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We wish to thank the contributors for the many conversations that the chapters in this volume reflect and hope that readers will find them as engaging as we have. Our warmest thanks to the team at Wiley Blackwell: to Haze Humbert for commissioning the volume; to Veronica Visentin, Todd Green, and Skylar Van Valkenburg for guiding us through the publication process; and to Christine McKnight, Ajith Kumar and Sakthivel Kandaswamy for their kind and attentive assistance in production. Thanks also to the Plautus Festival of Sarsina, Italy, for the use of the cover image.

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GFF DMD
Introduction: A 2020 Vision of Plautus

George Fredric Franko and Dorota Dutsch

These verses from the prologue of *Trinummus* communicate bundles of information to audiences and readers. We learn that the plot is adapted from a Greek ancestor; that a certain Philemon wrote the Greek script; that Plautus renovates the story by making a Roman “barbarian version”; and that Plautus renamed the play with an ambiguous joke, for the *Tri-* prefix in *Tri-nummus* could suggest both a modest “Three Penny Opera” and a grandiose “Super-Bitcoin” (cf. Fontaine 2010, p. 20, n. 29). To open our Companion, let’s unpack these bundles more carefully, starting with the identity of the Roman playwright.

Titus Maccius Plautus? Other prologues – four from Plautus, three from Terence – call him “Plautus”; *Asinaria* calls him Maccus; and *Mercator* calls him Titus Maccius. The tripartite Roman name familiar to us from later aristocrats, such as “Gaius Julius Caesar,” sounds lofty and contrived for a third-century BCE playwright, especially if Plautus came from upland Umbria rather than urbanizing Rome. Two parts of the name suggest a pseudonym derived from theater: Maccus the clown; and Plautus the mime-actor. Moreover, “Titus,” like “Dick,” was slang for “penis.” So perhaps the name “Titus Maccius Plautus” is a saucy pen name for an individual or even a collaborative team, not unlike “Monty
George Fredric Franko and Dorota Dutsch

Python” (Gratwick 1973; character names in Plautus do convey jokes or thematic significance, see López López 1991). The second-century ce scholar Aulus Gellius claimed that 130 scripts circulated under Plautus’s name; while not impossible, the claim suggests exaggeration or shared attributions as much as it proves Plautus’s popularity. His traditional dates (born 254, active from c.210 till death in 184; all ancient dates BCE unless noted) seem reliable enough. His purported home of Sarsina seems reasonable, especially since most Latin authors of the Republic were not born in Rome itself, and the tradition will likely be cemented by Sarsina’s recent support of productions and studies in Plautus’s honor (the 1998–2017 Lecturae Plautinae Sarsinates, ed. R. Raffaelli and A. Tontini, published by QuattroVenti). Other biographical data found in later ancient sources have little independent authority. The anecdote that Plautus had experience as an actor or stagehand is plausible, for his scripts historically have fared better on the stage than on the page. That he lost all his money and worked in a mill is less credible and probably a fanciful reconstruction based upon threatened punishment of slaves in his comedies.

Greek fabula, Philemon scripsit? Fabula, not unlike Greek “mythos,” has a wide range of meanings that include “play,” “story,” “narration,” “scene,” and “myth,” as well as the English derivative “fable.” Plautus uses fabula to mean both specifically the “play being staged” and also more generally the “story.” Plautus lifted the script (scripsit) from an earlier Greek playwright, Philemon. Philemon (c.362–262) wrote dramas not in the genre of fantastic and salty Aristophanic “Old Comedy” of fifth-century Athens but in the smoother and cosmopolitan “New Comedy” of the Hellenistic age. We do not have any of the scripts Philemon wrote. From his more famous peer Menander (342–291) we have one complete script unearthed in 1959 (Dyskolos), one almost complete (Samia), and substantial papyrus fragments of a half dozen others. Our corpus of Menander, though still probably less than 5% of his total output, is now large enough to enable substantive rather than speculative exploration of his dramaturgy, stagecraft, reception, and interaction with social contexts (Sommerstein 2013). The study of Menander has dominated our perception of Greek New Comedy, but that dominance must not obscure the fact that we have lost hundreds of scripts from dozens of other Greek playwrights in that genre. For decades Plautus and his fellow Roman dramatists plundered that treasury of Greek New Comic scripts and boasted of the thievery. Where plagiarism attempts to hide the theft of an earlier work, intertextuality celebrates the theft and renovations, encouraging audiences and readers to appreciate the interplay between the earlier work and the new version. Plautus’ bold statement demands that we ponder the process by which all “mature poets steal” and sometimes even appropriate another culture’s classics, from Vergil to Bob Dylan (Thomas 2017, pp. 193–225).

