METAGENRE AND THE COMPETENT AUDIENCE
OF PLAUTUS' *CAPTIVI*

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Writing on *Poenulus* and Plautus' genre, Henderson has proposed that the extant Plautine plays are 'emphatically heterogeneous', such that 'no one play typifies the oeuvre.'[1] His argument counters a charge often leveled against Roman Comedy, that the plays are all the same, or at least that they all amount to the same thing. Henderson was right that they are not and do not, but the fact remains that Plautus' plays have a certain predictability. Their formulaic nature is what promises, in the face of manifold obstacles, a happy ending. It is what indicates that the fragments of *Vidularia* once added up to a recognition play[2]—and what defines 'recognition plays' as a group. It is what prompts claims that *Captiui* is 'unusual', filled with 'oddities' and 'mistakes'.[3]

Captiui in particular stands out as a problem play because it seems to defy its genre. It lacks common elements, including many stock types: this is the only surviving Plautine comedy to include not one woman,[4] and it excludes other familiar characters such as the *leno* ('pimp') and *miles gloriosus* ('braggart soldier'). It also includes things that are highly unusual. *Captiui* uniquely not only threatens but enacts the violent punishment of its *seruus callidus* ('clever slave'). Some have also seen in it a moralizing elevation in tone that sets it apart from the rest of the genre.[5] Historically, these distinctive characteristics have led to criticism of *Captiui*'s artistic merit[6] and questions about how its Greek model could have looked[7] or whether the play is even Plautine.[8] But if *Captiui* has caused surprise, confusion, or even a sense of wrongness among readers of the last century, then at least part of that reaction has arisen out of our status as readers of an incomplete corpus, unable to access the precise performance dynamics or range of plays that informed the experience of Plautus' contemporary audience.

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1. Henderson (1994), 26.
2. Reconstructions of *Vid.* include those of Dèr (1987), Calderan (2004), and de Melo (2013), 389–92.
3. 'Unusual': Duckworth (1952), 151, Leach (1969), 263, Gosling (1983), 53; 'oddities': Thalmann (1996), 113; 'mistakes': Krysiniel-Józefowicz (1954), 159.
4. *Trin.* features no female characters, either, but one of its plotlines concerns the marriage of Callicles' daughter, although she does not appear onstage. Women are scarcely mentioned in *Capt.*
5. Especially Lessing, as described in Lefèvre's (1998) account of historical scholarship on the play. More recent remarks upon the tone appear in Viljoen (1963), Leach (1969), and McCarthy (2000).
6. e.g. Norwood's (1932), 63, vitriolic assessment that 'the *Captiui*…outdoes all its companions in sheer blockheadedness'; cf. Krysiniel-Józefowicz (1954).
7. Hough (1942), Krysiniel-Józefowicz (1954), Viljoen (1963).
8. Segal (1987). Blänsdorf (2002) provides a more exhaustive list of *Capt.*'s unusual qualities.

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Would his audience have perceived a difference in *Captiui*? This question requires qualification. Plautus' audience was not monolithic but 'multilevel',[9] so that it is more accurate to speak of the plural experiences of individual members than that of 'the audience' in the aggregate. The closest twenty-first-century scholars can get to that experience is speculation on the kinds of spectators who were likely present and their probable responses. Any comic audience in the mid-Republic included members varying in gender, ethnicity, social and civic status, and numerous other demographics. It also likely included a wide range of experience with the New Comic tradition in which Plautus' comedies participate.

Goldberg has argued for a small audience attending Plautus' plays amid distractions, crowding, and adverse weather.[10] These conditions suggest a self-selecting audience, the majority of which actively wanted to attend Plautus' plays. Some members would have been newcomers who had never seen a comedy, and many or most would have been first-time viewers of a given play, but I propose that a self-selecting audience would also have included at least some 'fans' of Roman Comedy, and still more members who had seen several examples of the genre over their lifetimes.

From their repeated experience of comedy, this group would have acquired what Revermann, writing about Athenian audiences, has called 'theatrical competence'.[11] In addition to familiarity with the social demands and formal sign-systems of the theater, the competent audience of 'formally conservative' traditions like Attic tragedy and Old Comedy acquires 'a strong sense of genre, in particular its visual markers, movements, a sense of theatrical space, delivery, melody, rhythm and fundamental structural markers'.[12] Although Roman Comic performance occurred in a very different social and historical context, the New Comic tradition is equally formally conservative, a genre that Fraenkel described as 'liberissima nei particolari e tuttavia molto convenzionale nell'insieme.'[13]

The portion of Plautus' audience that gained this 'sense of genre' through exposure and re-exposure offers the closest contemporary analog to the scholarly reader's systematic acquisition of competence in Roman Comic conventions. These viewers' experience of *Captiui* offers a test case for the play's divergence from generic expectations. The following is an exercise in informed speculation about what *Captiui* expects a competent audience to know and how it destabilizes those viewers' generic expectations. This reading produces a new view of *Captiui* as a comedy that makes a theme of its own engagement with generic conventions. *Captiui* strikes an odd note not because it is aberrant or un-Plautine, but because it so far exceeds Plautus' other plays in embracing self-referential effects. This is a

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9. Richlin (2005), 22.
10. Goldberg (1998), 13–16.
11. Revermann (2006).
12. Revermann (2006), 115. *Poen.* 17–45 shows that Plautus' audience, too, was expected to acquire social and formal competence in the theater.
13. Fraenkel (1960), 4.

metatheatrical comedy in a number of ways, but it is something more, too: it is a metageneric play in which Plautus provokes a confrontation between his competent viewers and the limits of variation within his genre.

Paradigms and Plotlines: The Prologue

In its 'orientation' to the play,[14] *Captiui*'s prologue introduces two primary plotlines that structure its narrative, one concerned with deception and the other with recognition.[15] Each plotline takes its basic shape from what Konstan calls 'paradigms', the broad patterns of conflict and resolution common to New Comic plays.[16] These paradigms—the romance of the *adulescens amans* ('young man in love'), the trickster's deception of antagonists, the identification of a long-lost child, and others—recur from play to play and, while they allow for the variation that Fraenkel cited as characteristic of the genre, they incorporate generic conventions in combinations that are nevertheless predictable.[17] Because a limited number of paradigms provide the scaffolding for Plautus' plays, their characteristic features can be recognizable even to a viewer who has seen relatively few Roman Comedies. Once noticed, these features allow audience members to anticipate the trajectory along which a play is likely to proceed toward its 'target ending', its generically predetermined resolution.

