

Joseph Conlon

Plautus' *Persa*

INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARY

Studia Comica



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Joseph Conlon

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Introduction

Of the more commonly read and popular plays of Plautus, some English commentaries have aged gracefully, such as Lindsay's 1900 commentary on the *Captivi*, which, while dated in certain respects, is still serviceable and is the best commentary available on the play in English; a few plays have received excellent treatment in English in more recent times, such as Christenson's 2003 commentary on the *Amphitruo* and Gratwick's 1993 commentary on the *Menaechmi*; still other plays have only basic student editions available, such as the *Rudens*, a masterpiece which deserves a much more thorough commentary than Fay's 1969 edition offers, and the *Curculio* and the *Mostellaria* as well; finally, there are a number of plays (including the *Stichus*, *Trinummus*, and the *Persa*) which have no commentary in English at all.

This situation is less than ideal for many reasons, but especially since the existence and accessibility of commentaries often play a large role in guiding what students read and what scholars study. This is compounded by the fact that the plays of Plautus themselves are often less accessible already because of their linguistic distance from the Classical Latin of Cicero, Vergil, and others. Some of Plautus' 20 surviving plays are admittedly less interesting than others, but each play is certainly worthy of study and, at the very least, of being made accessible to a broader audience of readers.

The *Persa* of Plautus has received little scholarly attention. Aside from a handful of articles and a few passing remarks in monographs about other plays or aspects of Plautus or Roman comedy, the only commentaries on the play are: Woytek (1982, German), Ammendola (1922, Italian), Ussing (1886, Latin), Operarius (1679, Latin), and Lambinus (1577, Latin). The present work on the *Persa* is the first commentary and, more generally, the first full-length treatment of the play in English. The introduction attempts (1) to show why all previous commentaries in other languages fail to meet the needs and address the interests of modern readers and scholars of Plautus, (2) to demonstrate that the *Persa* has been neglected unjustly and that the play merits attentive reading just as much as the more popular comedies of Plautus, and (3), to outline the main issues of the play and the main interests of the commentary which follows. The commentary itself performs all of the basic work that one would expect: collecting comparanda, explaining difficult and corrupt passages, providing necessary cultural and historical context, etc. In addition, it places particular emphasis on explaining Plautus' language (especially alliteration, proverbs, etymology, the relationship between the colloquial and literary registers of Latin, word choice, and parallels with modern European languages), the staging of the drama, and the development of the characters and their relationships. The goal throughout is to render the play more accessible to a wider audience of readers.

There are three issues which immediately draw the modern reader of Plautus to the *Persa*: the cast composed almost entirely of slaves; the uniqueness of the character of the *virgo*; and the issues of race and cultural identity which seem to be announced in the title of the play. The lack of modern scholarly attention given to the *Persa* is perhaps an accidental result of earlier distaste for the first of these aspects, the cast composed of slaves and social degenerates. But it is precisely this aspect of the *Persa* that makes it so interesting for modern readers. The unique presentation of slaves in the play will be one of the main focuses of this commentary and is outlined in more detail in the second part of the introduction. The sympathetic portrayal of the eloquent and intelligent *virgo*, which is largely without parallel in other Roman comedies, will also interest modern readers and will be handled in more detail in the introduction and the body of the commentary itself. Conversely, the issue of race and cultural identity, which at first would seem central to the *Persa*, will not receive the same attention, because, as will be seen, the play never delves deeply into these questions and deals mostly in clichés and stereotypes.

The first section of the introduction will provide a brief overview of modern work on the *Persa* and scholarship on Plautus more generally before outlining the reasons that the *Persa* stands in need of a commentary in English. The second section will introduce in detail the interests and scope of the commentary which follows.

I. Why a new commentary on the *Persa*?

1. The *Persa* and Wilamowitz

Modern scholarship on the *Persa* might be said to start with Camerarius. In 1558 he wrote in his introduction to the *Persa*: “argumentum fabulae est exile, amationis servilis, et iocosum ac plausible in lenonis circumventionem.”¹ The mild praise and lukewarm judgement of the plot are considered by some to be responsible for the general lack of interest in the *Persa* to this day.² Ritschl, who edited much of Plautus and ushered in a new standard of philological accuracy in Plautine studies, offered in 1851 an equally lukewarm opinion: while some parts of the play are “nur für das grösste Publikum berechnet,” Ritschl admits that it has a “sehr natürlichen, gleichmäßigen Fluß” and that it is composed “einfach und gewandt.”³ But it is Wilamowitz’ 1893 treatment of the *Persa* in his *de tribus carminibus latinis commentatio* that most influenced the course of subsequent scholarship. This piece sets out what was to become the central problem of scholarly interest in the *Persa* (the date of the Greek original) and simultaneously condemns the value of the play as a work of art. Although he was later able to see the play in a more positive light,⁴ his original judgement exerted much force on later appraisals. Many scholars blindly mimicked his disapproval, while others, such as Gurlitt, responded to Wilamowitz violently in the opposite direction, singing high the praises of the *Persa*.⁵ The judgement of the *Persa* ultimately stabilized over the course of the 20th century, but Wilamowitz’ concern for Greek originals behind the *Persa* and especially the dating of these originals has persisted much longer than his judgement of the quality of the play. In many respects, establishing the date of the lost Greek original has become the main point of discussion of most scholarly attention paid to the *Persa*.

