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**Kathleen McCarthy: Slaves, Masters, and the Art of Authority in
Plautine Comedy**

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Chapter I

THE CROWDED HOUSE

The purpose of poetry is to remind us
how difficult it is to remain just one person,
for our house is open, there are no keys in the doors,
and invisible guests come in and out at will.

—Czeslaw Milosz, “Ars Poetica?”

PLAUTUS is a poet whose house is open to a bewildering variety of guests. Earnest ingénues and cynical tricksters make themselves at home there; both masters and slaves proclaim themselves to be honored inmates. The plots that focus on reweaving familial bonds and the triumph of love are often almost derailed by the emphasis on deception tricks and gags through which these plots are brought on stage; likewise, the socially conservative values of such familial plots, the ways that they support existing hierarchies, must coexist with the charmingly subversive intelligence of the clever slave. Conversely, the amoral genius that motivates these clever slaves is never really allowed to embrace its logical conclusion, that is, the revelation that the master’s authority is merely arbitrary, and so this liberatory potential goes unrealized as well. In these plays neither the humane mode of naturalistic comedy nor the cynical mode of farcical comedy ever completely frees itself from the other; the two are engaged in an ongoing dialogue. This book is an attempt to interpret the literary and the social effects of Plautus’ comedy by analyzing the complex instability that these two contradictory modes of comedy produce.

Let me make clearer what I mean by the difference between these two modes with an example from a familiar play. Early on, Plautus’ *Mostellaria* advertises that its theme is the undoing of a young man in love. Through a famous monody in which he compares himself to a dilapidated house, the young lover reveals an intriguingly clear vision about what his amours have cost him, financially and morally (84–156). This monody prepares the audience for a play that will explore the psychological and social tensions between self-indulgence and self-respect. In other words, this young lover’s speech fits perfectly with what we have learned to expect in New Comedy,

Epigraph translated by Lillian Valle, with the author.

a conflict of social paradigms that pits the erotic satisfactions of the individual against the moral norms of the community, a conflict that will be resolved in the end by a fortuitous twist that obviates the need for any real choice between the two alternative paradigms. But the *Mostellaria*, in important ways, is not a play that explores these psychological and social tensions. This monody is preceded by a farcical slapstick battle between two slaves, in which the slave who is advocating immorality clearly has the upper hand (1–83). Even more puzzling, after the first act, the *Mostellaria* completely abandons the young lover and develops instead the role of the fiendishly clever slave, a role that has no edifying moral or psychological lessons for us. Indeed, this style of comedy too, even though it is fundamentally different in tone and moral outlook from the tender troubles of the soul-searching young lover, is utterly familiar. In this farcical style of comedy, we are used to seeing downtrodden slaves and sons kick over the traces; they have no remorse for their misdeeds, and moreover they bring to rebellion the attitude that could be summed up in the Latin word *malitia*, a not-too-distant cousin of English “malice.” Like the more sentimental mode of comedy, this mode too will sidestep the need for any radical changes in the household, but where naturalistic comedy avoids changes by “revealing” the conflict of values to have been illusory all along, farce acknowledges that conflict is permanent and unchanging: the master forgives the slave for tricking him, but neither does he change his policies of mastery nor does the slave learn the lesson of obedience. The end leaves them coexisting in their opposition just as they began:

TRANIO: Quid gravaris? quasi non cras iam commeream aliam noxiam:
ibi utrumque, et hoc et illud, poteris ulcisci probe.

(*Mos* 1178–79)

TRANIO: Why are you being so difficult? Don't you think I'll commit another wrong tomorrow? Then you can punish me properly for both of them, today's and tomorrow's.

Although it is possible to develop an interpretation of this play that involves explaining away the presence of one or the other of these comic modes, or subordinating one to the other, to do so would inevitably distort the reader's and spectator's experience of the play, which is that each of these modes is presented on its own merits, not as a strawman for the other.¹

¹ Leach (1969c) argues that, anchored by the imagery contrasting the two houses, the play has a serious point to make about the conflict between generations, even though we never see on stage the father and son together, only the slave and master. Although her reading is filled with well-observed points, it still requires that we privilege Frye's notional template of comedy (i.e., that it is about the conflict of generations) over the evidence before our eyes.

One of the major themes of Plautine scholarship has been the attempt to assert a reasoned basis for deciding what is really Plautine in Plautus, for separating out the signal from the noise.

Because Plautus adapted his comedies from Greek plays, and because the fragments we have from these Greek authors seem to fit cleanly the pattern of naturalistic comedy, the problem of inconsistency in Plautus has often been solved by invoking the scripts' foreign origins. If, as many earlier critics argued, Plautus was a semicompetent adapter of Greek New Comedy, then the silly antics of clever slaves in his plays could be seen simply as intrusions into the plots of familial crisis, as (at best) comic relief for the drama of humane values.² If, on the other hand, as many more recent critics believe, Plautus was a sly parodist, who used his Greek models merely as a foil for his own carnivalesque wit, then the plots of young love and lost children serve only to provide grist for his mill, and a narrative framework for trickery and rebellion.³ But even this quick sketch of the *Mostellaria* shows that neither of these two views can account completely for the overall effect of this play, in which both comic modes perform positive functions. Furthermore, these explanations assume a neat boundary between naturalistic Greek comedy and farcical Roman Comedy, an assumption that relies heavily on the meager evidence for Greek New Comedy (of which we have many fragments but only one complete play, Menander's *Dyskolos*, and only one passage of about one hundred lines where a Greek original can be compared with its Latin adaption, Menander's *Dis Exapaton* with Plautus' *Bacchides*). If we explain the presence of naturalistic comedy in Plautus by appealing to reconstructions of Greek New Comedy, we reduce the complexity of both the Greek and the Roman texts, by ignoring the possible variation within the Greek corpus, and by assuming that naturalism has only a negative function in Plautus. What is needed is not a finer gauge for separating the genuine Plautus from the distracting accretions but a way of theorizing the text as we have it, as an irreducibly complex structuring of these varied elements.

I am suggesting two ways of thinking about the coexistence of these modes that will help us give a truer description of the Plautine genre. First, rather than seeing this genre as one of these two modes with the (welcome or unwelcome) intrusion of the other, I propose that the genre consists precisely of the combination of them. It is not that Plautus is trying to

On the other hand, Segal's (1974) treatment of this play takes no account at all of the striking monody and its dramatic effect.

² E.g., Norwood (1932), Webster (1953).

³ E.g., Anderson (1993), Halporn (1993).

write Menandrian comedy and somehow his farcical style keeps intruding, nor that he wants to write Atellan farces but unaccountably bases them on Greek plots. The knitting together of the two modes is exactly what defines the pied beauty of this genre. The second proposal is to see the coexistence of these two modes as dynamic and self-conscious, a relationship that could be characterized by Bakhtin's concept of dialogism. That is, each mode represents itself in response to the other, with what Bakhtin calls "a sideways glance" (1981: 61). The essence of dialogism is not a polemical argument but rather the self-consciousness of discovering how one's own language and worldview sound and look to another language and worldview.⁴

What function could such a ragtag dramatic form have played in the civic life of the Romans, who gave these frivolous plays a place in some of their most important religious festivals?⁵ Especially since the two modes of comedy that constitute this corpus offer two very different attitudes towards authority, we must wonder what was the investment of socially and politically dominant Romans in having such plays performed. I hope to demonstrate here that the combination of the two modes allowed Plautine comedy to fulfill multiple and mutually contradictory fantasies for its audience. What this genre sacrifices in coherence and dramatic unity, it more than compensates for in the powerfully protean dreams it offers, dreams that are at once liberatory and deeply grounded in traditional authority. Thus my view of Plautus' audience also stresses an unresolved multiplicity: just as the plays do not present a unified dramatic mode, neither the audience as a whole nor each individual member of the audience can be assigned to a fixed point in the social network, an assignment that would allow us to label their interests as either in favor of or against maintaining social hierarchies. Because, as I will argue below, masters have a need for rebellion in their own lives, as well as anxiety about the possible rebellion of slaves, this form of comedy both promotes and undermines rebellious fantasies. What I am advocating in the following pages is a way of grappling with the question of elite investment in popular literature by finding a middle path between augmenting the ideological power of the elite (by accepting their own naturalized view of their domination) and giving way to a romantic impulse to see subversion where none existed.

⁴ Morson and Emerson (1990: 132): "Bakhtin cautions that it is a crude understanding of dialogue to picture it as 'disagreement'..." Unlike the novel (Bakhtin's model system), Roman comedy does not attach each worldview to a specific, highly developed character but retains a greater degree of authorial control in orchestrating the interactions of the two worldviews.

⁵ L. R. Taylor (1937) on frequency and organization of these festivals; see also Gruen (1990: 124–57; 1992: 183–222).

DOUBLE VISION

It may seem that the description I am giving of Plautine comedy—the free dialogic interaction between two comic modes, without an overarching organizing structure—would make it impossible to think of these plays as literary texts at all. In this section, I will argue for a way of thinking about Plautus’ literary activity that will explain how such texts could come to be and how they can be recognizable as dramatic comedy. I will also give a more detailed picture of the stylistic, thematic, and dramatic traits that characterize each mode.

