

INTRODUCTION



WHY THIS BOOK

A few years ago, I began to feel an increasing need for materials I could use in teaching about Roman attitudes toward the people they conquered, especially in Africa and the Near East. Since my undergraduate days I've been interested in Roman humor and invective, Roman xenophobia and ethnic stereotyping, and I wanted to teach about Roman attitudes that arguably amount to a kind of racism and are certainly connected with imperialism, and how those attitudes are expressed in comedy and pop culture. Hence *Rome and the Mysterious Orient*. The title takes its form from comedy ("Jeeves and the Impending Doom") and melodrama (*Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*), and I hope the translations in this book are funny, but that doesn't mean this book is a joke. The title also deliberately uses an old Orientalist cliché (see Said 1979). My point here is that jokes have a cultural job to do, and I hope this book will help people think about that job and how it gets done.

Between the time when I started and the time of publication, world events have only made such a book more useful. The histories of fighting in (what the West thinks of as) the Near East and of incursions by the West into the East and vice versa are very old, and people need to bear this in mind. I think it is also useful to watch an earlier culture, our ancestor in many ways, process its hatred, fear, curiosity, amusement, fascination, enjoyment, adoption—all this and more—and think about how that tallies, or doesn't, with what goes on now.

But nothing is simple, and I also want this book to raise the possibility that Plautus's plays represent the voice of an underclass talking (partly) to an underclass. That means that what the plays have to say about empire and immigrants and race and language has to be taken in its social and historical context: what was going on in the Mediterranean, who the playwrights were, who the actors were, who was in the audience, who paid for the production. The introductions to the volume and the individual plays, along with the notes, are meant to help answer those questions.

The three plays I picked—*Curculio* (*Weevil*), *Persa* (*Iran Man*), and *Poenulus* (*Towelheads*)—have to do with Rome and Greece, Rome and the Balkans, Rome and the Near East, Rome and North Africa. The themes they raise fill other Plautus plays, and you might also want to look at *Captivi* (*P.O.W.s*), *Stichus* (*Lineman*), and *Trinummus* (*Three Bucks*), or . . . But these three make a good start.

WHY TRANSLATE THIS WAY

The translations in this book are full of slang and refer to current events, because that's how Plautus's plays were. Sometimes here the lines use phonetic spelling and nonstandard grammar; these features in the original Latin continue to plague editors and commentators. It has not been standard practice to translate so as to reproduce these aspects of Plautus, and the general approach taken in this book flies in the face of much current scholarly opinion. So why do it?

I was trained in a scholarly tradition that does not consider translation to be scholarship. But writing these translations taught me a lot. The plays are comedies, after all, and I figured that the first thing necessary to convey their meaning to students was for them to be funny—which meant coming up with humor that *is the equivalent now* of what the plays' humor was then. When you do that, you need to know a lot about the ancient context, and you need to think about what is funny *to us*, and which “us,” and why. As the great papyrologist H. C. Youtie once remarked, “A translation is the most economical form of commentary” (thanks to Janet Martin); I hope classicists reading this book will take it seriously as a way of reading Plautus. Theater people already know that it don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing.

All readers: I hope the translation is of use to you, but I strongly encourage you, at every point at which you would argue with my translation, or where it uses slang you wouldn't use, to work out your own version (the notes will give you a literal translation). Please go ahead and plug in what works for you, as in “Mad Libs.” These plays were working scripts, not carved in stone.

With texts that were performed, their meaning must largely have been determined by how they worked *in performance*. To translate, you need to take the play off the page—to consider aspects like delivery, and action, and casting, and the space of the theater. You need to consider what would *play*; you need to see and hear it in your head, and laugh. Many studies of Plautus treat the text as a read text, as if the audience would have been composed of college professors (or the second-century B.C.E. equivalent) reading along with libretto in hand—or just reading, without any performance at all to distract them from the job of analysis.

For jokes, it is well established that the function of the form is precisely to discourage the recipient from analyzing the joke content (Richlin 1992a: 60–61, 73). I would postulate that the same must be true for comedy on a larger scale, and that any analysis we do must include an attempt to visualize what was a visual as well as a textual performance, to imagine it in a specific space at a specific historical moment (for expert advice on this, see Gamel 2002).

Or, rather, during a series of moments: plays shoot forward like cannonballs, while textual analysis moves back and forth over a text frozen in time. Though these plays may have been toured or revised, few spectators would have seen a given play more than once, much less read one, during Plautus's lifetime. So our analysis needs to be in terms of a single performance on a single day around 200 B.C.E., and in terms of an audience swept along through runs of gags, barred by laughter from giving any one line a lot of thought. Also, since this audience was composed of many different kinds of people, *the plays interpellate the audience segmentally and intermittently*. That is, 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 (see Althusser 1971 on interpellation). The one set of people who would have had the kind of intimate knowledge of the plays that we now associate with scholarship would have been the actors themselves.

There is a big problem with level in translations of Plautus. We don't know what to do with these plays. They're in Latin, they're classical, so that makes them highbrow; Shakespeare based plays on them, that adds another highbrow layer. We dress the players in togas (wrong, anyway, they wore Greek outfits, the *pallium*), keep the names as Plautus wrote them, and set them on the way to the forum. And, too often, we translate the Latin into a sort of scholarly humor, based closely on the original text. The translations in this volume take a shot at matching lowbrow with lowbrow and pop culture with pop culture.

Warning: these plays were not originally politically correct in the sense "not capable of offending an oppressed group." (They *were* politically correct in the sense "dumping on nations against whom Rome currently has troops deployed.") The plays include ethnic slurs—this is the point of translating these plays in particular, to trace the history of xenophobia. Translating the title of *Poenulus* as *Towelheads*, in particular, may seem problematic (for an explanation, see the introduction to the play). The amazing thing about *Poenulus* is that, though it was written very shortly after the peninsula of Italy had been steamrollered by Carthaginian troops, the main characters find out at the end of the play that they are all Carthaginians, and they are delighted. The attitude of these plays is not simple.

CONVENTIONS OF REFERENCE AND ABBREVIATIONS

Classicists refer to the plays of Plautus by their Latin title followed by the line numbers (i.e., they don't use conventions like "act 1, scene 2," though Plautus's plays were divided into acts and scenes in the Renaissance, and the Oxford text replicates these divisions; see Beare 1964: 196–218). Lines are numbered consecutively, starting from the first line of the play and going straight through to the end. The translations in this book are based on the Oxford Classical Text (OCT) edited by W. M. Lindsay and follow his line numbering; except as noted, the plays are translated word for word and line for line, so you can reliably compare a given line here with the Latin text. Sometimes Lindsay changed the order of the lines in the manuscripts; at those points, you will see out-of-sequence numbers here, too. In the few places where I have added words or phrases for clarity, I have enclosed them in curved brackets, {}.

When modern editors analyze ancient texts, they will sometimes print lines from extant manuscripts that they believe not to have been in the original but consider important enough still to be printed. These lines appear in square brackets, [], in scholarly editions like the Oxford Classical Texts, and such lines appear in this volume still in square brackets. Likewise, editors will sometimes insert words when they feel certain they were originally there, and such words appear between angle brackets, <>, in the OCT and here.

The Latin titles of the three plays in this volume are *Curculio* (this word literally means "Weevil," which luckily is still a funny word); *Persa* (this literally means "the man from Persia," a location that corresponds to modern Iran, hence *Iran Man*); and *Poenulus* (this literally means "The Little Punic Guy," but see the play's introduction). The plays are conventionally referred to by various abbreviations of their Latin titles, so that elsewhere you may, for example, see lines 1–10 of *Curculio* cited as *Curc.* 1–10 or *Cu.* 1–10.

The one standard reference work referred to throughout by its abbreviated title is the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, abbreviated as *OLD*.

HOW THESE PLAYS GOT FROM PLAUTUS TO US

Plautus's plays were originally performed around the year 200 B.C.E., but they seem not to have been formally published or collected for about 150 years; scholars guess that actual scripts held by actors were collected for publication at that point, though others may have been in circulation previously. After that, these plays basically never quite went out of print—though until the fifteenth century,

the only way they could be reproduced was by hand copying, which means that there was a great deal of room for errors to slip in (see MacCary and Willcock 1976: 233–35 for a quick description of the manuscript tradition). With the invention of the printing press, Plautus’s popularity becomes evident; there are, for example, more than twenty-five editions dating from 1510 to 1605, printed all over Europe, in the Cambridge University Library. In 1594, Thomas Nashe gives one of the characters in his proto-novel *The Unfortunate Traveller* the chance to see famous men from antiquity, and his first request is for “pleasant *Plautus* [. . .] in what habit he went, and with what countenance he lookt when he ground corne in the mil” (cited by Riehle 1990: 1). Shakespeare would have been assigned the plays to read in Latin at the school he attended (Riehle 1990: 12, 279–83), and it is likely that he knew them well. The Elizabethans were big on performing both Roman plays and updated versions of them; schoolboys began performing Plautus’s plays in Latin at Westminster School in 1560 (Zinn 1965).

Translating ancient texts was a highly charged political act in early modern England, part of a youth movement that aimed to shake up established ideas, and here Plautus played a small part; Edward Courtney, duke of Devonshire, translated *Amphitryo* in 1562/63 (Conley 1967 [1927]: 143). But until the twentieth century it would have been expected that a person interested in Plautus would know Latin and read, perform, or watch the plays in the original; the first translation of the collected plays into English does not appear until 1769–74—and, though charming, it’s bowdlerized, despite the fact that it was organized by Bonnell Thornton, one of the great wits of eighteenth-century London (see Bertelsen 1986). In other words, Plautus himself was for the educated, while most people would have known Plautus, without realizing it, through plays in the vernacular that used Plautine elements.

The late nineteenth century saw the rise of affordable editions of Latin texts for use in teaching and for scholarly reference; these texts incorporate notes that show, in highly condensed form, what the text editor has learned about possible variants in the text from looking at manuscripts and the work of previous scholars. The Oxford Classical Text on which this translation is based is one such text, produced by W. M. Lindsay, a great scholar of early Latin, in the early twentieth century. Though such a text is recognized as standard, it is really an amalgamation of Lindsay’s decisions at many points, and in this volume the introductions to *Iran Man* and *Towelheads* talk about their textual peculiarities.

Illustrations of the plays are rare, even in the sixteenth-century editions. Figures 1 and 2 show captioned illustrations from a 1511 edition printed in Venice from the collection of the Cambridge University Library (Sel.2.63). Figure 1 appears at the



FIGURE 1. Illustration at *Poenulus* act 5, scene 1, from a 1511 edition of Plautus's plays in the Cambridge University Library, Sel.2.63. By permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

head of act 5, scene 1, and carries the caption “Hanno Poenus loquitur Punice” (“Hanno the Punic speaks in Punic”); this caption appears at the head of the scene in many sixteenth-century editions. Though at this point in Venetian history we might have expected Hanno dressed as a Turk, he seems to be depicted as a Moor. This is clearer in the illustration from the head of act 5, scene 2, which shows Hanno with Milphio and Agorastocles (their order in the caption is reversed). The illustrations in this edition are, as it were, rubber stamps, repeated identically though not consistently from scene to scene (i.e., there were two stamps for “a young man”); Hanno is the only character to be shown consistently. The other Carthaginian characters are shown as Venetians; the characters disguised as Persian and Arabian in *Persa* are shown as Venetians; only Hanno is singled out. To these readers in the Renaissance, the color of his skin is as important as the language he speaks.

Dramatis Personae and Scene Headings

The lists of characters and roles at the beginning of each play do not come from the ancient manuscripts, but depend on the lists of characters and roles in the scene headings, which do (see Packman 1999; Lindsay 1904). However, the scene headings themselves were greatly battered over time, and have often had to be re-

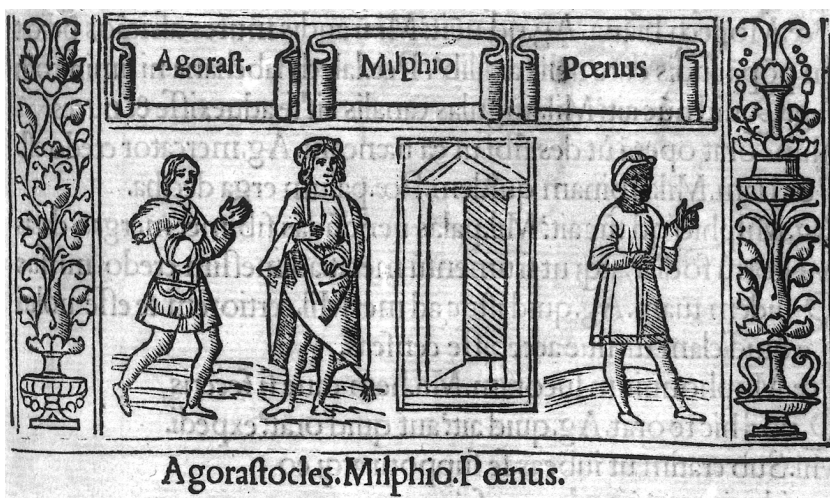


FIGURE 2. Illustration at *Poenulus* act 5, scene 2, from a 1511 edition of Plautus's plays in the Cambridge University Library, Sel.2.63. By permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

stored (i.e., guessed at). Names and roles are thus not only subject to editorial revision but have in some cases just been fashioned by editors. In most of the early printed texts I looked at, “Persa” is given as the name of the girl who is sold in *Iran Man* (today she’s just “Virgo,” and editors agree that the “Persa” is one of the male characters), the nanny in *Towelheads* is named “Giddeneme” (now she’s “Gidde-nis”), and the pimp in *Iran Man* is called “Dorpalus” (now “Dordalus”).

Stage Directions, Line Assignments, Sets

There are no stage directions printed in the Oxford text, and there probably never were any. The extant manuscripts do not assign lines to characters, either, but only mark where a new speaker begins, and sometimes even this is in question. Thus the line assignments in the OCT represent Lindsay’s opinion, taking into account the opinions of centuries of scholars. The text itself provides a lot of explicit cues; working from this, like other translators, I have inserted stage directions, which here appear in italics. These should be taken as entirely hypothetical. Likewise with line assignments: in *Iran Man*, for example, I have incorporated quite a few changes to the OCT based on Erich Woytek’s commentary.

The stage set for Plautus’s plays is commonly the fronts of two or three buildings, with doors leading inward, while the stage L exit (on the spectators’ right)

represents “to town” and the stage R exit represents “to the harbor” (see Beare 1964: 255). For an experience-based hypothesis on the physical stage Plautus might have used, along with an account of a production, see Beacham 1991.

The doors are a major feature of every Plautine stage setting, and (as in all ancient drama) represent the barrier between inside and outside; they always make a loud creaking noise when opening, as cued by a thousand lines (*concrepuit foris*, “the door has creaked”). In Roman culture, this focus on doors matches a well-attested folk custom, *occentatio*, in which a person’s enemies would stand in front of his house, exchange insults with him in front of the door, possibly write insults on it, and (I suppose in extreme cases) set fire to it (Lintott 1999: 6–10; Habinek 2005). The insults seem to have taken a specific, formalized pattern, like the Dozens in African-American culture, and Plautus’s comedies include insult matches that follow this pattern; there is a good one in *Iran Man* between Toxilus (Bowman) and the pimp Dordalus (Dorkalot), and there are references to *occentatio* in both *Weevil* and *Iran Man*. (Indeed, there are insult matches in many of the twenty extant plays, and I think it is safe to assume that the audience would have looked forward to them, like the patter songs in the Savoy operas. They are fun to translate, but even better in Latin, for example *Towelheads* 1313: *manstruca, halagora, sampsa!*) All Roman comedy, as many have remarked, artificially yanks the inside action out into the street, turning the audience into rubbernecks. Readers should realize that this would not have been an unfamiliar position for a Roman audience to be in.

