

PROLOGUE TO PLAUTUS'S AMPHITRUO AND ITS SENSE OF HUMOUR

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Most of the twenty-one extant plays of Plautus are thought to have been adapted from the comedies of various Greek dramatists, chiefly of the New Comedy¹. They seem to be adaptations rather than translations, for, apart from the many allusions in his comedies to customs and conditions distinctly Roman, there is enough evidence in Plautus's language, style and his humour to show that he was not a close translator or imitator. The favourable judgement which certain Roman critics passed on his literary merits, on the whole, confirms this argument². Taking this fact into consideration, H.J. Rose rightly says:

"... for the more, original genius of Plautus, one of the best comic writers of the world, did not allow him to follow so different an author as Menander, or indeed any Greek, with sufficient closeness for us to criticize the original on the basis of his adaptation."³

It is a well-known fact that every nation has its own peculiarities, and a piece of comedy, while being introduced to a different people, has to be adapted to its taste and pleasures. Accordingly we may be right in thinking that Plautus made radical changes particularly in language to achieve comic effect in Latin. At the same time we must

1 The original of the *Asinaria* is said to be the *Onagos* of the unknown playwright Demophilos (*Asin-* 11); from Diphilos of Sinope come two plays: The *Casino* is an adaptation of his *Klerumenoi* (*Cas-* 31—34) and the *Rudens*, probably of his *Pera* (*Rud-*, 32); perhaps the *Vidularia* and the lost *Commorientes* come from some other plays also of Diphilos; from Philemon's *Emporos* and *Thesaurus* were translated respectively the *Mercator* (*Mer-*, 9—10) and the *Trinummus* (*Trin-*, 18—9), probably the *Mostellaria* also comes from him (*Most-*, 1149); from Menander's *Adelphoi* comes the *Stichus*, from his *Dis Exapaton* the *Bacchides*, from his *Sunaristosai* the *Cistellaria*, also the *Aulularia* comes from a play of Menander (title unknown).

2 See note 11 below.

3 H.J. Rose, *A Handbook of Greek Literature*, pp. 245, Methuen, 1964. See also T.BX. Webster, *Hellenistic Poetry and Art*, p. 266 ff., Methuen, 1964; idem p. 267: "Then plays of Plautus also exhibit a far greater variety of metre than any Greek New Comedy that we know."

note that most of the prologues to Plautus's plays⁴ are his own writings and to a great extent they are original pieces independent of the plays adapted from Greek sources.

It has been suggested that the *Amphitruo* too is an adaptation, of the *Nyx (Night)* attributed to Philemon by Dietze,⁵ or according to Casaubon, of the *Nyx Makra (Long Night)* of Platon the comic playwright, whereas Vahlen thought that it was modelled on one of Rhinton's phlyax-plays⁶. On this much-disputed question scholarly views differ widely from one another. A large number of classical scholars in the past sought an acceptable model for Plautus's *Amphitruo* among the works of the playwrights of the New Comedy, on the basis of the fact that the Roman comedy was almost entirely based on the New Comedy. In contrast to this old tendency a great many modern scholars have posited Middle Comedy originals for both the *Amphitruo* and the *Menaechmi* for the reason that they, particularly the *Amphitruo*, do not comply with the general requirements of the New Comedy. This point will be discussed in detail below in connection with *Amph.* 50-63.

Mercury expresses the "argumentum" of the play to the audience in the second half of the prologue to the *Amphitruo* and refers to its theme as a worn and ancient tale (*Amph* 118: veterem atque antiquam rem novam ad vos proferam,). By these words he means that he is going to submit to them a new version of the tale which is very old and well-known by the majority of people. But, although this is a suitable occasion, he does not tell us how new and whose version it is. The earliest mention of this tale in literature is made in Homer's *Illiad*, (XIV. 323-34), where Zeus confesses his furtive love affairs to his wife Hera without hesitation in order to express the extent of the desire, now he feels for her.⁷ The same tale has been told at length in the *Shield of Heracles* (26-56). Before Plautus there had been tragic ver-

4 Four of Plautus' plays have prologues without argumentum. These are the *Pseudolus*, the *Trinummus*, the *Asinaria* and the *Truculentus*. The other ten have prologues with argumentum: The *Amphitruo*, the *Aulularia*, the *Captivi*, the *Casina*, the *Cistellaria*, the *Menaechmi*, the *Mercator*, the *Miles*, the *Poenulus*, the *Rudens*. Six plays do not have prologue: the *Stichus*, The *MosteUaria*, the *Persa*, the *Curculio*, the *Epidicus* and the *Bacchides*. The *Vidularia* has a prologue in fragmentary form.