Vortit barbare? Plautus touts his transformation of the original Greek script, inviting us to evaluate both the process (vortit) and product (barbare) of his renovations. Unfortunately, scholars could not assess his process through direct, detailed comparison of Roman adaptation and Greek original for Trinummus or any other play because we had no Greek scripts that Plautus adapted. An opportunity emerged in 1968 with the discovery and publication of about a hundred lines from Menander’s Dis Exapaton, the model for Plautus’s Bacchides (Handley 1968; Gaiser 1970; Anderson 1993). Comparison of the parallel passages exploded some earlier theories of Plautus’s relations to his originals and largely confirmed the insights of Eduard Fraenkel (1922, 1960, 2007), who identified
patterns of Plautine thought and expression that indicated zesty free adaptation rather than incompetent slavish translation. Despite the dangers and limitations of comparing fragments of Greek New Comedy with full texts of Plautus, recent studies have moved far beyond Fraenkel in confirming Plautus’s reputation as a brilliant comic poet. An older tendency to dismiss him as a pale imitator of Greek comedy, worthy of study not in his own right but only to reconstruct lost Greek plays, has faded, and he is currently celebrated for creating a distinctly Roman comic experience.

In some ways Roman comedy inscribes itself as a continuation of the Greek tradition, in other ways it resists the tradition, but in all ways it aggressively appropriates and renovates the genre to conform to Roman tastes, venues, and culture. Greek New Comic playwrights wrote scripts for performance in permanent theaters, with the units of action divided into five acts by four choral interludes, and the dialogue performed by no more than three speaking actors. Roman New Comedy, while nominally set in Greece and inhabited by Greeks, presented characters that spoke and sang in Latin for their Roman audience in Rome, hence barbarae. Roman stages were temporary, shoehorned into available spaces in the civic and religious epicenter of an expanding empire. No chorus meant no choral interludes and no act divisions, generating continuous and often frenetic action. As with the Greeks, all lines were composed in verse, but the alternation of unaccompanied speech with musically enhanced passages created arcs in the action that effectively replaced the hard divisions of four choral interludes. The Roman playwrights acknowledged no limit on the number of speaking actors other than economic or dramatic necessities. Given these fundamental differences in staging, Plautus rightly claims to produce a culturally and theatrically Roman version (vortit, “turned,” the root of “version”) rather than a simple Latin translation. One might usefully dub the process, to borrow Michel Garneau’s Québécois term, “tradaptation” (Hoenselaars and Bassnett 2012, part III). Barbarae is a dense, polyvalent signifier: linguistic (non-Greek speakers speak barbarae rather than Graece); ethnic (non-Greeks are barbarians); and aesthetic (non-Greeks are barbarous).
We contend that three approaches have significantly reinvigorated Plautine studies. First, the emergence of performance criticism treats Plautus as author of plays to be seen rather than works to be read. For example, attention to the extra-textual elements essential for performance (e.g. music, metatheater, and improvisation) has demanded reassessment of the scripts. Second, as the Greek term “drama” derives from “doing,” we now consider what characters do and how plays function more than who the characters are and what data the plays record. Current study of Plautine texts as documents implicated in social history emphasizes a character’s active performance of a social role rather than passive occupation of an assigned social status. Studies focusing on how individuals perform their gender and class have broken new ground in understanding Plautus as reflector, generator, or subverter (vortere again!) of Roman social practices and ideologies. Third, recognition of Plautus as a dramatic poet coincides with a shift in scholarly attention from tradition to reception. Where tradition values fidelity to the predecessor based upon any verbal, structural, or thematic parallels detected through source criticism (Quellenforschung), reception values the agency of the later artists in their inventive renovations. Alison Sharrock (2009, p. x) laments her introduction to Roman comedy as a mere coda to Greek tradition, “a stereotype-ridden exercise in lamentable literary secondariness.” The more we view Latin literature itself not as derivative but as innovative, the more we appreciate Plautus as a creative adapter of his Greek predecessors, rather like Catullus and Horace, who renovate Sappho and Alcaeus, or Vergil with Homer (West and Woodman 1979; Feeney 2016).

