exchange, a scene-type often built around recurring verbal formulae. This reading is fortified if we compare the scene to another, earlier scene from the play when Libanus and Leonida mock and physically assault a different freeborn character, this time the merchant whom Demaenetus has asked them to defraud (381–503). Much of the dialogue in the merchant-insult scene also foregrounds social dynamics and social status, for example when the merchant at one point asks, *tun libero homini male seruos loquere?*, "Are you, a slave, insulting a free man?" (476–77). Though often humorous, the tone of the jokes in the scene as a whole does seem genuinely insulting, insofar as the merchant being mocked frequently becomes quite angry at what is being said. The later, parallel scene with Argyrippus appears mild in comparison, which could argue for taking it as an instance of non-hostile, albeit outrageous, banter among socially unequal friends.

Another solution is available, however. The structural parallels just mentioned are strong evidence that the scene with Argyrippus is built as an insult-joke routine, but this in and of itself does not indicate the insults used are sanctioned. The only real evidence for a cooperative (or perhaps better, neutral), non-hostile duel is that Argyrippus never seems to get truly angry at the slaves. He does have occasional outbursts, and at different times calls one or another of the slaves by various slave-specific terms that are potentially insulting,[103] but these flashes die away quickly, and never amount to any wholesale resistance to the escalating insults that he undergoes. Moreover, Argyrippus never gives as good as he gets—that is, there is no tit for the tat dished out by Libanus and Leonida—and his participation in the routine seems involuntary, given that his attempts to end it are consistently ignored. This all indicates that the scene is, in fact, hostile, that its insults are unsanctioned, and that Argyrippus is not a willing participant, but rather submits to the abuse without showing obvious signs of being insulted. A possible explanation for such a

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[103] E.g., *uerbero* at 669, *furcifer* at 677, *carnufex* at 697.

strange result is that the exchange is *intentionally* distorted, and is in fact a kind of "meta" routine wherein Plautus subverts the formal verbal duel structure that occurs elsewhere in the play—and which, in fact, introduces us to Leonida and Libanus, the two characters who have the most on-stage time in the first half of the play. The duel with Argyrippus (if we can even call it that) is the third major insult exchange that the two slaves engage in; by this point in the play, the audience would think they know what to expect from these two, and while the third exchange does echo back to the previous two, as I have already discussed, it also veers away from the expected track in having one opponent, Argyrippus, essentially concede the match, while the other opponents, Libanus and Leonida, refuse to accept that concession. If we want to find a narrative purpose in the scene, I believe the total subversion of Argyrippus' authority is it.

The subversion of his authority then fits into a larger theme of the play, and establishes a plausible character arc for the *adulescens*, which unfolds in the play's second half. When Libanus (finally) hands Argyrippus the money the young man needs to hire Philaenium "for an entire year" (*annum...perpetuom*, 721), the slave reveals the catch: the son must give his father *noctem huius et cenam* ("a night with her, and a dinner", 736). Argyrippus immediately concedes to the offer, despite its sleaziness (*iube aduenire, quaeso*, "Tell him to come, please", 736), a decision that shocks even Leonida, who is no pillar of morality (*patierin, Argyrippe, / patrem hanc amplexari tuom?*, "You're going to let your dad screw your girlfriend?", 738–39).[104] Argyrippus brushes him off by saying that "the money will make it easy to bear" (*haec faciet facile ut patiar*, 739), but does not elaborate. The claim is unconvincing on its own, and is totally belied later by Demaenetus who, at the beginning of Act V, several times asks Argyrippus to cheer up (*quin te ergo hilarum das mihi?*, 850) while the young man attends his father's dinner with Philaenium; tellingly, Argyrippus has to watch him

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[104] Note that the phrase *patierin, Argyrippe* is an emendation, and the following line is restored from later in the passage. For *amplexari* as a euphemism for "have sex with," see Adams (1982: 181–82).

kiss her (892), although he does nothing. The arrangement clearly bothers Argyrippus—so why does he agree to the deal? If the abuse scene between him and the slaves were shorter, and if the slaves simply handed the money over, the question would be more pressing, since his capitulation would be abrupt, and almost unmotivated. By introducing—even framing—the money transfer with a long bit of abuse wherein Argyrippus totally debases himself, the character's later behavior becomes consistent. Argyrippus is a cowardly person who routinely allows himself to be addressed and treated in a way that most people would never stand, and in a way that another character in the play, the Merchant, has vigorously opposed. As elsewhere in Plautus's plays, this character's response to insult individuates him, and the nature of his response telegraphs his later behavior. The slaves Leonida and Libanus are proxies for Demaenetus, their *senex* owner, and in allowing himself to be "tamed" (*subdomari*) by their abuse, Argyrippus by extension proves his unwillingness to resist Demaenetus. This decision, and this character trait, thus enable the surprising narrative shift in the fifth act of the play, whereby Diabolus, as a side character and amorous rival of Argyrippus, arranges for Cleareta, Demaenetus's wife, to find out about her husband's incipient philandering, and so stop it, rescuing Argyrippus in the process, although Argyrippus will be lucky if he can get to share Philaenium with Diabolus (917-18). All of this action proceeds directly from the abuse and humiliation that Argyrippus undergoes. His steady loss of status—stage face, and in-play prestige—shapes his narrative arc, and each reduction is brought about by insult.

3.6. Insult, Power, and Status: Some Conclusions

In this and all of the abuse scenes that I have examined in this chapter, we see again and again how relative power and stage status shift between characters engaged in insult exchanges. Whether between characters of the same generic template, or between characters of different and even

opposing types, insult scenes reveal nuances of relationship and identity that map to larger themes of the respective plays. This tendency is particularly obvious in the scenes that involve slave characters, whose social position (and thus, relative power) is focalized by the insult lexicon that they often use. Discussion of torture, physical punishment, and subjugation predominate, but the valence of these terms is so thoroughly based on context as to almost sap them of meaning, insofar as their insult potential is magnified or obviated based on the identity, intent, and personal history of the person using them. The combined result of these many subversions is chaotic: considered simply as two-dimensional, in-play entities, it is very difficult to predict or describe how insult in Plautus works, beyond the fact that it is both revelatory and subversive. The intimacy framework certainly gives some insight into Plautine insult, as discussed for example in the *matronae* scene with which I opened this chapter. Nevertheless, intimacy is only one part of the whole, as it is in some ways secondary to the status and power complications that are at the heart of many insult scenes. Insults can also be neutralized through conscious appropriation of the face-threat (as Grumio and Lysidamus do), or be sanctioned (and so non-threatening) if performed deliberately in a conventional setting. Social relations in Plautus are fluid enough that I question whether it is even useful to talk about "horizontal" and "vertical" categories at all, except as basic grounding points in the schematic formalities of the *palliata* tradition. The "stage face" that characters develop in insult scenes consistently subverts their outwardly marked social positions, a process actors would have worked through in early rehearsals, as they refined characters from the words on the page. In the next phase, this subversion becomes part of a larger spectacle, that is, actual performance, when the shifting dynamics and character elaborations that I have identified in the texts must be picked up and interpreted by an audience. This is a space where the insult criteria developed in this chapter will again have to be re-evaluated, since it is the way an audience

responds to character details (as signaled by power and status shifts) that makes them truly

meaningful. This then is what I propose to examine in the next chapter.

4. Actors + Words + Audience: Three-way Dynamics in Comic Scenes

4.1. Insults on the Stage

Plautine insults are dynamic: characters in Plautus' plays salt their dialogue with potential abuse, sometimes by dumping a provocative word (or three) in the middle of a speech and allowing it to radiate malevolence. Other times, latent insult meanings are suggested by embedded performance cues that offset otherwise innocuous words so that the light glinting off them seems just a bit wrong. Whether other characters detect these insult signals—obvious or interstitial—is a matter of plot and performative interpretation, and in the last chapter we considered the various textual cues that signal how insults can develop in interactions between actor-characters. The perspective in that chapter is hermetic, accounting only for the in-play reality, and so it ignores the most important component of theatrical performance: the audience.[1] We can think of the positive or negative "valence" of a potential insult like an atomic waveform that exists in one of many potential states until it is collapsed by the view of an outside observer. The specific terms that Plautus uses may predispose insult meaning to tip one way or the other, depending on their associations and distribution in the narrative of the play, but the final arbiter for the semantic shape these take is the view of the audience. These disparate perspectives are brought together by the theatrical event, when the play is performed specifically for a set of viewers at a specific occasion, and audience approbation is essential to success or failure of the comic performance.[2] Potential insults are hardened into actual abuse during their transition from the scripted interior

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[1] The presence of a viewing audience is perhaps the defining feature of theater, as implied even in the etymology of the word "theater" itself. See e.g. Schechner ([1976] 2004) and Revermann (2006: 3–65, 159–178) for discussion.

[2] A fact frequently noted by Roman playwrights themselves. Prologue speakers will instruct the audience in how to behave (e.g., at Plautus *Amph.* 64–96) and many of Plautus's plays close with the actors requesting applause from the audience. See discussion in Moore (1998: 9–18). Note also Terence's remarks about the perils of audience distraction in the prologue to *Hecyra* (1-7), as discussed in e.g. Gilula (1981), Parker (1996: 11–12), and Marshall (2006: 24–26). See also *ad loc* commentary of this passage in Goldberg (2014), in addition to introductory comments (p.3, 15ff) on the relevant historical and social contexts.

reality of the play to the less predictable exterior reality that encloses the viewing audience.

Plautus and his *grex* recognized this and planned accordingly, and so any examination of insult in

his comedies will need to do the same.

Of course, the audience of Roman comedy was heterogeneous, and the demographics that

composed it would have varied from occasion to occasion. The word "audience" is a convenient

cover-term used to describe the mass of individuals who were brought together for various

theatrical events, all with differing reactions to what they saw onstage. Amy Richlin describes the

process thus: "different lines of the play address different audience members in their various social

roles, thereby reinforcing those roles, and not all audience members are being addressed at any

one time."[3] Richlin originally based this idea on Louis Althusser's larger concept of "interpellation,"

the notion that a play (or other cultural experience) will reinforce the norms of a state hierarchy by

demonstrating to an audience their proper social roles. She clarifies her adaptation in a later

article, however, and applies the concept to illustrate how a truly diverse audience at the *palliata*

would have responded individually to in-play developments and prompts.[4] Specific lines sung or

spoken in a performance would have been meaningful for specific constituencies; sometimes this

significance would have been deliberate, sometimes it would have been a chance conjunction of

signal and receiver. This would be true for every compositional and thematic element at play, from

insults and jokes to the broader narrative and thematic arcs around which individual comedies

were built. Such a reality further complicates our picture of Plautine insult, as some terms or

utterances would necessarily resonate more with one specific group than with others, and even

within certain categories of person—women, slaves, the poor, the wealthy—we would have sub-

groupings and individual reactions. The same is true of any kind of language in use, and one of the

[3] Richlin (2005: 3). See also Richlin (2017a: 8) for further comments.

[4] See discussion in Richlin (2013: 351–57).

major challenges of modern sociolinguistics has been to develop taxonomic models for associating

certain language features with specific speech communities or groups of speakers. That is,

figuring out how to slice the linguistic pie.[5] The problem is especially acute for Latin, since much

of the evidence we have for Latin linguistic usage is literary (i.e., artistic language), and *all* of our

available evidence is textual: thus, written, and so mediated (at some point) by a literate person.[6]

Our picture of spoken Latin, and the dynamics of Latin pragmatic usage, is limited.

The situation is especially delicate for the language of the *palliata*, since it is an imposture of

reality. To be successful, onstage dialogue and speech must ape the rhythm and inflections of

linguistic idioms that the audience can recognize. Stage language in comedy has an additional

layer of artifice, since it is engineered (for the most part) to induce a specific effect in the listener—

laughter. Even when naturalistic, as Plautus's language is often stated to be, comic stage language

is artful and obviously different from the language speakers use spontaneously in conversation; at

the very least, stage dialogue smooths out the stumbles, false starts, and vocal tics that even the

most articulate speakers make.[7] As a dramaturgical apparatus in a scripted performance, stage

language—even that improvised or ad-libbed by the actors while onstage—wavers between

naturalism and artifice, and requires an audience to suspend their disbelief enough that they can

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[5] Examples of language features can range from the phonological (e.g., loss of "r" at word-end) or lexical
(e.g. calling a long sandwich a "hoagie" rather than a "sub") to the syntactic (e.g., presence of "be Xing"
constructions) and the pragmatic (e.g., considering certain titles—"dude," "motherfucker"—to be rude or not).
Speech communities can be defined along various axes, e.g. race, gender, geographic location, level of wealth or
education, and so on. Of course, such categories will overlap, which creates issues of association: does feature X
belong to group Y, or a blend of that group and another? Discussion of such problems is found throughout the
sociolinguistic literature, but see in particular Downes (1998: 46–92, "Language Varieties: processes and
problems") for insightful discussion and illustrative case-studies.

[6] See again the discussion of these issues in Chapter 1.3, as well as the bibliography provided there.

[7] See Jocelyn (1993) for discussion of Plautine "Mündlichkeit" and for further bibliography. See also Karakasis
(2005), which emphasizes Terence's language, but with abundant reference and bibliography related to similar
issues in Plautus.

accept and identify with the characters using it, but not so much that they cannot analyze that language for the jokes and wordplay that distinguish the play as a comedy.

How would the combination of this artifice strike a particular person in the audience? To even begin to consider the question, we have to imagine who was in the audience of a *palliata* performance, itself a difficult question. For my discussion here, I will follow Marshall in assuming that "[t]he audience of Plautine comedy was composed of individuals from every social station in Rome."[8] Evidence for this assertion is primary and based largely on metatheatrical comments by characters and prologue-speakers in the various plays; many of these are found in the prologue to *Poenulus* (17–45), and cover everything from male prostitutes (*scortum exoletum*, 17) and lictors (18) to slaves (*serui*, 23), and even married women (*matronae*, 32). Freed slaves are there hypothetically (*vel aes pro capite dent*, 24).[9] On this basis, I assume a fully mixed audience, where all of the following groups *could have* been present at performance of Plautus' plays: free, freed, and enslaved women of all types; free, freed, and enslaved men of all types; citizens of every social order and class, including magistrates; free non-citizens of varying socio-economic positions.[10] Whether people from every walk of life *were* at every *palliata* performance is impossible to know, and so the idealized audience I conjure up in subsequent discussions will, in general, be composed of these groups about equally. However, even within these categories, we must assume that reactions to on-stage action and language were diverse. Although, as Marshall suggests, Plautus may have "take[n] the diverse individuals in the audience and treat[ed] them as a corporate whole," how a person reacts to insult is still determined as much by personal identity and personal experience as by

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[8] Marshall (2006: 75). Richlin shares the same belief, as discussed at e.g. Richlin (2014: 175). Michael Fontaine advocates for a narrower audience composed of educated elites, as discussed in e.g. Fontaine (2014).

[9] This and other evidence is fully surveyed at Marshall (2006: 74–82).

[10] Marshall's comment: "All levels of society were present at Roman comedy, with no apparent restrictions based on finances, sex, age, or social position" (Marshall 2006: 76). On the presence of slaves and freedmen/freedwomen in the audience specifically, see Richlin (2014).

context.[11] Thus my discussion of the reactions that "men," "women," or "slaves" might have evinced necessarily trades in general categories, with occasional finer-grained speculation. Though my conclusions and models, then, are often based on limited evidence, I hope this will give at least some insight into the dynamics of on-stage action in relation to an audience, and provide avenues for further inquiry.

Such inquiry is certainly needed, as the question of just how much attention audiences gave to onstage action and dialogue is controversial in the scholarship. It is also fraught with attendant issues concerning the topography of ancient performance spaces, where spectators would (or could) sit in the theater, and, ultimately, the purpose of Roman comic performance. Seating location (and seating hierarchies) for Roman *ludi scaenici* is much discussed due to a passage from Livy that states in 194 BC, "the senate first watched separately from the people" (*primum senatus a populo secretus spectauit*, 34.54.4). Timothy Moore has argued that although there may not have been a formal division of seating assignments, "it was tacitly accepted that slaves and the poorest spectators would stand" when seating was scarce.[12] Others, including Marshall and Richlin, have argued that seating was more a first-come-first-served arrangement.[13] This fits with an emerging consensus about the nature of the stage space itself during Plautus' time, based on the work of Sander Goldberg, that the comic stage would have been small and *ad hoc* for each performance.[14] During at least some of the *ludi publici* held at Rome, spectators would have sat on the steps of

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[11] Marshall (2006: 77). Cf. the diverse reactions by modern audience to political speeches, sitcoms, comedy performances, or risqué jokes: even if a majority of people enjoy the event, others may be offended. Humor is to some degree *always* risky, since it always involves some violation of norms and beliefs. See the discussion of "Benign Violation Theory" in the Chapter 5.

[12] Moore (1994: 122).

[13] See Richlin (2017a: 141 n6) and Marshall (2006: 78).

[14] This is addressed more specifically in the next section.

stone temples, and the *ad hoc* stage was erected at the foot of the temple complex.[15] The space

around the stage would have been busy and full of festivalgoers, with people moving around the

periphery of the theater space and the performance itself an integral feature of the festival

landscape.

In the next section I discuss possible consequences of this arrangement on the reception of

insult, but the question of seating also plays into a larger debate about the purpose and cultural

position of Roman comedy. The debate tends toward two major positions: that the audience was

orderly and gave complete attention to performance subtleties, implying a more elite attendance;

or, that the space was chaotic and the audience mixed, which required a constant effort by the

actors to retain audience attention. Recent work by Michael Fontaine has most ardently promoted

the first idea, arguing that Plautine comedy is fundamentally Hellenistic, and that Plautus'

sophisticated wordplay provides ample evidence of this.[16] Similar assumptions about Plautine

comedy, differently framed, inform Kathleen McCarthy's work on comic slaves, as well as Allison

Sharrock's examination of literary elements in the texts of Plautus and Terence.[17] Those working

against (or oblique to) this position have relied on the authoritative work of Sander Goldberg,

discussed above, as the basis for reconstructing a theatrical space that would welcome mixed

audiences and permit close contact between performers and spectators.[18] Most significantly, Amy

Richlin's recent work effectively counters the elitist position and convincingly argues for a "bottom

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[15] See Goldberg (1998) for temple performances, and Goldberg (2018) for the size of the stage, and the chaotic atmosphere of *palliata* performances. Famously, no permanent stone theater existed in Rome until the Theater of Pompey was built in 55 BC. See also Beacham (1991: 1–85) for background discussion of early theater spaces, and Marshall (2006: 16–45) for the mechanics of performance generally.

[16] Fontaine's ideas are summarized in Fontaine (2014), and underpin the arguments made throughout Fontaine (2009), a monograph-length discussion of Plautine verbal humor. For specific critiques of Fontaine's method, see Goldberg (2011), Dutsch (2011), and Richlin (2014: 217).

[17] McCarthy (2000) and Sharrock (2009), respectively. See Richlin (2017a: 17–18) for specific critiques of McCarthy.

[18] Goldberg's ideas are generally followed by C. W. Marshall in Marshall (2006), as well.

up" view of the *palliata*.[19] I find Richlin's arguments convincing, and in my discussion here (as elsewhere) take it as read that Plautus, as well as the comic *grex*, would have "spoken" to the subaltern and low-status as much as or more than they did to educated elites. There is simply too much in the *palliata* that has to do with non-elite life, and too little evidence to indicate that *pallita* comedies were not broadly popular. By imagining a mixed audience, we are also free to imagine mixed plays that include jokes set at different registers, and so imagine a richer concept of "literature" and "education" than what is suggested by a binary distinction between "literate" and "illiterate," "elite" and "uneducated."[20] In the ancient world, as in the modern, bilingualism (or trilingualism, etc.) is as much a quality of the poor as it is the rich; low status and elite, the uneducated and the educated all have access. Even if we do strain the available evidence and propose a unitary, elite audience, would we find a corresponding, unitary reaction by members in that audience to the performance? Of course not, no more than we find in modern audiences. Unitary backgrounds are as impossible as unitary responses, and so given this fact, the audience I imagine is diverse, as are the reactions of that audience.

One additional complication that must be accounted for when considering onstage abuse language is the potential for insults to emerge from context and personal interpretation. In Chapter 2 I discussed how the metatheatrical relationship between audience and actors (and the characters they play) can affect the outcome of an insult, but my analysis is restricted to the scene where Euclio addresses the audience directly, and does not consider how audience attention systemically affects insult meaning during a performance. A great deal of Plautus' dramatic technique is metatheatrical, insofar as it is "theater that demonstrates an awareness of its own

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[19] Programmatically laid out in Richlin (2014), and Richlin (2017b), and now fully articulated in Richlin (2017a), in which see especially Chapter 1 (pp.1–68) for complete background on different approaches to the question.

[20] See for example discussion in Horsfall (2003: 48–63) about different models of "culture" and education. As Horsfall and others have pointed out, "education" does not mean simply learning literature and oratory at school.

theatricality," and even the most serious of Plautus' plays feature frequent reminders of their

essential "playness."[21] Metatheatrical moments can include showy setpieces, as when the *choragus*

in *Curculio* points out various disreputable members of the audience during a mid-play interlude

(462–86), but bread-and-butter techniques like the joking aside and the soliloquy are much more

common and are just as metatheatrical, in that they shift the audience from passive observation to

active collusion with an actor.[22] Since these cues necessarily puncture the illusion of separation

between audience and actors (that is, the presentation of a conversation or situation as "real," with

the audience as eavesdroppers/voyeurs), they also influence the emotional reactions that the

audience develops through their attention to the action in the play. Most importantly, and as is

apparent in the scene where Euclio insults the audience, such metatheatrical, puncturing elements

can shift an audience's affections from sympathy for characters *as constructs* to feeling an

attachment for them as part of the spectacle that is being staged.

This is consequential for insults as a system in Plautus' plays: if the valence of an insult is

determined by context and the personal relationships of those speakers using the term, then it

follows that Plautus' audience had final say on what was insulting. For example, at *Stichus* 715–18

the slave Sangarinus, a character within the play, tells the *tibicen* who is providing musical

accompaniment *for* the play to stop performing and have a drink of wine:

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[21] Slater ([1985] 2000: 10).

[22] The self-awareness of Plautus was influentially discussed in Slater ([1985] 2000), and has become mainstream in modern Plautine criticism. Other crucial discussions are Benz, Stärk, and Vogt-Spira (1995) and Frangoulidis (1997), but see especially Moore (1998), which develops the idea of audience "rapport" that I consider parallel to sociolinguistic concepts of intimacy and personal connection. On asides as metatheater, see Marshall (1999); for monologues and soliloquies, see Slater ([1985] 2000: 16–17, 127–30, and *passim*). For audience "collaboration" as an essential component of comedy, and comic meatheater, see again Revermann (2006: 31–45). Finally, for a review of scholarship on metatheater in Roman comedy specifically, see Petrides (2014), as well as Moodie (2007: 15–27) for an overview of work on metatheater and "pretense disruption" in both Greek and Roman comedy.

bibe, tibicen. age si quid agis, bibendum hercle hoc est, ne nega.
quid hic fastidis quod faciundum uides esse tibi? quin bibis?
age si quid agis accipe inquam. non hoc impendet publicum?
haud tuom istuc est te uereri. eripe ex ore tibias.

Drink up, piper! Do whatever you're doing—but dammit, this has to be drunk. Don't say no!
Why are you nervous about what you have to do here? Why aren't you drinking?
Do whatever you're doing...I said take it! Isn't this at public expense?
It's hardly like you to shy away. Take your pipes out of your mouth!

Plautus jokes about out-play *tibicines* elsewhere,[23] but this instance is interesting for the way

Sangarinus obliquely insults the musician when he implies the *tibicen* is a drunk (*quin bibis?...haud*

tuom istuc est te uereri).[24] The joke requires a triangle of perspectives: that of the in-play characters

who are participating in the narrative action (here a drinking party they have organized); that of

the in-play characters responding as in-play character actors to the out-play *tibicen* (who,

presumably, then responded in some way, although he does not give in and take a drink until line

762); and finally, the verbal and physical signs all of these performers send to the out-play

audience. With the addition of the audience, the triangle becomes a tangle, and we might ask

where the valence of Sangarinus' insult is negotiated in this scene, and whether it is possible to

determine what factors affected its reception. Intimacy certainly does, since the joke about the

bibulous *tibicen* requires the audience to know that theater musicians have a certain reputation.

The insult becomes a joke (rather than a mere mean-spirited comment) because of the bond

established by this knowledge, which the audience shares with the actors onstage.[25] Anyone in the

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[23] E.g., at *Pseud.* 573a the titular character remarks to the audience as he walks offstage, *tibicen uos interibi hic delectauerit*, "The *tibicen* will entertain you here for a while." Cf. *Aul.* 557–9, where the poor man Euclio complains about a *tibicina* who could "drink a fountain." On which, see Moore (1998: 92–99) for the *Pseudolus* scene, and Moore (2012: 26–63) for *tibia* and *tibicines* generally.

[24] The type of face such an inuslt might threaten depends on what we think the implication is: if the piper is too drunk to do his job, then it may be positive impoliteness, intended to exclude him from the group of performers.

[25] A type of "benign violation," using the terminology of McGraw and Warren (2010), on which I expand in the next chapter.

audience who got the joke would have been momentarily pulled into the play as a notional member of the acting *grex* (inclusion is, after all, fundamental to the nature of in-jokes—"I wonder if anyone other than me got this?"), but for the joke to work the audience must also recognize that the *tibicen* is in on the whole thing. This recognition in turn is enabled by their understanding that he is not separate from the actors, but allied with them—and that as part of the *grex* he enjoys a social intimacy with the rest of his troupe, and so knows that the joke about his drinking is not a hostile, personal comment (regardless of any possible validity in the real world).

This softening of tone is essential to the success of the joke, which is recycled and repeated several times later in the scene as Sangarinus and Stichus become more intoxicated. Each callback marks a further stage of drunkenness, and a potential increase in hostility. At 723, Sangarinus orders the *tibicen* to start playing again, presumably because he has overcome his earlier bashfulness, and is now drinking with enthusiasm. He and Stichus resume drinking together, and after both reach the "I love you, man" stage of inebriation (*haec facetia est, amare inter se riuales duos*, "This is a lovely thing: that two competitors love each other…", 729) they order the *ancilla* Stephanium to dance for them. She replies that she won't unless they give more wine to the *tibicen*, which derails their request for dancing (*siquidem mihi saltandum est, tum uos date bibat tibicini*, 757). This callback reinvokes Sangarinus' earlier comments to the *tibicen*, but takes the comedy a little further by making his intervention in the scene obligatory. Sangarinus once again orders the *tibicen* to drink (758–60), and when he is done, to play a sexy song they can all enjoy (761–62). The *tibicen* does stop playing (as indicated by the change to a spoken meter at 762), presumably without expressing any ill-will to the other actors. They can return to the joke because they have already defused the insult on which it is based, which allows the joke to be further developed without seeming cruel. The transmuted insult becomes a cuing mechanism for comic shtick, and though all in good fun, for us in the audience the joke still has a risky flavor that wafts from the latent

insult at its core. Even as a joke, the stage status ("stage face") of the piper is reduced somewhat, as the two slaves drive the conversation and give him orders, all of which keeps the joke's insult potential simmering in the background. (A potential that the [feigned] drunkenness of the two slaves would only have exacerbated.) This additional element also makes the scene seem even naughtier and more transgressive than it already does; by laughing at this transgression, the audience is implicated in it, which further strengthens their intimate connection with the actors.[26]

The above scene introduces the final lines of the play, which ends with Stichus and Sangarinus pseudo-drunkenly dancing together onstage.[27] The foregoing comic bit between them and the *tibicen* structures the conclusion of the narrative, and the perspective of the audience fills out this structure as soon as it determines the valence of the insult behind the recurring joke. The process is complex, and leads to several important questions, most importantly: how often audience perspective undermines "on the page" Plautine insult in this way, and how frequently Plautus used audience rapport to provide alternate "readings" of an insult that were not necessarily apparent to in-play characters. In the *Stichus* example above, the slaves generally treat the *tibicen* in a friendly way, and the bantering relationship between the three men is easy to see even if one misreads (or simply misses) the insult that begins the joke-run. The stage status of the *tibicen* does diminish, but he surely did not suffer a genuine loss of face. Other transactions are not so clear-cut, however: Plautine characters insult one another for a variety of reasons, and in a variety of situations, not all of them friendly. Plautus usually gives verbal clues to these in-play relationships, sometimes by means of insult scenes themselves, but the addition of an audience and its inherently out-play

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[26] The same thing occurs in modern comic performance every time an audience laughs at a joke on a sensitive or taboo topic. A good example is Louis C.K.'s notorious bit about being a parent, which he opens by saying, "The other kid we have is a girl, she's four…and she's also a fucking asshole" (*Shameless*, 2007). The line gets a huge laugh in performance, but reaction shots of the audience reveal the surprise and embarrassment many people feel at the same time.

[27] "Stichus and Sangarinus dance competing steps in turn, evidently only joining together at the very end of their dance scene" (Moore 2012: 128).

perspective could undermine these cues. If audiences are heterogeneous, then their reactions are heterogeneous. This makes the already slippery nature of Plautine insult even more so.

The issue is vital to understanding the role of insults in live comic performance, and in the rest of this chapter I will explore potential scenarios where audience perspective on insults in use might complicate outcomes that seem obvious when simply reading the text. Throughout, I will carry over the concepts and conclusions explored in the last chapter, but resituate them alongside discussion of performance in order to consider how onstage insults and impoliteness might have worked "on the ground." To begin, I will re-examine two short scenes that were discussed in the previous chapter, as test-cases to examine how an external perspective affects the deployment and reception of insult. From these I will move on to case-studies of scene-types that are pitched specifically to the audience perspective in monologues and soliloquies, all of which often contain insults, and exist in a strange perceptual space shared between actor and audience.

4.2. Viewing Staged Insult

To begin, I want to revisit the scene from *Casina* between Myrrhina and Cleostrata that I examined at the beginning of the last chapter. This is a horizontal insult exchange between two *matronae* characters of relatively equal social standing and authority, though, as previously discussed, at the end of this exchange Cleostrata seems to emerge with a superior stage status. The initial, sung greeting between the two women establishes a mutual friendship (*Cas.* 171–84):[28]

> CL. Myrrhina, salue.
> MY. salue mecastor. sed quid tu es tristis, amabo?
> CL. ita solent omnes quae sunt male nuptae: 174–5
> domi et foris aegre quod siet, sati' semper est.
> nam ego ibam ad te. MY. Et pol ego isto ad te.
> sed quid est quod tuo nunc animo aegrest?

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[28] See again the discussion in Chapter 3.1 for comments about the "on the page" politeness dynamics in this scene.

nam quod tibi est aegre, idem mi est diuidiae.   180–1
CL. credo ecastor, nam uicinam neminem amo merito magi' quam te
nec qua in plura sunt
mihi quae ego uelim.
MY. amo te, atque istuc expeto scire quid sit.

CL. Hello, Myrrhina!
MY. Goodness, hello! Why on earth are you so upset, though?
CL. That's the way things go for people in bad marriages: 174–5
at home and outside, there's always enough to go badly.
Actually, I was coming to visit you. MY. And I was coming to you!
But what's on your mind?
Whatever bothers you bothers me too.   180–1
CL. You know, I believe you, since I don't love any neighbor lady more than you.
There's no one with more qualities
that I would wish for myself.
MY. I love you, and I want to know what's going on.

The meeting between Cleostrata and Myrrhina is a kind of type-scene in Plautine comedy, in

that it involves two women meeting and speaking together. According to Moore's calculations,

male characters have significantly more spoken lines ("character verses") in comedy than female

characters do: a ratio of 86.6% male to 13.2% female.[29] As such, the presence of two women onstage

speaking to each other is a notable event,[30] and because these are *matronae* characters specifically,

it is important to remember that, at least according to the *Poenulus* prologue, actual *matronae* could

have been watching in the audience when *Casina* was performed, along with slave women and

freedwomen.[31] Within Plautus' plays, the behavior and reactions of female characters are not

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[29] Moore (2012: 385).