Captiui's prologue plants clues about its plotlines for competent viewers to find, beginning with the recognition paradigm:

> seni huic fuerunt filii nati duo;
> alterum quadrimum puerum seruos surpuit
> eumque hinc profugiens uendidit in Alide
> patri | huiiusce. iam hoc tenetis? optumest.
> …
> fugitiuos ille, ut dixeram ante, huiius patri
> domo quem profugiens dominum apstulerat uendidit.
> is postquam hunc emit, dedit eum huic gnato suo
> peculiarem, quia quasi una aetas erat.
> hic nunc domi seruit suo patri, nec scit pater.
>
> (7–10, 17–21)

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14. The navigational metaphor is Leo's (1912), 214.

15. McCarthy (2000), 175f., identifies three paradigms at work in *Capt.*, including the 'comedy of humors' focused on Hegio's personality. This three-paradigm description effectively explicates the play's moral and philosophical content, but Hegio's storyline contributes little to the play's metageneric structure and so is omitted here.

16. Konstan (1983), 16.

17. Bettini (1982) provides a comprehensive typology of these paradigms, which he calls 'ossature'.

> This old man had two sons. A slave kidnapped the one when he was four years old, ran away from here, and sold him in Elis to this guy's father. You get it already? Great. …That runaway slave, as I said before, sold his master whom he had taken when he ran away from home to this guy's father. After that man bought this boy, he gave him to his son—this guy—for his very own, since they were about the same age. Now this one's a slave in his home to his own dad, and his dad doesn't know it.[18]

Plautus' recognition paradigm involves a child separated from its family at an early age and kept away through ignorance either of its own origins or of the whereabouts of its birth family. The target ending restores the lost child to its family when recognition tokens that identify it are united with a recognition character familiar with those tokens.[19] *Captiui*'s prologue signals the presence of this paradigm by referencing two of its hallmarks. First, it casts Tyndarus as a lost child kidnapped from his family as a toddler. Tyndarus' age at the time of kidnap, as well as the kidnapping itself, reflect Plautus' usual management of this paradigm, as his lost children are almost always under ten,[20] and they are always separated from their families either by exposure (of girls) or abduction (regularly of boys).[21] Second, the prologue emphasizes the protagonists' ignorance of Tyndarus' origins.

After establishing the recognition paradigm, the prologue proceeds to deception. A Plautine favorite, the deception paradigm concerns a trickster character (usually, but not always, a *seruus callidus*)[22] who pursues a specific objective by tricking or cheating antagonists. This paradigm meets its target ending when its tricksters succeed in their goals while escaping serious consequences for their misdeeds.[23] The prologue describes *Captiui*'s deception plotline in some detail:

> hisce autem inter sese hunc confinxerunt dolum,
> quo pacto hic seruos suom erum hinc amittat domum.
> itaque inter se commutant uestem et nomina;

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18. Quotations of Plautus' Latin are drawn from Lindsay (1904–5); translations are my own. The intervening lines (11–17) comprise a joke at the expense of audience members.

19. Examples occur in *Cist.*, *Cur.*, *Epid.*, *Men.*, *Poen.*, *Rud.*, and *Truc.* Ketterer (1986) argues that recognition tokens serve causative and labeling functions within their plotlines. Taking *Cist.*'s titular *cistella* as an example, he shows, 36, that recognition tokens unite characters in knowledge and space: 'The recognition is complete when all the characters share the same perception of the box's symbolism.'

20. *Cist.* 164–7; *Cur.* 528; *Poen.* 64–7, 83–90; *Men.* 24–33; *Rud.* 744. Only Telestis may have been older (*Epid.* 573–6).

21. Plautus has three lost boys: Agorastocles (*Poen.*), Epidamnian Menaechmus (*Men.*), and Diniarchus' son (*Truc.*). Only the last was not kidnapped.

22. Non-slave tricksters include Curculio (*Cur.*), Phronesium (*Truc.*), Cleostrata and Pardalisca (*Cas.*), and Callicles and Megaronides (*Trin.*).

23. This paradigm occurs in *Am.*, *As.*, *Bac.*, *Cas.*, *Cur.*, *Epid.*, *Mil.*, *Mos.*, *Per.*, *Poen.*, *Ps.*, *Trin.*, and *Truc.*

> illic uocatur Philocrates, hic Tyndarus:
> huius illic, hic illius hodie fert imaginem.
> et hic hodie expediet hanc docte fallaciam,
> et suom erum faciet libertatis compotem,
> eodemque pacto fratrem seruabit suom
> reducemque faciet liberum in patriam ad patrem
> inprudens.

(35–44)

> But these guys have contrived this trick between themselves so that this one, the slave, can send his master home, away from here. So, they're switching clothes and names between themselves. That guy's called Philocrates, and this one's Tyndarus: that one looks like this one today, and this one looks like that one. And this one's going to pull off this trick cleverly today and give his master a share of freedom, and at the same time, he'll save his brother and bring him back a free man into his country and to his father, without knowing it.

Tyndarus takes on the role of *seruus callidus*, devising a trick to free his master Philocrates from captivity at Hegio's expense. This piece of exposition reflects the similarity of *Captiui*'s deception plotline to other Plautine trickster comedies by incorporating the keywords *dolus* and *fallacia* (both 'trick'), and by specifying that the scheme relies, like those of several other *serui callidi*, upon impersonation.[24]

Competent and attentive spectators thus learn a number of clues that suggest not only the paradigms that underpin *Captiui*, but also its probable conclusion. The prologue anticipates just such an audience by addressing the preconceived expectations that its members might bring to the show. Near his conclusion, the *prologus* (i.e. speaker of the prologue) issues a warning:

> sed etiam est paucis uos quod monitos uoluerim.
> profecto expediet fabulae huic operam dare:
> non pertractate facta est neque item ut ceterae.

(53–5)

> But there's still something I'd like to warn you about briefly. It will really help to pay attention to this play. It's not overdone, and it's not just like the rest.

He then lists several stock types and scenarios that *Captiui* will not feature. The prologue's insistence that this play will not be 'overdone' (*pertractate*) hints at

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24. Cole (1920), 55–62, surveys acts of impersonation in Plautine deception plays.

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Roman Comedy's formulaic tendency. More tellingly, the suggestion that *Captiui* will require special attention implies that Plautus expected at least some members of his audience to have attended other comedies and to bring their prior experience to bear upon the current performance.