5 Dietze, *De Philemone comica*, Göttingen, 1901, p. 22—23.

6 J. Vahlen, *Plautus und die fabula Rhinthonica*, Rhein. Mus., 16 (1861), 472, etc. For a detailed discussion of the subject cf. T.B.L. Webster, *Studies in Later Greek Comedy*, p. 86—97, Manchester 1953.

7 See also *Iliad*, 19.96 ff.; *Odyssey*, 11, 266 ff.

sions of *Amphitryon* by Sophocles and Aeschylus of, Alexandria, and *Alcmenas*, also a suitable title under which to treat the same subject, by Euripides, Ion of Chios, Astydamos, Dionysios the tyrant, Archippos the playwright of Old Comedy and the burlesque writer Rhinthon. Plautus's source can be a work of Greek comedy. But we must not entirely neglect the possibility that Plautus and his predecessors were influenced by Roman tragedy. For the earliest Roman playwrights wrote both tragedy and comedy, and therefore, they may very well have borrowed tragic technique for comedy.

The prologue to the *Amphitruo* is the longest one preserved to us in Latin plays and it contains an "argumentum" (*Amph.* 93-152). This is not without reason; a complicated plot like that of the *Amphitruo* with the duplication of the leading characters by putting on the same guise needs to be explained at length to the audience to avoid a misunderstanding.⁸ Otherwise the play would fail to achieve its purpose and be lost upon the usually uncultured holiday-makers as the majority of Roman audience at Plautus's time were. Plautus undoubtedly had this in his mind when he, in addition to the argumentum of the play (*Amph.* 93-152), made Mercury and Jupiter wear tokens to distinguish themselves from their human counterparts⁹, introduce themselves directly or indirectly and frequently unfold the plot of the play to the audience when they appear on the stage at the beginning of each scene and also at the end of each scene when they leave.¹⁰

A skilful playwright aims to capture the attention of his audience by composing a witty and attractively worded prologue in which he outlines the plot of the play. Plautus is very successful in holding the audience's attention not only in the prologue but also throughout

8 The other notable examples of complicated plots in Plautus's works are those of the *Captivi* and the *Menaechmi*, which also have long prologues.

9 Mercury says that he will be wearing a little plume on his hat all through the play and Jupiter will have a little gold tassel hanging from his in order to make it easier for the audience to distinguish them from their counterparts (*Amph.* 142—145).

nunc internosse ut nos possitis facilius,
ego has habebo usque in petaso pinnulas;
turn meo patri autem torulus inerit aureus
sub petaso: id signum Amphitruoni non erit.

10 Merc., Act I, Sc. I., 464—496; Jup., Act III, Sc. 1, 861—881; Jup., Act III, Sc. III, 974—983; Merc., Act III, Sc. IV, 984—1007.

the play.¹¹ According to Quintilian's quotation from Varro (10, 1, 99), Aelius Stilo thought that if the Muses had wished to speak Latin, they would have used the language (*sermone*) of Plautus¹².

In the *Amphitruo* the prologue is spoken in a pompous way by Mercury, whose name is suggestive of trade (cf. *merx*, *mercimonium*, *mercari*)¹³. He introduces himself to the audience as the god whom they all call upon in their business affairs such as selling, buying, speculations, present and future undertakings, at home and abroad in order to bring them good luck, ample and constant profit and glad news (*Amph.* 1-9). In the third line he makes himself a figure of self-importance by ignoring the sphere of other gods' activities: ".
atque adiuvare in rebus omnibus." Mercury, beginning his boastful words with the topic of money and profit, reminds us of the humorous and greedy bankers or money-lenders of other comedies¹⁴. While boasting of his divine power, he does not forget to flatter his spectators at the same time by addressing them as if they were wealthy merchants or big businessmen¹⁵. In fact the majority of the people in Rome

11 Among ancient authors the general opinion on Plautus's status as a playwright is favourable: Cicero ranks him with the Athenian poets of the Old Comedy for his "elegant, polished, ingenious and witty manner of jesting" (*De Officiis*, I. XXIX. 104); Volcacius Sedigitus, a contemporary of Cicero, in his lost work *De Poetis* puts him second in order of merit among the ten Roman comic playwrights after Caecilius (cf. Aulus Gellius, XV, 24); Varro praises him for his "*sermones*"; he judges that Caecilius was the best constructor of plots, whereas Plautus wrote the best dialogue (*Sat. Men.*, 399); Sidonius Apollinaris says that Plautus surpasses in charm the wit of Greece (c. XXIII. 149); only Horace criticises him unfairly (*Ep.*, II. 1. 170; A.P. 270 ff.).