2. From Wilamowitz to Woytek

At the beginning of his treatment of the *Persa*, Wilamowitz writes of his approach to Plautus that “Plautum multo plura exemplis suis debere quam plerique crediderant,” and that scholars who think otherwise are simply “eximia ac vere Latina sermonis et argutiarum arte decepti.”⁶ Setting aside all other potential interest in the play by claiming it to be “vitiis suis iam magis memorabilem quam virtutibus

¹ Camerarius 720.

² E.g., Woytek 9.

³ Ritschl 2, 748f, quoted by Woytek 9.

⁴ Wilamowitz 1925.

⁵ Gurlitt 1921. See also Woytek 10–11.

⁶ Wilamowitz 13.

futuram” and along the way criticizing the “infantiam artis in conectendis scaenis,”⁷ Wilamowitz devotes all of his energies to establishing the date of the Greek original of the *Persa*. He concludes: “argumentum nobis unum est....cetera omnia eo consilio disputata sunt, ut Demosthenicae aetati graecam comoediam a Plauto expressam convenire appareat.”⁸

The advances made in scholarship on the *Persa* between *de tribus carminibus latinis commentatio* and Woytek's commentary are few.⁹ In 1894 Friedrich Hüffner proposed a date of 312 against Wilamowitz' 338, but Friedrich Leo's approval for Wilamowitz' thesis in 1895 sealed the question. The early 20th century saw sporadic continuation of this debate with little innovation or advancement.¹⁰ Ammendola's commentary appeared in 1922, and in 1957 Müller wrote his dissertation *Das Original des plautinischen Persa*, in which he argued that the original was written in Athens in the 3rd century by an emulator of Menander.

Although Woytek's commentary appeared in 1982, it often reads as if it had been published almost a century earlier, perhaps a few years after Wilamowitz' *de tribus carminibus latinis commentatio* in 1893, or at least in the first quarter of the 20th century. The reason for this is that Woytek is centrally and primarily concerned with the question of the Greek original and presents his entire commentary as a solution to this problem. He announces this focus immediately in his preface: “Als das zentrale Problem, das der *Persa* der Plautusphilologie aufgibt, muß seit nunmehr bald neunzig Jahren die Datierung des griechischen Originals angesprochen werden. Seitdem Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf im Jahre 1893 das Stück kategorisch der griechischen Mittleren Komödie zuwies, blieb die Diskussion über diese Frage stets im Flusse, und das Problem kann auch heute noch nicht als endgültig geklärt angesehen werden. So setzte auch meine Beschäftigung mit diesem Punkte an, wobei ich davon ausging, daß eine genaue Untersuchung des Stückes selbst zu einer verlässlicheren Datierung führen sollte als sie aufgrund historischer Spekulation möglich war.”¹¹

So Woytek believes that a detailed commentary on the play and a close comparison with other works of Plautus will yield an answer to this century-old question. Woytek produces a new text of the play and provides a commentary and apparatus to explain his decisions and to investigate the question of the Greek

⁷ Wilamowitz 15, 22.

⁸ Wilamowitz 26. Cf. also his famous formulation: “scripta enim est superstite Persarum regno fabula, in qua Timarchides Atheniensis expeditioni interest a rege Persarum susceptae, et *Persa* puellam ex Arabia raptam Athenis vendit. quae quod non re vera facta sunt, sed a Toxilo servo finguntur, ad hanc rem omnino non pertinet. finguntur enim quia fieri tunc poterant.”

⁹ See Woytek 13–15 for a more detailed survey of the contributions from 1893 to 1980.

¹⁰ Including minor contributions from M. Meyer (1907), W. Suess (1910), P. Legrand (1910), H. Prescott (1916), Gurlitt (1921), G. Jachmann (1931).

¹¹ Woytek 5.

original, and then in his introduction to the commentary he offers his conclusions and answers. The new text which he produces rather liberally reattributes speaking roles, questions and reverses textual decisions of Lindsay and Ritschl, and even restores an old lacuna and posits a new one. Goldberg is unhappy with many of these textual changes, and attributes them to the fact that Woytek “forgets that the *Persa* is a play and obstructs our view of the dramatic forest with disproportionate attention to the philological trees.”¹² I largely agree with Goldberg’s claim; the changes that Woytek proposes will be dealt with in detail in the commentary. Some of them are thought-provoking, but few if any contribute to his overall argument about the dating of the Greek original.

After discussing Wilamowitz’ dating scheme and the critical response to it, as well as providing an outline of the plot, structure, and characters of the *Persa*, Woytek presents the backbone of his critical stance in a section entitled “*Persa* und *Asinaria*: Die Zeit des *Persa*originals.”¹³ Woytek rightly sees many parallels and almost identical aspects in the specifics of the plots of the two plays, e.g., the fact that in both plays the girl is purchased with stolen or misappropriated money (in the *Persa* with money from a sale of cattle, in the *Asinaria* with that of asses),¹⁴ or that the money in both plays is referred to by metonymy with the names of the animals themselves,¹⁵ or that both plays end in similar “Foppszenen.”¹⁶ But beyond a few specific instances of similarity, Woytek speaks rather impressionistically of “der ganz ähnliche Geist” of the two plays and says that “die aus den beiden Stücken zu abstrahierende Weltsicht der Autoren auf das engste verwandt ist.”¹⁷ This impression of similarity leads him to posit that the Greek originals of both plays must have been written by the same author. He emphatically denies that the similarities could be attributed to the preference, style, or artistic choices of Plautus,¹⁸ claiming that in those plays of Plautus of which the author of the Greek original is known, the “mark of the original poet’s personality” is clearly felt.¹⁹ Making once again

¹² Goldberg 249.

¹³ Woytek 65–79.

¹⁴ Woytek 67.

¹⁵ Woytek 67–8.