The foundation of my argument is that the literary aesthetic that shaped Plautus’ plays was in the strictest sense, “traditional.” The fullest exploration of Plautine comedy as the product of a traditional dramatic style is John Wright’s *Dancing in Chains: The Stylistic Unity of the Comoedia Palliata*, in which a thorough analysis of the extant fragments demonstrates that the style we think of as characteristically Plautine was in fact the common property of all the authors of this genre, the so-called “comedy in Greek dress.” If we accept Wright’s argument, we can see that Plautus’ theatrical instincts allowed him to combine and recombine a relatively small vocabulary of comic forms into plays that were satisfying dramatic experiences; but this argument in favor of Plautus’ traditional aesthetic also means that we should not assume that he wrote with the goal of self-expression. Plautus made his artistic decisions based on a subtle knowledge of the comic forms at his disposal. This is not to say that he knew or cared about the meanings of these forms, but he understood with precision how the audience wanted them to be used, combined, and modified. If the aesthetic that governed Plautus’ work was traditional, shared by all the authors of the *comoedia palliata*, it might seem that this kind of tradition precludes the literary self-consciousness we are used to attributing to individual authors (e.g., Ovid). But it is possible that this traditional aesthetic was centered on a distinctively self-conscious stance towards language and literature.⁶

This self-conscious aesthetic can be seen especially in three characteristics of Plautine comedy I will discuss here: stylization (using language for its formal properties as much as for the content it conveys), secondariness

⁶ Thus, although I agree with many of the observations of Sharrock (1996), particularly the emphasis on literary self-consciousness, I would disagree that this is necessarily the product of a sly individual author pretending to be at a loss for working out a complicated plot. Rather, the evidence for Plautus’ traditionality should make us reconsider exactly how sophisticated a tradition can be. Further, Sharrock’s argument implies that we can take Plautine comedy seriously as an object for literary study only if we first prove that it is informed by the same aesthetic rules that inform later texts. I think that the plot of *Pseudolus* really is weak in the way that its detractors have noticed but that the specific kind of weakness that Plautus tolerates and why he tolerates it should become the objects of our analysis.

(embracing Latin literature's epigonal relation to Greek literature), and dialogism (juxtaposing comic modes to highlight the incommensurability of languages and worldviews). This description of Plautus' aesthetic has implications for the literary analysis of his corpus, but I will also use it to lay the foundation for a methodology that will allow us to discuss the social effects of these plays without positing (directly or indirectly) the desire of an individual author to make a coherent statement. My thesis is that we can derive from these plays an understanding of the internal logic that governed Plautus' use of these comic forms, a logic that is itself shaped by his audience's broadly held assumptions about social relationships. In fact, because these plays are both traditional and popular, one could argue that they provide a clearer insight into Roman society than those dramas that are the product of an individual playwright who stamps them with his own mark.⁷

Stylization, secondariness, and dialogism are all products of a specific attitude towards language that subtends the peculiarities of early Latin literature as a whole and Plautus in particular. Although it has not been phrased in exactly these terms before, scholars have long recognized the influence that the material aspects of language, especially sound patterns, had on the style of early Latin literature.⁸ We can push these observations a little further by positing that this privileging of sound patterns is itself a manifestation of a deeper principle, the consciousness of language as a separate system that is never exactly coextensive with its function as a means of communication.⁹ Thus, form (language) and content (meaning) in Plautus and other early Roman authors are juxtaposed rather than unified. The familiar description of Plautus as stylized and secondary (in relation to Greek literature) can be understood in these terms, and these qualities can in turn help us to understand dialogism in Plautine comedy.

⁷ To risk a comparison that may seem irrelevant to some readers, I might point to the American TV situation comedy. Like the domestic comedies of Plautus, sit-coms strive to work a given formula in a way that is both utterly familiar and yet satisfyingly different every time; furthermore, the social biases that shape sit-coms (assumptions about class, race, gender, sexuality) almost by definition agree with the biases of the audience since sit-coms "give the people what they want." Examples of scholarly analysis of sit-coms include E. Taylor (1989), Jones (1992); for similar analyses of soap operas, see Mumford (1995).

⁸ E.g., Conte (1994: 19–22), Williams (1982: 53–55).

⁹ We should consider the possibility that the multilingual atmosphere of archaic Italy created this ability to think outside any individual language, the kind of atmosphere that Bakhtin posits as a necessary condition for the development of the novel: "The new cultural and creative consciousness lives in an actively polyglot world. . . . Languages throw light on each other: one language can, after all, see itself only in the light of another language. . . . In this actively polyglot world, completely new relationships are established between language and its object (that is, the real world) . . ." (1981: 12). See also specifically on Latin's relationship to Greek (1981: 62).

Stylization is Roman comedy's most striking characteristic, as Wright puts it, a "concentration on language as an object of interest in itself . . ." (1974: 36). Again and again in Plautine plays, we have the sense that the stream of words (dappled as it is with alliteration, homoioteleuton, *figurae etymologicae*, etc.) exists for its own sake, not for the expression of any thought but just because it sounds right. Throughout Wright's study of the fragments of the *comoedia palliata*, he repeatedly points to the patterning of language, rather than the content conveyed, as a guiding force in the work of all the authors, not just Plautus.¹⁰ Fraenkel's detailed study of Plautus comes to a similar conclusion. Comparing the opening of Menander's *Heros* and the opening of Plautus' *Curculio*, he writes, "Plautus' dialogue doesn't settle for being a medium; it is, to an extreme degree, an end in itself" (1922: 413 = 1960: 391 [my translation]). Fraenkel explicitly associates this emphasis on language with the centrality that archaic Latin literature grants to the perception of the senses and the experience of the moment.¹¹ Stylization and the emphasis on sense perception differentiate these texts from those organized around abstract thematic principles and intended to convey ideas, not just dazzle the ear and eye of the beholder.

Like stylization, what I am calling secondariness (the choice to write in reaction to an existing text rather than to start fresh) has long been seen as a definitive quality of Plautus and other early Latin authors.¹² I would argue that this quality, too, grows out of an attitude towards language that acknowledges the gap between form and content. Fraenkel makes only a negative connection between the richness of Plautus' linguistic resources

¹⁰ All the authors, except Terence, that is (1974: 127–51). For stylization in other authors, see (1974: 18, 32, 119–20). Bettini (1985) suggests yet another way in which stylization is constitutive of archaic Roman literature. He argues that it exerted a force by organizing language and marking it as specifically poetic, i.e., that stylization performed for archaic poetry the functions that meter performed in the classical period. This explains why the highly stylized literature of this period exhibits a metrical system that seems to us to be curiously loose or ridden with exceptions.

¹¹ Fraenkel (1922: 418 = 1960: 395): "Ungemein stark entwickelt aber ist bei ihm [sc. Plautus] die auf der Intensität des sinnlichen Wahrnehmens ruhende Fähigkeit das Charakteristische eines äußeren Vorgangs, einer Bewegung, eines Geräusches oder dergleichen bis in die leisesten Nuancen hinein aufzunehmen, das Aufgenommene in der Phantasie jederzeit zu reproduzieren und dann dafür reiche und erstaunlich präzise sprachliche Ausdrucksmittel von suggestiver Kraft zu finden."

¹² Rather than finding a new, more positive term than "secondariness" to describe Latin literature's relation to Greek literature (a move that would, I fear, imply that my object is the aesthetic recuperation of early Latin literature), I am asking the reader to think of secondariness as a value-neutral term that merely describes a literary process. Although he chooses to reject the term "secondary" to describe this quality of Roman literature and myth, Feeney's recent comments on the process of Roman appropriation of Greek cultural forms comes close to my own; he proposes "the Romans as founders of an active and dynamic trans-cultural sensibility" (1998: 75).

and his use of Greek New Comedy as a model. He believes that Plautus' skills did not include the ability to create a plot line from scratch; in order to make up for this deficit, the Roman playwright turned to the well-made plots of Hellenistic Greek comedy (1922: 405 = 1960: 383). But we can also imagine a positive reason for his use of Greek models. The view of language and literature attributed to Plautus here is exactly the kind of perspective that would lead to an interest in translation, reworkings, parody, adaptation. All these forms of literature depend on the fact that language and the content it expresses are not coextensive: on one hand, content does not exist only in language, since it can be translated or expressed in different words; on the other hand, these new, secondary texts never just repeat the primary text but in reexpressing the content inevitably introduce new tones and emphases. These secondary texts derive their power from the difference between two kinds of meaning: the meaning that is expressed through form and the meaning that exists in form. The latter kind of meaning is, by definition, untranslatable. This literary perspective that exploits the gap between form and content differs profoundly from one that asserts the unity of form and content.¹³

This attitude towards form and content in language defines the genre in which Plautus works, creating a body of plays written in stylized Latin but based on Greek texts, which were originally composed with a very different attitude towards language; thus the dialogism I am positing for Plautus is a congener of the more familiar Plautine characteristics of stylization and secondariness. But even after the archaic Roman penchant for form, separable from content, has operated by using a foreign (in every sense) play as a model, its presence can be felt in the comedies themselves. The plays highlight the separability of form and content by exaggerating, rather than minimizing, the contradictions between the attitudes toward language embodied in Greek New Comedy and in its Roman adaptations.¹⁴ These two

¹³ Fraenkel (1922: 410 = 1960: 387–88) figures the contrast between the two attitudes as the contrast between a tree (a growing organism in which the bark and the interior of the tree are united in an organic relation) and a vase (a plastic object, the surface of which can be elaborated and that has no essential connection to the content with which it is filled). Wiles (1991: 213) puts these observations in the context of the modern critical concerns: “[In Plautus] the audience can relish the fact that the word is a sign rather than a meaning. There is a dissociation between signifier and signified, the word and the thought behind the word. . . . [In Menander] the audience is not aware of the words but of the ‘chosen content,’ the thought behind the words. . . . There is no sense of a dissociation between word and thought, signifier and signified.”