[30] Cf. the modern "Bechdel Test," named for cartoonist Alison Bechdel. The tests considers whether a piece of media 1) has two women characters who talk together, and 2) whether they talk about something other than a man. Properly speaking, the scene between Cleostrata and Myrrhina fails the test, as they are discussing Lysidamus, but they at least also talk about Cleostrata's property, and their friendship (if only briefly). By the standards of Plautine comedy, however, the scene is exceptional.

[31] *Poen.* 32, *matronae tacitae spectent*. Also, *nutrices* (nurses) are addressed at 28, where they are directed to leave the children in their care at home (28–30). As always, it is crucial to keep in mind that "women" onstage in the *palliata* were men in drag: see especially Marshall (2006: 56–66), Dutsch (2015), and Richlin (2017a: 281–303) on female costuming and onstage presentation of women.

homogeneous, but heterogeneous and reactive; female characters will notice the status of other women in the play and react accordingly.[32] For example, *matronae* and *meretrices* characters are natural enemies, and the discord that results is often used to drive comic plots; Marshall has pointed out that some household slave-women are treated onstage as sex slaves, and this is the case in *Casina*, where the *matrona* Cleostrata struggles throughout the play to keep her husband from having sex with the slave Casina.[33] Casina is not a *meretrix* as such, but represents the same threat to home and husband that *meretrices* in plays like *Asinaria* and *Truculentus* do.[34] The situation with the *ancilla* Casina represents a further tension between free women and slave women, both onstage and in actual Roman life, which originated in the structural inequities of the Roman slave system, as well as the vulnerability of enslaved women to predation by the *erus* of a household— again, as happens to Casina the slave in *Casina* the play.[35]

The convergence of these various audience perspectives with the meeting of the *matronae* characters Cleostrata and Myrrhina during an actual performance would have prompted differing reactions to the insults and pleasantries the characters use. As discussed in the last chapter, the conversation begins with a series of conventional verbal friendship cues between the *matronae* (*salue*, *amabo*, *amo te*), all standard politeness markers. Since both characters are *matronae*, this exchange of intimate words could signal to the audience that the women were friends. A good thing in the abstract, since Cleostrata is a central character in the play, and as discussed in the last

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[32] Amy Richlin in particular has addressed the "friction" between female comic characters at Richlin (2017a: 272–78, 303–6). See also James (2015) for the language of Plautine *matronae*, and p.110 for discussion of this scene in particular. For female comic speech generally, see again Dutsch (2008), especially Chapter 1, for details of the linguistic characterization specific to female characters. See Dutsch (2008: 31–32) for discussion of this scene specifically.

[33] Cf. also the complaint of a *senex* in a fragment of Caecilius Statius' *Plocium* that his wife has sold a slave-woman he enjoyed (Gellius 2.23.10).

[34] The competition between *matronae* and *meretrices* is sometimes even acknowledged onstage, as in the famous speech of the *Lena* in *Cist*. 29–37. See Marshall (2015).

[35] See Richlin (2017a: 274–5, 277).

chapter, her interaction with Myrrhina quickly sets out the stakes of the play, along with Cleostrata's defining strength of character. These elements are crucial for the play's narrative in isolation, but may not have necessarily been positively received by everyone in the audience. For example, a slave woman in the audience whose daily life was defined by an obligation to serve without refusal may not have been terribly sympathetic to the plight of Cleostrata the *era*, in which case Cleostrata's reluctance to follow Lysidamus' orders might have been especially galling; she at least seems to have a choice (within the world of the play), and unlike a slave, seems capable of standing up to behavior to which she objects. Similarly, some of the *matronae* in the audience may have sympathized with Cleostrata, but others were surely more conservative and so would have supported Myrrhina's position in the argument. (Namely, that Cleostrata should allow her husband to do whatever he likes with Casina the slave-woman.) The plot of *Casina* is laid out in a prologue, and so the audience would have already known why Cleostrata was upset, even before she tells Myrrhina specifically. For those who sided against her (a contingent that included some men, too, no doubt), her pleasantries with Myrrhina may not have seemed polite at all, but rather insincere and self-serving. The possible perspectives are nearly endless, and like fractals, can be split and re-split almost infinitely.

But this all assumes ideal conditions, where someone watching could even hear the dialogue the actors playing each character spoke. The audibility of onstage speech during a performance would have varied from person to person, depending on that viewer's location in the theater space, the conditions of the actor's voice, how rambunctious the audience as a whole was, and the degree of interference from other people attending the festival but not in the audience as such.[36] The

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[36] To this point, we should remember Terence's complaint in the *Hecyra* prologue: *Hecyram ad uos refero, quam mihi per silentium / numquam agere licitum est*, "I bring my *Hecyra* back to you, which I've never been able to stage in silence" (21–22). Compare requests by Plautine prologue-speakers for silence, as at *Poen.* 3: *sileteque et tacete atque animum aduortite*, "Be quiet, shut up, and pay attention!"

actors performing a comedy needed strong voices, and extensive training to use them properly, so that they could deliver lines quickly, clearly, and on-pitch. Only lines in iambic senarii were spoken without music; trochaic lines were "recited" or chanted, while *cantica* (lines in more complex meters) were sung according to a melody, and with musical accompaniment.[37] However strong the actor's voice, it had a finite range, especially in the open-air, *ad hoc* theater-spaces in which the *palliata* was performed during Plautus' time.

In addition, the actor needed to speak and sing while wearing a large mask, which naturally dampened the sound, and while swathed in a costume, which naturally impeded movement.[38] Richlin refers to this as "encasement," the complete submersion, from head to toe, of the actor into the role to be performed, with every physical signifier of the role layered on top of the actor's physical body.[39] Integral to this enclosure process would have been the use of elaborate physical gestures, just as in oratorical performance, which would have visually reinforced the main audible content—musical, vocal—of the comic performance.[40]

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[37] On the importance of an actor's voice, Moore (2012: 77–104) covers all aspects and reviews the available evidence. On the relationship between meter, music, and song, see Marshall (2006: 203–244), Moore (2008), and Moore (2012: 15–25, 92–104, and *passim*).

[38] The evidence for what—and even if—masks were used in Roman comedy is complex. Marshall assumes that Roman comic actors in Plautus' time were masked, and I follow his lead. For discussion, see Marshall (2006: 126–58), as well as Wiles (1991) for literary and material evidence for masking in Greek New Comedy.

[39] On encasement: Richlin (2017a: 49, 286).

[40] There is considerable debate about how gesture functioned in comic performance, as Marshall points out: "If there is one aspect of Roman performance that resists even the most generous speculation, it is the use of gesture" (Marshall 2006: 167). As such, my own comments about gesture will be general, and do little more than assume that Roman actors used specific gestures, that the meanings of these would have been mostly clear to those in the audience, and that the gestures used would have complemented their surrounding dialogue and music. For discussion of the issue, see Marshall (2006: 91–92, 167–70), which provides a comprehensive overview and bibliography. An influential study is Graf (1991), but see especially recent work by Dorota Dutsch (Dutsch 2013), which in addition to a full survey of the problem and the evidence relative to it, offers an elegant system for classifying and understanding theatrical gesture.

As a final impediment, all of this pageantry—costume, speech, music, gesture—took place on a small outdoor stage that, at least in some contexts, was set at the base of a temple complex.[41] The size and shape of the temporary stage erected for festival performances has been another source of debate in the scholarship, but recent work with digital models has led to promising new reconstructions, such as the model in Figure 1:
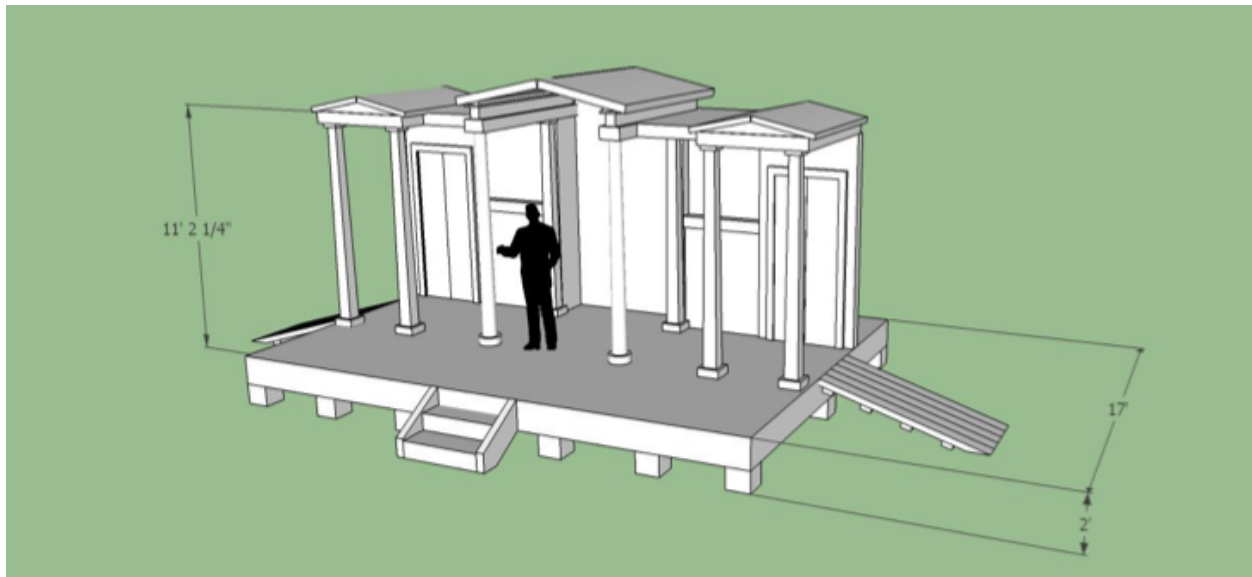
Fig. 1 — Digital Stage Reconstruction, courtesy of UCLA RomeLab.

This stage was developed as part of a digital research project at UCLA, and is based on measurements and calculations by Alan Hughes.[42] The reconstructed stage is not large, sitting only 2 feet or so off the ground, and running 20 feet or so in length. Most significant is the lack of

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[41] Cf. Goldberg (1998) and Marshall (2006: 35–37). Goldberg's reconstruction of the theater space as an extension of the temple seating is based specifically on evidence for the performance of *Pseudolus* at the Megalensian Games (*Ludi Megalenses*) in 191 BC. He extends and refines the model in Goldberg (2018), however, and suggests that the same arrangement would work even for plays staged in the Forum Romanum.

[42] Official credit: Saldaña, Johanson, and Goldberg (2018). Calculations for the model are from Hughes (2012). The model itself was developed by the UCLA RomeLab project, as part of the UCLA Humanities Virtual World Consortium. The project director is Chris Johanson, and the model itself was built by Marie Saldaña. See http://hvwc.etc.ucla.edu/moving-stage for the project.

wings, stage overhang, and other enclosing features that were regular on later, permanent stone theaters. All of these elements help to make the performance space seem contained and intimate; they were a barrier against sights and noise from outside the theater, and so helped to insulate the audience from distraction—that is, to create a sense of shared immersion. In contrast, the small stage in Figure 1 is exposed: to the environment, to the festival going on around it, and to view. While the audience surely paid some attention to the performance, distractions would have been everywhere, not least of which were people not in the audience walking behind or around the stage on their way through the festival grounds. These onlookers would have become temporary spectators themselves, but instead of a performance would have seen the actors moving around behind the scenes, waiting for cues, and the back of the stage proscenium. Some of this same material would even have been apparent to those in the audience, depending on where they sat. Indeed, the relatively small size of the stage would have conspired with the straight rows of seats formed by the temple steps to create awkward viewing angles, the exact problem that the curved seating of later permanent amphitheaters was designed to address.

All of these elements, combined with the innate complexity of insult-language in use, would have resulted in a truly polysemous theatrical experience, even for relatively straightforward exchanges, as in the initial greeting between Cleostrata and Myrrhina. For example, consider the different perspectives of audience members watching the exchange from the positions marked in Figure 2:[43]

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[43] That is, positions A, B, C, and D. I devised this simple schematic based on the reconstruction of the temple to the Magna Mater found in Goldberg (1998), which is after the site reports of Patrizio Pensabene. It is not to scale, and is intended to be suggestive rather than schematic.
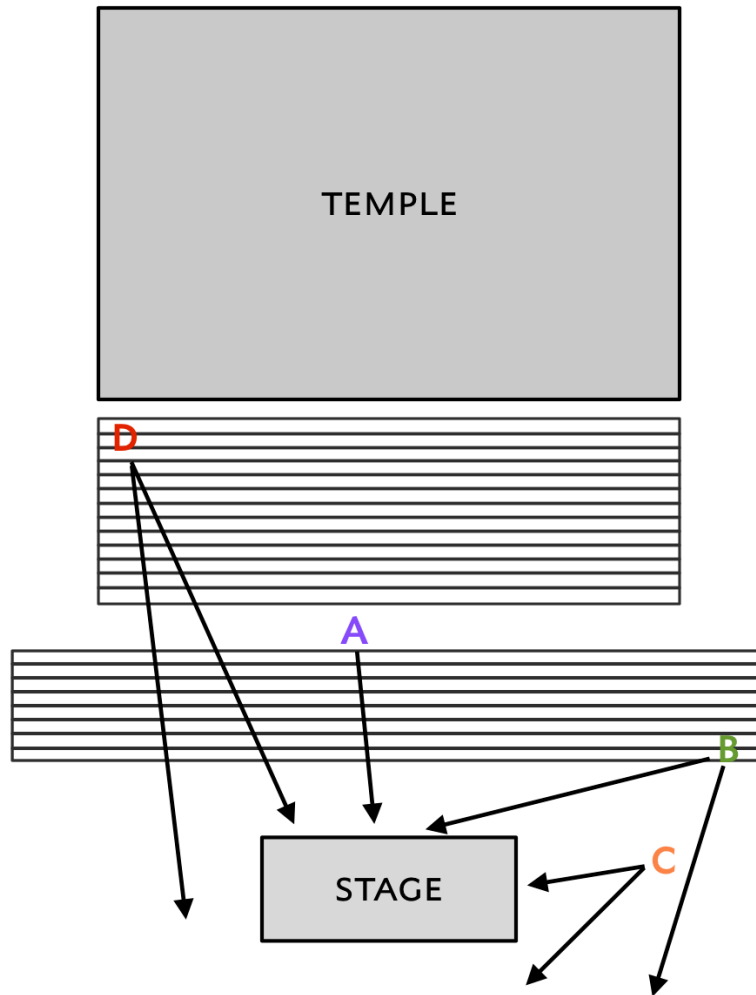
Fig. 2 — Hypothetical Audience Placement Schema

Someone at position A, at the rear of the lower bank of temple steps, would have a relatively

unobstructed view of the stage-action, despite not being in the very front rows. They would look

down on the action at a shallow angle, and though the festival background would be visible on

either side of the stage, the actors would still be the central focus of A's visual field. Assuming

regular conditions, someone at or near position A would be able to hear and see the onstage

dialogue and music clearly (as well as see any gestures or dancing performed by the actors).

Compare this to someone sitting at position B, who although slightly closer to the stage in terms of

linear distance, nevertheless would have a clear view of stage right only, and just a partial view of stage left.[44] The person at B would also be sitting at or near the level of the stage, and so (if sitting) would be looking up at the actors slightly. This angle would partially obscure some entrances and exits, and in ensemble scenes that involved three or more actors, B would certainly not be able to see all of the action.[45] The B position might even have made hearing some dialogue difficult, depending on what direction the actor was facing when delivering a line, and how much interference viewer B received from the non-audience crowd to his/her left. More importantly, the person at position B would have a split visual field, with the stage in their right field of view, and backstage plus the festival space in their left field of view, a perspective that would have restricted full immersion in the play. Even worse is position C, which involves all the problems of B, but to a higher degree. Someone standing at position C, as must have happened during performances of popular plays, would see effectively only half the performance, though their close proximity would probably allow them to clearly hear all the music and dialogue; how compelling that dialogue would have been when half of the stage (and actors occupying it) was obscured is difficult to say. The situation for someone sitting at position D would have been similar, but inverted: they would be able to see most of the stage action, albeit while looking down at a steep angle, and without it being in central focus. More importantly, the distance of position D from the stage would have made hearing performed dialogue difficult in everything but ideal conditions. Note that the scene between Cleostrata and Myrrhina incorporates a "What's that you said?" cue for Cleostrata to repeat what she has just said to Myrrhina (187-88), the kind of line (and musical phrase?) that could

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[44] "Right" and "left" here defined, as is usual, by the actor's frame of reference when looking at the audience from the stage.

[45] The number of actors onstage at any one time would vary by play and scene. Marshall calculates that some plays would require as many as eight or nine actors onstage together, e.g. at *Most.* 348–91 (8 actors), and *Pseud.* 133–69 (9 actors); his calculations are laid out in Marshall (2006: 94–114). See also Franko (2004) for discussion of ensemble scenes as comic elements.

have been ad-libbed to remedy a disturbance backstage, or even in the actual audience. This kind of repetition is in fact common in Plautus and as here is often done with a wink, as too at *Poenulus* 550-65 when the *Advocati* complain to Agorastocles that they should not have to repeat his instructions because they all rehearsed them together—but then they repeat them anyway. Musical accompaniment would have been clearer to those listening in the audience, especially given the high-pitched tone of the *tibia*, though this itself may have made the sung and recited dialogue more difficult to understand. At least the actors' dancing and gestures would have been relatively clear to someone at D, and these elements in combination with the music may have filled in some of the semantic holes created by unclear dialogue.

Indeed, it is useful to think about the various aspects of *palliata* performance—vocal, musical, gestural—as overlapping "redundant systems" that served to reinforce and strengthen one another. If the "signal" in one of these systems dipped—due to inaudible dialogue, say, or an unclear viewing angle—a viewer in the audience might be able to patch in semantic information from the other signals in order to cover the gap. This "signal repair" would have been imperfect, of course, as music and gesture cannot directly replace the expressiveness of spoken language, but in combination with the other conventional building blocks of a *palliata* comedy (plot, jokes, characters, etc.), it seems highly likely that anyone giving even minimal attention to the play could have reconstructed its basic narrative shape even if they missed some dialogue. In the best cases, gesture, music, and delivery would have cohered into a single stream of information, all serving to reinforce and refine the conventional semantics of the vocabulary and delivery used by the actors onstage. Moments of disagreement or dispute—where impoliteness and insult emerge—would have been been accompanied by musical and gestural cues that were meaningful to those watching in the audience. This reinforcement may have been fleeting, but it was essential: polite terms are not unfailingly so—consider previous discussions of English compliments that can be

used ironically—but anyone in the viewing audience of *Casina* who was familiar with Latin conversational and social norms would have understood these, and so also immediately have recognized the friendly relationship the women have.

4.3. Scene Revision: Considering Audience Attention

Even strict attention to onstage action and critical exposition in dialogue would not deliver a guaranteed outcome, due to variations in both the performance, and in reception by members of the audience. That is the case with the exposition Cleostrata delivers in her conversation with Myrrhina, during the initial meeting between the two characters, as they bicker about the role of a wife in a household: a forecast in miniature of the conflict that drives the play's narrative. As discussed in the previous section, the reaction of various people in the audience to the pleasant greetings between Cleostrata and Myrrhina—or even to the character types themselves—would prompt different reactions to the insult-sequence, one way or another. However, the musical cues that accompany the two women's introductory meeting would have produced a more constant effect, and perhaps would have guided the differing perspectives toward a certain outcome. The meter used during their initial meeting scene fluctuates from iambs to anapests to cretics, but once their conversation becomes more hostile, the meter (and the musical accompaniment that would have corresponded to it in performance) changes to a more sustained mode (185–95a):

> CL. pessumis me modis despicatur domi.
> MY. hem, quid est? dic idem (nam pol hau sati' meo
> corde accepi querellas tuas), opsecro.
> CL. uir me habet pessumis despicatam modis,
> nec mihi ius meum optinendi optio est.   190
> MY. mira sunt, uera si praedicas, nam uiri
> ius suom ad mulieres optinere hau queunt.
> CL. quin mihi ancillulam ingratiis postulat,
> quae mea est, quae meo educta sumptu siet,

uilico suo se dare,   195
sed ipsus eam amat.

CL. He disrespects me at home in the worst ways.
MY. Oh? How's that? Tell me again, please—I haven't completely
grasped your worries in my mind.
CL. At home, my husband disrespects me in the worst ways,
and I have no chance of getting my rights.   190
MY. That's crazy, if you're telling the truth—after all, husbands
are hardly able to get their rights with their wives!
CL. But he's asking me against my wishes for my slave girl—
who's mine, and who was raised at my expense—
so he can give her to his farm manager…   195
but he's in love with her himself.

Myrrhina asks Cleostrata to explain her problem at line 184, a bacchiac tetrameter, but when

Cleostrata replies at 185 (*pessumis me modis despicatur domi*) the meter shifts to cretic tetrameter,

which prevails until 195. Both of these meters would have been sung, but the change to a different,

sustained mode indicates a thematic change, one that would have been clear to an audience, as this

was consistent with the "ABC" cycle of comic meters: as compositional units, comic scenes usually

begin with iambs, move to sung/accompanied meters, and then resolve into trochaic "recited"

sections. This bacchiac-cretic sequence is part of a central, "B" portion, and so represents a

highpoint of energy and onstage activity.[46] Moreover, cretic and bacchiac meters were often

associated with female characters in Plautine comedy, and as compositional elements, they

provided a "stately" or "orderly" sense to a scene.[47] However, Timothy Moore has suggested that

cretics are thematically versatile due to their balanced structure, and so can serve multiple ends:

"[a] combination of slow pace, relative orderliness, and rhythmic 'bounce' makes cretics

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[46] On this movement, see especially Marshall (2006: 203–25) and Moore (2012: 253–58).

[47] For women and bacchiac meters, see Tobias (1979); for the "feeling" of cretic and bacchiac meters, see Marshall (2006: 232–34) and Moore (2012: 190–99). For general comments on the use of musical cues in comedy, see again Moore (2008), as well as Moore (2012: 237–66) for discussion of the performance feeling(s) associated with various metrical cues, and for discussion of how metrical/musical changes correspond to narrative shifts.

appropriate both for serious moments and for scenes of great playfulness."[48] This dual nature is

perfect for the confrontation between Cleostrata and Myrrhina, since it is both serious and

humorous. Just as modern film and television scores shift key or tempo to anticipate important

on-screen events, the suddenly stable cretic meter of this passage would have been an audible cue

to the audience that what was being said was different from what had come before, and was

therefore noteworthy; at the same time, the dance each actor did would probably have changed.[49]

The combination of these cues would have carried throughout the theater space, and been

available to nearly everyone listening and watching in audience.

What about vocal delivery? If the actor playing Cleostrata delivered her lines in a hyperbolic or

excessively comical way, he might have earned some laughter, but at the expense of narrative

coherence. Cleostrata is laying out her complaint against Lysidamus and reviewing the backstory

of the play. If this were presented as silly or absurd, then Cleostrata's subsequent efforts to stymie

Lysidamus would seem empty. Similarly, the delivery choices made by the actor playing Myrrhina

during these lines would have been crucial to the larger comic arc of the scene, which only

develops during the disagreement that breaks out between the two women once Myrrhina advises

Cleostrata to knuckle under to her husband (*nam peculi probam nil habere addecet/clam uirum*, "a

proper woman shouldn't have any property separate from her husband," 199–200). Here the

exchange takes a decided turn toward insult. This deontological statement, delivered to a friend

who has just said she resents having her husband appropriate her property, is a rebuke; the

delivery of *probam*, "a proper woman," could add the implication "which you're not," a major insult

by implication. Myrrhina is not overtly impolite, since she delivers the potential insult in an

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[48] Moore (2012: 192).

[49] On dancing during the *palliata*: Moore (2012: 105–34). The dance here would be "gestural dance," which was "almost certainly ubiquitous" in the *palliata* (Moore 2012: 114).

impersonal statement (e.g., "One could say…"). But then she reinforces the potential insult with another abstract, supposedly non-personal claim: *quae habet, partum ei hau commode est,/ quin uiro aut suptrahat aut stupro inuenerit* ("…a woman who does have [property] hasn't gotten it properly,/ but has either stolen it from her husband, or gotten it by being a slut," 200–01). Myrrhina strongly implies both stealing and sexual impropriety, clear efforts to shift positive impoliteness onto Cleostrata, by excluding her from the club of "proper" *matronae*. This implication is followed by a flat denial that wives can own anything (not a historically accurate claim), and Cleostrata's response seems mild under the circumstances. But things get worse (203–12):[50]

> CL. tu quidem aduorsum tuam amicam omnia loqueris.
> MY. tace sis, stulta, et mi ausculta. noli sis tu illi aduorsari,   204–5
> sine amet, sine quod libet id faciat, quando tibi nil domi delicuom est.
> CL. satin sana es? nam tu quidem aduorsus tuam istaec rem loquere. MY. insipiens,
> semper tu huic uerbo uitato abs tuo uiro. CL. Quoi uerbo? MY. I foras, mulier.   210–12

> CL. Everything you're saying is against your friend.
> MY. Be quiet, stupid, and listen to me! You shouldn't fight him: 204–5
> let him be in love, let him do whatever he wants, since there's nothing wrong at home.
> CL. Are you nuts? Because you're really not supporting your own cause. MY. Idiot,
> you need to avoid that line from your husband— CL. What line? MY. —"Get out of my house,
>   woman!"   210–12

These lines are also in cretics (specifically, cretic tetrameter), and so continue the serious/ playful tone established earlier; here we can really see the potential of the meter to signal different reactions to a passage. In Chapter 3.1 I examined how Myrrhina's abrupt *tace sis, stulta* is in comic contrast to Cleostrata's relatively minor complaint. The insult *stulta* is of course blunted by the affection previously displayed by the two women, but the actor's delivery and stance leading up to this line would have been critical to how *well* that established intimacy was communicated. For

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[50] Note that that the line-numbers in this passage follow those in de Melo's Loeb edition, which are based on breaks in lyric meter.

example: if, while Cleostrata was speaking in lines 185–95 (the speech in sustained cretic tetrameter), the actor playing Myrrhina turned away from Cleostrata and appeared not to be listening, the audience would have been less likely to feel that the women shared any intimacy, and that they were genuine friends. The "bouncy" cretic music could have been a reinforcing cue for their friendship, however—an aural reminder of the politeness markers the women exchanged earlier. But since cretics can also be used in serious or weighty scenes, there might instead have been an additional edge to comments like *tace sis, stulta, satin sana es*, and *insipiens*, causing the audience to wonder whether the comments were a joke or not. This ambiguity could have been visually resolved or exacerbated by gesture: if during Cleostrata's speech Myrrhina made exasperated, dismissive, or comical motions, the sense of friendship between them could be undercut, thus leading some in the audience to feel that her hostility was genuine. If Myrrhina's behavior were obviously disrespectful—e.g., rude gestures, or a sarcastic tone—the playful sense of the music could then flip, and so indicate to some in the audience that they should re-evaluate the friendly relationship ostensibly established earlier in the scene. In this scenario, the sense of intimacy and mutual respect that the polite, friendly terms signified would become ironic, or even duplicitous. The actors of course knew how the narrative of the play would develop, but the choice to emphasize farcical comedy over narrative consistency would not necessarily have been fatal, depending on the audience. The comic "feel" of the later insult exchange between the two characters would then also change as a result: rather than a good-natured dispute between two friends, bookended by instances of mutual affection, the encounter becomes an example of overt, negative impoliteness—the efforts of two people to exclude the other from shared community.[51]

Of course, if handled differently, the *stulta, sanus es*, and *insipiens* cracks the women make towards one another could seem like playful banter ("jocular mockery"), rather than genuine

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[51] The bookending polite terms occur during the greetings at *Cas.* 156–80, and in closing pleasantries at 214–16.

impoliteness. The actor playing Myrrhina could behave as though exasperated, even annoyed, but if that initial sense of intimacy were retained through vocal delivery and gesture, the abuse would be neutralized for the viewing audience, possibly even sanctioned as a type of intense, mutual teasing between friends.[52] The effect would not be complete, of course, as individual members of the audience would react differently to every cue, but at a performative level the actors and musician(s) could have deliberately tried to convey the scene as teasing rather than insulting. The joke about divorce (*i foras, mulier!*, 200) might have been a key element in determining how the jokes were received by individual audience members, since it sets up the stakes of the dispute between Lysidamus and Cleostrata, but also turns on a fundamental gender distinction that existed *visually* onstage, as well as in the audience (and Roman society generally). The female characters onstage were marked by distinct costume, though onstage distinction was only visual, since the actors playing both women were male. This is a representation of female friendship from a male perspective, but one that would work as a visual signifier for women in the audience as well. On one level, the joke is descriptive, in that it encodes a fundamental power differential between Cleostrata and Lysidamus: as his wife, Cleostrata is under the control of Lysidamus, and so is vulnerable to punishment if she defies him.[53] Different audience members would no doubt have reacted to this joke differently, or for different reasons. A married man in the audience might have found it funny for the same reason that English jokes about "women drivers" or "my wife's cooking" continue to be evergreen; though not terribly funny or original (at least to many, and especially to many women), they reflect a dominant power differential, and so reinforce the same in their telling.

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[52] As seen for example in the relationship between Lucy and Ethel in the American *I Love Lucy* television series, or that of Edina and Patsy in the UK television program *Absolutely Fabulous.*

[53] This assumes a notional *cum manu* marriage arrangement.

Would women in the audience have found this joke funny? Some of them, possibly. Empirical

work on the relationship between power and humor has found that humor responses diminish as

gaps in social power widen.[54] However, if women did come to the plays, they must have found

something to enjoy in them; Richlin has pointed out that female owners onstage often take abuse,

a tendency that might have delighted some slave women in the audience.[55] On the other hand,

Sharon James emphasizes the strong onstage support given to female owners by their female

slaves.[56] Studies on jokes in contemporary American culture indicate that both men and women

find gender-based jokes against women less funny the more they psychologically identify with

women as a group.[57] As already discussed, however, women are not a unitary category, and *ancillae*

in the audience might not have identified with Cleostrata enough to see the divorce joke as

insulting. Even some *matronae* might not have been sympathetic, and so might have found the joke

darkly humorous. In addition, the venue itself would have encouraged laughter rather than

offense; expecting to laugh and experiencing the laughter of others around you is a powerful

factor for determining whether people find something funny or not.[58] Nevertheless, an *ancilla* or

other woman in the audience who found Myrrhina's divorce joke funny would at the same time

probably have seen it as an insult, since the kernel of the gag is a potential loss of face by

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[54] On social power and humor, see Knegtmans et al. (2017); for the "social distance theory of power" on which that study is based, see Magee and Smith (2013).

[55] Richlin (2017a: 303–306).

[56] James (2012).

[57] See results in e.g. Kochersberger et al. (2014). The study concludes that "male and female participants were more amused by sexist humor the less they identified with—the more they felt psychologically distant from—women as a social category" (441). See also Abrams, Bippus, and McGaughey (2015), a study that found both women and men in a sample group considered sexist humor funnier when it was targeted at members of the opposite sex.

[58] This is true even of sexist or otherwise offensive gender-based humor, as discussed in Gray and Ford (2013). See also Filani (2017), on how the venue can affect perceptions of a joke's appropriateness.

