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PLAUTUS' *EPIDICUS* AND THE CASE OF THE MISSING ORIGINAL*

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Certain techniques of composition are acknowledged manifestations of originality among the Roman writers of *comoediae palliatae*. A Greek play could be shortened or expanded, its meter changed, scenes interpolated from a second play, and newly invented characters could be added. The texts of Plautus and Terence show signs of such freedom, and what detailed comparisons we can make between parallel Greek and Latin passages confirm the license of the Roman dramatists. The hundred odd lines of Menander's *Dis Exapaton* published in 1968, for example, contain two scenes Plautus omitted in making his *Bacchides,* and the double structure of that play now appears to be Plautus' own work.[1] The focus, characterization, and comic impact of the *Bacchides* probably made it a rather different play from the *Dis Exapaton.* In terms of plot, however, the link is unmistakable. The main limitation on the dramatist's originality in the *palliata* appears to be in plot construction and often justifies discussion of Plautus and Terence in terms of Greek originals. We know a specific Greek original or at least a Greek author for twelve of the twenty-one Plautine plays and for all six of Terence, by whose time the established poets of the *palliata* apparently engaged in a conscious program of fidelity to Greek originals.[2] Terence's prologues make this dependence explicit. So

*Earlier drafts of this paper were improved by the comments of audiences at Indiana University, The Ohio State University, and the 1977 meeting of The American Philological Association. I must also thank Professor John Wright for his detailed comments and encouragement and the two readers for *TAPA* whose detailed criticisms have, I hope, led to a tightening of the argument.

[1]Thus J. R. Clark, "Structure and Symmetry in the *Bacchides* of Plautus," *TAPA* 106 (1976) 85–96. In the following discussion Plautus is quoted from the OCT of W. M. Lindsay (Oxford 1904), but readers are advised to consult the revised text of G. Duckworth, *Plauti Epidicus* (Princeton 1940), hereafter cited as *Duckworth.* E. Fraenkel, *Elementi plautini in Plauto* (Florence 1960), will be cited as *EPP.*

[2]See H. Oppermann. "Zur Entwicklung der Fabula Palliata," *Hermes* 74 (1939) 113–29, and C. Garton, *Personal Aspects of the Roman Theatre* (Toronto 1972) 41–72. In the words of

do the prologues to Plautus' *Asinaria, Mercator,* and *Trinummus.* "From the point of view of the audience," writes one modern critic, "there can hardly have been much doubt from the start that they were to see a Latin version of a Greek play, and possibly . . . the naming of Greek author and title is, as much as anything, a reminder that the goods are genuine."[3]

Yet a few Plautine plays for which we have no specific testimony of Greek originals have so successfully resisted the efforts of analytic scholarship to deduce them that it may be time to question whether, at least in the time of Plautus, the goods need *always* have been so genuine. The *Epidicus* is one such play. It has neither didascalia nor prologue identifying a Greek source. No fragment of any Greek comedy has been associated with it, nor is any reconstruction of such a play currently in favor. Plautus sacrifices character and some would say logic to display the formidable talents of a comic type largely absent from the *Nea,* and key elements of its plot are unparalleled in and really incompatible with genuine Greek dramatic practice. Is it possible that this play had no Greek original? It is a complex problem, and the only real source of information is the text itself.

A masterly piece of trickery bears unexpected fruit at the climax of the *Epidicus* when young Stratippocles suddenly learns that the girl Telestis, whom Epidicus has schemed to buy him, is actually his sister.

