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## HOMOSEXUALITY IN PLAUTUS' PLAYS

Saara Lilja

Jachmann was, as far as I know, the first to suggest that Plautus' allusions to homosexuality are a genuinely Plautine feature. In his treatment of the *Rudens* he makes an important observation that lines 1072—76 are Plautus' own addition, not only on account of the assonance between the Latin words *primarius* and *comprimere*, but also because lines 1074f. contain a pointedly homosexual ambiguity: "Nebenbei bemerkt stimmt auch die päderastische Zweideutigkeit der V. 1074—75 zu der Beurteilung der Stelle, wie sie sich für unbefangene Betrachtung eigentlich von selbst ergibt, denn sie ist mehr im Stil des Plautus als in dem der νέα κωμωδία."<sup>1</sup> It was not until half a century later that Cody devoted more attention to this topic restricting, however, her investigation to Plautus' *Casina*,<sup>2</sup> and for my own part I am at present writing a book entitled *The Romans' Attitude to Homosexuality before A.D. 14*, in which the first of the three main chapters deals with comedy. This paper is intended to give an advance summary of the most significant results achieved so far; for more detailed information the reader is requested to consult the book itself, which I hope will be published in 1983.

My treatment of comedy in the forthcoming book starts from three points in Cody's paper that invite further examination. First, according to her, the prominence of homosexuality in the *Casina* contradicts Duck-

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<sup>1</sup> G. Jachmann, *Plautinisches und Attisches*, Berlin 1931, 58, n. 2. Trachalio's words to Gripus' master, *comprime hunc* (1073), are misunderstood by Gripus: *quid? tu idem mihi vis fieri quod erus consuevit tibi?/si ille te comprimere solitust, hic noster nos non solet* (1074f.).

<sup>2</sup> J. M. Cody, *The senex amator in Plautus' Casina*, *Hermes* 104 (1976) 453—476. She refers to Jachmann's monograph several times, but not to the important passage cited above.

worth's remark that Plautus' allusions "are confined to the appearance of *pueri delicati* in isolated scenes and to insults hurled at various characters which, again, occur only very rarely" (454).<sup>3</sup> Secondly, all homosexual gibes in Greek comedy are directed at effeminate males, whereas Lysidamus in the *Casina* "is not effeminate, but is homo- as well as heterosexual out of an excess of lust" (474). Thirdly, the fragments of Atellan farce ought to parallel the ending of the *Casina* "in their blunt, but not effeminate, portrayal of homosexuality" (475).

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The number of *pueri delicati* in Plautus' plays seems, at first sight, very small. The most typical of them is Paegnium, a senior slave's darling, who appears in three scenes in the *Persa*. But also Pinacium and Phaniscus, though called *servi* in the *dramatis personae*, behave like *pueri delicati* in a short scene in the *Mostellaria* (885—903), where one of them is teasing the other that he is their young master's minion.<sup>4</sup> In a lively scene in the *Asinaria* (591ff.), the *servi* Libanus and Leonida form a similar couple, acting as though they were both (Libanus in particular) their young master's pet slaves. Further, the insolence of an adult slave in several other plays can only be explained by the surmise that he has been, or still is, his old master's minion. Stalagmus in the *Captivi*, the title-character in the *Pseudolus* and Olympio in the *Casina* are such slaves, and the old masters in these plays are described correspondingly as having homosexual inclinations.

The *Casina* is exceptional — that is, if the transvestite theme is disregarded — in the abundance of homosexual allusions: two long encounters (451ff. and 733ff.) and one very short (809—813) between Olympio and old Lysidamus prepare the audience for the homosexual burlesque of the finale. As regards the other plays mentioned, homo-

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<sup>3</sup> See G. E. Duckworth, *The Nature of Roman Comedy*, Princeton 1952, 293—295 and 352, n. 53.