Cleostrata. For those coming at the joke from a position of resentment, this insult *is* the joke, and to enjoy one implies enjoying the other.[59]

A number of potential perspectives have emerged so far, and it is interesting to compare these to potential audience receptions of the sanctioned insult-exchange between Libanus and Leonida from *Asinaria*, also discussed in Chapter 3 (297–305):

LE. gymnasium flagri, salueto. LI. quid agis, custos carceris?
LE. o catenarum colone. LI. O uirgarum lasciuia.
LE. quot pondo ted esse censes nudum? LI. non edepol scio.
LE. scibam ego te nescire, at pol ego, qui ted expendi, scio: 300
nudus uinctus centum pondo es, quando pendes per pedes.
LI. quo argumento istuc? LE. ego dicam, quo argumento et quo modo.
ad pedes quando adligatumst aequom centumpondium,
ubi manus manicae complexae sunt atque adductae ad trabem,
nec dependes nec propendes—quin malus nequamque sis.   305

LE. Hi, you whip's playground! LI. What are you doing, dungeon warden?
LE. Chain-farmer! LI. Rod's lust!
LE. How much do you think you weigh naked? LI. Hell if I know...
LE. I knew that you didn't know, but by god, I know, because I weighed you.   300
Naked and bound, you weigh a hundred pounds...when weigh-t-ed by your feet.
LI. How's that? LE. I'll tell you how it is.
When an even hundred-pound weight is tied to your feet,
when your hands are cuffed and raised to a beam,
you don't hang high or hang low—to keep you from being bad and worthless!   305

This exchange is in trochaic septenarii, the most common meter used by Plautus.[60] The ubiquity of this verse-type made it, in some ways, unmarked, though it was a recitative meter and so had some kind of musical accompaniment. It is often found in quick comic exchanges, and the same meter prevails throughout the exchange between Libanus and Leonida.[61] The steadiness of

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[59] I discuss the mechanics of insult jokes, and address the politeness complications they entail, in Chapter 5.

[60] Discussed in Moore (2012: 172–74).

[61] See Richlin (2017a: 162–63) on the prevalence of this metrical type in both verbal duels and other kinds of abusive verbal wordplay.

this meter, and the long run of lines through which it persists here (from line 263–462) suggests that the focus of the interaction is vocal rather than musical.[62] Indeed, in this entire exchange between Libanus and Leonida the insults *are* the jokes, an example of "jocular mockery" or *uerbiuelitatio*.[63] This in-play perspective sets up the exchange as a comic setpiece that exists separate from the plot of the play. Exchanges of sanctioned insults like this seem to have been popular and entertaining.[64] People in the audience expected these exchanges in the *palliata*, and so would have recognized the significance of the mutual, joking greetings the two slaves give one another (e.g., *gymnasium flagri*, *custos carceris*), just as they must have understood it was ending when Libanus signals the resumption of normal dramatic action at line 307 and tells Leonida to stop horsing around (*uerbiuelitationem fieri compendi uolo*). The insult exchange has little narrative consequence and is effectively forgotten once the two slaves move on to other business. Aside from the inherent pleasure those watching from the audience would have gotten from the exchange, it provides little information except to indicate that Libanus and Leonida are 1) slaves, 2) somewhat scurrilous, and 3) friends. This last point is mechanically relevant for the play, insofar as from this point forward in the play the two characters function as a kind of character dyad, appearing together in every scene in which either appears, and playing off one another's behavior. This dynamic does not necessarily advance the plot, however, as the scene between Cleostrata and Myrrhina does.

Despite this, in performance the exchange still has real potential for multiple interpretations. In this exchange especially, the insults and other dialogue must be heard in order to make sense:

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[62] It is generally agreed that lines spoken in trochaic, recitative meters would have a melody, and that this would differ from the melody used in cantica. The nature of the difference is unclear, however; see discussion at Moore (2012: 102–3), which suggests that in recited meters, "words would remain dominant" over melody.

[63] See again previous discussion of this passage in Chapter 3.3 for specifics.

[64] "Insult matches like these fill the plays in order to fill the seats" (Richlin 2017a: 160). See her discussion in Richlin (2017a: 151–55) on the Latin background of these duels, and of their apparent popularity.

the trochaic meter does not change throughout, and is so common as to be wallpaper. The jokes each slave makes are on full display here, but a spectator sitting far away from the stage, or in a position where they could not hear clearly (such as positions B and D, on the diagram in Figure 1) could miss the exchange entirely if conditions were imperfect. Although the two slaves may have gestured back and forth, this would not have preserved the jokes at the heart of their interaction; in fact, without the joking context provided by the tit-for-tat insults, the two might seem to be genuinely angry at one another, especially if the actors playing them were very animated, or used exaggerated gestures. However, because the interchange contains little non-joke (i.e., expository) content, missing or mis-hearing a joke or two would not ruin one's understanding of the scene (or play) as whole; the jokes are quick enough and disconnected enough that an audience member could jump in or out and still enjoy the exchange as a piece of comedy. The laughs might even have been big enough to recapture the attention of someone who had become distracted. Nevertheless, it seems likely that slaves and freeborn people watching the scene would have different views of the insults used in it. For a slave, the slavery-specific insults Libanus and Leonida use are matters of everyday life; when Leonida imagines hanging Libanus, manacled, from a beam (*ubi manus manicae complexae sunt atque adductae ad trabem*, 304), he is describing a punishment inflicted on slaves, a consequence of the physical control that all slaves were subject to. A freeborn person watching the scene might sympathize with the slaves or not, but surely found the humor funny—if they did—for a different reason, one that originated in the innate privilege that the freeborn person carried, and the enslaved lacked.[65] Slaves could have seen in-group joking that helped to make light of their situation, whereas free people might have seen an entertaining pageant of

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[65] See e.g. Parker (1989) for a Freudian reading of torture jokes, focalized from an elite perspective; for a response to Parker, focalized through the view of slaves, see Richlin (2014) and Richlin (2017a: 44–45).

slaves tearing each other down and making light of their own circumstances.[66] In this latter view, the insults used would, I think, have seemed more real to the viewer, if for no other reason than that the condition of slavery entailed so drastic a reduction of both positive and negative face; to a free person, wouldn't abuse language that invoked this condition suggest the same kind of diminution?

Interestingly, the insult scene between the two *matronae* closes with an end-of-gag cue that is similar to the one found in the dueling scene between Libanus and Leonida. It occurs immediately after Myrrhina makes her half-serious threat about divorce, to which Cleostrata replies *st! tace* ("Shh! Quiet!", 213). Ostensibly, she has caught sight of her husband Lysidamus, the very cad she has just been complaining about, and so is trying too scoot Myrrhina offstage before Lysidamus enters and catches them together. This in and of itself is a meta-joke, since the actor *playing* Lysidamus necessarily knows that both women are onstage, and is listening to them carefully so that he does not miss his entrance cue. Some of the audience must have seen him too, if they were watching from a view off stage right (as in positions B and C on the Figure 1 diagram).[67] The meter also shifts to anapestic tetrameter for a single line, and the actor playing Cleostrata surely telegraphed the *st! tace!* line with some kind of arm gesture—perhaps even pointing offstage—and a change in body position. Cleostrata's *st! tace* command here is one piece in a thematic whole, as she used the same short phrase in her earlier encounter with the slave Pardalisca: *st! / tace atque abi* ("Shh—hush! And get inside!", 148–50). Her command to "be quiet and leave" is repeated to Myrrhina, whom Cleostrata also orders to quiet down (213) and then *intro abi* ("Go inside!", 214). This call for silence is elsewhere echoed by Myrrhina's use of *clam* (*clam uirum*, 200). The women

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[66] Similar to the verbal duel Horace apparently saw on his journey to Brundisium, which he mockingly describes in *Satires* 1.5.

[67] Lysidamus enters stage right according to de Melo's note in the Loeb edition; see his stage directions *ad loc.*

are talking secrets—or at least, Cleostrata is—though not real secrets of course, because in-play they tell each other everything, and out-play, they spill everything to the audience. Moreover, *tace* is an empty gesture on the stage. The actor playing Cleostrata does not want either the actor playing Pardalisca, nor the actor playing Myrrhina to genuinely quiet down, else the audience listening would not be able to hear. The actors playing this scene could have delivered their "quiet" lines in an exaggerated stage whisper, but this would have been more affect than anything else.[68] Although quite short, the *st! tace!* line still acts as a complex performative signal that also serves as a scene-ender with several referential levels. Within the world of the play, it effectively punctuates the concern Cleostrata has just expressed to Myrrhina about her husband, and so reminds the watching audience of the narrative stakes of the play. But it also acts a type of submerged insult against Myrrhina, at least in the view of the audience, since it makes a direct parallel between Cleostrata's behavior toward her slave and her behavior toward her good friend. In both interactions, Cleostrata takes charge and wields her authority. As a mechanical cue, the line (and accompanying physical gesture) redirects audience attention to the major blocking character of the play, and in their subsequent dialogue Cleostrata and Myrrhina provide the audience with brief, essential information about the character coming onstage: *MY: quid est? CL: em! MY: quis est, quem uides? CL: uir eccum it* ("What is it?" "There!" "Who is it you see?" "That's my husband coming…", 213).

The arrival of Lysidamus and the commentary by Cleostrata and Myrrhina on this arrival also signals the ends of their time together (203–212), and ties Lysidamus' entry to Myrrhina's joke-threat about divorce (*i foras, mulier*, 210–2), which effectively ended their insult-exchange. This thematic echo is then carried through as Myrrhina exits the stage, and, after Lysidamus'

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[68] "[D]uring an outdoor masked performance any 'stage whisper' is going to be loud, clear, and hardly distinguishable from normal delivery, except by overt gesture" (Marshall 2006: 166).

monologue, Cleostrata begins a new insult encounter with Lysidamus (228–274). Whatever

reactions different people in the audience had to the dispute between the *matronae*, the scene

transition serves to gather up attention and redirect it to a new narrative segment. In performance,

the changeover would have been obvious to nearly everyone: visually, since a totally new character,

played by a new actor would enter the stage, and audibly, due to the actor's different voice, and to

changes in the musical accompaniment. Lysidamus' entry is a kind of "Speak of the devil, and he

will appear!" joke, but unlike the insults and gags used in the *uerbiuelitatio* between Libanus and

Leonida, Myrrhina's pointed divorce joke and Cleostrata's response are thematically essential to the

plot of this play.[69] In particular, the joke reinforces Cleostrata's vulnerability to reprisal (divorce or

otherwise), especially since in Plautine comedy female characters are often the ones who threaten

divorce against their ethically wayward husbands.[70] This same vulnerability never seems

immanent for Libanus and Leonida, who behave in remarkably transgressive ways throughout the

play. Anyone in the audience who understood the threat behind the divorce joke would also

understand the danger implied by Cleostrata's warning to Myrrhina that she should be quiet. Thus

the *st! tace!* cue, in addition to all of the other work it does, also marks a thematic transition from

the emotionally intimate expository conversation between two women to a non-intimate,

sustained confrontation between two opposing forces: Cleostrata, the *matrona*, and Lysidamus, the

senex.[71] At the same time, Cleostrata and Myrrhina return to the affectionate, polite language that

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[69] Note that the jokes and gags the slaves use in their scene are relevant to their *status* as slave characters: all of
their jokes and jibes originate in the lived reality of an enslaved person; e.g., the elliptical, riddling references to
physical torture with which they greet one another: *gymnasium flagri, custos carceris, catenarum colone, uirgarum
lasciuia* (*As.* 297-8). Similarly, the elaborate call-and-response joke that Leonida cooks up when asking Libanus
about his weight (299–305) is based on a form of physical torture, attested elsewhere. These status-specific jokes
reinforce the slave identities of the two characters (and of some of the actors playing them).

[70] See discussion in Richlin (2017a: 266–67).

[71] Much of this confrontation is then conducted by their respective slave proxies, Chalinus (for team Cleostrata)
and Olympio (for team Lysidamus). These characters and their mutual animosity are actually introduced in the
scene immediately before the meeting of Cleostrata and Myrrhina (*Cas.* 89–143), and the hostility on display there
provides a deep contrast to the affection displayed by the two female characters.

they used at its beginning (e.g., *amabo* 214; *igitur tecum loquar, ualeas*, 215), cues that would suggest to viewers sympathetically inclined to the *matronae* that the two characters are friends, and that the spurt of insult was effectively neutralized by the friendship (i.e., intimacy) they share.[72]

Myrrhina's joke about divorce is, ultimately aimed at the audience, and in the text alone, its vector is determined by the narrative shape of the play. Similarly, the effectiveness of any insults the *matronae* use depends on the intimacy they demonstrate for each other at the opening and close of the encounter. In actual performance, any number of factors could have complicated this relationship and its reception by members of the audience, from predisposition to dislike *matronae* to an inability to see or hear the onstage action clearly. Most importantly, specific choices by the actors themselves could have immediately undercut or strengthened both the markers of politeness, as well as the insults they potentially defuse.[73] Taking such pains to reconstruct and think through the staging of a few lines in this one scene may seem trivial, or even otiose, but the aggregate effect of the many small performance choices we mentally reconstruct significantly influences our conception of the text as an artistic entity. In performance, these choices would have been omnipresent and subtly unique for each member of the audience, with every combination just as freighted with meaning as the actual dialogue in use. This is especially true given that, unlike what happens as readers read a play, a live audience would have been able to see a character for the duration of their time onstage; for modern readers, characters (and their reactions) have a tendency to "disappear" from view the moment they stop speaking, even if they are still notionally present in the scene. Even less visible are non-speaking characters, who

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[72] Assuming that this is what the actors playing them actually evinced.

[73] To repurpose the example with which I began Chapter 1, imagine the differences in meaning that could result if the actors playing Myrrhina or Cleostrata delivered their *amo* and *opsecro* lines with an exaggerated tone of voice, or a sarcastic lilt. If carried throughout the scene, then the women would hardly seem like friends at all, but rather acquaintances, or even thinly veiled enemies. The actors playing the scene necessarily know how the general arc of the play (as do some of the audience), but this foreknowledge does not lock them in to any one performance reading; it only suggests one.

sometimes make essential interventions into onstage action, but whose importance is difficult to grasp when the comedy is played out in the "theater of the mind."[74] Unfortunately for us, living as we do over two millennia after the plays were first staged, and over a millennium after the language in which they are written ceased to be spoken, we know Plautus almost exclusively through *reading*. To fully understand the insults that he used—and thus the plays to which those insults are integral—we need to build our understanding of in-play dynamics around an assumed, physical reality.

As such, I will assume that the same level of detail and analysis applied above could be applied to every scene in Plautus, though such a task is obviously impossible. Rather, for the rest of this chapter, I will take the performance realities just enumerated as a baseline for thinking about possibilities in other scenes, via two case-studies that involve monologues and soliloquies specifically. Both are formats where the attention of an audience would have been focused exclusively on individual actors, and where every nuance of his performance would have been crucial.

4.4. Overheard Insult in *Aulularia*: a Case Study

Plautus' plays do not lack for monologues and soliloquies, and the importance of these as comic and structural elements is widely recognized in the scholarship.[75] The role of monologues and soliloquies as conduits for insults and abuse is more complicated. In the *Aulularia* scene previously discussed in Chapter 2.4, during which Euclio insults the play's audience, the insults are delivered as part of a long rant that, strictly speaking, might be considered a monologue, since throughout it

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[74] See for example the practical discussions in Prescott (1936) and Klein (2015).

[75] I am here using the conventional definition of a *monologue* as any long speech given by a character onstage; the *soliloquy* is a subspecies of monologue, given when a character is alone onstage or unnoticed by other characters. Fraenkel devotes an entire chapter to "Plautine expansions" in monologues (Fraenkel [1922] 2007: 96–144); see in addition Duckworth ([1952] 1994: 102–13), and especially Stürner (2011), for an exclusive treatment of these elements in the Plautine corpus.

Euclio stands alone and speaks to the audience. Nevertheless, we can question to what degree Euclio's interaction is, in fact, a soliloquy, since he addresses the audience as individuals, and thus effectively draws the audience as a whole into the onstage action, making them for a short time active members of the play's cast. This would be doubly true if anyone in the audience were bold enough to talk back to the actor, as the scene would effectively shift from monologue to dialogue, at least briefly. This engagement would have been increased if Euclio moved off the front of the stage and into the *cavea* space during his harangue. Moreover, Sander Goldberg has suggested that during this scene Plautus (or whoever was *choragus* for the play) might have planted "spectators" among the audience—actually shills or members of the acting troupe—who would have responded to Euclio's lines with cued responses, in order ensure that his interaction was effective.[76] This is a suggestive idea, and further complicates the question of how to classify Euclio's address.

Even without such direct interaction with the audience, Plautine soliloquies are rarely straightforward, insofar as all soliloquies necessarily imply *some* kind of audience perspective, and Plautus often exploits or even amplifies this relationship. For example, elsewhere in *Aulularia* the rich *senex* Megadorus makes a long speech about the relative merits of poor women as wives (475–536), prompted by his desire to marry the daughter of Euclio, who is a poor and miserly man.[77] Euclio is standing onstage throughout Megadorus' speech, and makes occasional comments on its content, as in the following short extract (498–504):[78]

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[76] Goldberg (2018: 141 n3). Characters in Plautus' plays sometimes mention the same tactic, as at *Amph.* 65–6, when Mercury asks *ut conquistores singula in subsellia/ eant per totam caueam*, "that inspectors walk through all the seats in the theater," to look for clacquers. See also discussion in Richlin (2017a: 145).

[77] As the *Lar Familiaris* of Euclio's household tells us at the beginning of the play, 15–22.

[78] See Stürner (2011: 228–33) for discussion of this entire monologue.

ME. nulla igitur dicat "equidem dotem ad tu attuli
maiorem multo quam tibi erat pecunia;
enim mihi quidem aequomst purpuram atque aurum dari,   500
ancillas, mulos, muliones, pedisequos,
salutigerulos pueros, uehicula qui uehar."
EUC. ut matronarum hic facta pernouit probe!
moribu' praefectum mulierum hunc factum uelim.

ME. No woman should say, "For my part, I've brought to you a dowry
much greater than the money you have;
so it's fair that I be given gold and fancy clothes,   500
female slaves, mules, mule-drivers, attendants,
slave boys that shout greetings, and carriages to carry me."
EUC. How well this man knows the ways married women behave!
I'd like this man to be made Inspector of Female Behavior!

Megadorus' complaints about and verbal abuse of women here fits into a longstanding

tradition of misogynistic complaint in Roman (and Greek) literature, but as a nexus for insult, this

scene is complex and difficult to sort out.[79] The soliloquy begins as Megadorus comments on the

advantages of marrying Euclio's daughter, whom his friends praise (475–76), but who is *indotata*,

"undowered," because she is poor. The speech ties into the central themes of this play—rich man,

poor man—and unfolds as Megadorus rationalizes why marrying a poor woman is to his

advantage. The insults he deploys (women only want money, they are irresponsible, they are

extravagant) also connect back to this same rich/poor theme. Megadorus only becomes more

imaginative and voluble as he warms to his subject, and the speech peaks with a fanciful list of the

workmen, shopkeepers and attendants the shrewish, wealthy wife he imagines would demand of

him were he to marry her (507–22). As Megadorus tells it, Euclio's daughter is a moral exemplar

because of her poverty (which necessarily makes her dependent on her husband and father). The

commentary takes on an added dimension because throughout it, Euclio is lurking (or possibly

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[79] On misogyny in literature, see e.g. discussion in Richlin (1992: 105–43) and Richlin (2017a: 252–310). See also
Fantham (2015) for female agency in Roman comedy, and Watson (1991) for slaves and dowries in Roman law.

hiding) upstage, occasionally commenting on Megadorus' statements, but out of his view—though not, of course, that of the audience. Onstage, Megadorus enters stage right, and was probably at the front edge of the stage, in a position that afforded full view to as many of the audience as possible. Euclio, although he announces his intention to go up to Megadorus and speak to him, immediately pauses, and is clearly meant to stay hidden from Megadorus, as the wealthy man acts surprised when he sees Euclio (*an audisti?*, "You listened?", 538). During Megadorus' speech, however, Euclio makes occasional, approving comments to the audience (496–97, 503–04, 523–24), until he reveals himself to Megadorus (536) and the two men begin speaking together (537ff.).[80] Toward the end of Megadorus' speech Euclio briefly remarks, *compellarem ego illum, ni metuam ne desinat memorare mores mulierum: nunc sic sinam* ("I would interrupt him, if I weren't afraid he'd stop talking about the habits of women: now I'll just let him go on," 523–24). The behavior Megadorus critiques is a matter of *mos*, "character," that most Roman of concerns, and Euclio clearly agrees with him—as perhaps do some (or more than some) in the audience (discussed more below). Where Euclio was lurking during the speech is less clear—the relatively small size of the stage did not permit anything but a faint gesture toward actually hiding oneself onstage. If the actor playing Euclio kept back too far, he risked being lost to the audience watching from extreme positions far to the right or left of the stage. In order to deliver his "whispered" lines clearly, he might have simply stood behind Megadorus a short distance, effectively hidden only by the other actor's determination not to turn around and see him.

This artifice is evident in the dialogue, since the comments both actors make are directed toward the audience, and neither acknowledges the other during this scene, *except in how they*

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[80] Such eavesdropping and commentary scenes are relatively common in Plautus' plays, as for example when Mercury spies on Sosia in *Amphitruo* (153–341), when Phaedromus listens to Curculio's rant in *Curculio* (280–304), when Charmides overhears Stasimus in *Trinummus* (1006–1069), and so on. Marshall refers to these setups as "split focus" scenes, since audience attention bounces back and forth between two speakers maintaining independent lines of dialogue (Marshall 2006: 166–67). See also Moore's discussion of how eavesdropping can build rapport with the audience at Moore (1998: 34–40).

respect cues for one another's lines. The actor playing Megadorus would naturally have paused while the actor playing Euclio spoke, and since all of Euclio's lines are possible jokes (e.g., the "Inspector of Female Behavior"), he would also have needed to wait out any audience laughter or reaction that occurred in response to the aside. The audience would have recognized this fiction as a natural part of the performance, and as a convention native to the faux-reality created by the play. But of course, Megadorus' ignorance is a pose of the actor. So: the actor playing Megadorus is listening, but the character is not. The complication occurs when we begin triangulating perspectives that would have determined the valence of the insults Megadorus uses. We know that Euclio does not find the speech insulting—quite the opposite—and he tells the wealthy man as much once he reveals himself (*nimium lubenter edi sermonem tuom*, "I gobbled up your speech only too happily!", 537). This suggests that, during Megadorus' speech, while Euclio is hidden, the actor playing him would have delivered his interjecting lines with an approving tone of voice, and may have performed approving gestures or kept an approving posture while Megadorus was speaking. We know too that Megadorus (the character) approves of what he is saying—at whom, then, are the insults directed?

At women, obviously—but what women, and to what purpose? Like Myrrhina's impersonal "it is proper to do X" jab at Cleostrata, Megadorus frames the abuse as normative—or prescriptive— behavior. The narrative frame of the scene focalizes an exclusively male perspective, and the ethical commentary in Megadorus' speech is presented as obvious and obviously correct. Moreover, Megadorus' preposterous list of servants that a rich wife would demand (e.g., *flammarii, uiolarii, carinarii*, 510) is a complex, extended joke: the list itself is absurdly long (12 lines, ll.508–519), and it becomes more outlandish as it moves from "standard" luxury servants (e.g., *fullo*, "fuller"; *aurufex*, "goldsmith," 508) to the exotic (*strophiarius*, "bra-maker"; *molocinarius*, "mallow-dyer," 514). In addition, most of the nouns in the list are asyndetic, and so could be rattled off quickly (long

lists are always funnier when delivered at speed), especially since many of the terms Megadorus

mention are nonce forms built with the *-arius* derivative suffix (e.g., *solearii…molocinarii*, 514),

inflected in the masculine plural, and so rhyme. The meter throughout Megadorus' speech is in

iambic senarii, an unaccompanied meter that was spoken (usually) without accompaniment.[81]

That means there would have been no musical cues to carry additional meaning, nor to prop up

the understanding of audience members who could not clearly hear what was being said.

Megadorus' monologue is 61 lines long in total (from 475–536), with only short interruptions by

Euclio. It would have required a strong vocal performance to be effective, though it is also possible

that its length and conventional subject matter (the failings of wealthy women) would have made

it accessible to those in the audience who could hear it only partially. The total speech is also

broken into individual sections of varying length (from 6–21 lines each), and it is easy to imagine

that in performance the actor playing Megadorus might either try to get through the shorter

sections (such as the list cited above) in a single gust of breath—the humor increasing as his

delivery became increasingly strained—or that he might deliberately pause, gasp for breath and,

exasperated, continue on with exaggerated effort.

 The net effect would have varied, depending on who was in the audience. Married men of a

certain means might consider his insults benign, and interpret them in the same vein as they

might have taken the divorce joke Myrrhina used against Cleostrata. From a male perspective of

privilege and assumed superiority, these might not be insults at all, but rather lighthearted jokes

about the foibles of wealthy, married women. The logic of condescending jokes is twisted,

requiring someone telling them to either embrace their face-threatening character, or to frame

them as non-insults; since insults are utterances designed to damage face, the idea goes, someone

in a naturally subordinate position (e.g., women with respect to men) does not have face to lose—

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[81] On lack of accompaniment and iambic senarii, see Moore (2012: 174–77).

only the superior does.[82] Could women in the audience have enjoyed Megadorus' insults as jokes? At one level, it looks like there is little for them *to* enjoy.[83] Of course, poor women in the audience, as well as slave women, may have been inclined to dislike the rich, spoiled *matrona* Megadorus describes, depending on how much they identified with the fiction he sketches out.[84] In *Cistellaria*, the *Lena* gives a speech that advises class solidarity among different ranks of women, as she advises the near-*meretrix* Selenium about the ill-will of "blue-blooded married women from the upper classes" (*summo genere gnatas, summatis matronas*, 25). The increasing absurdity of Megadorus' insults—"she would want this, and *this*, and THIS!"—could have hindered identification for some, as the woman he describes becomes less a plausible Roman *matrona* and more a caricatured boogeyman. Psychological separation from the subject of an insult-joke reduces the risk that laughing at the joke would result in damage to one's own face: "I laugh at you, and you are not me."[85] Moreover, the misogynistic jokes Megadorus makes are of a type found elsewhere in early comedy and later Roman literature, and if not actual evidence for widespread misogyny in Roman social life, they at least indicate a tolerance for it in the time when Plautus lived.[86] Similar jokes would have, presumably, been familiar to both men *and* women, which may again have conditioned laughter and papered over the insults; in this scenario, someone enjoying

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[82] This may sound absurd, but it is essentially the same argument that has been made about slave honor and slave face in Roman society. See again my discussion of this in Chapter 2.3, in reference to Euclio's insults to the slave of Lyconides.

[83] As Richlin puts it: "Considering the plays' common misogyny, their pervasive objectification of women, and the probable lack of women behind the masks of the *palliata*…it is a good question what women viewers found to enjoy, although they were certainly there" (Richlin 2017a: 253).

[84] See again Kochersberger et al. (2014) for the relationship between personal identification and assessments of humor.

[85] Indeed, this is the point of contention between Cleostrata and Myrrhina. By excluding Cleostrata from the ranks of "proper" womanhood—positive impoliteness—Myrrhina creates psychological distance, which gives space to the insult.

[86] "Whatever the truth in [real-life] individual cases, it is a fact that, onstage in the *palliata*, *matronae* serve as the butt of a centuries-old tradition of misogynistic jokes" (Richlin 2017a: 304).

the joke would consider Megadorus' misogyny to be a conventional humor cue, rather than outright abuse or insult.[87]

Whatever the social situation, reactions and responses to these jokes would have varied among men and women both, just as, for example, we see significant variation in whether modern English speakers enjoy jokes that have coarse, racist, or sexist content. Scholarship on the relationship between offensiveness and humor has consistently shown that a person's view of joke humor is inverse to his or her perception of its offensiveness.[88] The relationship between insult and humor is covered more fully in the next chapter, but for this scene we should keep in mind that an assessment of offensiveness could originate not just in identification (or not) with the butt of a joke, but with its teller as well. To consider a joke funny, a person must want to laugh, and if the teller is irritating or off-putting, even the best joke, told in the best way, can fail to land, and so turn the teller himself into the butt of a joke. Could anyone in the audience have identified with Megadorus in this scene? Or with Euclio? Neither character is particularly likable: Euclio has systematically mocked, insulted, and even physically abused everyone he has met throughout the play. Indeed, in his first scene onstage he yells at and beats his slave-woman Staphyla (40–66, 79–103), and the nasty temper he showcases here continues through most of the rest of the play.[89] Within the frame of the scene, Megadorus clearly approves of what he is saying, and the interstitial comments Euclio makes also seem positive; this could be a meeting of two unlikable characters who bond over their shared misogyny. Megadorus acts as a sort of cipher, showing up

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[87] Cf. the apparent cognitive dissonance of someone like Don Rickles, who in his autobiography talks at length and with joy about how much he loves his wife, and then dedicates an entire chapter to describing how he mocks and caricatures her in his stage act: "Without a doubt, my Barbara is the world's best sport. I say that because even though she quickly became a character in my routines, she never complained" (Rickles 2008: 129).

[88] For the correlation between humor and perceived violation of societal norms, see e.g. Veatch (1998) and McGraw and Warren (2010).

[89] Similarly, the *Lar Familiaris* for his household tells us in the prologue to *Aulularia* that Euclio is the latest in a generation of nasty misers (6–27).

to advance the plot by offering to marry Euclio's daughter, and blandly bowing out when his nephew Lyconides wants to marry her.[90] All of this is done at the behest of his sister, Eunomia, a high-status *matrona* who shares Megadorus' anti-woman feelings (122–26, 140). Megadorus is not a distinct character so much as as a thematic foil for Euclio, and is everything Euclio is not: wealthy, even-tempered, and oblivious to the complicated plot swirling around him. Euclio on the other hand is, of course, poor, but also frenetic and simmering with paranoia. As the main character of the play, he is not sympathetic, even to Megadorus, who tries to help Euclio, and whose opinions about women Euclio professes to like. Nevertheless, he has previously accused Megadorus of plotting to steal his gold: *...aurum mi intus harpagatum est. nunc hic eam rem uolt, scio, / mecum adire ad pactionem...* ("...my gold inside has been stolen—I know that he [Megadorus] wants to make a deal with me about it...", 201–2). Shortly after revealing to Megadorus that he was eavesdropping on the soliloquy, he again becomes hostile and renews the same accusation (547–86).

Crucially, Euclio's general hostility toward Megadorus in the play does not turn on the wealthy man's ideas about women, but rather on his personal wealth and what it represents to Euclio. When during his jeremiad against women's luxury Megadorus praises thrift (475–95), Euclio approves: *ita me di amabunt ut ego hunc ausculto lubens. / nimis lepide fecit uerba ad parsimoniam* ("As truly as the gods love me, I love listening to this guy—he's spoken so well about saving!", 496–97). For Euclio, female behavior and money are intertwined, and at least in principle, he seems to share Megadorus' ideas on the subject. This, at least, was something that a portion of the audience could have sympathized with. Given the extreme social upheavals and constant war taking place in Rome (and indeed, the Mediterranean generally) during the time when Plautus was writing, the uncertainties of the time and constant threats to safety and home would have exacerbated money

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[90] Lyconides raped the girl and impregnated her. Megadorus' withdrawal is so inconsequential that it happens offstage, and is mentioned only briefly by his sister at 694–95.

worries among Rome's vulnerable populations.[91] A poor person in the audience or someone who

had suffered any kind of reversal of fortune, male or female, might have found something to like in

Megadorus' complaints about conspicuous wealth and luxury; the issue was in the air at the time,

certainly, as the *Lex Oppia* attests, a sumptuary law established in 215 BC that aimed to prevent

shows of luxury by wealthy women—just as Megadorus describes.[92] Public morals are something

that everyone has an opinion about, and those opinions are nearly always directed outward: *they* do

this, but *I* do X. (And, of course, "X" is always the better, more principled choice.) Megadorus

himself is discussing *mores mulierum* (523) in this speech; Euclio and Megadorus might be

considered audience surrogates, at least for a certain section of the audience. What each person in

the audience saw through them would have differed, though I think a non-trivial number would

have approved Megadorus' comments right along with Euclio. And, that some would have

commiserated with Euclio's gold obsession and financial paranoia, even if they did not like

everything about him as a character.

In the end, the scene is a powerful demonstration of how perspective conditions the reception

and use of insults in performance. The contextual differences that lead to this varied reception

may seem obvious, but their relationship to insult specifically is rarely discussed, despite playing a

crucial role in determining the power relationships at the heart of this play's narrative. In *Aulularia*,

the fundamental line of conflict between Euclio and Megadorus (and everyone else) is wealth.