¹⁶ Woytek 72.

¹⁷ Woytek 69.

¹⁸ He claims “daß diese Tatsache nicht auf die Wirksamkeit des römischen Bearbeiters zurückgeführt werden darf,” (69).

¹⁹ “Trotz der mit der Umformung durch eine so starke und ausgeprägte Persönlichkeit naturgemäß verbundenen nivellierenden Effekte wird die spezifische Eigenart jedes einzelnen Autors, sei sie auch nur an gelegentlich hervorblitzenden Einzelzügen zu erkennen, nicht völlig verschüttet, tragen beispielsweise nach Menander gearbeitete Stücke in freilich unterschiedlichem Grade an Deutlichkeit immer noch den Stempel seiner Persönlichkeit, der eine Verwechslung etwa mit den auf Philemon zurückgehenden Komödien ausschließt,” (69).

a somewhat fuzzy appeal to the “Übereinstimmung des Weltbildes, das im Persa und in der Asinaria deutlich wird,” he claims that the original Greek author of the *Persa* must be the Demophilus mentioned in the prologue of the *Asinaria* (11: *Demophilus scripsit, Maccus vortit barbare*).²⁰ Following Gurlitt, he suggests that “Die Dominanz des Materiellen über das Emotionelle” is a “Kennzeichen” for the comedies of Demophilus, and proceeds to find evidence of this in the actions of the main characters of the two plays.²¹ He says, for example, that neither the *Persa* nor the *Asinaria* presents as ideal “eine sentimentale Liebesbeziehung.”²² The world of both plays is “grundsätzlich völlig unsentimental” and displays absolutely no “Selbstlosigkeit des Menschen in seinen Handlungen.”²³ The presentation of authority is also similar: parental authority is “ungebrochen und wird mit allem Nachdruck ausgeübt,” while the authority of masters over slaves is always undermined.²⁴ A few other examples of similarity are brought forth, but in sum Woytek claims that the *Weltsicht* of the author of the two plays displays “keine wesentlichen Unterschiede,” and adds: “Das Weltverständnis beider Autoren ist durchaus materialistisch, der Gefühlswelt gegenüber bewußt skeptisch, ja feindlich; das Verhalten der Menschen zueinander sehen beide Dichter, dem Tenor der Stücke nach zu schließen, vom brutal und kompromißlos ausgeübten Recht des jeweils Stärkeren bestimmt.”²⁵ He is ready to admit that the *Gewichtigkeit* and the *Beweiskraft* of the similarities between the two plays may seem unconvincing when the parallels are isolated, but remains convinced that, taken together, they point to the common origin of the two Greek originals.²⁶ Woytek then briefly analyzes a few surviving fragments of Greek comedy for style and content,²⁷ makes a few additional comments on Wilamowitz’ thesis, and draws his conclusion: “Wir sehen also den Persa als ein Produkt der späten Nea, geschrieben schon unter dem Einfluß niederer dramatischer Formen wie des Mimos, demgemäß auch durchaus *proche ancêtre de ce que sera plus tard la comédie italienne, avec ses Arlequin, ses Scapin, ses Pantomimes*.”²⁸

²⁰ Woytek 69.

²¹ Gurlitt 324 claims that Demophilus is “der zynischste von des Plautus Meistern.” See Woytek 69–70.

²² Woytek 70.

²³ Woytek 71.

²⁴ Woytek 71.

²⁵ Woytek 72.

²⁶ Woytek 73–4. He does however lightly qualify his assertion: “[das Nahverhältnis] auf Identität des Verfassers zurückgehen kann, aber nicht unbedingt muß.”

²⁷ This Woytek does in little more than two pages, 75–77.

²⁸ Woytek 79, quoting Ernout’s edition of the *Persa*.

3. Critique of Woytek

While in the preceding review of the methods, conceits, and conclusions of Woytek's commentary many of the inadequacies and anachronisms are immediately apparent, it will prove helpful to outline them directly. We will treat first the problems with his argument about the dating of the Greek original before addressing larger methodological issues, although the two are very much interrelated. As noted above, the heart of Woytek's critical work on the *Persa* comes in a 13-page section entitled "Persa und Asinaria: Die Zeit des Persaoriginals." His discussion of the two plays is interesting, and he carefully outlines all the parallels in plot, structure, and characterization, and even gives a few examples of similar jokes or diction. Nevertheless, too much weight in his argument is put on somewhat slippery similarities in the "Geist," "Weltsicht," "Weltverständnis," or "Gefühlswelt" of the plays or authors. And even if one were to rightly identify these similarities, the assertion that they must go back to a common Greek author is tenuous at best and assumes somewhat unbelievably that Plautus, even if one is to accept that he faithfully and purely preserved certain elements of his Greek models, could not have modified the "Geist" of his plays as he translated them in Latin and adapted them for Italian audiences. Goldberg addresses this problem succinctly: "It is axiomatic for the Plautine *Quellenforscher* that similarities perceived between, say, *Mercator* and *Trinummus* occur not because Plautus wrote them both, but because Philemon wrote their Greek originals."²⁹

The identification of the author of the Greek originals as Demophilus is also not without problems. In his commentary on the *Asinaria*, Bertini writes: "[de Demophilo] nihil aliunde comperire possumus."³⁰ Not only do no fragments of his comedies survive, but his only testimony is the prologue to the *Asinaria*.³¹ We know absolutely nothing about him, and Goldberg notes that Ritschl "actually banished Demophilus from literary history by emending [the reference in the *Asinaria*] to 'Diphilus.'"³² This is incredibly convenient for Woytek, and Goldberg rightly criticizes: "at best W. has brought the discussion of *Persa*'s original around to a faceless, dateless Greek poet."³³ It is certain, of course, that Woytek does not pull his argument out of thin air, as shown above, and he closely follows Gurlitt's

²⁹ Goldberg 250.

