Plautus’ *Pseudolus*

**Background**
- *Pseudolus* was written for the dedication of a temple in 191 BCE for the Magna Mater after the Second Punic war (Barsby 60).
- The Second Punic War is in the background of the play, notably in Pseudolus’ impersonation of Surus (Augustakis 182).

**The Basic Issues**
- Who does Pseudolus trick? Ballio, yes. But Simo too?
- How to deal with supposed loose ends
  - Where does Callipho go? Why does he not return?
    - Griffith speculates that Callipho might have returned in the Greek original to arbitrate the splitting of the minae at the end between Pseudolus and Simo (Griffith 61).
  - Why is there the cook scene? Why is it so long? What is its purpose?
    - The introduction of the cook scene seems to serve no thematic purpose or further the plot in any way (Wright 404).
    - Slater proposed that both the character of the cook and Pseudolus could have been played by the same character so the reference to Plautus could in some way connect the two characters (Hallett 24).
  - One of the spices in the cook scene, called *maccidem*, could be a play on Plautus' *nomen* Maccius especially since there is no reference of this 'spice' being referenced anywhere else (Hallett 22-23).

**The Many Faces of Pseudolus**
- Wright sees language as transforming Pseudolus from a serious character into a comic character (Wright 407).
  - For example the scene of *flagitatio*, is made comedic not by Pseudolus who offers the usual criticisms of pimps, but Ballio’s clever quips that the insults are meaningless to him (Wright 409).
  - These transformations take place through metaphors which change him first into a cook and other things like a playwright and the Delphic Oracle (Wright 410-411). Out of these roles the ones relating to theater like being a playwright or the self-conscious actor playing an actor are the most important (Wright 413).
  - "Pseudolus has been transformed into Plautus himself" (Wright 416).
- "Pseudolus is characterized in three ways in the play. He is a Greek, a poet, and a trickster" (Stehle 246).
  - Socrates, the Delphic oracle, and Ulysses as quintessential Greek ‘liars?’
  - Actor, Playwright, Director
  - As a trickster, Pseudolus tries to trick both the other characters and the audience, because you never know if Pseudolus ever really had a plan or not (Sharrock 166-167).
Improvisation and Metatheater

- Pseudolus implies that it is the job of the poet to make up the play as it goes and this connects with Italian forms of performance which were most often unscripted (Barsby 62, 58).
- Barsby concludes that while the play was not improvised, it was made to appear so in many ways (Barsby 70).
- Improvisation can be seen to resolve issues dealing with loose ends
- *Pseudolus* is overtly metatheatrical, because the main point of the play is how Pseudolus creates the play from nothing.
  - Christenson argues that the primary element of the plot is about how the twists and turns of Plautine comedy are crafted rather than the stock plot of such comedies (Christenson 26-27).
  - The elements of metatheater are intended to remove the pretense of the literary comedic tradition and entice the audience to think that they are going back to unscripted forms of theater where things were spontaneously happening (Barsby 63).
  - "So Plautus is not clumsily 'breaking the dramatic illusion', as is sometimes implied; he is operating in a tradition where the dramatic illusion itself did not operate" (Barsby 63).

Bibliography