Euclio projects onto every social interaction his fear of being robbed, a concern that would have

been poignant for some viewers because we know that Euclio is not wealthy; just as many—

perhaps most—of the audience who originally watched the play were not wealthy and may have

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[91] On social upheaval and the *palliata*, see Leigh (2004) (especially Chapter 1), as well as Richlin (2014) and Richlin (2017b).

[92] On the *Lex Oppia*, see Culham (1982).

had similar concerns about theft and loss of property.[93] Euclio is the latest in a line of male relatives who have fallen into greater poverty through their miserliness, expressed through neglect of the *lar familiaris*.[94] The wealth he has found is actually money that Euclio's grandfather buried, but which the *lar* has concealed thus far due to the continued *avaritia* of the family. The *lar* has revealed it now on behalf of Euclio's daughter, who is more pious than Euclio (23–27), so that Euclio can "give her a wedding" (*quo illam facilius nuptum...daret*, 27). Crucially, the *lar* states that Euclio can use the money this way only "if he wishes" (*si uellet*, 27), and Euclio's character arc in the play involves him moving toward this choice: away from being an unrepentant jerk toward doing the right thing, when he gives the gold to his daughter for a dowry.[95]

True, Euclio is abusive, irascible, and rude, and deeply unlikable at points. Nevertheless, his poverty would have resonated for many in the audience, and his eventual turn toward generosity would have redeemed him, at least to some in the audience. Euclio acts like a crazy person while protecting his pot of gold, but we only see this as humorous because of the context: framed differently, and if played with more seriousness by an actor, it could be deeply sad, and the insults and abuse he uses would take on a much darker tone. In the play, Euclio's growing worry motivates most of the narrative conflict, and most of the play's comic interactions. Euclio's self-imposed conflict with Megadorus originates in a *class* mismatch, but in the scene discussed above we can see that their perspectives unite along another, more powerful social axis: gender.[96] The distinction

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[93] See again my discussion in Chapter 2.7 about the prevalence of anti-theft inscriptions, and the widespread social anxiety that these suggest.

[94] The *Lar* says this directly in the prologue (6–22).

[95] Note that this outcome is actually not in the play proper, as the ending is missing. The outcome is preserved in both of the *argumenta* that accompany the play, e.g.: *cum perdidisset aulam, insperato inuent / laetusque natam collocat Lyconidi* ("When he [Euclio] lost the gold, he unexpectedly finds it again and happily marries his daughter to Lyconides," Arg. I 14–15).

[96] Euclio's own misogyny is signaled at the beginning of the play when he insults and flogs Staphyla, his elderly *ancilla*.

is crucial, because their shared gender determines the tenor and type of the insults both men use; but, this convergence pushes against their status mismatch, and complicates reception of those same insults by characters within the universe of the play, *and* by members of the audience. The fact that the insults are delivered as part of a soliloquy (with occasional commentary) makes their function in the play more transparent. Megadorus ostensibly uses the soliloquy to further rationalize his decision to marry Euclio's daughter, which advances the plot and gives insight into his character. This exposition could just as well have been delivered as dialogue, however, as it is earlier (155–75): the decision to set it in a soliloquy, addressed directly to the audience as a whole, necessarily makes it more visceral, and the potential insults more immediate. The jokes pop, as does the abuse. Exactly how each audience member reacts—with laughter, offense—both strengthens and is conditioned by the ethical system that informs onstage action in the *palliata* (or at least, this play), a system that was intelligible and comfortable to a majority of the audience.

4.5. Monologue and Ambiguous Insult in *Captivi*: a Case Study

The gender-based insults in Megadorus' monologue are polyvalent, and it is relatively easy to track the conjunction of perspectives and performance possibilities that would have affected their reception by characters, as well as different people in the audience. This methodology can be extended to other, similar scenes, of which there are many.[97] Nevertheless, insults delivered in soliloquy specifically pose an interesting interpretive problem: if insults damage the face of those against whom they are used, for that damage to actually occur the target must perceive the insult. Insults delivered in a soliloquy certainly have potential to damage face, and may have hostile intent, but their only audience is, well, the actual audience itself. If the hostile message of the insults contained in the speech is never communicated to a target, then no face-damage will occur,

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[97] See for example discussion in Stürner (2011: 117–128).

although there is a *potential* to insult them. But what if the target of the insult appears to be the

speaker him/herself? The performative and pragmatic factors behind self-insult are rarely

remarked on in either literary or linguistic scholarship.[98] How self-insult works in living discourse

is an issue to consider at another time, but in a dramatic context, self-insult is explicitly

performative, and the valence of the insults used is determined by a watching audience. This

perspective must fuse with the in-play logic of the scene, however, which can create an interesting

perspectival dynamic that is rarely remarked on (from the standpoint of insult). This in itself is

surprising, because such auto-insult scenes are relatively common in Plautus' plays, and are

especially distinctive of certain characters, such as *parasiti*.[99] For example, in *Captivi*, the first

character to speak is the *parasitus* Ergasilus, who, like most *parasiti*, opens with a long monologue

about the difficulties of being a *parasitus* (69–84):[100]

> Iuuentus nomen indidit "Scorto" mihi,
> eo quia inuocatus soleo esse in conuiuio.   70
> scio absurde dictum hoc derisores dicere,
> at ego aio recte. nam scortum in conuiuio
> sibi amator, talos quom iacit, "scortum" inuocat.
> estne inuocatum <scortum> an non? planissume;
> uerum hercle uero nos parasiti planius,   75
> quos numquam quisquam neque uocat neque inuocat.
> quasi mures semper edimus alienum cibum;

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[98] This is not to say that the rhetorical and psychological aspects of self-critique receive little discussion; such is not the case. See for example Niwa and Maruno (2009), a study of how individual use of self-critical humor in a community of speakers can build intimacy. However, this study, like much other work on "self-insult," presumes that the self-critique is part of a larger discourse, and does not consider the pragmatic realities of the insult action alone.

[99] A prime example is Gelasimus in *Stichus*, who in a long speech talks about being publicly embarrassed by the *curiosi* who gawk while he sells all his worldly goods (199–216); Gelasimus goes through his various misfortunes, and steadily paints himself as an object of ridicule (or pity—often the same thing, at least in comedy). Similarly, Saturio in *Persa* describes his *parasiti* ancestors as "mice, that always eat another's food" (*quasi mures semper edere alienum cibum*, 58); as discussed below, Ergasilus will make a similar remark in *Captivi*. A defining feature of the Plautine *parasitus* was not just his hunger, but his embarrassing poverty; see discussion in Richlin (2017a: 134–36).

[100] The prologue-speaker of the play technically speaks before Ergasilus does, but he has no other lines or role in the play, and so I do not consider him a character as such.

ubi res prolatae sunt, quom rus homines eunt,
simul prolatae res sunt nostris dentibus.
quasi, quom caletur, cocleae in occulto latent,   80
suo sibi suco uiuont, ros si non cadit,
item parasiti rebus prolatis latent
in occulto miseri, uictitant suco suo,
dum ruri rurant homines quos ligurriant.

The youth have given me the name "Hooker,"
because I'm always called out during a party.   70
I know the ones who laugh at me say this is just a joke,
but I say it's accurate: when her lover tosses the dice
at a party, he calls out his party hooker: "Hooker!"
Is the hooker called on or not? Clearly yes.
But dammit, we *parasiti* are called out more clearly,   75
since nobody ever "calls us in" or asks us!
Like mice, we always eat another's food—
when it's vacation season, when people go to the country,
our teeth are on vacation at the same time.
It's like how snails go and hide when the weather's hot,   80
they live on their own juices if the dew doesn't fall.
In the same way, *parasiti* hide in misery during
the holidays, and they live off their own juices
while the people they lick are out of town.

This is a remarkable first introduction to a character, and an even more remarkable opening to

a play as tonally dark as *Captivi*, which concerns the ransoming of war captives. Other scholars

have commented on the sexual content of Ergasilus' speech, which notably clashes with the

prologue-speaker's claim only 15 lines previous that the play has no *spurcidici...uorsus*

immemorabilies ("naughty lines...that can't be repeated,," 56), and no *periurus leno* nor *meretrix mala*

("lying pimp...evil prostitute," 57).[101] Instead, as Ergasilus tells us, we have a *parasitus* called *scortum*,

possibly a joke about the sexual vulnerability of slaves and other low-status individuals, but

certainly a violation of the prologue-speaker's claim. This subversiveness tells us a great deal about

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[101] See for example comments in Fontaine (2009: 230–36) and Richlin (2017a: 110). Fontaine's discussion is helpful for noting the tonal mismatch between the play's opening and Ergasilus' speech. See also comments in Moore (1998: 70) on this speech.

Ergasilus as a character; he introduces himself via an apparent insult (*scorto*) that the *iuuentus* have given him, but he then trickily undermines the aptness of that insult by dismissing the *derisores* ("those who laugh") who say the name is used *absurde*, "mockingly." His intention here is slippery to grasp, as he first points out the name, and implies this is insulting by equating its use with *derisores*. But Ergasilus then affirms the essential correctness of the *scortum*-analogy through explaining that *parasiti* are, in fact, often shouted at during parties (*parasiti planius*)—because they are unwelcome (*quos numquam quisquam neque uocat neque inuocat*). This bit of sophistry effectively sidesteps the face-threatening potential of being called a *scortum* (positive impoliteness, excluding Ergasilus from community and personal connection), since—as Ergasilus argues it—a *parasitus*, like a *scortum* is "called on" all the time, and thus greatly liked.

This joke is especially interesting for the way Ergasilus destabilizes its implication via an elaborate (and somewhat opaque) pun: just as the *scortum* of a young man is *inuocatus* ("called on") at a *conuiuium* when the dice are rolled, so Ergasilus and other *parasiti* are *inuocatus* ("uninvited") when they are at the party. The joke turns, if it does turn, on polysemy of the *in-* from *inuocatus*; through phonological confusion of two different etyma, in Latin compounds the prefix morpheme *in-* can mean "in" or "very," as well as "not."[102] The comments about dismissing *derisores* are a feint; you expect him to say "I know they don't (or do) mean it." Instead, Ergasilus says they're right, and goes on with comments about the nature of *parasiti* that are even more abusive. The abuse is compounded when he—a *parasitus* himself—continues the speech and compares *parasiti* to mice (*mures*, 77), snails (*cocleae*, 80), and dogs (*uenatici...Molossici*, 85–6).[103] We and members of the

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[102] It is lovely that the same punning mechanism is still productive in English today, as in a famous joke from the film *Three Amigos* (1986) when the titular heroes receive a telegram asking them to come and fight the "infamous outlaw, El Guapo." After reading it, Dusty (Chevy Chase) asks, "What does that mean? Infamous?", and Ned (Martin Short) replies, "Ah, Dusty! Infamous is when you're more than famous! This guy El Guapo is not just famous, he's IN-famous!" Cf. popular confusion about the meaning the words *flammable* and *inflammable*. For discussion of this joke, see Moore (1998: 28–29) and Fontaine (2009: 231).

[103] On written expression of poverty in Rome, including the metaphor of the poor as dogs, see Woolf (2006).

audience might excuse dogs as being loyal or useful (though the word is often abusive in Latin, as well as English), but mice and snails are, at best, small and beneath notice; at worst, they are vermin that people actively despise. This latter sense is clearly what Ergasilus has in mind when he presents *parasiti* as, well, *parasites* who literally feed off of (*ligurriant*) the bodies of their "hosts." Like pests, *parasiti* are shouted at and abused, sometimes physically: *nisi qui colaphos perpeti / potes parasitus frangique aulas in caput* ("...unless you as a *parasitus* can stand a smack and pots busted on your head...", 88–9). The net image is both unflattering and humorous, and at a conceptual level, squares perfectly with Ergasilus' joke that *parasiti* are both seen at and uninvited to parties: like mice or snails, they show up uninvited, annoy everyone while making a mess of the pantry or garden, and stay until chased away (or stepped on).

As I already noted: while very funny, this extended joke about insult-joke jokes is a surprising way to open a relatively serious play. How would it have worked in performance? Ergasilus is alone onstage when he delivers the speech, and there is every indication that throughout he speaks directly to the audience. The speech changes tone somewhat toward the middle, when Ergasilus ladles out a few more chunks of exposition, another instance of re-telling for the benefit of the audience, but this time with Ergasilus' personal touch.[104] The first twenty lines or so (69–91), however, are all joke-insults about *parasiti*, again something typical of the entrance speeches of *parasitii*. This material quickly orients the audience to Ergasilus' character type, something that would also have been visually signaled by his costume.[105] Even if not, Ergasilus' character type and

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[104] Much of what he says actually doubles information already presented in the prologue; e.g., that the play takes place in Aetolia, which is at war with Elis (24, 93), and that one of Hegio's sons has been taken prisoner (9–10, 94–5). This marks Ergasilus as a character in the know, and shows us that even he disapproves of Hegio's trafficking, before we meet Hegio. For re-telling and crowd noise, see discussion of 4.1–4.2 above.

[105] For the appearance of the *parasitus*, see Csapo and Slater (1995: 71–72, 396, 401, Plate 10a). See also the discussion of costuming in Marshall (2006: 56–66), and the use of masks in Marshall (2006: 126–58). For comparison, see discussion in Wiles (1991). For *parasiti* in Greek and Roman comedy, see Corbett (1986), Tylawsky (2002), and Antonsen-Resch (2004). See also Otto (2001) for discussion of "the fool" as a recurring comic element in different world cultures.

general disposition would have quickly been made clear to a viewer. Less clear is *why* Ergasilus introduces himself in this way, and how the audience is meant to interpret the insults he uses. The question is significant because Ergasilus is a prominent character in the play, and his role is unique in the narrative. Excluding the prologue, he speaks the three longest monologues found in the play (see the chart below), but when onstage he is either always alone, or speaking exclusively with Hegio, the *senex* character who is one of the play's central antagonist.[106] The plot of *Captivi* involves Hegio's attempt to ransom his son who has been taken captive in war, and the drama resolves when Hegio regains not just this imprisoned son, but also another son whom a former slave had abducted at a young age. Ergasilus does not engineer either of those reunions—that is done by the play's other major characters, Tyndarus and Philocrates—but late in the play the parasite does tell Hegio about the return of his abducted son (and the son's captor), in order to extort food from the old man. Hegio is overjoyed, and rewards Ergasilus with the fabulous dinner requested; Ergasilus disappears from the play, and Hegio is propelled into a recognition and resolution scene, and thus the end of the play.[107]

Narratively speaking, Ergasilus is not necessary to the play's structure: his actions are largely without consequence to the plot, and what little influence he has (delivering information to Hegio) could easily have been handled by another character. Nevertheless, he is thematically important, and his dialogue and behavior—exemplified by the insults Ergasilus uses when introducing himself at the start of the play—are thematically appropriate to his character, and thus are key ingredients to the overall tonal shape of the play. Ergasilus' role is primarily comic, and the jokes he delivers in monologue and during several back-and-forth "shtickomythia" scenes with Hegio

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[106] All three of Ergasilus' monologues are canonical soliloquies as well: the play-opening entrance monologue, 69–109; "nobody likes *parasiti* anymore" monologue, 461–97; "prayer to Juppiter" monologue, 768–80.

[107] The scene in which Ergasilus negotiates the fee for his information is quite long (781–901), and includes several *par pari* comic exchanges. How Ergasilus acquires his valuable information is barely mentioned, and is irrelevant to the narrative; while mooching food down by the harbor, he happened to see the son getting off a ship (871–76).

provide a comic lightness to what is otherwise a grim and serious play about war, loss, and captivity.[108] Jokes pepper the play as a whole, of course, as in the absurd confrontation between Hegio, Aristophontes, and Tyndarus, when Tyndarus insists that he is not Tyndarus, but Philocrates (534–58). However, this bit, funny as it is, ends with Tyndarus in manacles and hauled off to the quarries to be worked to death. Ergasilus as a character avoids most of the heavy stuff— his concerns are food and, well, himself—and he provides a certain effervescence to *Captivi*. This is not to say that everything he says is light, as his complaints about starvation and hunger no doubt echo contemporary worries about wartime privation, but as a character who pops in and out of the action without affecting it significantly, Ergasilus fulfills the same comic role that slave characters perform in other plays: for example, he befuddles a straight-man character of higher prestige (782–833), he provides comic counterpoint to an otherwise serious narrative (albeit through the lens of his own suffering, e.g. 129–94), and he provides important news that leads to a resolution in the narrative's major conflict (871–76).[109] Plautus sometimes gives *parasiti* characters qualities typical of slave characters, and Ergasilus himself draws attention to this convention when, after learning some good news, he sets off to find Hegio while stating, *eodem pacto ut comici serui solent, / coniciam in collum pallium, primo ex med hanc rem ut audiat* ("in the same way comic slaves usually do, I'll throw my cloak around my neck, so he can hear this business from me first," 778–9).[110] That is, he decides

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[108] On Ergasilus as a comic element, see Moore (1998: 192): "In many ways, the antics of the parasite Ergasilus provide a welcome relief from the disconcerting actions of the main plot. He embodies the spirit of escapist comedy: the serious dilemmas of the play proper become for him mere obstacles to dinner." For Marshall's coinage "shtickomythia" and examples of it, see Marshall (1999) and Richlin (2017b: 179–92).

[109] Cf. parallels in other plays. Befuddling: Tranio tricking Theopropides at *Most.* 432–531, or Epidicus manipulating Periphanes at *Ep.* 721–31. Counterpoint: Sosia chatting with Amphitruo at *Amph.* 551–632. Bringing news: Pinacium bringing important news in *Stich.* 274–397.

[110] A major example of a *parasitus* in slave role is Curculio in *Curculio*, who even has an extended (and much discussed) "running slave" speech (280–98), for analysis of which see Moore (2012: 122–24). The thematic and structural relationship between slaves and parasites is widely recognized in the secondary scholarship; see for example discussion in Lowe (1989) and Richlin (2017a: 97–104, 110, 126–137).

to adopt a slave's costume and perform a "running slave" routine for Hegio.[111] Here and elsewhere, Ergasilus punctures the seriousness of the play's overall tone, and breaks up the flow of the plot with his jokes and irreverence.[112]

Yet, rather than a bit of Plautine excess grafted onto an otherwise straightforward narrative, Ergasilus' disruptive role makes *Captivi* the interesting, anomalous play it is. Through levity and frequent metatheatrical commentary to the audience (as in the examples already discussed), he positions himself as an emotional conduit between the audience and the onstage action. Indeed, as noted, the only people who see or interact with Ergasilus in the play are Hegio... and the audience, as laid out in Table 1:

Label	Entrance	Exit	Content of Speech
A	69	109	No physical exit; entrance monologue; stands aside when Hegio and Lorarius enter. *Meter: ia6.*
B	129	191	Back-and-forth with Hegio about arranging a dinner for Ergasilus. *Meter: ia6.*
C	461	497	Soliloquy complaining that nobody will feed him in exchange for jokes. *Meter: ia6.*
D	768	780	Mock-prayer/soliloquy giving thanks to Jupiter. No physical exit. *Meter: varying iambo-trochaic.*
E	781	900	Trades information with Hegio for a lavish dinner. No physical exit. *Meter: ba4.*
F	901	908	Soliloquy describing his love of pork. His last lines in the play. *Meter: tr7.*

Table 1: All of Ergasilus' onstage appearances.

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[111] This and similar metatheatrical "role crossing" jokes are discussed at Moore (1998: 192–93).

[112] As was seminally discussed in Fraenkel ([1922] 2007: 170–71). See also Moodie (2007: 95–153) for the apparent tendency of "subordinate" characters to do the most narrative puncturing in Plautine plays.

Note that segments D, E, and F represent Ergasilus' continuous presence on the stage for 140 lines; likewise, he is present onstage throughout A and B, another 122 lines. These are the perspectives that define Ergasilus as a character, and the only "sight lines" that determine the valence of the insults he uses. The only character other than Hegio whose dialogue Ergasilus even hears is that of the Lorarius, who briefly speaks with Hegio from 110–128; Ergasilus hangs back during this exchange, and neither Hegio nor the Lorarius see him. All of his other dialogue is with Hegio, or addressed to the audience itself. Of course, Hegio's perspective on Ergasilus is just a subspecies of the audience's: we view Hegio as he views Ergasilus, and throughout it all Ergasilus, ever the *ridiculus*, looks at us to gauge our reaction. Ergasilus speaks to the audience as often as he speaks with Hegio, and defines himself through direct speeches.[113] In each of the long soliloquies that he delivers, Ergasilus reaffirms his basic motives and character shape; throughout these speeches, he repeatedly mocks himself and behaves in absurd, even disreputable ways, as at the end of his opening speech when he explains why he is concerned about Hegio's plight (94–108):

> ...nam Aetolia haec est, illi est captus [in] Alide
> Philopolemus, huius Hegionis filius   95
> senis, qui hic habitat, quae aedes lamentariae
> mihi sunt, quas quotienscumque conspicio fleo;
> nunc hic occepit quaestum hunc fili gratia
> inhonestum et maxime alienum ingenio suo:
> homines captiuos commercatur, si queat   100
> aliquem inuenire, suom qui mutet filium.
> quod quidem ego nimis quam cupio <et opto> ut impetret;
> nam ni illum recipit, nihil est quo me recipiam.
> n<eque> ulla est spes iuuentutis, sese omnes amant;

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[113] For example: Ergasilus' longest soliloquy is near the middle of the play (461–97), and is largely detached from the onstage action. In it Ergasilus complains about his lack of food, and (as I discuss below) frets over the collapse of his typically lucrative relationship with idle young men. The speech comes between two scenes that are crucial to the dramatic narrative, but does not bear on either. Instead, it focalizes Ergasilus' perspective, and brings the audience into *his* world, which is only glancingly connected with the universe of the play's framing narrative. Ergasilus has a narrow, specific interest: he depends on Hegio and Philopolemus (Hegio's captive son) for food and comfort. Without them, Ergasilus will starve.

ill' demum antiquis est adulescens moribus,   105
quoius numquam uoltum tranquillaui gratiis.
condigne pater est eius moratus moribus.
nunc ad eum pergam...

...for this is Aetolia, and Philopolemus was captured there,
in Elis, the son of this man Hegio,   95
the old man who lives here, whose house is heartbreaking
to me, and I cry whenever I see it.
Now for his son's sake he's started with this dirty
business that's totally unlike him:
he's trading in prisoners on the chance that   100
he'll find someone he could exchange for his son.
Which I really hope and pray that he makes happen:
if he doesn't get him back, there's nowhere I can go!
There's no prospect with the young guys—they all love themselves.
Only *that* young man has traditional principles,   105
whose face I've never brightened up without reward.
His father has the same kind of values, just as he should,
I'll go see him now...

Ergasilus may be charming and self-deprecating, but his intentions are mercenary. He wants

Hegio to get his son back because the boy (Philopolemus) is an easy touch, and Hegio himself—

despite Ergasilus' confidence in this speech—is in no mood for handouts.[114] Hunger drives

Ergasilus, hunger that is the result of war, and this simple motive is a counterpoint to the "bad

business" (*quaestum...inhonestum*) that Hegio has begun by buying enslaved war-captives. The

desires of both men are selfish, but contrast in scope—what is hunger to the pain of a parent?

Regardless, Ergasilus' critique of Hegio's behavior and his belief that this is *maxume alienum ingenio*

suo ("totally unlike him") are made sharper by what we already know about Ergasilus. He freely

insults himself and is candid about the realities of his character class—the "parasitic lifestyle."

Through his self-insult at the beginning of the play, Ergasilus presents himself to the audience as a

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[114] In their first onstage meeting (129–94), Ergasilus poses to Hegio increasingly unsubtle hints that he would like some dinner. Hegio repeatedly declines, and in the end offers only *asper...uictus*, "coarse food" (188)—not at all what Ergasilus has in mind.

character with a certain perverse integrity. He "tells it like it is," at least to the audience; when he first speaks to Hegio, Ergasilus is more oblique as he flatters the old man, and even begins to weep (feigned?) tears over the misfortune of Hegio's son.[115] This too connects back to Ergasilus' opening self-insult and remarks about *parasiti*. The play's original audience, and we as readers, have a privileged view and understand that while both Ergasilus and Hegio miss the captive son, their reasons differ. However, we would not recognize this difference (or if so, only dimly) without the initial round of jocular insults that Ergasilus levies against himself.

To ensure that this important information landed with the audience, during his initial monologue "Ergasilus" (i.e., the actor playing him) would have filled the stage with as loud, animated, and arresting a performance as was possible. Like Megadorus' monologue discussed in the last section, this speech is also in iambic senarii (which continue through Ergasilus' subsequent dialogue with Hegio), thus no music would have accompanied it.[116] The lack of music would have put total focus on the actor performing Ergasilus, and this important speech would have risked being overwhelmed by crowd noise and other distractions. To capture the audience's attention throughout the monologue and provide enough momentum to carry that attention through the subsequent, similarly unaccompanied dialogue with Hegio, the actor would have needed to project with maximal energy. His initial self-insult would itself have been arresting if shouted to a crowd: "THE YOUNG MEN CALL ME 'HOOKER'...<pause for effect>...BECAUSE I AM CALLED OUT DURING A PARTY!" We might even see in this a kind of performance joke: the character who is shouted at is shouting out a joke about shouting (*invocatus*). As the monologue progressed, the jokes and self-insults would have drawn the audience in and secured attention for the expository parts of Ergasilus' speech; the candor of the insults and Ergasilus' good humor in

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[115] *Capt.* 139: HE. *ne fle.* ER. *egone illum non fleam?*, Hegio: "Don't cry." Ergasilus: "Shouldn't I cry for him?"

[116] See again Moore (2012: 174–77).

delivering them would have quickly endeared him to viewers, and made the less humorous material palatable. Many modern stand-up comedians use similar techniques to draw in and form a rapport with an audience. The technique is a hallmark of the so-called "confessional" school of stand-up comedy, a style pioneered in America by Lenny Bruce, and later, by Richard Pryor, and characterized by comedy drawn from real experiences in the comedian's life—such as Pryor's extended joke about the heart attack that almost killed him.[117] In this scene, the move was surely calculated: by immediately and candidly insulting himself, and by making the self-interest of his motives clear, Ergasilus (both character and actor) steadily increases his intimacy with the audience, which results in a corresponding *decrease* in the insult "power" of the terms he uses.

The connection is reinforced—and possibly even catalyzed—by Ergasilus' winking knowledge that he is in on the joke. The pun in *invocatus* is our first clue that Ergasilus is having fun, and he shares the fun with the audience, as though they are characters in the play—or as though he were not. This is another signal toward a shared intimacy, though it may have only landed for part of the audience, those able to hear clearly, and paying enough attention to get the gag. Either way, he and people in the audience are buddies, and so should share a laugh.[118] Later in the play, in his second monologue ("C" in Table 1), Ergasilus spells out this relationship more clearly (469–77):

> ilicet parasiticae arti maximam malam crucem,
> ita iuuentus iam ridiculos inopesque ab se segregat.   470
> nil morantur iam Lacones unisubselli uiros,
> plagipatidas, quibus sunt uerba sine penu et pecunia:
> eos requirunt, qui libenter, quom ederint, reddant domi;

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[117] From his 1979 concert film, *Richard Pryor: Live in Concert*. The style is still broadly popular today, and perhaps reached its zenith when the comedian Tig Notaro performed a show structured around her recent breast cancer diagnosis (*Tig Notaro: Live*, 2012). The earnestness of the style has also inspired various ironic burlesques, such as Steve Martin's "ramblin' guy" stand-up persona. The same irony was no doubt common in Roman (and other) comedy, though we would be more likely to call it "paracomedy" (see Hunter (1995)), in order to preserve the generic frame.

[118] That is, they share a strong rapport, as discussed in Moore (1998: 192–94).

ipsi opsonant, quae parasitorum ante erat prouincia,
ipsi de foro tam aperto capite ad lenones eunt   475
quam in tribu sontes aperto capite condemnant reos;
neque ridiculos iam terrunci faciunt, sese omnes amant.

The hell with this *parasitus* business—
since young men keep away from comedians and folks without money.   470
They don't bother with us Spartan dogs on our lonely benches,
abuse soaker-uppers—who have jokes but no food or money.
They look for those who'll gladly pay back an invitation, once they've eaten!
They do their own shopping—which used to be the territory of the *parasiti*!
They themselves go from downtown to the pimps, as boldly   475
as they condemn guilty men in county court.
They don't give two cents for comedians, and love only themselves!

Unlike his opening monologue ("A" in the table), in which he shrugs off mockery from *derisores* ("those who laugh"), this speech displays Ergasilus as upset. This time he enters with the self-descriptive *miser homo est*, "a person is pathetic" (461). The reason for his anger and self-disgust is itself a joke: Ergasilus is angry because he is not given the chance to be *ridiculus*, that is, the opportunity (a *conuiuium*) to be insulted and abused. Instead, the *iuuentus* are keeping to themselves and no longer inviting hangers-on to their dinners. They have taken on the usual menial chores assigned to *parasiti*, such as buying supplies (*opsonant*) and procuring women (*ad lenones eunt*). Ergasilus asserts that such duties are the *parasitorum…prouincia*, "territorterritory of the *parasiti*," but elsewhere in the complaint he refers to himself and others of his class as *ridiculi*, an adjective used substantively as an occupational title.[119] Importantly, the adjective is based on an insult, translated as "absurd," "silly," "ridiculous." The word is derived from the root behind the verb *rideo*, literally "I laugh," and so carries with it all the attendant, complicated motives humans find for laughter. It also brings us back, lexically and thematically, to Ergasilus' opening speech (A), where he dismisses the *derisores* (< *dē* + *rīdeō*) who mock him, except that here in speech C the

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[119] Cf. de Melo (2011b, *ad loc.*), "entertainer."

situation is reversed, and the *derisores* no longer mock him at all, although he badly needs them to.

He goes on (478–88):

> nam uti dudum hinc abii, accessi ad adulescentes in foro.
> "saluete" inquam. "quo imus una?" inquam [ad prandium]: atque illi tacent.
> "quis ait 'hoc' aut quis profitetur?" inquam. quasi muti silent,   480
> neque me rident. "ubi cenamus?" inquam. atque illi abnuont.
> dico unum ridiculum dictum de dictis melioribus,
> quibus solebam menstruales epulas ante adipiscier:
> nemo ridet; sciui extemplo rem de compecto geri;
> ne canem quidem irritatam uoluit quisquam imitarier,   485
> saltem, si non arriderent, dentes ut restringerent.
> abeo ab illis, postquam uideo me sic ludificarier;
> pergo ad alios, uenio ad alios, deinde ad alios: una res.

> When I left here a little while ago, I approached some lads downtown.
> "Hi!" I said. "Where are we going together?" I said. And they're quiet.
> "Who says 'Here,' or who's volunteering?" I said. They're like mutes—   480
> they don't even laugh at me. "Where should we eat?" I said. And they shrug.
> I tell a funny story, one of my better stories,
> with which I used to get dinners for a month.
> Nobody laughs. Right then I knew it was a conspiracy.
> Nobody was even willing to act like a mad dog   485
> so that, if they wouldn't *smile*, they'd at least show their teeth!
> I left them, after I saw that they were making fun of me like that.
> I went to others, then some more, then some more: all the same situation.

