

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, nova res bellicoso 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.

2.

The Conspirators:

Palaestrio
Pleusicles
Periplectomenus
Philocomasium
Acroteleutium
Milphidippa

The Dupes:

Sceledrus
Pyrgopolynices

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.

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 dicito esse, et Philocomasio id praeciendum est ut sciat, ne titubet, si exquiret 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 praeciendum 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 praecepta de meo nihil his novom adposivi.

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

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

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 poteris 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.

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.

10. Plautus. *Miles*. 1029

tu cetera cura et contempla et de meis venator verbis

11.

The Tricksters:

Pseudolus

Simia

The Marks:

Simo

Harpax

Ballio

Plevs. 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.

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.

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

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

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