While Wiley-Blackwell’s A Companion to Terence devotes a chapter apiece to the six comedies of Plautus’s successor, we avoid a collection of discrete explications of the 21 plays in favor of thematic chapters. While we recognize the drawback in potentially slighting someone’s favorite play, we believe that thematic approaches better illuminate commonalities within the extant scripts and allow different chapters to provide multiple perspectives on individual plays. The Companion divides into four manners of viewing the scripts and four areas of inquiry: retrospection of the plays’ theatrical background; introspection of the scripts for their plots, characters, and dramatic techniques; circumspection of how the plays embody and embed contemporary Roman social history; and prospection of how the scripts transmitted the plays through the centuries. The rest of this introduction attempts to highlight and integrate very briefly some salient points of each chapter and to indicate the changing climate of Plautine studies (fuller biographies for which will be found in the References of each chapter).

Retrospection: The Background of Roman Comedy

We open the Companion with TIMOTHY MOORE’s judicious assessment of the ancient evidence for Roman theatrical activity in the era of Plautus. While we know that the Romans had enjoyed public theatrical performances for decades before Plautus, we cannot accept at face value the agenda-driven accounts of them from centuries later, such as that found in the historian Livy. We can safely deduce that the Romans witnessed performances of theatrical and paratheatrical activities springing from local, Italian, and Greek traditions – including dance, unscripted farce, and scripted drama in the genres of comedy, tragedy, and history – and that Plautus’s plays implicitly draw upon and explicitly allude to
those performance activities. For example, jokes about stock characters in improvisatory Atellan farce suggest that Plautine comedies riff on their progenitors; but without any script of Atellan farce from Plautus’s era, we cannot accurately assess how those allusions function as mockery, homage, inside jokes, or clichés. For our study of Plautus’s Greek roots, SEBASTIANA NERVEGNA supplements old-fashioned textual analysis of Plautus’s Bacchides and Menander’s Dis Exapatón with the visual evidence on two vases to provide some new perspectives on the central question of how Plautus transformed his Greek originals.

The players, magistrates funding the festivals, and hawkers of food, drink, and other merchandise all profited in some way from the plays, which – put crassly – required putting butts in seats. What seats? ANNE GROTON combs the evidence of Roman topography, vase painting, artwork, and later literary accounts to corroborate and refine the evidence for stages and stagecraft encoded within Plautus’s scripts. The curious fact that the Romans had no permanent, purpose-built theater until 55 suggests that the transient quality of Roman drama was one of its attractions rather than an impediment. Temporary stages exploited available plazas with limited seating areas to energize an intimate playing space for roughly 1300–3000 spectators (far smaller venues than for the 5000–30000 spectators of Greek theaters). Architectural necessities generate theatrical virtues. For example, the intimacy of the space, with no orchestral pit to separate actors from audience, makes the divisions minimal and porous between actor and audience, or fictive Greek setting and visible Roman topography.

Staging a Plautine production required the work of many individuals, including actors, musicians, and an actor or dominus gregis – an “actor-manager” or even “producer.” The professional theater troupes were multitalented units. All actors of the palliata were male, even for female roles, and masked, allowing one actor to play multiple roles. Over half of the lines were delivered with musical accompaniment. The versatile performers could act, sing, dance, and improvise in verse in accordance with rhythm and melody. ISABELLA TARDIN CARDOSO links the vorsipellis (“skin-changing,” meaning “skilled” and “versatile”; the same root as vortit) actor with the vorsipellis audience, a mixed group from all socio-economic, legal, ethnic, educational, and gender groups. The old model of a monolithic Roman audience of naive clodhoppers, a model perhaps originating in Terence’s prologues (which at Hecyra 4 even disparages them as a populus stupidus), has been replaced. Current theoretical reconstructions of the plays’ primary audience range from a restricted elite (Fontaine 2010b) to a swelling slave class (Richlin 2017). Whatever the precise composition, the popularity of Plautus confirms that the varied components of the audience groups – men, women, free, slave, soldiers, senators, shopkeepers, farmers, etc. – appreciated the plots, acting, metatheater, and overt or covert social commentary explored in this Companion.