St. nunc enim tu mea es. Te. soror quidem edepol, ut tu aeque scias.
salue, frater. St. sanan haec est? Ep. sana, si appellat suom.
St. quid? ego ⟨quo⟩ modo huic ⟨sum⟩ frater factus, dum intro eo atque exeo?
Ep. quod boni est id tacitus taceas tute tecum et gaudeas.
St. perdidisti et repperisti me, soror. Ep. stultu's, tace.
tibi quidem quod ames domi praestost, fidicina, opera mea;
et sororem in libertatem idem opera concilio mea. (648–54)

At the turn of the century Karl Dziatzko hypothesized a Greek original for the *Epidicus* in which Stratippocles actually did marry his half-sister Telestis and his father married the girl's mother. Dziatzko thought Plautus' abrupt reversal of Stratippocles' expectation here was an alteration necessitated by the Roman abhorrence of half-sister marriage. But no play of Menander, who was famous in antiquity for his skillful plots, is as symmetrical as the one Dziatzko invented, and C. W. Keyes has since shown that as Telestis and her mother are apparently not Athenian citizens, legal marriage with Stratippocles and his father Periphanes would have

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Schanz-Hosius, *Gesch. röm. Lit.* I (Munich 1927) 126: "Der Römer ist zunächst Bearbeiter eines griechischen Originals, das Argument ist nicht sein Werk." Section 47 on the limits of free creation in the *palliata* is a fair statement of the prevailing view.

[3]E. W. Handley, "Plautus and his Public: Some Thoughts on New Comedy in Latin," *Dioniso* 46 (1975) 117–32.

been impossible at Athens, too.[4] Nor have critics agreed on the nature and quality of this ending. "Few Plautine passages," says Eduard Fraenkel, "seem to have preserved the color and delicacy of Attic dialogue as faithfully as this one." Gunther Jachmann thought differently. "To the Athenian public this event would have appeared entirely senseless and would have certainly remained incomprehensible."[5] Does this scene make sense, or, for that matter, does the entire plot of the *Epidicus* really cohere? This is the key issue, and the failure of such scholars as Fraenkel and Jachmann to reach a consensus brings to mind Lejay's wry comment on similar failures among their illustrious predecessors: "When one sees that the logic of Leo is not that of Ribbeck and that the logic of Ribbeck is not that of Ritschl . . . there is the possibility that the logic of Plautus was neither that of Ritschl, nor that of Ribbeck, nor that of Leo."[6] We must examine the problem of the *Epidicus* in terms of two related questions: What logic governs its action? In what sense is it meaningful to speak of a Greek original for it?

The play opens with a dialogue between a *servus currens,* a young man named Thesprio, and the slave Epidicus, who is quickly revealed to be *callidus.* Both figures are fixtures of the Roman stage with only vague Greek prototypes, and their repartee is entirely Latin.[7]

[4]C. W. Keyes, "Half-Sister Marriage in New Comedy and the *Epidicus,*" *TAPA* 71 (1940) 217–29. Dziatzko's theory, set out in "Der Inhalt des Georgos von Menander," *RhM* 55 (1900) 104–11, was also a major component in the reconstruction of W. E. J. Kuiper, *Het Origineel van Plautus' Epidicus* (Amsterdam 1938), and was accepted by nearly everyone except Fraenkel, *EPP* 300–06 and 434–35. *Duckworth* 394–96 reviews the discussion. Interest in the *Epidicus* has waned since the publication by Keyes. The meticulous symmetry of Dziatzko and Kuiper is conspicuously absent from Menander's *Perikeiromene* (unknown to Dziatzko but cited by Fraenkel) and *Samia.*

[5]Fraenkel, *EPP* 303, unchanged from the German edition of 1922, p. 316; G. Jachmann, *Plautinisches und Attisches* (Berlin 1931) 214. *Duckworth* 386–87 discusses the various opinions held of this scene.

[6]P. Lejay, *Plaute* (Paris 1925) 216.

[7]The scantiness of the Greek evidence has made the identification of prototypes for the familiar figures of Roman comedy precarious and often subjective. P. W. Harsh, "The Intriguing Slave in Greek Comedy," *TAPA* 86 (1955) 135–42, argues for the presence of this figure as a major element of New Comedy, but if, for example, we look at the play now known to be *Aspis* (cited by Harsh, p. 140), we can now see that Daos neither controls the action nor is cast as the central character of the play. Yet this Daos is certainly the closest Greek parallel to the *servus callidus.* Similarly, both W. S. Anderson, "A New Menandrian Prototype for the *Servus Currens* of Roman Comedy," *Phoenix* 24 (1970) 229–36, and T. Guardì, "I precedenti greci della figura del servus currens della commedia romana," *Pan* 2 (1974) 5–15, err in citing him as a *servus currens* at *Aspis* 399 ff. He enters from the house and is thus the *exangelos* familiar from tragedy. Contrast such flat characters as Daos of *Aspis* and *Perikeiromene,* Getas of *Dyskolos,* and Parmenon of *Samia* with the elaborately developed figures discussed by Fraenkel, *EPP* 223–41, and G. Duckworth, "The Dramatic Function of the *Servus Currens* of Roman Comedy," *Classical Studies Presented to E. Capps* (Princeton 1936) 93–102.