12 Aelius Stilo (c. 150—70 B.C.) was the first great Roman scholar, he was chiefly interested in literary criticism, antiquities, grammar and etymologies (Suet. *Gram.* 3; Pliny, HN 33. 29). He was also the teacher of Varro and Cicero (*Brutus*, 205—7). As a scholar on Plautus he established a canon of twenty-five plays of Plautus separating them by philological examination from the pseudo-Plautine plays, of which then there were many in the market due to the profit the name and style of Plautus brought. '

13 He may have been Hermes introduced into Italy by a title. The other gods who read prologues in Plautine plays are Lar Familiaris (*Aul.* 1. ff.); Fides (*Cos.*, 1 ff.), cf. Skutsch, in *Rhein Mus.*, 55. 272; Auxilium (*Cist.*, 149 ff. here, as in some of Menander's plays, the prologue is postponed); Arcturus (*Bud.*, 1 ff.). But these gods do not take parts in the plays as Mercury and Jupiter do in the *Amphitruo*.

14 Cf. *Cur.* 371 ff. where Lyco has the same humorous attitude when he enters the stage with the words:

"I seem to be prospering; I have just done some reckoning to see how much money I have and how much I owe. I am rich if I do not pay my debts."

15 The same idea of referring to the audience as the rich occurs in the *Captivi* (Prologue, 15—16).

who frequented the theatres were penniless plebs, slaves, children, nurses, etc., for masters and rich people were usually busy with their work¹⁶.

Mercury proceeds to praise his other power, that over messages, which he proclaims is most beneficial for them. Here again he is full of conceit about his heraldic authority:

"nam vos quidem id iam scitis concessum et datum.
mi esse ab dis aliis, nuntiis praesim et lucro-:
haec ut nie voltis adprobare adnitier,
ita huic facietis fabulae silentium
itaque aequi et iusti hic eritis omnes arbitri.

Amph., 11-15

As the spectators undoubtedly know, again through his flattery, it is to him the other gods have yielded and given supreme power over messages and profits (*Amph.* 11-12)¹⁷. His words carry a touch of self-importance and create an impression as if there were other gods who wished to obtain the same power for themselves, but had to yield to him (concessum). In his transition to his main theme Mercury delivers the customary request for silence to the audience in a witty way. Since the audience invoke him to bring them profit and good news, he asks them in return to keep silent and be unbiased judges of the performance. Mercury seems to act on the basis of contract, namely "give and take" which is the core of the Roman religion. So he is setting forth a condition that he will give them what they pray for if they fulfil what he orders them to do. Mercury's plea for silence and a fair hearing is very important to ensure the success of the play, and he repeats the same plea a second time in the guise of a request from Jupiter and appeals to the audience's sense of justice and fairness (*Amph.*, 38 ff., 64 ff., 94, 151).

The main purpose for this pompous, witty, and flattering behaviour towards the spectators is to coax them into good humour and attentiveness¹⁸ because some of them are still chatting noisily and the

16 Sep the prologue to the *Poenulus* (21—43).

17 Cf. *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* for his heraldic power. In Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* the goddess Iris seems to be sharing this duty with Hermes.

18 Cf. G.E. Duckworth, *The Nature of Roman Comedy*. 1952, Chp. The Nature of **Plautine** Prologue, p. 211 ff.

late-comers are trying to make room for themselves among the packed crowd. A secondary reason is this: Plautus is preparing the ground for the part of the clever, humorous and boastful type of slave Mercury is to act in the play. It is very interesting to note that, although Mercury wears the appearance of Sosia, he does not entirely adopt the slave's character. He is far funnier than the real Sosia.

Mercury is approaching his main remark by making a link between his divine power over messages and his present mission to deliver Jupiter's pleas to the audience. This time he adopts the pose of an ambassador (*Amph.*, 16 ff.) and becomes quite serious.¹⁹ The authors of the article on Hermes in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (1984) say the following in connection with his heraldic power:

"A herald must of course state his business plainly and on occasion plead the cause of those who sent him. Hence from a fairly early date Hermes is associated with oratory."

Mercury introduces himself as 'iustus orator' (*Amph.* 34). His eloquence and cleverness, which he proved on the first day of his life by his precocious exploit of carrying off Apollo's cattle,²⁰ can be seen here in the *Amphitruo* both in his speech and in the comic situations he creates. Mercury's words are very similar to those that one would expect from an ambassador sent by a haughty but weak king to demand some service from his subjects:

tam etsi, pro imperio vobis quod dictum foret,
seibat facturos, quippe qui intellexerat
vereri vos se et metuere, ita ut aequom est Iovem;
verum profecto hoc petere me precario
a vobis iussit, leniter, dictis bonis.