³⁰ Bertini 11.

³¹ Bertini 11–13; Goldberg 250.

³² Goldberg 250. But see also Bertini 12: "Ritschl ille, cum prius Demophilum in Diphilum corrigere voluisset, postea suam mutavit sententiam." Cf. also Marigo 534 (quoted Bertini 12): "è certo che il tentativo di correzione fatto dal Ritschl del v. 11 dell'*Asinaria* è errato e l'errore fu francamente confessato dal critico stesso che lo commise."

³³ Goldberg 250.

and ultimately Leo's assertions about Demophilus.³⁴ Goldberg's criticism nevertheless stands: although Woytek presents himself as a commentator whose methodology actively tries to avoid historical speculation in the dating of the Greek original,³⁵ he seems to have embraced a more radical form of literary speculation.

But perhaps the biggest methodological concern confronting a modern reader of Plautus is Woytek's rather strong resistance to giving Plautus credit for innovation as a poet and dramatic artist. This manifests itself most obviously in the far greater interest of the commentator in the lost Greek originals than the extant plays of Plautus. This leads Woytek to three critical mistakes:

- (1) Placing so much emphasis on the Greek originals and paying so much less attention to Plautus' own personality, style, and innovations leads Woytek to the false assumption that similarities in two or more plays of Plautus must go back to similarities in the Greek originals. This false assumption is present in much of Woytek's ideas about the *Persa* and ultimately leads him to posit a date and author for the *Persa* that, given our evidence, cannot be objectively corroborated, as seen above.
- (2) His interest in the philological comparison of discrete aspects of Plautus' plays with one another and with rather artificial generalizations about Greek comedy means that Woytek rarely pauses to look at the bigger picture and imagine what is happening on stage.³⁶ Indeed, Woytek's philological rigor is commendable, but it interferes with reading the *Persa* as a piece of dramatic art.
- (3) Woytek's singular focus means that other potential influences on Plautus, such as native traditions of farcical comedy in the Umbrian and Oscan speaking parts of southern Italy, or even Etruscan or Carthaginian influences, are overlooked or ignored. It also means that he spends very little time addressing other issues that are not only of interest to the general reader of Plautus but which also make us much better readers of his plays, such as slavery and race in the ancient world, the role of music, staging, and the audience in performance and scriptwriting, Plautus' presentation of himself as a creator and translator, and the metatheatrical and poetically self-conscious games Plautus likes to play in his productions. These concerns will also be addressed more thoroughly through this commentary.

³⁴ See above on Demophilus and Gurlitt. See also Bertini 12 on Leo's *Plautinische Forschungen*: "Fridericus autem Leo sectatorem quendam Menandri Demophilum fuisse iudicavit."

³⁵ Woytek 5, quoted above: "So setzte auch meine Beschäftigung mit diesem Punkte an, wobei ich davon ausging, daß eine genaue Untersuchung des Stückes selbst zu einer verlässlicheren Datierung führen sollte als sie aufgrund historischer Spekulation möglich war."

³⁶ Cf. Goldberg 249, quoted above: "He forgets that *Persa* is a play and obstructs our view of the dramatic forest with disproportionate attention to the philological trees."

4. Modern Plautine scholarship

The present commentary aspires to offer a fresh reading of the *Persa* in the context of a number of recent developments in Plautine scholarship. In the following, I provide a brief overview of the most influential sources of inspiration for this commentary's critical stance and interests. The influence of the works mentioned below will be apparent throughout the body of the commentary.

One of the most important moments in scholarship on Plautus in the 20th century is the appearance of Erich Segal's *Roman Laughter* in 1968.³⁷ This book approaches Plautus from an entirely different perspective than the big names of German scholarship on Plautus that most influence Woytek's commentary.³⁸ Segal is quick to point out that while these heavyweights of continental philology have made invaluable contributions in preparing the texts of Plautus, they have focused almost exclusively on his relationship to Greek New Comedy, while "no one has studied Plautus in relation to contemporary Roman culture or to the comic tradition."³⁹ Segal's premises are simple: (1) as the most successful dramatic poet of antiquity, as a "theatrical phenomenon," Plautus himself deserves careful study, and not just his relationship to Greek New Comedy;⁴⁰ (2) one cannot separate the comedies of Plautus from their performances and their relationship to the audience: "it is impossible to understand Plautine comedy without appreciating the context in which it was presented;"⁴¹ and (3), the primary context of the plays of Plautus is the holiday or festival, which Plautus took advantage of in order to invert (to use Segal's word) the "melancholic" norms of everyday Roman life (such as pietas, obedience, hard work, etc.) and provide a venue for a comedic form of Aristotelian catharsis. The generalizations that Segal makes about the typical Roman audience might seem a bit theoretically outmoded,⁴² and he may well both rely too much upon and misunderstand Freudian ideas,⁴³ but his work is a step in the right direction in Plautine studies: throughout, Segal pays Plautus his fair due, analyzing his plots, jokes, and dramatic techniques on their own terms, without reference to Greek originals, and is always interested in uncovering how the plays

³⁷ Segal's book, although published fourteen years earlier, is not mentioned in Woytek's commentary.

³⁸ i.e., Wilamowitz, Ritschl, Leo, and even Winkelmann.

³⁹ Segal viii.

⁴⁰ Segal 1–5.