Ep. Heus, adulescens! Th. quis properantem me reprehendit pallio?
Ep. familiaris. Th. fateor, nam odio es nimium familiariter. (1–2)

We might expect a traveller, especially one returning from a military expedition as Thesprio is, to wear the cape-like *chlamys*. His reference to a *pallium* calls attention to the fact that this comedy is a *palliata*, and the immediate play on *familiaris* and *familiariter* proclaims the Roman nature of what will follow. Their banter continues with jokes over the expected feast for returning travellers that builds upon a comic motif which is largely Roman (6–8). Even their jokes about the loss of their young master's arms are Plautine (29–38), and the entire scene is set as an extremely elaborate canticum.[8] The exposition, though it contains a surprising twist, is straightforward. Stratippocles has returned from a campaign against Thebes in debt to a moneylender for the purchase of a captive girl (Telestis) he now loves passionately, while Epidicus, acting on his prior instructions, has already tricked his father Periphanes into unwittingly purchasing for him another girl, Acropolistis. After Thesprio's departure Epidicus supplies the additional information that he has secured Acropolistis by convincing Periphanes that she is his missing daughter (87–90). Epidicus has thus succeeded in one trick even before the play opens, and the exposition is framed in terms of a further challenge to his wits. The mention of Periphanes' lost daughter has two immediate effects. It raises the lingering question of how Epidicus convinced the old man, and, because the feat seems so very improbable, it furthers our estimate of how clever Epidicus must be. This giving and holding back of information, however effective, is rather unusual. The Greek technique was to reveal such key facts in a prologue, much as Plautus does in such plays as the *Aulularia*, which is probably based on a play by Menander, and the *Rudens*, which Arcturus identifies as based upon Diphilos.[9] Trickery before a play opens, as in the *Amphitruo* and *Captivi*, is detailed in such prologues and in the body of the play, while the *Curculio*, which probably had no prologue, does not require its leading figure to be as knowledgeable as Epidicus must be.[10] Plautus' departure from the usual technique in the *Epidicus* is deliberate.

[8]For returning travellers see J. Wright, *Dancing in Chains* (Rome 1974) 138–51, for the jokes on Stratippocles' arms Fraenkel, *EPP* 80–82. The metrical analysis of *Duckworth* 417 lists thirty-four changes of meter from lines 1 to 80. See his commentary *ad loc.* and L. Braun, *Die Cantica des Plautus* (Göttingen 1970) 101–04.

[9]The newly discovered plays of Menander conform to this general pattern of exposition. See S. Dworacki, "The Prologues in the Comedies of Menander," *Eos* 61 (1973) 33–47. Plautus' departure from the norm has puzzled and perhaps misled critics of the *Epidicus* who fail to see its purpose. For their arguments see *Duckworth* 97–100.

[10]But see E. Fantham, "The *Curculio* of Plautus: An Illustration of Plautine Methods in Adaptation," *CQ* 15 (1965) 84–100.

His exposition, so clearly stamped with the hallmarks of Latin originality, enhances the mystique surrounding the slave's resourcefulness while providing an indication of things to come for an audience experienced in the devices of comic plots.[11] In the following scene Stratippocles' comic threats and appeals for help further enhance Epidicus' stature, and the act ends with the slave rising heroically to the challenge.