<sup>4</sup> Later in the play (939), they are actually addressed as *pueri*; note also *puere, nimium delicatu's* (947), shouted at Phaniscus. The distinction between *servus* and *puer*, then, is not so clear-cut as Delcourt maintains (130) in her paper *Le prix des esclaves dans les comédies latines*, *AC* 17 (1948) 123—132.

sexuality is brought to the foreground in one single scene in each.<sup>5</sup> The role reversal between master and slave, which is very conspicuous in the *Casina* (see Cody 456f.), also characterizes the scene in the *Asinaria* (591ff.).<sup>6</sup> A similar role reversal in the *Captivi* explains the unexpectedly rude allusion to old Hegio's homosexuality (867) made by his parasite; this insinuation serves as a prelude to the scene between Hegio and his former pet, Stalagmus. In the *Pseudolus*, too, the homosexual finale of old Simo and his slave is skilfully anticipated by several hints to their homosexual inclinations (120, 314 and esp. 1175ff.).

In all these separate scenes the homosexual relationship exists between a slave and his own, young or old, master (in the *Persa*, senior slave). In each case the slave, not the master, is taunted, and he is taunted by another slave. It is only after the role reversal between master and slave that the slave who has now become the 'master' takes the liberty of behaving haughtily towards the one-time master. A similar role reversal takes place when Hegio's parasite is once bold enough to allude to his patron's homosexual past (*Capt.* 867). The other isolated allusions to homosexuality include two that deal with the relationship between a slave and his master, each taking the form of a dialogue between two slaves.<sup>7</sup> Only once, in the *Aulularia* (line 637), does an alien slave taunt old Euclio in a similar way. This almost incredible effrontery serves to suggest how contemptible and ludicrous the old miser is.<sup>8</sup>

The prominence of the homosexual element in the *Casina*, then, is not so "unique in the Plautine corpus" as Cody believes (461). What about her second point (474) — that Lysidamus is not effeminate, but is bisexual out of an excess of lust, whereas all homosexual gibes in Greek

<sup>5</sup> The only exception is the *Persa*, but Paegnium's role in the finale is not predominant.

<sup>6</sup> The role reversal in this scene is discussed in detail by E. Segal, *Roman Laughter*, Harvard Univ. Press 1968, 104—109.

<sup>7</sup> *Rud.* 1074f. has been cited above (n. 1); the other instance is *Epid.* 66. The other isolated allusions are concerned with parasites, moneylenders, cooks and procurers, all of whom, though not slaves, were nevertheless low in the social scale.

<sup>8</sup> It is typical for him that, instead of cursing as one might expect, he only says naively: *aufer cavillam, non ego nunc nugas ago* (638). Note further that the alien slave's master is the young man who loves Euclio's daughter.

comedy are directed at effeminate males? Though an investigation into Old Comedy is not needed for a study of Roman Comedy, Dover's discussion of Aristophanes indicates that Cody is right as regards Old Comedy.<sup>9</sup> As regards Middle and New Comedy, both are characterized, to cite Dover, by "the exploitation of any kind of effeminacy for the purpose of jokes about passive homosexuality" (145). In the plays of Plautus, not only Lysidamus, but all old and young masters who have homosexual inclinations, are heterosexual as well: old masters are married,<sup>10</sup> and young masters (in the *Persa*, senior slave) have girl-friends. A dialogue in the *Truculentus* between the courtesan's maid and young Diniarchus shows that men's bisexuality was regarded as a matter of course: *ad pueros ire meliust* (150) ... *utrosque pergnovi probe* (152) ... *utriscum rem esse mavis?* (153). This dialogue is followed by Diniarchus' mock-serious comparison of *pueri* with courtesans. Referring to an analogy between Lysidamus and New Comedy, Jachmann mentions the blacksmith in the *Theseus* of Diphilus, who wrote the original of the *Casina*.<sup>11</sup> As a matter of fact, nothing is known of the homosexual blacksmith's heterosexual inclinations, but being 'the strongest of all things' he is certainly not effeminate.<sup>12</sup>

When the Plautine soldier — e.g. in *Poen.* 1309ff. and *Truc.* 608ff. — jeers at another male for effeminacy, it is mere abuse. Though boasting of his manliness, the title-character in the *Miles Gloriosus* shows considerable interest in his own sex (1111—13). Fraenkel's view that this

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<sup>9</sup> K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, London 1978, 135—153. On the manifold relations between Greek and Roman Comedy, see S. Lilja, *Terms of Abuse in Roman Comedy*, Helsinki 1965, 90—94.