Following this initial warning, the prologue specifies which expectations, applicable though they might be to other plays, viewers will not see fulfilled here:

> neque spurcidici insunt uorsus inmemorabiles;
> hic neque peiiurus leno est nec meretrix mala
> neque miles gloriosus; ne uereamini
> quia bellum Aetolis esse dixi cum Aleis:
> foris illi extra scaenam fient proelia.
> nam hoc paene iniquomst, comico choragio
> conari desubito agere nos tragoediam.
>
> (56–62)

> And there aren't any filthy, unrepeatable lines in it. Here there's no lying pimp, no bad *meretrix*,[25] and no braggart soldier. And don't be afraid because I said that there's a war on between Aetolia and Elis. The battles will happen away from here, over there, offstage. It would be pretty unfair for us to try to put on a tragedy unexpectedly on a comic stage.

This characterization of the genre is, as Moore has written, 'misleading at best.'[26] The lying pimp, bad *meretrix*, and braggart soldier are common roles, but obscene lines so explicit as to be unrepeatable are almost unknown in Roman Comedy, and onstage violence is unusual. The *prologus*' ostensible attempt to reframe expectations to suit *Captiui* better asks competent viewers to sideline surprisingly few elements of their prior knowledge—in effect, only the stock characters. This 'orientation' concludes, then, with a confusing impression of the extent to which comic paradigms will apply to the present performance.

The *Captiui* prologue thematizes conventions and expectations, first priming its audience to construct projections of the deception and recognition plotlines and their target endings, and then calling prior knowledge of the genre into question. This process of building and undermining expectations continues throughout the play, which initially follows conventional trajectories before deviating drastically in the middle of the narrative. The following reading of the play's key structural developments will demonstrate how *Captiui*'s interrupted progress toward its target ending destabilizes competent spectators' reliance on generic conventions and encourages them to reassess their expectations and recalculate their projections constantly as the plot unfolds.

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25. I leave *meretrix* alone untranslated due to the lack of an appropriate English equivalent. On the problem of translating Latin terms for sex labor, see Witzke (2015).
26. Moore (1998), 70.

The Plotlines: Expectations Versus Reality

First, I will offer a projection of *Captiui*'s plot based on the information available to a competent and attentive audience member: the *argumentum* ('synopsis'), the examples of other plays, and the target endings of the deception and recognition paradigms. This projection represents the baseline of expectations from which *Captiui* deviates. Because the play incorporates two paradigms, I attempt to integrate the two into an interdependent relationship in which each plotline propels the other toward its target ending.[27]

Other deception plays starring a *seruus callidus* begin with success for the trickster who accomplishes the early stages of his scheme without much difficulty. In *Bacchides*, for example, Chrysalus steals money from Nicobulus without arousing suspicion; similarly, *Mostellaria*'s Tranio easily persuades Theopropides that his house is haunted. Subsequently, the trickster encounters a setback: partway through the deception of Ballio, for instance, Pseudolus in the eponymous play doubts that Simia has what it takes to humiliate the pimp. In the end, however, the trickster gets what he wanted and avoids punishment. Sometimes, as in *Epidicus*, the *seruus callidus* is even rewarded with freedom.[28] In light of *Captiui*'s *argumentum*, then, a spectator approaching the play with prior knowledge of Plautine deception could expect to see a similar trajectory with a smooth start, a bumpy middle, and a successful conclusion free from consequences.

Such a trajectory could dovetail with a projection of the recognition plotline. Family reunions generally overshadow lingering resentment of prior events, as when Periphanes of *Epidicus* is so pleased to meet Telestis that he manumits the same Epidicus whom he had just threatened to beat to death.[29] Once Hegio and Tyndarus understand that they are father and son, the *senex* ('old man') can be expected to forgive his son's transgressions. Because recognition plays tend to reach their target endings through the union of recognition tokens with recognition characters who understand the tokens' significance, a competent viewer could anticipate the introduction of these common plot elements over the course of *Captiui* as well.

In summary, *Captiui*'s experienced spectators could have formed the following projection of the deception and recognition plotlines introduced in the prologue: Tyndarus and Philocrates succeed in the early stages of their scheme, but along the way they hit a snag or two, the resolutions of which provide

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27. Most of Plautus' plays involve more than one paradigm; in fact, only *Mer.* seems to adhere to a single, primary paradigm. Where multiple plotlines coexist, they are interrelated: for example, Calidorus' and Phoenicium's relationship motivates Pseudolus' and Simia's trick in *Ps.*, and Planesium's recognition resolves the romance plotline in *Cur.*

28. For the sake of brevity, only a few deception plays are cited here, but *As.*, *Cas.*, *Cur.*, *Epid.*, *Mil.*, *Per.*, *Poen.*, *Trin.*, and *Truc.* follow this rough outline.

29. Manumission: *Epid.* 711; threats: *Epid.* 605f. Forgiveness also prevails at the ends of *Poen.* and *Rud.*

ample opportunity for laughter. Meanwhile, a recognition character arrives, encounters Tyndarus, and infers his identity through tokens discovered during the action. Hegio joyfully welcomes Tyndarus back into the family and agrees to put the deception behind them and live happily ever after.

The prologue's warnings notwithstanding, *Captiui*'s first half validates this projection. Following the parasite Ergasilus' initial appearance, addressed more fully below, the play takes up its deception plotline in a conversation between Philocrates and Tyndarus during which the former restates the premise of their scheme: *erus mihi es tu atque ego me tuom esse seruom adsimulo* ('You're my master and I'm pretending to be your slave', 224). Their success requires the accomplishment of two initial tasks: first, to persuade Hegio that they are who they claim to be, and then, to convince him to send Philocrates to Elis rather than some other agent. Tyndarus' boastful confidence in the trick provides the first hint of a favorable outcome. When Hegio leads Philocrates away to talk individually, Tyndarus remarks in an aside:

> nunc senex est in tostrina, nunc iam cultros adtinet.
> ne id quidem, inuolucre inicere, uoluit, uestem ut ne inquinet.
> sed utrum strictimne attonsurum dicam esse an per pectinem
> nescio; uerum, si frugist, usque admutilabit probe.
>
> (266–9)

> Now the old man's in the barber's chair, and the clippers are coming in close. He didn't even put on a smock to keep his clothes from getting dirty. But whether I'd say he's in for a trim or a shearing down to the skin, I don't know. One thing's for sure: if [Philocrates] is any good, he'll get good and fleeced.