¹⁴ This is different from the position often expressed (e.g., Gratwick [1982], Slater [1985: 166–67], Wiles [1991: 7], Anderson [1993: 3–29]), that the Greek elements in Plautus serve as a foil to be subverted. I am suggesting that their presence has a fundamental positive function, not just the negative function of providing contrast. Further, I would differentiate between my approach and what we might call a “bricolage” approach, which argues that the

attitudes produce two very different modes of comedy, modes that differ in diction, meter, and characterization but also in their fundamental literary and moral orientation. Because the incommensurability of the two modes is the driving force behind this use of Greek models in the first place, the modes are left unsynthesized and allowed to coexist and interrogate each other. Plautus' text becomes a crowded house, populated by guests who do not necessarily agree either with each other or with their host.¹⁵

Although both these modes are present in each of Plautus' plays, there is a range across his corpus from plays that are almost entirely in one mode to those almost entirely in the other. To help clarify what I mean by each of these modes, for the moment I will be describing each as it would look if it were on its own.¹⁶ The literary mode of idealizing naturalism represents the familiar world of the spectators, but with all the rough edges smoothed away, and keeps this represented world seamless in itself.¹⁷ This is not to say that this mode is realistic; the occurrences and coincidences that move

presence of contradictory attitudes in the text is intended to add up to one meta-meaning and to reveal the untenability of a specific moral position (see, e.g., the moral interpretations of the *Casina* by Forehand [1973] and Slater [1985: 91–93] and of the *Persa* by Chiarini [1979: 219–29]). This approach is unsatisfactory for reasons similar to those I noted for Sharrock's argument (above, note 6), namely, these arguments assume that a text we recognize as literary must be characterized by some kind of underlying coherence, no matter what chaos exists at the surface. Furthermore, consistent with the unwillingness to accept a "broken" or inconsistent text is the unwillingness to accept a poet who may be encumbered by the same kind of moral/political baggage as his contemporaries; thus, it is no coincidence that the readings produced by the bricolage approach save for us the convergence of carnivalesque wit and humane sensibilities.

¹⁵ I find an interesting parallel to this dialogism of modes in Lott's discussion of the mixed musical modes of blackface minstrelsy (1995: 171–86). Relying on the work of Richard Middleton (1983, 1986), Lott distinguishes between "musematic" repetition in music (roughly equivalent to a stylized, nonrepresentational literary style) and "discursive" repetition, which lends itself more to the expression of narrative (roughly equivalent to a representational literary mode). Lott emphasizes, as I do in the Plautine case, that there is no essential connection of slave culture with one kind of style (the musematic in his example, the farcical in mine). What is important in both Plautine comedy and early nineteenth-century blackface minstrelsy is that the mixture of styles allows a member of the audience to see two possible sites for identification, without having to decide finally which represents the self and which the other.

¹⁶ Examples of the most extreme naturalistic plays are *Captivi*, *Rudens*, *Aulularia*, and *Trinummus*. Examples of the most extreme farcical plays are *Pseudolus*, *Casina*, *Bacchides*, and *Miles Gloriosus*.

¹⁷ Wiles' (1991) analysis of Menander serves as an excellent reminder of the subtlety and complexity of naturalism. Wiles characterizes Menandrian theater as the use of idealized, conventional character types (masks) to express ethical and philosophical principles. It is not that Menander is blind to the artificiality of his creations but that the dichotomy between reality and artifice is so useful to him that he strengthens it rather than challenges it, as Plautus does. See esp. 1991: 225.

the plot forward are often extremely improbable. But these improbabilities are clothed in the garb of everyday life. This mode presents itself as somehow “truer” than real life, as if we are seeing the workings of both social life and divine will, without the distracting minutiae of life as lived. The plot device of recognition (*anagnorisis*) is virtually constitutive of this kind of comedy and perfectly expresses its worldview: in these comedies we find out in the end that the identities we took seriously were merely optical illusions, caused by the flux of appearances, and the real identities remained all the time hidden beneath this veneer. Resolutions in this mode have a profound and permanent effect on the characters’ lives: families are reunited and marriages contracted. The language and dramatic style of this mode further emphasize this possibility of stripping away the distracting details of life that prevent us from perceiving the truth. The style of naturalistic comedy calls attention to the content of the plays rather than to the play itself, again with the sense that this elegant and self-effacing language is truer to the fundamental truths of life, even though it is, in the narrow sense, “unrealistic.”¹⁸ The overall effect of this mode is to make the dramatic illusion as powerful as possible, as if we are spying on the characters through a one-way mirror, rather than watching a play scripted by an author and performed by actors.

The second mode, which I will call the farcical mode, both in its stylized language and in its frequent rupture of the dramatic illusion, draws attention to the theatrical artifice itself, undermining any attempt to focus on a transcendent meaning of the play.¹⁹ In this mode, form triumphs over content: the reader and the spectator are regaled by a stream of patterned language, slapstick bits, and stereotyped characters—all leading exactly nowhere, in dramatic terms. Just as the recognition scene revealed the idealizing mode’s attitude toward truth, in the farcical mode trickery is given pride of place. This plot device presumes that the confusions of life are neither created nor dispelled by divine workings but by the tendentious and half-baked schemes of individuals. In sharp contrast to the resolutions of the naturalistic mode, those of the farcical mode never change anything fundamental to the characters’ situation: the trick is revealed, but the clever

¹⁸ Wiles (1991: 223–24) on Menander: “The actual words efface themselves, throwing attention on the *legomena*, the ‘what-is-said.’ Every trace of the actor’s body is effaced, beneath mask, cloak and tights. Body-language is never remarkable in itself, but draws attention to the situation represented. Concealed behind the figures physically represented on stage is deemed to be an *ethos*.” Cf. again Fraenkel (1922: 413 = 1960: 390–91).

¹⁹ Wiles (1991: 225). Grimal (1975b: 151): “Plaute est parfaitement conscient des limites de cette prétendue vérité dont se soucient les poètes comiques grecs. Il préfère, pour lui, le *ludus* barbare, qui pénètre plus avant dans le réel, en surmontant, même si pour cela, il est nécessaire de bousculer les conventions de la pseudo-vérité.” This is true, but it ignores such Plautine plays as the *Captivi* and *Trinummus* that not only show a preference for “pseudo-vérité” but also manage to overturn the nonteleological conventions of farce.

slave remains a slave, looking forward to another round of trickery without consequences. This literary mode is obviously more fantastic than the other, relying on elaborate language and disguise tricks, and yet in its willingness to leave loose ends untied, it could be seen as more realistic; or at least, it is more faithful to a vision of reality that sees the details of life as the real thing, not as static that is clouding the picture of the real, underlying pattern. And yet, this mode continually reminds us of the play's status as an artifact, created by an author and embedded in a system of literary conventions, both through the emphasis on "artificial" language and dramatic construction and through the sometimes explicit identification of the playwright with the clever trickster.

The difference between these two literary modes is partially obscured in the plays because they share a common impulse toward rebellion. Both forms of comedy tend to privilege youth over age and freedom over constraint, a property of comedy that Northrop Frye (1957) elevated to its defining characteristic. But this similarity masks a much more important difference. In the naturalistic form of comedy, whether instantiated in the romantic plot type or the plot type of the misanthrope (comedy of humors), this rebellion is in the service of a more humane, more flexible, happier society. The young lovers overcome the narrow-mindedness of their parents, or the miser is taught the value of generosity to point the way towards a better life, what Frye calls "paradigmatic freedom" (1957: 169). In the farcical mode, on the other hand, the rebellion is its own justification. Far from being justified by humane values, farcical trickery is a mockery of these values. Many of the fathers who are hoodwinked in Plautine comedy are not oppressive tyrants, and most of the young lovers are almost anonymous in their lack of a distinctive personality. The interest in the deception comedies falls primarily on the scheming slave, who is motivated neither by love nor by a desire to correct the flaws of the misanthrope but by a sheer desire for fun. Thus even in their common impulse to overturn the authority of the *paterfamilias*, the two modes of comedy clearly differentiate themselves.

The difference in the two kinds of rebellion gives us a way to characterize the differing moral/ideological stances of the two modes. The moral perspective associated with naturalistic comedy affirms the real contemporary social code by exalting those who exhibit the virtues of nobility, generosity, piety. This perspective constructs a form of authority based on these virtues and on behavior that is self-assured, honest, and proof of an inborn nobility.²⁰ As with this mode's attitude towards plot and style, its moral perspective is a better version of real life (a version in which people really observe

²⁰ Whether this nobility of character coincides with nobility of birth is a charged issue that is usually avoided by a plot twist. For an extensive discussion of this problem, see below, chap. 5, on the *Captivi*.

the moral laws they claim to value) but does not replace the values of real life with a new and different set of values. Because this mode presents itself as a disinterested mirror of reality rather than merely the poet's idiosyncratic view, the moral values it champions take on the status of transcendent, uncreated truth. To take the example of *anagnorisis*, this mode's defining plot device: we are left at the end of recognition plays believing that wrongs have been righted, mistakes corrected, by a divine force that will always prevail; these plays draw our attention away from the long time when everyone was living in error, treating a freeborn girl as a slave and focus instead on the moment of realignment with the underlying, persistent truth. Therefore, it would not be too much to say that these plays perform the function of hegemonic discourse: they make the world around us seem to be the one that is destined by divine (or superhuman, at least) will. There is a benevolent Providence, these plays say, that operates reliably to correct human error, and if that is so, then the way things are must be the way they ought to be.

Opposed to this moral perspective is that of farce, which reverses normal hierarchies through the fantasy of the slave as hero. This perspective reverses the identities of those in power and even exalts virtues exactly opposed to those exalted by the idealizing perspective. Duplicity, aggressiveness, and boldness win the day.²¹ This inverted authority is fundamentally linked to the fictive world of poetry. First, the cleverness of the hero, and his pride in the power of his bare-faced lies, is explicitly compared by Plautus to the inventiveness of the poet.²² Furthermore, just as the first type of authority is sanctioned by the audience's everyday experience, the second type is sanctioned by the familiar fictive world presented in this conventional body of comedy.²³ Even more telling, these plots undermine the naturalness or inevitableness of contemporary social structures by showing everything to be contingent, the result of accumulated choices and actions. Although the subversiveness is limited by the slave hero's ultimate failure to challenge his status, this mode does contain the germ of a genuinely subversive idea, as if the trickery plots are written from the perspective of a sharp-eyed and unsentimental subordinate who sees the claims of hegemony for what they are: the attempt on the part of the dominant to pretend

²¹ Chiarini (1979: 54, 61, *passim*), Petrone (1977: 19–20), and Anderson (1993: 88–106) have very good analyses of the concept of *malitia* as the ruling principle of Plautine antimoralism.