Act II opens with old Periphanes' embarrassment. Believing he has now found his daughter, he would like to find and marry the girl's mother, but he is ashamed to make the necessary admissions to his son. In Menander's *Samia* a similar, though reversed, combination of reticence and affection characterizes relations between Moschion and his father Demeas, and Menander, building his play around the resulting complications, features that relationship. Plautus ignores this possibility. The scene simply establishes Periphanes' commitment to finding his second family—the desire that sets the course for the play's action—and foreshadows the eventual appearance of the woman Philippa. Periphanes' character itself remains undeveloped, and we learn neither the facts of this early love affair nor of any later marriage with the woman he wronged. Plautus keeps these details far in the background and lavishes attention only on Epidicus, who is the link between father and son. The heart of this second act is a long, colorful monologue in which Epidicus, describing a scene he has not witnessed, reports the conversation of two girls who do not exist, and wins Periphanes and his friend Apoecides to a course of action he has no intention of following (205 ff.). Epidicus tells Periphanes that his son has a mistress and persuades the old man to forestall this infatuation by buying the object of his affections and eventually selling her at a profit to a Rhodian soldier already in love with her. There is, of course, no girl except Telestis and no lovesick Rhodian. Epidicus will put a hired lyre girl in the part and then use the money given him to buy her to enable Stratippocles to pay for Telestis. This act, like the first, ends with a short monologue in which Epidicus announces his intentions. Two sets of citizens, first Stratippocles and his friend and now Periphanes and Apoecides, have come to him for help. The two acts build Epidicus' reputation and prepare for a scheme whose complexity and audacity will be worthy of our expectations. As Stratippocles remarks in admiration for the scheme that gives him the money he needs, "you have more turns than a potter's wheel" (371).

[11]Cf. Terence, *And.* 220–24, where Davus dismisses as *fabulae!* the account that will eventually resolve young Pamphilus' dilemma. J. N. Hough, "The Understanding of Intrigue: A Study in Plautine Chronology," *AJP* 60 (1939) 422–35, observes Plautus' increasing reliance on his audience's knowledge as he streamlines his exposition in the later plays.

Epidicus' scheming does indeed go by in something of a whirl, for Plautus leaves several of its details unclear. What were the terms of his arrangement with the *leno* from whom he pretended to buy the lyre girl? Is she his accomplice or his dupe? What are Periphanes' plans for his son? These loose ends do not result simply from the careless adaptation of a more tightly-knit original; they are calculated omissions of detail. The reason for them lies in the very structure of the play, and the best way to discover it is to see how Plautus handles the pair of discoveries that bring Epidicus' elaborate scheme tumbling about his ears.

The striking parallelism of these two discoveries gives coherent shape to the spectacle of Epidicus' apparent downfall. The instrument of the first lies in the early exposition, where Epidicus tells Stratippocles of a Euboean soldier in love with the first girl, Acropolistis (153–55). This soldier has heard—correctly, of course—that Periphanes has purchased her, and he now appears in order to buy her for himself (437 ff.). Periphanes mistakes him for the Rhodian of Epidicus' imagination and is happy to oblige. He blithely summons the lyre girl onstage, whereupon the soldier becomes indignant and Periphanes realizes that he has been tricked. The trickster is not far to seek, but Periphanes' quickness in perceiving Epidicus' trick is overshadowed by his complete failure to suspect still another. His blindness to this possibility heightens our expectation of the further discovery that awaits him.

This second discovery is brought about by the arrival of Philippa, the woman he once wronged, whose appearance has been carefully foreshadowed. Periphanes announced her existence at the beginning of Act II, and his later reflection on the sins of his youth primes us for her appearance (382–93). Like the soldier, she comes onstage looking for Periphanes, and their reunion is an opportunity for a touching scene. While Menander in the *Misoumenos,* however, enriches the comparable reunion of the captive girl Krateia and her father Demeas with tragic overtones, Plautus makes his scene entirely humorous. As Periphanes and Philippa draw near they echo each other in their asides.