**Introspection: The Analysis of Plautine Scripts**

We can begin with observing that an early twentieth-century obsession with lost Greek originals and attempts to disentangle Greek versus Roman elements, the so-called Plautinisches und Attisches, has abated (Leo 1912; Fraenkel 1922; Jachmann 1931; Zagagi
1980). Such analysis continues to enrich our understanding, but, barring discovery of new specimens of Greek New Comedy, the field has been thoroughly excavated. In the later twentieth century, Gregor Vogt-Spira complicated the model of a simple binary between scripted Greek and re-scripted Roman by proposing a third limb: oral Italian extempore farce. The attention to formative oral Italian elements within the literary palliata spurred a prolific approach to Plautus, the so-called “Freiburg School” of Eckard Lefèvre, Ekkehard Stärk, and their colleagues, whose monographs and collected volumes have been published by Gunther Narr Verlag for the Scriptorialia series (Benz et al. 1995; Lefèvre et al. 1991; Vogt-Spira 2001). Their seductive studies assert improvisation (Stegreifspiel) as a crucial element of Plautine drama. While Stegreifspiel has had the salutary effect of turning our attention from retrospection of antecedents to actual staging, at times the Freiburg School has pushed claims for Plautine originality too far by replacing one Will-o’-the-Wisp (lost Greek scripts) with another (unrecorded and un-recordable improvisations).

With the onset of the twenty-first century, performance criticism has directed our study of Plautus as dramatist to interrogation of how his scripts function (e.g. Slater 1985; Moore 1998; Marshall 2006). Of course, we cannot ever recover or recreate an original performance. We can, however, interrogate the scripts more closely as open-ended signifiers whose meanings are embodied in performance through an actor’s choice and an audience’s reception, and thereby propose an interpretive complement to traditional philology. The 2012 American institute on “Roman Comedy in Performance,” sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities (Safran and Fulkerson 2015; online videos at Moore and James 2015), gives only a sample of the progress made through performance criticism and invites others to continue that progress.

We hope that the recent progress made in Plautine studies finds a receptive ear outside the world of classics. Far too often, students and scholars in other fields who do not read Plautus directly but rely upon the potted summaries transmitted in handbooks and webpages assume that the goal of his New Comedy is romantic marriage. At the risk of reifying and ripping a venerable straw man, the influential expositions of Northrop Frye can exemplify how criticism outside classics sometimes misleadingly implies that Plautus shared the same dramatic priorities as Terence and Menander:

The plot structure of Greek New Comedy, as transmitted by Plautus and Terence, [is] less a form than a formula […] that a young man wants a young woman, that his desire is resisted by some opposition, usually paternal … At the end of the play the device in the plot that brings hero and heroine together causes a new society to crystallize around the hero. (1957, p. 163)

