

Here and There in Plautus' *Curculio*

The *Curculio* transpires both 'here' and 'there'. Although the play's deception and *anagnorisis* occur at its *mise en scène* in Epidaurus, the stage for these developments is set elsewhere: several plot-driving events take place during the *Vorgeschichte* in Caria, where the young man Phaedromus had sent Curculio, a parasite, in search of a solution to his lover's dilemma. During the course of the play, all of these remote events are conjured up and reenacted at Epidaurus, giving the *Curculio* a dual chronological and physical setting that scholarship has failed to perceive. In this paper, I investigate the comedy's doubling of place and time by considering Caria as a *locus* of dramatic action. How, I ask, are the kinetic occurrences that have already happened in the East transferred to Epidaurus, and what are the effects of this complex orientation? My discussion focuses on Curculio. I argue that the parasite acts as an essential pivot between the plot's *scaenae* by relaying information and conveying the dramatic action to and fro. Ultimately, I show that Plautus uses narrative focalization and long-distance communication to bridge the *Curculio*'s twofold theatrical setting.

Curculio meets the braggart soldier Therapontigonus in Caria. There the *miles* haplessly tells the parasite about his coincidental purchase of none other than Planesium, Phaedromus' love interest, and there, too, does Curculio steal the all-important sign of authenticity that 'seals' his fraud. Crucially, Therapontigonus' (faked) decision to complete his suspended purchase of the *meretrix* and send word by letter to his *tarpezita* 'happens' in Caria, too, a (phony) development that clinches the schemer's theft. To begin, I consider Curculio as a source of insight into these remote developments, evincing his role as internal focalizer who controls our vision of the first dramatic *scaena* - Caria. Specifically, I suggest that the messenger speech at vv.328-70 in which Curculio recounts the play's backstory functions as an internal prologue, a

fact signaled by the parasite's call for attention as he begins his story – a typical element of theatrical prologues (vv.327-8):

CV: nihil attuli.

PH: perdidisti me. CV: invenire possum, si mi operam datis.

CV: I got nuthin'.

PH: You've lost me. CV: I can find you, if you give me your attention.

The narrative that follows has a dual setting. Not only does the parasite thereby *reperform* at Epidaurus the action that occurred at Caria, but he also relates *verbatim* what the *miles* had, in turn, recounted to him about the arrangements he had previously put in place to purchase Planesium while in Epidaurus (vv.343-8, 434). Further, this embedded narrative – the *Vorgeschichte's Vorgeschichte*, one might say – gives the prologue a duplex chronological orientation that reaches doubly back in time.

Next, I demonstrate that Curculio's actions serve to unite the two theatrical *loci*, a function concretized in his role as *nuntius* both within and without the play's micro-plot. The parasite aids in collapsing the space that separates Epidaurus and Caria by bearing messages back and forth, enabling a dialogue by proxy between the settings' distant casts of characters (Phaedromus and his *sodalis*, 'Therapontigonus' and his banker) and in so doing literally transmitting the plot. In this vein I pay particular attention to Curculio's textual ruse, which materially 'brings' the Carian setting to Epidaurus in letter-form: according to the pervasive ancient notion of epistolary discourse as *sermo absentium*, the recitation of 'Therapontigonus'' missive (vv.429-36) evokes the *miles'* absent *persona* onstage. Adding to recent scholarship on theatrical letters (Rosenmeyer 2001; Jenkins 2005, 2006), here I offer some observations on Plautus' use of the epistolary motif.

In the final section, I propose that the *Curculio*'s doubled backdrop may be metatheatrically reflected in its famous *excursus* at vv.462-86. The *choragus* appears on stage to give the spectators a 'tour' of the Roman *forum*, likely the very setting of performance (Gaggiotti 1985). Moore 1991 has shown how this speech blurs the lines between the real world of the audience and that of the play, conflating them. This juxtaposition of theatrical and physical location may be replicated in the *Curculio*'s bifurcated setting: the slippage between Rome and Epidaurus achieved by the *choragus*' monologue reflects, I submit, that of Caria and Epidaurus in the plot. Remarkably, these sets of *loci* are each linked by text – a script and a letter, both of which contain a fictive premise to be acted out.

Bibliography

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