Prologues and Argumenta

The prologues that appear in some of the extant plays were, in their Roman form, something new: an effort to win over the audience (Beare 1964: 159–61). Some seem to have been added to the plays after Plautus, in revivals. No prologue is extant for *Weevil* or *Iran Man*, but the one for *Towelheads* is famous for its full depiction of the audience and stage crew, its double account of the play’s content, its references to the play’s sources, and its metatheatrical ending (see Slater 1992).

All three plays also have an *argumentum*, or synopsis of the play, something like the pitch that is now made for a screenplay: a short, punchy overview. The unusual thing about the Plautine ones is that, in some of them, the first letter of each line spells out the title of the play, reading down the lines—a sort of word game called an “acrostic.” None of the *argumenta* were originally part of the plays; they were added by editors or owners of manuscripts, the acrostic ones probably in the fifth century C.E., when acrostics were popular (Lindsay 1904: 86–87). Though the *argumenta* were written as a feature of a read text, and not of a performance, espe-

cially in the case of *Iran Man* I think a production might want to perform the *argumentum*, perhaps using letters on placards to show the audience the point. The *argumenta* appear here on the title page of each play.

OTHER TRANSLATIONS

As noted above, translation of the collected plays of Plautus into English begins in the eighteenth century; Bonnell Thornton's five-volume set (1769–74) incorporates translations by various hands. In the nineteenth century, Bohn's Classical Library offered the collected plays translated by Henry Thomas Riley, which went through many printings (1881 [1852]); in the early twentieth, the Loeb Classical Library offered a five-volume set translated by Paul Nixon (1916–38; still in print). George Duckworth's *Complete Roman Drama* (1942) includes a translation of *Persa* by Charles T. Murphy, who titled the play *The Persian Girl*, though he noted that the *Persa* in the play is the man who sells the girl. The Slavitt/Bovie collection (still in print) brings us up to the late twentieth century (see Bovie 1995).

Collections matter because *Curculio*, *Persa*, and *Poenulus* have been infrequently translated and are relatively little known, compared with *Miles Gloriosus* (source of *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*) and *Menaechmi* (source of *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Boys from Syracuse*, among others). Among notable versions, *Poenulus* was produced in Latin in 1994 at Chapel Hill by John H. Starks Jr., who also provides a teacher's edition (1997, with condensed translation) and a video; both *Poenulus* and *Persa* are now being translated by James Tatum. In 1970, *Poenulus* was translated by Janet Burroway, who provides an extremely clever treatment that gives a much better sense of the wordplay in the original than I have been able to do; her goals are poetic, where mine have more to do with social history and performance. For details of C. W. Marshall's masked production of *Curculio*, see www.cnrs.ubc.ca/masc. On translations, see also the bibliography.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Who Was Plautus?

You can look in any encyclopedia or handbook that covers Roman culture and find out that we don't actually know much about Plautus at all. His name is suspiciously meaningful—Titus Maccius Plautus. "Maccius," supposedly his family name, sounds like a fancy version of "Maccus," which was the name of one of the stock characters in the popular lowbrow ancient Italian drama form called Atel-

lane farce, and “Plautus” supposedly meant “flat-footed” (Paulus ex Festo 275L; Beare 1964: 47) and was a term associated with the barefoot players in another popular lowbrow ancient Italian drama form, mime (nothing like Marcel Marceau, more like ensemble standup comedy). Or it might just mean “floppy.” There is no contemporary information on him by other writers. We cannot even be 100 percent certain that he wrote under the name T. Maccius Plautus—the “Plautus” part is certain, the “T. Maccius” part is slightly iffy. Adrian Gratwick argues that even the “Titus” part was funny, in the same way that the name “Dick” is funny now (1973), and that in this period of Roman history a three-part name would have sounded hoity-toity. If this was his name, let us start right out by contemplating what it means to take a name that translates as “R. Harpoe Clownshoes III (just call me ‘Dick’),” or possibly “R. Harpoe Floppé (call me ‘Dick’).”

He is the earliest Roman writer for whom we have any complete works; there are twenty extant plays and a small part of a twenty-first. However, he probably wrote more plays than this (the first-century B.C.E. literary historian Varro picked these out of 130 circulating under Plautus’s name [Gellius 3.3.3, 3.3.11, cf. Beare 1964: 45–46]); he is a sophisticated, complex writer of a form that already can parody its own clichés; and there were plenty of other playwrights around when he was writing—we just do not have their work. John Wright’s book *Dancing in Chains* (1974) gives an excellent account of the fragments we do have, though (unfortunately for theater historians) he does not translate the Latin. The important ones are Caecilius Statius, a younger playwright whose work some major Roman critics preferred to Plautus’s; Gnaeus Naevius; Livius Andronicus; and Quintus Ennius (all of these but Caecilius also wrote tragedies and nondramatic literature), and Wright convincingly shows that their comedy was a lot like Plautus’s. Terence (Publius Terentius Afer), the other Roman comic playwright whose plays have survived, would make his brief appearance twenty years after Plautus’s death; his comedy, as Wright and many others have felt and shown, is quite different from Plautus’s (see Goldberg 1986).

We have very little to go on to date the plays or Plautus’s life. *Didascaliae*—very brief headnotes on the circumstances of production—survive for two plays, *Pseudolus* and *Stichus*. Because they include the names of magistrates, we can date these plays to 191 B.C.E. and 200 B.C.E. respectively; however, even this minimal information is shaky (see Mattingly 1957). In addition, the prologue of one play, *Cistellaria*, contains two lines (201–2) cheering the Romans on to victory against the Carthaginians, which seems to date this play before the end of the Second Punic War in 201 B.C.E. And there may possibly be a reference in *Miles Gloriosus* (lines 211–12) to an incident involving the playwright Naevius that took place in

205 B.C.E. This is it—all other dating of Plautus’s plays is conjectural. We have no idea how successful any of the plays were, except that the extant prologue of *Casina* suggests that it was revived, perhaps after Plautus’s death. We do not in fact know when *Poenulus* was written relative to the Punic War. We know that Plautus came before Terence, because Terence in the prologue to his *Andria* lists Plautus, Naevius, and Ennius as his predecessors (see H. Parker 1996 for what we do not know about Terence).

The putative facts about Plautus come from four writers who lived long after him: Cicero (103 B.C.E.–43 B.C.E.); Pompeius Festus (late 100s C.E.), who made a condensed version of a dictionary written in the first century B.C.E. by Verrius Flaccus; Aulus Gellius (fl. 130s C.E.); and Jerome (fifth century C.E.). To put this in perspective, Cicero was as far distant in time from Plautus as we are from Gilbert and Sullivan; Jerome was a hundred years farther from Plautus than we are from Columbus. Cicero only says a few things about Plautus, but seems to have been relying on relatively fresh information. The rest are relying on literary historians whose work we know only through them. And even Festus is partly known to us only through an even later writer, Paulus Diaconus (late 700s C.E.), who made a condensed condensed version of Flaccus, known as “Paulus ex Festo.”

Cicero says (*Brut.* 60) that Plautus died when Cato the Censor was censor, in what we call 184 B.C.E. If so, we might guess that the plays were mostly written between 210 and 184; Cicero says elsewhere (*Sen.* 50) that as an old man Plautus took pleasure in writing *Truculentus* and *Pseudolus*, but all this tells us is which plays Cicero liked (so, rightly, Beare 1964: 63), nor do we know *how* old. Let’s be conservative and date the plays to a span of time from 224 B.C.E. to 184 B.C.E.

Paulus ex Festo (275L) and Jerome (s.a. 200 B.C.E.) say that Plautus came from Sarsina, in Umbria. What does that mean? If it is true, it is profoundly interesting. Sarsina is in the middle of nowhere: a small town in the Sapis River valley, tucked well back in the Apennines, a good twenty miles from the highway, the via Aemilia, down which lay the nearest large town, Ariminum, northward along the Adriatic (east) coast of Italy, in short about a million miles away from Rome. Umbria at the time of Plautus’s birth was not exactly a Roman place; it was an ally of Rome—the mid-second-century B.C.E. historian Polybius says that “Umbrians and Sarsinates” (note the division) sent 20,000 men to help resist the Gauls in 225 B.C.E. (2.24), and that is about all he has to say about either Sarsina or Umbria. Indeed, according to the figures projected by the demographer P. A. Brunt (1971: 54), in 225 B.C.E., Umbria had the lowest population of free persons of all the regions of Italy, and the smallest territory; the number of free persons per square mile in Umbria is lower than that of any area except Etruria (then full of large grain-

producing plantations), and the next regions higher are Apulia and Lucania (proverbially poor). People from Sarsina would not have had Roman citizenship in Plautus's time (see Salmon 1982: 96).

From a Roman perspective, the whole area was a backwater, barely mentioned by Roman historians of the period. It wasn't even Latin-speaking: Umbrian was a separate language, with its own alphabet. During Plautus's childhood, Umbrian would not yet have given way to Latin (Salmon 1982: 122–23). In short, Sarsina is exactly the sort of place that throughout the multiverse has always exported writers to big cities, each in turn slamming the door on the way out and trying out a stage name (Harpoe Clownshoes?). If [insert birth name here] was not from Sarsina, he should have been, or from someplace similar.

Jerome says that Plautus went to Rome, where he had *annonae difficultatem*, “trouble with the cost of living,” and so hired himself out (*se locaverat*) to a miller to work in a *molae manuariae*, a “hand-operated mill.” This story goes back to the first-century B.C.E. literary historian Varro, according to Gellius, who says (3.3.14)

Saturionem et Addictum et tertiam quandam, cuius nunc mihi nomen non suppetit, in pistrino eum scripsisse Varro ait et plerique alii memoriae tradiderunt, cum pecunia omni, quam in operis artificum scaenicorum pepererat, in mercatibus perditam inops Romam redisset et ob quaerendum victum ad circumagendas molas, quae trusatiles appellantur, operam pistori locasset.

Varro says, and many others have handed down the story, that he wrote *Fatso* and *Wage Slave* and a third play, the name of which now escapes me, in a mill. He had lost in trading ventures all the money that he had made in jobs related to the theater, and had returned to Rome, broke, and in order to make enough money to eat he had hired out his labor to a miller, for turning the mill (the kind they call a push-mill).

This story has him first come to Rome, [then] achieve some success in “jobs related to the theater” (this is a somewhat vague phrase and could mean acting or production as well as writing), [then] leave and lose it all in trade, and then return to Rome penniless to work in the mill.

What does that mean? Working in a mill was slave labor, and labor for slaves who were being punished, like a chain gang; some mills (where flour comes from) were powered by treadmills powered by human feet (for a harrowing description of what this did to the mill slaves, see Apuleius *Metamorphoses* 9.12; I can never look at the treadmills now pounded by well-heeled feet in gyms without thinking of it as a slave punishment). The extant plays of Plautus, which include neither

Fatso nor *Wage Slave*, are full of black-comedy allusions to the threat the mill posed for slaves. Whether this is what really happened to Plautus or only what later people liked to say about him, it implies that his social status was very low. In Roman law, *locatio*—working for pay—was much looked down upon, as if, like prostitutes, gladiators, and actors, you were selling your own body, as in self-imposed slavery; an *addictus* is a person who has been enslaved for debt or theft. Let us be conservative and say that this story at least does not conflict with the content of Plautus's extant plays—that the plays have a lot in them about trading ventures and losing all your money and slaves and mills. In Plautus's *Captivi* (*P.O.W.s*), a freeborn person winds up working in the quarries, which were even worse than the mills.

Gellius says that Varro and his other, unnamed sources say that Plautus wrote three plays while actually working in the mill; Jerome says Plautus wrote and sold his plays in his spare time at the mill. Again, this is the kind of story people tell about writers now (think of Quentin Tarantino in the video store), but how normal was it for the period? Never mind the question of how you would write plays in your nonexistent spare time, by the light of an oil lamp—maybe in your head, this was an oral culture—is this story consistent with the time?

Very much so. A lot of people lost their homes and property in the late 200s and 190s B.C.E., though more from the aftereffects of war than from trade. And the writers of this period all reflect in their biographies the events of the time. (Note that all these “biographies” are known to us from much later sources and may be entirely fictitious. Or not.) Livius Andronicus was supposedly a Roman prisoner of war (i.e., he was enslaved—his name shows he was born Andronicus and freed by a man named Livius), from the Roman capture of Tarentum, in southern Italy. Naevius fought in the First Punic War, which ended in 241 B.C.E., and was said to have come from Campania, the area around what is now Naples; he is also said to have ended his life as a political exile. Ennius was a soldier who came to Rome with the Cato who later became censor; he is said to have come originally from Rudiae in southern Italy, which was a tiny town (Brunt 1971: 127 says it had about 500 male citizens in the second century C.E.), and to have said that he had three hearts because he spoke Greek, Oscan, and Latin (Gellius 17.17.1). Indeed, the story goes that Cato picked him up in Sardinia when on his way home from being stationed in Africa (Nepos *Cat.* 1; cf. Astin 1978); Cato had no military business in Sardinia that we know of, and it seems at least plausible that what made him add Ennius to his entourage was seeing him performing, not seeing him pitching a tent. Jerome says Caecilius Statius was an Insubrian Gaul, “some say from Milan” (a big Insubrian center in this period), and at first was En-

nius's *contubernalis*, which could mean he served in the army with Ennius or that he was Ennius's roommate; Gellius (4.20.13) says he was a slave and that "Statius" is a slave name. If this is true, the name "Caecilius" would have come from his former master, and his birth name is unknown to us. Most of these are rags to rock star stories; all the writers come to Rome from elsewhere, most of them from the Greek- and Oscan-speaking south, Caecilius from the Celtic north.

Amongst the writers of the next generation, Accius is said by Suetonius to have been the son of freed slaves from Pisaurum in Umbria (land of Plautus). And Terence was supposedly born at Carthage around 185 B.C.E. and came to Rome as the slave of a man named Terentius Lucanus. His name, P. Terentius Afer, means "I was the slave of P. Terentius, who freed me," and "I come from Africa." It is unlikely that Latin was the first language of any of these writers, and, if these stories are at all true, all of them would have experienced hunger and war, several of them slavery and the loss of name and family. In this company it makes some sense to have lost your given name and write as Harpoe Clownshoes.

Plautus wrote his own material but, like his fellow writers, famously based his plays on comedies written in Greek and produced throughout the Greek-speaking Mediterranean in the late 300s and 200s B.C.E., known as New Comedy or *Nea*. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, classical scholars did a great deal of work on Plautus, both to arrive at the best reconstruction of a text full of slang, rare or unique words, abbreviations, and jokes, and to try to decide what the relationship was between Plautus and his Greek originals. I personally find the scanty remains of these Greek originals so unfunny, and so different from Plautus, that I am happy to say that writers on Roman drama since the 1950s have been putting more emphasis on what is Roman about Plautus and on the (hypothetical) relation between what Plautus wrote and the (lost) very-low-culture genres of mime and Atellane farce. I think that Plautus and his lowlife companions on the Roman stage may have developed Roman comedy in the work farms and dives of war-torn Italy, the way James Brown came out of the county farm in the 1950s (Gourevitch 2002), and the way Public Enemy came out of the ghettos of the Reagan years. Maybe they used some pieces of plays they'd remembered or heard told, as in *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, but the music especially seems to have been all their own. Of the three plays presented here, only *Poenulus* has even the name of a Greek play given as source—*Karkhedonios* ("The Carthaginian")—and this is given in the prologue of the play itself, and may be a joke (see John Henderson 1999). No source at all is known for *Curculio* or *Persa*, and a great deal of both of them is so Roman that the idea of a "Greek original" becomes fairly meaningless.