²² Slater (1985) gives ample evidence and a thorough description of this pattern.

²³ Wright (1974: 47–48, 105–6) on the existence of clever slaves in other authors of Roman comedy; Fraenkel (1922: 231–50 = 1960: 223–41) on the clever slave as the distinctively Roman contribution. Contra: Spranger (1984). Slater's (1985) emphasis on the concept of comic heroism and its use of the theater (rather than real life) as the implicit referent of "life" in Plautus is the best analysis of this phenomenon.

that their domination is the nature of things, not an edifice that has been constructed and is always in need of maintenance.

I have described these modes as each would be if it alone controlled any given play; but in order to read Plautine comedy as we have it, we have to understand the way the two modes work in a dialogic interaction. Although the relation is not always polemical, each mode does consistently present itself in response to the other, highlighting the differences in dramatic style and worldview that separate them. An aesthetic that seeks rather than avoids inconsistency in tone, style, characterization, and plot, and that organizes plays by reference more to language than to content, calls for a new kind of interpretive methodology. The principles of literary interpretation usually employed to describe and analyze Roman literature, especially when we assume the primacy of content and the author's desire to convey a transcribable meaning, will not alone suffice for a full treatment of Plautine comedy. These principles will take us most of the way towards an understanding of those plays in which the naturalistic mode predominates. But even in these cases they must be augmented by principles derived from a dialogic aesthetic. For the most farcical plays, which are close to being incomprehensible if we use only the values of naturalistic theater, the principles of a criticism based on a division of style from content will offer a more effective point of departure.

First, the division of style from content means that individual elements of Plautine comedy—everything from characterization to a way of phrasing a question—are influenced more powerfully by the system of comic convention than by any content-based meaning of the play itself. Precisely because, as Wright demonstrates, the genre of *comoedia palliata* is so stylistically uniform, we must see stylistic choices as growing out of a relationship to other texts rather than out of a relationship to the thematic content of the play itself. The conventionality of Plautine comedy continually reminds the audience of the artificiality of the play they are watching by emphasizing that the play is a text reflecting other texts. This stance rejects any attempt to pretend that the characters are real or that their words have any indissoluble link to their essences. It emphasizes the artifice of the characters (by reminding the audience of other plays) and the manipulability of their language (by divorcing their words from any attempt to express an individual essence).

As a result, while each play has its own constellation of motifs (both substantive and stylistic), an individual play cannot be fully understood without reference to the corpus as a whole. The practical consequence for methodology requires the reader to read “horizontally” across the corpus, in addition to reading each play as a unit. Only by cataloging the repeated instances of a particular plot situation, character type, or speech pattern can we recover the artistic context within which each of Plautus' literary

decisions was made. Bettini's comprehensive study of Plautine plots has shown the truth of this assertion at the level of the action in the plays and in the distribution of functions among the character types.²⁴

Of these "horizontal" aspects in each play, perhaps the most important are the plot types, patterns of situations that help the audience orient itself with reference to the characters and expected outcomes of each play. Usually the very first scene of each play offers enough clues to the spectator or reader familiar with the genre to define the heroes, the villains, the major lines of the action, and the outcome. If this is so, it is equally obvious that suspense is not among the pleasures that Plautus offers his audience. In place of suspense, we get the pleasure of experiencing an extremely subtle teasing, as the author capriciously alternates between fulfilling and disappointing our expectations. The clarity of the system of conventions and the obviousness with which these conventions are invoked allow Plautus the capability of joining two seemingly incompatible plot lines (plot lines, for example, that identify opposed characters as the heroes).²⁵

Further, because these plays adhere so strictly to a limited set of conventions, the audience gains a deep and precise knowledge of the fictive world represented in Plautine comedy. Since the interaction between the two types of authority depends in part on the normalcy of the slave's power in farce, the stronger the audience's impression of the workings of this world, the more effective the slave's authority. Again and again we see the same pattern of actions that create and support the clever slave in his power. Thus, this body of comedy makes the audience automatically use a set of assumptions about what is likely and what is unlikely that is the exact opposite of the set of assumptions they would use in everyday life.

The second methodological implication of this aesthetic is that it requires us to explore the text's social meaning in ways that do not rely on authorial argument or opinion. If Plautus constructs plays on the basis of the opportunities they offer for the juxtaposition of contradictory literary and moral outlooks, we cannot expect that these plays will offer consistent judgments or opinions. But just because these plays were not intended as social commentary does not mean that we should ignore the evidence they

²⁴ Bettini (1982). These functions in turn have great effect on the surface details of the particular play. For example, a plot aimed at the tricking of a rival or a pimp will always stress a linear trajectory, in which the trickery is not rescinded at the end but is permanent. Plots that involve tricking a father, on the other hand, stress a conciliatory conclusion in which the trick is forgiven and order restored.

²⁵ Konstan (1983) provides the best example of how rich an analysis can come from perceiving the interaction of two (or more) traditional plot lines. See esp. his readings of *Asinaria* *Cistellaria*. The only way I would disagree with these readings is to argue that these shifts need not add up to one meaningful whole but might result in plays that have no center. See below my treatment of the *Casina*, chap. 3.

give us of social life. The view of Plautine comedy as a crowded house may seem to imply that it has a liberating effect, since it allows a point of view that critiques naturalized social structures to take a place beside the point of view that performs that naturalizing. I suggest that this dialogue does chip away at authority's claim to be natural and uncreated, but, in part because the dominant themselves are among the beneficiaries of this effect, it does not really undermine authority in any substantial way.²⁶ In the next section I will describe more fully how the specifically Roman form of authority works, especially what use it makes of comedy and what use comedy makes of it. What I offer here is not a social historian's reading of Plautus; it is a literary reading that analyzes the effect of social forces in this system of comic forms and, I hope, opens up new ways for Roman historians and historians of slavery to make use of these texts.

POWERFUL PLEASURES

It is not always the case that pleasure . . . entirely
coincides with ideological intention; it has an
underestimated ability to take its captives in wayward
political directions . . .

—Eric Lott, *Love and Theft*

The link between the literary dialogue of comic modes that I have described above and the social effects of comedy can be seen most clearly if we focus on understanding the pleasures that Plautine comedy offered its audience. First we should define to whose desires these pleasures catered. Because these plays were performed at publicly funded religious festivals, it is difficult to categorize them as the self-expression of those who were normally without a voice in Roman public life.²⁷ It is much more likely that

²⁶ This shows, contrary to Bakhtin's own sense, that dialogism is compatible with the maintenance of authority, what Lott (1995: 146) calls the "less than liberatory effects" of grotesque realism. I will show here that Plautine comedy gives an example of dialogic openness as part of an ongoing successful domination and therefore that dialogism is not necessarily connected to a more humane social practice. In view of Bakhtin's overall optimism/denial (Morson and Emerson [1990: 470]), it should not surprise us that he did not emphasize this possibility.

²⁷ Since Plautine comedy was both traditional and public entertainment, and since it was funded by the aediles, I think it improbable that it expressed viewpoints at odds with those accepted as mainstream. As for the possibility that it voiced the viewpoint of slaves in some allegorical way, we must ask whether these servile viewpoints were intended to be understood by the nonservile members of the audience or not. In the first case, if masters are intended to feel the sting of these barbs, then we have to ask, again, why the free population as a whole would continue to fund and attend such performances (and clamor for more) if they were insulted by them. If the airing of slaves' viewpoints is not intended to be understood by anyone other than slaves, why would slaves choose a public performance, where the majority of the audience is made up of nonslaves, for their literary expression of solidarity? The com-

they formed part of what the political theorist James Scott has called “the public transcript” (1990), those actions and words that dominant and subordinate groups use when they are together. By definition, this public transcript expresses the dominant’s view of their own domination; the contribution of subordinates to this transcript is circumscribed by the imperative that the transcript as a whole preserve a view of the existing social order as both natural and just. The theatrical metaphor that Scott uses is helpful (though, for our purposes we need to keep it separate from what is actually going on in dramatic comedy): “The dominant never control the stage absolutely, but their wishes normally prevail. In the short run, it is in the interest of the subordinate to produce a more or less credible performance, speaking the lines and making the gestures he knows are expected of him. The result is that the public transcript is—barring a crisis—systematically skewed in the direction of the libretto, the discourse, represented by the dominant” (1990: 4). I am emphasizing the logic for thinking of Plautine comedy as part of the public transcript because it gives a firm basis for arguing that it is the desires of the dominant in Roman society, rather than those of subordinates, that exert the primary force shaping these plays.

The next step is to ask in what did the pleasures of Plautine comedy consist. Following Eric Lott’s (1995) arguments about the pleasures that blackface minstrelsy offered to white, Northern, working-class audiences, we should be wary of explanations that imagine masterly audiences to be completely in control of the comic fantasies that entertained them. Lott’s argument about minstrelsy situates the forces militating against ideological control in tensions surrounding race, class, and sexuality. For the nineteenth-century Northern urban audiences he is studying, these axes of hierarchized difference are embedded within a culture that placed great value on the egalitarian and individualistic principles of democracy and capitalism. For the Plautine audience, on the other hand, such axes are embedded within a fundamentally hierarchical and authoritarian culture, a culture that never shrank from explicitly ranking people and assigning unequal rights and responsibilities. Roman society is fractured by divisions within divisions within divisions, each one marking out difference as well as marking out a hierarchical relation. These mutually complicating divisions include gender, juridical status, census rank, geographical provenance,

parison with fables, for which this kind of argument has been made (Bradley [1987: 150–53], Hopkins [1993]) only strengthens my point with respect to Plautine comedy, because fables are the ideal literary form to be passed around within the slave community without ever having to be performed before a mixed audience. Also, for all these arguments, we must ask how not just Plautus but all the authors of this traditional form of comedy (since both Wright and Fraenkel argue that the clever slave is endemic to the tradition) came to be so familiar with the viewpoints of slaves and so sympathetic to it. Did Naevius and Caecilius also take a turn at that mill?

wealth, and cultural/intellectual achievement.²⁸ Furthermore, each of these bases of assigning social value does not divide the Romans into “haves” and “have nots” but establishes a finely calibrated scale on which each person is placed above some and below others. The result was that the ranking of each person in Rome was extremely open and unapologetic but could never be fixed in anything more than a relative and ad hoc way, since the multiple scales on which value was measured could very well be in conflict.²⁹ Just as important as this complex pattern of hierarchy is the dynamic quality of it. Because status could be defined in so many different ways and because status was so important in the functioning of Roman society, the contesting of status, the continual battle to define and assert oneself in preference to others, was a defining feature of Roman life. In such a society (almost) no one is permanently and universally subordinated and (almost) no one is permanently and universally dominant.³⁰ Thus the audience of a Plautine comedy is not made up of “masters” per se but of spectators, each of whom enjoys and struggles against a contradictory cluster of privileges and obligations made concrete in a variety of relationships defined both upwards and downwards. When analyzing what such spectators might want from comedy, we should take account of their fears and vulnerabilities as much as of their powers and self-confidence.