As Ergasilus tells it, the fundamental premise of his identity *as a parasitus* has broken down. His previous relationship was transactional: he supplies jokes (*ridiculum dictum*) and a willingness to be mocked (*ridiculos*, *rident*) in exchange for food. He is a comedian, he is an entertainer, he is an object of derision, but not without purpose; it is in exchange for something. Ergasilus the character speaks from within the play, but as Amy Richlin has noted, the yuks-for-food (or its stand-in, money) relationship also defined the lives of the actors performing *parasiti* and other "hungry"

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characters.[120] Dramatic actors were low-status and vulnerable. Their relationship with the audience was desperate, and largely the same as Ergasilus' with his crowd of *adulescentes*. Like Ergasilus the *ridiculus*, the job of comic actors was to entertain, and a troupe that displeased or failed to amuse an audience during a comedy show would, also like Ergasilus, no longer be able to eat. Ergasilus and the actor playing him speak directly to the audience at the same time here, and the complaint they present is inverse to what we see elsewhere in comedy. It is not mockery, abuse, or insult that Ergasilus-as-comic fears, but *indifference*. Whether live at the play or a crowd of *adulescentes* going to dinner, the audience for a comic is expected to laugh, and both comic performer and audience understand that laughter is a mark of intimacy and rapport. As we expect (and have seen elsewhere), this intimacy obviates any insults—it makes the *derisores* toothless—and so its loss is a much greater blow. Ergasilus is angry not because he is mocked, but because he is not: the silence and lack of response from is audience is a true insult (*postquam uideo me sic ludificarier*). His jokes don't even elicit scorn (*ne canem quidem irritatam uoluit quisquam imitarier*) and the intimate relationship he depends on for his livelihood has collapsed. It is equally the nightmare of *parasiti* and comic actors.

In place of the old order, where *parasiti* demean themselves for the amusement of patrons, Ergasilus finds those same patrons are now doing all the jobs themselves. He specifically mentions procuring food (*opsonant*) and prostitutes (*ad lenones eunt*), but the logic of the speech suggests that the *adulescentes* and *iuuenes* have now also begun to entertain themselves. They invite one another to dinners at home (*eos requirunt, qui libenter, quom ederint, reddant domi*), and specifically exclude poor comedians (*ridiculos inopesque ab se segregat*). In his opening monologue (A in the table),

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[120] Richlin (2017b: 171–79). Other *parasiti* in other Plautine plays also comment on this relationship, sometimes even more bluntly. For example, in *Stichus* the parasite Gelasimus, desperate for money, tells the audience that he plans to auction all of his worldly possessions (193–95). Among these are his *logos ridiculos*, "jokes" (221). The actual joke is that Gelasimus offers to sell them for a *cena* or a *prandium*, "dinner" or "lunch" (222). That is—Gelasimus is offering the transaction that all *parasiti* offer: jokes for food.

Ergasilus presents *parasiti* as completely dependent on their patrons; when the hosts are absent,

the parasites have no means of sustenance. The phrase *ridiculos inopesque* might as well be

hendiadys, then, or even a merism, for the way it so completely describes the "parasitic

experience:" namely, being poor, and the necessity of enduring abuse as a way of life.[121] As already

discussed, the *parasitus* role in Roman comedy often tracks closely to the roles played by slaves, but

here we have another commonality, in how both classes of characters—really, stand-ins for real

people—require the benevolence of someone with complete power over their well-being in order to

survive.[122] Many in the Roman audience no doubt recognized aspects of their own lives in these

depictions, and this recognition would have only strengthened their feeling of intimacy with

him.[123] This reaction was of course reciprocal, as it transmuted Ergasilus' auto-insults to jokes,

which prompted laughter; this in turn was cycled back to the actor(s) onstage, and prompted them

to work for more laughs, and so on.

How significant, then, that Ergasilus *is not* a slave, especially in a play that narratively and

thematically is all about slavery and enslavement. Ergasilus straddles categories, in that he is

notionally enslaved (by his hunger, his dependency, and his structural role), but is also legally a

free person, at least on stage.[124] He can speak from both sides of the experience, and thus is

emotionally available for a broad number of people in the audience. Ergasilus' blurry status allows

him unique insight into the events of the play, and is partially expressed in his metatheatrical

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[121] Often physical, as Ergasilus himself notes: *nisi qui colaphos perpeti / potes parasitus frangique aulas in caput* ("unless you as a *parasitus* can stand a smack and pots busted on your head," 88–89).

[122] On the notional slavery of *parasiti*, see e.g. Richlin (2017a: 110–11). This is also the main argument of McCarthy (2000: 7–34) and Fitzgerald (2000), who associate the pattern with upper-class Romans, or at most with Roman citizens.

[123] As indeed has been persuasively and extensively argued by Amy Richlin in Richlin (2014) and, especially, Richlin (2017a).

[124] The actual civil status of the actor playing Ergasilus might have been lower; he might have been a slave. If he were a Roman citizen, he would not have been in an upper census bracket. See discussion in Richlin (2017a: 16–17).

nature: he is slave and free, joker and commentator, in the play and out of it. His commentary highlights in-play themes (hunger, war, enslavement), but his self-interests also focuses audience attention, and moves it along. Although hunger and his transactional relationship with young men are the first things Ergasilus brings up, the second is of course the unfortunate Hegio and the plight of his son. Since Hegio is Ergasilus' interlocutor in the play, Hegio is necessarily a foil to Ergasilus in the scenes where they interact. Hegio, Ergasilus tells us, is also engaged in some transactional business—buying war-slaves in order to ransom back his own enslaved son—which Ergasilus claims is atypical of Hegio's character. The central conflict of the play is that two of the slaves Hegio has bought (Tyndarus and Philocrates) were slave and owner in Elis, but both are now enslaved; the twist is that Tyndarus is actually Hegio's long-lost son. Neither man wants to be enslaved, and the fictitious nature of civil-status categories is an overt theme of the play, as a *lorarius* (torturer) makes clear to the audience (and other characters). This happens in the scene when Tyndarus and Philocrates are first addressed directly, although they may have been onstage from line 1. The lines are sung through 239, and the Lorarius begins (195–200):

> Si di immortales id uoluerunt, uos hanc aerumnam exsequi,   195
> decet id pati animo aequo: si id facietis, leuior labos erit.
> domi fuistis, credo, liberi:
> nunc seruitus si euenit, ei uos morigerari mos bonust
> et erili imperio eamque ingeniis uostris lenem reddere.
> indigna digna habenda sunt, erus quae facit.   200

> If the immortal gods have wished that you endure this trouble,   195
> then you ought to suffer patiently. If you do that, the burden will be lighter.
> You were free men at home, I think:
> if slavery has now come upon you, it's a good habit to do your duty to it
> and to your owner's orders, and make slavery easy through your disposition.
> The improper things an owner does have to be considered proper.   200

Tyndarus and Philocrates reply to this softly worded but horrifying introduction by crying out: "Oh! Oh! Oh!" (200a), a response that is as heartbreaking as it is universally understandable. This scene occurs less than 90 lines after Ergasilus finishes his opening speech (which ends at 109), and immediately after Hegio leaves the stage, having finished a fifty-line back-and-forth in senarii with Ergasilus (B in Table 1). As the free characters leave the stage and the music begins, it signals a stark change in mood.[125] In every way, the song of the Lorarius is the inverse of Ergasilus' opening speech: whereas that was dense with insults and abusive jokes about *parasiti*, all of which originated with its speaker, the language in this scene is remarkably mild; indeed, he is almost polite. The *lorarius* never directly calls either Tyndarus or Philocrates *serui*, but implies it.[126] The language he uses emphasizes personal choice and morality (*uoluerunt*, *decet*, *morigerari mos bonust*, *ingeniis*), but the final clause makes clear that the choices are compulsory, and the morality imposed: *indigna digna habenda sunt*, "improper things must be considered proper." A few lines later, Tyndarus explains why they have cried out: *at nos pudet, quia cum catenis sumus*, "But we are ashamed, because we are in chains!" (203).[127] Again, the word *servus* is not used, but implied, and again, the argument is framed with the language of morality and politeness (*pudet*). The reality would have been crystal clear in performance, however, where both characters would have been dressed as slaves, and would have carried prop chains to visually reinforce their status to the audience.[128] These props were markers of their reduced status, a physically instantiated loss of

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[125] See comments about the "urgency" in lines just subsequent to this scene in Moore (2012: 228). See commentary on the mixed tone of this and subsequent exchanges with the Lorarius at Richlin (2017a: 94–97).

[126] E.g., the past tense in *fuistis…liberi*, and the empty conditional hedge in *seruitus si euenit….*

[127] A lone iambic octonarius, a meter commonly associated with slave characters (Moore 2012: 182). Its use here reinforces the situation the Lorarius has just explained.

[128] The actual costuming of Tyndarus and Philocrates in *Captivi* poses interesting problems, because the two characters switch identities. Tyndarus in particular would need to look like a plausible stand-in for Philocrates, and so must have been visually marked—by mask, and by costume—as a freeborn *adulescens*. See the extensive discussion in Marshall (2006: 149–51). For a discussion of the visual semantics of props in *Captivi*, see Ketterer (1986b: 111–18).

face, as Robert Ketterer points out: "The chains on Tyndarus and Philocrates in *Captivi* have a scenic mechanical function, but they are also a label of captives for the audience, a symbol of shame for the captives themselves, and an indication of the lenience and good nature of Hegio."[129]

The scene where Ergasilus introduces himself is all insults, but there is no lasting bite. The scene where Tyndarus and Philocrates are introduced by the *lorarius* has elements of surface politeness, but a sense of insult nevertheless dominates. Just as Ergasilus' playful humor and candor to the audience create a bond that defuses the insults he uses, in this scene the subtle menace of the *lorarius* and the horror of the enslaved men compel us to see menace latent under the polite vocabulary. This menace is couched in the language of social status—that is, face—and so manifests as a *de facto* insult as the *lorarius* "reminds" the men of their new stations. The insult-potential of the reminder is especially potent coming as it does from another slave, one explicitly charged with handling and punishing fellow-slaves; that is, Tyndarus and Philocrates, slaves themselves, are both subordinate to a different slave, a reduction that must have been especially pointed for Philocrates.

To consider how the scene would have been staged in performance is a challenge, as its comedy is not obvious. Ergasilus himself has just left the stage, but his zany energy no doubt lingered; it is entirely possible that the scene would have been played seriously, in order to emphasize and provide a foil to the many themes first introduced by Ergasilus. Whereas he is slave-like and playful, these characters are real slaves (in the narrative, and likely so in reality); whereas he brings the audience into the comedy of the play, at least in this scene, Tyndarus and Philocrates push the audience outward, into the real-life world of Roman political strife, war, and mass enslavement. Too much mugging would undercut the politeness-insults of the *lorarius*, and shift the scene into melodrama. This may have been exactly what happened, but the themes of the

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[129] Ketterer (1986a: 64).

text suggest that something more serious is going on in *Captivi*. Unlike the "cooperative monologue" from *Aulularia* discussed above, where both Euclio and Megadorus function as audience surrogates who focalize a particular view (i.e., that of free males), the viewpoint in *Captivi* is constantly moving. It begins with Ergasilus' genuine but humorous complaints about hunger, moves to Hegio's understandable worry about his son(s) and his teasing of Ergasilus, and then shifts to Tyndarus and Philocrates, and their horror at being (re-)enslaved. Perspectives are then shuffled again, and each time they are the frame of reference the audience depends on for evaluating onstage insult shifts as well.

4.6. Insult and Staging: Some Conclusions

The relationship between insult and staging is, as they say, "complicated." The conventional linguistic markers for politeness and stage status that I examined in the last chapter all still apply, but every one has the potential to be undermined, strengthened, or completely abandoned in actual performance. Even the most basic verbal cue, such as the *amabo* greeting specific to female characters, becomes fraught in a performance space. On the dramaturgical side, the actor speaking this word could say it ironically or resentfully, thus turning it into a potential insult; if accompanied by whimsical music, it could seem funny, or more somber with a different mode; if delivered alongside an exaggerated or mocking gesture, the meaning could be similarly undercut. Add to this the potential for those in the audience to interpret any given line according to their own experience and temperament—the shape of which can be intuited, but never fully deduced according to categories of gender, class, or status—and the word becomes truly unstable. This rich, almost endless polyvalence is true of all Plautine language in performance, but its significance for insult is rarely noted, partly because of how difficult it is to reconstruct. Nevertheless, the centrality of insult language to character development and narrative action in Plautus' comedies

makes the question of central importance. Thinking through the possibilities of meaning makes every line fresh, and creates exciting new possibilities for jokes and humor to spring out of insult interactions—exactly what I will examine in the next and final chapter.

5. Insults and Joke Structure: Laughing at Psychic Pain

5.1. Insults as Jokes

Plautine insults live off the page, and so do Plautine jokes. Discussions in previous chapters have repeatedly shown the complex relationship between textual and performed insult. An important feature of this relationship that I have only discussed in passing is how insults work as jokes in Plautus' plays. We have seen that insults can double as jokes in many cases, and insult exchanges can make for funny showpieces, regardless of whether they involve neutralized, sanctioned, or genuinely hostile abuse. The verbal duel between Libanus and Leonida in *Asinaria* is full of insults that double as jokes (e.g., *custos carceris*, *catenarum colone*, 297–98; see chapter 3.4), and these provide little pops of humor as the slaves toss them back and forth. The comedy of the exchange grows as the one-liners pile up. Just as funny is Euclio's outburst against the theater audience (see chapter 2.5), but for different reasons; it is a slower build, with the laughs not pegged to individual lines (though some of these may have struck people as funny), but in Euclio's slow burn, increasing anger, and climactic, metatheatrical rant. Nevertheless, as modes of expression, jokes and insults seem incompatible. Laughter is, at least in the "vernacular ideology of humor," affirming and pleasurable.[1] Is a joke anything that elicits laughter? My theoretical approach in preceding chapters has been based on the premise that insults originate with a specific intent—to harm face —and that in reception, whether by another speaker or an audience, the hostile intent of an insult can be blunted or even neutralized. What I have not considered, however, is how an insult can be funny as well, and how insults can be used to develop humorous scenes. The question is intriguing, as it entails a number of different perspectives, from all facets of the theatrical event. Are insults jokes? Yes—or rather, they can *become* jokes, depending.

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[1] The phrase and concept "vernacular ideology of humor" is adopted from Marsh (2014).

My analysis of comic insult in preceding chapters is based on the subfield of Linguistics that

studies how politeness (among other kinds of information) is communicated in speech. (The

subfield itself is usually referred to as "pragmatics.") The politeness framework puts explicit

emphasis on the purpose behind linguistic utterances, and a key component of pragmatic theories

is the intent of a speaker.[2] Insult, as demonstrated in previous chapters, is any utterance that

causes a specific effect—face damage—in an interlocutor or audience. Whether this effect occurs

and the utterance is successful depends both on the intent of the speaker, and on how the

interlocutor (or audience) interprets this intent. Intimacy, performance, context, and social power

can all modulate or complicate the reception; speakers can also insert intent where there may be

none, magnify it beyond its original scope, or even ignore it completely. Language is messy, and

communication is always a matter of averages.[3] As I discussed in Chapter 4, theatrical

communication can be even more unpredictable, because the actors onstage, however much they

may work to include the audience in the world of the play, still must deal with a group of

individuals, and not a single entity. Ultimately, all speech-based communication works only when

all those participating in a speech act cooperate and use good faith when communicating—and

interpreting.[4] The kind of cooperation expected of the participants will vary; obviously, the

expectations when arguing a legal case in court (or at the forum) differ from those when in an

informal conversation with friends. In an organized event, such as a play, the expectations are

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[2] E.g., from the introduction to Betty J. Birner's widely used introductory textbook on the subject: "The bulk of this book is devoted to describing some of the principles we follow in producing and interpreting language in light of the context, our intentions, and our beliefs about our interlocutors and their intentions" (Birner 2013: 3). See also Dynel (2016) on the relationship between humor and (im)politeness, which Dynel demonstrates is mediated by how an interlocutor (or spectator) interprets the intent behind an utterance.

[3] "Once we as communicators are left to the vagaries of implicature and inference, we have abandoned the firm ground of a strict system of encoding (into language) and decoding (back into "meanings"), and introduced the potential for an endless variety of misunderstandings" (Birner 2013: 296).

[4] Broadly, this is premise of H. P. Grice's famous "cooperative principle," although as originally formulated the principle applied only to speakers: "We might then formulate a rough general principle which participants will be expected (ceteris paribus) to observe, namely: Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Grice 1975: 45).

overwhelmingly generic, and come as much from the playwright and actors as they do from an audience's collective experience with similar events. For ancient audiences, as with modern, comedies are meant to be funny, at least in the abstract, and those watching them expect to laugh.[5] People watching a comedy that features insults may interpret these as jokes, whether the insults are intended to be funny or not. But there is just as much potential that an insult could be considered *un*-funny, even if it were intended to be a joke. Generic expectations can guide interpretation, but they do not guarantee it. The hostility at the heart of insults makes them volatile, and as I discussed in the last chapter, a person's background and individual experience are powerful determiners.

Regardless, Plautus does seem to use lots of insults in his joke routines, a choice with consequences worth considering. Comedies as a genre are defined by their jokes, and how a playwright combines and recomposes jokes is a matter of style. This aspect of style is key in critical discourse on Roman comedy, especially when scholars distinguish between the "proper plays" of the *togata* and *palliata* traditions, and "farces" such as Atellan and mime.[6] In addition, critical commentary on the relative styles of Plautus and Terence often emphasizes the different ways each playwright uses jokes in his plays.[7] Plautus has been said to prefer "extravagant," elaborate joke routines that break the narrative frame and pause dramatic action, whereas Terence favors "restrained" jokes that are tightly integrated with character development and narrative

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[5] The question of what exactly constitutes "comedy" has been a live philosophical and literary problem for centuries. It certainly isn't something that I will tackle in any comprehensive way. For a thorough overview of Western humor theories from antiquity to the modern period, see Hokenson (2006). For the applicability of comedy theory to ancient comedy, see overviews (which provide additional bibliography) in Lowe (2007: 1–20), Beard (2014: 1–98), and Richlin (2017: 43–47). For an overview of humor theory from a linguistic perspective, see Larkin-Galiñanes (2017). For the relationship between laughter and comedy in ancient contexts, see again Beard (2014) for the Roman context and Halliwell (2008) for Greek. For a practical study, see also Kidd (2011), which explores the evidence for scripted laughter cues in Greek comedy.

[6] "Atellana was apparently a kind of burlesque popular farce, regarded as crude, rustic and old-fashioned and considered to be a short, impromptu performance" (Manuwald 2011: 169).

[7] This topic is vast; sample critical discussions include e.g., Fraenkel ([1922] 2007) (very broadly, on Plautine style as a distinct element), Wright (1974), Goldberg (1986), Parker (1996), Karakasis (2005), Lowe (2007), etc.

flow.[8] The distinction works in the abstract—and if the *palliata* plays are considered only as texts—

but is easy to complicate (or even erase) in performance: the "extravagance" of Plautus' jokes

emerges only if we imagine them delivered by enthusiastic actors to an equally enthusiastic

crowd.[9] A more concrete difference between Plautine and Terentian style is how the two comic

playwrights use insult. In her study of comic abuse language, Saara Lilja considers comic insult to

be diagnostic of their different approaches, and argues that Plautus' joy in composing insults and

insult scenes distinguishes his style from that of Terence.[10] In particular, she sees sustained comic

intent behind the way Plautus plays with insult, an intent that is lacking—or severely reduced—in

Terence's plays.[11]

In other words, Plautus intended for many of the insults his characters use to be jokes, which

makes for an intriguing conjunction of conflicting communication signals. According to the

schema I set out in Chapter 3.4, the essential distinction between genuine insult and jocular

mockery (e.g., teasing, verbal dueling) is whether the insults used in an exchange are genuine—

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[8] A representative discussion is Duckworth ([1952] 1994: 328–30), which includes comments like the following: "The fun of Plautus is characterized by haste and vigor; he delights in incongruities and irrationalities…" Less kind critics sometimes make Terence's "restraint" equivalent to "unfunny," but as discussed in Parker (1996), Terence was quite popular with ancient audiences.

[9] The dreaded "dead room" where the audience does not laugh is still the bane of comic performers, as discussed by e.g. Steve Martin: "I was contracted to be onstage for twenty-five minutes. I had a solid ten minutes, and the rest of my material was unreliable. If I got some laughs, I could almost make it, but if the audience was dead, my twenty-five-minute show would shrink to about twelve" (Martin 2007: 17). Most people know this feeling firsthand, and understand how painful it can be when someone either tells a joke badly, and/or receives no response after the telling.

[10] "…Terence contents himself with conventional terms of abuse which were in common use in his time, whereas Plautus takes a special delight in coining new and picturesque expressions of his own" (Lilja 1965: 82). In this Lilja follows ideas advanced by Miniconi (1958), as well as others.

[11] For example, Lilja identifies instances where characters use insults in groups of three, a classic comic technique (Lilja 1965: 82), and one noted by e.g. Duckworth in his comments about "triadic structure" in Plautus' jokes (Duckworth [1952] 1994: 341). Important to note is that affection for linguistic triplets is not a specifically Plautine or even Latin tendency; the "rule of three" in jokes and folk poetry has been widely noted by scholars. See for example the classic treatment of "Butz Triads" in Morgan (1983), which addresses the "rule of threes" specifically, as well as the more abstract "law of increasing members" seminally treated in Cooper and Ross (1975), on the phonological factors that influence how speakers arrange members in a list.

bona fide—or not.[12] Speaking descriptively, *all* onstage, comic insults are non-*bona fide*, because they are ultimately meant to create laughter and not damage face. The problem is analogous to what happens with onstage slapstick comedy: imagine that a person is suddenly punched during a conversation. If that event were to occur onstage, it could be tragic or comic, depending on the context and presentation, but only the most credulous member of an audience would think that it was genuine. Even if the actor who had been "hit" convincingly depicted pain, and reacted in a way that suggested genuine harm, most viewers in an audience would understand that the reaction was non-*bona fide*, even in a tragic context. Nevertheless, the depiction of pain could cause sympathy, and could easily elicit anguish or distress from an audience. And yet, physical comedy— including casual beatings—is a staple of comedy at all levels, and appears in everything from vaudeville routines to modern romantic comedies, as well as in Plautus' plays.[13] Context is key, and this combined with personal expectation makes clear to an audience member whether they *should* be laughing at something painful or unfortunate—whether this is suffering or a pratfall.[14] Thus a central question of Plautine abuse language is how it can be both insulting and funny, for it must be both, at least at certain points. If onstage insult did not seem credibly hostile, then it would have no narrative weight; without a genuine capacity to damage face, at least within the world of the play, it would pose no threat, and would elicit none of the rapport and sympathy that we have seen operative in previous discussions. At the same time, this threat must somehow diminish or be transmuted on its way to the viewing audience. Insult jokes are only funny when they are not genuinely damaging—at least, not damaging *to us*.

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[12] This terminology is borrowed from Partington (2006: 66–68, 149–50).

[13] The evidence for onstage physical abuse is laid out Richlin (2017: 90–105).

[14] Modern comedians understand this as well as ancient comedians did. See the discussion of "Brutality" in vaudeville routines at Davis (2011: 171–89), as well as the discussion of how "comic contexts" condition laughter responses in Filani (2017). Dutsch discusses the relationship between jokes and pain in Plautine comedy at Dutsch (2008: 92–148). See also Peacock (2014) for a exploration of "comedy and pain" in the Western slapstick tradition.

In theatrical performance, the perceptual conditioning of jokes and slapstick is similar to situations we have seen that involve insult, especially since both entail two major perspectives: 1) that of the "in-play reality," where the dramatic stakes and narrative consistency are created, and 2) that of the "out-play reality," where the humor blooms through interaction between audience and actors. How a playwright fits out-play facing comic elements to the in-play narrative logic of the plot depends on personal and generic style. The actors who perform a play must navigate both aspects; they invest their characters with enough detail and animation to move the narrative along and make it compelling to a viewer, part of the in-play stuff that separates drama from standup performance or a series of vignettes. The physical furniture of stage drama (sets, costumes, props) help to bulk out this reality, and the audience tacitly accepts the dramatic illusion as they experience it. The other angle, the out-play reality, is the ineffable space of comedy and humor. It is spun from a mass of verbal jokes, music, gestures, and delivery, and piped directly to the audience via the bundle of sensory cues that make up the play experience.[15] Jokes necessarily involve the audience, since they are designed to elicit an observable, physical response—laughter. This by its nature punctures the hermetic in-play reality the actors share, and work in concert to preserve.[16] Laughter rubs against the narrative reality of the play (i.e., "real" people rarely joke and carry on to the extent that Plautus' characters do), and when manifest as an out-play physical reaction, has the potential to disrupt attention and slow down action onstage. At the same time, it engages attention: a single successful joke can reignite interest among audience members whose attention is flagging, and the shared experience of laughter gives a performance energy.

The tension between these two perspectives poses interesting challenges to the definitions of insult that I have developed thus far. In order to address these, the rest of this chapter will consider the linguistic and performative machinery that allowed a Plautine insult to travel from the in-play

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[15] See e.g. the "imaginary sensorium" discussed at Richlin (2017: 296–97).

[16] Cf. the discussion of Megadorus and Euclio respecting one another's line cues in Chapter 4.4.

reality where it damages face, to the out-play reality where it could cause laughter in an audience.

In particular, I will consider two long sequences that rely on strings of insults to build up a

sustained comic effect, and examine these according to a theory of comedy—the "Benign Violation

Theory"—in order to offer a new perspective for evaluating the tricky relationship between

Plautine insult and Plautine humor.

5.2. Insults, Face, and Laughter: Another *Captivi* Case-Study

To begin, I want to explore the intersection of humor and abuse in a scene where verbal insults do

obvious double duty as jokes and, well, insults. A perfect example occurs in *Captivi*, in the scene

when the *senex* Hegio escorts the slave Aristophontes onstage to meet "Philocrates," who is actually

Tyndarus in disguise. Aristophontes knows Tyndarus' real identity, and in order to sidetrack

everyone, Tyndarus insults Aristophontes and accuses him of being insane (540–56):

> HE. Sequere. em tibi hominem. adi, atque adloquere. TY. Quis homo est me hominum
>
> $$\text{miserior?} \qquad 540$$
> AR. Quid istuc est quod meos te dicam fugitare oculos, Tyndare,
> proque ignoto me aspernari, quasi me numquam noueris?
> equidem tam sum seruos quam tu, etsi ego domi liber fui,
> tu usque a puero seruitutem seruiuisti in Alide.
> HE. edepol minime miror, si te fugitat aut oculos tuos,   545
> aut si te odit, qui istum appelles Tyndarum pro Philocrate.
> TY. Hegio, hic homo rabiosus habitus est in Alide,
> ne tu quod istic fabuletur auris immittas tuas.
> nam istic hastis insectatus est domi matrem et patrem,
> et illic isti qui sputatur morbus interdum venit.   550
> proin tu ab istoc procul recedas. HE. ultro istum a me. AR. ain, uerbero?
> me rabiosum atque insectatum esse hastis meum memoras patrem,
> et eum morbum mi esse, ut qui me opus sit insputarier?
> HE. ue uerere, multos iste morbus homines macerat,
> quibus insputari saluti fuit atque is profuit.   555
> AR. quid tu autem? etiam huic credis?

HE. Come on—there he is. Go say hello. TY. <aside> Who on earth is worse off

than me?   540

AR. Why is that you won't look me in the eyes, Tyndarus,

and snub me like I'm a stranger, as though you never knew me?

You know, I'm a slave like you, even if I was free at home—

you've lived as a slave in Elis since you were a kid.

HE. Well jeez, it's no wonder if he won't look at you   545

or if he dislikes you, since you call him Tyndarus instead of Philocrates.

TY. Hegio, this guy was considered a rabid nut in Elis,

so you shouldn't listen to anything he has to say.

For example, at home he chased his mom and dad around with spears,

and he occasionally gets the sickness that gets you spit on.   550

So, you should back away from. HE. Get him away from me! AR. Oh really, *uerbero*?

You're saying that I was crazy and that I chased my dad with spears,

and that I have the sickness that makes me be spit upon?

HE. Don't worry, that sickness dissolves a lot of people,

and for them it's been helpful to be spit upon, and it's done them good.   555

AR. What—you too? Do you really believe him?

Aristophontes chides Tyndarus for not recognizing him, and indeed refusing to look at him

(*Quid istuc est quod meos te dicam fugitare oculos*, 540), despite being a "slave just like you" (*equidem tam

sum servus quam tu*, 543). Aristophontes tries to establish common ground, but Tyndarus is

pretending to be a friend of Aristophontes' from home, and so must reject the gesture. To maintain

his deception Tyndarus in turn mocks Aristophontes and accuses him of being crazy. In terms of

insult, the most interesting moment of this exchange is Hegio's comment as he reassures

Tyndarus: "Don't worry, that sickness dissolves a lot of people, / and for them it's been helpful to be

spit upon, and it's done them good."[17] Aristophontes is astonished: "What…you believe *him*?" A few

lines earlier Aristophontes reacted vigorously to Tyndarus' suggestion of insanity with the blunt,

ain, uerbero? ("Really, *uerbero*?", 551). He is stung not only by the suggestion that he is crazy but also

by Tyndarus' unexpected refusal to acknowledge their relationship. In the formal terms of

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[17] The verb *insputari* here is an obscure joke: the *morbus* that causes you to be spit upon is epilepsy. Cf. de Melo's note at this point: "People spat out when the saw an epileptic fit; this apotropaeic rite was meant to protect from infection…Hegio goes one step further and humorously treats being spat on as a cure" (de Melo 2011b: 562 n22).

impoliteness theory, Tyndarus here violates both *positive face* and *negative face*: positive face when he rejects Aristophontes' expression of their shared slave experience, and so excludes him from potential companionship; negative face when he belittles Aristophontes' mental competence, which is fundamental to his social value and claim to self-governance. The servile status of the two men is the key to both interactions, since—as Aristophontes himself points out—it is an innate bond, a possible rapport that can override the older disparity in their respective social statuses (namely, that Aristophontes was "free at home" in Elis (543), a place where Tyndarus was still a slave.) Hegio believes Tyndarus over Aristophontes—at least initially—and it only further damages the relationship. Hegio's reaction sets up additional conflict by further isolating Aristophontes, which pushes him to attack Tyndarus. The result of this attack will be the eventual reveal (to Hegio) that Tyndarus is not, in fact, Philocrates.

The conflict escalates throughout the rest of this scene, until line 651 when Tyndarus is outmaneuvered and caught in his lie. The subsequent hostility orbits around (and takes energy from) his initial rejection of offered friendship and intimacy, a point Aristophontes accentuates when he calls Tyndarus *uerbero*, a word that (as mentioned in Chapter 3) is always used in Roman comedy against slave characters, associated as it is with the servile punishment of flogging.[18] His use of a slave-specific insult against a fellow slave is a type of facework, a strategy to repair the face-damage caused when Tyndarus rejected him. It is a two-way signal that transmits out-play to us and the audience, and in-play to his interlocutors, and it asserts that Aristophontes no longer identifies with Tyndarus, his *conseruus*, if he ever did, but rather is now positioned against him. In only ten lines, Aristophontes shifts from friendly appeal (*Tyndare*, 541) to hostile rejection (*uerbero*, 551). Again, the insult term is not what marks this shift, since other slave characters in other plays

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[18] See discussion in e.g. Lilja (1965: 54), and the entries *s.v.* in the index of Opelt (1965: 283). Lilja points out that the term is addressed to a "respectable free man" only once in the Plautine corpus, and this at *Asin.* 485, when the slave Leonida is abusing an unnamed *mercator* character. This scene, as Lilja cautions (and others have commented), is "something exceptional," since throughout it so clearly works to undermine the expected norms of usual slave-free power relationships.

use it and similar terms such as *mastigia* and *furcifer* during verbal duels or other jocular insult exchanges; the long insult match between Libanus and Leonida (discussed in Chapter 3.3) is a good example. However, when Aristophontes uses the term here, it is not a sanctioned term in a playful exchange but a hostile attempt to diminish Tyndarus, and thereby distinguish Aristophontes from him. Aristophontes tries to reestablish the status distinctions that separated him from Tyndarus before the war by diminishing Tyndarus' face and building up his own. Although in-play *conservi* now, in his initial comments to Tyndarus Aristophontes is careful to point out that he *used* to be free (*etsi ego domi liber fui*, 543); Tyndarus, on the other hand, has *always* been a slave, at least so far as Aristophontes knows. Most of *Captivi* is about the unreality of slave status, and this interaction slips into insult through a steady application of impoliteness: the rejection of a gaze at 541, rejection (*aspernari*) at 542, an appeal to common status at 543, and then a retraction of the initial greeting at 544. For many watching in the audience, this bit of insult retribution is further sharpened by their knowledge that Tyndarus *is*, in fact not just free-born, but Hegio's actual long-lost son.[19] As a character, Tyndarus could have elicited empathy from both free people and slaves in the audience, though for different reasons. The audience's knowledge of his actual background would have inclined some of them to feel a particular bond with Tyndarus, and the abuse he suffers would hurt more as a result.[20]

Aristophontes repurposes *uerbero* from a piece of inter-slave banter into the language of oppression that one would expect from an owner such as Hegio, who, after all, owns Aristophontes. Aristophontes is angry, his face has been damaged, and his new owner now thinks that he is a crazy or a liar. To recover, he aligns himself against Tyndarus—a thematic development that could be mirrored in actual performance if the actor playing Aristophontes had directed his

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[19] Information delivered early in the prologue at 4: *senex qui hic habitat Hegio est huiius pater*, "Hegio, the old man who lives here, is the father of this one here." (The speaker would at this point be pointing to Tyndarus.)