It's true that this kind of comedy is known as *palliata*, “comedy wearing the *pallium*” (which was a sort of short cape worn by Greeks), and there are plenty of jokes in Plautus that show the actors were wearing the *pallium*. Another form of comedy developed later in the second century B.C.E. in which actors did wear the toga, and these plays were set in Italy, which the *palliata* were not. Actors in the *palliata* also wore *socci*, slippers or soft shoes, and this was one point of distinction between them and the barefoot actors in mime. But this clothing is worn self-consciously and often ironically, as will be seen in *Weevil* and *Iran Man*.

Background on Roman Culture

Other ways to read Plautus: it helps to understand the systems of Roman culture—slavery, marriage, sex/gender, law, war, performance, as well as politics. See “Suggestions for Further Reading” below. If you have only this book to go by, maybe the following will be enough:

- Roman slavery was a permeable institution in places. Urban household slaves were often freed, especially personal slaves who knew their masters; slaves who worked on the plantations that took over the Italian countryside in the second century B.C.E., or in the mines, mills, and shipping that fueled the Roman economy, had little hope of anything but an early death.
- Sources of fresh slaves included war (prisoners), sale (by impoverished parents), kidnapping (by pirates or other bad people). Because the whole Mediterranean was a war zone during this period, the number of slaves skyrocketed. Prisoners of war could be ransomed, but this was always dicey (see Leigh 2004: 57–97; Thalmann 1996).
- Once freed, Roman slaves owed specific kinds of allegiance to their former owners, and often continued to work for them and receive help from them. The ex-owner was now the *patronus* or *patrona*, the freed slave the *libertus* or *liberta* and a Roman citizen.
- Roman citizens could not legally be subjected to corporal punishment, whereas a whole array of punishments was meted out to slaves, of which crucifixion is only the best known today. An urban household slave could be punished by being transferred to the country or the mill. Freed slaves lived in a middle ground; their ex-owner retained some rights over their bodies.

- The Roman sex/gender system was different from current Western systems. It was normative for adult males to perceive both women and adolescent males as sex objects, though citizen boys were supposed to be off limits (see *Weevil* 33–38 for the classic statement of these norms). Girls could marry as young as age twelve, and would normally marry for the first time in their teens. Sex between women is little discussed in Roman texts. Adult males who wanted to be sexually penetrated by other men were the object of mockery and suffered civil disabilities. See Hallett 1997; Richlin 1992a, 1993, 1997a.
- All slaves were available for sex with citizens.
- Prostitutes could either be slaves, often owned by a pimp, or free, trained by a prostitute mother who brought them up to the trade. Prostitutes were *infames*, subject to civil disabilities; see Edwards 1997; McGinn 1998; McGinn 2004: 55–71. On the sale of children by their families, see *Iran Man* introduction.
- Slaves could not legally marry anyone; their unions were not recognized by law, and their children were the property of the master.
- Roman citizen women, though they married very young, did not lead sheltered lives, and (as well as participating in business, city life, and culture) they attended the theater; as did slaves (see Moore 1994; Goldberg 1998).
- The ideal adult male Roman citizen, for example, Cato, was involved in law, politics, and the army, which by the 180s B.C.E. had established Roman hegemony throughout much of the Mediterranean.
- The Roman army was organized by property classes; the rich were officers, the poorest were ineligible to serve. The army was filled by draft. After the Second Punic War, as Rome fought a series of preemptive wars in Greece and the Near East, the property qualifications for the infantry were lowered.
- The world of the ancient theater left quite a trail behind it: whole theaters, some still in use; souvenir figures; tickets (tokens); theater-inspired wall paintings; theater-fan graffiti still readable on the walls of Pompeii (for material remains, see Bieber 1961).

War, History, Geography

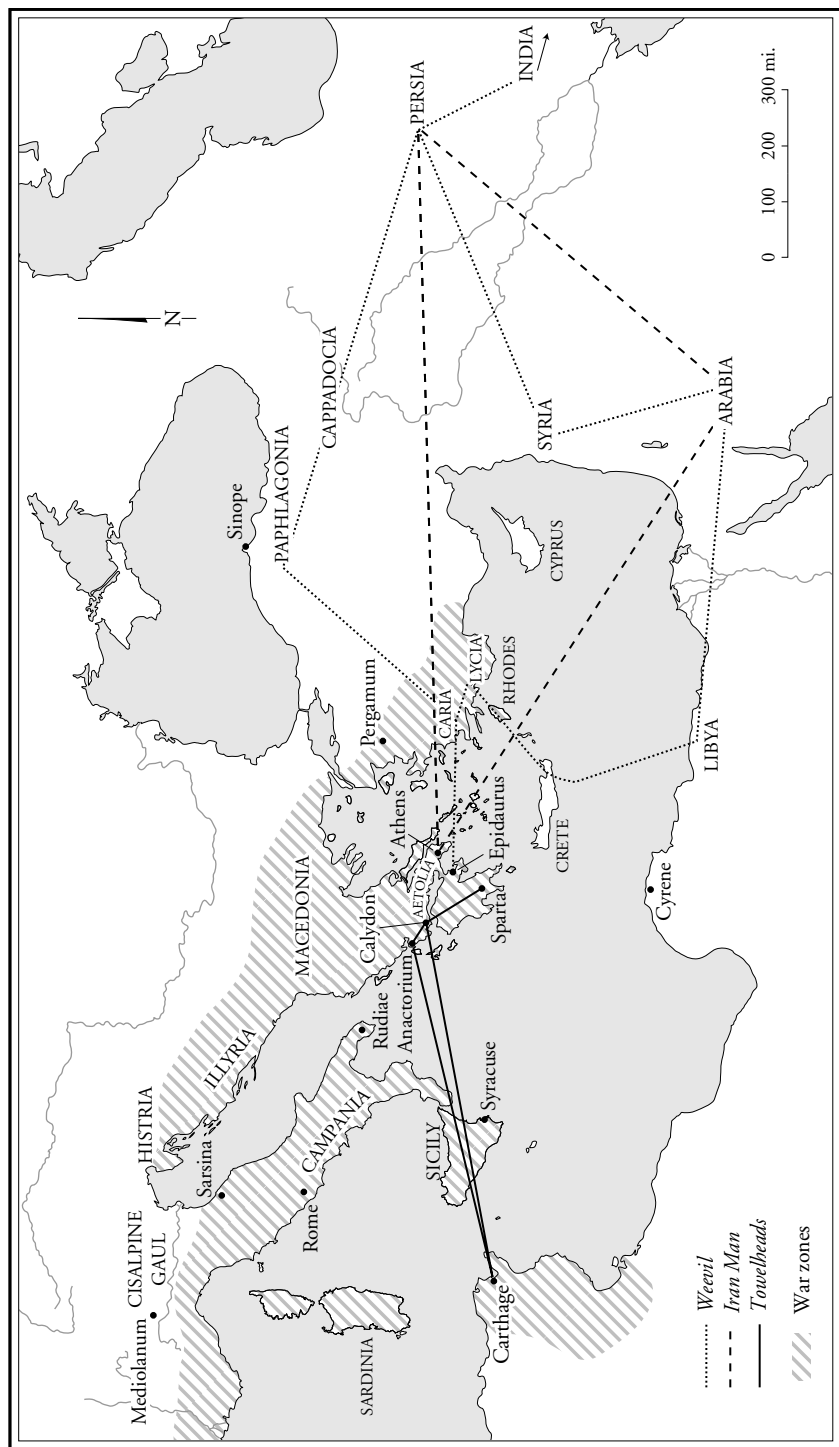
The period during which Plautus's plays were produced was crammed with major geopolitical events, with massive social changes within Italy, and with a huge boom

in literary production. No one doubts that these phenomena were connected, but it is usually asserted that Plautus is not a topical playwright like Aristophanes (fifth century B.C.E., Athens), whose plays are full of jokes about persons then living. I wish to side with the small minority who have argued that Plautus was a topical writer (Gruen 1990; Harvey 1986; and see now especially Leigh 2004).

The map on page 18 shows all the places that feature in this volume; the shaded areas are places where Rome fought wars during this period. As Franco Moretti argues in *Atlas of the European Novel* (1998: 3), “geography is not an inert container, is not a box where cultural history ‘happens,’ but an active force, that pervades the literary field and shapes it in depth.” Mapping the plays of Plautus shows us that they do not keep still; most of them involve travel, in war zones, between Here and There. And very often There is part of the Orient, a place of radical otherness. Edward Said, in *Orientalism*, begins by saying, “The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences” (1979: 1). This is what defines Plautus’s landscape, and forms the setting for playwrights, actors, and audience as well as characters and stories.

What people exactly were the Romans fighting? Plautus’s adulthood runs at most from about 244 B.C.E. to about 184, and Rome was engaged with her neighbors on all fronts at this time. Most crucial were the wars with Carthage: the First Punic War, which started in 264, didn’t end until 241, and the Second ran from 218 to 201. The twenty-year gap between them was occupied with, among other fights, a major invasion of Italy by Gauls from the north that got as far as Etruria. After this, Hannibal’s invasion ravaged the peninsula and famously got up to the very gates of Rome.

Meanwhile, Rome was also involved in “pacifying” Italy itself. And the rest of the Mediterranean was a mess. During these years, Rome fought major wars and some good-sized interventions against or in Sicily, Sardinia, Histria, and Illyria (roughly what subsequently became Yugoslavia and Albania), Macedon, Rhodes, and other states in the Near East and Greece, including the Aetolian League. Leaders of these states—King Philip V of Macedon, King Attalus of Pergamum, the Seleucid kings of the former Persian empire including Antiochus the Great—show up in Plautus’s plays embedded in catchphrases, as if everybody knows who they are. Greece was chaotic during this period, and the Romans were only part of the problem, amidst a welter of massacres, purges, forced exiles, and refugees. The scene was volatile; some areas, for example Caria and Lycia in what is now southern Turkey, were political footballs, much like the West Bank or Kashmir at present. Each war made new roles for people: soldier, veteran, prisoner of war, refugee, exile, slave, widow, orphan, prostitute.



Travels in Plautus. Adapted from R. M. Errington, *The Dawn of Empire* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1972).

Those who were enslaved did not always accept this as a permanent change in their lives. Military campaigns dumped batches of slaves all over the Italian countryside, and, though the new slaves came from different cultures, they still managed to band together and rebel (see Shaw 2001 for a collection of translated accounts). These stories are, for Roman narrators, stories of trouble for themselves. But even with this top-down view, we do get some idea of these slaves' agency and strategy.

Actors

Were the actors who performed Plautus's plays mostly slaves? We don't know for sure, but here at least there is some internal evidence from the plays. The only actor whose name is associated with Plautus is a male Roman citizen, T. Publilius Pellio, whose name appears in the *Stichus* didascalía, though the word "acted" there is a conjectural addition; Pellio is also mentioned in a joke in one of the plays (*Bacchides* 215) as having acted in *Epidicus*.

How about the rest of the cast? The prologues and epilogues of the plays, which have a liminal quality as if the actors were speaking as themselves, occasionally hint at the actors' status. The actors are a *grex*, a "herd" (*Asinaria* 2–3, *Casina* 22, *Pseudolus* 1334), with *domini* ("masters") and *conductores* ("bosses," i.e., men who hire people, *Asinaria* 2–3), and at the end of the *Cistellaria* the speaker(s) of the epilogue say that actors who did a bad job will be beaten, while those who did a good job will get a drink (785). At the end of the *Casina* prologue, the speaker implies that the actor who played *Casina* will have sex for money (84–86; cf. *Truculentus* 965–66). We do know of one participant in the plays who was definitely a slave: according to the didascalía, the music for *Stichus* was performed by Marcipor Oppii. This old-fashioned slave name means "Marcus's boy, [slave of] Oppius," that is, "slave of Marcus Oppius." Similarly, the didascalíae for all of Terence's plays list the same freed slave musician: Flaccus, freedman of Claudius. Again, by the first century B.C.E., we know that actors were *infames*, like prostitutes (Edwards 1997); indeed, "mime actress" is pretty much synonymous with "prostitute" in elite writers. Beare concludes that it is safe to assume that "the social status of the average actor in tragedy or comedy was probably not high" (1964: 167). This seems like a safe bet; put another way, there is nobody associated with the theater in the second century B.C.E. who is any kind of an aristocrat, except the sponsors.

Were all the roles played by male actors? We don't really know (Garton 1972; Rawson 1985), though this is normally assumed. There is plentiful evidence for male actors playing female roles in other types of drama in antiquity, but one Roman lowbrow form—mime—was co-ed. If male actors did play female roles in

the *palliata*, were they thought of as effeminate? The *cinaedus* (originally a Greek word, *kinaidos*) is associated in Plautus with what the Victorian commentators called “lewd dancing”; by the 140s B.C.E., it is a rude word for an adult male who likes to be on the receiving end of anal sex (see Richlin 1992a: 93, 165; 1993). Could *cinaedi* have been playing the female roles, or some of them? Maybe parts like those of Tchotchka and Katya in *Towelheads* were played by *cinaedi*, who would then have been something like drag queens (see C. Williams 1999). The last act of *Iran Man* features a scene in which three male characters do a sort of mocking dance around the pimp, and one of the four is called a *cinaedus* (see notes at *Iran Man* 804).

Most of the roles in comedy are male. And it is easy to think of examples of modern comedy groups with few or no female players: the Pythons (but with Carol Cleveland), the Marx Brothers (but with Margaret Dumont), the Three Stooges, Firesign Theater. Arguably, comedy troupes just manifest the male-bonding aspect of comedy and humor (Richlin 1992a: 58–59, 74–75, 79), as seen in Harvard’s Hasty Pudding Club, Princeton’s Triangle Club, and the staff of humor magazines (notably the *National Lampoon* and *Mad*). *Saturday Night Live* is unusual in its gender balance.

Suppose all the roles in Plautus were played by male actors. Then *Towelheads* is not just a romantic comedy, it is a romantic comedy with a large drag-show element in it; *Weevil* likewise features both a romantic female lead played in drag and a drunken old bag played in drag. It is commonly argued that the concept of drag has no place in the ancient theater, in which men playing women was just a time-honored convention. Perhaps this was so at some time or place in the ancient Mediterranean, but Roman sources make it clear that the actor’s transgressive skills were viewed as risqué (Richlin 1997b) and that men who dressed in women’s clothing outside the theater were viewed as perverted; they formed a staple of Roman humor (Richlin 1993, 1995: 203–4; Corbeill 1996: 194–98). For the first-time theatergoers in the audience, this aspect of the comedies must have been hilarious (as in Robert Benchley’s 1925 spoof of all-male college shows, “‘The King of Razbo-Jazbo’”). And there are some jokes about the size of the “girls”: see *Towelheads* 1167.

Or could there have been women onstage? Some historians of Greek drama have argued that the mute nude female characters in the plays of Aristophanes might have been played by actual naked women, rather than by male actors with comic female parts pasted onto them (Zweig 1992); compare the women on *Benny Hill* or *The Man Show*. And it does seem possible that some of the very small parts written for sexy women in Plautus’s plays might have been done by female actors who were essentially showgirls (Georgia Moon in *Iran Man*, even Wanda in *Wee-*

vil). But *Iran Man*, anomalous in so many ways, includes two large and outspoken female parts—Brain Muffin and Cherry—and the social setting of this play seems so close to mime to me that I wonder whether the company might not have borrowed a couple of mime actresses for the occasion.