⁴¹ Segal 7. See also vii: "Laughter is an affirmation of shared values.... Comedy always needs a context, a community, or at least a communal spirit."

⁴² In his review, O'Neil says that one should read the book and "everywhere...replace the word 'Roman' with 'aristocratic.'" The point being that it is dangerous to assume that the audience of popular comedy would have shared the same values and ideals of behavior as the aristocratic authors who attest these virtues.

⁴³ See Wiles.

functioned not only in the performative but also the social context of Republican Rome, as well as how Plautus artfully played with and inverted aspects of this social context through his dramatic technique and humor.⁴⁴

Another big moment in Plautine studies came just three years after Woytek's commentary with the publication of Niall Slater's *Plautus in Performance: The Theatre of the Mind* (1985). The book's approach and methodology are similar to Segal's (i.e., informed by the need to reappraise Plautus' artistry and innovations), but with a different topic and focus. Of the innovations that Plautus brings to the stage, Slater focuses on his extensive use of metatheater, which he defines as "theatre that demonstrates an awareness of its own theatricality," and argues that in particular clever slaves, long considered the main seat of Plautine originality, transcend the other stock characters and "demonstrate a self-awareness of the play as play and through this awareness demonstrate their own ability to control other characters in the play."⁴⁵ Slater suggests that Plautus' use of metatheater is actually closer to Old Comedy than New Comedy. New Comedy, Slater argues, had the more typical goal of theater: mimesis, or pure illusion. Old Comedy and the comedies of Plautus, on the other hand, contain non-illusory elements which break the fourth wall and draw the audience into the play.⁴⁶ These elements include the prologue, epilogue, monologue, the aside, eavesdropping, role-playing, the play-within-the-play, and improvisation.⁴⁷ Throughout, Plautus and his artistry are at the center of the argument; Greek comedy makes a minor appearance, but only to underscore Plautus' innovations and independence from his Greek models. The methodological approach of both Segal and Slater rests on the idea that before we try to reconstruct a (largely) lost genre, before even we can understand what Plautus can tell us about this genre, we first must read and understand the texts of Plautus themselves. With a solid understanding of Plautus, his work, motivations, goals, audience, and dramatic techniques, the philologist can then proceed to speculate on much firmer ground about Greek New Comedy.

Timothy Moore's book *The Theater of Plautus: Playing to the Audience* (1998) follows in the footsteps of both Segal and Slater. Through a close reading of six plays of Plautus, Moore analyzes the relationship between the performers and the audience.⁴⁸ Moore is aware that evidence for the original performance context of Plautus is difficult to interpret, that even big questions, such as whether or not the actors wore masks, remain controversial, and that "texts are woefully

⁴⁴ See Segal vii: "Moreover, the fact that ancient comedy was presented to an audience which constituted an entire citizenry suggests that laughter might at times even be a national gesture."

⁴⁵ Slater 14.

⁴⁶ Slater passim, sed vide praecipue 9–12.

⁴⁷ For the list and explanation, see 12–14.

⁴⁸ Moore 1.

inadequate substitutes for performance.”⁴⁹ Nevertheless, by focusing on “theatrical reminders and direct communication from stage to audience” (i.e., what Slater would call metatheater or non-illusory theater), elements which obviously shape the interactions between audience and the actors, he attempts to reconstruct this relationship.⁵⁰ In other words, while Slater points out where and when Plautine metatheater occurs, Moore explores how it happens, how it affects the experience of both performers and audience, and, perhaps most interestingly, “how [it] helps Plautus’ plays to succeed with his audience.”⁵¹ One very interesting way in which he advances the conversation about Plautus is his analysis of the instances in Plautus where the actors refer to the setting of the play.⁵² He comes to the conclusion that Plautus’ plays constantly remind the viewers that “the Greek setting is a product of theatrical pretense.” The implications of such an argument contradict many of the Plautine Quellenforscher who want to see Plautus as preserving more or less intact the purity of the Greek originals. Moore, in contrast, argues that the plays have been so thoroughly adapted to Roman taste and social reality that any references to Greece in Plautus’ plays are satirical, an assertion that is seemingly confirmed by much of the plot of the *Persa*.

It is in this tradition that David Christenson published his commentary on the *Amphitruo* two years later in 2000. This commentary presents a thoroughly modern reading of Plautus, especially in the section of his introduction entitled “The play’s the thing,” a thirty-page reading of how the *Amphitruo* achieves its dramatic and comic effect. Christenson’s reading testifies to obvious influence from Segal, Slater, and Moore: from Segal comes his sensitivity to the festival context in which the plays were performed,⁵³ and from Slater and Moore he derives his analysis of the metatheatrics of the “play within the play” in the *Amphitruo*.⁵⁴ The commentary itself sacrifices no philological rigor and offers extensive comparanda from Plautus and Latin and Greek literature. But Christenson never lets the technical details, such as scansion, textual variants, or difficult phraseology, obscure his view of the bigger questions and interests of modern Plautine scholarship outlined

⁴⁹ Moore 1.

⁵⁰ See Moore 2–4. Moore focuses his analyses on the elements which Slater identified, such as eavesdropping, monologues, etc.

⁵¹ Moore 4.

⁵² This is his third chapter, entitled “Greece or Rome?” 50–66.

⁵³ See, e.g., Christenson 33ff: “Plautus warmly embraced the festival license temporarily granting freer rein to the Roman populace’s social fantasies, and his plays are rife with social inversions, the slave’s outwitting of his master being one of the most common of these.” He then goes on to talk more about the dynamics of the festivals, the visibility of the nobility in the theater, and touches on the material aspects of the performance setting.