Pe. certo east
quam in Epidauro
pauperculam memini comprimere.
Ph. plane hicine est
qui mi in Epidauro virgini primu' pudicitiam perpulit? (540–41)

Their reunion is full of such echoes, which we now know to be thoroughly Plautine. The approach of the two young men Pistoclerus and Mnesilochus in the *Bacchides,* which in Menander takes only a trimeter (*DE* 103), is staged by Plautus with precisely this comic expansion.

Pi. estne hic meu' sodalis? Mn. estne hic hostis quem aspicio meus?
Pi. certe is est. Mn. is est. adibo contra et contollam gradum. (534–35)

The potential drama of the reunion of Periphanes and Philippa is further undercut by Periphanes' mistaken belief that he is about to restore their daughter to Philippa.[12] Plautus thus provides a musical recognition *and* some of the long-suppressed background information *and* the anticipation of a further surprise in the offing for Periphanes. Once again Periphanes calls a girl from his house, and once again his control of the situation is revealed to be illusory. When confronted with this "daughter" Philippa's vehemence and Acropolistis' cheek in confessing the fraud reduce the old man to a comic butt and turn the situation into farce. It is a brilliant scene that, like the earlier discovery of the lyre girl, is dominated by a single, unseen presence. *Epidicus mihi fuit magister,* says Acropolistis (592), and Periphanes can only answer Philippa's demand for an explanation with the helpless reply, *seruos Epidicus dixit mihi* (597). His immediate desire to seek out and punish Epidicus focuses attention squarely on the absent *callidus,* whose momentary terror opens the final act.

Just as the two discoveries of Act IV were linked by their parallel structure, so the events of the dénouement use elements of the first act to unite beginning and end. Stratippocles' promise here to help Epidicus reverses their usual relationship (618–19, cf. 120), but the appearance of the moneylender with Stratippocles' new love Telestis solves the problem at once. While Stratippocles is inside getting the money Epidicus recognizes the girl as Periphanes' true daughter, for he had previously brought her a birthday gift at Thebes. This recognition finally explains why Periphanes took Epidicus' word for the identity of Acropolistis, and Epidicus' ability to comfort Stratippocles for the loss of Telestis with the reminder of Acropolistis already inside makes deft and economic use of his initial bit of trickery. Stratippocles has already revealed his passions to be less than deep, and the transferral of his affections back to Acropolistis is evidently no hardship (655, cf. 135). Epidicus' calls to Thesprio at 657 and 660, a rather surprising reintroduction of the name, if not the presence of a protatic character, links the scene with the opening dialogue between Epidicus and Thesprio, and the final confrontation between Epidicus and the two old men builds further upon the beginning. Epidicus' insolence before them is calculated to obscure the fact that he has escaped this final difficulty entirely by chance. He insists upon being bound, and then, once

[12]Cf. the further parallels in 543–45, 550, 554, and the repeated play on *salue* and *salua* at 548–49, 558. For the metrical complexities of their duet see Braun (above, note 8) 108–10 and *Duckworth* 348 ff.

Periphanes discovers Telestis safely reunited inside with her mother, he actually imposes conditions before consenting to be set free. Their exchange is a set of demands and responses, just as the dialogue between Epidicus and Thesprio began with a set of demands.

> Ep. uenire saluom gaudeo. Th. quid ceterum? Ep. quod eo adsolet:
> cena tibi dabitur. Th. spondeo— Ep. quid? Th. me accepturum,
> si dabis. (7–8)
>
> Pe. soccos, tunicam, pallium
> tibi dabo. Ep. quid deinde porro? Pe. libertatem. Ep. at postea?
> nouo liberto opus est quod pappet. Pe. dabitur, praebebo cibum. (725–27)

The play ends as it began, with a series of offers and with Epidicus in the forefront. Stratippocles, Philippa, Telestis, and Acropolistis are forgotten as Epidicus triumphs over circumstances and over Periphanes. The epilogue makes the dramatic focus clear: *hic is homo est qui libertatem malitia inuenit sua.*