This is complicated by the question of whether the actors in Plautine comedy wore masks. We don't really know. All the textual evidence on masks long post-dates Plautus, and there are no clear references to masks in the plays. The visual evidence (tchotchkes, mosaics, reliefs, wall paintings, even some actual masks) mostly does not come with labels explaining what it is showing, and the few examples that do are not showing Plautus in performance. This question is not resolvable on the basis of the current evidence, though historians of ancient drama lean toward "yes" (Beare 1964: 303–9), some with an enthusiasm based on stage experience (Marshall 2006; Wiles 1991).

In the normal Plautine play, then, the actors, probably all male, are, possibly, not native speakers of Latin, perhaps native speakers of a Celtic language, Umbrian, Oscan, or Greek, and performing on stage in Latin as people who act like native Romans but have Greek names and are usually supposed to be in "Greece." And some of them are playing women. In addition, some or most of them may well have been slaves, and they play both slaves and free people; within the play, as slaves, they joke about slave punishments. They act on a stage set in both a local and a geopolitical context.

Audience and Venue

So far I have been imagining a pretty trashy context for the production of Roman comedy: the actors, musicians, and playwrights are a bunch of rubes, runaways, army vets, ex-cons, ex-slaves, slaves, and lowlifes who may have done time together at the county farm and, when in Rome, may have met up at the local *popina* ("bar and grill"—a word of Umbrian origin; see McGinn 2004). What kind of audience could such a group possibly have pleased?

It is interesting to think about the subversive possibilities of slaves speaking to audiences that included both masters and slaves. Especially *Iran Man*, which takes place entirely in the absence of the master and utilizes his goods and authority to make things happen: how would that have played? To various audience members? And was the use of low-class language and jokes about slave torture entirely exploitative? The point is often made about Plautus that the uppity slaves in the plays are allowed such freedom due to the Saturnalian context of the religious festivals at which the plays were put on; this is freedom for only a day; why would the aediles pay for subversive plays? Usually, I agree with this; Roman satire and in-

vective in general partake of the nature of rituals of reversal, which basically reinforce the status quo (Richlin 1992a: 75–76). But I do wonder about the multilevel Plautine audience and the ironically situated slave actors, and I want to side here with the very small minority who have seen these plays as in some way slave literature (Dunkin 1946; contra Anderson 1993, McCarthy 2000; Fitzgerald 2000: 10 allows briefly for an open-ended model). The plays are full of pointed comments, and the audience was full of people who had front-row seats on the process whereby citizens turned into prisoners of war turned into slaves. At the end of *Weevil*, Wanda protests to Weevil, “I was born a free woman,” and he replies, “Yeah, like a lot of other people that are slaves now” (607). In *Iran Man*, a lot of Cherry’s speeches in disguise can be taken as critiques of the enslavement of prisoners of war. And in *Towelheads*, Igor says (965–66), “Y’know it’s a sin to let your fellow citizens / be slaves, right in your face, when they were free at home.” Plautus, Terence, Caecilius: none of them is known to history by the name his parents gave him. How could they leave this subject alone?

Here I would like to reject two common models that are used for imagining Plautine theater.

(1) Highbrow, alien. Modern critics commonly use opera as an analogy for Plautine comedy. This is highly misleading. They draw this comparison because Plautus’s comedy was musical, and because some other writers, going back to Horace, have dumped on this comedy as stupid and its audience as stupid, too. However, comparing Plautus to any kind of opera, for most readers today, means “Plautus is highbrow” (wrong) and “I wouldn’t like it,” because most people in the United States don’t like opera (but Roman comedy seems to have been popular; I think that probably the writers who make this analogy like opera themselves). It would be reasonable to compare Roman comedy to opera in Italy in the nineteenth century, where it was popular across class lines.

This argument applies to another analogy writers sometimes draw, between Roman comedy and Kabuki theater. Again, what this conveys to most readers in the United States is “this drama is unintelligible,” which is wrong. Writers make this argument to be honest about how different the conventions of the Plautine stage were from conventions now. But the best analogy for Plautine comedy is [something I find hilarious], because this comedy was performed for a wide audience, for whom it had to be intelligible.

(2) Rarely seen. Historians of Roman theater focus on how these plays came to be performed at major annual festivals instituted by the Roman government from the 240s through the 190s, so that eventually there were “seventeen days a year available for dramatic performance” (Wright 1974: 130; cf. Beare 1964: 162–63,

L. Taylor 1937). No, there were seventeen days a year for *state-sponsored* dramatic performance; we can only speculate about what went on for the rest of the year. It is true that at this point there were no permanent theaters outside of southern Italy; the whole stage had to be put up and taken down every time, and we do not even know whether plays had runs or not. There is a tiny shred of evidence for troupes going on tour, from around 150 B.C.E. (Lucilius 1034ff. Marx; Habinek 1998: 43). Occasionally during the next three hundred years a writer mentions performances way out in the country, with the audience sitting on the grass (Juvenal 3.172–79). Let's be conservative, and say that on the other 348 days each year the actors and writers had to be doing something. Maybe they gave lessons, maybe they took lessons, maybe they had day jobs, maybe they starved. But a lot of them must have been performing, and in non-state-sponsored venues. And this would have been the majority of their work; the seventeen days at festivals would have been, for them, the exception.

But we do need to think clearly about what went on during those seventeen days. First, what were these festivals? They are known as *ludi*, which is usually translated “games.” Most of them were instituted by the Roman central government to keep up morale and foster social cohesion (Habinek 1998) at times of severe threat to Rome itself, especially the Second Punic War and the mess that followed as Italy tried to get back on its feet. Technically, they were religious festivals, including ceremonies that promised good things to the gods and dedicated the festivities to them. They were a central-government production—the job of hiring entertainers was delegated to the aediles, a set of junior magistrates—and if Rome had had a national anthem, the crowd would have been asked to stand and mumble along. During wartime—and Rome had armies in the field during the entire period from 224 B.C.E. to 184 B.C.E.—the stated goal of the festival would be to get [insert god's name here] to help Rome beat the tar out of [insert name of enemy here]. But the main feature of these *ludi* was indeed “games”—chariot races, gladiatorial combat, wild-beast hunts. We know from a much-discussed prologue of Terence that there were also other shows, like boxing matches and circus acts (see H. Parker 1996). As cultural events, these were the equivalent of stock-car racing and professional wrestling. This was the cultural context of Plautine comedy in its state-sponsored form.

And who would have been in attendance? Let's be safe and call it a mixed audience. We do not know where most of the performances took place, but Sander Goldberg (1998) has argued persuasively that in the time of Plautus performances would have been staged in front of the temple of the particular deity being honored, with people sitting squashed together on the temple steps. Each show would

have accommodated about 1,600 people, and there might well have been multiple shows to accommodate a city with a population of about 200,000 and all the out-of-towners.

Who do we know were there? We can be sure of these at least: people who lived in Rome, first of all, as many as could cram in—the *Towelheads* prologue makes it clear that people of all ages, genders, and social classes were expected, including slaves (see Chalmers 1965). There would probably have been special seats for nobles and state officials—this was made law by 194 B.C.E. (Livy 34.44.4–5; cf. Goldberg 1998: 13–16, Moore 1994). Others who might have been there included refugees who had crowded into Rome from the countryside during and after the Carthaginian invasion in 213–12 (Habinek 1998: 40, 42); noble hostages taken by Roman armies from various states, and political exiles (the historian Polybius was one); immigrants; traders. And, depending on how easy it was to travel at a particular time, people presumably would have come from far and wide, like the crowd at Woodstock, or at the World Cup. This comes up casually in Plautus's plays, usually in the little histories of how somebody got raped or kidnapped: "It was the [whatever] festival, and people had come from all over, as people do. . . ." (Anybody here from Umbria today?)

It is important to remember this because of the argument commonly made about why Plautine comedy can't be subversive. Why would the aediles pay out good money for subversive entertainment? Well, why did Ed Sullivan host the Beatles and the Rolling Stones? Why did Nixon invite Elvis to the White House? What the aediles wanted was a happy crowd, including but certainly not limited to happy voters. Did the aediles limit what could be said? Probably (see the section on "Obscenity" below). Was there an element of selling out in doing comedy at the *ludi*? You bet (*ob quaerundum victum*). Does that mean Plautine comedy was squeaky clean, in any sense? No.

But the plays that we have do show signs of having been designed for the "national audience," as it were, that attended the *ludi*. Like radio, at the beginning of broadcast media in the United States, the plays had to be funny for farmers as well as New Yorkers as well as greenhorns, and Plautus's plays definitely include mixed levels of humor. We might assume that, if a *grex* really did go on tour to Umbria, the humor would have been less mixed and the whole effect would have been less elaborate, because we do know that the games cost the aediles a lot of money, that Terence was paid a record amount for one of his plays, and that the play's producer/director rented costumes and props through the aediles (there's a famous example of this in *Weevil* and another in *Iran Man*).

The large number of jokes that depend on technical terms from farming certainly suggests that people came in from the country to see the plays—or else that a lot of people had moved to Rome from the country. Generally, the country is a joke in Plautus, also the place a slave does not want to get sent to; Blini in *Towelheads* is funny partly because he is fresh up from the country and this is not really in keeping with getting disguised as an assassin fresh from the killing fields in the Balkans. Even he thinks it's funny. The prologue of *Mercator* includes a tour de force in which the young man recaps the speech his father made to him about “When I was a boy, how hard we worked down on the farm,” including bona-fide-sounding farming proverbs. The boy and his dad are both *mercatores* now, though—traders who deal in import-export by ship—and this combination locates Plautus very securely in a landscape in which family farms were being over-run by agribusiness. Plautus has this in common with his contemporary, Cato the Censor, who in many ways seems to be Plautus's opposite (see Gowers 1993: 66–67; Habinek 1998: 42–43, 56; Leigh 2004: 98–157).

The plays themselves incorporate features that accommodate first-time theatergoers. In the prologues, and scattered here and there in the plays, we can recognize allusions to a few members of the stage crew; here, in the *Towelheads* prologue, we find the *praeco*, the announcer, who told everybody to sit down and keep quiet, as well as ushers who control the crowd. The actors' lines are full of cues and stage directions. And the combination of these lines with the prologues, which often tell the whole plot of the play—in the case of *Towelheads*, several times—reminds me of nothing so much as children's theater (“Uh-oh—here comes that bad man. I'll hide over here!”). This kind of cuing is also characteristic of effective rhetoric and preaching, and Plautine comedy cues even its own discourse: *animum advortite*, “pay attention,” means “I'm going to tell you the story now”; *dicam*, “I'll tell you,” means a lie is coming up; and lines like “enough foolishness” always signal the end of a run of gags and a return to dialogue. Opera companies that want to survive now use supertitles, because they can't depend on that sophisticated audience any more. The comedies are set up so that everybody can have a good time.

Let's run the tape back to another element of the audience: immigrants. Plautus inhabited a sort of ongoing world war, the streets always full of soldiers, many families short a son or two, refugees and exiles everywhere, a slave market swollen with the by-products of war, the whole Italian way of life teetering, along with the family farm. Rome, as readers of Terry Pratchett will recognize, was beginning to be Ankh-Morpork—the archetypal Big City—and this must have meant some fundamental changes in the city fabric (Pratchett 1990: 3–4): “No enemies had

ever taken Ankh-Morpork. Well, *technically* they had, quite often; the city welcomed free-spending barbarian invaders, but somehow the puzzled raiders always found, after a few days, that they didn't own their own horses any more, and within a couple of months they were just another minority group with its own graffiti and food shops."

Terry Pratchett dubbed the part of his invented world that features deserts, turbans, and camels "Klatch," and Ankh-Morpork is full of Klatchian take-out joints, one of which plays a role in his novel *Jingo*, which is naturally about the war between Ankh-Morpork and Klatch. It is crucial to bear this Klatchian take-out side of things in mind when reading Plautus. It's not just that Plautus's audience included farm boys who had Seen Paree. That audience would have been peppered with the Pareesians themselves, present not only as prisoners of war turned slave (and invisible to us, even if we had their tombstones, under the glamorous new names bestowed upon them by the slave dealers), but as what the Romans called *peregrini*—noncitizens resident in Rome. Cubans in Miami. West Indians in London. Proprietors of Klatchian take-outs. What did they feel about the ethnic geography of comedy? Their children would have been at least bilingual, and doubtless spoke a fluent Latin full of urban slang. There was a whole court system just for legal issues arising with peregrines, dating, not surprisingly, from about this time period. So all the jokes where "this Klatchian goes into a bar, see," are being told in a context, familiar to us, of mixed ethnicity, stemming from a process of imperialism.

And even for the audience members who hadn't gone to war, a radical overhaul of the imagination must have been going on, as the Near East turned into Out There. Where anything could happen; where fabulous cities of gold lay waiting to be looted; inhabited by strange creatures, strange gods, exotic maidens, and gigantic mercenary soldiers, all with funny names. It's like the Pacific Rim as viewed by Ross Thomas's great con man Otherguy Overby: "'Well, when the war ended in Nam things went dead as a doornail out there,' he said, opening the refrigerator and taking out another beer. 'Out there' to Overby was the Far East—everywhere from Seoul to Sydney" (1978: 89; cf. 193, 255).

The Greeks had made the same sort of division between themselves and their near neighbors in Asia Minor and Egypt, but the Roman version feels different: *We* become so plain, so homespun, and *Out There* becomes so wondrous, so scary, so much fun. It was a formulation that lay for centuries waiting for Rudyard Kipling's wake-up kiss.

So for this audience, this huge, mixed audience that assembled on seventeen days a year, something was needed that would work for all of them, and why

should it not have come up from below? Mass culture is not always hegemonic, and hegemonic culture is not always from below, for example ballroom dancing and the “palais de dance” culture in the 1930s–40s, where the lower classes dressed up. But sometimes hegemonic culture does come up from below. In the 1950s, suddenly blue jeans—workmen’s clothing—became hegemonic; in the 1990s, white kids in the suburbs were flashing gang signs; maybe in the 180s, a lot of people liked to hear that slave style. But this genre is as ephemeral as “Be-Bop-a-Lula.” Because by 50 B.C.E., it was all over, and Plautus was headed for the vocabulary museum, which is where most of his fragments come from: his language was a curiosity already by the time of Verrius Flaccus’s dictionary.

Let’s run the tape back again and think about the women in the audience. It is too rarely noted that these plays are highly sexist (see Rei 1998). In fact, I want to pay tribute here to John Wright, who in 1974 wrote: “Note how in both cases the girl’s intransigence is met with a wheedling speech characterized by diminutives (a fact that might interest Simone de Beauvoir *et aliae*)” (1974: 174). OK, it’s not radical feminism, but it’s a start. Maybe the plays’ sexism has always just seemed too obvious to mention; maybe we are used to it from TV and it seems normal. The range of female roles includes sexy prostitute, chaste prostitute, the occasional respectable girl (Cherry in *Persa*), shrewish wife, occasionally a clever wife (*Casina*), old prostitute, female slave. “Take my wife” jokes are common (e.g., *Trinummus* 51–64, a whole sequence between two old men; *Cistellaria* 175, “and then she passed away—finally she was nice to her husband” [run laugh track]). After Elaine Fantham’s thorough overview of women in New Comedy both Greek and Roman (1975), Zola Marie Packman (1993) is the only critic to have commented at length on the primary part played by rape in the marriage plots of Roman comedy (cf. on rape in Terence, James 1998; on Greek New Comedy, Henry 1985 and Lape 2004; on law, Scafuro 1997).