⁵⁴ *passim*, sed vide praesertim 25.

above, such as slavery, metatheater, social roles and context, dramatic technique, and Plautine innovation.

Since the turn of the millennium and the appearance of Christenson's commentary there have been many fresh contributions to various aspects of Plautine scholarship. Alison Sharrock's *Reading Roman Comedy* (2009), for example, builds upon Slater and analyzes the plays of Plautus and Terence as sophisticated and metapoetic literature, uncovering in Roman Comedy the origins of poetic principles more familiar to students of Augustan poetry, such as programmatic statements of poetics, programmatic language or catchphrases which announce a certain poetic stance, and intertextual readings. Roberta Stewart's 2012 book *Plautus and Roman Slavery* investigates what Plautus' plays reveal about how slavery functioned both economically and psychologically in Republican Rome. She isolates a handful of elements which exist in most systems of slavery (such as the act of buying and selling, violence and hazing, and gaining freedom) and uses scenes from Plautus to further our understanding of the dynamic which existed between masters and slaves in this period of Roman history. Michael Fontaine's *Funny Words in Plautus* (2010) gives a philologically rigorous analysis of traditionally misunderstood words and jokes in Plautus and in so doing puts our understanding of Plautine language in humor on a much firmer grounding. Timothy Moore's *Music in Roman Comedy* (2012) offers a thorough treatment of some of the most elusive elements of the art of Plautus: song, dance, rhythm, meter, and music. Since the cantica are generally understood to be a Plautine innovation,⁵⁵ and since a play like the *Persa* is over thirty percent cantica, Moore's book, as well as Cesare Questa's recent critical edition of all of the cantica of Plautus (1995), his book about the topic, *La metrica di Plauto e Terenzio* (2007), and Benjamin Fortson's *Language and Rhythm in Plautus* (2008), all provide the student of any play of Plautus with the necessary material to begin an analysis of one of the most difficult aspects of working with Plautus. Furthermore, when it comes to understanding the difficulties of Plautus' archaic language, one cannot underestimate the many contributions of Wolfgang de Melo. In addition to many articles about specific morphological phenomena in Plautus, his 2007 book *The Early Latin Verb System: Archaic Forms in Plautus, Terence, and Beyond*, while not without faults, casts new light on old problems and misunderstandings in basic morphological and syntactical difficulties in Plautus and Old Latin generally, such as sigmatic futures and infinitives, irregular subjunctives like *duim*, and the workings of the sequence of tenses. But perhaps his most impressive contribution is his 2011

⁵⁵ See, e.g., Christenson 24: "In the absence of any firm evidence as to the nature of Plautine music and singing techniques, and how these coloured individual scenes, we can only conceive of broad analogies with modern musical comedy or opera. We suspect but cannot prove that dance was also a regular feature of Plautine performance. At any rate, in their musical virtuosity alone Plautus' performances immediately distinguish themselves from the relatively quiet drama of a Menander or Terence."

five-volume Loeb edition of Plautus, which replaces the rather outmoded edition of Nixon. de Melo has an impressive command not only of the philological niceties of Old Latin morphology, but also of Plautine idiom and phraseology, producing translations that are much more respectful to the Latin than Nixon's. He not only provides the reader with a new, clean text and many helpful tools, such as a complete commentary on the Punic passages in the *Poenulus*, but also remains sensitive to modern directions in Plautine scholarship and generally does a good job of reading the plays as theatrical works.

5. Conclusion

I hope that the need for a new commentary on the *Persa* in English has become apparent from the preceding. Woytek's commentary has in many ways laid the foundation for work on the *Persa*, and the present commentary is throughout indebted to his work, especially in matters that he has treated thoroughly, such as the collection of parallel passages, analyses of the peculiarities of meter, and the history of emendations (especially by German philologists) for specific words and lines in the play. Much of this ground I have chosen not to repeat except where absolutely necessary, as Woytek's account of these matters is still entirely serviceable. But in many other aspects, although only slightly more than thirty years have passed since the appearance of Woytek's work, the traditional focus on Quellenforschung has prematurely dated much of the commentary. The following sections of the introduction will provide an overview of how the present commentary's reading of the *Persa* has grown out of the developments in Plautine scholarship outlined above.

II. The *Persa* and interests of the commentary

In addition to performing all of the basic work of a commentary (collecting comparanda, explaining difficult and corrupt passages, providing necessary cultural and historical context, etc.), the reader will notice that a handful of ideas and interests are treated throughout with great frequency. Within the broad category of Plautus' language fall: word choice, alliteration, proverbial expressions, etymology, and parallels with modern European languages. Among the aspects of Plautus' artistry as a playwright, three elements stand out: the handling of the staging, music and meter, and the development of the characters and their relationships. Under this last category are found also the issues of slavery, gender, and race in the *Persa*.

1. Staging

As stated above, throughout Woytek's commentary, there is little care given to imagining what the actors would be doing onstage. In some cases, this results rather innocuously in misunderstanding the tone in which an actor would pronounce a line, or in failing to fully understand the dynamics of an interaction onstage. In other cases, however, the failure to read the play dramatically often leads Woytek to emend the text, reattribute speaking roles, and revive older readings which have long since been improved by other editors. There are a handful of instances where Woytek's judgement is to be accepted, but in many cases his suggestions seem inferior in comparison to the text of Lindsay's OCT. Many of Woytek's emendations and reattributions have made their way into de Melo's Loeb edition, which is likely to be the sole text that will be read by those who are not scholars of Plautus or seasoned Latinists or linguists. I have made note of these instances throughout the commentary and have offered, where relevant, explanations and interpretations of why Lindsay's text is often to be preferred.