The *Epidicus,* then, does indeed have an internal logic. The techniques of building upon earlier details and of writing successive scenes in parallel give the play a coherent structure, but if Plautus was willing to take this much trouble, why did he leave other aspects of his plot so foggy? As noted above, Epidicus' arrangements for hiring the lyre girl are omitted, and Periphanes' talk of marriage for Stratippocles and for himself is quietly dropped. Nor do the mechanics of Epidicus' scheme bear close inspection. How had he planned to deliver Acropolistis to Stratippocles when Periphanes believed she was his daughter? How was he to accommodate the girl who turned out to be Telestis? What happened to the further inquiries of that Euboean soldier looking for Acropolistis? Plautus keeps these matters strictly outside his play. To say that Epidicus' schemes are senseless or unworkable is only to say that they are impossible in any context except the present one, in which they happen to work quite well. The unauthorized purchase of Telestis could not have turned out better for Periphanes, and Stratippocles is happy to accommodate Acropolistis. The future plans of Periphanes and Philippa have no more bearing on events than the implied reconciliation of Demeas and his mistress Chrysis in Menander's *Samia,* and the Euboean soldier, having served his purpose, disappears as conveniently as the arbitrants Syriskos and Daos in the *Epitrepontes.* Our new-found knowledge of Menander reveals how loose a structure Greek New Comedy actually tolerates, and Plautus' omissions of detail might seem to be well within the accepted limits. Yet the looseness of structure is deliberately designed to make the play a *tour de force* for its clever slave. Other possible interests are ruthlessly sacrificed to this aim, and the clever slave, as

Fraenkel has demonstrated, is primarily a Roman figure. Though it would be rash to claim that clever slaves were not prominent in plays of Diphilos and Philemon, or even in the Menander still lost, Plautus' concentration on this figure here to the exclusion of all other dramatic interests casts doubt on the value of thinking in terms of a Greek original for this play.

There is no independent evidence for the assumption that *palliata* comedies in the time of Plautus had to be versions of specific Greek plays, though most Plautine comedies certainly are. Friedrich Leo, approaching Plautus through Livius Andronicus and Ennius, could see Plautus' art as "nicht mehr aber nicht weniger als die Übersetzungskunst," but scholars building on his foundations have put increasing distance between the Roman comic poets and their Greek models. The didascalia to the *Stichus,* for example, which is the only complete didascalia to Plautus, identifies the play as being based upon an *Adelphoi* of Menander, but Eduard Fraenkel has shown how radically Plautus must have altered his original. Gordon Williams has done something similar with the *Miles Gloriosus,* and the recent study of the *palliata* style by John Wright casts in sharp relief the independent capabilities of the Roman tradition.[13] No ancient sources indicate an obligation for the poets of Plautus' time to use specific Greek originals. The ancient comparisons between Latin plays and their Greek models center on the later Roman dramatists, and even then they imply that such comparisons are out of place or at least unusual. Cicero ridicules the *eruditi* who prefer Menander to Caecilius and Terence (*de fin.* 1.4), and Aulus Gellius, in that famous passage comparing Caecilius' *Plocium* with its Menandrean original, is conscious of the novelty of his enterprise (*NA* 2.23). Only a sudden impulse while reciting from the *Plocium* leads to the reading of Menander's play, and his selection of parallel passages is then compiled especially for his purpose. As for the *Epidicus,* the action is structured to reflect characteristically Roman comic interests, and some of its fundamental details cannot be easily integrated into a genuine Greek dramatic context.

First, the external background has proven impossible to relate to the history of the fourth or third century. The Athenian expeditions against

[13]F. Leo, *Plautinische Forschungen* (Berlin 1912²) 87–101, whose penetrating discussion became the authority for such later judgments as that of Schanz-Hosius quoted above, note 2. On the *Stichus* and *Miles* see Fraenkel, *EPP* 268–81, and G. Williams, "Evidence for Plautus' Workmanship in the *Miles Gloriosus,*" *Hermes* 86 (1958) 79–105. Wright's book is cited above, note 8. F. H. Sandbach in A. W. Gomme & F. H. Sandbach, *Menander, A Commentary* (Oxford 1973) 6, remarks of the *Stichus* that "one is tempted to doubt whether it is more than distantly connected with Menander." The attempt to reconstruct a Menandrean plot by T. B. L. Webster, *Studies in Menander* (Manchester 1960²) 139–45, is unsuccessful.

