

The Improvisatory Spectrum in Plautus

All translations are my own.

1. Livy. 7.2.

Et cum vis morbi nec humanis consiliis nec ope diuina levaretur, victis superstitione animis ludi quoque scenici, novas bellicosas populo—nam circi modo spectaculum fuerat—inter alia caelestis irae placamina instituti dicuntur; ceterum parva quoque, ut ferme principia omnia, et ea ipsa peregrina res fuit. Sine carmine ullo, sine imitandorum carminum actu ludiones ex Etruria acciti, ad tibicinis modos saltantes, haud indecoros motus more Tusco dabant.

And when the force of the sickness could not be alleviated by human plans nor divine aid, [the Romans'] minds were overwhelmed by superstition. Theatrical shows too are said to have been instituted among the other appeasements of divine wrath, a novelty for a people fond of war – you see, there was only the spectacle of the circus. Moreover, small too, as nearly all beginnings are, and this thing itself came from abroad. Without any song, without an act of imitating songs, players were summoned from Etruria, dancing to rhythms on the tibia, and they were making, in the Tuscan way, not at all ugly movements.

2.

The Conspirators:

Palaestrio
Pleusicles
Periplectomenus
Philocomasium
Acroteleutium
Milphidippa

The Dupes:

Sceledrus
Pyrgopolynices

Our *servus callidus*; formerly a slave of Pleusicles
Palaestrio's former master; lover of Philocomasium
The helpful old man; neighbor to the soldier
The beloved, stolen by the soldier
Prostitute; pretends to be Periplectomenus' wife
Acroteleutium's clever maid

Pyrgopolynices' faithful slave; Philocomasium's guard
The *miles gloriosus*

3. Plautus. *Miles*. 246-248

Pal. Sed simillimas
dicio esse, et Philocomasio id praecipiendum est ut sciatur,
ne titubet, si exquireret ex ea miles.

Pal. But say they are really similar and Philocomasium needs to be instructed about this so she knows, so she doesn't slip if the soldier should ask her.

4. *Miles* 385

Pal. Palaestrionis somnium narratur.

Pal. The dream of Palaestrio is told.

5. Plautus. *Miles*. 790-793

Pal. Vt ad te eam iam deducas domum
itaque eam huc ornatam adducas, ex matronarum modo,
capite compto, crinis vittasque habeat, adsimulatque se
tuam esse uxorem: ita praecipiendum est.

Pal. Just that you bring her now home to your place, and you bring her here dressed up like a married lady, hair done-up, keeps her hair covered, and pretends that she is your wife. You have to instruct her so!

6. Plautus. *Miles*. 809-811

Plevs. Meminero. sed quid meminisse id refert, <rogo> ego te tamen.

Pal. Ego enim dicam tum quando usus poscet; interea tace; ut nunc etiam hic agit, actutum partis defendas tuas.

7. Plautus. *Miles*. 882-884

Acr. quin egomet ultro,
postquam adbibere auris meae tuae oram orationis,
tibi dixi, miles quem ad modum potis sit deasciari.

8. Plautus. *Miles*. 905-913

Per. Ad tua praecpta de meo nihil his novom
adposivi.

Acr. Nempe ludificari militem tuom erum vis? **Pal.** Exlocuta es.

Acr. Lepide et sapienter, commode et facete res parast.

Pal. Atque huius uxorem volo <te esse> adsimulare. **Acr.** Fiet.

Pal. Quasi militi animum adieceris, simulare. **Acr.** Sic futurum est.

Pal. Quasique ea res per me interpretem et tuam ancillam ei curetur.

Acr. Bonus vates poteras esse, nam quae sunt futura dicis.

Pal. Quasique anulum hunc ancillula tua abs te detulerit ad me, quem ego militi <porro> darem tuis verbis. **Acr.** Vera dicis.

Pleus. I remember, but why does it matter if I do. I'm asking you nevertheless. **Pal.** Well, I'll tell you when the need demands. In the meantime, shut it. Just like this guy's been playing his role, you take care of yours carefully.

Acr. Didn't I tell you without prompting after my ears drank in the outline of your speech how the soldier could be plucked.