As this type of boasting characterizes the *seruus callidus* type, Tyndarus' confidence prepares the competent audience to accept him as an example of the type and so to expect his success in the scheme.[30]

The slave's confidence appears well-founded when Hegio accepts their assumed identities. In their initial conversation, the *senex* never questions Philocrates' role as slave or Tyndarus' as master, and Tyndarus comments upon how convincing his fellow captive is, first complimenting 'how cleverly he's turned his speech to slave-talk' (*ut facete orationem ad seruitutem contulit*, 276) and then praising him for 'philosophizing' (*philosophatur*, 284).[31] That Tyndarus offers this commentary while eavesdropping renders his opinion particularly persuasive. As Moore argues, Plautus' eavesdroppers 'gain a great advantage in the

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30. On the boastfulness of the *seruus callidus*, see Duckworth (1952), 249f., and Fraenkel (1960), 226–31.

31. Pseudolus also characterizes the deceptive speech of fellow slaves as 'philosophizing' (*Ps.* 687, 974).

competition [among characters] for rapport [with the audience]: they share with the audience a sense of power over the character being overheard, and they encourage the audience to see the actions of others through their eyes.'[32] Tyndarus' alignment with spectators cues them to accept his assessment of Philocrates' performance and his apparently justified hopes for their eventual success. Later, when Tyndarus and Philocrates converse privately again, Hegio confirms his belief in their disguises as he praises their relationship: *quantis * laudibus | suom erum seruos conlaudauit!* ('How much praise the slave heaps upon his master!', 420f.) The dramatic irony produced by viewers' knowledge of the captives' true identities makes the *senex*'s acceptance of their performance all the more striking. The slaves thus obtain their first objective and fool Hegio into believing their ruse.

Hegio's original intention of sending someone from his own household to Elis in order to negotiate Philopolemus' release is obviously at odds with Philocrates' goal of playing that role himself, and so the *adulescens* plants an excuse early in their conversation to persuade the *senex* otherwise. When asked about his father, Philocrates describes a difficult miser with the outrageously verbose speaking-name Thensaurochrysonicochrysides (285–92). Tyndarus later invokes this characterization to convince Hegio that no one could persuade a man as stingy as a Thensaurochrysonicochrysides to ransom Philopolemus, except for the miser's own slave (344–50). The excuse works: Hegio instantly agrees to send the disguised Philocrates. By the end of their first sustained interaction with the *senex*, the two slaves have fully succeeded in the first stage of their trick.

Hegio foreshadows a setback when he voices his intention to take Philocrates to the praetor for a travel document, in response to which suggestion Tyndarus asks, 'What visa?' (*quem syngraphum?*, 450) In thus expressing alarm, Tyndarus reminds attentive viewers that there are still ample opportunities for the deception plotline to fail before Philocrates reaches Elis. On the other hand, he demonstrates his ongoing confidence by informing Philocrates obliquely that he expects manumission upon their release from enslavement: *haec pater quando sciet | … | numquam erit tam auarus quin te gratiis emittat manu* ('When my dad knows about this, he'll never be so stingy that he wouldn't free you for free', 406–8). Following the play's prior validation of Tyndarus' confidence, his anticipation of success encourages an audience already sympathetically aligned with the slave to accept his hopes for a favorable outcome, too, despite foreshadowed complications. The opening scene of the deception plotline affirms the competent spectators' projection largely through persuasive characterization of the two title-characters. Each captive's behavior conforms to the typical persona of the *seruus callidus*, encouraging experienced viewers to conclude that Philocrates successfully mimics the role, while Tyndarus genuinely embodies it.

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32. Moore (1998), 34.

The recognition plotline also develops along projected lines, as the first half of the play hints at recognition tokens and a recognition character who will be instrumental in restoring Tyndarus to his real identity. As a victim of kidnapping who has subsequently endured slavery, warfare, and resale, Tyndarus cannot be expected to remain in possession of tangible tokens, but the slaves' conversation with Hegio hints that a significant name will serve in lieu of a physical object.[33] After Philocrates gives Hegio his father's false name, he discloses the real name in a comment that must be interpreted as an aside, given Hegio's lack of reaction: *nam illi quidem Theodoromedes fuit germano nomine* ('But his real name was Theodoromedes', 288). In addition to tipping off less perceptive viewers to the lie, this aside suggests that the father's real first name is significant enough to the plot that audience members need to know it. Because the names of family members often figure in recognition scenes, competent spectators may expect to see this name again later in the play.[34]

Hegio's last comment as he departs for the praetor raises the possibility of a recognition character who may appear to interpret this verbal token. Intending to visit his brother, at whose house his other captives are kept, he says: *eadem percontabor ecquis hunc adulescentem nouerit* ('At the same time, I'll ask if anyone knows this young man', 459). Hegio's use of *nouerit* ('knows') makes this foreshadowing more explicit than the father's name alone. Although he has no reason to suspect that Tyndarus is not who he seems, the dual connotations of 'knowing' and 'recognizing' in *noscere* imply that Tyndarus may soon encounter a character who can identify him.[35] The announcement of a potential recognition character appears to deliver upon the prologue's implied promise of a recognition scene.

After Ergasilus delivers his second monologue, discussed below, Hegio returns and announces that he has brought an acquaintance of Philocrates' (508–13). When Hegio identifies this acquaintance, Aristophontes, as the person he had hoped to find at his brother's house, continuity between the two scenes casts Aristophontes as the recognition character implied during Hegio's prior exit. To viewers anticipating the imminent resolution of this plotline, the tone of Tyndarus' reaction upon hearing of an acquaintance from Elis may seem incongruous: *nunc illud est quom me fuisse quam esse nimio mauelim,* | *nunc spes opes auxiliaque a me segregant spernuntque se* ('Now's the time when I would much rather have lived than be living. Now hope, help, and assistance are avoiding and shunning me', 516f.). His monologue suggests not a happy ending, but impending disaster for the deception plotline.

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33. Information and personal characteristics regularly serve as recognition tokens; cf. the Menaechmus twins' memories of their father's name (*Men.* 1078f.), Planesium's recollection of the whirlwind during which she was abducted (*Cur.* 644–9), and Agorastocles' monkey-bite scar (*Poen.* 1072–4).

34. cf. *Epid.* 635f.; *Curc.* 641–3; *Poen.* 1045–65; *Rud.* 1160–4; and *Men.* 1108, 1131.