[20] A pain that is only increased when Aristophontes finally does realize what Tyndarus is up to at 697–702, and so understands the real trouble he has gotten the slave and (Philocrates) into.

insult lines directly to Hegio, whose opinion as the owner and social superior of both slaves is central to the plot and conflict of the play. Aristophontes is "virtue signaling," demonstrating to Hegio that he is not a *conseruus*, but a fallen *erus*.[21] Aristophontes continues to use slave-specific language against Tyndarus throughout their encounter: in addition to *uerbero*, he twice calls Tyndarus *furcifer* ("fork-carrier," 563, 577), and near the end of the scene calls him *mastigia* ("marked by the whip," 600).[22] In turn, Tyndarus repeatedly accuses Aristophontes of being insane, calling him *rabiosus* (547), accusing him of attacking his parents with spears (549), of having epilepsy (553), of acting like a rabid nut (557–58), of being unable to control himself (558), and of being possessed by evil spirits (598–99). These accusations clearly rile up Aristophontes (*furcifer/male loqui me audes?*, "Do you dare to insult me, *furcifer*?", 563–64); the word *audes*, "do you dare," is always used by a higher status person—or someone who *feels* they are higher status, as here—against a lower status person who has stepped out of line. Aristophontes becomes increasingly upset throughout the scene. The two slaves jockey to win Hegio over to their respective sides, and in performance, the three characters would have been jockeying to dominate onstage focus, or where onstage the audience directs its attention.[23] Aristophontes is a newcomer, and disrupts the action of the play that has been set up thus far; Tyndarus is a central character, and one in whom we are emotionally invested; Hegio is the heavy, whose desires push the plot along, and whose authority makes him dangerous to the other characters. In this scene, Hegio is a keystone: a free man and slaveowner, he has real power in the world of the play, and everyone in the audience—slave or free alike—would have understood the consequences of this power. He can punish and coerce, something he demonstrated earlier in the play while discussing with the Lorarius how to prevent slaves from

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[21] "Virtue signaling" is a term from social signaling theory, and is shorthand for the tendency of people to advertise ethical opinions that they think will garner praise or esteem. The term has recently become popular in pop-psychology, and has developed a pejorative connotation

[22] See again my brief discussions of *furcifer* (and other slave-specific terms) in Chapter 3.4 (note 68), and of *uerbero* in Chapter 3.5 (note 96).

[23] On audience focus in the *palliata*, see Marshall (2006: 160–74).

escaping their owners (110–125). Throughout *Captivi*, Hegio the character is defined first as a father and then as a man who buys, keeps, and trades in slaves. The prologue of the play opens with the prologue speaker and *captivos duos* (two slaves) onstage. Hegio is then mentioned as the father of Tyndarus (4), and his plan to get his other son back by trading slaves is mentioned at 27. This is brought up again by Ergasilus during his play-opening monologue (92–101), and drives the plot of the play until its send.[24] Although Tyndarus wants to keep his scheme with Philocrates a secret from Hegio, he puts Aristophontes in genuine danger by undermining his face—and credibility—to the *senex*. Aristophontes claims to know Philocrates and Tyndarus, and Tyndarus presents him as a crazed liar. And, alarmingly for Aristophontes, the old man seems to believe the lie. Meanwhile, Tyndarus' own safety depends on maintaining his lie until Philocrates rescues him; Aristophontes loves Philocrates but his ignorance almost kills Tyndarus. In just a few lines, punctuated with a few insults, the plot of the play thus far is upended, and two characters, Aristophontes and Tyndarus, are put into genuine danger.

But what about *jokes*? For all its tension and anger, the insult-slinging scene between Aristophontes and Tyndarus is potentially very funny. The first insult Tyndarus uses to smear Aristophontes is viscerally biological, with its details about homicidal urges, disease, and spitting (547–550). As Tyndarus tells it, Aristophontes is a dangerous madman who not only does not honor his parents, but actually chases them with spears. How can you trust someone like that? And Hegio himself does not, immediately recoiling (551), and then following along with Tyndarus (556–60):

> AR. quid tu autem? etiam huic credis? HEG. quid ego credam huic? AR. insanum esse me?
> TY. uiden tu hunc, quam inimico uoltu intuetur? concedi optumumst,
> Hegio: fit quod tibi ego dixi, gliscit rabies, caue tibi.
> HE. credidi esse insanum extemplo, ubi te appellauit Tyndarum.
> TY. quin suom ipse interdum ignorat nomen neque scit qui siet.   560

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[24] And, as discussed in Chapter 4.5, Ergasilus goes so far as to point out how out of character slaveholding is for Hegio, thus suggesting that he too been made a bit crazy by the war.

AR. What—you too? Do you really believe him? HE. What would I believe him
                                                about? ARG. That I'm crazy?
TY. Do you see him? How nasty he looks at you? You ought to go,
Hegio: just what I told you would happen is happening. He's gone rabid—be careful!
HE. I thought he was nuts right away when I heard him call you Tyndarus.
TY. Sure—occasionally he forgets his own name, and doesn't know who he is!   560

This is pure farce, and the beginning of a "shtickomythia" run, as the characters jab back and forth with insults and jokes. Aristophontes incredulously asks whether Hegio believes he is actually crazy (556), and Hegio replies with a zinger: "I thought he was crazy when he called you Tyndarus!" (559). The joke is directed both in-play to Tyndarus and Aristophontes, and out-play to the audience. In-play, it affirms to Tyndarus that Hegio has, for the moment, bought the lie; this furthers the insult against Aristophontes, and creates a plausible narrative reason for him to become angrier and more defensive as the scene develops. As an out-play address, the joke is beautifully compact: the premise is unexpected (a truthful character being called a liar by a liar), and the resolution surprising (he is crazy because he did not confirm an expectation). The audience knows something Hegio does not, and this makes Hegio look foolish. Tyndarus delays the punchline of the joke by describing a caricature of madness: Aristophontes is looking at them in a crazy way, is making threatening gestures, and is a menace (557–58). Is this a description of what would have happened in performance, or another lie for Hegio? Either way could be funny. If true, the actor playing Aristophontes could have pantomimed along with Tyndarus' descriptions, further demonstrating not madness, but his character's anger and frustration. Alternatively, he could have remained still and calm, or acted surprised and puzzled, as a counterpoint to Tyndarus' description. This would further advance the idea that Tyndarus is lying and that Hegio is being duped, while also reinforcing the sense of insult that the lie entails.

Tyndarus' immediate strategy is to disorient Aristophontes and prevent him from revealing the scheme Tyndarus and Philocrates have concocted, but this encounter has a larger purpose,

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both in-play and out-play. Similar disguise encounters in other plays suggest possible alternate

solutions to the problem of Aristophontes recognizing the other man's true identity. From an in-

play perspective, this encounter could have played out differently, with Tyndarus taking

Aristophontes aside and managing to conspire with Aristophontes rather than bluff him; the two

conserui, like other slave characters in other plays, might team up and spin out an elaborate,

cooperative con against Hegio, each trying to top the inventions of the other, until they are found

out and punished. Instead, they fight in order to win over Hegio, and this competition is what

ultimately leads to the revelation of Tyndarus' plot, and his resulting punishment. The insult

match between the two slaves steadily increases the narrative stakes of the play, and each slave

uses a different strategy in trying to win: Tyndarus depicts his opponent as insane, and unworthy

of trust; Aristophontes works to characterize *his* opponent as "more enslaved" than he is (actually

being Tyndarus, who was already a slave in Elis), and thus subordinate. The respective strategies

are clear in the following exchange (589–97):

<div style="text-align:center">AR. quin tute is es:</div>

neque praeter te in Alide ullus seruos istoc nominest.   590
TY. pergin servom me exprobrare esse, id quod ui hostili optigit?
AR. enim iam nequeo contineri. TY. heus, audin quid ait? quin fugis?
iam illic hic nos insectabit lapidibus, nisi illunc iubes
comprehendi. AR. crucior. TY. ardent oculi: fit opus, Hegio;
uiden tu illi maculari corpus totum maculis luridis?   595
atra bilis agitat hominem. AR. At pol te, si hic sapiat senex,
pix atra agitet apud carnificem tuoque capiti inluceat.

<div style="text-align:center">AR. But you yourself are him!</div>

Other than you, there's no other slave in Elis with that name.   590
TY. Are you really mocking me for being a slave, something that happened
<div style="text-align:right">because of war?</div>
AR. Okay, I can't take it anymore— TY. Oh, oh, do you hear what he's saying?
<div style="text-align:right">Why aren't you running?</div>
Now he's going to chase after us with rocks, if you don't order
him to be restrained! AR. I'm dying here. TY. His eyes are burning! It's

<div style="text-align:center">211</div>

> don't you see how his whole body is covered with pasty spots?   595
> Black bile is driving him! AR. No, dammit—if this old man were smart,
> black tar would drive you at the executioner's, and light up your head like a candle!

Every joke and insult in play here involves slavery. Aristophontes, still vainly hoping that facts will win the day, argues that "no other slave in Elis" was named Tyndarus (590). Tyndarus, adopting the ever-popular "Fake News!" approach to derailing arguments, is outraged: "Are you really mocking me for being a slave, something that happened because of war?" (591). Aristophontes is not—the issue is identity, which is tied to status—and being constantly thwarted wears on him. "I can't take it anymore!" he vents (592), and Tyndarus is there to twist the meaning into something sinister; he warns Hegio that he should run away before Aristophontes throws stones at them (593), and then suggests that Hegio should have Aristophontes seized (*comprehendi*, 594). The sequence reaches a final peak when Tyndarus warns Hegio that if gets close to Aristophontes, Aristophontes will "denose his face with his teeth" (*os denasabit tibi / mordicus*, 604–05); again, Tyndarus characterizes Aristophontes' madness in terms of physical grotesquery, a deviation that is also a direct threat to the safety of his *dominus*. The maneuver is subtle, as Tyndarus shifts from outrage about being called a slave to recommending that someone else be *treated* as a slave, thus appropriating—or using by proxy—the power of a free slaveholder. In this effort, he mirrors Aristophontes himself, who began the encounter with Tyndarus with a face-negotiation based on their previously disparate statuses. Here, Aristophontes responds succinctly, and with an expression that is appropriate to Tyndarus' rhetoric: *crucior*, literally, "I am being tortured/crucified." As Tyndarus adopts the language of an owner, Aristophontes embraces his role as slave. The status-based insult that leads this scene is reified, the face-threat renewed, and the conflict continues.

As does the humor. The growing anger of Aristophontes is a classic "comic freakout" of the type already discussed in Chapter 2, when Euclio begins to rant at the audience when they "refuse"

to help him. Tyndarus' smug sophistry in this scene makes him a perfect foil to Aristophontes, who is presented by Hegio as a source of truth (i.e., someone who can recognize Philocrates, 509–13). A recurring gag throughout the scene are Tyndarus' increasingly outlandish descriptions of Aristophontes' madness, sometimes in literally colorful terms, as above, when he suggests that the other slave is breaking out in colored spots (597). Unlike a previous instance when the actor playing Aristophontes could have mummed along with the description, this is pure fantasy[25]: the actor surely was not covered in spots, and given that his face was covered with a mask, it is difficult to imagine that his eyes were burning (*ardent oculi*, 596) in the way Tyndarus describes. The description is aimed at the audience as a joke, but it is a clear insult to Aristophontes, who *is* frustrated and angry. These emotions must have come through in performance, as the actor gestured, stomped around, raised his voice, and acted increasingly frantic. Outbursts of this type are a natural—even appropriate—response when being insulted or mocked, but Tyndarus perverts them into something darker when he suggests that Aristophontes' frustration is actual madness, and thus unnatural and dangerous. The relationship between slavery and madness is complex, and Dan-el Padilla Peralta has pointed out that madness and crazed behavior by Roman slaves—in Plautus as well as other sources—is construed as a threat to the control and power of an owner.[26] When Tyndarus describes Aristophontes as crazy, he means to drive a wedge between Hegio and the other slave. The implication is that Tyndarus is not crazy, nor is he a threat, but rather that he cares for Hegio (*caue tibi*, 558; cf. 557, *concedi optumumst, / Hegio*). It is an effective counter to Aristophontes' more obvious efforts to manipulate face with Hegio.

Throughout his encounter with Aristophontes, Tyndarus continuously upends the other slave's efforts to maintain personal face: by rejecting proffered intimacy and rapport, by making both

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[25] See Richlin (2017: 297–98) on the use of deixis to focus audience attention in descriptive scenes of this kind.

[26] "[N]ot much separated prophetic madness from the forms of religious charisma wielded by leaders of slave revolts. Moreover, simulated madness could and almost certainly did operate as a tactic of resistance to the control or wishes of the master" (Padilla Peralta 2017: 342).

negative- and positive-face attacks, by frustrating the other's attempt to repair his own face, and by characterizing his very *attempts* at face-repair as deviant, rebellious, and dangerous. Again, all of the insults and humor in this encounter revolve around concepts of slavery, and so, fittingly, it ends with a type of inquisition into Tyndarus' own background. Aristophontes has begun to convince Hegio, and together they turn on Tyndarus (627–32):

> HE. quid tu ais? TY. me tuom esse seruom et te meum erum. HE. haud istuc rogo.
> fuistin liber? TY. fui. AR. enim uero non fuit, nugas agit.
> TY. Qui tu scis? an tu fortasse fuisti meae matri obstetrix,
> qui id tam audacter dicere audes? AR. puerum te uidi puer.   630
> TY. at ego te video maior maiorem: em rursum tibi.
> meam rem non cures, si recte facias. num ego curo tuam?

> HE. What are you saying? TY. …that I am your slave, and you are my owner. HE. That's not
>   what I asked.
> Were you free? TY. I was. AR. Oh no he wasn't! He's bullshitting you.
> TY. How do you know? Or did you happen to be my mom's midwife—
> is that why you dare to talk so bravely? AR. When I was a boy, I saw you as a boy!   630
> TY. But I'm a grownup, and I see *you* grown up—so take that!
> You shouldn't be in my business, if you want to be decent. Am I getting into yours?

Everything turns on Hegio's brief question: "Were you free?" (628). Tyndarus' reply, "I was," is, again, heartbreaking irony: he *was* born free, as the son of the man now threatening him harm. The audience knows this, but so far as Tyndarus knows, it is a lie. Aristophontes calls him on it (*enim uero non fuit, nugas agit*, 628), and Tyndarus' reply only makes the irony thicker: "How do you know? Or did you happen to be my mom's midwife— / is that why you dare to talk so bravely?" (629). It is a clever retort, but also an indirect insult that casts Aristophontes as a woman—who tends to *other* women—and also flips around the *audes* ("do you dare") that Aristophontes had used against Tyndarus previously (564). This time, the power differential has changed, and Tyndarus presents himself as the aggrieved superior swatting down a presumptuous subordinate. Despite Aristophontes' reply that he knew Tyndarus as a child (630), and thus knows his background,

Tyndarus is right—he very well *could* be freeborn. But Aristophontes promotes *his understanding* of the past in order to reestablish the hierarchies of their lives before both men became slaves in Aetolia. Although Tyndarus tries to reassure Hegio of his status, emphasizing present loyalty and natal alienation (*me tuom esse servom et te meum erum*, 627), in his disguise as Philocrates, Tyndarus is also trying to create an alternate reality in which he was freeborn (and sane), and thus more trustworthy than Aristophontes (freeborn, but crazy). Both slaves adopt a posture of freedom, or some distant claim to it, in order to sway Hegio, and when Aristophontes finally convinces the old man that *his* story is true, and that Tyndarus is, in fact, a liar, the shifting alliances between the three characters snap to clarity, and the lines of power are clear.[27]

Hegio is outraged at the deception; he feels deeply insulted, and characterizes his embarrassment in the visceral, corporeal terms Tyndarus used when mocking Aristophontes: *ego deruncinatus, deartuatus sum miser / huius scelesti technicis*, "I'm pathetic, cut apart and dismembered by the schemes of this criminal" (641–42). He recognizes that he has not only been disrespected, but actively deceived by the joint scam with Philocrates (*mihi stolido sursum uersum os subleuere offuciis*, "Like a dummy, they totally pulled the wool over my eyes" [lit., "smeared my face with paint"] 656). Within the world of the play, Tyndarus' trick is negative impoliteness of the worst sort: he has embarrassed and undermined Hegio in his role as a slaveowner, and has made him look foolish in front of multiple people—even worse, in front of multiple *slaves*. Like Aristophontes, Hegio reacts with anger and facework, in order to recover his position. He does this by asserting his prerogatives as a slaveholder, and as a free man: he immediately shouts for three *lorarii* to put manacles (*manicas*, 659) on Tyndarus, commands that he be tortured in "the worst possible ways" (*exemplis excruciaro pessumis*, 691), and has him sent to the quarries (*latomias lapidarias*, 723).

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[27] In Politeness terms, we can think of this as parallel efforts at facework and face-threats: each slave attempts to further his positive face-wants (social acceptance, in-group cohesion) in order to generate negative impoliteness for the other (reduce personal autonomy). Both slaves try to achieve this facework by pandering to Hegio's positive- and negative-face wants.

Prior to this scene, Hegio had been reasonably kind to Tyndarus, at least as much as is permitted in a slave system; being badly insulted hardens him, and in order to repair his sense of face he asserts his power. Even before the physical punishment he commands, his shift in attitude is clear when he calls Tyndarus *mastigia* (659), the same slave-specific insult that Aristophontes had used (600). Directed in-play, the insult aligns Hegio with Aristophontes, and informs Tyndarus that he is, in fact, in real trouble. Directed out-play, it creates narrative stakes, a sense of danger, and gives us a good sense of the anger Hegio feels. The entire scene is a remarkable demonstration of in-play insult dynamics. But is it *funny*?

5.3. "Benign Violations" in Onstage Abuse and Insult

Jokes and laughter are a matter of expectation and delivery, mediated by tone and intent. What tone and intent does the insult match between Aristophontes and Tyndarus have? Unlike some of the two-person "jocular mockery" scenes discussed in Chapter 3, this confrontation is antagonistic, and the stakes of its outcome are high. Indeed, Tyndarus is sent to be tortured to death once he loses the insult match, but his back-and-forth with Aristophontes is full of gags, and as just discussed, many of the insults seem to be packaged as jokes, despite their serious consequences. The dynamic is complex, and either element could easily have gotten out of hand in performance, leading to a too-serious tone that would have quashed the comedy, or too much mugging and silliness, which would have undercut the gravity of the narrative. Though the problem is especially notable in *Captivi*, it is not unique to this play, or even to Plautus' work.[28] The same impulse, differently framed, animates the modern "insult comedy" subgenre, as well as the more political comedies of Aristophanes and other poets of Old Comedy. To understand the role of insults in

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[28] Thus the whole question of "dark comedy" or "black comedy," which is usually in response to serious events or circumstances. See e.g. the discussion of "gallows humor" in Obrdlik (1942) for thoughts on the relationship between comedy and misfortune during wartime. Other Plautine plays that include a rich mixture of the troubling and the absurd are e.g. *Bacchides*, *Mercator*, *Persa*, *Poenulus*, and *Truculentus*. All of the surviving plays contain troubling episodes and scenes, however.

comedy as a whole, we need to consider why abuse and other notionally unfunny elements can generate humor.

The psychology behind this is interesting, but my interest is much narrower, and concerns the specific question of why—or how—a person can find *insult humor* funny, even when it is aimed at them. Many humor theories approach the problem by trying to explain the psychology of laughter a whole, and then applying this to higher-level discussion of how jokes trigger the laughter mechanism. For example, in the "relief theory" model of humor, a version of which was influentially promoted by Sigmund Freud, repressed desires or fears can become manifest in jokes, and the laughter that ensues relieves psychological pressure.[29] This and similar theories can provide interesting insights into joking behavior, as well as comic literature, but they are also broadly incompatible with sociolinguistic approaches to language. Freudian theory in particular presupposes that humor and joking originates in hostility.[30] This position does not square with the theory of insult that I have explored in preceding chapters, which is based on the idea that the hostile intent by which insults are defined originates in perception, and can manifest in transmission, reception, both, or neither. To be compatible with this approach, a theory of comedy —or perhaps better, a theory of laughter—needs to make a similar assumption, at least in how it describes humor.

I believe a recent theory of humor offers a possible answer—or at least another useful tool with which to taken on the question. In their 2010 paper, "Benign Violations: Making Immoral Behavior

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[29] Relief theory was the dominant approach to humor in Western thought for centuries, dating at least to Lord Shaftesbury in 1709, who explained humor as a venting of pent-up "natural spirits." The idea was also promoted by Herbert Spencer, John Dewey, and Sigmund Freud; Dewey in particular described the act of laughing as a kind of "relief." See the discussion in Morreall (2016: section §3) for an overview, and *passim* for other approaches to humor. Freud's formulation of the theory is laid out in Freud (1960). Freud's ideas have been especially influential in literary studies; for a thoughtful Freudian-inspired reading of Plautine comedy, see Parker (1996), as well as the complementary (but more cautious) remarks in Richlin (2017: 43–46); cf. on Roman sexual humor generally Richlin (1992: 59–63), following Henderson ([1975] 1991).

[30] E.g.: "Yet what comedians say about their art bears out Freud's ideas about the hostility that underlies many forms of humor, and makes explicit the often-noted dark side of comedy" (Richlin 2017: 45).

Funny," Peter McGraw and Caleb Warren propose a theory of humor with a simple but powerful premise. According to McGraw and Warren, "[A]nything that is threatening to one's sense of how the world 'ought to be' will be humorous, as long as the threatening situation also seems benign."[31] Under what conditions is something a "benign violation"? Simple: for a benign violation to occur, "[a] situation must be appraised as a violation, a situation must be appraised as benign, and these two appraisals must occur simultaneously." In the terms of traditional humor theory, this sounds like the classic "incongruity" model: the mismatch between expectation and outcome creates a kind of mental gap, which creates surprise and then laughter.[32] A key innovation differentiates the McGraw-Warren model from the incongruity concept, namely, the stipulation that to be humorous an appraisal must be simultaneously a violation and benign—the classic paradox of "holding two contrasting ideas in the mind at the same time." Whereas incongruity theory suggests that humor—or at least laughter—arises when the unexpected takes the place of the expected, Benign Violation Theory (hereafter BVT) proposes that laughter originates not in surprise but *contrast*. Many things in life (and literature) are surprising and incongruous, but not necessarily funny. I might fall down on my face, get robbed by a stranger, or be struck by lightning

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[31] McGraw and Warren (2010: 1142). McGraw and Warren are careful to point out their debts to earlier theories, especially the "violation" and "disgust" approaches, as well as to the linguistic theory of Thomas Veatch (Veatch 1998). Veatch first developed the idea that *linguistic* humor is based on simultaneous recognition of normalcy and violation; McGraw and Warren extended this idea to account for non-linguistic humor as well (e.g., physical comedy), and refined the terminology. Their version of the idea, and its attendant jargon, are what I use here. An especially useful—and compelling—feature of the McGraw-Warren model is its precise formulation, which allows for empirical testing and analysis; their initial paper on the topic includes results from several interesting clinical studies. The experimental suitability of Benign Violation Theory (BVT) has led to a boom in its popularity among academic researches on humor. In addition, McGraw has contributed to a number of non-specialist publications (e.g., McGraw and Warner (2015)) aimed at a popular audience, which has given the theory a certain currency in the popular press.

[32] This paraphrase hardly does the idea full justice, but is accurate enough for the current discussion. For details on incongruity and its relationship to other humor theories, see Morreall (2016: section §4), as well as comments in e.g. Lowe (2007: 1–21), Hokenson (2006) *passim*, and Beard (2014: 23–69). Incongruity theory became especially popular within linguistic circles, and was developed into a "General Theory of Verbal Humor" by Victor Raskin and Salvatore Attardo in Attardo and Raskin (1991). See also Attardo (1994) for a monograph-length discussion of the mature theory.

—all surprising events, but none terribly humorous on their own.[33] However, they all *could* be funny if the violation was, ultimately, benign. After all, slapstick-style comedy is an evergreen gag in comedy of all kinds, and millions of Charlie Chaplin, Marx Brothers, Three Stooges, and Plautus fans laugh at unfortunate physical abuse without a second thought.

Most importantly for my study of Plautine comedy, BVT takes into account—and in fact, explicitly relies upon—the idea that the presence of "unfunny," serious, and mundane elements can, weirdly, *make* a situation funny, so long as it does not pass a threshold into being truly offensive or upsetting. Of course, the threshold for this will vary from person to person. In experimental trials of the theory, McGraw and Warren observed that within their sample populations, there was a strong statistical correlation between laughter and viewing a violation as benign; but at the same time, they found that none of their test subjects ever agreed completely about what stimuli *were* benign.[34] Even very taboo topics, such as cannibalism, theft, and necrophilia showed a range of reactions, and not all subjects considered jokes on these topics offensive or ultimately un-funny.[35] This makes makes sense, because such assessments are complex and personal. They draw on individual background and belief, social context, genre conventions, and other factors—the same complexity observable every day when people have

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[33] Indeed, the most persistent criticism of Incongruity Theory is that the unexpected/incongruous criterion tends to over-generate, and does not provide simple guidance on what kinds of "incongruous" events are funny, and what are not. In my view, an even more significant critique is that quite a lot of comedy is *not* novel; jokes, shtick, physical comedy, and so on tend to be built on recurring, widely-recognized, and widely expected patterns. Audiences listening to jokes, comic performances, and comedy shows often know exactly when and what punchline is coming well before it is delivered. That they laugh anyway suggests that Incongruity Theory, in its simple formulation, does not provide the whole story.

[34] "We found that benign moral violations tend to elicit laughter (Study 1), behavioral displays of amusement (Study 2), and mixed emotions of amusement and disgust (Studies 3–5). Moral violations are amusing when another norm suggests that the behavior is acceptable (Studies 2 and 3), when one is weakly committed to the violated norm (Study 4), or when one feels psychologically distant from the violation (Study 5)" (McGraw and Warren 2010: 1147).

[35] See e.g. the statistical spread of Study 1 (McGraw and Warren 2010: 1143–44), which compares reactions between a control prompt (non-violation) and a stimulus response (violation). In total, McGraw and Warren conducted five different clinical studies for their paper, each based on different humor prompts and the reactions these elicited.

different reactions to "dirty" or otherwise controversial jokes.[36] What *does* remain constant, regardless of individual reactions, is the response itself: people find something most funny when it balances between risky and safe, an idea that has exciting consequences for the study of ancient comedy in performance, especially in relation to the comic potential of insults and abuse language (as well as other types of violence).

As discussed in Chapter 3, most of the insult-terms that Plautus uses are common words, and the situations in which they occur tend to follow specific patterns of shtick. Roman comedy in general was highly formulaic, with individual plays made up of recurring plots, character types, and conflicts, pieced together like mosaic chips into novel configurations. The assemblage is held in place with clever dialogue and (no doubt) a healthy dose of onstage brio. Some of Plautus' plots do seem truly surprising—plays like *Amphitruo*, *Captivi*, and *Truculentus* stand apart, in certain ways —but even these turn on familiar routines and patterns. The familiarity of this material would have been an asset precisely because of the expectation it sets up. The "stylistic unity" of *palliata* plays would have made audiences immediately comfortable, at least to a point, and thus willing to accept the many slips of logic and plausibility typical of the genre. More importantly, this connection would have "primed" the intimate audience-actor rapport essential to the theatrical experience, and so predisposed those watching to consider any upsetting onstage material as essentially benign. The in-play/out-play split considered above would support this tendency, since insults and other abuse presented onstage would have been "filtered" through the audience's understanding—and expectation—that most if not all of what they were watching was intended to make them laugh. Crucially, the BVT model dovetails nicely with the "intimacy and neutralization" approach to insult that I have developed throughout this study. The two models can be thought of

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[36] Indeed, debates over what is or is not a "benign violation" are equivalent to controversies over whether certain jokes are "appropriate" or not. Individuals censured for telling an inappropriate joke will often appeal to some other authority in order to establish that their assessment is correct. E.g., "My black friends thought it was hilarious!" or "My wife loves that joke!" Social power is also key in establishing dominant benign-violation assessments, as discussed in Knegtmans et al. (2017).

as interlocking pieces that combine to provide a comprehensive picture of how insults and humor work in language: the core of each model is an assumption that semiotic signs (linguistic or otherwise) are inherently unstable, and can resolve along a spectrum of potential meanings. In a conversation or other speech-event, whether an insulting speech act will shade into a joke (and the other way around) depends on the degree of intimacy between the speakers, how they assess each other's intent when making individual speech acts, whether they think the completed utterance violates expected norms, and if so, whether this violation is benign.

For example: in the scene from *Captivi* discussed above, Tyndarus starts off the dispute by calling Aristophontes a rabid nut (*homo rabiosus*, 547) who threatened his parents with weapons (*hastis insectatus est domi matrem et patrem*, 549). We have already seen that Aristophontes interprets this as an insult (551), but it seems likely that the audience takes it as a laugh-line. Tyndarus' reaction to Aristophontes' friendly (if somewhat condescending) greeting is certainly not the usual response, and the story Tyndarus cooks up to deflect Aristophontes is absurd. Nevertheless, the actual content of his story would be unsavory to the audience and Aristophontes both, since madness and parricide were serious issues in Roman society; the latter was especially reviled, and convicted parricides could be punished cruelly.[37] As an in-play utterance, the remark destroys any goodwill Aristophontes had toward Tyndarus, and sets up the ensuing conflict; it also acts as a trigger to Hegio, who has, after all, lost both of his sons, and has father-child relationships on his mind. Directed out-play to the audience, the valence of the utterance is somewhat unclear. Any reference to parricide would be provocative, just as an ostensible joke about trying to kill parents or children would be in contemporary American culture, but the audience expects a joke, given the genre context and what they have seen elsewhere in the play. This expectation, combined with the

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[37] This was via the horrific *poena cullei*, whereby the perpetrator was placed naked into a sack—possibly with live animals—and then tossed into a body of water to drown. E.g., Livy *Per.* 68.1, *Publicius Malleolus matre occisa primus in culleo insutus in mare praecipitatus est*, "After killing his mother, Publicius Malleolus was the first person sewed into a sack and thrown into the sea." See also the extended description of the punishment in Cicero *Rosc. Am.* 70–72, there relevant to a historical charge of *parricidium* against Sextus Roscius the younger; see historical notes in the textual commentary of Dyck (2010: 1–2, and *ad loc.*), as well as broader the historical discussion of Cloud (1971).

intimacy rapport already established, and perhaps greased by the festival atmosphere of the performance venue, must have been enough to make this bleakest of insults—accusing Aristophontes of attempted parricide—into something broadly funny. Well, funny to some of the audience, at least.