Frye’s synthesis repays reading because, even when one disagrees on details, it is far more insightful and nuanced than this snippet suggests. But for us, the quotations can serve as a template against which all the plays of Plautus rebel or deviate to greater or lesser degree. The palliata depends upon expectations that Plautus chooses to fulfill or foil, and the pleasure derives from encountering surprises within the formulaic structure. The chapters that follow show both the inadequacy of any crude application of the rigid template found in handbook summaries and the comic value of stretching or subverting any template.
First, Plautus stands apart from Menander and Terence in his rejection of the marriage plot so fundamental to their comic worlds. SHARON JAMES opens this section of the Companion with a catalog of Plautus’s plays to demonstrate that the overwhelming majority avoid or downplay the marriage plot. In many plays, marriage is impossible because the woman is a meretrix, a courtesan or sex-worker, and the goal of the young male lover is continued access to the woman as meretrix rather than as wife. Plautus reveals no ideological investment in citizen society, no interest in fertility and the production of the next generation of citizens. Next, DAVID CHRISTENSON examines Pseudolus as an exemplary play (as both typical specimen and paragon) for identifying Plautus’s Roman dramatic priorities. Pseudolus amplifies the machinations of the clever slave to supplant the usual Menandrean emphasis on romantic elements. Within the formulaic unity of the palliata, Pseudolus displays stunning agency and improvisatory skill; indeed, the creativity of servile Pseudolus mirrors the creativity of Plautus in breaking the fetters of a formulaic genre inherited from Greek “masters.” COSTAS PANAYOTAKIS examines the Amphitruo and the Menaechmi and demonstrates how, building on comic incidents which arise out of the confusion involving identical twins or pairs of people who, for some reason, appear to be the mirror-image of one another, Plautus explores issues of unreliable vision, inaccurate knowledge, unstable personal identity, illicit sexual desire, and irresponsible social behavior. Contrary to Frye’s assertion that Plautus’s New Comedy generates a new society, SHAWN O’BRYHIM argues that the resolutions in Plautus snap characters back to a kind of steady state, a return to prescriptive norms rather than to the promise of a new tomorrow. His analysis suggests that even the seemingly exceptional Captivi is quite typical, restoring the household to a long-lost status quo ante bellum. Yet while a Plautine play’s plotted destination may be a return to the status quo, the path thither is frenetic and often topsy-turvy because the characters in control are not the patriarchal fathers, sons in their prime, or virile soldiers; instead, delightfully resourceful subaltern characters take charge. Plautus exhibits a fascination with slaves and women challenging and overthrowing patriarchal figureheads of authority. FERDINAND STÜRNER examines the appeal of arguably Plautus’s most enduringly popular and flamboyant figure, what we commonly call the servus callidus or “tricky slave” in Pseudolus, Mostellaria, Epidicus, and Bacchides. While the clever slave often may steal the spotlight, in several plays strong female characters upstage him or provide an alternative focal point. Women in Plautus were long neglected by scholarship; for example, George Duckworth’s 36-page chapter on “Characters and Characterization” devoted only eight pages to female roles, lumping together virgo, ancilla, matrona, and meretrix (1952, pp. 253–261). Such conglomeration helped perpetuate a tendency to disregard functions and individuality, treating female characters as objects rather than subjects. But closer attention to how male actors in female roles perform their gender, class, and occupational identities (Dutsch 2008; Dutsch et al. 2015) recovers a Plautine dramaturgy of greater sophistication and vivacity. CATHERINE CONNORS explores three plays (Bacchides, Truculentus, Menaechmi) in which an independent meretrix wields autonomy and, from the male perspective, beckons with a perilously enticing descent into the underworld. BARBARA GOLD’s analysis of Casina shows how the matrona Cleostrata, with the help of two other women, uses trickery to corral her husband, a creepy senex amator, and direct the action toward a socially acceptable ending. ANNE FELTOVICH tackles the archetypal male central characters of the miser in
Aulularia, the boastful soldier in Miles Gloriosus, and the greedy pimp in Pseudolus not as specimens of blocking characters, but as a function class of masculinity. In short, Plautus delights not in the stabilizing finality of romantic citizen marriage but in a temporary destabilizing of males abusing their (real or imagined) positions of authority.

The overthrow of persons misusing their authority generates laughter. But if comedy is a movement toward happiness, harmony, and reconciliation (Nelson 1990), then mockery and overthrow suggest satire and ridicule insufficient for, or even contrary to, integrative comedy. The palliata pursues various avenues for obtaining a comic ending, with deception and mockery as just two possible means. STAVROS FRANGOULIDES traces in Rudens, Cistellaria, and Poenulus how romance can find joyful resolution via competing plots that work with or against the larger arc of Fortuna. Yet grave doubts about divine Providence can emerge from Amphitruo, our lone extant example of mythological New Comedy, when Jupiter uses unseemly trickery to sleep with a married woman without her knowledge or consent. If we laugh at Amphitruo, we laugh awry at an anti-marriage plot, an adultery plot. As WALTER STOCKERT explains, Plautus challenges the most fundamental romantic template of the genre, coining the term tragicoedia because Amphitruo defies the normative generic boundaries articulated by Aristotle. As Plautus revels in reorienting Menandrean generic norms, he embraces his position as anti-Aristotelian (Gonçalves 2015).

Turning from macro-issues of plot, character, and genre, what do comic micro-techniques reveal about Plautus’s craft? Aulus Gellius claims that readers could identify the work of Plautus by verses that are Plautinissimi (“most Plautine,” NA 3.3.4), even via a single line. PETER BARRIOS LECH gives us a glimpse of how that is possible through a close reading of similar passages in Plautus’s Curculio, Turpilius’s Epicerus, and an unnamed Menandrean Greek script to indicate some hallmarks of Plautine style and Early Latin.