The clever slave in comedy serves as a talisman against anxieties having to do specifically with slavery but also, more broadly, against the anxieties

²⁸ The prologue to the *Poenulus* (esp. 17–35) has been seen as particularly rich evidence for the range of social statuses represented in the Plautine audience (Slater [1992], Moore [1995: 114–17]), but even the kinds of labels this prologue encourages us to use (e.g., slave, matron) are oversimplifying, because each individual audience member occupied a variety of different positions in relation to domination in his or her daily life. See now Fitzgerald (2000) for a reading of this prologue that pays close attention to the ways it expresses an implicit decorum of appetites that separates the free from slaves and that connects this decorum to the paradox of repression and freedom that is key to the use of slaves in comedy.

²⁹ Nicolet (1980: 343–44): “The whole structure of Roman civic life was pervaded and organized by the differential system. Citizens were classified in terms of a civic hierarchy which did not precisely coincide with the spontaneous social hierarchies, nor was it wholly distinct from them.” See also Nicolet’s insightful description of the census as the backbone of this system, since it assures those ranked that they are full Roman citizens and at the same time enforces clear-cut distinctions among the citizens (1980: 49–50, 57–60).

³⁰ This raises the possibility that we should compare Roman slavery not only to the slave systems of the New World but also to other slave systems that, like the Roman, are embedded in more generalized systems of hierarchy rather than within a capitalist democracy. Cooper’s (1977) study makes explicit the differences between the East African plantation system and those in the New World. In particular, he emphasizes the personalization of power and the fact that the allowances and prohibitions that structured slaves’ everyday lives were fundamentally shaped by the surrounding social context (1977: 241–42). Cooper’s astute treatment of this topic frees him from the dichotomy of generosity/harsh treatment in assessing the actions of the slave owners in such a personalized society, a dichotomy that is singularly unproductive.

that arose from the constant need to jockey for position in the many minutely gradated hierarchies that ordered Roman society. The clever slave presents a character who is specifically marked with the attributes of slavery and yet stands in for all those who are actually or potentially subordinated to others (in other words, the whole audience). This heroic character, then, slides back and forth between being a figure of difference for the majority of the audience and a figure of sameness, a site for sympathetic identification. It should be clear that my understanding of this social effect stands in stark contrast to the widely accepted “safety-valve” theory of comic rebellion,³¹ that is, that fictive rebellion is permitted by the dominant as a way of bleeding off the pressure of resentment among the subordinated (especially slaves and sons). I am arguing that since everyone is subordinated in some sense, the desire to participate imaginatively in staged rebellion does not divide the audience (say, between masters and slaves or between fathers and sons) but unifies it. Furthermore, the doubleness of the comic slave himself, his ability to be seen as both “different” and “same,” allows this figure to allay each audience member’s anxieties about his/her relations downward in hierarchical scales (distancing oneself from the clever slave as different, as a charming but ultimately infantile trickster) and upward (identifying with the clever slave as same, as a smart subordinate who sees through the pretensions of those who claim superiority).

Nor is the use of the slave to effect the conjoining of these two audience responses coincidental. Since comedy is part of Rome’s “public transcript,” it makes sense that the citizen population used this opportunity both to reassert their difference from slaves (and, in doing so, reaffirm the essential meaninglessness of slave resistance) and to enjoy under the cover of this very difference the pleasures of liberatory release (without ever having to admit that they, not just their slaves, were in need of such release). In order to see masters taking pleasure in the clever slaves’ antics, of course, we

³¹ For Plautus, see esp. Segal (1987). Parker (1989) provides a variant on the safety-valve theory that brings his argument close to mine here, by positing that the son’s improper desires to rebel against the father go unpunished because they are routed through the anarchic clever slave: “The audience can identify with the young man, who is allowed to step outside of the power of his father, even to make the Oedipal wish for his father’s death, yet incurs no guilt and is reunited in the proper order of family and property. That guilt is displaced onto the slave, who satisfies the son’s anarchic and libidinous desires, yet is always controlled by the threat of punishment, but remains unpunished. Power is mocked but mollified. Desire is satisfied, but without cost. The wish for rebellion is indulged, but the fear of rebellion is pacified.” Two primary differences between my argument and Parker’s are that I want to stress the potential to be subordinated that everyone in the audience feels (including even a *paterfamilias*) and that I see no reason to posit the *adulescens* (always the least interesting character in any Plautine play) as the site of identification (we can easily do without this bland middleman and see that it is the slave himself with whom the audience identifies).

must believe that it is possible for them to identify across the boundary of status with slaves rather than assume that they will always identify with the fictive masters onstage. Although this kind of cross-identification might seem counterintuitive, perhaps we tend to dismiss this possibility precisely because our intuition has been shaped by Roman masters' own loudly voiced denials. It is an important element of the accepted self-presentation of masters that they would never identify with slaves and that they themselves have no need of the liberatory release that comic rebellion provides. Thus the clever slave allows masters to mask, from themselves and others, their investment in fictive rebellion, since this figure also so clearly fulfills the requirements of a comic safety valve operated at the will of the authoritative to placate the powerless.³²

Slavery, although it represents just part of the continuum of domination, offers an attractive choice for the dramatic presentation of the audience's broader anxieties about subordination for several reasons. First, the slave's social role as an instrument of the master's will makes him or her the perfect choice for a dramatic embodiment of the fantasies of the free population as a whole. The objectification that is fundamental to the use of a person as an instrument easily extends itself into the use of a fictional character as a screen onto which fantasies are projected.³³ Thus the success of the comic slave as a talisman both depends on and, in turn, supports the social practice of treating slaves as instruments and objects.

But the slave's status as a subject is just as important for the dramatic uses of slavery as his or her status as an object. One of the most powerful reasons for putting the relationship between master and slave on center stage to stand in for all relationships of domination is that slavery poses in an extreme form the problem that competing subjectivities create for the effective practice of domination. The crux of slavery is that slaves become useful only when they can combine two contradictory attributes: being as much as possible as extension of the master's persona and yet exercising judgment and skills of their own.³⁴ In other words, a slave who can merely

³² Scott (1990: 67, *passim*) on elite as consumers of their own fictions of authority. See also Clover (1987) for an argument about identification across gender lines in slasher films, where the femaleness of the person endangered on the screen allows the male spectator to experience this vulnerability but also to shield from himself his investment in it.

³³ See now Fitzgerald's (2000) suggestive readings and analyses of slavery in Latin literature, in which he explores a wide range of functions performed by literary slaves, including this kind of imaginative projection.

³⁴ This idea finds somewhat different expression in Finley's concept of the "ambiguity of slavery" (1980: 93–122), i.e., that the slave was a human being and yet was denied recognition as such. He writes (1980: 99–100): "I cannot discover that, apart from individual exceptions (and they are extremely rare in the available documentation) awareness of this ambiguity produced doubts or guilt-feelings in the master-class. . . . No guilt-feelings were called for,

carry out explicit orders is useless, and a slave who goes his or her own way is useless. This paradox of slavery finds concise expression in Varro's formulation of the slave as an *instrumentum vocale*, a speaking tool,³⁵ a formulation that expresses both the slave's instrumentality and his or her persistent subjectivity. But this subjectivity that is so useful also provides a platform from which the slave can perceive his or her own interests to be different from the master's interest. It is the unresolved subjectivity of the slave, and the difficulties it poses for the practice of domination, that provides the impetus behind the audience's desire for this particular vision of freedom and the substance of that freedom.

In order to analyze the ways that comedy and mastery support each other, we need to start by looking more closely at the practice of mastery at Rome. Just as slavery is only part of a continuum of domination, mastery itself fits into a continuum of practices of authority or, in Latin, *auctoritas*. Karl Galinsky, writing about a later period, has called *auctoritas* "a quintessentially Roman and therefore untranslatable term . . ." (1996: 12) and has described it in language that emphasizes its intersubjective, noninstitutional and dynamic attributes: "*Auctoritas* is something that is not granted by statute but by the esteem of one's fellow citizens. It is acquired less by inheritance, although belonging to an influential family or group is accompanied by some degree of *auctoritas*, than by an individual's superior record of judgment and achievement. Again, *auctoritas* is not static but keeps increasing . . . by continual activity of the kind that merits and validates one's *auctoritas*" (1996: 14). In other words, the socially and politically dominant Romans may be born into a presumption of authority, but they must each as individuals realize this authority by constructing and maintaining it in action every day.

This personalized form of power fundamentally differentiates Rome from those societies (such as modern Western capitalist democracies) in which power is routed through more abstract institutions such as bureaucracy and wage labor. Galinsky is right in differentiating Roman *auctoritas* from a sheer exercise of coercive power, since *auctoritas* consists above all in the idea that the subordinate's will is in compliance, not just his or her actions. But even if this kind of authority bases itself on subordinates' acceptance/acquiescence, it does so not out of any egalitarian impulse but

only the endless complexities and refinements of juristic analysis arising from the ambiguity of the institution." I would just add that these "endless complexities and refinements" were not confined to juristic analysis but were required in every area of the master's life.