35. *OLD* s.v. 4 and 5.

Tyndarus attributes this misfortune to the same circumstance that makes Aristophontes attractive as a potential recognition character: *perdidit me Aristophontes hic modo qui uenit intro; | is me nouit, is sodalis Philocrati et cognatus est* ('This Aristophontes who just came in has destroyed me; he knows me, he's a friend and relative of Philocrates', 527f.). Tyndarus' *novit* echoes Hegio's *noscere*, but here the verb is cast in another light. Tyndarus anticipates that recognition will come as a catastrophic development in his trick, because he assumes that Aristophontes will recognize him from his days in Elis and reveal his identity as Philocrates' slave.[36]

Tyndarus reacts with a hastily conceived backup plan, which he deploys when Aristophontes realizes his fears by addressing him by name (541). The *seruus callidus* pretends that his fellow captive has gone insane. This type of on-the-spot recalculation commonly occurs in the deception paradigm, in which it regularly results in a new and better trick.[37] At first, the new plan also works: when Hegio doubts Aristophontes' reliability, Tyndarus looks to be on the verge of pulling off his scheme despite the obstacle that the third Elian presents. As Aristophontes maintains his sanity, however, Hegio begins to doubt his madness, and the *senex*'s suspicions only grow (572–4) until Tyndarus begins lamenting the failure of his plan: *nunc ego omnino occidi, | nunc ego inter sacrum saxumque sto, nec quid faciam scio* ('I'm totally dead now, now I'm between a rock and a hard place, and I don't know what to do', 616f.).[38]

This confessional aside represents a turning point in the deception plotline. When further questioned about his identity, Tyndarus' answer shows little inclination to pretense, as he simply states to Hegio: *me tuom esse seruom et te meum erum* ('[I say] that I'm your slave and you're my master', 627). This resignation divorces Tyndarus from the *seruus callidus* role in which he was originally cast, first, because the type rarely shows such acquiescence to a master's will, and second, because Plautine deception schemes do not fail so catastrophically in other extant plays. After Tyndarus confesses to tricking Hegio, the *senex* calls for the slave to be restrained (657–9).

While the comic *senex* often threatens punishment for a misbehaving slave, the slave actually receives it very rarely.[39] In *Captiui*, Hegio not only follows through on his threats, but further resolves to punish Tyndarus especially brutally, through

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36. The repetition of *noscere* creates a manipulative dramatic irony. At this stage, Plautus still allows the competent audience to imagine the recognition scene intact and Aristophontes' arrival as the progression toward the play's resolution, even as it seems to spell defeat for the deception plotline. Such an assumption offers audience members an illusion of privileged knowledge that encourages them to discount, or even laugh at, Tyndarus' fears about upcoming recognition.

37. cf. *Bac.* 671–760, *Epid.* 81–103, *Ps.* 394–414.

38. An almost identical line sounds the death knell for Lysidamus' failed scheme at *Cas.* 970: *nunc ego inter sacrum saxumque sum nec quo fugiam scio* ('Now I'm between a rock and a hard place, and I don't know where to run').

39. *Mos.* 1064–180 comes close but stops short of punishment for Tranio; *Epid.* 683–96 casts the onstage punishment of slaves as humorously incompatible with Roman Comedy's conventional outcomes.

hard labor in the quarries (723–6). Aristophontes' shock emphasizes the horror of the punishment: *per deos atque homines ego te optestor, Hegio, | ne tu istunc hominem perduis* ('For god's sake and ours, Hegio, I beg you, don't destroy this man!', 727f.). Back-breaking labor in the stone quarries is a death sentence, as Tyndarus acknowledges by envisioning his own demise (741–4). Far from earning the typical reward, *Captiui*'s trickster receives severe punishment for his efforts.

This turn for the worse results from Aristophontes' failure as a recognition character. In the course of Hegio's conversation with the other Elian captive, the *senex* questions him about Tyndarus' background, calling Philocrates' bluff about his father's name. Their exchange reveals the name Theodoromedes to have been what Arnott might have called a 'red herring', which he defined, writing on Euripides, as a type of 'minor surprise' for the audience, the success of which 'depends on the partial foreknowledge that ancient tragedians could demand from their audiences when they were exploiting familiar myths.'[40] Plautus' red herring here depends upon his audience's familiarity with comic paradigms. While a conversation like Hegio's interrogation of Aristophontes often leads to the identification of lost children,[41] Aristophontes lacks sufficient information to perform a successful recognition, because he knows nothing about Tyndarus' kidnapping. Consequently, his answers to Hegio only further obscure Tyndarus' identity:

> *He*. fuitne huic pater Thensaurochrysonicochrysides?
> *Arist*. non fuit, neque ego istuc nomen umquam audiui ante hunc diem.
> Philocrati Theodoromedes fuit pater.
> …
> *He*. satin istuc mihi exquisitum est, fuisse hunc seruom in Alide
> neque esse hunc Philocratem? *Arist*. tam sati' quam numquam hoc
> inuenies secus.
>
> (633–9)

> *He*. Was Thensaurochrysonicochrysides this guy's father? *Arist*. He wasn't, and I've never heard that name before today. Theodoromedes was Philocrates' father… *He*. Have I discovered correctly that this man was a slave in Elis, and he's not Philocrates? *Arist*. So correctly that you'll never learn differently.[42]

As this information unravels the deception plotline, it also overturns expectations of recognition that Philocrates had raised in revealing his father's name. Aristophontes restores Tyndarus only to his initial, slave identity.

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40. Arnott (1978), 2f.
41. cf. *Poen.* 1039–279; *Men.* 1060–134; *Rud.* 1143–90.
42. The elided lines are a panicked aside from Tyndarus.

After Tyndarus has been escorted offstage and Hegio returns to his brother's house, Aristophontes summarizes his failure as a recognition character in programmatic terms that emphasize expectation-building and reversal: *exauspicaui ex uinclis. nunc intellego | redauspicandum esse in catenas denuo* ('I had good expectations coming out of my chains, but now at last I understand that I have to reassess them going back into the shackles', 766f.). The abandonment of the deception plotline and the failure of the foreshadowed recognition scene represent divergences from the projected narrative that are significant enough to require viewers to recalculate their expectations. As Plautus unravels his plotlines, however, he plants no clues to guide such a reassessment. *Captiui* seems to be at a dead end.