Per. I added nothing new of my own to your instructions for these two. **Acr.** Naturally, you want the soldier, your master, to be played? **Pal.** You said it! **Acr.** The job's prepared lovingly and wisely, fittingly and charmingly. **Pal.** And I want you to pretend to be this guy's wife. **Acr.** So be it. **Pal.** To pretend like you've given your affection to the soldier. **Acr.** So it will be. **Pal.** And like this affair is being handled by me and your maid as go-betweens for him. **Acr.** You could've been a good prophet. You see, you say what will be. **Pal.** And like your maid brought this ring from you to me so I could give it to the soldier, moreover, with your message. **Acr.** You speak the truth.

9. Plautus. *Miles*. 1025-1027

Milph. Quo pacto hoc Ilium accedi velis, ut ferrem abs te consilium. **Pal.** Quasi hunc depereat—

Milph. Teneo istuc.

Pal. Conlaudato formam et faciem et virtutis commemorato.

Milph. (*in aside*) How do you want this Troy to be toppled? I hand that plan over to you. **Pal.** Like she's desperately in love with him.

Milp. Got it. **Pal.** Praise his beauty and looks, and recall his excellence.

10. Plautus. *Miles*. 1029

tu cetera cura et contempla et de meis venator verbis

Pal. Take care of the rest, think it over, hunt for it from my words.

11.

The Tricksters:

Pseudolus
Simia

The Marks:

Simo
Harpax
Ballio

A consummate improviser
A slave scrounged up to play a messenger

The young lover's father, failed source of money
The soldier's messenger, failed source of money
Brothel-keeper extraordinaire and all-around bad guy

12. Plautus. *Pseudolus*. 401-405.

Ps. sed quasi poeta, tabulas cum cepit sibi,
quaerit quod nusquamst gentium, reperit tamen,
facit illud veri simile, quod mendacum est,
nunc ego poeta fiam: viginti minas,
quae nusquam nunc sunt gentium, inveniam tamen.

Ps. But like a poet, when he takes his writing tablets, he looks for what is nowhere in the world. Nevertheless, he finds it. He makes that which is a lie similar to the truth. Now, I'll become a poet. 20 minae, which are now nowhere in the world, I'll find 'em nevertheless.

13. Plautus. *Pseudolus*. 601-602

Ps. novo consilio nunc mihi opus est,
nova res subito mi haec obiectast: 601^a
hoc praevortar principio; illa omnia missa habeo, quae ante
agere occipi.

Ps. Now I need a new plan. A new situation has suddenly been tossed my way. I'll give my attention to this first. I consider all those others which I began to do before dismissed.

14. Plautus. *Pseudolus*. 562-568

Ps. suspicio est mi nunc vos suspicarier,
me idcirco haec tanta facinora promittere,
quo vos oblectem, hanc fabulam dum transigam,
neque sim facturus quod facturum dixeram.
non demutabo. atque etiam certum, quod sciam,
quo id sim facturus pacto nihil etiam scio,
nisi quia futurumst.

Ps. It's my suspicion that you now suspect that I've been heretofore promising these great deeds, so I could entertain you while I act out this play, and that I'm not going to do what I said I would. I won't go back on my word. And certainly still ... what I know about how I'm going to do it I still know nothing – except the fact that it will really happen.

15a. Plautus. *Pseudolus*. 984-985

Bal. Quis is homost qui iussit? **Ps.** Perii, nunc homo in
medio lutost;
nomen nescit, haeret haec res. **Bal.** Quem hanc misisse ad
me autumas?

Bal. Who's the guy who ordered? **Ps.** Shit! Now my guy's stuck in the mud. He doesn't know the name. This affair hangs in the balance! **Bal.** Whom do you claim sent this to me?

15b. Plautus. *Pseudolus*. 986-991

Sim. Nosce imaginem: tute eius nomen memorato mihi,
ut sciam te Ballionem esse ipsum. **Bal.** Cedo mi epistulam.
Sim. Accipe et cognosce signum. **Bal.** Oh,
Polymachaeroplaides
purus putus est ipsus. novi. heus, Polymachaeroplaides
nomen est. **Sim.** Scio iam me recte tibi dedisse
epistulam,
postquam Polymachaeroplaidem elocutus nomen es.

Sim. Take a look at the seal. You recall his name to me so I know that you are Ballio himself. **Bal.** Give me the letter. **Sim.** Take it and look at the seal.
Bal. Oh! Polymachaeroplaides, plain and simple, it's him. I know it. Hey. His name's Polymachaeroplaides. **Sim.** I know now I've given the letter to you rightly after you said the name Polymachaeroplaides.

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