³⁵ Varro, *de Re Rustica* I.17.1; cf. Aristotle, *Politics* 1253b, who elaborates further on the intertwining of subjectivity and instrumentality by imagining slaves as intermediaries between the master and the physical tools by which work gets done; in fact, he writes, if tools could do the work themselves (as Daedalus' and Hephaistos' robots could), then slaves would be unnecessary.

because this view of power recognizes the subjectivity of subordinates and so sees that true authority consists in the subordinate's assent to the power of the dominant.³⁶ For this reason, it is important that we acknowledge the fundamental ways that this kind of authority is different and resist the temptation to grade it as more or less humane, more or less cruel than the impersonal kind of authority that is familiar to later Western societies.³⁷ In a regime of this kind of personalized power, mastery is made up of a series of specific, concrete events in which subordinates express their acceptance of the master's will. The master must be always on the lookout for ways to impose his or her subjective viewpoint on the slave and to protect his or her subjectivity from the contrary imposition.³⁸ Although this struggle to impose one's view on another without being imposed upon is fundamental to all domination, Roman culture, with its constitutive emphases on hierarchy and personalized power, made this kind of impermeable sovereign self both more desirable and more obviously unattainable.

Slavery holds a central place in such a system of personalized power, since in the abstract at least, it can be seen as the exercise of almost pure authority: the slave must carry out the master's orders, put the master's interest before his or her own, without compensation or consideration, just because the slave is a slave. Furthermore, one of the central tenets of mastery is that the slave should not just obey the individual commands of the master but should have accepted the master's point of view so fully that the slave can anticipate the master's wishes and make the master's will

³⁶ Cicero, *Pro Caecina* 51–52: “What law, what decree of the senate, what edict of the magistrates, what pact or agreement or even, if I may speak of civil law, what will, what judgments or stipulations or formulae of agreement and contract could not be weakened and pulled apart, if we wanted to twist the substance to suit the words and leave unaccounted for the intentions, reasoning and *auctoritas* of those who wrote the document? By god, everyday household language will make nonsense, if we try to pounce on each other's words (*si verba inter nos aucupabimur*); ultimately there would be no household authority (*imperium domesticum*) if we allowed our slaves to obey us in accordance with our words, and not comply with what can be understood from the words.”

³⁷ Bourdieu (1990: 122–34) on the modes of domination in precapitalist societies where economic relations are carried out not through objectified institutions but through euphemized social intercourse (1990: 126): “Because the pre-capitalist economy cannot count on the implacable, hidden violence of objective mechanisms which enable the dominant to limit themselves to reproduction strategies (often purely negative ones), it resorts to forms of domination which may strike the modern observer as more brutal, more primitive, more barbarous, and at the same time as gentler, more humane, more respectful of persons.” Cf. Cooper's historical analysis of East African slavery (see above, note 30).

³⁸ Scott (1990: 10–11) uses Orwell's essay “Shooting an Elephant” as an example of how subordinates' subjectivity might be imposed on the dominant. Orwell writes: “A sahib has got to act like a sahib; he has got to appear resolute, to know his own mind and do definite things. . . . And my whole life, every white man's life in the East, was one long struggle not to be laughed at.”

effective in the world in ways that the master might not even have consciously desired.³⁹

Thus successful mastery would confer on the master a mark of unquestionable prestige, the mark of someone who was constantly up to the difficult task of making others conform to his or her will and whose power in the world was multiplied by being able to act through others. Conversely, however, the very difficulty of constantly imposing one's will and getting others to accept it means that, in practice, slavery was conducted not by exercising pure authority but by offering slaves a variety of overt and covert forms of compensation in return for good service and obedient behavior. It should be obvious that although slaves can make mastery labor intensive, by obeying the letter but not the spirit of the master's injunctions and thus forcing the master to offer compensation in return for more enthusiastic participation, this small pressure that slaves can exert will nearly disappear in the face of the overwhelming social and economic advantages of slaveholding. The key word in the previous sentence is "nearly": this form of resistance will never break down the institution of slavery, will never even make an individual slaveholder give up on the system that offers to him or her so many satisfactions, but it does constitute a thorn in the master's side, by undermining the absoluteness of masterly authority. This kind of resistance can do no more than unremittingly demonstrate the separate, unresolved, unassimilable subjectivity of the slave, but even that tiny defiance troubles the master precisely because the slave's separate subjectivity is both the reason for slavery and the chink in its armor.

A concrete example will clarify this important point. Scholars of slavery at Rome and in other cultures have recognized the importance of manumission and other rewards as instruments by which the master could motivate and control a slave. A prominent and strongly stated version of this argument in regard to Roman slavery has been made by Keith Bradley (see esp. [1987: 81–112], [1994: 154–65]). He argues that Roman masters held out the promise of eventual manumission and other rewards in exchange for loyal, obedient, and trouble-free service. Certainly this must be right. But even when masters could get slaves to accept the deal, they opened themselves to the possible interpretation that the slaves' obligations were owed only in exchange for these rewards, thus undermining the essential point of slavery that differentiates it from wage labor: the absoluteness of the slave's obligation. For this reason, the promise of manumission, or even

³⁹ See Cicero quotation, above, note 36; also the importance of slaves as agents in Roman law rests on exactly this kind of understanding of slavery, that the master need not supervise every decision a slave business agent makes as long as the slave is trusted to act in ways that are consistent with the master's wishes. The corollary of this is that trusted slaves were granted an enormous amount of responsibility and "freedom."

the actual giving of other smaller rewards, is not an end to the master's problems but always opens a new round of negotiations, starting with new offers and counter-offers that each party will in turn try to redefine in its own favor.⁴⁰ This is not to overstate the slave's power in this situation by imagining that he or she is an equal partner and can make demands that must be met. On the contrary, the atmosphere of these negotiations is always conditioned by the master's ultimate authority; the master can refuse to agree or can even renege on previous commitments. But we should recall that if the master's power were as absolute as these last alternatives imply, he or she would not need to make the original promises of rewards in the first place. And, while it is true that masters always have the threat of (sanctioned) physical punishment to back them up, so do slaves have the threat of (unsanctioned) physical retaliation. Even in the Republic, when masters did not have before their eyes such enlightening examples as Pedanius Secundus and Larcus Macedo,⁴¹ the implications of angering their slaves cannot have been lost on them.

Thus the Roman form of personalized authority produces a form of domination that can be extremely effective in its repressive aims but is also very labor intensive for the dominant. Although slavery embodies this kind of authority in an extreme way, we can also see it in operation in all the many hierarchical relations of Roman life. It would not be surprising, then, that the audience of a Plautine comedy looked for release from the labor of mastering those below them, especially slaves, but also others in various hierarchical relations. Further, when we recall that each member of this audience is not simply either "dominant" or "subordinate" but stands on both sides of domination in various relationships to others, it also makes sense that they would enjoy a release from the labor of fending off the impositions of those above them. With this in mind, we can ask again the question with which I started this section: What pleasures does Plautine comedy offer to such an audience?

Each of the two comic modes offers something to each audience member, and the interaction of the two maximizes these enjoyments while limiting the liabilities. Farcical comedy offers the chance to identify with someone whose low juridical status does not prevent him from controlling

⁴⁰ Scott (1990: 70–107) examines the role of hegemonic discourse in encouraging the compliance of subordinates and in (against the intention of the dominant) offering subordinates concessions with which to stake a claim. He writes, "The plasticity of any would-be hegemonic ideology which must, by definition, make a claim to serve the real interests of subordinate groups, provides antagonists with political resources in the form of political claims that are legitimized by the ideology" (1990: 95).

⁴¹ Two senators killed by their slaves; on Pedanius Secundus, see Tacitus, *Annales* XIV.42–45; on Larcus Macedo, see Pliny, *Letters* III.14. On these and other possible cases of masters killed by slaves, see Bradley (1994: 112–13).

those around him and, more important, who can see through all the pretensions and high-minded claims of justice and right. But this fantasy is always limited by the fact that the social order reasserts itself in the end: the master regains control, even if he demonstrates that control by pardoning the slave. Conversely, the naturalistic mode reassures the audience members that their control over others is as it should be and is safe from any irresponsible challenges. But this mode itself is often enlivened by the cynicism and rebellion that trickery can offer. This understanding of the coexistence of two very different modes of comedy can explain the popularity of Plautus and the role that his comedies played in Roman dramatic festivals. This doubled form of comedy presented a mixed form of heroism with which people in very different social positions could identify while at the same time ensuring that the potentially subversive element of farce was leavened by the more conservative element of naturalistic comedy.

This description of Plautus can also explain the centrality of the clever slave as the canonical hero, a figure who provided a wellspring of subversive energy. The defining characteristic of slaves in Plautus is their attitude toward the meaningfulness of masterly rhetoric. Most readers would agree that there are two easily distinguished types of slave in Plautus.⁴² The first is “the good slave,” a slave who accepts the masterly structure of rewards and punishments; that is, he believes that the master will adhere to the structure as set out and even that these rewards and punishments are meaningfully related to, and anchored by, an abstract moral scheme of good and bad.⁴³ Obvious examples of this type of slave include Messenio in the *Menaechmi*, Grumio in the *Mostellaria*, and Sceledrus in the *Miles Gloriosus*. The second type of slave is, of course, the *servus callidus*, the “clever slave,” who is defined not just by disobedience but, more accurately, by his disbelief in the master’s rhetoric. Slaves like Pseudolus, Tranio (in the *Mostellaria*), and Epidicus seem to believe that the master might actually punish them (or reward them if they could choose to be good), so the important point is not that they dismiss the reality of the rewards and punishments in

⁴² Spranger (1984: 22–26, 39, 115, *passim*) distinguishes between good slaves and clever slaves and believes that both, while exaggerated in comedy, reflect real slaves. Stace (1968: 72–73) unquestioningly accepts the masters’ point of view when he asserts that the good slaves were more realistic. Although Bradley argues more carefully, he ends up agreeing with the idea that rebellious comic slaves are a fantasy, and good slaves are realistic. He takes the view that the clever slaves in Plautus reflect the master-class assumption that slaves are deceptive, lazy, greedy, etc. (1987: 28–30). In reference to good slaves’ loyalty and fear of punishment, he writes, “Once all allowance is made for comic exaggeration and irony in the plays which provide the material, it seems inconceivable that they are not grounded on true servile fear of slave-owners . . .” (1987: 136; see also 1987: 38–39).