Throughout this commentary I have suggested stage directions and have imagined (to the best of my ability) the instructions which would have been given to the actors as to how to deliver their lines. In making these suggestions, I always have two criteria in mind: (1) increasing the comedic effect of jokes and scenes; and (2), rendering the Latin of the exchanges in the play more comprehensible through dramatic context. Obviously, these directions can never be more than educated guesses, and one must always remember that the play would be performed differently by different troupes of actors at different times and different places. Nevertheless, it is my firm belief that this type of analysis is necessary when one approaches Plautus, or any dramatic text. Some of my suggestions may well be wrong (in the sense that they do not reflect what Plautus or the original stage director intended), but it is my hope not only that they will be helpful to those

who may be interested in producing the play, but also that they will open fruitful discussion about the characters, plot, and language of the *Persa*.

The following is one, small example of the type of approach taken in the commentary below:

At line 47, Toxilus, after having convinced his friend Sagaristio to look for some money for him, says: *quaere tamen, ego item sedulo*! This is the version found in the manuscripts and printed by Lindsay. Woytek, however, prefers and prints Ritschl's suggested emendation *quaero*. He argues that the imperative *quaere* was written by mistake because of all the other imperative forms in the neighborhood and that, if we keep *quaere*, we cannot find a parallel example where *item* is used with the ellipsis of a verb. This is a clear example of an instance where Woytek's commitment to philological principles interferes with his ability to read the text. Not only would the present-tense verb *quaero* (instead of the future, *quaeram*) be slightly awkward here, but the resulting word order, in my opinion, is unlikely: I have not found in all of Latin literature the sequence first-person present verb + *tamen ego*. In addition, and more importantly, the ellipsis of the verb is likely not a syntactic phenomenon but a dramatic one. The exchange could be imagined to run something like this:

- (1) Sagaristio promises his anxious friend Toxilus twice that he will search for the money (44: *quaeram*; 46: *hoc meum est ut faciam sedulo*).
- (2) Toxilus then tells Sagaristio to let him know whatever happens (46: *recipe te ad me*).
- (3) At this point, the exchange is more or less complete, and Sagaristio has likely already begun to turn around and rush off to help his friend and make his exit.
- (4) Toxilus then bursts out another command as his friend starts to leave, saying *quaere tamen*!
- (5) Sagaristio makes a sign of exasperation (perhaps by waving his hand or shaking his head) and continues on his way, as Toxilus, who wants to assure his friend that he will also be doing his best to find the money, shouts after him *ego item sedulo* [*quaeram*]!
- (6) Sagaristio now turns around, interrupts Toxilus (perhaps even as Toxilus is beginning to say something like *quaeram*), and with an annoyed tone shouts *si quid erit, te faciam ut scias*!, as if to say, "Calm down and get off my case! I promise I'll let you know if I find anything!"

Thus the imperative fits nicely with this scene, which derives much of its comedic value from the fact that the lovesick Toxilus is bossing around his friend Sagaristio and not realizing that he is rather forcefully making seemingly impossible demands of his fellow slave. The height of Sagaristio's annoyance with his whimsical friend is reached one line later, with *ah! odio me enicas*! (48). In my hypothetical staging of this small exchange, one could punctuate with an ellipsis after *ego item sedulo* instead of a period.

This is a small example of how imagining the action onstage and the dynamics of the exchanges between the actors can improve our understanding of the text. This example involves only one word, but others are much more serious, involving entire clauses, lines, or exchanges. Each instance is considered in depth in the commentary itself.

2. Characters: Slavery, Gender, Race

a. A cast of slaves: Toxilus, Sagaristio, and Paegnium

One of the most interesting and unique aspects of the *Persa* is the cast of characters. In almost all other plays, the main characters are freeborn, while in the *Persa*, five of the eight speaking characters are slaves (Toxilus, Sagaristio, Sophoclidisca, Lemniselenis, Paegnium) and an additional character pretends to be a slave (the *virgo*).⁵⁶ Because of this, many of the traditional roles in comedy are reversed or inverted, giving the entire play a Saturnalian atmosphere. Much of the comedy and appeal of the play derives from the upset expectations of the audience.

Toxilus, the main character of the play, is a hybrid between a clever slave and young lover, roles which elsewhere are distinct. The tension between these two roles is felt in the first line, as a character appears on stage in a costume which obviously would have marked him as slave and begins speaking about love. The opening exchange between Toxilus and his friend Sagaristio makes it very clear that this inversion of roles will be a running theme in the play, summed up neatly in Sagaristio's surprised question *iam servi hic amant?* (25). Toxilus hardly responds directly to the question, but says: *quid ego faciam? disne advorser? quasi Titani cum eis belligerem quibus sat esse non queam?* (26–7). The rhetorical polish of these words and the mythologizing of Toxilus' situation confirm Sagaristio's suspicion: not only do slaves have love affairs in this play, but they do so in a style proper to educated free men. A few lines later we learn that Toxilus has decided to take action and seize his beloved prostitute at this point in time because his master is currently out of town (29: *quia erus pereгри est*). Thus the entire play is presented as a window into what slaves get up to when they are left unsupervised.⁵⁷ The sit-

⁵⁶ Cf. van IJsendijk 1884, 47, 50: "In ceteris Plauti fabulis res aguntur aut ab hominibus liberis aut ab hominibus liberis una cum servis: hac in fabula soli servi telam texunt et usque ad finem deducunt....Nusquam ergo servi locum primum explent: sunt sane plerumque dolorum auctores, verum herorum et filiorum herilium causa: servi quidem sunt qui agant, verum res eorum non agitur. In Persa autem servi agunt et servorum res agitur," (quoted by Auhagen 2001, 95).