Thebes in 293 or 290 would be appropriate models for Stratippocles' campaign, but no historical rationale has been found for putting Periphanes in Epidaurus as an Athenian soldier some fifteen or twenty years earlier, when he must have met Philippa and fathered Telestis.[14] New Comedy tends to be non-political, but it is not so wholly non-historical. Secondly, the disclosure of Epidicus' scheme with the lyre girl hinges upon Periphanes' identification of the Euboean soldier looking for Acropolistis with the imaginary Rhodian. Yet what Athenian could confuse an Ionian from Euboea with a Doric-speaking Rhodian? This may seem a minor detail until we recall how popular a feature of Greek comedy dialect humor was. The Megarian and Boeotian of the *Acharnians,* a Boeotian in Eubulos' *Antiope* (fr. 12 K), and the Doric-speaking "doctor" of Menander's *Aspis* testify to the continuing popularity of the motif. Like the problem of historic background, the blithe disregard of distinct dialects and their comic potential is difficult to square with known Greek practice. Yet both points are crucial to the *Epidicus* and are typical of Plautus. The sandwiching together of Epidaurus, Thebes, and Athens adds exotic color and a gleeful complication to events that, though unparalleled in the *Nea,* accord well with a love of polysyllabic Greek names and gratuitous references to Greek dress. *Pergraecari* is Plautus' word for the practice. As for the Rhodian, he has been invented as someone who could be expected to take the girl far away.[15] He thus fits the context perfectly, while the problem of dialect is something a Roman could easily ignore.

The essential coherence of the *Epidicus* and the inability to reconcile fundamental details of its structure with Greek dramatic practice suggest an aggregate of familiar motifs on which Plautus has fixed his own sense rather than a continuous Latin rendering of a specific, distinguishable Greek play. Recent scholarship has revised upwards our opinion of both the sophistication of Plautus' audience and of the independent strength of the Roman comic tradition, and there is ample room in this new vision for the occasional reworking of familiar material into similar, but essentially independent plays.[16] The dramatic tradition of Plautus' day was not an

[14]See the statement of the problem by U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *De tribus carminibus latinis commentatio* (Göttingen 1893) = *Kleine Schriften* II (Berlin 1971) 260–62. At lines 437 ff. Periphanes' military career is the subject of comic interplay with the soldier who has come to purchase Acropolistis. That Periphanes met Philippa while on campaign is a natural inference for which the text offers no indication to the contrary.

[15]Noted by Keyes (above, note 4) 223. Keyes and *Duckworth* 196–97 lay to rest the belief that the Rhodian was anything more than imaginary.

[16]The re-evaluation of the capabilities of Plautus' audience was urged by Hough (above, note 11). See now W. R. Chalmers, "Plautus and His Audience," *Roman Drama,* ed. T. A. Dorey and D. R. Dudley (London 1965) 21–50, and Wright (above, note 8) 190–93.

inviolable canon of rules for translating Greek plays but a loose set of characters, situations, and story patterns built upon the Greek *Nea* combined with a humor, a love of song, and a literary style that were essentially Latin. When, as in the *Epidicus,* the comic characters and interests are so distinctly Roman and the structure of the Greek original eludes us, it may be time to ask whether such a hypothetical original ever really existed. When Plautus speaks at *Bacchides* 214 of *Epidicum, quam fabulam aeque ac me ipsum amo,* he may have had special reasons for thinking it a favorite.

The suggestion, then, is that the *argumentum* of the *Epidicus* is for all practical purposes Plautus' own work. The strong tradition of the *comoedia palliata,* like Greek New Comedy before it, offered its practitioners a set of fertile and tested elements for making plays. Plautus generally built his dramatic structures by following specific Greek plans, but there is no explicit bar to his creation of a play using the traditional material without one. The persistent Plautine logic of the *Epidicus* and the inability of a century's scholarship to divine an underlying Greek pattern for it raise this possibility, but in the present state of our knowledge the case of the missing original may still need to be considered unsolved.