Words in the scripts allow only a glimpse of the extra-textual elements crucial to live performance. First, music was paramount. The scores have not survived, only the complex meters whose rules and patterns baffled scholars for centuries (Gratwick 1993; Questa 2007; Moore 2012). Since over half the lines in Plautus were delivered with musical accompaniment, we must recognize that rhythm and melody were essential to the theatrical experience, a point that TED GELLAR-GOAD hammers home through comparison to Hamilton and a hands-on exposition of the musical architecture in Bacchides. Second, metatheater. Although the term has acquired so many uses that some may deem it anathema (Rosenmeyer 2002), metatheater remains a fundamental category for discussions of Plautine dramaturgy. Metatheater can denote plays constructed from other plays, and thus mimetic of earlier theater rather than holding a mirror up to nature. As the Trinummus prologue announces, the palliata derives from Greek scripts refurbished with barbarous elements. Metatheater also includes non-illusory remarks that puncture the boundary between actor and audience or actor and character, indicators that characters have a self-awareness of their identity as theatrical entities. CHRISTOPHER BUNGARD reviews the varied approaches to metatheater in Plautus, especially Pseudolus and Miles Gloriosus, and suggests how his plays may hold up a mirror to life. If all the world’s a stage, then the Romans, like us, and like the characters in Plautus, embodied and performed their scripted and improvised social identities daily.

Finally, using Asinaria and Casina, MARTIN DINTER tackles perhaps the most basic and difficult question for anyone studying Plautus: why do we, and did the Romans, laugh? While we can explicate verbal jokes – puns, bawdy, tongue-twisters, paratragedy,
etc. – and detect cues for physical humor, such as buffoonery or slapstick, we have lost the most important component in delivering a joke: delivery. Since laughter is both an internal, personal phenomenon and an external, social phenomenon, repeated schticks in Plautus must tell us something about what Roman audiences found funny in their society as sources of delight, ridicule, or anxiety, right?

**Circumspection: The Interaction of Plautine Plays and Roman Society**

So what can Plautine texts tell us about Roman social contexts? Plays are embedded within ambient society; they are popular entertainments reflecting, shaping, and embodying ideology. But three factors make the study of Plautus and Roman social history especially challenging. First, Plautus is not Aristophanes, whose plays abound with overt and precise socio-political commentary on his contemporary Athenian democracy and imperialism. Second, distinguishing the plays’ Greek from Roman elements poses obstacles to using Plautine texts as documents of Roman social history. For example, one can diligently disentangle Greek versus Roman legal practices in a Plautine play, but each play primarily operates under idiosyncratic comic law, a fiction serving the dramatic logic that each individual plot requires. Third, the middle Republic’s contextual evidence is comparatively limited. Since we have only minimal literary, epigraphic, and archeological evidence contemporary with Plautus, scholars confront a difficult path between swashbuckling synthesis and paralyzing analysis. Two landmarks from the later twentieth century may illustrate these polar extremes.

Erich Segal’s frothy *Roman Laughter* (1968, 2nd ed. 1987) identified the essence of Plautine comedy as a festive, Saturnalian inversion of a Puritanical, “Catonic” Roman value system. Segal was a comparativist literary critic rather than a social historian, and his reconstruction of Roman attitudes mixed anachronistic theories of carnival with fanciful Freudian social psychology and reductionist theories of laughter. Those defects noted, Segal’s model continues to stimulate the study of Plautus as a distinctly Roman poet. At the other extreme, Erich Gruen’s sober historicism, by negating the conclusions of others more than offering positive interpretations, served to close rather than open avenues of exploration. After denying any specificity for topical allusions to triumphs, sumptuary laws, political struggles, and Philhellenism, Gruen’s diagnosis offered only the blurry conclusions that “contemporaneity permeates the plays of Plautus” and “the playwright’s posture is complex and elusive” and “all is grist to the comic mill” (1990, pp. 156–157). Again, Plautus is not Aristophanes: since Plautine topicality does not operate at such a granular level of names and dates, the historicist microscope needs a different lens.

The difficulty of avoiding myopic and hyperopic interpretations has deterred book-length historicist studies of Plautus, but we can celebrate two noteworthy exceptions that focus on ideology. David Konstan’s *Roman Comedy* (1983) scrutinizes the serious social tensions and class conflicts encoded within the plays. Konstan’s sensitivity to the intersection of literature and ideology provides a corrective lens for those who might overlook details peculiar to the ancient city-state by misconstruing them as transhistorical. Matthew Leigh’s *Comedy and the Rise of Rome* (2004), which probes the plays as reflections of
Roman expansionist preoccupations, has arguably opened a new path for using Plautus as evidence of the *zeitgeist* during the transformative era of Roman Mediterranean imperialism. Even the smallest choices of interpretation matter for reconstruction of a *mentalité*: translating *Captivi* as “POWs” yields a richer and more precise historical resonance than the vague “Captives.”