Rape makes no appearance in the three plays in this volume. But in all three plays, women are property, passed from hand to hand. Cherry in *Iran Man* is allowed by her father to be sold into slavery as part of an elaborate con game, just as he is literally lending her to Bowman in exchange for a meal, and, as she comments, will want to dispose of her to a husband some day; the selling of women into slavery as a by-product of war is central to the plot, and it comes up often in other plays. (What is somewhat unusual is that Cherry is also the sole voice of honor and reason in her play, though she could easily be played as whiny.) Georgia Moon in *Iran Man* starts out as a prostitute owned by a pimp, and at the end of the play evidently still has a master, although she is now supposedly free. Tchotchka and Katya in *Towelheads*, like Wanda in *Weevil* and numerous other

girls in Plautus, have been kidnapped, taken far from home, and sold to a pimp. Wanda is already for sale, while Tchotchka and Katya are about to be turned out and, when first seen, are primping enthusiastically for the “slut market” at the local festival; when their father finally appears, they think he is a customer, and he lets them believe it (just at first; what a scream!).

Modern readers sometimes take Aristophanes’ plays about women—*Lysistrata*, *Ekklesiazousai*, and *Thesmophoriazousai*—to be proto-feminist, and they can be played that way, as, for example, in Mary-Kay Gamel’s production of *The Julie Thesmo Show* (see Gamel 2002). But it would be hard to play Plautus as feminist. Whereas the plight of (male) slaves fuels much of these plays’ comedy, the plight of women as a class is less of an issue here. Old women are drunk, young women are desirable, wives in general are tyrannical bitches (*Menaechmi*). The one woman who really seems to run things, the prostitute Phronesium (Little Prudence) in *Truculentus*, is held up in the prologue as having “the morals common these days” (13)—greedy; and “that’s how women are, / for they all do it, when they know they’re loved” (16–17).

And how might women in the audience have received these plays? The plays define a set of roles and rules still too familiar in popular culture. The two central roles in Plautine comedy—the person in love and that person’s tricky assistant—are never held by female characters. Women in the plays are always secondary, and two of the extant plays have no female characters at all (*Captivi* and *Trinummus*). And what if they were always, or usually, played by men dressed up amusingly as women? Oddly enough, considering that women played such a full part in Roman public life, we know of the names of very few female writers, none of them in the field of drama. So for Roman women this form of entertainment was male-designed, male-performed, and basically not theirs—addressed *to* them, sometimes played *at* them, often *about* them—but *not* them. Yet, as in the prologue of *Towelheads*, they are still presumed to be there for a good time. In other cultures that are this phallogentric, women often develop joking subcultures of their own; there are slight hints of this for Roman women (Richlin 1992b, 1992c), but basically this is something we just don’t know.

And even talking about “Roman women” like this is wrong: the women were divided themselves, into slave, freed, and free; from Rome, from the country; speaking Latin or Greek or Oscan or Umbrian or a Celtic language or an African or Asian language; native or immigrant or exile or captive. And the slave/free divide was a big one; in some Roman religious rituals, free women acted out their superiority on the bodies of slave women (Richlin 1997a).

What we can safely assume is that some of the wellsprings of the comic plot in Plautine comedy—the exposure of infants due to illegitimacy or poverty; capture in war leading to enslavement and prostitution; rape at a festival, or, more likely, in war; the loss of children to war (*Captivi*) or kidnapping (*Towelheads*, *Weevil*)—would have been experienced by some of the women in that huge audience (see *Iran Man* introduction on the sale of children by their families). Very seldom do the plays show a mother’s reaction to the loss or recovery of a child; *Epidicus* is a rare exception. It is a shock, toward the end of *Towelheads*, to hear Uncle Saddam give thanks (1253) “for what the good Lord is giving to me, to you, and to your mother”—this is the first we have heard of her. And in this same play, when the comic slave nanny Yasmin recognizes her own long-lost son among Saddam’s slaves, this just enables a big laugh line calling her cries of greeting “womanish furniture” (1145). What would that mean to the women in the audience who had lost children? What would the hundreds of jokes about enslaved prostitutes mean to the female slaves in the audience? How about the plot line, in which the girl is miraculously found by her sorrowing parents?

And, if we can spare a short paragraph or so for the audience’s sexuality: the plays are certainly not subversive sexually, except insofar as they credit slaves with feelings of romantic love (*Iran Man* is the big example, but there are others). Actually, the one unusual thing the plays do is give occasional voice to the *puer*, the boy sex slave who is a standard object of desire for adult males in Latin love poetry. In love poetry, the boys’ attitude is sexy; here, Toyboy in *Iran Man* talks about the economy of sex from his own standpoint, saying to Einstein, “At least I don’t do it for nothin, like you” (285). And the *puer* in *Pseudolus* complains about what it means to be a *puer* in the household of a pimp, saying he is too little (783) and fearing that tomorrow he’ll have to drink “fuller’s juice,” that is, urine (782; fullers used urine to clean clothing). The plays make it clear that boys as well as girls were part of the flesh trade: Boris in *Towelheads*, and seemingly his adoptive father as well, had been kidnapped and sold. What would the jokes about the sex work of male slaves mean to the male slaves in the audience? As Sandra Joshel has so conclusively demonstrated, there is a big difference between what slaves thought about their own work and what elite writers said about it (Joshel 1992).

And what about *cinaedi*? The question of whether there was any sort of gay subculture in Rome is hotly debated (see Richlin 1993; C. Williams 1999), and, especially during this period, when the plays of Plautus and the fragments of other writers are the only contemporary evidence, it is impossible to speak with certainty. But the plays are certainly in keeping with the sexual norms of later periods. The main

point of interest here, I think, must lie in the casting of men as women and the possibility that this might have read as drag and that *cinaedi* had an official role in the plays. Maybe there was a consciously cinaedic element in the audience as well, who might have especially liked this about the plays. But on this point there is no evidence at all, and as for lesbian identity and what any proto-lesbians might have found in the plays, who knows (on the Roman idea of lesbians, see Hallett 1997). *Cinaedus* is used as an insult in Plautus, as are imputations of cinaedic sexuality (e.g., *Pseudolus* 1180–81). Slaves insult fellow slaves with their sexual permeability (*Iran Man* 230, 284–86). The word *tribas*, later used by Roman writers to describe a butch lesbian, does not appear in Plautus, nor is there any clear mention of sex or love between women—though there may be some double entendres.

So, to sum up: even the audience at the *ludi* (or especially that audience) was not a unitary audience. Their needs would be variously met by Plautine comedy, and maybe some of them just liked gladiatorial combat better, anyway. Books about Plautus are full of arguments about what the plays meant to the “Roman audience,” but while the audience at the *ludi* may have been physically in Rome at that moment, only some of it was “Roman.” This is especially important in relation to the question of slaves, gender, ethnicity, and class in the plays. Do the plays reinforce the norms of the Roman class/gender system? Sure. Are they Rome-centric? Less clear. But the plays were acted by slaves (maybe) and non-Romans (maybe), and there were slaves and non-Romans in the audience, and these lines and plot lines would have played quite differently to slaves than to masters, to women than to men, to non-Romans of various kinds than to citizens. That is, the plays interpellate the audience segmentally.

Moreover, I cannot agree that these plays were made to order *by* the elite class *for* the elite class, or even that “socially dominant Romans” were an important target audience for them (contra McCarthy 2000). Not only were the writers not elite, most of the audience was not, either. Like television sponsors, the elite paid for the plays at the *ludi*, but they could not totally determine the plays’ meaning. And comedy was bigger than the *ludi*; it had a whole other life, which shaped both plays and actors.

TRANSLATION ISSUES

Let’s go back to the axiom that these plays should be funny in translation. The plays are certainly the equivalent of what is now dubbed “pop culture,” like TV—a lot like sitcoms, which derive their *dramatis personae* and structure in direct lineage from Plautus. Or more like musical comedy, especially the kind with clever lyrics.

Like both these forms, Plautus's plays are, as often noted, formulaic, obsessively re-instantiating the Marriage Plot. It is therefore a mistake to translate these plays into scholaresse, as sometimes happens. We cannot always reconstitute the sense of Plautine slang, but it is possible to get close to the tone. We have to remember, again, that the most popular forms of entertainment during this period were the equivalent of stock car racing, professional wrestling, and the films of the Farrelly brothers. Unfortunately in the early twenty-first century an ability to read Latin does not often go hand in hand with an appreciation of pro wrestling. During the past fifteen hundred years, the entirety of Roman culture has become the property of an intellectual elite. This poses a problem for reading Plautus accurately. Kathleen McCarthy, in a book published in the year 2000, refers to the players in *Persa* as "characters of the *demimonde*" (33). Such an archaizing, and arch, description fundamentally misleads non-Latin-readers about what Plautus is like.

Translate or Transpose?

In dealing with jokes, a translator has two choices: one, to put down what the original said as literally as possible; two, to put down an equivalent, to try to give the reader what will make sense in current context.

I found I could not translate at all without making up an ideal cast for the play—without hearing funny voices (see below on performance issues); then I could find words they would say. Plautus transposed his Greek originals into Roman contexts and Latin slang; I have opted to look for English equivalents that bring Plautus into focus as funny.

Example: Saturio, the parasite in *Persa*, compares himself to a Cynic philosopher (123–25), with his [globular or pear-shaped bottle or flask for holding oil], his [metal instrument for scraping off dead skin in the baths], his [concave vessel used for various purposes] or possibly [chamberpot], his [low-heeled shoes or slippers worn by Greeks and by comedians], his [mantle worn by Greeks and by comedians], and his [pouch]. The problem is (a) to achieve the same tone without a long explanation of what Cynics were like; (b) to deal with the fact that the Cynic's gear overlaps with the costume of the comic parasite. Solution here: Fat Jack in *Iran Man*, dressed in jeans and cowboy boots, talks about the "wise old cowboy" instead of the Cynic philosopher, and the list of gear becomes "just his canteen and his lar-iat, his tin pan, boots, and poncho, / and his leather pouch." The paradigm here is the narrator in the Coen brothers' movie *The Big Lebowski* (1998), but any solution would do that paired crusty wisdom with a costume overlap.

Comedy is by nature ephemeral in many of its aspects. Language is a big one. Plautus should sound funny, but what sounds funny changes subtly over time and

per audience. These plays need to be updated often, and any translation used by a current production company will need to be thoroughly reworked so that it will sound funny on the day it is performed, in the place where it is performed. I did *Curculio* as vaudeville, *Persa* as a Kevin Smith project, and *Poenulus* as drawing-room comedy, but the options are infinite, and it is my hope that the translations I offer here will serve as a jumping-off point for a lot of improvisations.

Language (Latin/Greek)

As Thomas Habinek notes, Latin never fully dominated Italy (1998: 44; cf. Pulgram 1958). If Plautus really came from Umbria, he might well have learned Latin as a second language, and nobody can see the oddities and beauties of a language like a nonnative speaker. Indeed, even his name points to how outsider status can be marked by language (Paulus ex Festo 275L): “Those who have flat feet are called ‘Ploti.’ Whence also the poet Accius, because he was an Umbrian from Sarsina, from the flatness of his feet was first called ‘Plotus,’ and later was called ‘Plautus.’” This is one of the sources that ties together Plautus’s family name and cognomen, though confusedly—the text has Accius (a different poet), presumably an error for Maccius (we hope). What is interesting here is that the text seems to imply that being called “Plotus” is somehow connected with being from Sarsina. We do know that spelling (and presumably pronouncing) words with “o” instead of “au” was characteristic of common as opposed to upper-class Roman speech. So if—and it’s a big if—we can believe any of this story, it would mean that Plautus’s name not only had a funny meaning, it sounded either backwoods, or lower class, or both.

Could we expect a person from Umbria to come to Rome and make a hit putting on plays full of Umbrian slang? Maybe not; consider Danny Boyle’s film *Trainspotting* (1995), which needed subtitles to make Scots slang intelligible to an English-speaking audience. But maybe so; maybe *popina* is not the only word that came into Plautus’s Latin from the north. (It is possible that *leno*, “pimp,” the word for Plautus’s chief villain, is among these, along with *lena*, “she-pimp”; neither is originally a Latin word, nor are they Greek.) Habinek argues that the Roman elites, in their search for linguistic hegemony, could at least build on a state of basic mutual intelligibility; for the Hannibalic wars, Livy emphasizes the “incompatibility of Punic with the languages of Italy,” but the Roman allies can talk to each other (1998: 41). And Livy did come from the north himself; but then he was teased about his accent.

What has always stood out in Plautus is the use of Greek words, some naturalized into Latin, some still in Greek letters. Embedded in a Latin play, these words are exotic, but exotic how? Again, here, there are multiple levels. The naturalized

Latin words could describe popular institutions (*balineum*, “public baths”); hybrid formations like *basilice* (“royally,” but formed with a Greek noun and a Roman adverb ending) sound like slang—the effect is something like “kingissimo.” Some words come out of the experience of war (*strategus*, “general”; *machaera*, “scimitar”) or the luxury trade with the East (*murrinus*, “myrrh-scented”). Linguists have shown that Plautus’s Greek, by and large, comes from lower-class trades and people (Habinek 1998: 43; Palmer 1954: 83; Shipp 1953; Wright 1974: 181).

Greek would have been the first language of many Roman slaves and prisoners of war, and when Bowman in *Iran Man* uses some Greek words in talking to his friend Einstein, this probably is not meant to sound like philosophy or tragedy. At *Iran Man* 29, he says, *basilice agito eleutheria*, “In a kingly manner (Greek/Latin) I am agitated (Latin) for the Festival of Freedom (Greek).” I turned this into “I’m royally loco, just like Cinco de Mayo.” With *Persa* set in Los Angeles, now, Spanish is the right equivalent to Bowman’s Greek; the play needs to be set in an urban, bilingual (or multilingual) setting.

Slang

Plautus’s vocabulary may be low, but it is an extraordinarily rich one. Many of his words are used only once, not only by him, but in all of Latin. Some he clearly made up on the spot. But some things, like the oaths by Hercules and Castor and Pollux, or the repeatedly used adverbs *lepide*, *graphice*, *probe*, are clearly slang. And doing this translation made me think about how *located* slang is, both in English and in Plautus’s plays. It is not just that the grandiose mercenary soldiers who clank through the plays talk like comic commandos (one of them even has a speech in which he says he’s not going to talk that way, *Truculentus* 482–86). Certain kinds of slang and certain ways of talking belong to each of the various character types: pimps threaten, young men dither, and, as Gellius tells us (II.6.3), the oath *mecastor* was used by women in particular. There is no replication of accents or dialect (something Aristophanes does do), and the modes of speech are not as individuated as they are for characters in Dickens (Mr. Mantilini, Sam Weller). But the characters use language appropriate to their class and gender positions, and since a lot of them are slaves, pimps, and whores, no Gibbon periods here.

And no sort of language dates more rapidly than slang. This is one reason these plays need to be translated often; the Loeb translations are almost unreadable now, and they usually aren’t funny, but Paul Nixon started writing them in 1916. At that point it probably made sense to translate the Greek into French, so that *Towelheads* 137 (*gerrae germanae, hai de kollurai lurai*), which I here translate “phony baloney, a lotta pastafazool,” appears in the Loeb as “nothing but pure piffle, *rien que belles*

balivernes.” To Nixon’s audience, French was funny enough, I suppose; for an American audience today, I’ve used American immigrant slang.