Restoration and Resolution

Plautus leaves little time for spectators to recollect their thoughts. After Hegio's departure with Aristophontes, Ergasilus emerges brimming with excitement, announcing: *nunc ad senem cursum capessam hunc Hegionem, quoi boni | tantum adfero quantum ipsus a dis optat, atque etiam amplius* ('Now I'll make my way to this old man, Hegio, to whom I'm bringing as much good news as he prays to the gods for, and even more than that!', 776f.). The audience's previous experience of Ergasilus consists of two substantial scenes (69–191, 461–97), in both of which the parasite tries and fails to secure dinner invitations. Because his gastronomical subplot barely overlaps with the primary plotlines to this point, viewers are unlikely to imagine that his news will redeem Tyndarus. More probably, attentive audience members will remember the relationship that the parasite described between himself and Philopolemus in his first appearance (102–6). This might lead them to assume that the parasite's good news concerns his erstwhile young patron.

Plautus delays the revelation of Ergasilus' news for ninety-five lines of monologue and then dialogue with Hegio. This interval, filled with jokes and reminders that game-changing news awaits, builds up a shock of suspense that the parasite discharges at lines 872–6:

> nam filium
> tuom modo in portu Philopolemum uiuom, saluom et sospitem
> uidi in publica celoce, ibidemque illum adulescentulum
> Aleum una et tuom Stalagmum seruom, qui aufugit domo,
> qui tibi surrupuit quadrimum puerum filiolum tuom.

<div align="right">(872–6)</div>

> For I just saw your son Philopolemus at the harbor, alive, safe and sound,
> on a fast ship, and together with him there, that Elian kid and your own

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slave Stalagmus, who ran away from home, who stole your little four-year-old son from you.

Ergasilus' declaration meets and then exceeds the expectations that his optimistic reentry built up. It affirms the suspicion that his news relates to Philopolemus, and it offers new developments in the deception and recognition plotlines with the return of Tyndarus' partner-in-crime and the introduction of a new potential recognition character.

Stalagmus' arrival resumes the progress of *Captiui*'s recognition plotline toward its target ending, because he performs the successful identification of Tyndarus that Aristophontes could not. As Tyndarus' kidnapper, Stalagmus has all of the knowledge required to reveal his victim's familial relationship to Hegio, and he does so summarily during the *senex*'s interrogation:

> *St*. et fugi et tibi surrupui filium et eum uendidi.
> *He*. quoi homini? *St*. Theodoromedi in Alide Polyplusio,
> sex minis.

> (972–4)

> *St*. I both ran away and kidnapped your son and sold him. *He*. To whom?
> *St*. To Theodoromedes of the Polyplusians in Elis, for six *minae*.

Stalagmus recalls the name Theodoromedes as a recognition token but places it in its proper context, revealing that it belongs not to Tyndarus' father, but to the Elian who bought him. When this information leads Philocrates and Hegio to the conclusion that Tyndarus is Hegio's long-lost son, the recognition scene is successful in its second take, and *Captiui*'s final lines see Tyndarus and his family reunited in the target ending required of the comic recognition paradigm.

Although *Captiui* ultimately upholds the expectations that its prologue and opening scenes set, insulating Tyndarus and Philocrates from Hegio's retribution and uniting father and son, the failed recognition scene in the middle destabilizes the competent audience's experience of an ostensibly formulaic performance. As will be familiar to readers who have 'binge-watched' multiple episodes of television crime dramas or sitcoms, part of the entertainment value in formulaic genres —the novelty of which lies in creative variations on established patterns—comes from forming and revising a plot projection. *Captiui* encourages its experienced viewers to enjoy this aspect of Roman Comedy but, by staging failures of the paradigms that define the genre, it also calls into question the very conventions that shape those viewers' expectations. When Plautus corrects these failures in the dénouement, he leaves *Captiui*'s fulfillment of the prologue's promises an open question. Is *Captiui* 'just like the rest', or isn't it?

The Neglected Parasite

If the deception and recognition plotlines implicitly perpetuate *Captiui*'s systematic destabilization of audience expectations, Ergasilus' subplot makes this process explicit. Historically, scholarship on the parasite has considered him a flaw in the play's construction, poorly integrated and only tangentially related to the plot. In the early twentieth century, Prescott found him 'inorganic', an unsuccessful Plautine invention who endows *Captiui* with comic relief but little else.[43] Later scholarship, influenced by the mid-century trend toward holistic analysis of Plautine comedy, found a sympathetic role for Ergasilus: Duckworth identified him as 'an emotional foil for Hegio',[44] an idea that Leach developed by arguing that he 'serves as a measure for the more fragile, unpredictable persons in the foreground.'[45] Viewed in light of *Captiui*'s concern for audience expectations and recalculation, however, Ergasilus emerges instead as an embodiment of the play's central thesis, neither irrelevant nor merely illustrative of the protagonists' personalities. The parasite is an index of *Captiui*'s dramatic and thematic unity.

For the majority of the play, Ergasilus' subplot does not share in the interdependent relationship of the deception and recognition plotlines, intervening in Tyndarus' story only during the parasite's last appearance (768–908).[46] Nevertheless, this plot participates in manipulating audience expectations by undermining the prologue's promises at the same points at which the primary plotlines diverge from and return to the competent audience's projection. Unlike the primary plotlines, the parasite subplot goes unaddressed in *Captiui*'s prologue, so that when viewers first encounter him they can have formed no expectations of him.[47] He integrates himself into the play, however, by immediately engaging the prologue's promises regarding *Captiui*'s content, opening the action with a joke about his own nickname:

> iuuentus nomen indidit 'Scorto' mihi,
> eo quia inuocatus soleo esse in conuiuio.
> scio apsurde dictum hoc derisores dicere,
> at ego aio recte.
>
> (69–72)

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43. Prescott ([1920]), 268f.; cf. Hough ([1942]), 33 and 36f., and Viljoen ([1963]), 45.
44. Duckworth ([1952]), 152.
45. Leach ([1969]), 286.
46. Philippides ([2014]) provides a detailed, linear reading of Ergasilus' subplot separate from, but thematically intertwined with, Tyndarus' story.
47. His costume and mask may have provided some clues, but Saunders ([1909]), 85–90, describes the parasite's costume as similar to that of the *adulescens*, and Marshall ([2006]), 126–58, cautions against assuming a one-to-one correspondence between masks and stock types.

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> The kids have given me the nickname 'Call-Girl', because I usually come to dinner un-called-for. The guys who laugh at me say this joke doesn't make sense, but I say it does.