Amph. 21-25

On the other hand Plautus has so far brought Mercury to some extent down to human status; now Jupiter is being brought into the same position. This idea becomes quite apparent when Mercury compares Jupiter's fear of ill-treatment with the fears of his human audience:

¹⁹ "...iustus sum orator datus" (*Amph.*, 34). cf. "orator" in prologue II of Terence's *Hecyra* ed. by T.F. Carny, 1963, note 9.

²⁰ Cf. *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*.

etenim ille, cuius huc iussu venio, Jupiter
 non minus quam vostrum quivis formidat malum:
 humana matre natus, humano paire,
 mirari non est aequom, sibi si praetimet.

Amph., 26-29

Plautus seems to be reducing Jupiter to human status in the third line above by referring to the Cretan Jupiter (Zeus), who was born of a mortal mother and father and who became a god after his death.²¹

Some scholars have shown a tendency to endow Jupiter with mortal parentage when they punctuated the passage in such a way that "mi-mana matre natus,...." appears to apply to Jupiter²². Mercury adds that whenever Jupiter feels afraid, he being Jupiter's son, can not help experiencing the same fear (28-29). W.B. Sedgwick takes the *iU*-treatment (*malum*) in this sense: unsuccessful actors, being slaves, might be flogged²³. But his suggestion could hardly be convincing here if we fix the significance of "malum" through its context in the sentence. Jupiter has ordered Mercury to obtain his plea from the audience by means of placatory, gentle words rather than by giving commands, which might have been well suited to his character as a god. A better explanation of Jupiter's fear of ill-treatment is that the audience would have little respect for his commands now that he has appeared on the stage in human form. He is afraid of being humiliated if his orders are flouted. If it had been as W.B. Sedgwick has suggested, it would have followed that Jupiter resorted to a gentle way of asking because he was afraid that he would be flogged by the manager of the company if he resorted to a high-handed approach by giving orders to the audience. This idea is contrary to what is followed in the prologue to the *Poenulus*²⁴. Also it should be remembered that Mercury is addressing the spectators, "vostrum quivis" in general. This does not mean that every spectator has the fear of flogging but that they are afraid of any kind of ill-treatment²⁵. Plautus makes this idea quite clear by putting the 'malum' as the object of both 'formidat' and 'praetimet'.

21 Cf. Ennius's *Euhemerus*, 125 ff.; cf. Callimachos's *Hymn to Zeus*.

22 See the editions of the play by Leo, Sedgwick and cf. Loeb's, edition.

23 *Cist.*, 785: qui deliquit vapulabit; qui non deliquit, bibet.

24 The speaker of the prologue to the *Poenulus* assumes the functions of a military commander (*imperator histricus*) and issues orders for the discipline of his raw recruits, namely the spectators.

25 Observe that there are some people of high rank among the audience; aediles (line 72) and some inspectors (in line 65, 82). cf. W.R. Chalmers, *Plautus and his Audience*, (Moreover in the theatrical. . . ff.) p. 23 of "*Roman Drama*" edited by T.A. Dorey and D.R. Dudley.

In line 32 Mercury explains the reason (propterea) why he is coming in peace and bringing peace to them. He pays a compliment to the audience (iustis) and does not forget to include himself (iustus orator) in his compliment:

nam iusta ab iustis iustus sum orator datus.

Therefore as 'iusta' are the pleas of Jupiter, this indicates that Jupiter also is just. In line 39 Mercury imposes the wills of Jupiter and himself upon the spectators:

debetis velle quae vellimus: meruimus
et ego et pater de vobis et re publica;

Amph., 39-40

The second part of the sentence beginning with 'meruimus' is strong and explains the reason why the audience should want the same things which Jupiter and Mercury want²⁰: "because we deserved this from you and your republic through our good deeds". Here he is twitting the audience with the good he and his father did them, though Mercury says in lines 46-7 that "it never was a habit of my father to twit good people with the good he did them".

It is a curious thing that Mercury says that he had seen tragedies in which other gods, Neptune, Virtus, Victoria, Mars and Bellona, recounted their help to human beings. It is understood from Mercury's praise of Jupiter that these five gods, who are involved in war in some ways, mentioned their aid to mortals in a tone of regret.

..... -ut alios in tragoediis
vidi, Neptunum, Virtutem, Victoriā,
Martern, Bellonam, commemorare quae bona
vobis fecissent, -quis bene factis meus pater,
deorum regnator, architectust omnibus?
sed mos numquam (ille) illi fuit patri m̄o,
ut exprobraret quod bonis faceret boni;
gratum arbitratur esse id a vobis sibi >
meritoque vobis bona se facere quae facit.