Disentangling the Greek from the Roman in Plautus is sometimes impossible, as Greeks and Romans share many Mediterranean features; sometimes crucial, as an element may depend upon a culturally-specific practice or ideology; and sometimes pointless, as the plays exist neither in Greece nor Rome but in Plautinopolis (Adrian Gratwick’s nifty 1982 coinage for Plautus’s fictive universe). SOPHIA PAPAIOANNOU guides us through the complicated realm of Plautinopolis, suggesting how the temporary, make-believe stages can reflect permanent, real Roman absorption and assimilation of Greek literature and culture.

If constructing a physical stage also constructs a mental landscape, to what extent do Plautine theater and metatheater reflect and authorize Roman imperialism? PAUL BURTON’s analysis of warfare and imperialism in and around Plautus shows conclusively that the plays resonate with both precise echoes of contemporary military discourse and general areas of anxieties over intercultural contacts. The Greeks were not the only cultural competitor in the Mediterranean, for the Carthaginians offered a different Other against which the Romans could define themselves. The Carthaginians posed a continual and dire threat to Rome, especially in the war with Hannibal (218–201). SETH JEPPESEN examines religious practices in *Poenulus*, staged shortly after the Hannibalic War. As modern religious studies focus on the sociology of practices rather than theology of beliefs, the chapter views religious ritual as performance or paratheatrical activity. Should one understand a Carthaginian character engaging in Roman ritual as parody or piety? A dramatic necessary for even the Punic inhabitants of Plautinopolis or a marker of real and aggressive cultural assimilation?

Great progress in historicizing Plautus explores the experiences of subaltern characters on stage, especially women and slaves, as embodiments of women and slaves in Roman society. SERENA WITZKE surveys the Plautine corpus to illustrate how individual characters perform their social roles in terms of gender and class. Plautus portrays a full menu of sexual attractions and agents – male, female, slave, free, old, young – pursuing goals beyond heteronormative citizen marriage. Our willingness to move beyond the prim category of romance and look frankly at uncomfortable issues, such as rape and the lives of sex laborers, has yet again provided a salutary counterbalance or corrective to the primacy of the marriage plot.

Uncomfortable, too, are those scenes depicting objectification of humans as slaves. Since slavery was a central feature of Roman society and Plautine plays, particularly in an era when the spoils of imperialism included a massive influx of foreign chattel slaves, the *Companion* devotes multiple chapters to slavery. AMY RICHLIN surveys the entire corpus to demonstrate how the pervasive experience of slavery functions as the core condition informing all aspects of Plautine theater. Her chapter outlines the wide range of servile roles, names, appearances, and behaviors to help contextualize what we should – and should not – take for granted in Roman comedy. ROBERTA STEWART begins with the ideas that slavery is both a tangible relationship between humans (master and slave) and
an intangible ideology that produces, and is transmitted by, public discourse. From there, she adduces the modern lenses of “labor” and “commodification” to examine the texts, revealing, for example, that Plautus and Cato are mutually illuminating and reinforcing rather than antagonists. As noted earlier, Ferdinand Stürner’s chapter on the slave in charge examines the slave as a character operating within the genre’s plot structures. Taken together, these chapters offer readers an essential overview (Richlin), a study of ideology within particular scenes (Stewart), and four famous case studies (Stürner). Since we must not reify a monolithic Roman audience with a singular response to something we find ridiculous, strange, or terrifying, the Companion welcomes the three differing strategies and conclusions to indicate the complexity of a phenomenon that admits of no single, simple solution. Multivalent jokes must have landed differently among the different segments of the Roman audience (slaves and their owners, men and women, fathers and daughters) by touching different fantasias and anxieties, and they continue to land differently today.

We should add that since new plays respond both to ambient society and to the conventions established by earlier plays, metatheatrical and historicizing interpretations can and must offer complementary rather than competing lenses. For example, we know that when Plautus’s clever slave Chrysalus in Bacchides brags of stealing larger sums than other New Comic slaves, “those Parmenos and Syruses” (649–650), he metatheatrically brags of surpassing the corresponding slave character named Syros in Menander’s Dis Exapaton. Chrysalus invokes the sack of Troy not only to praise himself and Plautine drama but also to remind the audience of recent Roman conquests, such as the defeat of King Antiochus in the Syrian War of 192–188 (Jeppesen 2016). Thus, his metatheatrical allusion to “Syrians” acquires an additional historicizing interpretation (cf. Livy 36.17, where the Roman consul tells his troops: “here are Syrians and Asiatic Greeks, the vilest nation of men and born for slavery”). In short, any passage “about” slavery or warfare or sexuality in Plautus both embodies Roman realities or ideologies and embeds them within the fictions of Greek New Comedy, Atellan farce, and the palliata.