At any rate, part of the *raison d’être* of slang seems to be to act as a generational marker. So Nancy Mitford (1975 [1931], ch. 9): “His correct and slightly pompous manner combined with the absence in his speech of such expressions as ‘O.K. loo,’ ‘I *couldn’t* be more amused,’ ‘We’ll call it a day,’ ‘lousy,’ ‘It was a riot,’ ‘My sweetie-boo,’ and ‘What a poodle-pie’ to indicate the barrier of half a generation . . . which more than any other often precludes understanding, if not friendship, between young and youngish people.” Note that this novel was first published in 1931, and that most (not all!) of the expressions cited are now in the vocabulary museum along with Plautus. Indeed, this aspect of Plautus’s writing surely played a part in sending him to the vocabulary museum, while Terence lived on as exemplar of the *purus sermo*, “pure speech.” Plautus must have sounded very much of his time; let me postulate that to his huge mixed audience, he sounded desirably up-to-date and metropolitan, in short, hip.

Obscenity

Remarkably, Plautus was hip without using any of the common Latin primary obscenities, what in English we call “four-letter words.” The lack of these words is so extremely marked in Plautus, compared with later writers of satire and invective, that it is hard not to wonder whether the aediles and the setting at the *ludi* had something to do with it (“We want clean family entertainment here”). Or, like Beare, you could attribute the cleaned-up language to self-policing, Plautus’s “care never to risk a jest which might sully the honour of a free-born woman” (1964: 65). At least by the time of Cicero, who luckily wrote a long essay in a letter to a friend about what was and was not polite to say in Latin, there were rules about this, including respecting the presence of ladies (Richlin 1992a: 18–26). The satirist Lucilius, who wrote in the generation after Plautus, but who was not writing for performance to a wide public, felt free to use obscenities (Richlin 1992a: 164–74). In writing these translations, I was not able to approximate the class location of Plautus’s Latin without using four-letter words sometimes. Though if I were writing them for TV, I would have to.

But this is not to say that Plautus’s plays are clean. The insult matches noted above involve highly inventive obscenity, in which excrement plays a featured role—still without primary obscenities. Male characters commonly accuse each other of being on the receiving end of anal sex. And there are a lot of double entendres, some of which depend on stage business, like the candle scene at the opening of *Weevil*. Sometimes Plautus just relies on his own vigorous imagination, as

in the phrase “fuller’s juice” (see “Audience and Venue” section above, on sex slaves in the audience). I think what we see at work here is a skill that informs all of Latin literature, now commonly recognized in the literature produced under the repression of the Empire (Ahl 1984), but that, I would argue, was already hard at work in Plautus’s plays: the ability to say something outrageous in the most innocent of words. We should probably assume that Plautus’s audience picked up more than we will ever be able to.

Catchphrases and Parodies

If slang is ephemeral, consider the importance to comedy of the catchphrase, which always depends, at least originally, on the audience’s familiarity with an intertext (see Farkas 2003, with John Ayto’s prefatory comments, vii–ix). “Walk this way,” which I use here at *Weevil* 87, can never be a simple invitation to anyone who’s seen Mel Brooks’s *Young Frankenstein* (1974). The triumphs of Monty Python have made it impossible for some people to hear the words “huge tracts of land,” “shrubby,” or “pining for the fjords” without grinning. For them, “huge tracts of land” is always accompanied by a visualized hand motion that makes it have nothing to do with land. People who went to college when I did used to say, “He’s no fun at all, he fell right over” or “hamburger all over the highway” and laugh, because of Firesign Theater. People who don’t remember the original skits will still say “Vy a duck?” (Marx Bros., *Coconuts*) or “Who’s on first?” (Abbott and Costello) or “Slowly he turned, step by step” (Lucille Ball, and evidently vaudeville before her). Inspired by *Saturday Night Live*, for several years those in the know hailed each other as (e.g.) “the Bobmeister!” Even non-Stoogologists know that “Mmm, wise guy, eh?” is a quotation. It’s endless.

And Plautus is clearly full of this kind of thing, but we almost never have any idea of what it’s about. The intertexts are long gone. But this is the kind of language the plays are written in, so a good translation will try to interlard itself with similar current catchphrases, as best it can. Some examples: When the pimp Dorkalot fails to express sufficient enthusiasm on first seeing the disguised Cherry, Bowman remarks, *ut contemptim carnufex*, which literally means “How contemptuously the executioner [is talking]!” (*Iran Man* 547). Phrases with this shape show up in *Asinaria* (*ut osculatur carnufex*, “how the executioner kisses,” 892), *Bacchides* (*ut subblanditur carnufex*, “how the executioner wheedles,” 876), and *Pseudolus* (*ut paratragedat carnufex*, “how the executioner acts like a tragedian,” 707), and, with a variation, in *Weevil* (*ut fastidit gloriosus*, “how the war hero turns his nose up,” 633). The *carnufex* in Roman humor is a loathed figure (*carnufex* literally means “flesh-maker”), and all the activities in which he engages in these phrases are funny.

This looks like the kind of repeated catchphrase that Flip Wilson made famous in the 1970s with “The Devil made me do it.”

A great line in *Iran Man* comes up when Bowman challenges Brain Muffin to get his instructions right and she replies (305), *magi’ calleo quam aprugnum cal-lum callet*, which literally means “I’m shrewder/tougher than a boar’s hide is shrewd/tough.” (It’s here translated, “You know I’m hipper than hippo hide”; Mary-Kay Gamel suggests, though, that the reference is to the scars caused by flogging, and translates, “It’s been beaten into me.”) The jingle in the expression depends on the double meaning of *calleo*, “be tough”/“be shrewd.” It comes up again, slightly altered, in *Towelheads*, spoken by the completely un-hip Blini (579): “Nope, hippo hide ain’t gonna be hipper than me!”—again in response to a command. Are the lines playing off each other? Or off something else, familiar to the audience—or just to some segments of it? *Shrek 2* is full of intertextual references, some of which are only recognizable to residents of Los Angeles, others to fans of *Garfield* or *Mission Impossible*, many aided by recognition of the voice behind each character and other roles that actor has played. Here, in Plautus, we can only guess.

The melodramas and various previous dramatic forms Plautus often burlesques are also gone, but it is not so hard to see when he is doing this and to come up with a good equivalent. In the Savoy operas, Gilbert and Sullivan burlesque everything from sea chanteys to the mad scene in *Lucia di Lammermoor*; late-twentieth-century performance is full of burlesqued forms, both in music (Tom Lehrer, e.g., “Vatican Rag”) and film (*The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, the Austin Powers films). When Plautus does a melodramatic flashback at the end of *Curculio*, it is easy to think of equivalent conventions with which to set this up on stage now, because the genres themselves have persisted. Mike Myers does the same thing in *Goldmember*.

Conversely, it is tempting to translate some Plautine jokes into current catchphrases. In act 4, scene 6 of *Iran Man*, there’s a great bit where the pimp Dorkalot is paying out a large sum of money and announces that he’s charging [a small sum of money] for a bag deposit. Bowman comments sarcastically (688), *sine, quaesio, quando lenost, nihil mirum facit* (literally, “Leave it, please. Since he’s a pimp, he’s doing nothing surprising,” or, “He’s a pimp. It’s normal for him”). In the summer of 2002, I couldn’t help translating this, “The guy’s a pimp. It’s Nature’s way,” having just seen Steve Irwin make this cheerful remark about numerous venomous reptiles and amphibians in *The Crocodile Hunter: Collision Course*. By the time you read it, this intertextual joke will doubtless be well on its way to unintelligibility. And the same must be true for dozens of slightly mystifying turns of phrase lurking in Plautus.

Topical Jokes

Occasionally Plautus's plays seem to refer to a specific current event, for example the reference in *Towelheads* to the city now at peace (524; see note ad loc.). And some of the plays include in their prologues a sort of political cheerleading in which the actors wish the audience members good luck with their war. The possible referents for such lines have been much discussed (see Gruen 1990, 1992; Harvey 1986), never conclusively, because the lines are always almost-but-not-quite specific.

Much more common than the tantalizing almost-specific references are lines that locate the plays in the current geopolitical landscape, often associating Out There with money and/or luxury and with war. One telling war itinerary comes from the slave Stasimus in *Trinummus*. If they lose their last field, he fears, he and his master will have to go to foreign parts (*peregre*, 596) and take up shield, helmet, and pack to go as *latrones* (brigands, thugs, mercenaries) “to Asia or Cilicia” (599). He repeats this fear at 718–26, adding that he will have to fasten heels to his *socci* (which are, again, the comedian's garb as well as the slave's) and become a *caculla*—a soldier's slave, like Harpax in *Pseudolus*—as they serve “some king” (722). What is fascinating about this is the hybridity of his imagined picture (see section below on “Locations”): they will lose the family farm and have to go into the army, only not the Roman army but “some king's” army, as *latrones*. But mercenary soldiers in Plautus have outlandish accoutrements; Stasimus dresses himself and his master as Roman soldiers. Again, to the audience at the *ludi* this picture would be only too familiar. In the Roman army, officers were rich men; the foot soldiers came from the common people.

Roman names in the plays are almost nonexistent, but the names of historical Greek persons in the plays also make a lightweight roster—fewer than a dozen; all are well known, but almost all were dead in Plautus's day. The names from Out There are much more interesting. They are all names of kings, many current, and again they are associated with power and money. King names show up in a joking catchphrase structure, the *mirum quin* construction; *mirum quin* basically means “It would be weird if. . . .” The miser husband in *Aulularia*, sniping at his wife, says (85–86): “It would be weird if Jupiter made me into / King Philip or Dareus [*sic*] on your account, triple witch.” His point is that he has no money. Fat Jack in *Iran Man* says to his daughter, who has tearfully asked him if he is really going to sell her just to fill his own belly, “It would be weird if I sold you for King Philip or Attalus / rather than for me, since you *are* mine” (339–40). This is a “duh” joke, very snotty, and for it to work the audience has to be familiar with the people

named: in *Iran Man* these kings are replaced by “Saddam or the Saudis.” But note that “king” in Plautus often simply means “rich man.”

The most common context for kings is in boasting, usually by a clever slave, usually making a favorable comparison between his own achievements and those of some Eastern monarch. The unnamed Slave of Lyconides in *Aulularia* says (701–4):

I’m rich! Me! I’m richer than the dragons
who hold the Gold Mountains! Hey, I’m not gonna even
bring up those other kings—practically homeless guys:
I am the actual King Philip!

He here identifies himself with the king whose name was identical with gold coins. This is topicality from the bottom up.

Once in a while we get a cue that a joke comes from current popular culture: at the end of *Iran Man*, Einstein and Bowman, taunting the pimp, threaten to strike dancing poses for him like ones evidently familiar to the audience (824–26):

EINSTEIN: Pimp, I can’t help but dance a little pose for you that Hegea
once did. Really, see if you like it. BOWMAN: Me, too, I also want
to give you my rendition of what Diodorus once did in Ionia.

These lines cause a big “?” to form over the head of the reader; I turned Hegea into John Travolta, Diodorus into Michael Jackson, and Ionia (known for effeminate dancing) into West Hollywood. But who knows.

Another common form of topicality in the plays is what I have called here “parabasis moments.” In Aristophanic comedy, the parabasis is the part of the play where the chorus comes forward and gives a comic lecture on some current issue, full of the names of people and places. Plautus likes to do something similar without the chorus or the names: a character will suddenly start talking about some current issue. This happens several times in *Iran Man*, especially in Fat Jack’s diatribe on bounty-hunting informers (62–74) and Cherry’s on homeland security (550–60); in *Weevil*, the title character delivers a savage comparison of bankers to pimps (494–511). These sections are not that funny when translated, and in production they need to be transposed so as to deal with current events. In Tucson in 2004, for example, we rewrote to have Fat Jack discuss the ethics of turning in illegal aliens to the INS. This exercise made it clear that the “parabasis moments” must have been tied to breaking news: it’s a choice between large dead spots in the plays or the shock of hearing Fat Jack or Cherry or Weevil sound off on a hot issue.

Locations

The plays' locations have to be translated into a current equivalent in order for them to mean anything at all; few Americans now know where Aetolia was, but it was a highly meaningful location in Plautus's day (see section on "War, History, Geography" above), as were Sparta and Carthage. Sicilians in the plays are evil (*Towelheads* 897, but also *Captivi* 888, *Rudens* 49–57) presumably because of feelings left over from the First and Second Punic Wars. Writing in 2000–2004, I used current and recent war zones as equivalents for the ones presented in these plays, and I have tried to make them reasonably parallel, in terms of geography and importance, to their original locations relative to Rome. So Carthage has become Iraq; Persia, Iran; Aetolia, the former Yugoslavia; Anactorium, Belgrade; Sparta, Kosovo; and Caria, Jerusalem. Arabia has stayed Arabia. Sicyon, a city involved in a siege during a complex peacekeeping mission, makes a brief appearance as Sarajevo in *Weevil*; Calydon becomes Sarajevo in *Towelheads*. Already, though, Iraq means something different than it did when I started, and Sarajevo looms less large.

Epidaurus, the site of *Weevil*, was harder; like Athens, it slips toward a sort of default mode in which the location is just a marker for hybridity. This poses enough problems, as, for example, *Weevil* comes running back into the streets of Rome/Epidaurus saying that nobody can bar his way—"not a strategus or a tyrannus or an agoranomus / or a demarch or a comarch" (285–86). How to translate these words? Are they exotic in the Out There way, so that they should be translated as "not a paladin or a sultan or a caliph / or a vizier or a sheikh"? Are they only mildly foreign—say, British as opposed to American—so that they should be translated as "not a major-general or a monarch or a meat inspector [Henry Taylor trans., inspired] / or a Lord Mayor or a civil servant"? Because, in contrast to the Latin text in which it is embedded, the series is so strikingly Greek—it almost immediately precedes *isti Graeci palliati*, "those Greeks wearing the *pallium*" (288)—I decided they needed to be markedly foreign and wound up with "not a warlord nor an overlord . . . nor a border guard / nor a tribal chief nor a village chief."

Italian place-names are used extremely rarely in Plautus, but *Weevil* features the single biggest exception to this rule: the tour of the Forum that begins act 4. All the Italian place-names in Plautus appear in jokes, most of which depend on the spectators' local knowledge to be funny. The Forum tour is transposed here onto the map of New York City, but in performance would always work best with a city the audience knows well, since the places are repeatedly associated with bad behavior, which is not going to be funny in a list of places the audience has never heard of.

I made the Athens of *Iran Man* into Los Angeles, but it could be any big city—Athens is the default location of Plautus’s plays. If you are using this book and thinking about production, please do choose a city well known to your audience.

Plautine comedy is also full of fantastic geographies, in which characters wander off the map (see map on page 18). In *Trinummus*, the Sycophanta says he has gone to Arabia (sort of) and then to the island of Rhadamanthes and up to the sky to visit Jupiter (928–47). In *Iran Man*, the action only gets as far as Arabia and the City of Gold (cf. the Gold Mountains in the section on “Topical Jokes” above); in *Towelheads*, the main characters bounce around a lot, but only in the Mediterranean. But the soldier in *Towelheads* has been to “Pentetronica,” where he killed off the natives—a tribe of flying men (471–90). Soldiers get around. Thus when Weevil tells a tale of his supposed time with his soldier, he goes for quite a trip (442–46). In Latin, he visits the Persians, Paphlagonians, Sinopians, Arabs, Carians, Cretans, Syrians, Rhodes, Lycia, and the coast of Libya (real places), and Peredia (very hungry place), Peribesia (very thirsty place), Centauromachia (place where the centaurs fought their [famous] battle), Classia Unomammia (Tribal One-tit-place), and Conterebromnia (place for screwing around with everything). As well as translating the joke names (see “Funny Names” below), the translation transposes the real places into comparable contemporary war zones and peoples: “the Iranians, / the Kurds, Tehranians, Arabs, Palestinians, Jordanians, Syrians / and Libya, Lebanon. . . .”