Amph., 41-49

26 Note the time-sequence of the sentences, "debetis....: meruimus"

Probably Plautus is alluding here to the fact that these gods are only invoked occasionally, and people forget them in the intervals between wars, so these gods reproach people for neglecting them in peace time. At the same time Mercury, the mouthpiece of Plautus, by his high praise of his father's excellence makes these five gods appear selfish and less important. It seems reasonable to infer from this that there is a rivalry among the gods similar to that of the actors in the play²⁷. As for the historical role of these gods in tragedies before Plautus, we do not have any evidence to ascribe them to a particular play²⁸. The three war-goddesses do not occur in the surviving tragedies written before the first century B.C. though the first appearance of these goddesses in Roman state worship was ascribed by scholars to the first quarter of the third century B.C. (Bellona 296 B.C.; Victoria 294 B.C.²⁹). W.B. Sedgwick suggests that "the mention of no less than five gods indicates that during the war-years it had been a common practice for Roman poets to add to their tragedies patriotic prologues; or, perhaps, rather epilogues. The names themselves, Virtus, Victoria, Bellona, show that the passages could not have come from the Greek—an interesting light on Roman tragedy." But this could hardly be a matter of patriotism in the case of Plautus, who usually makes fun of the human feelings of the gods. He is quite irreverent towards the gods as befits a writer of comedies³⁰:

enim vero di nos quasi pilas homines habent.

(the Prologue to *Captivi*, 22)

This lack of respect shown here and there to the gods* does not prove any lack of author's belief in them. For instance, the Dionysiac festivals were occasions to make all sorts of ribald fun of the very god in whose honour the plays were produced. The spirit of the rite involved poets' adopting such an attitude towards the god and this was to ho-

27 See lines 83—4.

28 cf. Loeb, *Remains of Old Latin II*, Trag, by Authors Unknown p. 625: "..... Haec bellicosus cui pater mater cluet Munerva", see note "b" on the same page.

29 Some sources for these goddesses in Latin literature: Virtus: Varro, L.L.V, 73; Cic. N.D. 2, 23, 61; 2, 31, 79; *Leg.* 2, 8, 19; 2, 11, 29; *Phil.* 14, 13, 34; Livy, 27, 25, 7; 29, 11 13. Victoria: Varro: L.L., V. 62; Cic. N.D. 2, 23, 61; Ovid, *Mel.* 8, 13. Bellona (duellona): Varro L. L.V.73; VII, 49; Livy, 26, 21, 1; 28, 9, 5; 30, 21, 12; Vergil, A. 8, 703; Horace, S. 2, 3, 223; Ovid, F., 6, 201. ff.

30 see lines 138—9: Mercury is a thief; and 133: Jupiter is a liar; cf. Ovid: *Art of Love* I, 631—636: *Met.* I. 615.

nour him more. W.B. Sedgwick's suggestion, "The names themselves, Virtus, Victoria, Bellona, show that the passages could not have come from the Greek -an interesting light in Roman tragedy-" is in contradiction with the fact that two of these gods, Virtus and Victoria have their equivalents in Greek, Areta (or Aretes) and Nike.

Plautus usually adopts a sarcastic style when one of his characters invokes a god or gods (ErgasUus Parasitus, *Captivi*, IV, 768 ff.). Plautus's regular procedure is to mention one or more gods by name in order to achieve a comic effect on his audience³¹.

Lydus -Quid huc? Quis istic habet?
 Pistoc. -Amor, Voluptas, Venus, Venustas, Gaudium,
 locus, Ludus, Sermo, Suavisaviatio.
 Lydus-Quid tibi commercist cum dis damnosissimis?

(*Bacch.*, 116-18)

Unlike Terence, Plautus is fond of abstractions as seen in the quotation above. He introduces several specifically Roman personifications; and Virtus, Spes, Salus, Fides, Fortuna and many others are mentioned likewise as goddesses in some of his plays³². The mention of the five gods above (*Amph.*, 42-43; Neptunus, Virtus, Victoria, Mars and Bellona) is made not only to improve his and Jupiter's image in the eyes of the audience, but also to achieve a somewhat comic effect.

Coming to one of his main points, Mercury tries to learn the opinion of the spectators about comedy and tragedy introducing the play as if it were a tragedy. The reaction of the audience is hostile, so Mercury makes use of his divine power in order to prove that he has been in command of the situation all along: "deus sum, commutavero" (53). Then he asks the spectators whether they wish him to change the play into a comedy. This time he accuses himself of stupidity because "gods know everything":

31 cf. also *Bacch.* 892 ff.

Ita me Jupiter, Iuno, Ceres,
 Minerva, Lato, Spes, Opis, Virtus, Venus,
 Castor, Polluées, Mars, Mercuries, Hercules,
 Summanus, Sol, SIturnus, dique omnes ament.