⁴³ Spranger (1984: 26): “Dieser [sc. the good slave] betrachtet sich selbst mit den Augen seines Herrn und mißt seine Tugenden mit den Wertmaßstäben des Freien, die er unbedenklich als die richtigen Normen anerkennt.”

themselves but that they refuse to take these as meaningful in the master's structure of meaning. For example, physical pain is only part of the effect of whipping intended by the master; what whipping is supposed to accomplish is branding the slave with marks of shame and dishonor that go far deeper than the scars on the skin. Indeed, much modern scholarship about slavery has focused precisely on this kind of consistent degradation as the ultimate source of masterly control.⁴⁴ But when we think of the clever slave's attitude towards whipping, it is exactly this degradation that is missing. The clever slave may not relish the actual pain involved in whipping but refuses to see this physical act as depriving him of honor. In fact, the most consistent attitude expressed towards whipping by clever slaves is to talk about their scars as a mark of honor.⁴⁵

If the primary characteristic defining comic slaves is the degree to which they accept the master's view of mastery, this is the point where we should look for the source of comic pleasures. It is the ability to be free from another's subjectivity that is embodied in the clever slave and other heroes of Plautine comedy. The clever slaves of comedy are unburdened by the master's view of the world in a way that real masters hope to be but can never be, unburdened by the slave's view of the world, since in practice masters must always act in the knowledge of potential slave resistance. This freedom from another's viewpoint inside our own heads is the miraculous freedom with which the clever slave is endowed. What makes this freedom so powerful and so attractive is that it goes far beyond the juridical freedom that we might think of as the opposite of slavery. It embodies rather the illusion that anyone can be free from others' subjectivity (in Bakhtin's terms, that anyone can be truly monologic). This kind of freedom is desired and unattainable in almost any society. But Roman society, in which both hierarchy and personalized authority were at an extreme, would recognize even more acutely the desire and the impossibility of locking our doors against others and "being just one person."⁴⁶

Thus we can explain the slave-master relations in Plautine comedy as the conjunction of two pictures: the good slave embodies the view that masters would like slaves to have of slavery, and the clever slave embodies the view that masters themselves would like to have of their own lives. But

⁴⁴ E.g., Patterson (1982). For this argument in the context of the Roman household, see Saller (1944: 133–53).

⁴⁵ E.g., *As* 545–77; *Bac* 1055–57; *Per* 20–23 (this example specifically makes use of the language of civic and military honors to describe slaving at the mill), 264, 268–71; *Ps* 1325; for more examples of this phenomenon, see Segal (1987: 143–54).

⁴⁶ My explanation of the clever slave makes him a complementary opposite to the gladiator, as that figure has been explicated by Barton (1993: 12–25, *passim*). The clever slave offers his audience the illusion of an absolutely unencumbered subjectivity through rebellion, while the gladiator similarly elevates his subjectivity, but through submission.

although comedy provides these two complementary pictures, it cannot prevent them from complicating each other. First, the hero of the play, the person we can most easily identify with, is also the person against whom masters—if they were only or even primarily masters—would have to identify themselves. The clever slave is not only ideologically defined against the worldview of mastery, but he is much more obviously dramatically defined against the master in each individual play, especially the canonical clever slave comedies, like *Pseudolus*, *Mostellaria*, or *Miles Gloriosus*. Plautine comedy's moral/ideological discontinuity offers to the audience the pleasures gained from identifying with two contradictory forces. It is not an illusion that these plays seem to both exalt and undermine rebellion, to both deify and infantilize the clever slave. Nor must we choose one of the impulses (either the exaltation or the dismissiveness) as primary, defining the other as a negligible side effect. The conjunction of these two contrary impulses is the source of Plautine comic pleasure.⁴⁷

But there is even a further complication. In many of the plays, including the four I will be examining in detail, the hero is not literally a clever slave but a master who invades the territory of the trickster and steals all the best lines.⁴⁸ These plays, then, push to an extreme the logic implicit in the other plays; in these plays, the master not only notionally identifies with the clever slave but becomes a clever slave himself. It is fundamental to this logic that when the master usurps the power of the clever slave, the uses to which he puts this power are the uses of domination. That is, when the master fantasizes about locking out the meanings others have given to social actions, the fantasy is one of effortless domination.

And yet there is another attribute of this miraculous power that has decisive importance for the ways that the plots of actual plays are organized. Although the emphasis in Plautine comedy is on the clever slave as a site of liberatory release, this emphasis does not exclude its counterpoint: the pleasures that the dominant might take in temporarily experiencing the

⁴⁷ Lott (1995: 153) describes the violence in minstrelsy perpetrated against black women by black men in similar terms: "The violence against black women vicariously experienced but also summarily performed; the spectacle of black male power hugely portrayed, but also ridiculed and finally appropriated. Just as the attacker and the victim are expressions of the same psyche in nightmares, so were they expressions of the same spectator in minstrelsy." Lott cites the work of Carol Clover (1987) as fundamental to this analysis.

⁴⁸ This is not so clearly the case in the *Persa* as in the other three. In the *Persa* there is a double switch: the usual clever slave who offers a site for masterly identification has been made into a master who retains all the qualities of a clever slave. The presence of the two contrary identifications in a single character is enough to show how clearly this play is related to the scheme I outline here, but the ways that this somewhat unusual instance gets worked out will become clear in the full analysis offered in chap. 4.

demeaning life of the subordinate.⁴⁹ The point of audience identification with the clever slave, then, depends on both his lowliness and his triumph over that lowliness. When a master takes on the role of hero in these comedies, he must define himself as, in some way, subordinated or at least constrained “normally,” that is, outside the fictive frame of the play. This is particularly challenging when the hero is a *paterfamilias* “rebellious” against his own dependents, but even there it is possible.

THE ART OF AUTHORITY

The art of authority in Plautine comedy is the skill that allows a hero to negotiate the tightrope between dominating and being dominated, between the degradation of slavery and the wearying labor of mastery. It is the art of managing two incompatible literary styles in order to possess the authority that masters have in real life and the authority that slaves have in comedy. Further, we can see Plautine comedy itself, with its ability to both disarm rebellion and appropriate it for masters, as an art of authority, though it will never be so successful in soothing masters’ anxieties that it does away with the need for its services.

The explanation I have given above of the sources of comic pleasure for masters should make it clear that both the literary mode that replicates the authoritative structures of real life, and the literary mode that reverses those structures, have pleasures to offer masters. We can see the good slave as the product of the naturalistic mode and the clever slave as the product of the farcical mode. Although these two modes envision the relation between comedy and real life very differently, together they create a complementarity that allows for the kind of dual identification for which I have argued above. There is no essential or necessary connection between the naturalistic mode and the master’s voice or between the farcical mode and the slave’s voice. If we assumed such connections, we would be back in the trap of believing that masters are so completely defined by their mastery that they

⁴⁹ Clover (1987: 220) argues, for the slasher film, that the identification of male viewers with females on the screen is fueled by “the willingness and even eagerness . . . of the male viewer to throw in his emotional lot, if only temporarily, with not only a woman but a woman in fear and pain. . . .” Barton (1993) places great emphasis on the cultural and psychological operations of inversion, and the paradoxical disruption and proliferation of the categories in which these operations are grounded, as a way of understanding the “sorrows of the ancient Romans.” Stallybrass and White (1986: 191) in reference to later European manifestations of the carnivalesque: “But disgust always bears the imprint of desire. These low domains, apparently expelled as ‘Other’, return as the object of nostalgia, longing, fascination.” However, unlike the high literature (Jonson, Pope and others) that Stallybrass and White are analyzing, Plautine comedy is not written from a vantage point outside the popular cultural forms that it uses.

can have no imaginative stake in rebellion, or believing that when we see slaves in comedy rebel, we are witnessing the *cri de coeur* of an oppressed population. Both the literary perspective that accepts contemporary social structures as natural and the literary perspective that allows us to see the world upside down are useful to masters, but both also attest the masters' need to bolster their own morale.

The four readings offered in this study aim at an explication of the related literary and sociological aspects of each play. Such literary and social dialogues pervade the entire corpus of Plautus, but we can obtain a precise grasp of how this dialogue works only in the close study of specific plays. I have chosen these plays, the *Menaechmi*, *Casina*, *Persa*, and *Captivi*, for three reasons. First of all, they are spread out over the spectrum that Plautine comedy offers. These four plays differ from each other in ways that are illustrative of the variety of the corpus as a whole. For example, the *Menaechmi* and *Casina* illustrate Plautus' comic vision of the household and the tensions that pervade it, while the *Persa* and *Captivi* are more civic, bringing to the fore the differences between citizens and outsiders. On the other hand, in treatment, the naturalistic mode of comedy dominates the *Menaechmi* and *Captivi*, while the other pair (*Casina* and *Persa*) gives two extreme examples of the farcical mode. Precisely because I am arguing that the divergent comedies of Plautus can be seen as products of a single aesthetic, I have not favored any single type of play but have attempted to engage with the full range of the corpus.