A certain ambivalence toward things Greek is suggested by the repeated use Plautus makes of the words *barbarus*, *barbaricus*, and *barbaria*, which he always uses to refer to Italy or to Italian writers, especially himself: as with his general take on geography, here he specifically plays with Italy as both here and there, the Greeks’ despised Other, so called in fast and colloquial Latin. This running joke shows up in *Weevil* in Beauregard’s serenade (150) and in *Towelheads* in a joke about stage money (598). As with the slave’s vision of going to war in *Trinummus* (see section on “Topical Jokes” above), the plays manifest a hybrid identity.

Funny Names

Translations of Plautus almost without exception retain the original names, and this I feel to be a central mistake, because the names are meaningful and comic, and Plautus’s audience would have recognized that. Even to a Latin-reading American audience today, the names are opaque, unfunny, just handles. At best, they sound like some names in Shakespeare. We are used to comic characters with comic names: Rocky and Bullwinkle, Olive Oyl, Mini-Me, Edina Monsoon, Sponge Bob Square Pants, Roseanne Rosannadanna, Dick Deadeye, Biggus

Dickus, Dixie Normous, Silent Bob. The Dude abides. . . . Most audiences watching Plautus in translation have to assume that what is funny about these names is that they are in Latin, which (a) is mostly not true and (b) would not have been what was originally funny about them. For students, all the names in a play often boil down to “Stringofsyllables.”

Among the Greek features of Plautus’s plays are the names of the locations (almost never in Italy) and the characters (many, though not all, are Greek). In Greece, these names wouldn’t be comic unless the town name itself was funny (Schenectady, Cucamonga—now *Rancho Cucamonga*), and the names were funny (Jeeves, Pongo Twistleton, Charlotte Corday Rowbotham). It’s hard to see from extant Greek comedies exactly how the names were funny, because most ancient Greek names seem somewhat funny to us (Aristophanes means “Best Looking,” for example). But for a Latin-speaking audience, setting the plays in Greece and giving the characters Greek names is a big deal in itself.

For, although some of the actors, some of the people in the audience, and some of the playwrights were native speakers of Greek themselves, and might have been born with Greek names, in Roman ideology being Greek is heavily charged with meaning. As noted above, Rome was at war with various Greek-speaking countries throughout the third and second centuries B.C.E. But the Romans always admired Greek culture. And yet they consistently voiced contempt for Greeks, conceived of everything east of them as effeminate, weak, and corrupt, and found many things Greek laughable, if not disgusting. And among those things were Greek names, which were markedly different from Roman names.

A Roman male citizen’s name has three parts: praenomen, nomen, and cognomen. Marcus Tullius Cicero. Gaius Julius Caesar. Titus Maccius Plautus. The first names are limited in number, only about ten of them; the second and third are family names, à la “John Quincy Adams.” (Actually the third name often means something funny—Cicero means “Chickpea”—and if we translated these names they would sound even stranger to us than they already do. It’s hard even to be sure that “Harpoe Clownshoes” would really have sounded funny to a Roman. But probably it did, even to somebody named Mark “Chickpea” Tully. And probably we should translate all the names, all the time, to get over our feeling that they sound like something that should be carved in marble.) Anyway.

A Roman woman’s name is the feminine form of her family nomen: Tullia; Julia. And slaves likewise (hmm) just had a single name, which was often a Greek name, sometimes because the Romans took a lot of captives from places that spoke Greek, and sometimes because a slave trader or a new master would want to give a slave a Greek name because Greek slaves were classier than, say, Jewish slaves or Ger-

man slaves. Greek citizen men, on the other hand, have one name: Socrates. Plato. Like women! And a lot like slaves! But these names aren't even family names. They're weird made-up names, like "Hippokrates" ("Horse-Strength") or "Agathon" ("Noble"). It's clear that they sounded funny to native speakers of Latin. Moreover, the Greek names in Plautus are not ordinary Greek names—most aren't found elsewhere. They're not just Greek names, they're funny Greek names: a double whammy.

And how do we translate that funniness? Funny like "Dances with Wolves"? Funny like "*Frankenstein*"? Funny like "Yum-Yum"? In each of the three plays in this volume, I've taken a different approach.

The streetwise, lowlife world of *Iran Man* needs to be populated by people with lowlife names; I translated them as Bowman, Einstein, Fat Jack and his daughter Cherry, Toyboy, Georgia Moon, Brain Muffin, and the pimp Dorkalot. Each of these translations has a linguistic connection to the original Latin name (see the *Iran Man* introduction), and also tries to translate what is funny about the name. What I could not do was replicate the bilingual base of the humor—all these names except Fat Jack's and Cherry's were originally Greek; these plays might best be dealt with by a bilingual translator in a bilingual context like Los Angeles or Montreal.

Because I transposed *Towelheads* onto Sarajevo, I transposed the names as Slavic names: Boris, Igor, Tchotchka, Katya, General Popoff, Blini, Vodka. The Punic names in the play were transposed as (vaguely) Arabic. This double transposition gives something of the feel of a play that makes protagonists of two cultures that would have been recently at war with Rome. It also makes use of current comic ethnic stereotypes, pushing the question of how inherently ludicrous the names and settings would have been to their audience—or how offensive. The same goes for the comic Punic in *Towelheads*, which is made of a patchwork of Hebrew and Arabic words that have come into English, along with nonsense words (see *Towelheads* introduction).

In *Weevil*, I used light-romance English names for the normative characters and, as in *Iran Man*, tried to base the English name on the meaning of the original name (see *Weevil* introduction). All the names in *Weevil* are calculated to show class: Beauregard and Cornwallis have upper-class associations; Lt. Napoleon Plaza-Toro represents the military; Madame Lola, Mr. Wolf, Turk, Wanda, and Weevil have low-class associations. But even in *Iran Man* the names clearly show a white, academic standpoint, and could and should be rethought for your own context. Overall, I think translating the names will help an American audience get what is going on in the plays, though I know some readers like the original names; these appear in the cast lists at the head of each play.

An easier problem is posed by the name formations in the plays that are clearly jokes, like *Plautus Pulti-phagonides* in *Poenulus* (line 54) or *Summanus* in *Curculio* (line 413) or the comic place-names in *Curculio* (see section on “Locations” above) or the string of names Einstein makes up for himself in *Iran Man* (lines 701–5). Example: *Virginesvendonides* (*Iran Man* 702), “Virgins-seller-[Greek patronymic ending],” the whole being a standard comic name formation with Eastern touches, turns into “Baima-i-Sistra,” which plays on Eastern phonetics and name formations and on Western comic ethnic slurs and stereotypes.

Food

Food is often hard to translate, and in any case we do not know what many of the Plautine words for food referred to. In *Iran Man*, Bowman calls out the following instructions (87–88):

Mix together the [wine mixed with honey]; get the [small variety of quince;
sometimes used in double entendres for male genitalia] and the [pods of
an unidentified tree] ready,
so that it gets hot on the platters, and throw on the [sweet flags—a type of reed also
used to make pens, musical instruments, and vine props].

(Definitions here come from the *OLD*.) You could, I suppose, speak this on stage so that it was funny, especially if you had an audience of undergraduate Classics majors accustomed to dictionary frustration and ready to laugh about it. But it wouldn’t be the same kind of joke as in the original, though that joke is hard to get close to. Never mind that the text is corrupt and may be talking here not about food at all but about a sort of hot sangria (see notes ad loc.).

I translated the passage as follows: “Mix up the sangria, get out the nuts and the guacamole, / heat up the platters and throw on some fajitas.” Why? *Mulsum* is sweetened wine; maybe the quinces are an hors d’oeuvre, anyway they’re small and round, and we need a possible double entendre, hence “nuts”; the pods are clearly a lost cause, so (rejecting “edamame,” which, though pods, would be hard to put over on stage) I made guacamole out of them; the platters (if they aren’t pitchers) are okay as is; finally, stuck for something shaped like sugarcane that has to go on a heated platter, I opted for fajitas (flautas would be even closer to the Latin word, but not as recognizable). For, most important, all these words, except *mulsum*, are Greek; this is ethnic food, and, like other food lists in Plautus, has overtones of class. Think of translating [grain]: “popcorn” or “granola”? Or [cut of pork]: “hot dog” or “baked ham”? See *Weevil* 295 on “French-fried,” *Towelheads* 54 on “corn-pone,” and *Towelheads* 325–26 on “briquettes” or baked goods.

Animals

Plautus likes to use animal analogies, and sometimes these are hard to put directly into English. When Bowman tells his slave Toyboy to fly, on the run, Toyboy replies (*Iran Man* 199), “just like the ostrich does through the circus.” This seems to refer to the presence of ostriches—N.B., an exotic creature, another by-product of conquest—in Roman public entertainment, where the usual point was to see them killed. As might very well be happening at the *ludi* at which this play might have been performed, hence a familiar sight to Plautus’s audience. I first translated this line “like a pig through a slaughterhouse.” But the proper analogy would probably be Demolition Derby, so I switched over to “like a Maserati at a Demolition Derby,” going for foreign–fast–fragile–lower class, but losing the creature and the Orientalizing.

Money

Foreign coinage is hard to translate and, when specific names are used, gives a strong sense of location (pounds, pesos, yen . . .). The common denominations in Plautus are *Philippi aurei* (“gold Philips”), *minae* of silver, obols, and the generic *nummi*, here often translated “bucks” or “cash.” Except for *nummi*, these are Greek forms of money and would have sounded either exotic or slangy or both to their audience. The one effort I made in this direction was to translate *Philippi* as “rubles” in *Towelheads*, but that misses the whole dimension of magic-wealthy-king (see section on “Topical Jokes” above); I tried “Krugerrands” first. The problem posed by translating money should at least lead to discussions of how money combines with nationality to produce meaning. And money is the Grail of all Plautus’s plays.

But some things are just untranslatable, and if you transpose any of the plays into a modern setting, you get stuck at these points.

Slaves and Parasites

The most intractable one is slavery. These plays revolve around slavery; it is the central institution that governs what goes on. *Servus* and *ancilla* in Latin do not mean “servant” and “maidservant,” they mean “male slave” and “female slave.” *Erus* and *dominus* mean “master.” In translating, I have often reduced these to “employee” and “boss,” but all three plays hinge on buying a female slave out of her slavery. Luckily for us, there is no real modern equivalent; in this respect, the plays just cannot be translated out of their original cultural context.

Beyond this basic vocabulary, there is a whole range of roles and institutions that defy transposition. A freed slave, a *libertus* or *liberta*, would often go on

working for his or her master, and would take the master's family name as his or her own. No English word conveys the social bond and status of the word *libertus*. Conversely, the former master or mistress is now the *patronus*, a person to whom the former slave owes loyalty as well as services. The chilling interlude at the end of *Iran Man* in which Bowman tells Georgia Moon that he expects her to do as he tells her and show proper gratitude provides a brief illustration of the hazards of such a relationship (and he is not even really her *patronus*). A person who was born free was an *ingenuus*; for the enslaved women of Plautus, facing prostitution, the proof of status as an *ingenua* was the magic news they awaited.

One of the most pervasive elements of the plays is the jokes revolving around the punishment and torture of slaves (see H. Parker 1989). This was evidently a surefire source of laughs, and there are a dozen insulting terms that not only cannot be directly translated into English but would not be funny if they were. Among these:

furcifer, “fork-bearer”: refers to a heavy wooden yoke used as a slave punishment (*Towelheads* 784)

mastigia, “person suitable for flogging” (*Weevil* 567)

verbereum caput, “head suitable for beating” (*Iran Man* 184)

These epithets are often located in a lowbrow context of insult matches; often they are used by one slave against another, so that the accusation of being a prime candidate for corporal punishment comes actually from one member of the oppressed group to another. If the plays are in any way an accurate rendition of the language of a subculture, we might compare the use of the term “nigger” within African-American culture, for example in the work of Richard Pryor. To see how far we are from really understanding these plays, imagine a translator setting *Persa* in the antebellum American South with an all-black or mostly black cast. Whereas Americans are used to laughing at the antics of poor folks and criminals, we have lost our taste for comedy based in slavery (but see McCarthy 2000 on comedy and the minstrel shows).

Another untranslatable role is that of the *parasitus*. Though the word is Greek, the position is basically that of the *cliens*, the freeborn person dependent on a more powerful or solvent free person, who would be his *patronus*. The *parasitus* in particular is dependent on his *patronus* for meals—the word in Greek literally means “next-to-the-food”—and in Plautus the *parasitus* is greedy, always hankering after food, which is used to motivate him (cf. Gowers 1993: 76–78; Tylawsky 2002). This

Rabelaisian element plays a large part in Aristophanic comedy (e.g., Dikaiopolis in *Acharnians*) and also in the Atellane farce, in which one of the four stock characters was Manducus, represented by a mask with huge, champing jaws. Food is one of the main topics of Plautine comedy, and the *parasitus* is a main source of food humor. There are two great examples in the plays in this volume—Fat Jack (Saturio) in *Iran Man* and Weevil (Curculio) himself—and it was very difficult to render the (derogatory) vox propria *parasitus* by which other characters often refer to them. In *Weevil*, I changed the translation depending on the speaker; Beauregard likes Weevil, so for him Weevil is his “associate”; to others he is his “sidekick,” “that leech,” “that bloodsucker,” “that bum.” Fat Jack is less problematically a bum. But his parasitic relationship to Bowman is all the more interesting in that Bowman is just a slave, and can only dispense food to Fat Jack insofar as he has control of his master’s kitchen. Plautus’s audience might have been more attuned than we are to the fact that the parasites are not just greedy, they are hungry. Some of them were familiar with hunger.

Pimps and Whores

Translatable, but odd to a modern audience, is the persistence of pimps and whores as main characters in these plays. The pimp is the archetypal bad guy of Plautus’s plays, though actually a pimp appears in only five of the extant plays. But sixteen of the plays feature prostitutes or young women at risk of becoming prostitutes. Come to think of it, the fact that the young men at the center of these plays are so often in love with girls who are either prostitutes or on the verge of becoming prostitutes is not all that unfamiliar a plot element to current American audiences—see, for example, *Pretty Woman*, *Nightshift*, *Risky Business*, *Trading Places*, *The Girl Next Door*, and so on. And Plautus’s prostitutes are often about as whorelike as Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman*—that is, not very. They are usually potential wives. But the pimp has disappeared from modern romantic comedy and strikes a harsh note in these plays. Like slavery, he cannot be elided; the plots demand that the hero pay the pimp to get the girl.

Swearing

Another element is rarely fully translated in Plautus’s plays: swearing. The slave insults discussed above, which must sorely vex any translator, have resulted in translations of Plautus littered with names nobody has been called in English for a long time: “you rascal!” “you scoundrel!” “you jackanapes!” A moment’s reflection will assure us that, when Americans use bad language, we rely heavily on sex and ex-

crement. This is rarely so in Plautus, although later Roman satire is full of sexual insults. But Plautus is full of other words that are evidently very rude. Translated literally, they fit comfortably with “scoundrel,” “rascal,” “jackanapes”: “Go to a bad thing!” or “Go to the cross!” And Plautus is full to bursting with oaths, which are almost never really translated at all: *hercle*, “By Hercules!” and *edepol*, “By Pollux!” and *di deaeque te perdant*, “May the gods and goddesses ruin you!”