32 cf. *Capt.* 529; *Merc.* 867; *Pseud.* 679, 709.

" sed ego stultior, '
quasi nesciam vos velle, qui divos siem."

Amph., 56-7

So he decides on "*tragicomoedia*" and explains the reason for doing so: kings and gods are the subjects of tragedy but the characters in the play also include some slaves, who by convention appear as characters in comedies and are not permitted to appear in tragedies.

According to K. Abel, Mercury's jest can work only on the supposition that the audience did not know whether a tragedy or a comedy is performed on this occasion; this situation could not be found in Athens because on certain days tragic works and on the others comic works were put on the stage. So Mercury's words (*Amph.*, 51 ff.) and his witticism would not appeal to the Athenian people³³. What K. Abel says is true. Yet Mercury's jest seems to be effective to achieve its purpose, first because the title and the theme of the play can suggest a possibility of tragedy to some part of the audience who came without really knowing whether a tragedy or comedy would be staged; secondly, Mercury, knowing that most of the audience have come expecting a comedy, is trying to tease them and give them a surprise by introducing the play as if a tragedy. So he is playing upon the expectation of the audience for the sake of fun. Although Mercury decides on "*tragicomoedia*" (*Amph.* 63), it is interesting to note that later he refers to the play twice as a comedy (*Amph.*, 88: *comoediam*; 95: *comoediae*), and Jupiter does the same once (*Amph.*, 868: *ne hanc inchoatam transigam comoediam*). In fact the play has more to do with comedy than tragedy.

The *Amphitruo*, defined by Mercury as tragicomedy in view of its leading characters being kings and gods, and the existence of slave's part in it, is the only mythological burlesque among the extant specimens of New Comedy. We can add to Mercury's argument also the point that its theme is mythological and this fact can impose restrictions on the comic side of the play in terms of the requirements of New Comedy, for the plots of the works of New Comedy, as we know them from the extant specimens, are less complicated and for the most part neither fantastic nor mythical, but consist of imaginary events such as might possibly take place in daily life under ordinary circumstances. Among these love themes have a prominent place. A few mythological plays seem to have been written during the period of New Comedy. Of the

33 K. Abel: *Die Plautusprologe*, (Frankfurt a.M), 1960, p. 32.

titles of Philemon's works only the two, *Myrmidones* and *Palamedes* sould like mythological burlesque. In some cases the titles are misleading, for instace, Menander's *Heros* deals with ordinary life and the god Heros is only the speaker of the prologue. For these reasons many modern scholars are seeking and positing Middle Comedy originals for both the *Amphitruo* and the *Menaechmi*. A Middle Comedy original for the *Amphitruo* is possible, for burlesque of mythology well established in Old Comedy seems to have been more popular and therefore commoner in Middle Comedy particularly in the first half of the period.³⁴ Yet, at the same time we must not entirely neglect the possibility that it came from Old Comedy and became subject to some minor changes in the hands of Plautus or somebody before him so as to gain its present form. This is the next point I am going to discuss below.

As to the question who first saw the comic possibilities of the theme of the *Amphitruo*, we do not have an exact answer to it for lack of evidence or even clues from ancient sources. But the playwrights of Old Comedy had already seen such possibilities in the treatment of mythological themes and laid the way to those who came after them to follow. In this respect Kratíon of Old Comedy, whom Aristophanes gives in his list as one of the greatest comic poets of the past (*Knights*, 520 ff.) and his mythological burlesque called *Dionysalexandros* (*Oxyr. Pap.*, 663; Demianczuk, p. 41-33) require a special attention. We have an epitome of the play, which it is possible to call a tragicomedy by the same criterion by which the *Amphitruo* is judged as *tragicomoedia*. It runs as follows. Alexandros the son of Priam, better

34 Some of the Middle Comedy playwrights who wrote mythological burlesques or parodies of tragedy are as follows:

Platon: *Zeus Kakumenos*, *Xantriai* and *Kerkopes*, *Nyx Mahra*, *Adonis*, *Daidalos*, *Laios*, *Mene'leos*, *Phawn*.

Eubulos: according to Suidas he wrote 104 plays of which 58 titles are known to us and about half of them are indicating mythological burlesques or parodies of tragedy.

Alexis: he is said to have written about twelve mythological burlesques.

Amphis: about half of the twenty-eight titles known to us as belonging to him come from mythology.

Anaxandrides: out of forty-two titles that survived, 15 denote mythological burlesques.

Antiphanes: about 134 titles are known. Many titles denote mythological burlesques (*Adonis*, *Aphrodites* *Gonai*, etc..)

