

# *Poenulus* and the Play-within-the-Play: A Metageneric Reevaluation

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“one of the least successful of Plautus’ comedies”

Duckworth 1952, 154

“a right mess”

Henderson 1994, 3

“The central peculiarity of this play is that it contains two tricks which cause it to fall into unsatisfactory halves.”

Gratwick 1982, 98

## *Poenulus*' Main Characters

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Hanno	<i>senex</i> , father of Adelphasium and Anterastilis
<i>aduocati</i>	Agorastocles' associates, witnesses to the trick

# *Poenulus* 547-554: Agorastocles and *aduocati*

AG. scitis rem, narraui uobis quod uostra opera mi opu' siet de lenone hoc qui me amantem ludificatur tam diu, ei paratae ut sint insidiae de auro et de seruo meo.

ADV. omnia istaec scimus iam nos, si hi spectatores sciant; horunc hic nunc caussa haec agitur spectatorum fabula: hos te satis est docere, ut, quando agas, quid agas sciant. nos tu ne curassis: scimus rem omnem, quippe omnes simul dedicimus tecum una, ut respondere possimus tibi.

AG. You know the business. I've told you what I need your help for, about this pimp who's been playing with me, the lover, for so long, and how a trap's been laid for him with money and with my slave.

ADV. We already know all this, as long as these spectators know. This play is being put on here now for the sake of these spectators. It's enough for you to tell them, so that when you act, they know what you're acting out. Don't you worry about us. We know the whole thing, since we all learned it at the same time, together with you, so that we could answer you.

# Poenulus 555-562: Agorastocles and *aduocati*

AG. ita profecto est. sed agite igitur, ut sciam uos scire,  
rem  
expedite et mihi quae uobis dudum dixi dicite.

ADV. itane? temptas an sciamus? non meminisse nos ratu's  
quo modo trecentos Philippos Collybisco uilico  
dederis, quos deferret huc ad lenonem inimicum tuom,  
isq'se ut adsimularet peregrinum esse aliunde ex alio  
oppido?  
ubi is detulerit, tu eo seruom quaesitum aduentes tuom  
cum pecunia.

AG. meministis memoriter, seruasti' me.

AG. That's exactly right. But come on now: so  
that I'll know that you know, explain the  
business and tell me what I told you a while  
back.

ADV. Is that how it is? You're testing whether  
we know? You don't think that we remember  
how you gave three hundred Philippics to  
your *uilicus* Collybiscus for him to bring here  
to your enemy, the pimp, and how he'll  
pretend to be a foreigner from another town  
somewhere else? When he's brought it, you'll  
arrive there to look for your slave with the  
money.

AG. You remember it memorably. You've  
saved me.

# Poenulus 563-575: Agorastocles and *aduocati*

ADV. ille negabit: Milphionem quaeri censebit tuom;  
id duplicabit omne furtum. leno addicetur tibi.  
ad eam rem nos esse testis uis tibi.

ADV. He'll deny it. He'll think your Milphio's  
being looked for. That will double the whole  
theft. The pimp will be awarded to you. You  
want us to be your witnesses to this affair.

AG. teneti' rem.

AG. You got it.

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AG. mittite istaec. quid uelim uos scitis.

AG. Forget about that. You know what I want.

ADV. callemus  
probe:

ADV. We understand perfectly: you're intent  
on destroying the lying pimp.

lenonem ut peiiurum perdas, id studes.

## Maurice 2004, 273

“This is a comedy that uses role-playing as its major plot device and which constantly emphasises costume, play-acting and the power of speech. ... [I]t is explicitly stated that this plan depends upon role-playing, with Collybiscus acting out a part, pretending to be something that he is not. It is immediately apparent that a play within a play will be performed here with this deception.”

## *argumentum*

in Plautine prologues, a narrative section introducing key characters, describing their situations, and suggesting how the plot will progress

# *Poenulus* 46-47: On the *argumentum*

ad argumentum nunc uicissatim uolo  
remigrare, ut aeque mecum sitis gnarures.

“Now I want to come back again to the *argumentum*, so that you’ll be acquainted with it as much as I am.”



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## *Mercator 972-973: adulescens amans*

nam te istaec aetate haud aequom filio fuerat tuo  
adulescenti amanti amicam eripere emptam argento suo.

“It wasn’t right for you, at your age, to rob your son, an adulescens amans, of the girlfriend he bought with his own money.”

# *Trinummus 129-131: adulescens amans*

dedistine hoc facto ei gladium qui se occideret?

quid secus est aut quid interest dare te in manus

argentum amanti homini adulescenti, animi impoti ... ?

“Did you also give him a sword to kill himself? How’s it different, or what separates that from you putting money into the hands of a person, an adulescens amans, without any self-control ... ?”

## *Captiui 1030-1032: adulescens amans*

neque in hac subigationes sunt neque ulla amatio  
nec pueri suppositio nec argenti circumductio,  
neque ubi amans adulescens scortum liberet clam suum patrem.

“There were no secret affairs in this [play], nor any canoodling, no baby-swapping, no money-stealing, no part where the adulescens amans frees a whore secretly from his dad.”

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# *peiiurus leno* in Plautus

- *Persa*: 562
- *Pseudolus*: 132, 351, 363
- *Rudens*: 126, 360, 651 (*peiiuri plenissimus*), 722, 1375
- *Captiui*: 57
- *cf. Curculio* 263-269

# *Poenulus* 809-816: the *aduocati* on the Trick

iniuriam illic insignite postulat:  
nostro seruire nos sibi censet cibo.  
uerum ita sunt \* isti nostri diuites:  
si quid bene facias, leuior pluma est gratia,  
si quid peccatumst, plumbeas iras gerunt.  
domos abeamus nostras, sultis, nunciam,  
quando id quoi rei operam dedimus impetrauimus,  
ut perderemus corruptorem ciuium.

That man [Agorastocles] is trying to do us a remarkable injustice! He thinks that we serve him but provide our own rations. But that's how those rich men of ours are. If you do them a good turn, their thanks is lighter than a feather. If you wrong them, they're angry like a lead weight. Now, if you don't mind, let's go home, since we've succeeded in doing what we worked for: we've ruined a corruptor of the citizens.

## *Persa* 858: Final Lines (Toxilus and *Caterua*)

Tox. mei spectatores, bene ualete. leno periit.     CAT. plaudite.

Tox. Take care, dear spectators! The pimp's done in.

CAT. Clap!

# *Bacchides* 1207-1211: Epilogue

hi senes nisi fuissent nihili iam inde ab adulescentia,  
non hodie hoc tantum flagitium facerent canis capitibus;  
neque adeo haec faceremus, ni antehac uidissemus fieri  
ut apud lenones riuales filiis fierent patres.  
spectatores, uos ualere uolumus, [et] clare adplaudere.

If these old men hadn't been good for nothing even since their teenage years, they wouldn't be behaving so disgracefully today, now that they're white-haired. And we wouldn't enact it like this if we hadn't seen it happen before, that fathers become their sons' rivals in brothels. Spectators, we want you to take care and clap loudly.

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# Applications: Hanno and the Carthaginians

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