I have tried, in these translations, to use insults that are actually in common use in American English today and to translate oaths with oaths. This may be the most unsettling element in these translations; they often sound blasphemous. Oddly enough for plays produced at religious festivals, these plays often *are* blasphemous. My feeling is that to make these plays really understandable, the artificial gentility of “By Pollux, go to a bad place, you rascal!” needs to be replaced by what the Latin really meant, which is (roughly) “Jesus, get lost, asshole!” Since nobody has sworn by Pollux or Hercules for a long time, English translations need to pepper the plays with “God,” “Christ,” “goddamn,” “bloody,” “Jesus,” and so on—as people actually do speak now, even godless humanists; once you substitute “Jesus” for every *hercle* on a page, suddenly it starts to sound like people talking. The long list of alternatives includes euphemistic substitutes like “golly,” “gee,” “jeeze,” “egad,” “By Jove,” “By George,” and so on, and I have used these as it seemed appropriate. For Catholic audiences, the polytheistic *di deaeque* might be translated “Jesus, Mary, and Joseph,” but perhaps not elsewhere.

Similarly, jokes based on Roman religion need to be transposed into something recognizable to a modern audience. When Weevil describes how the soldier invited him to dinner, he says, *religio fuit, denegare nolui* (Weevil 350)—“It was [an impediment to action resulting from doubt, religious awe, conscience, etc.]—I didn’t like to say no.” I transposed this into “It was my Christian duty—I didn’t like to say no,” because this is a joke about the Weevil’s cheerful greed, expressed here as hypocrisy, and that joke exists in English. I have translated almost all references to multiple gods and goddesses into references to the singular “God” or “Jesus”; like the use of Roman names and togas, the persistence of polytheism in these plays usually serves to distance them from current audiences. If you swear by one of that huge pantheon, to a modern audience it doesn’t sound like swearing at all. But it was, and should be rendered as such. At one point (*Towelheads* 1220), I substituted Joseph and Mary for Jupiter and Juno, and the result sounds quite blasphemous, but so it was in the original. The one ancient deity who resisted translation here was Venus, and she stayed in; maybe she has never lost her following.

PERFORMANCE ISSUES

Students of theater will realize that this volume is the product of limited stage experience. For expert advice, see the website for MASC (Modern Actors Staging Classics) maintained by C. W. Marshall—www.cnrs.ubc.ca/masc—and Marshall's book on Plautine stagecraft (2006).

Imaginary Casts and the Comedy Troupe

As noted above, I not only transposed the plays to modern settings, I imagined an ideal cast for each, now included in each play's cast list. I found that I could not write speakable lines without hearing a particular comedian's voice in my head. Whether this will work for readers, I have no idea. If what I have done does not work for you, I still recommend that you try it for yourself; populate these plays with the people who make you laugh and see what happens.

However, this thought experiment has convinced me of two major points about Plautus's plays. (No, three; three major points. No . . . let me go out and come back in again.)

One: These plays were written for particular actors. If the *grex* referred to in various prologues really stuck together, the same actors would appear in play after play; the playwright would have known their range intimately, and the plays would reflect that. And I think the repetitiveness of the cast of characters has something to do with that (possible) fact of theatrical life.

Weevil has to be someone with a lot of manic energy: I imagined Michael Palin here, but it could be Roberto Benigni or Eddie Murphy or Jackie Chan—even Steve Irwin taking a break from hunting crocodiles. I have a hunch that Plautus played Weevil himself. Of the various soppy young men in love, Boris in *Towelheads*, with major episodes of inarticulate raving, cries out to be played by Hugh Grant, but Beauregard in *Weevil* is much more deadpan and has to carry off a ridiculous deadpan song: Owen Wilson. Bowman in *Iran Man*, though, is totally different: with his all-slave milieu and his nasty ways, he was made to be played by Jason Mewes. But maybe they were all played by the same actor originally.

Two: Each play has a feel to it, each different from the next. *Iran Man* has a Kevin Smith ambience, gritty and lowlife, but young and full of trashy force; also full of metatheatrics and self-reflexivity. *Towelheads* plays well as light romantic comedy in drag; *Weevil* is more like music hall or *Saturday Night Live*, more a series of bits than a play. What does this mean in terms of the first point and the idea of a troupe with a repertory of plays? Maybe it has to do with the fact that all

comedy—and all drama—is a rehash of leftovers that have been lying around forever, and that the job of any troupe that wants to stay in business is to keep it fresh, to keep remixing that old hash (see Gowers 1993: 78–107, esp. 83, on Aeschylus’s Homeric steaks. Even Homer didn’t get to start from scratch.)

But thinking about Plautus’s troupe made me think about how common a form that has been historically for comedy in the West. Not only do movie directors do this now: Woody Allen, the Coen brothers, Christopher Guest, Kevin Smith. This tradition seems to move directly up from antiquity into the *commedia dell’arte* to Shakespeare, and on, visible in literature in *Nicholas Nickleby* (Vincent Crummles’s melodrama troupe), and in J. B. Priestley’s *The Good Companions* (pierrots), strongly in the D’Oyly Carte troupe, taking literary form in the novels of P. G. Wodehouse that paralleled his writing for musical comedy, and on into TV and situation comedy. The Savoy operas were so markedly written for particular voices and talents that subsequent incarnations of the company have a problem re-creating them across the board.

Writing funny lines is a lot easier if you can rely on a funny voice to put them over. Listen to Richard Suart sing “The Law Is the True Embodiment” in Gilbert and Sullivan’s *Iolanthe*, and listen to him sing the lines “All very agreeable girls, and none / is over the age of twenty-one.” Probably the word “twenty-one” has never before or since been pronounced with the degree of salivating lechery with which Suart infuses it. But Suart is the inheritor of a set of roles designed for George Grossmith, the original Savoy comic baritone, who started out as a sort of musical standup (or, rather, sitdown—like Victor Borge) comic. And Grossmith in turn was part of a company whose personnel in part determined the *dramatis personae* of many of the Savoy operas. There is always a brilliant young man (tenor), or two, and a comical older man (baritone), and a forbidding older man (bass), and a brilliant young woman (soprano), with a couple of less talented soprano sidekicks, and a forbidding/comical, plump older woman (contralto).

The particular kinds of songs Gilbert and Sullivan wrote were likewise conditioned by the talents of their original troupe: the patter song, the soprano fireworks. (When Grossmith left, just before *The Gondoliers*, one result was that *Gondoliers* is markedly short on funny songs.) This brings us to the issue of music.

Music

There is one huge problem of loss that has to be dealt with in translating these plays. They were originally musicals. This was one of Plautus’s big innovations: he got rid of the Greek chorus, made the star actors into singers/dancers/actors, and wrote a lot of clearly very funny songs. All the tunes are gone.

As a child, I spent hours poring over a copy of *A Treasury of Gilbert and Sullivan*, edited by Deems Taylor. I couldn't read music, so I didn't know most of the tunes. I read the lyrics, though; anyone can see that they are funny. Nobody can turn a rhyme like W. S. Gilbert. But repeatedly listening to the operettas on CD made me think a lot about funny music, and what makes music funny. When Richard Dauntless in *Ruddigore* calls Rose Maybud a "right little, tight little, slight little, light little, trim little, prim little craft"—a list of diminutives that could come right out of Plautus—it's clearly a nice bit of rhyming and repetition, but it's the way the music exactly echoes what makes the words funny that makes this so brilliant: it's a right little, tight little jig, it sounds nautical, and it's also extremely catchy. The same goes for the gorgeous anthemlike tune Sullivan wrote for "When Britain Really Ruled the Waves" in *Iolanthe*—it would make a superb national anthem, except for the words ("The House of Peers throughout the war, did nothing in particular, and did it very well"). The wonderful tunes Sullivan wrote for the comic semi-heavy who pops up in every play, now memorably Richard Suart, often sound like funny dances: the Lord Chancellor in *Iolanthe* jigs irresistibly through "a pleasant occupation for, a rather susceptible Chancellor"; the Duke of Plaza-Toro in *Gondoliers* stomps like a flamenco dancer through "In Enterprise of Martial Kind" as "that unaffected, undetected, well-connected warrior, the Duke of Plaza-Toro." Similarly, Tom Lehrer's "Vatican Rag" is funny not only because of the words but because it's a rag, and the opening words are dance instructions ("First you get down on your knees . . .")—it's a takeoff on dance rags of the 1920s, and specifically on "Varsity Drag." And "Fugue for Tinhorns" is funny partly because it's a fugue—a classical form—sung by three gamblers, about horseracing.

If you think about what would be lost if *H.M.S. Pinafore* or *Guys and Dolls* were done without music, and without the songs even being read as metrical, you get a sense of how much is lost of Plautus. It's breathtaking, and disheartening.

However, it's also an overstatement. Sullivan is quoted as saying, "The first thing I have to decide upon is the rhythm, and I arrange the rhythm before I come to the question of melody" (D. Taylor 1941: 8). For a technical explanation of Plautine meter, see Beare 1964: 320–34, where he entertainingly illustrates many of Plautus's famously numerous meters from the lyrics to Gilbert and Sullivan songs. If you read the plays in Latin, you can, with training, read the original meters, and see what the patterns were. And it turns out that the number of real songs—production numbers—would have taken up a much smaller proportion of the show than the songs in a Savoy opera or a musical, never mind grand opera: only one long number in *Weevil* (it shows up in this translation as three songs linked by spoken lines); four numbers in *Iran Man*; and two in *Towelheads*. (N.B. of these

seven songs, five involve female characters, and two that are sung by male characters are hymns: song type matched to voice type?) So the plays were more like comic revues with a few songs than like fullblown musicals. Moreover, Plautus had no chorus, and he didn't have much in the way of a pit orchestra, either; based on the scanty evidence, it seems likely that all he had was a woodwind player and maybe a couple of percussionists. So the loss is not so large in scope.

The meters are somewhat difficult to translate into English equivalents, though. And the plays were in meter almost throughout—though not rhymed; rhyme was not part of Roman poetry. We do not really have enough evidence to understand fully how these meters were used, but the evidence suggests that there were three modes of utterance in the plays: speech, recitative, and song (see Beare 1964: 219–32; Habinek 2005).

Long sections of the plays were spoken; these were set in iambic senarii, and the metrical effect of a single line of it is the same (with a lot of tinkering allowed) as a line and a half of “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening”:

Whose woods these are I think I know; his house is in

. . . or of a line of Shakespeare plus one iamb:

Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings

In translating the plays, I have generally adhered to this pattern where I found it (sometimes I used pentameter instead), though you could easily read the translations in this volume without realizing it. If you do read for meter, plenty of these translated lines won't look like smooth senarii, but that is emphatically true of the original, which was anything but metrically glassy. The original also clearly uses short words like “now” and “here” and “well” as grout to fill up the metrical line, and it is similarly fascinating to see how many ways you can translate a single line in order to take in both the sense and the meter.

The sense of loss is much greater for the songs and recitatives. The songs are marked as such by the complex metrical schemes they employ; with tunes, these would not have seemed like mathematical exercises, as they do now. I have turned the songs in *Weevil* and *Towelheads* into songs “to the tune of,” and the songs in *Iran Man* into rhymed rap, and all I can say is that this kind of thing, though it seemed worth a try here, is funnier when you do not also have to translate Latin as closely as possible. A few short dialogues and transitions that were sung in the original I have translated as spoken.

Between songs and spoken lines were the recitatives—chanted lines—recognizable by their meters, most commonly the trochaic septenarius (trochaic tetrameter catalectic, seven trochees plus one syllable). Other recitative meters were the trochaic octonarius, iambic septenarius, and iambic octonarius (see Beare 1964: 221, 323, 328–29). These meters also appear in Roman folk forms like riddles and charms and the soldiers’ nasty songs at triumphs. The trochaic octonarius amounts to a pair of lines from Longfellow’s *Hiawatha*:

By the shores of Gitche Gumee / By the shining Big-Sea-Water

It also, interestingly, is basically the same meter used in hip-hop: just a coincidence? Listening to Public Enemy will give a fairly accurate idea of the beat and tone of *Iran Man*. So in *Iran Man* I reproduced these meters with some care, and they could be read or performed as unrhymed rap (see *Iran Man* introduction). In *Towelheads* and *Weevil*, here more genteel, I did them all, roughly, as trochaic octonarii, except for one run of iambic septenarii in *Weevil*. In English, the difference just boils down to starting on the downbeat or the upbeat. I have noted the meter of the original at change points and scene openings here; for exact lists, see Lindsay’s OCT at the end of each volume.

The idea of a musical accompanied only by a woodwind player and a couple of percussionists often makes commentators on Roman comedy express doubt about its musicality. This has to be a mistake, abetted by the common translation of *tibia*, the word for the instrument used by the musicians of the *palliata*, as “flute.” Based on visual evidence, and the fact that it could be heard above singing in an outdoor space, it must have been more like a clarinet or tenor saxophone. Plenty of vernacular music forms do not rely on big orchestration: rock, bluegrass, zydeco, polka, square dance, jazz, hip-hop. The cantina band in *Star Wars* is not a big band, but it really swings, and the main melody line is carried by something like a clarinet. We are hampered by having little idea of what ancient music sounded like, and by a suspicion that it may have sounded like Near Eastern music, which is hard to follow for most Western ears. Probably it did; who knows? But I feel certain that the songs in Plautus (a) had tunes, which (b) were funny, that is, parodying serious forms or echoing what was funny in the words, and (c) were marked by intricate, catchy rhythms. Both mime (Cicero *Cael.* 65) and, later, pantomimus, included a percussive accompaniment performed by a sort of tap dancer, the *scabillarius*.

For the songs in *Weevil*, I chose familiar tunes that tie in with the meaning and/or structure of the lyrics rather than with the original metrical scheme. In the

two big songs in *Towelheads*, the tunes relate to the original rhythms: the bacchiacs of the girls' opening scene are interpreted via strip-tease beat, and the girls' final duet, which Plautus set in anapests, the "marching rhythm," appears here as a march (a little meter joke).

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Of course, you do not have to limit yourself to Plautus to find out about Roman attitudes toward the cultures Rome was busily demolishing. But you do have to fast-forward. You can pick up an interesting angle from the histories of Polybius, a Greek exile living at Rome about a generation after Plautus. You can pick up a lot, with patience, from the speeches of Cicero, especially the Verrine orations (60s B.C.E.); or from Horace's *Satires* and *Epodes* (30s C.E.); or, with caution, from the histories of Diodorus Siculus (60s B.C.E.) and Livy (20s B.C.E.–10s C.E.). You can pick up a lot more from the (lesser-known) ethnographers: Caesar (40s B.C.E.), Strabo (10s B.C.E.), Mela (40s C.E.), the elder Pliny (70s C.E.), and especially the *Agricola* and *Germania* of Tacitus (98 C.E.). Most of all, you should look at three satirists of the empire: Petronius and his novel, the *Satyricon* (probably written around 60 C.E.); Martial and his epigrams (80s–90s C.E.); and Juvenal and his satires (110s C.E.; readers of this book should not miss Juvenal's fifteenth satire, on cannibalism in Egypt, along with his more famous third, on Greeks). All are available in translation, but it is well worth learning Latin to be able to read Petronius and Juvenal in the original. They are two of the greatest satirists who have ever written, and Juvenal is one of the greatest stylists; only Samuel Johnson ever really approximated Juvenal in translation. Satire was like the acme of standup comedy; if you are reading this book because of a general interest in comedy, do not miss Roman satire.

Meanwhile, for recommended translations and some starting points in secondary literature, see the last section of the bibliography at the end of this volume.