Audiences are not homogeneous, of course, and so we should not assume that all the comic violations that Plautus committed were considered benign by everyone who watched one of his plays.[38] It was surely a tightrope act, and it seems likely that in performance jokes would have been swapped in or out by the actors, according to the temper of specific audiences. Even then, as in modern performance, personal background and disposition would have created diverse responses. The sense of violation would vary by individual, according to the types of experience afforded by different statuses, classes, and genders in Roman society.[39] In particular, the reactions of slaves and free people in the audience of *Captivi* must have differed at points, possibly at many points, as the respective experiences of the enslaved and the free or freed in the audience would have led to different evaluations of whether certain joke-violations were benign or not.[40] The distinction is very much worth remembering, since it only makes our understanding of Plautus' comedy richer and more polyvalent. In the rest of this chapter I will look in-depth at several passages from the final scenes of *Bacchides*, all of which contain comic elements on their own, but which also mesh together into a sustained joke built specifically on an intersection of humor and insult. This long

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[38] See again the discussion in Chapter 4 of how audience reactions may have varied depending on disposition and background.

[39] The same is true of modern audiences, and there is an interesting subfield of research devoted to documenting the different factors (cultural, contextual, linguistic, and so on) that contribute to the positive or negative reception of jokes. See e.g. Slugoski and Turnbull (1988) for a study of how jocular cruelty can increase social intimacy; Kotthoff (1996) for programmatic remarks on the relationship between joking and impoliteness; Marsh (2014) on "going too far" in jokes; Filani (2017) on how the venue of standup comedy affects its reception; Knegtmans et al. (2017) on the relationship between social power and assessment of violation in jokes; and Krys et al. (2017) on the reception of humor in cultures with different concepts of face or dignity.

[40] This even without taking into account the "hidden transcript" meanings and themes embedded in Plautus' texts, as illustrated in Richlin (2014) and Richlin (2017), and which spoke directly to slave experience.

joke closes the play, but the way it springs from and develops through different kinds of insult ultimately result in it undermining much of the thematic material found earlier in the play, and its raunchy punchline is a perfect opportunity to consider how far Plautus was willing to push his audience, and to challenge what they considered to be a "benign violation."

5.4. Jokes and Insults in *Bacchides*: Part 1 — The Setup and Build

One of the more interesting insult-runs in all of Plautus' plays occurs at *Bacchides* 1087–1103, during a monologue by the *senex* Nicobulus. Prior to the speech, the old man has twice been swindled out of money by his slave, Chrysalus (acting on behalf of Mnesilochus, the son of Nicobulus), and he is justifiably angry at being fooled. This is a not-uncommon setup in Roman comedy,[41] but what makes this scene truly unusual is both the comprehensiveness of the insults Nicobulus uses, and the fact that he directs most of them not at the slave, but at *himself*:

> Quiquomque ubi sunt, qui fuerunt quique futuri sunt posthac
> stulti, stolidi, fatui, fungi, bardi, blenni, buccones,
> solus ego omnis longe antideo stultitia et moribus indoctis.
> perii, pudet: hocine me aetatis ludos bis factum esse indigne?   1090
> magis quam id reputo, tam magis uror quae meus filius turbauit.
> perditus sum atque eradicatus sum, omnibus exemplis excrucior.
> omnia me mala consectantur, omnibus exitiis interii.
> Chrysalus med hodie lacerauit, Chrysalus me miserum spoliauit:
> is me scelus auro usque attondit dolis doctis indoctum, ut lubitumst.   1095
> ita miles memorat meretricem esse eam quam ille uxorem esse aiebat,
> omniaque ut quidque actum est memorauit, eam sibi hunc annum conductam,
> relicuom id auri factum quod ego ei stultissimus homo promisissem:
> hoc, hoc est quo <cor> peracescit; hoc est demum quod percrucior,
> me hoc aetatis ludificari, immo edepol sic ludos factum   1100
> cano capite atque alba barba miserum me auro esse emunctum.
> perii, hoc seruom meum non nauci facere esse ausum! atque ego, si alibi
> plus perdiderim, minus aegre habeam minu'que id mihi damno ducam.

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41 Cf. Hegio's anger at Tyndarus in *Captivi*, Lysidamus' anger at Chalinus in *Casina*, the soldier's anger at Curculio in *Curculio*, Periphanes' anger at Epidicus in *Epidicus*, Theopropides' anger at Tranio in *Mostellaria*, the pimp's anger at Toxilus and Sagaristio in *Persa*, the soldier's anger in *Poenulus*, and Simo's anger in *Pseudolus*.

Wherever, whoever they are, in the past or in the future,
the dummies, morons, idiots, toadstools, rubes, drivellers, and mouth-breathers—
I personally surpass them all in stupidity and foolish ways.
I'm screwed, I'm ashamed: can I really have been conned so badly, *twice*, at

                        my age?   1090

The more I think about it, the more I'm burned up at the trouble my son's caused.
I'm totally screwed, totally ruined; I'm in agony over everything.
All kinds of problems are chasing me, and I've died every kind of death.
Chrysalus mangled me today, Chrysalus stripped me of everything and left

                        me miserable.

That crook totally clipped stupid me of my gold with his smart tricks—just like

                        he felt like.   1095

Then the soldier says that the girl that guy said was his wife is a prostitute, he

                        explained how

everything was done, how he'd hired her for himself for a year,
and the rest of the money that I, idiot that I am, had promised, was the remainder.
And that—that!—is why my heart's gone sour: that's finally why I'm so tortured,
because I was scammed at my age—no, because I've been scammed this way   1100
and had my gold squeezed out of my nose, despite my gray hair and white

                        beard! I'm pathetic!

I'm screwed—that my slave *dared* to think this wasn't worth anything. And if I
lost more somewhere else, I'd be less annoyed, and would think it was less a loss.

There is quite a bit to unpack here, but perhaps nothing more remarkable than Nicobulus'

initial claim to excel all *stulti, stolidi, fatui, fungi, bardi, blenni, buccones* (1088), past and future, in

stultitia and *moribus indoctis* (1089). The insulting comparanda Nicobulus uses are sonically

exceptional: three groups of alliterating insults (chiming on *s*, *f*, and *b*, respectively), with the

groups arranged in an asymmetrical pattern with two groups of two members, and a concluding

group with three members. This arrangement—short, short, long; or, equal, equal, extended—is a

recurring folk motif, sometimes referred to as a "Butz Triad."[42] Famous examples include "Father,

son, and Holy Ghost," as well as "snips, and snails, and puppy-dog tails," but the pattern manifests

in emphatic lists of all kinds, not just aphorisms and folk poetry. Here it gives structure to what is

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[42] Following Morgan (1983). See again the discussion of poetic triplets above, in Chapter 5.1.

otherwise a list of synonyms, all relating to stupidity.[43] The effect is cumulative, as each chime of the sonic string reinforces the depth of the stupidity. The triplet structure of the list is also layered on top of the anapestic meter of the passage, which gives additional emphasis to the arrangement. The anapests lend the speech a bright, cutting tone that "raise[s] the level of agitation or emotional intensity."[44] The total effect—repetition, jingles, and semantics—makes Nicobulus' meaning more than apparent.

The reason for Nicobulus' bold allegation against his own mental abilities is that he has twice been been scammed (1090), both times by his slave, Chrysalus. The terms Nicobulus use to describe the grifts are interesting (1093-94): *lacerauit* (to mangle—to abuse physically), *spoliauit* (to strip—to take property), *attondit* (to clip—a shearing metaphor that will be picked up later in the play). Nicobulus' metaphors are all physical—mangle, strip, clip—and all carry a strong sense of negative impoliteness, since all imply a reduction (or total loss) of autonomy. The fact that a *slave* has done this to him makes the loss of face even greater. Nicobulus is angry and deeply upset (1092) at Chrysalus, clearly, but he does not direct the initial barrage of abuse against the slave—instead, he abuses himself. Only later in the play will Nicobulus, along with Philoxenus, another *senex*, go and try to roust his son in order to fix the situation that Chrysalus has engineered.[45] In similar scenes

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[43] The first two terms (*stultus*, *stolidus*) are relatively common in Plautus' plays, appearing at least 35 times; *fatuus* is less common, but does appear in near-contemporary writers (e.g., Lucilius 447M *fatuum*, Terence *Eun.* 604 *fatue*, etc.). The word *fungus* as an insult is notably odd; Lilja connects it to an earlier line when Chrysalus tells Nicobulus to his face that he *tanti est quanti putidus fungus* ("He is worth as much as a rotten mushroom", 821), though this does not explain the nature of the insult here (Lilja 1965: 29). Interestingly, Nicobulus calls himself *fungus* earlier in the play: *adeon me fuisse fungum*, "How could I have been so dumb?" (283). The last three terms (*bardus*, *blennus*, *bucco*) are very rare: *bardus* only appears one other time in Plautus (*Per.* 169), and *blennus* is a borrowing from the Greek comic word βλεννός, "drivelling." The term *bucco* is derived from the name of the character-type *Bucco*, found in Atellan farce (Lilja 1965: 17); see e.g. Pomponius *Atell.* 10, *bucco, puriter fac ut rem tractes* ("Bucco, be sure to handle that thing cleanly!"), as well as discussion in Frassinetti (1967: vi–vii). For brief discussion of this insult run generally, see Lilja (1965: 24–25).

[44] Moore (2012): 201.

[45] Namely, that the son, Mnesilochus, has fallen in love with a prostitute and used Chrysalus to get the money he needs to spend all his time with her. The two *senes* set out together at 1117, their confrontation with the prostitute and her sister lasts until the end of the play.

from other plays, when someone has been duped by a slave (or other crafty character), the abuse is usually directed outward, toward the perpetrator.[46] The scene makes Nicobulus seem strangely vulnerable, and so sets up a character feature that will be exploited later when he eventually sets off to find his son. In performance this speech could have been played in a number of different ways, each with a different result (melodramatic, humorous, crazed). Whatever style he chose, the actor playing Nicobulus would guide that depiction by how he delivered these insults—were they just tossed off jokes? Were they presented as genuinely cutting?

The problem, as always, entails multiple perspectives. From an in-play angle, Nicobulus does seem to express genuine anger, in equal measure with regret. Read against this, the insults might be symptomatic of his mental state, indicating not just his frustration at the situation, but also low self-regard, or even a kind of meta-understanding of his own reduced stage status. We have to work to get there, though, since Nicobulus does not come out and just call himself "foolish," but rather couches his self-insult in an elaborate rhetorical construction that takes three full lines to unfold. It begins with three relative clauses (*Quiquomque ubi sunt, qui fuerunt quique futuri sunt posthac*, 1087), in asyndeton to each other and fronted before their apparent antecedents.[47] These follow in the next line, and—seemingly—comprise the bulk of the insult: *stulti, stolidi, fatui, fungi, bardi, blenni, buccones* (1088).[48] The third line of the monologue brings the point home: "I personally surpass all [those idiots] in stupidity and general foolishness" (*solus ego omnis longe antideo stultitia et moribus indoctis*, 1089). This is a surprise twist, and the lapidary syntax suggests deliberate

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[46] For example, the scene between Euclio and the slave of Lyconides discussed in Chapter 2.3; Theopropides plotting with Simo to punish Tranio in *Most.* 1030–40; Hegio's anger, rant against, and physical punishment of Tyndarus in *Capt.* 641–765.

[47] "Apparent" because, as the full sentence reveals, the actual antecedent is accusative *omnis* in 1089; the nominatives in 1088 are either in agreement with or in apposition to the nominative relative pronouns in 1087.

[48] This rhetorical opening is found elsewhere in Plautus' plays; e.g., Dordalus remarking on his own foolishness in *Persa*: *qui sunt, qui erunt quique fuerunt quique future sunt posthac, / solus ego omnibus antideo facile, miserrumus hominum ut uiuam* ("Living as I do as the most pathetic of all people, I alone easily surpass all those who have lived, will live, and have lived," 777–78).

misdirection. The actual subject of the main clause—Nicobulus—is held back until the third line, and when revealed, it forces a listener to reappraise the scope of everything heard thus far. Rather than the long list of insults in 1088, the main insult terms Nicobulus uses are *stultitia* and *mores indocti*. The "list of fools" are units of comparison: "I am stupider than those we call stupid."

The way Nicobulus implicates himself in the insults at the last moment is a surprise, but once that is done, the rest of his speech is more straightforward, as he complains about being taken advantage of, blames the slave Chrysalus—blame that also implies a deep feeling of insult—and gives a brief summary of the play's basic plot thus far. Why the elaborate insults at the beginning of the monologue? Strictly speaking, the abuse terms Nicobulus uses are not directed at anyone but himself, since the *stulti* and *fatui* people he mentions are all indefinite. At first, he alone is the object of the bashing (*solus ego…antideo stultitia*, 1089), which prompts the question: does self-insult damage face? From an in-play perspective, and according to the politeness definitions of Culpeper, Brown and Levinson, and others applied in previous chapters, the answer seems to be "no." Face itself is relational, being a measure of social self-worth, and like material worth, social value is meaningful only in comparison with the relative positions of others in the community of comparison. Self-criticism can in theory diminish one's personal conception of face, but social prestige as such is awarded by others. In addition, the face-damaging power of insults, already discussed, is based on intent, and it seems far from obvious that Nicobulus is trying to diminish himself here—instead, he is *expressing* the feeling that he has lost face. Indeed, Nicobulus seems to be worrying about how being fooled twice by his slave affects his status as an elder: he mentions being cheated "at his age" twice (1090, 1100); he localizes his anger by pointing out that being tricked despite his "grey hair and white beard" (*cano capite atque alba barba*, 1101) is what really upsets him (*hoc est demum quod percrucior*, 1099).[49] By this point, Nicobulus seems genuinely angry throughout the speech, as he loops continuously back to how Chrysalus swindled him, something

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[49] Nicobulus on being cheated: 1090, 1100, and 1101.

the anapestic meter would only reinforce. The anger he builds up here will continue, and will guide his behavior into the final scene of the play, when he goes to confront the prostitutes. From an out-play perspective, many in the audience probably see him as a fool, but his self-deprecation, frustration, and genuine concern with his status, while pathetic in a way, could also elicit some sympathy.[50] Whether this was played only for laughs or if there was some genuine pathos would depend on delivery, and the actor playing Nicobulus would sing these anapestic lines—insults, self-mockery, and all—accompanied by a melody on the tibia. The meter and music could have conveyed high emotion, but Nicobulus' words do not suggest he is trying to damage his (own) face so much as they telegraph just how much face he has *already* lost through the course of the play: Nicobulus' personal and social standing has taken a beating throughout *Bacchides*, as a result of being repeatedly tricked by his slave and his son—his social inferiors—into giving up money for a prostitute. Nevertheless, in the next scene he will join them. The cumulative effect of these tricks and swindles is, for all intents and purposes, the same reduction of face as happens with verbal insult: specifically, extreme negative impoliteness, as Nicobulus' autonomy and social position are steadily eroded.

Although a buffoon in the play, Nicobulus' emotion here seems genuine, and his use of self-insult could have made the scene very affecting—or at least, highly melodramatic—if the actor chose to play it straight. Nicobulus is not alone onstage during his monologue (Philoxenus has been onstage since 1076), but he certainly believes himself to be alone, since he is surprised to see Philoxenus when the other man addresses him.[51] Nicobulus addresses his monologue to the audience, and their impression of his anger and complaints would depend on what kind of rapport has been established thus far in the play. The old man is in some ways a sympathetic character (at

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[50] Empirical work on insult and the psychology of humor suggests that self-deprecation, in appropriate circumstances, does not necessarily damage a person's face in the eyes of others, but can instead express politeness and thus increase rapport within a community; see Niwa and Maruno (2009).

[51] *Eugae, socium aerumnae et mei mali uideo*, "Oh hey, I see an ally in my suffering and trouble!", 1105.

least, thus far; this changes shortly); he has not been actively malevolent, unlike some *senes* in comedy, and his repeated duping is the result of a concern for his son. If these aspects of his character were highlighted in performance, the audience could establish an emotional bond with Nicobulus, even if this was only humorous pity for someone whom they considered foolish, butdid not actively dislike.[52] In his structural-metrical analysis of the play, Marshall places this scene in the middle section of the play's final metrical "arc," that is, in the last of the repeated senarius-canticum-recitative sequences typical in Plautus plays.[53] As just discussed, the anapestic meter used here was conventionally associated with scenes of high emotion, and Nicobulus' distress—though not addressed directly to the audience, as Euclio's was—is still directed out-play, and so falls right in the lap of the audience.

What is the joke here? The insults Nicobulus uses at the start of his speech are funny sounding on their own (*stulti, stolidi, fatui, fungi, bardi, blenni, buccones*), with a jingly, alliterative rhythm that would have been fun to say, and fun to hear if performed quickly. The rest of the speech is less showy, but it has a quickness that, combined with the anapestic rhythm, would have been fun to bounce along with in performance. If played against his escalating anger, the delivery could build to a funny crescendo, as we have seen when other comic *senes* freak out. In terms of content, it might be that the joke is simple cruelty: Nicobulus could be played as a dupe and fool, an "Elmer Fudd" character, in which case the emotional outburst here would be performed with maximal silliness and limited emotional content. In general, the less we empathize with someone—or some situation—the more likely we are to find it funny when they are hurt, either emotionally or

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[52] Though note that this kind of rapport is never total. My discussion in Chapter 4 demonstrates the complexity of audience reaction, and some members of the audience for this play, due to their social backgrounds or personal disposition, would not have sympathized with Nicobulus' predicament. Some may have even thought his self-mockery was completely justified and deeply humorous.

[53] Marshall (1999: 281, *s.v.*). This is similar to Moore's "ABC" metrical grouping, laid out in Moore (2012: 253–55).

physically.[54] In terms of BVT, emotional distance leads to objectification of a person or situation, which makes the potential violation less severe. This is why, for example, cartoon characters like Daffy Duck or Wile E. Coyote are never hurt permanently despite suffering repeated and extreme physical violence in their various Looney Tunes adventures; though sometimes they are shown using crutches or in a cast, their injuries are never permanent, and even after taking horrific abuse, they are shown back to full health in the next scene. Permanent pain would trigger empathy, while the lack of consequence retards it. (The non-permanent physical violence of the Three Stooges works on a similar principle.)[55] If these elements were highlighted in performance, there would be little sense of violation, because the audience would not take Nicobulus or his emotions seriously. There is another possibility, however, a slower-burn type of comedy—the *iocus difficilior*, if you will —which takes a larger view of the gag that is being set up. This would require a different performance arc, and an understanding by the actor that the monologue was not just meant to be funny in isolation, but was also the setup for a larger situational joke that closes out the play. I do not propose this as an either/or situation, where Nicobulus' self-insult must be played as funny or not. Instead, I propose to think of it as a matter of emphasis: jokes in comic routines, as Plautus plays unarguably were, are rhetorical constructs by nature; to be effective, all jokes require structure—at its most basic: a setup, build, and punchline. During extended performances, joke routines can become very complex, as individual setups and punchlines are woven together into

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[54] Sometimes referred to as the "empathy and objectification" model of humor, as discussed in Peacock (2014: 62–80). Cf. Richlin (1992: 61), "The more pertinent a victim B is—the greater the number of Cs who are normally vexed by such a B—the greater the audience's solidarity."

[55] See also narrower applications of this principle to specific humor genres in e.g. Kochersberger et al. (2014) (on the role of empathy in sexist humor) and Schwind (2015) (on empathy and embarrassment humor).

larger swells and ebbs of humor.[56] In the larger structure of the play's ending sequence, Nicobulus'

monologue-length bout of self-insult is a perfect setup for a larger, more sustained joke. This plays

on the sense of indignation Nicobulus expresses in his monologue, and leads to a surprising

reversal at the end of the play, when Nicobulus chucks all of his moral scruples and chooses to

engage the same prostitutes that have been entertaining his and Philoxenus' sons. The

development is a transgressive, provocative violation of moral order; how Plautus builds the

scenes leading up to this violation ultimately makes it, in the terminology of BVT, benign.

Nicobulus' monologue is the setup to the play-ending gag, and this begins transitioning to its

next segment—the build—when Nicobulus' sense of abused honor prompts him and Philoxenus to

set out and confront their respective sons, both of whom are partying at the house where two

prostitutes named "Bacchis" are living (1117). After Nicobulus pounds violently on the door of the

house, the meter switches to bacchiacs, and the prostitutes come out of their house. The two

women then begin to mock and abuse the old men (1120–28):[57]

BA. quis sonitu ac tumultu tanto nominat me atque pultat aedis?   1120
NI. ego atque hic. BA. quid hoc est negoti nam, amabo?
quis has huc ouis adegit?   1121a
NI. ouis nos uocant pessumae. SO. pastor harum
dormit, quom haec eunt [sic] a pecu balitantes.
BA. at pol nitent, hau sordidae uidentur ambae.
SO. attonsae hae quidem ambae usque sunt. PH. ut uidentur   1125
deridere nos! NI. sine suo usque arbitratu.

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[56] The three-part schema I propose here is adapted from existing theories of joke construction, but in particular follows a simplified version of the three-part "comic event" formula laid out in O'Shannon (2012). See also the discussion in Greenbaum (1999), which applies a classical (Aristotelian) rhetorical framework to analyze the structure of standup comedy routines. For a practical demonstration of humor rhetoric, see also the online "interactive essay" from the site "The Pudding" (Goldenberg and Daniels 2018), which includes an in-depth analysis of laughter dynamics in a taped performance by comedian Ali Wong. The analysis provides useful insight into how a performer, through the course of an hour-long performance, develops larger and larger laughs, and arranges discrete, interlocking jokes into a unified performance.

[57] A note on the naming conventions in the cues here: BA indicates "Bacchis 1," the prostitute from Athens with whom Pistoclerus, the son of Philoxenus, is in love. SO is "Soror," the sister of Bacchis, who confusingly is also named "Bacchis," and who will be referred to as "soror" or "Bacchis 2" below. She is the woman whom Mnesilochus, the son of Nicobulus, has been pursuing.

BA. rerin ter in anno tu has tonsitari?
SO. pol hodie altera iam bis detonsa certo est.

BA. Who is calling my name so loudly and making such a racket, knocking
<div align="right">on the door?   1120</div>
NI. Me and him. BA. What's going on, please?
Who drove these ewes over here?   1121a
NI. These awful women are calling us ewes! SO. Their shepherd
is asleep, so they're wandering around bleating, away from the flock.
BA. Both look shiny, though—they hardly seem dirty!
SO. Yep, both have been totally clipped. PH. It sure   1125
seems like they're making fun of us! NI. They can do what they want.
BA. Do you think these gals are clipped three times a year?
SO. Well hell, one of them's already been trimmed twice today!

It is striking how similar the insults Bacchis and her sister ("Bacchis 2") use against the two men are to the insults that Nicobulus has just used against himself. In particular, both women comment on how Nicobulus (and Philoxenus) have been "clipped"—i.e., swindled—in an elaborate metaphor that compares the two old men to sheep.[58] Sheep are usually white in color, and old men, as Nicobulus has just mentioned, typically have white hair and beards.[59] The women obliquely confirm the connection when they mention how "shiny" and "clean" the two *senes* are (1125), "shiny" and "clean" here being substitutes for "white."[60] For their part, Nicobulus and Philoxenus initially say very little in response to this abuse: Nicobulus seems astonished at first (1122), but when Philoxenus, shocked at the mockery, points out that they are being teased (1125–26), Nicobulus is strangely unconcerned (1126). This muted reaction is a contrast to the distress Nicobulus showed earlier when insulting himself in fairly similar terms, especially since the insults the *meretrices* use are, in fact, even more cutting. In fact, the two *senes* may be deeply

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[58] E.g., *Quis has huc ouis adegit?*, 1121a. Equating an easily fooled person with a sheep is a joke-metaphor Plautus uses elsewhere, as at *Merc.* 524–26: *ouem tibi eccillam dabo, natam annos sexaginta...tondetur nimium scite*, "I'll give you this sheep here, sixty years old...[who] is sheared very easily."

[59] *...cano capite atque alba barba*, 1101.

[60] This may in fact be a kind of embedded stage direction (*at pol nitent, hau sordidae uidentur ambae*), where the women caress or pat the "wool" of the "ewes"—that is, the hair of the old men.

surprised and cowed at how aggressively the two prostitutes behave. The mocking metaphor the Bacchises use literally both emasculates the old men and reduces them to the level of animals that are proverbially stupid, and so do nothing but wander around and make bleating noises (*balitantes*, 1123; cf. *palantes*, 1136; *balant*, 1138a). It is a direct affront to the same dignity of age that Nicobulus lamented in his monologue, and so carries the kind of face-damage that he had complained about, and in the same terms (*attondit*, 1095). Nicobulus keeps calm even when the women begin teasing him about the swindles he suffered (1128), which is especially surprising, because public knowledge of this embarrassing event is a direct, unambiguous threat to his reputation. When the *soror* casually advertises her knowledge of this little scandal, she makes an explicit face-threatening act, and a show of negative impoliteness.[61]

It takes the old men some time to respond in kind, but they eventually warm to the insult metaphor and begin to refer to themselves as *oues* ("ewes", 1140a, 1142) who have lost their "lambs" (*agnos*, 1145); that is, their respective sons, who are partying inside the house of the *meretrices*. This at first looks like an effort by the *senes* to reappropriate and so neutralize the insult language the *meretrices* have been using, similar to how Grumio reappropriates and defuses the country-specific insults that Tranio uses against him (discussed in Chapter 3.3). Indeed, it is reappropriation, but not for the same purpose; at 1141, just before Nicobulus again uses the word *oues* in reference to himself and Philoxenus (1142), the meter shifts from bacchiacs (in use since 1120, when they old men first knock on the door of the house) to trochaic septenarii. The shift in meter would have been accompanied by a shift in music and singing style (from sung *cantica* to "recited" trochaics), in addition to a shift in tone. Just before the meter change, at 1140, the *soror* has tried to pull her sister inside the house; she is done taunting the old men, and plans to leave them outside to bleat "with a human voice" (*humana...voce appellant*, 1141). In response, Nicobulus

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[61] That is, she effectively undercuts the social authority Nicobulus carries by suggesting he is irresponsible and easily duped.

threatens to give them a "huge beating" (*malam rem magnam*, 1142), because, as Philoxenus explains, the two women have their "two lambs locked inside" (*nostros agnos conclusos…duos*, 1145). To close out the threat, Nicobulus again picks up the sheep metaphor: *arietes truces nos erimus, iam in uos incursabimus* ("We're fierce rams, and we're going to attack you!", 1148). This threat ends the run of trochaic septenarii, and also caps the insult exchange. Nicobulus, stoking the anger he had built up during his self-insulting monologue (1087–1103), hijacks the insulting metaphor the women had deployed against him. He and Philoxenus are no longer feminine *oues*, they are male *arietes*. This is facework of a primal type, where physical violence or its threat (*malam rem magnam*, 1142; *in uos incursabimus*, 1148) substitutes for verbal negotiation of politeness. And, if the point were not already made clearly, after his threat the meter and music shift again, this time to anapests, the same auditory mode of "emotional intensity" that accompanied Nicobulus' self-insulting monologue. He has come full circle; he is still angry and spitting insult, but instead of mocking and abusing himself he sends it outward, against the women.

It is also directed square at the audience, and is designed to make them laugh, as we would expect from an insult exchange.[62] The in-play insults are genuine, as the *senes* react angrily to them, and steadily work to repair their sense of face after receiving them. In performance, the in-play insults become jokes for the out-play audience, and each of the insult-lines the actors tossed off would be a potential laugh. This would have made the scene dynamic, as there is a swirl of thematic and compositional movement that accompanies the old men as they go from confusion to annoyance to smug superiority, where each shift is accompanied by a corresponding metrical and musical cue. The physical movements of the actors onstage are more difficult to track; the scene requires four actors together, and since members from each "team" talk to one another in asides during their respective insult jabs, the two groups of actors would, at least at some points,

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[62] "One of the most important differences between sounding and other speech events is that most sounds are evaluated overtly and immediately by the audience…The primary mark of positive evaluation is laughter" (Labov 1972: 483).

probably be arranged opposite each other. There are also several occasions where one or another

actor from either "team" will make an aside comment to his or her counterpart.[63] This could be

evidence that each group was (at least at certain points) arranged in a line, and each line arranged

at a slightly oblique angle to the other; the angle would need to be shallow, however, as each actor

was, of course, speaking to the audience, and their voices would project better the more the actors

faced toward those actually listening. This arrangement would be awkward for those watching

from either side of the theater space, and one or another group of actors may have been partially

(or totally) obscured, depending. For those with a clear view, the broad "V" arrangement of the two

groups of actors would present a visual separation that echoed their thematic separation during

the teasing exchange. On the other hand, this arrangement is largely static, and hardly in keeping

with the dynamic changes in tone and meter that occur throughout this encounter, up until the

shift to anapests at 1149. (The anapestic meter continues until 1207, very nearly the end of the play,

the last four lines of which are spoken by the *grex*; discussed below.) Such an arrangement would

have the advantage of visually reinforcing the character oppositions set out in the dialogue,

however: if both teams were arrayed opposite each other, the hostility of their exchange would be

apparent in the visual field. This may also have been a base configuration, an arrangement with

which the scene begins as the old men come and pound on the door, but which changed (slowly or

abruptly?) as the flow of insult and power shifted from the *meretrices* to the *senes*.

However the four actors were arranged onstage, the insults they tossed back and forth would,

in the out-play perspective would have provided frequent opportunities for laughs. The escalating,

shifting ewes/lambs/rams theme is a classic comic technique, the "callback," where each new

instantiation of a word or phrase reinvokes previous instances, while also subtly changing to fit a

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[63] Example in-group asides in this scene: Nicobulus saying *ouis nos uocant pessumae* ("These awful women are
calling us ewes!", 1122); Bacchis saying *rerin ter in anno tu has tonsitari?* ("Do you think these gals are clipped three
times a year?", 1127).

new context. Audiences love recurring gags of this sort,[64] and used judiciously, joke callbacks can tie together a thematically loose set of comedy bits into a cohesive whole. The callbacks in this scene are more focused, however, and as just discussed, the way the *senes* react to the sheep/ewe jokes also marks their stage status (i.e., "stage face") in the scene. Moreover, the encounter between Nicobulus, Philoxenus, and the Bacchis prostitutes is a thematic and narrative pivot for the larger joke sequence that closes *Bacchides*. Throughout the play Nicobulus and Philoxenus have consistently worked *against* the Bacchis sisters (or, at least, against their respective sons, who are in love with the women), and the insult match that leads up to Nicobulus threatening to bash in the door of Bacchis' house is the culmination of this. However, immediately after Nicobulus makes his threat, in time with the musical change to anapests, the narrative shifts again, and the insults stop. Why? Sex, of course (1149–1153):

> BA. soror, est quod to uolo secreto. SO. eho, amabo. NI. quo illaec abeunt?
> BA. senem illum tibi dedo ulteriorem, lepide ut lenitum reddas;   1150
> ego ad hunc iratum adgrediar. possumu' nos hos intro inlicere huc.
> SO. meum pensum ego lepide accurabo: quam odiosum est mortem amplexari!
> BA. facito ut facias. SO. taceas. tu tuom facito: ego quod dixi hau mutabo.

> BA. Sis, there's something I want to say in private. SO. Oh! Please. NI. Where are
>   they going?
> BA. I'm gonna hand that farther guy over to you to soften up nicely;   1150
> I'll go after this angry one. We can lure them inside here.
> SO. I'll take care of my wool quota fine; but it's so gross to cuddle a corpse.
> BA. Just do it. SO. Hush—you do your bit; I'm not going to go back on what I said.