Philetairos: he is one of Aristophanes's sons. Of twenty-one comedies thirteen titles are preserved, four or five being mythological burlesques.

Mnesimachos: he wrote two mythological burlesques: *Alkmeon* and *Busiris*.

Theophilos: eight or nine titles survive, two of them are mythological burlesques.

Timokles: of 28 known titles, four denote mythological burlesques, *Heroes*, *Kentauros*, etc

known as Paris, is called upon to judge the three goddesses, Aphrodite, Hera and Athena. The mortal judge of the divine beauty contest takes fright and runs before the celestial beauties; after a short interlude Dionysos appears taking on the form and duties of Paris, gives his verdict in favour of Aphrodite and sails off to Greece to get his reward, namely Helen, as promised by the goddess. He returns, but is shocked deeply by the news that the Greek armies have come after him. He at once transforms himself into a ram and Helen into a goose, and he hides her in a basket. Now the real Paris enters and penetrates the disguises; after some discussion of terms between the leaders of the opposite forces, he keeps Helen for himself, but hands over Dionysos and the whole chorus to the mercies of the Greeks.

The play, which is said to have also political innuendo against Pericles as remarked by the writer of its epitome, provides us with a beautiful example of how a mythological theme can be treated in a comic way.

It is possible to draw a comparison between the *Amphitruo* and the *Dionysalexandros* to bring out the striking similarities and differences.

1- Both plays are mythological burlesques in which the gods are treated in a comic way. Yet the *Dionysalexandros* go further in the use of farce than the *Amphitruo*, and to achieve this farsical effect the former makes diversions from the orthodox myth, whereas the latter keeps to its standard version to a great extent.

2- The plots of both plays hinge on the gods' motivation to satisfy their sexual desire for mortal beauties. The myth of the divine beauty contest in its orthodox form does not contain Dionysos. So, to accomplish the same kind of plotting we find in the *Amphitruo*, Kratinos brings in Dionysos as the double of Paris.

3- The plots of both plays involve the absence or departure of mortal characters from the scene for a period of time. The story of Jupiter (Zeus) and Alcmene contains such an absence in its original and commonest version-the hero Amphitruo goes to war with the Teboians. But the myth of the divine beauty contest in its original form does not have anything of this kind and provides no occasion for Paris to take fright and run before the celestials. Therefore, Kratinos makes his own contribution to the myth in order to fulfil the basic requirement of the plot-he brings about the departure of Paris making him take fright and run before the goddesses.

4- As a result of the heroes' absence, Jupiter and Dionysos take the opportunity, transform themselves respectively into the forms of the absent heroes and assume their duties in order to satisfy their own sexual desire.

5- The Heroines Alcmene and Helen play the parts of the innocents in the respective plays. This similarity, perhaps a game of chance, is not very essential to our argument.

This device of plotting which seems to have been well known to the poets of Old Comedy, is used to bring about the duplication of the characters in comedies, which in return creates the complications necessary for a comedy of errors, and gives free scope for poets' abilities to treat the subject. The rest depends on playwrights' ingenuity to create comic situations and on their skill in writing the best kind of comic and effective dialogue each situation requires.

As we have just seen above, Kratinos (c. 484-419 B.C.) knew and used this device of plotting at least in the *Dionysalexandros*. I believe it was well known also to the other poets of Old Comedy and used by some of them successfully. It is also within the bounds of possibility that another one of them, if not Kratinos, easily saw the natural suitability of the story of Zeus and Alcmene and used it as the subject of his burlesque play. As we have seen, Kratinos is taking great pains to make additions to a myth which in its oldest and commonest form does not offer complications and comic possibilities - except the scene of beauty contest among the goddesses, perhaps naked, being examined by a mortal arbitrator-and to adapt the myth to a certain kind of plot by using the sort of device we have seen above in order to achieve the complications necessary for a comedy of errors, whereas, whoever the poet was, it must not have been so difficult for him to see the comic possibilities of the story of Zeus and Alcmene (*Aniphitruo*), since the story by nature contains in itself these complications and comic possibilities.

It is possible for us to say that, looked at from this point of view, the *Amphitruo* would fit in well with the Old Comedy, if there were not technical differences. It is true that the *Amphitruo* in contrast to some works of Old Comedy, accordingly to the *Dionysalexandros*, has not certain technical characteristics such as *chorus*, *parabasis*, *epirrheme*, *antepirrheme* etc. But Platonios in his work *On the Differences between Comedies*, i.e between Old, Middle and New Comedy (7) says that the plays of mythological burlesque of Old Comedy had neither chorus

nor parabasis. Although there are some exceptions to prove him wrong, for instance Kratinos's *Dionysalexandros* and *Odyssees*, which had both (frs. 144-6), his observation and comment must be valid in general. If we take his words as true, our argument that the source of the original of the *Amphitruo* could be Old Comedy can gain further substance.