⁵⁷ Stewart (2012, 37) places a different emphasis: "*Persa* stages the fantasy – or nightmare – of slaves taking vengeance on the slave owners for whom they are fungible chattel."

uation can be compared fruitfully to the very common iterations of this theme in modern movies, television, and animation, in which children, pets, toys, servants, or employees are left to their own devices while their parents, owners, or bosses are away or missing. The hijinks of the characters and the resulting comedic situations are often the result of attempts to imitate (either successfully or unsuccessfully) the world from which they are normally barred (i.e., the world of adults, masters, employers, humans, etc.).

A good example of the comedy that can result from this type of imitation is in the first exchange between Toxilus and Paegnium at 183ff. Toxilus and Paegnium enter on stage and do not notice Sophoclidisca, who has just delivered a monologue and who remains on stage during their comical conversation about Toxilus' plans and the charges he has laid upon Paegnium. Part of the comedy of the scene rests in the dynamic between the two characters, the nature of whose relationship is not immediately apparent. The audience's expectations have already been overturned as they learned that the main lover of the play is a slave, and then again when they found out that this slave has a parasite (Saturio). As Paegnium appears on stage for the first time accompanying Toxilus, the audience must immediately ask itself about the relationship between these two characters. It seems from their initial exchange that the dynamic resembles that between a master and a quick-witted slave, which seems to be confirmed in line 193 when Paegnium speaks of *fides erilis* in relation to Toxilus. The audience would ask itself whether our slave-hero has a slave of his own, or whether Toxilus could merely be playing the role of master with one of the other slaves from his house, and why, if this is the case, Paegnium is so obedient. From his role, perhaps we can imagine that Paegnium indeed is a younger slave from the same house as Toxilus, who looks up to Toxilus with brotherly admiration and who is ready to serve him as if he were his master. At any rate, the comedic success of the scene results from Toxilus trying to take on a role which otherwise would be barred to him. The audience watches as he comically attempts to convince both himself and Paegnium of his authority and does his best to imitate the manner and language of a master.

b. Slavery and gender: Saturio and the *virgo*

That the *virgo* (as Saturio's unnamed daughter is called) is a special character will be made clear by a brief discussion of women in Plautus generally. The three most common female roles in Plautus are the *meretrices* (prostitutes), *ancillae* (slave girls), and *matronae* (married women).⁵⁸ We have examples of fairly typical *meretrices* and *ancillae* in the *Persa* in the characters of Lemniselenis and Sophoclidisca.

⁵⁸ For an overview of the female stock characters in Plautus and the general attitude towards women in Plautus, See de Melo's introduction to the first volume of his Loeb edition, xxxviii-xliii.

Ancillae, while they can have fairly extensive speaking roles, like Sophoclidisca, are very rarely integral to the plot. They are almost always loyal to their female masters, and they can be slightly clever (but not as clever as the *servi callidi*). *Meretrices* are always portrayed as beautiful and young and are often little more than sexual objects. *Matronae* are not as common as *ancillae* and *meretrices*. When they do appear, they are almost always portrayed as nagging, annoying, or otherwise unpleasant characters who oppose the will of their husbands and meddle in their affairs. By far the least common character type is the *virgo* (the young, freeborn, bachelorette). *Virgines* very rarely appear on stage. Since willingly engaging in love affairs made *virgines* unfit for marriage, many of the *virgines* involved in Plautine plots have been raped and impregnated by one of the main *adulescentes* who will then marry her. Generally speaking, throughout Roman comedy the attitude towards women is negative and objectifying. This makes the positive, noble, and deeply personal portrayal of the *virgo* all the more remarkable and interesting.

The *virgo*, as noted above, is one of the only freeborn characters in the play (the other two being her father Saturio and the pimp Dordalus). She takes part in the deception of Dordalus by playing the part of a captured slave and thereby becoming, at least for the climax of the play, a part of the cast of slaves. The *virgo*, then, in some sense, can be seen as a bridge between the world of slaves and the world of the free. Her character is presented in a comical and safe way (after all, she only pretends to be a slave and is rescued according to plan) as a reminder to the audience that enslavement is always a very real possibility.

Saturio is in many respects a typical Plautine parasite: he is concerned only with his belly and will go to extreme lengths for free food. But in two important respects he differs from other parasites: he is dependent on a slave, which incorporates him into the cast of slaves as well, and, more importantly, he is the only parasite in Plautus to have a daughter. The *virgo* is herself noteworthy in being one of the most well-spoken, intelligent, and sympathetic female characters in the Plautine corpus. Indeed, Stewart says that one of the most unique elements of the *Persa* is that it allows the audience “to hear the private thoughts of a recently enslaved freeborn female.”⁵⁹ The *Persa*, then, is one of the few places in Latin literature where we find “evidence of the personal effects of slavery on the individual.”⁶⁰

We first meet the *virgo* at the beginning of the third act in the exchange between her and her father Saturio. In this conversation, Saturio announces his plan to stage the selling of his daughter, and the *virgo* quite eloquently and sympathetically resists. She offers philosophically prudent opposition while simultaneously realizing that she has no power to command her father (344–348). She appeals to the reputation and shame which will result for both of them, but is unable to dissuade Saturio from his intentions. Stewart says that in this scene “Plautus uses the

⁵⁹ Stewart 2012, 38.

⁶⁰ Stewart 2012, 44n.