This use of *scortum* creates an opportunity for the bawdy humor that the *prologus* just renounced, suggesting that Ergasilus will account for his nickname by likening his behavior to that of a prostitute, that is, by describing his own sexual behavior. The punchline, however, does quite the opposite:

> nam scortum in conuiuio
> sibi amator, talos quom iacit, scortum inuocat.
> estne inuocatum <scortum> an non? planissume;
> uerum hercle uero nos parasiti planius,
> quos numquam quisquam neque uocat neque inuocat.
>
> (72–6)

> Because a lover-boy calls out his call-girl at a party when he rolls the dice. Is she called-out or not? Obviously! But in fact, it's really more obviously about us parasites, because no one ever either calls us in or calls us out.

In punning on the innocuous *inuocatus* ('called-out') rather than the sexually suggestive *scortum*, Ergasilus' opening joke first subverts and then reaffirms the expectations that the prologue has set, all within the first eight lines of the action.[48] In the process, Ergasilus draws the theme of unstable expectations from the prologue into *Captiui*'s opening scene and models the process of destabilization that will occur in the primary plotlines.

   As the parasite's subplot unfolds, it builds a narrative momentum, based on Ergasilus' relationship to the audience, that continues throughout the play, driving *Captiui* through the crisis of its primary plotlines and toward its resolution. Ergasilus follows his opening joke with a monologue on the difficulty of his livelihood, exacerbated in the absence of Philopolemus, with whom he had been a welcome guest (77–107). At the conclusion of this monologue, Hegio enters and Ergasilus becomes an eavesdropper (108f.), able to enjoy the same rapport with the audience here that Tyndarus enjoys in his own eavesdropping scene, described above. Hegio's status as a relative stranger compared with Ergasilus enhances this intimacy, casting the parasite as an underdog, down on his luck but sympathetic.

   Plautus maintains an agreeable characterization of Ergasilus throughout the subsequent scene, during which he commiserates with Hegio over Philopolemus' absence (139–52). As their conversation concludes, the parasite requests a dinner

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48. Fontaine (2010), 231–3, presents an alternative explanation construing this joke as sexual innuendo.

invitation, in response to which the *senex* offers only the disappointing prospect of a *terrestris cena…multis holeribus* ('earthy dinner…with lots of vegetables', 189f.). The parasite likely departs with an air of dissatisfaction, given that he goes next to the forum to look for a better meal elsewhere (478–97). An audience that sympathizes with the parasite will now be likely to look forward to seeing him succeed.

This hope of success goes unsatisfied at first, because when Ergasilus reappears he recounts only failure. His inquiries about the dinner plans of the *adulescentes* in the forum are met with awkward silence (479f.), and, when the youths laugh, he discovers to his disgust that they are laughing not at his jokes, but at himself (487–90). The parasite professes a new plan as he departs: *nunc ibo ad portum hinc: est illic mi una spes cenatica; | si ea decollabit, redibo huc ad senem ad cenam asperam* ('Now I'll go from here to the harbor. That's my one hope for dinner. If it comes to nothing, I'll come back here to the old man and his dinner of roughage', 496f.). These lines leave Ergasilus' plotline in suspense, both promising a reappearance in the future and, assuming that the spectators maintain their goodwill toward him, leaving them to hope still for a happy ending.

This suspense plays a crucial role in *Captiui*'s dramatic unity following the failed recognition scene. While the crisis in the primary plotlines leaves audience members unable either to rely upon their plot projection or to recalculate the play's overall trajectory, Ergasilus' subplot remains intact, the last plotline that has not collapsed. When the parasite re-emerges proclaiming his triumph, this subplot reaches its target ending immediately after the primary plotlines have apparently fallen far short of their marks. Because Ergasilus' success results from his news which realigns the primary plotlines with their target endings, his quest for a dinner invitation serves as a bridge between the initial, failed recognition scene and the later, successful one. Unlike the deception and recognition plotlines, *Captiui*'s parasite subplot proceeds uninterrupted over its trajectory in accordance with audience expectations. It alone maintains the play's narrative momentum from beginning to end.

During his third appearance, Ergasilus continues to destabilize the prologue's promise of an inoffensive comedy, as his ensuing conversation with Hegio contains *Captiui*'s most risqué jokes. While boasting about his good fortune, Ergasilus tests Hegio's patience with wordplay:

> *He.* essurire mihi uidere. *Er.* miquidem essurio, non tibi.
> *He.* tuo arbitratu, facile patior. *Er.* credo, consuetu's puer.
>
> (866f.)

> *He.* As far as I'm concerned, you seem hungry. *Er.* My hunger concerns me, not you. *He.* As you wish. I'm easy. *Er.* I know. You learned to be when you were a kid.

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Ergasilus intentionally misinterprets Hegio's *patior* ('I'm easy') in its sexual sense as a reference to pederasty.[49] In the same scene, while the two discuss Stalagmus' Sicilian background, the parasite quips: *et nunc Siculus non est, Boius est, boiam terit: | liberorum quaerundorum caussa ei, credo, uxor datast* ('He's not Sicilian now, he's Boian! He's grinding down a Boia. He's gotten married, I think, so as to produce children', 888f.). Ergasilus' *terit* ('grinding down') equally suggests the wear of metal through friction and sexual activity.[50]

Unlike in his opening monologue, Ergasilus here engages in sexually suggestive humor, violating the prologue's promise that he had originally upheld. As *Captiui* concludes by revoking Tyndarus' death sentence and restoring him to his birth family, it lives up to the competent audience's initial expectations about its deception and recognition plotlines, but it overturns the expectations about its tone that the *prologus* and the parasite had carefully maintained throughout the performance. Ergasilus thus ensures that the destabilization of audience expectations continues throughout all of *Captiui*, leaving competent spectators with no secure means of assessing the reliability either of the *prologus* or of their own projections.

The concluding statement of the *caterua* ('company') further muddies the waters:

> spectatores, ad pudicos mores facta haec fabula est,
> neque in hac subigitationes sunt neque ulla amatio
> nec pueri suppositio nec argenti circumductio,
> neque ubi amans adulescens scortum liberet clam suom patrem.
> huius modi paucas poetae reperiunt comoedias,
> ubi boni meliores fiant.
>
> (1029–34)

> Spectators, this play has been made with respectable manners. There's no screwing around in it, no love-affair, no baby-swapping or money-snatching, nor any story where an *adulescens amans* frees his whore secretly from his father. Poets discover few comedies of this sort, where the good get better.