Also Cicero's words on the quality of Plautus's jests support our argument from a different point of view:

Duplex omnino est iocandi genus, unum inliberale, petulans, flagitiosum, obscenum, alterum elegans, urbanum, ingeniosum, facetum, quo génère non modo Pläutus noster et Atticorum antiqua comoedia, sed etiam philosophorum Socraticorum libri referti sunt, multaue multorum facete dicta, ut ea, quae a sene Catone collecta sunt, quae vocantur *apophthegmata*. Facilis igitur est distinctio ingenui et inliberalis ioci.

Cic, *De Off.*, I. XXIX, 104

There is something to the point in Cicero's judgement of Plautus's jests as elegant, polished, ingenious and witty for the most part, and his putting them in the same class with those of Old Comedy playwrights and the Socratic philosophers.

Plautus also took the opportunity to make allusions in his plays to the contemporary events and conditions in Rome³⁵. In the prologue of the *Amphitruo* we find two interesting allusions to bribery at elections (*Amph.*, 74) and to the concept of virtue by which triumphs may be obtained (*Amph.*, 78 ff.). He adapts these social situations to the stage by using the gods in the play as the safest medium through whom to speak. It is very interesting that Plautus should mention, as he indirectly does in the prologue of the *Poenulus* (36-39), the unfairness of the *aediles* to their faces, for the play and the actors are to be judged by them (*Amph.*, 72: *sive adeo aediles perfidiose cui duint.*). From line 65 to 72, the description of the measures to be taken and the ways of solicitation of the actors by the audience recall official elections. So, it is the plea of Jupiter that the same code of law obtaining in the case of the solicitation of a magistrate should be followed if someone in the audience were to be found guilty of this kind of action. Then follows Jupiter's moral advice that victory should be won not by fla-

35 Most of the commentaries on the *Amphitruo* and other plays of Plautus include these allusions. Cf. also K. Abel, *Die Plautusprologe*, Frankfurt a.M., 1960.

ttery, treachery or hired support but virtue; if one has self-confidence for the work he has been engaged in, he who plays his part right ever has support enough. So, Jupiter has ordered inspection of the actors who may have hired claqueurs for themselves and who endeavour to bring about the failure of his colleagues in the play. Here one might believe that this is Jupiter, the protector of law and morals, if Jupiter is not going to take part in the play, and if one does not suspect that *Jupiter histricus* is bringing in this law for his own safety for fear of being cheated by the jury and the other actors:

mirari nolim vos, quapropter Juppiter
 nunc histriones curet; ne miremini:
 ipse hanc acturust Juppiter comoediam.
 quid? admirati estis? quasi vero novom
 nunc proferatur, Jovem facere histrioniam;
 etiam, histriones anno cum in proscaenio hic
 Jovem invocarunt, venit, auxilio is fuit.

Amph., 86-92

It is quite reasonable to deduce from the surprise exhibited by the audience (89) that Jupiter had not taken part in any play in Rome, apart from taking the role of 'deus ex machina', until Plautus endowed him with this part in the *Amphitruo*. We might assume that even the device 'deus ex machina' was quite new to the Roman stage if we take lines 91-92 seriously.

To sum up, Plautus achieves humour in the prologue to the *Amphitruo* by making Mercury boast of his divine powers and his character just as a man do; flatter himself and the audience freely; advocate an argument, but in deed do the opposite of it; play upon the expectations of the audience; give a long list of examples or reiterate an idea in different ways, as in the example below:

iustam rem et facilem esse oratam a vobis volo,
 nam iusta ab iustis iustus sum orator datus.
 nam iniusta ab iustis impetrari non decet,
 iusta autem ab iniustis petere insipientia est;
 quippe illi iniqui ius ignorant neque tenent.

Amph., 33-37

while exalting his own and his father's godhead, exhibit weaknesses or short-comings,- his confession of his own and his father's fear of maltreatment or their fear of being cheated by the jury or other actors out of the palm, and his accusation of himself of stupidity for not perceiving the audience's preference for comedy. Plautus is good at bringing the gods down to human level and endowing them with human feelings, also at using the art of contrast and contradiction to achieve humour, but better at wording elegant, polished, ingenious and witty jests. This is the reason why many pseudo-Plautine plays came out to the book market after his death. The source of *the Amphitruo's* original could be, apart from the possibility of Middle or New Comedy, Old Comedy. It is possible that Plautus adapted into Latin an old version of the *Amphitruo* which survived through Middle Comedy to his time due to its popularity