Prospection: The Transmission and Reception of Plautus

What was Plautus’s legacy in Rome and thereafter? It is difficult to map the palliata after Plautus because we must try to orient ourselves based upon only two solid landmarks: the 20 scripts of Plautus and the 6 of Terence from a generation later. GESINE MANUWALD surveys the major figures in the palliata to the extent that fragmentary quotations permit conjectures. One reconstruction of the palliata’s history proposes a progression from Plautus to Terence (c.185–159), with Caecilius Statius (c.220–168) in between both chronologically and stylistically. Another reconstruction (Wright 1974) fingers Terence as an outlier, with all other authors of the palliata embracing a stylistic unity. Ultimately, our view of the palliata’s evolution depends upon the predilections of the later ancient scholars who selectively excerpted the material. We stand on more solid ground identifying traces of Plautus in other extant literature – especially in genres with an eye toward performance – where we can detect rhetorical techniques to manipulate a crowd that recall, if
not derive from, Plautine comedy. EMILIA BARBIERO reveals how the “synergy between comic stage and rostra” is more vibrant than previously thought. Plautus shows awareness of Graeco-Roman oratorical and rhetorical theory, and popular Roman orators – including Cato – seem to appropriate techniques of persuasion from the *palliata*.

Scripts originate as a technology of theater-makers to serve as a foundation for staging a play, a transcript of a play already staged, and a transmitter for restaging a play. Subsequently scripts can come to serve readers as well as theater-makers. These multiple functions of a script lead to additions, deletions, doublets, and substitutions in transmission that create a textual history far more fluid and complicated than the works of an historian such as Livy. ROLANDO FERRI traces the essentials for the textual transmission on which all subsequent tradition and reception depends. The huge gaps between Plautus's own productions, the late Republican and early Imperial editions, and our earliest extant manuscript in the fifth century make any reconstruction of a hypothetical “fair copy” impossible, rendering quixotic any effort to detect interpolations and recover an original Plautine text. While the striking absence of paratextual features such as cues, director's notes, illustrations, and musical scores effectively reclassified the plays as texts to be read rather than performed, the absence perhaps allowed later performers greater freedom to modify the scripts.

After interest in Plautus waned during the Middle Ages (ANTONY AUGOUSTAKIS summarizes two significant adaptations of *Aulularia*), his comedy returned to the public stage with a bang in 1486 in the performance of a vernacular version (*vortit barbare!*) of *Menaechmi* in Ferrara. GIANNI GUASTELLO shows how Italian Renaissance productions renovated Plautus with translations into *terza rima*, an absence of masks, and new songs. The renewed interest in Plautus cross-fertilized other genres, providing crucial comic DNA to subsequent early modern and modern drama. GEORGE FREDRIC FRANKO argues that while Plautus may have left minimal traces in early modern English grammar-school curricula, he had maximal impact upon the professional playwrights working in purpose-built London theaters. Plautine dramatic techniques, especially direct audience contact and emphasis upon scenes as discrete compositional units, inform all Shakespearean drama.

Tracing the reception of Plautine comedy in the history of European theater in Germany, France, and elsewhere, to say nothing of the world, would require too many chapters. We jump, therefore, to the later twentieth century, for which RODRIGO TADEU GONÇALVES examines something familiar – the Broadway smash *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* – and something peculiar – the Spanish playwright Alfonso Sastre’s renovation of *Amphitruo*. Plautus offers a heroic ancestor to those postmodern artists and theorists fascinated by radical forms of renovation of the canon, especially with his metatheatrical techniques. A postmodernist aesthetic can enable us to appreciate more keenly some of Plautus's dramatic priorities; for example, we can recognize the aggressively positive value of “barbarization” in *Plautus vortit barbare* rather than dismissing the phrase under the tepid label of “irony.”

Outside of classicists, most people who read Plautus do so in translations, which range from the scrupulously faithful to the flamboyantly free. Just as the wall that long separated scholars from performers has begun to fall, so too the wall between scholars and translators. As Dante Gabriel Rossetti observed, translation “perhaps remains the most direct