What they say is, by convention, heard by the audience but not by the *senes*. The audience finally sees the game the Bacchis sisters are playing at, or so it seems. Their sudden decision here to engage with the two old men is a preservation move, designed to defuse anger and keep the

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[64] Cf. the broad popularity of catchphrases or signature joke-tags used by standup comedians. E.g., Jeff Foxworthy's "You Might Be a Redneck If…" jokes, Jerry Seinfeld's "What's the deal with X?" opening style (something he himself frequently parodied on the *Seinfeld* television show), or Rodney Dangerfield's "Get outta here!" and "I don't get no respect!" tags.

men from tearing up the place like "angry rams" (*arietes truces*, 1148). This deflection is triggered by the *incursabimus* threat at 1148, and the women quickly develop a strategy to keep the old men from attacking them. Women in the audience watching this scene may have recognized in the sisters' earlier teasing the reflexive mollification that women sometimes feel compelled to perform in response to male anger; Bacchis signposts this angle when describing Nicobulus as *hunc iratum* (1151); indeed, we have seen this anger develop for some time, from Nicobulus' initial frustrated monologue (1087–1103), to the *tumultu tanto* he makes when pounding on Bacchis' door (1120), to the *incursabimus* threat (1148).[65] Female audience members would not necessarily have identified with the *meretrices* as characters, depending on the status and background of the audience member in question, but the way the Bacchis sisters manipulate the old men—and more importantly, the *necessity* of exerting control this way—may have been a moment that, for women in the audience, cut across status distinctions.

The *soror* of Bacchis clearly does not want to have sex with Philoxenus (*quam odiosum est mortem amplexari*, 1152), or even spend time with him, but she readily accepts the necessity of doing so, because this is the lever of control available to her. Her comment about "embracing a corpse" might have gotten some good laughs, from men and women both. The insult cuts deeply, especially for how it undermines the social value of the old age that Nicobulus had carped about earlier (1100–01). Men also, especially younger men, might have laughed in contempt at the old man the *soror* describes; in real life, notionally objects of respect, *senes* onstage are marked as much by the repugnance of their looks as by their often demolished authority. This, then, is an interesting benign violation, according to BVT: the disgrace of the *senes* by prostitutes violates moral and social norms of the day, but the exact nature of the violation differs according to

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[65] How interesting the *soror*'s response, *meum pensum ego lepide accurabo*, where the term *pensum* can mean "work, obligation," but is ultimately derived from the verb *pendo*, "weigh," and indicated the daily allotment of wool given to a woman for spinning. This too alludes to the ewes/lambs/rams metaphor that has developed during the earlier insult exchange. The term is fairly rare in Plautus, appearing only six times (*Bacch.* 1152, *Men.* 796, *Merc.* 397, 416, and *Per.* 272, *Truc.* 765). Of those instances, this is the only time a female character uses the word, but in all instances but *Truc.* 765 it has a gendered connotation.

audience. For women watching, the joke may have been the same as it was for men—the bearding of authority figures—or may have been centered on the fact that the old men turn out to be creeps who jettison their moral authority as soon as they are tempted with sex. Men throughout Plautus' plays act foolishly about sex, something *matronae*, *ancillae*, and *meretrices* in the audience would have recognized firsthand. This is a personal BVT violation, as it is the recognition of a daily horror, but made ridiculous. Both assessments are ultimately benign—that is, neutralized to a point where laughter could result—because of the psychological distance provided by the stage. And, in addition, by the final twist in the play that forms the punchline of the larger gag to whcih all these elements contribute.

5.5. Jokes and Insults in *Bacchides*: Part 2 — The Punchline(s)

Once the Bacchis sisters decide to seduce the two old men (1149–53), the united front the *senes* were presenting begins to fail. They have their own private consultation, held onstage after the sisters' but, in-play, notionally simultaneous with it (1154-65). The meter here is anapestic, and this accompanies both groups of characters as they split off to talk amongst themselves, and continues through the spatial reunion that follows (1166). The reunion marks a scandalous transition in the thematic character of the play, as the old men stop being moral exemplars and become something much funnier: hypocrites. It begins when Philoxenus, terribly ashamed of himself (*pudet dicere me tibi quiddam*, "I'm embarrassed to tell you something," 1155a), admits to Nicobulus that he is infatuated with the *soror* of Bacchis (*tactus sum … uisco / cor stimulo foditur*, "I'm caught in birdlime / my heart's being gouged by a cattle prod," 1158-59; *ego amo*, "I'm in love!", 1162). Nicobulus seems more scandalized than surprised, as he had suspected something was going on (*quid sit prope scire puto me*, "I nearly know what it is," 1160), a textual clue that in performance would no doubt have been telegraphed earlier by the body language of the actor playing Philoxenus. Nicobulus begins to abuse Philoxenus, and frames his criticism in the same terms he used against himself earlier

during his monologue, reminding Philoxenus that his urge is not appropriate to his social position and age (*tun, homo putide, amator istac fieri aetate audes?*, "You rotten human being, you dare to turn into a lover at your age?", 1163).[66] In response, Philoxenus offers an unusual defense: *quid opust verbis? meo filio non sum iratus,/ nec te tuo est aequom esse iratum: si amant, sapienter faciunt* ("Why bother with words? I'm not angry at my son/ and it's not fair for you to be angry with yours: if they're in love, then they're acting smart," 1164–65). Again, we have an emphasis on anger (*iratus*), the character feature that has defined Nicobulus since his first self-insults (at 1097). Here, Philoxenus characterizes anger as a negative virtue, in order to neutralized the positive face-threat Nicobulus has deployed when he challenged Philoxenus' choice "at his age."[67] Yes, he may be acting like an adolescent, but at least he isn't a grumpy stick-in-the-mud.

At this point the slow-burn of the joke first set up in Nicobulus' self-insulting monologue begins to speed up, rushing toward an explosive, play-ending punchline. Philoxenus' argument for his change of opinion is muddled: his appeal to the "wisdom of love" (*si amant, sapienter faciunt*) is not a sudden sympathy for his son, but an emotional reversion to a state of *adulescentia*. Everyone in the audience could have seen it coming, however, since Philoxenus, in his (long-delayed) second appearance in the play (1076-86), right before Nicobulus' rant, delivers a monologue explaining that he, too, in his youth, liked to party and "had a whore" (*habui scortum*, 1081). He cues this much earlier in the play, in his first scene (III.iii), remarking *feci ego istaec itidem in adulescentia* ("I also did these things when I was young," 410). In this line, *istaec* refers to carrying on with a *meretrix*, and Philoxenus brings it up when arguing with Lydus, the *paedagogus* of his son Pistoclerus, who is angry that the *adulescens* is in a sexual relationship with the *meretrix* Bacchis.[68] The confrontation

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[66] Here again we find *audes* in an abusive comment. This time, Nicobulus uses it to assert moral authority over someone.

[67] Nicobulus' criticism comprises both positive and negative impoliteness: positive, because it attempts to dissociate him from Philoxenus, and negative because it attempts to curtail the other old man's autonomy.

[68] The scene with Lydus and Philoxenus occurs at 405–499.

between Lydus and Philoxenus is a centerpiece of the play: in response to Lydus' criticism Philoxenus asks Nicobulus' son Mnesilochus to save his (Philoxenus') son Pistoclerus from Bacchis, which in turn leads—by the usual Plautine logic of mix-ups and misunderstandings—to Nicobulus being swindled a second time by his son, Mnesilochus, and his slave, Chrysalus.[69] This Rube-Goldberg linkage of causal machinery begins to snap closed as soon as Philoxenus admits to liking the *soror* of Bacchis.

    A theme throughout *Bacchides* is how the *senes* Philoxenus and Nicobulus are drawn into their sons' relationships with the Bacchis sisters, and the resulting "need" of the *senes* to confront their sons. When one of those same *senes* goes over to the side of the *meretrices*, he effectively destroys the moral scaffold on which he and Nicobulus have hung their arguments against the women— and against their sons. Nicobulus senses this, is astonished, and tries to shame his friend: *flagitium est* ("It's outrageous!", 1164). The term *flagitium* has a technical sense of public outrage or embarrassment; that is, loss of face.[70] Nicobulus is clearly upset with Philoxenus, and senses that the moral ground is being cut out from beneath them. By reproving his friend, he insults him (positive impoliteness, a rejection of association), and also attempts facework to prevent his own reputation (i.e., face) from being harmed through association with the other man. The onstage blocking of this sequence would surely have reinforced this split in the ranks, and the shift of Philoxenus' allegiance from Nicobulus to the *soror* of Bacchis. When each group withdraws to speak amongst themselves, they are supposed to be speaking "privately" (*secreto*, 1149), but we can imagine that during the conferences they would be peering over at one another. When Philoxenus admits his secret, Nicobulus' outburst (and obvious disagreement with Philoxenus) would surely have been noticed by the women, who had already been pointing at and gesturing toward the old men during their own *secreto* meeting. Philoxenus does his own gesturing during his dialogue and

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[69] Nicobulus had been swindled earlier by his son and slave (42-46, 220-367, 388-91).

[70] See discussion in Richlin (2017: 179–80).

points out the sister of Bacchis to Nicobulus (u*iden hanc?*, "Do you see her?", 1161). Nicobulus is unimpressed and insults Philoxenus' new crush (*pol uero ista mala*, "Yes, she really is bad," 1162), a remark that was also surely followed by a gesture. The audience would have been watching the old men bicker, but so would the *meretrices*. In response to the growing disagreement between the *senes*, they could have exchanged glances (a move made more obvious by the masks the actors wore), made flirty gestures, or even crept closer to the old men, until the two groups finally rejoin and begin the four-person interaction that finishes the play (1166ff.).

This would all be a precursor to the erotic tone that begins in earnest once the two groups come back together (1166–1174):

> NI. eunt eccas tandem
> probriperlecebrae et persuastrices. quid nunc? etiam redditi' nobis
> filios et seruom? an ego experior tecum vim maiorem? PH. abin hinc?
> non homo tuquidem es, qui istoc pacto tam lepidam inlepide appelles.
> BA. senex optume quantumst in terra, sine <me> hoc exorare aps te,   1170
> ut istuc delictum desistas tanto opere ire oppugnatum.
> NI. ni abeas, quamquam tu bella es,
> malum tibi magnum dabo iam. BA. patiar, non metuo ne quid mihi doleat
> quod ferias. NI. ut blandiloquast! ei mihi, metuo.

> NI. Look, they're finally coming,
> the make-you-do-bad-things wheedling women that they are. What now?
>   Have you given us back
> our sons, and my slave? Or should I try something harder on you? PH. Are you kidding?
> You're not a man, talking trash like that to someone so nice!
> BA. *<baby-doll voice>* You best man in the whole wide world, let *me* beg you   1170
> to stop fighting so much against this little misdeed.
> NI. Well, you are hot, but if you don't go away
> I'm going to give you such a…spanking… BA. I can take it. I'm not worried
>   about being hurt
> with anything you're packing. NI. She's so…convincing. Okay, I'm scared now.

The erotic tone of this exchange is as conspicuous as it is sudden.[71] The exchange is still in the anapestic meter that began when each group of actors split off for their secret conferences (1149), and the energy of that meter, which had earlier accompanied Nicobulus' angry and frustrated rant (1097–1103), gives the sexual material in this exchange an uncomfortable subtext.[72] Nicobulus goes on to make a few more gestures toward resistance, but everyone involved—characters and audience both—now know that he's cooked, and after a bit more cajoling (1174–92), he finally gives in: *caput prurit, perii, uix negito* ("My head's tingling—I'm finished, I can hardly keep saying no!", 1193).[73] His reason for resisting so long, he tells us, is that he is afraid to be *obnoxius filio...et servo* (1197). The word *obnoxius* here is surprising, and by itself illuminates Nicobulus' final, overriding worry. As a term of art, *obnoxius* is widely associated with slavery and being physically restrained, but through metaphorical extension it came to mean "obliged" or "liable," and eventually, "guilty."[74] All of these meanings are a bit puzzling in this context. How is Nicobulus obligated to both his son and his slave? How is he "liable" or "guilty"?

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[71] Bacchis' *non metuo ne quid mihi doleat / quod ferias* in response to Nicobulus' threat to give her a *malum...magnum* seems unusually on-the-nose, given Plautus' usual obliqueness about sexual jokes. Plautus never uses overtly obscene terms in his plays, e.g. the notorious "dirty words" found in other purportedly "low" Latin genres (*futuo*, *mentula*, *culus*, *cunnus*, *irrumo*, *fello*, *pedico*). These words are common in satire and epigram, as well as in fragments of Atellan, but not the *palliata*. This isn't to say that Plautus isn't fond of naughty jokes, but rather that he tends to mask these in double entendre, as at *Cur.* 31, *quod amas amato testibus praesentibus*, "Thou shalt love that which you love while witnesses/your balls are present." However, Seth Jeppesen has recently argued that the lack of *textual* obscenities did not preclude presence of *gestural* (i.e., performative) obscenity (Jeppesen 2015). That is certainly what is happening in this scene: suggestive language accompanied by even more suggestive gestures, by both the male and female characters. See Adams (1982: 33) for Plautine double entendre, and Richlin (1992: 1–26) for a discussion of what constituted obscenity in Latin literature. For a broad discussion of obscene language in ancient texts, see Henderson ([1975] 1991), which although specific to Greek literature is still valuable for Latin comedy for its method and thoughtful literary discussion.

[72] Indeed, we should remember that the *meretrices* are coming on to the *senes* due to a physical threat; they do not like them and are not attracted to them, as the *soror* of Bacchis made clear at 1152 (*mortem amplexari*).

[73] There was never any question that Nicobulus would give in, since elsewhere in the play Bacchis has shown herself to be more than capable of getting men to do what she asks. The first extant scene in the play (35–100) involves her convincing Pistoclerus to get some money to help her sister. (The beginning of the play are lost.) See Dutsch (2008: 60–61, 121–22).

[74] "[A] word that has a whole range of connotations associated with slavery: being bound, answerable, accountable, under the domination of; servile, submissive; liable or exposed to harm or danger, or exposed to the elements; subject to punishment; vulnerable" (Richlin 2017: 335).

Bacchis knows, as she immediately assures Nicobulus about his son, *tuost: unde illum sumere censes, nisi quod tute illi dederis?* ("He's yours! Where do you think he gets it from, if you personally didn't supply it?", 1198). The thing Mnesilochus "gets" is a desire for prostitutes. The old man, fretting about being *obnoxius*, is of course thinking about the moral obligation he bears as a result of scolding his son and slave for their plots against him. If he reneges on that moral stance then he loses what little authority he has left, and fully embodies the charge he made against himself in his initial monologue: that he really does excel all the *stulti, stolidi, fatui, fungi, bardi, blenni, buccones* in *stultitia* and *moribus indoctis*. What makes *obnoxius* so interesting is the power relationship it implies, with both the *filius* and *servus* in a position superior to Nicobulus, the *paterfamilias*. It is another inversion of power, of the type so often found in Plautus' plays, but made especially striking because it is the result of deliberate choice. It is also insult writ large: the reduction of face in a public setting (in-play, everything takes place on a public street), in front of a peer (Philoxenus), and two social subordinates.

In less than 150 lines, Nicobulus has gone from an old man concerned about his social standing and criticizing himself for being embarrassed publicly by social inferiors, to a feckless libertine excited to share a prostitute with another man's son. From a strictly narrative view, the outcome makes zero sense. As a comic gambit it is a daring gamble: a surprising, lively twist that neatly ends the play while simultaneously undoing all of the narrative and thematic development that led up to the joke. Nicobulus becomes one more in a line of Plautine *senes amatores* who are willing to trade their social authority for female companionship.[75] This, at last, is the punchline to the joke-mosaic begun in Nicobulus' monologue. Instead of taking back control of his son, and so salvaging his own reputation as he set out to do when going to confront the Bacchis sisters (1116–1119),

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[75] For example, Demaenetus in *Asinaria* (discussed in Chapter 3.5), or Lysidamus in *Casina*, who when trying to get control of the girl Casina from his *uilicus*, Olympio, begins flattering and even physically caressing the slave (449–475). Lysidamus eventually becomes so desperate that he tells Olympio, his own slave, *seruos sum tuos* ("I'm *your* slave!", 738). See discussion of the *Blandus Amator* in Dutsch (2008: 75–81).

Nicobulus completes the loss of negative face—insult—that his son and his slave began when they tricked him. To top it all off, Nicobulus finally becomes so twisted around as to claim that he is somehow morally obligated (*obnoxius*) to the same two jokers who fooled him in the first place. He and Philoxenus, once separate characters, effectively fall together in the narrative, indistinguishable old fools made more foolish by lust.

What a punchline. In case this total moral subversion was not obvious to the audience watching, the play ends with Nicobulus and Philoxenus going off with the Bacchis sisters, at which point the meter shifts once more, this time to "chanted" trochaic septenarii, and the *grex* delivers a quick homily (1207–11):

Hi senes nisi fuissent nihili iam inde ab adulescentia,
non hodie hoc tantum flagitium facerent canis capitibus;
neque adeo haec faceremus, ni antehac uidissemus fieri
ut apud lenones riuales filiis fierent patres.   1210
spectatores, uos ualere uolumus, [et] clare adplaudere.

If these old men hadn't been worthless from the time they were kids,
they wouldn't have have committed such an outrageous act now when they're white-haired.
And we wouldn't have acted this out if we hadn't already seen
fathers become competitors to their sons at a pimp's house.   1210
All you watching—we wish you well…[and] that you clap loudly!

Is this a funny ending? Is the punchline funny? According the Benign Violation (BVT) framework I discussed earlier (section §3), a "humor stimulus," such as the punchline of a joke, becomes funny when it simultaneously violates a moral or ethical norm *and* is considered benign —that is, the person receiving the joke assesses the violation as distant or unreal enough to be essentially harmless.[76] Violations can become "benign" in a number of ways; for example, psychological distance from the moral threat, an understanding that the violation is not designed to harm, or a superior position of power can all contribute, singly or collectively, to assessing a

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[76] "A second, seemingly contradictory, condition is that humor occurs in contexts perceived to be safe, playful, nonserious, or, in other words, benign" (McGraw and Warren 2010: 1142).

violation as benign. All of these factors would have been in play for an audience watching *Bacchides*, and throughout the play, a number of possible violations have occurred, none more powerful than that at its end, when the two *senes* go to party with Bacchis and her sister. However, audience response to this and other violations would surely have varied. From an in-play perspective, Nicobulus' moral flip is a significant violation, one that steadily unreels as the old man sheds his convictions and reverts to an *adulescens* state. This sort of thing happens in Plautine comedy, however, and the audience watching might have seen it coming, given the early moral waffling of Philoxenus, and the general tendency for *senex* characters in the *palliata* to value sexual gratification above all else. The moral reversal is a minor violation in the comic world, though it is more significant if considered alongside real-world Roman values, where patriarchal authority was baked into nearly every aspect of daily life, and personal dignity was expected to be commensurate with age.

The regression Nicobulus and Philoxenus undergo is compounded by the sleaziness of their choices—we should remember that the prostitutes with whom they plan to spend time have, up to this point, also been entertaining their two sons, and will continue doing so *in the presence of the old men* (1190-92). Plautus chooses to have each *senex* fall for the woman his son is *not* seeing, a welcome concession that may have made the joke more palatable for some in the audience.[77] The opinion of the *grex* on this is unclear: it is possible that the *grex* is trying to deflect some of the vileness by suggesting the unsavory behavior of the *senes* in *Bacchides* is no worse than what happens in real life (*neque adeo haec faceremus, ni...*, 1209). This may be true, but it does little to make the ending less raunchy, at least in the abstract. Perhaps then the *grex* is censoring the audience to some degree? After all, the actors would not have staged such filth if it was not something they had seen real people do—that is, something that people in the audience do (1209). But again, audience

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77 Bacchis (from Athens) has throughout the play been involved with Pistoclerus, the son of Philoxenus. Philoxenus ends up with the *soror* of Bacchis. The *soror* (from Samos) has been involved with Mnesilochus, and is the one Philoxenus is ashamed to say that he has become infatuated with.

perspective would have varied: for lower-status people in the audience, seeing two hypocritical *senes* fall into the muck may have especially funny. Slaves in the audience—men and women—might have found something to enjoy seeing the owner worry about being *obnoxius* to his slave, and to their eyes this may have, in terms of BVT, been a minor moral violation, easily made "benign" by joy at the reversal of power. For higher status people, especially elite men, the joke might have been more complex. Ultimately, both Nicobulus and Philoxenus choose to embrace the premises of an embodied insult: the complete lack of positive and negative face—group acceptance, and personal autonomy—through a reversion to youthful behavior to achieve sensual pleasure. This joke has much more potential to threaten an elite men in the audience, but only if they identified with *senes* onstage. Without identification, without empathy and an emotional rapport, an elite male spectator would be less likely to see a violation; or at least, less likely to see a violation that he felt applies to *him*. Because Nicobulus and Philoxenus choose to undermine their own moral arguments, they remove themselves as authorities for those arguments. A viewer who finds the resolution of the play offensive can grab on to their choice and point to it: "Well, I wouldn't do that—they deserve to be laughed at!" As an in-play element, the joke ends up working at two different levels, with the violation made benign in both instances, but for very different reasons. The self-insult Nicobulus brings up in his monologue is the key to the joke, but whether someone watching the play approved or disapproved of that insult would then affect why they laughed at the old men at the end of the play.

5.6. Insult and Humor: Some Conclusions

The Benign Violation Theory is not a skeleton-key for unlocking every mystery of what people find funny. No one theory can ever do this—or rather, I hope no theory will ever do this, because the pure heart of comedy is the infectious craziness latent in every joke. There is a pleasure in laughter that resists examination, and withers under it. However, as a tool for considering the relationship

between humor and insult, a type of speech that in its purest intent is meant to achieve the opposite emotional result of laughter, BVT is an effective complement to politeness theory and the theories of audience rapport and engagement that I have discussed in this and previous chapters. Whatever we think the "real" psychological function of laughter and humor is, the phrase "insult-joke" implies a serious contradiction in thinking: an utterance meant to provide both emotional pleasure and pain. As discussed in the examples throughout this chapter, the core mechanism behind whether we think something is a joke or an insult is largely the same. The person listening must gauge intent—is this meant to be funny? is it meant to harm?—and measure this against the context in which the utterance is expressed, as well as the reactions of those listening and watching alongside. If what is said violates ethical belief or social norms, we judge how serious that violation is, and whether it is slight enough to be ignored. A connection with a speaker gives this process a boost: if we trust the person, empathize with them, have a rapport with them or believe they have our interests at heart, then the transgression is downgraded, and has the potential to become funny. Or, if not funny, then not insulting. If there is not enough context or intimacy or empathy in play, then what is said can tip into insult, depending on whether it was directed at us personally, or another. Tracking this process and elucidating all of the sight-lines and contextual factors involved can be exhausting, and most speakers make their decisions instinctually, or even habitually. Reconstruction of the process after the fact can give us insight into the minds and opinions of ancient speakers—and ancient audience members.

6. Conclusion: Comedy and the Cloud Chamber

In this dissertation I have argued that insults in speech (Plautine or otherwise) are not static, not defined by lexicon, and not even tethered to a speaker's intention. Although these elements can help guide how an insult will be received and interpreted, insult is, ultimately, a matter of perception. If a speaker (or character) says something to someone else with the purpose of insulting them, but the target is unaffected, does it count as an insult? If another person interprets something said innocuously—or jokingly—as insulting, did the person who said it use an insult? These questions can be difficult because so much of how we think about language is based on the fiction of stable categories. Certain words are polite, others not so much; the lexicon is coherent, words indicate concepts. We want to know what a thing is, and what it is not. If we talk about it as scholars, this desire to know becomes an imperative: taxonomy is a baseline feature of the job.

Regardless, insult—like all speech—is built around percentages: if X word is spoken by Y speaker in Z context, with a certain tone of voice and a suggestive posture, it could, for the most part, have a very good chance of insulting someone. This example is only slightly exaggerated. If the most radioactive words in English can be used as positive banter in certain situations, then we have to expect that all terms will admit similar semantic wobble. In a play, one might think that this ambiguity would be reduced, at least somewhat, since onstage conversations are scripted and their outcomes predetermined. This is certainly what *I* thought was happening when I first began this dissertation, when I fully expected that any variations I found in the meaning of a Plautine insult would be due to external influences that could be cleanly identified and carefully plotted. My thinking was, if a Plautine slave calls his owner *stultus*, as happens frequently in the plays (e.g., *Epid.* 652, *Mos.* 495), and that owner does not react with hurt feelings or anger, then there must be an obvious mediating factor: social power, personal intimacy, comic expediency, something. Such factors certainly are present, at least from the perspective of an in-play, narrative reality, though they are rarely so clearly defined. Most of Chapter 3 is dedicated to exploring such influences.

Unfortunately, this in-play perspective also completely ignores the defining rationale of dramatic, staged dialogue: the stage itself.

Plautus' comedies were intended for an audience, and every feature of his language was originally tuned to the frequency of those who watched his plays live. The perspective an audience brings to the question of performed insult is…substantial. And yet, we have no witness accounts from those who attended *palliata* comedies, whether Plautus' or those of another comedian, and the internal evidence for performance reactions is slim. (In Chapter 4 I survey what evidence there is, and cite critical discussion of the same.) To circumvent the problem I have attempted to reconstruct, very generally, possible audience perspectives, and have proposed different readings of a line or encounter depending on the position, social background, or inclination of potential audience members. However, while trying to reconstruct how these perspectives might work, I kept coming back to the question of why someone would have gone to see one of Plautus' comedies in the first place. I never address this question explicitly in my dissertation, as it never fit anywhere—until now—but it seems important. Why watch comedy at all?

Of course, when thinking about the motives of another, we always—inescapably—consider them in relation to our own. Why do I like comedy? Why do I watch it, and why did I choose to devote years of my life to writing about it? I confess that I do not have good answers, except to shrug and say the obvious: I enjoy comedy because it is funny, and I enjoy Plautus because of his energy, and his wit, and his originality. These answers are poor because they elide so much of what makes Plautus' work interesting and durable. In particular, they skip the fact that so much of what he wrote is potentially *not* very funny. Just think about the uncomfortable morality (or *amorality*) that many of his characters flaunt—as in the scene from *Bacchides*, discussed at the end of Chapter 5, when the two *senes* go off with the prostitutes their sons have been seeing. Do I really find this funny? If I do, what does that say about me?

The American essayist and fiction writer George Saunders is sometimes described as a "humor writer," which is perhaps why he was asked to write an introductory essay for a reissue of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The piece was later included in Saunders' nonfiction collection *The Braindead Megaphone* (under the title, "The United States of Huck"), which is where I first encountered it. Part of Saunders' analysis deals with the "Central Moral Vector" of Twain's book, and Saunders maintains that this element, not narrative technique, local detail, characterization, or anything else, is what ultimately makes *Huck Finn* Twain's greatest work. To illustrate the point, Saunders highlights one episode from near the middle of the novel:

> For me, the most moving part of the book is the scene at the end of chapter 23. Jim tells Huck about the time he slapped his young daughter in the head for not obeying him, only to find that she had never actually heard him: she had gone deaf from a recent bout with scarlet fever. It's a heartbreaker, as I was reminded just now when I went to get the chapter reference, reread it, and started bawling. Any parent reading this is sickened with the magnitude and hurtfulness of Jim's error, with the impossibility of ever really erasing it, and—this is a particular manifestation of Twain's moral genius—with the fact that, horrible as this mistake would have been for any parent, this parent is a slave, a thousand miles from a home he will probably never get back to, if the prevailing national culture has its way.[1]

Twain's book, everyone agrees, is a comic novel, but it is not unfailingly so. The incident between Jim and his daughter is wrenching as Saunders describes it—and as Jim describes it—but occurring as it does in a narrative where violence frequently holds hands with comedy (remember, the Duke and the King almost get Huck and Jim lynched in Arkansas, among other things), it could easily tip into humor. Nasty humor, but humor nonetheless. Plautus staged comic misunderstandings like this all the time, and the results, at least on the page, are just as consequential. Think of poor Tyndarus, sent to the quarries to work until he dies (*Capt.* 728–31), due to an old man's whim and the "prevailing national culture." Is this funny? It could be, though I feel uncomfortable admitting it. When the mustache-twirling, villainous slave Stalagmus is caught and interrogated at the end of the same play (*Capt.* 954–997), despite admitting that he abducted

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[1] Saunders (2007: 191).

Hegio's son and will be severely punished (971–72), he still manages to crack wise and joke about how much better he knows Hegio's son than Hegio does (976). It's a solid joke, but nasty. Slapstick comedy trades in similar nastiness, and lives in the narrow relationship between pain and laughter; so does insult humor. Insult exchanges in performed comedy are a kind of "psychological slapstick," an abuse of the ego and the soul. For those watching them in a comedy, they are as much a moral affront as physical abuse is. Regardless, and as we have seen over and over again, insults can be funny, if we think the damage will not last; or, if it happens to someone we do not like; or, if the results seem just distant enough to be acceptable. Or, or, or...

To reinvoke the terms of the Benign Violation Theory of Humor: insults can be funny if we can figure out a way to make their violation of our moral principle(s) seem simultaneously benign. The centrality of this paradox to the BVT framework is exactly why I find the theory so intriguing. It does not try to *fix* comedy by framing it as some essential piece of a larger bodily mechanism. It accepts the irrationality and selfishness at the heart of humor. Rather than explaining laughter as a process for restoring psychological balance (as relief theory does), or for reconciling the unexpected (as incongruity theory does), BVT acknowledges—indeed, thrives on—the troubling paradox behind all comedy, by pointing out that we laugh at things we find worrisome or strange, but only if at the same time we do not find them worrisome or strange *enough*. I suppose that I like the theory for the same reason that I like the comedies of Plautus: it reveals a possible truth, and gives a clue to the nature of that truth, but does not fully explain its significance. We supply the explanation ourselves, every time we decide whether a violation is benign or not, whether an insult is sanctioned or not, and whether a joke is funny or not. In this, comedy is like a physicist's cloud chamber, a contained space that allows us to view from relative safety all the dangerous particles and energies sizzling in our respective brains. It is a controlled venue that is prepared for a specific kind of experiment: by observing the effects that a radioactive material introduced into

the chamber has on its enclosing medium—a cloud of opaque gas, or an audience—we can learn how that same material affects the outside world when *not* safely contained…or on the stage.

In a different essay from the same *Braindead Megaphone* collection, Saunders writes about his first experience reading Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*, when he was a young man right of college and living on his own. As Saunders tells it, he initially hated the book, because it did not feel like literature to him—literature (he had heard) was weighty stuff, difficult to follow, and, crucially, not funny. Vonnegut's story on the other hand had a lightness, despite being structured around an account of the bombing of Dresden in 1945, an event that killed tens of thousands of people. Saunders describes his inability to reconcile the simplicity of Vonnegut's style (and his frequent, unapologetic silliness) with the subject of the narrative. The mismatch irritated him, and he kept re-reading Vonnegut, trying to work out why this particular novel was considered a "classic," the only reason Saunders had picked it up in the first place. Eventually, Saunders writes, he started to get it, and came to understand the essential role of Vonnegut's humor:

> Humor is what happens when we're told the truth quicker and more directly than we're used to. The comic is the truth stripped of the habitual, the cushioning, the easy consolation. An "auditorium filled with two thousand men and women eagerly awaiting a night's entertainment" could also correctly be described as "two thousand smiling future moldering corpses" or "a mob of bodies that, only hours earlier, had, during the predressing phase, been standing scattered around town, in their underwear."[2]

Comedy as a mode is deliberate distortion—a violation—of our usual thinking, but it is one we can obviate, depending on how we explain the violation to ourselves. Plautus, many agree, is very, very funny, but at the same time, many also agree that much of his comedy is morally repugnant. Insult is everywhere in his comedies, and all of his characters trade in it. However, when it comes time to identify insult in his work, our identification will always depend on what we think that work is about, and who it was for. If we think elites were the intended audience for his plays, then subversions of power and insults about the *erus* take on a different significance than they would if

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[2] Saunders (2007: 80).

we thought the audience was full of slaves and freedmen. The same is true of every insult Plautus and his characters use, and the reactions these elicited would have changed from performance to performance, audience to audience, actor to actor. By reading his texts now, well after the theatrical events for which they were written have passed, we can see insult as paths in the cloud chamber, and so must do our best to follow the traces of these malevolent particles back to their source. But, ultimately, we are following emptiness, the track of something that has already whizzed by and traveled on. To really see Plautine insult, we need to actually see it, and to hear it, and to feel it: on the stage, shot out by a simmering, potentially dangerous element.

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