It is true that *Captiui* contains no romance plotline, but Ergasilus' violation of the prologue's promises regarding the play's explicit content demonstrate that morality was never the point. These last lines promote a sense of confusion

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49. For this usage of *patior*, see Adams (1982), 189f., who nevertheless states that it 'does not occur in Plautus.' Lindsay (1900) *ad loc.* obliquely acknowledges this sense, and Fontaine (2010), 127, takes the line as a sexual pun.

50. The pun resists translation. In addition to referring to a Celtic people, *boia* names a type of metal restraint. On the sexual sense of *tero*, see Adams (1982), 183; Richlin (2017), 372–4, further explicates the joke.

as to what viewers have seen, what they expected to see, and what they are meant to conclude.

Captiui and Metagenre

When *Captiui* is read with an eye toward plot paradigms and the expectations of a competent audience, the richness of its metageneric self-referentiality emerges. As much as it resembles contemporary Greece and Rome in its details, the Roman Comic world operates according to rules that differ radically from those of the real world: children lost for years return to their families, disobedient slaves escape punishment, and every story has a happy ending. These rules are partly codified in plot paradigms which define Roman Comedy as a genre with obligatory narrative characteristics such as its exploitation of stock types and its conventional happy ending for protagonists. *Captiui* can surprise, even confuse, a portion of its audience when its deception plotline collapses because it presupposes an audience that has enough experience with Roman Comedy to expect to see the genre's conventions played out in precisely the familiar form that the prologue and epilogue reject.

The crisis that *Captiui* encounters following the failure of Tyndarus' deception apparently violates the rules of the Roman Comic world, depriving the *seruus callidus* of the benefits of the deception paradigm and offering an unconventional outcome: instead of a clever escape, Tyndarus meets harsh punishment, and, instead of a miraculous *anagnorisis*, he appears headed for life and death in slavery's anonymity.[51] Slave torture and the permanent disappearance of the kidnapped are characteristics of the real world, not conventions of Roman Comedy, and *Captiui*'s departure from generic trajectories brings the play closer to 'realism' than any other surviving Plautine play. In the process, it reminds an attentive audience of just how far removed Roman Comedy is from reality, that is, just how artificial its generic conventions actually are.

Plautus engineers this confrontation with conventions through a persistent destabilization of his competent viewers' expectations, tricking them in much the same way that Sharrock describes him tricking *Pseudolus*' audience. *Pseudolus*, she argues, derives much of its humor from a metatheatrical ploy: it 'achieves its goals by word-power, while pretending to be trying to disguise a weak plot. Hence the apparent artlessness, hence inconsistencies, hence structural problems: they are all part of the wool Plautus/Pseudolus pulls over your eyes, for the big joke in the *Pseudolus* is to *look as if* it's a weak plot and play all held together by words.'[52] Similarly, *Captiui* relies upon an illusion of generic chaos,

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51. Richlin (2017), 401, emphasizes the verisimilar elements of the depiction of enslavement in *Capt.* and interprets Stalagmus' fate as an example of just the type of unsuccessful recognition that threatens Tyndarus.
52. Sharrock (1996), 155; emphasis in original.

because its suspense develops from the sense that the plotlines are out of control and beyond rescue when Hegio sends Tyndarus to the quarries. But like *Pseudolus*' metatheatrical trick, *Captiui*'s mid-play crisis is a set-up, a planned disaster that Plautus uses to reflect both the conventions of his genre and his own skill in testing their limits.

For all its unusual characteristics, *Captiui* remains highly effective as a comedy. Variations in its paradigms prompt viewers to wonder not whether Tyndarus will be recognized, but how the recognition will occur; consequently, its deviation from typical trajectories intensifies suspense when it reduces competent spectators' ability to imagine pathways to the target ending. The relief of anxiety over Tyndarus' status is all the more reassuring, and the restoration of the comic outcome all the more satisfying, for Plautus' near-abandonment of Roman Comic paradigms. Plautus does something highly skillful and highly Plautine in *Captiui*: he breaks his genre down to show his attentive audience how it works. This play is not merely metatheatrical, reminding its viewers that they are in the theater, but metageneric, insisting that they remember that they are in the *Roman Comic* theater.[53]

The implications of *Captiui*'s thematic treatment of its own genre extend beyond the rehabilitation of a problem play within Plautus' corpus. They concern the nature of the relationship that Plautus implies and assumes between performance and audience. Twentieth-century director Tyrone Guthrie writes that theatrical spectatorship is largely an imaginative experience, because 'action on the stage is a stylized representation of real action, which is then imagined by the audience.'[54] This imaginative creative process relies upon audience members' willingness to take an active role in playmaking, even if that role occurs primarily inside their own heads. To some extent a participating audience could be inferred from one that is self-selecting, in that those actively choosing to attend a comedy were likely willing to accept its formal and narrative demands, but *Captiui* shows that this audience participation is in fact essential to Plautine playmaking. In manipulating competent viewers' construction of plotlines to produce comic effects, *Captiui* shows Plautus accounting for and counting on their active, imaginative participation in the creation of a play.

If *Captiui*'s self-referentiality rewards spectators who are actively acquiring competence and applying it to new plays as they view them, then it is harder to imagine what an inexperienced audience gains from this type of metageneric game. The play does, however, hint at a more inclusive competence-building

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53. McCarthy (2004), 104, has also described Terence's comedy as 'metageneric' in its references to earlier examples of the Roman Comic tradition, which he represents 'as a set of conventions and stereotypes, rather than as a theatrical practice.' McCarthy contrasts metagenre with metatheater, the latter of which she describes as characteristic of Plautus; *Captiui* demonstrates, however, that Plautine plays may be both metatheatrical and metageneric.

54. Guthrie (1959), 349.

process at work in Plautine comedy as a whole. Competence grows in viewing plays generically, not particularly. The hypothetical projection with which I began can be extrapolated from any number of Plautus' comedies and relies on no specific example for definition; any viewer, then, can learn the rules, or learn more about the rules, from attending any Roman Comedy. As their competence grows, so does their ability to appreciate self-referential effects. If *Captiui* shows the kind of payoff that Plautus offers to the fans of his genre, and if this self-referential reward helps to explain a difficult play, then it also recharacterizes Roman Comedy as a genre that is more than merely formulaic. Plautus' Roman Comedy is *recursive*, a genre that gains cumulative dramatic effects through the application and reapplication of convention.

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