The second reason for choosing these particular plays is that each of them makes use of the plot devices that express the perspectives of the two comic modes: the trickery, which is central to the farcical mode, and the recognition of (previously mistaken) identity, which is central to the naturalistic mode. In particular, the hero in each of these plays offers a variation on the standard slave trickster. In the *Menaechmi*, the Syracusan twin inadvertently plays the part; in the *Casina*, this function is shared between a freeborn husband and wife, with the help of their own slaves; in the *Persa*, Toxilus, unlike all other clever slaves, schemes in his own interest; and in the *Captivi*, two *adulescentes* act the part of comic slaves in order to assert their true liberality. Each of these plays also contains either a real recognition scene or a parodic reflex of one. An analysis of how the canonical elements of each mode are combined in these plays will offer a way of making concrete the dialogue between modes.

My third reason for choosing these plays is a corollary of the second: because of the particular way that the two comic modes interact in these plays and the particular oddities of the tricksters, these plays offer insight into the ways that characters other than slaves try to lay claim to the subversive energy of rebellion. We will see embodied in the heroes of these plays the audience's own contradictory desire to be a clever, cynical subordinate

while remaining an authority figure whose power is morally justified. None of these heroes remains completely in one camp or the other, unambiguously identified as either rebellious or authoritative; it is the very blurriness of their relations to the kinds of authority constructed by the naturalistic and farcical modes that makes these figures both powerful dramatic presences and useful test cases for my theory of comic pleasures.

Further, the methodology of my analysis has also influenced the organization of the chapters that follow. Because it is the ongoing dialogue between the two modes that endows these heroes with their particular powers, not a teleological dramatic structure where we can read the play's literary and ideological orientation from its outcome, it will be especially important in the following chapters to chart the progress of the play from scene to scene, to pay attention to the false starts, wrong turns, and dead ends that characterize Plautus' loose plotting. Therefore, a major part of each chapter will be a linear analysis that describes the effect of the play as it unfolds in time, like music; this analysis will describe the language and dramatic structures at each point in the play, in reference both to the specific forces at work in the individual play and to the broader horizon of expectations created by the system of comic convention. Each chapter will then be rounded out by a concluding section in which the particular thematic structures of the play are summed up and considered against the backdrop of Plautine comedy as a whole, especially focusing on the operation of the character types in articulating these themes.

The *Menaechmi* lies squarely in the familiar tradition of comedies of mistaken identity. Twin brothers, one who is a native to the town in which the play is set and one who is a visitor, spend the day unintentionally living each other's lives. But this play also engages the plot device of trickery by having the visiting brother (without malice) trick his twin out of money and a girl. In other words, the twin motif is a way of naturalizing and softening the plot device of trickery, since in this case the trickster did not set out to create a deceptive appearance but was born with it and only partially realizes its power.

This play shows most clearly the links between the tiring labor of mastery and the master's desire to become a clever slave. Epidamnian Menaechmus, the native brother, is depicted as a weak-willed and beleaguered man just looking to escape from the strictures of his life, while his brother, Syracusan Menaechmus, proves to be clear headed and secure in his identity as master. The weaker brother has a style of mastery that requires him to bribe his dependents for their loyalty and inevitably opens him to the dangers of such mastery. As I argued above, this way of rewarding and punishing dependents can never settle the question of mastery but only opens a new round of negotiations. The Syracusan brother, on the other

hand, shows a masterful control of his slave, who obeys him not for rewards but simply because he is master. Furthermore, as he helps himself to the good things his brother has arranged for his own delectation and as he manages to avoid the consequences, the Syracusan twin makes use of the techniques and language that, in other plays, constitute the resources of the clever slave. As hero of this play, he combines within himself the highest degree of masterly authority and of “slavish” cleverness. Through his skillful use of the art of authority, and through the final recognition scene, even his bumbling brother gets to take part in this triumphant release from the burdens of mastery.

In the *Casina*, the element of farce becomes so prominent that the continuity and transcribable meaning of the play are greatly diminished. The inroads that the farcical aesthetic has made into romantic comedy are demonstrated explicitly in the prologue, where Plautus makes a point of telling us that he has written out of this play of young love and *anagnorisis* the young lovers and the recognition scene, leaving only the buffoonery of an old man in love. Because of this violent restructuring, the *Casina* shows very clearly the differences between the two modes that make up Plautine comedy. One of the most important effects of the shift from a naturalistic paradigm, ending in marriage, to a farcical one, ending only in the revelation of the trick, is that it brings to our attention the differing temporal structures of these two types of comedy. When a son rebels, this rebellion is implicitly understood to mark the inevitable succession of generations; that is, the son must eventually resist his father’s authority in order to grow up and become a father himself. So plays that make central the rebellion of the son, rather than that of the slave, end with a glance toward the future, usually represented through the marriage of the young lovers. On the other hand, because a slave will never grow out of slavery, slaves’ rebellion cannot lead anywhere. So plays that emphasize the slave’s rebellion will end with a scene that restores us to the situation at the beginning of the play. The peculiarities of the *Casina*, especially its story line that encompasses young love, recognition, and marriage without any of these being represented onstage, derive from its telling a romantic, idealizing story through the means of a farcical plot.

This play, like the *Menaechmi*, ends with a hero who can claim to be both the master and the clever slave. The *paterfamilias* who rebels here mistakenly crosses over the border allowed by comedy, when he uses his real-life household authority to bring about his subversive release from such authority. Rather than relying on the authority he gains from being a rebel, he forces his wife and slaves still to treat him with deference. The result is that he (temporarily) loses his identification as hero, and his wife becomes the clever trickster for the central part of the play. But in the final scene the *senex amator*, who has been beaten, ridiculed, and hoodwinked,

reasserts his priority not by asserting his rights as master but by assimilating himself to the clever slave. His ingenious wife, who has devised and carried out a plot worthy of Pseudolus, is thus implicitly put into the position of master, as she pardons her husband's wrongs and accepts his promise not to act up again. Again, a master has shaken off the burdens of his mastery by taking on the clever slave's ability to ignore the degradation others see in his actions.

In the final two plays, the *Persa* and *Captivi*, the relation between the two modes is more polemical, and each play exhibits an extreme form of one mode's dominance. These two plays are also more extreme examples of the Plautine aesthetic in that each uses the separability of content from form to undermine the credibility of the opposing mode. The *Persa* pulls off a nasty, subversive trick with the language and plot elements of civic-minded romantic comedy, and the *Captivi* asserts the ethical values of the naturalistic mode through a disguise trick performed by a clever slave. These two plays also complement each other in terms of the strategies by which they turn fictive slaves to the desires of the audience. The *Persa* reveals what fictions result from an extreme view of the slave as an instrument, and the *Captivi* reveals what fictions result from an extreme view of the slave as a subject.

In the *Persa*, even more than in the *Casina*, the domination of the farcical mode engenders a discontinuity of tone and action. This discontinuity in turn destroys any attempt to derive a transcribable meaning from what is essentially a series of almost vaudevillian tableaux. The prominence of the farcical mode in the *Persa* is signaled early in the play, when we realize that the clever slave is also the lover and that characters of the demimonde constitute the entire cast. But it is important for the dialogism of this genre that this is not merely a farcical play without any elements of naturalism or morality. The elements of the opposing mode are parodied in a brilliant twist. The trickery of this play, superficially aimed at tricking a *leno* so that the clever lover does not have to pay for his girlfriend, involves a play within a play that manipulates the most revered aspects of the naturalistic mode, including the recognition of a freeborn girl unjustly enslaved, the defense of civic virtue, and the bonds of gratitude that unite true *amici*.

Of the two aspects of slavery that motivate the invention of the clever slave, instrumentality and subjectivity, the logic of this play is emphatically based on the former. Since the slave is defined as an extension of the master's personality, in the fantasies of comedy, he or she can accomplish not only the liberating work of rebellion for the master but also the authoritative work of shoring up civic and domestic hierarchies. The view of the slave as an instrument creates the strategy that most readers find so striking in this play: that the main character is both a clever slave and a young lover. This conflation of the comic types of *servus callidus* and *adulescens* serves

instrumentally as an avenger against the pimp who violates civic values (values that a slave *qua* slave could have no stake in) and as a stand-in master against whom the resistance of slaves can be portrayed more explicitly than usual. In keeping with the fact that Toxilus' slave is bolder in his back talk than other fictive slaves, Toxilus is also harsher and more explicit in his domination than other fictive masters. The *Persa*, then, shows a somewhat different side of the clever slave, emphasizing his ability to help maintain hierarchies rather than his ability to offer release from social constraints.

The fourth and final play to be analyzed here is the antithesis of the *Persa* not only in theatrical style but also in the idea of the slave as a subject, not as an instrument. The *Captivi* makes use of the confusion of identities between two *adulescentes*, one who knows himself to be free (though temporarily enslaved) and the other who thinks he is a slave by birth, to comment on the natural and cultural sources of virtue. The character Tyndarus, stolen at age three and raised as a slave, represents the elusive harmony of honor and obedience, of loyalty and self-assurance that defines masters' dreams of the perfect slave. He is disobedient, but only in saving the life of his master; he has a sense of honor, but it requires him to die for his master rather than to escape slavery. Tyndarus, then, gets to enjoy all the naughty pleasures of trickery (and thereby the pleasures of unencumbered subjectivity); but his trickery also defends in the strongest terms the possibility (indeed, necessity) of good, obedient slaves.

But even this most high minded of Plautine plays does not excuse itself from the dialogic struggle of naturalistic theater and farce. By structuring its main character as a rehabilitated version of a clever slave, the *Captivi* defines both its difference from these amoral tricksters and its superiority to them. Without indulging in the kind of explicit metatheatrical exhibition characteristic of the *Pseudolus*, for example, this play discredits the rambling antics of slave farce that go round and round only to end up back at the beginning. It does this in two ways, by transforming the paradigm of slave trickery into one that leads to an important result (instead of falling into the void) and by showing the typically comic stereotype of the parasite as not just greedy but in fact a bumbler. The *Captivi*'s ethical message about the nature of virtue, its ideological imagery of slavery and freedom, and its literary polemic against the emptiness of farce reinforce each other and illustrate the complex relations between literary values and moral values in this dialogic form of comedy.