<sup>10</sup> Lysidamus beats them all, being attracted by both Olympio and Casina. His lavish use of perfumes (see S. Lilja, *The Treatment of Odours in the Poetry of Antiquity*, Helsinki 1972, 72) is not a sign of effeminacy, but rather a way of becoming rejuvenated.

<sup>11</sup> See Jachmann (op. cit. in n. 1) 125, and *Athen. Deipn.* 10,451 b—c. One of the riddles the three Samian girls asked in that play was: "What is the strongest of all things?" The answers were 'iron', 'the blacksmith', and 'the penis'. The homosexual point in the third answer is clear from the reason given: καὶ τὸν χαλκέα στένοντα πυγίζουσι τούτῳ.

<sup>12</sup> Another parallel to Lysidamus is the vital sea-captain in Diphilus' *Painter* (fr. 43 K), who shares the blacksmith's homosexual inclinations and his manliness.

passage is purely Plautine, is somewhat undermined by the fact that the soldier in Terence's *Eunuchus* is also plainly bisexual (479). This would corroborate Wysk's and Webster's belief that the Plautine soldier is Greek in origin, although it is equally possible that Terence took this particular detail directly from Plautus.<sup>13</sup> Terence followed Plautus, not New Comedy, in having no gibes at effeminate males, and he also followed Plautus, not New Comedy, in giving no examples of 'romantic' love for boys.<sup>14</sup>

Thirdly, after citing two fragments of Pomponius and two of Novius, Cody concludes that Atellan plays parallel the ending of the *Casina* "in their blunt, but not effeminate, portrayal of homosexuality" (474). The fragments of the *fabula Atellana*, in fact, offer considerably more examples of homosexuality to corroborate Cody's view, though some of them are by no means certain. The twenty homosexual allusions found in the 300 lines of Atellan farce which survive, far outweigh the four allusions (some, again, uncertain) in the 600 lines of the *fabula togata*.<sup>15</sup> But drawing conclusions on the basis of fragmentary material is, of course, always risky. Such arbitrariness is exemplified by the nonexistence of plain allusions to homosexuality in the fragments of Afranius, who was blamed by Quintilian for this very 'vice': *utinam non inquinasset argumenta puerorum foedis amoribus mores suos fassus* (Inst. Or. 10,1,100). Another difficulty lies in the long interval that separated the *togata* as well as the *Atellana* from Plautus; Decimus Laberius, the principal ex-

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<sup>13</sup> See E. Fraenkel, *Plautinisches im Plautus*, Berlin 1922, 257f., H. Wysk, *Die Gestalt des Soldaten in der griechisch-römischen Komödie*, Giessen 1921, 9, and T. B. L. Webster, *Studies in Later Greek Comedy*, Manchester 1953, 107—109. Note also Segal's opinion, with further references, about the "Roman touches to the soldier's characterization" (op. cit. in n. 6, 123—126).

<sup>14</sup> This kind of love is described in New Comedy by Damoxenus (fr. 3 K) and in the three anonymous fragments (222—224 K) which illustrate Plutarch's remark (Mor. 769 b) that the love of boys can be as passionate as the love of women. It may be the same kind of love Plutarch has in mind when he says (Mor. 712 c) that in the singularly large number of Menander's plays there are no examples of παιδὸς ἔρωσ ἄρρενος (Menander has pithy descriptions of effeminacy, notably fr. 363 K).

<sup>15</sup> Two of these four, both in Titinius' *Setina*, are gibes at an effeminate young man. This feature may have come directly from New Comedy, since it was not found either in Plautus or in Terence.

ponent of the literary *mimus*, was later still.<sup>16</sup> It might be expected that mimes, which were notoriously indecent, would abound in homosexual allusions, but these are relatively rare (three in 150 lines), perhaps because in Laberius' plays women were allowed to act for the first time in Rome, thus giving more emphasis to heterosexuality.

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I have not yet mentioned the most significant result achieved in my comparative study of the homosexual allusions found in comedy. In Plautus' plays, (1) the overwhelming majority of allusions to homosexuality are made to slaves and by slaves, (2) these allusions are either isolated or occur in clusters forming separate scenes, and (3) the homosexual relationship in question usually exists between a slave and his master. In New Comedy and in Terence, (1) slaves never allude to homosexuality, and (2) there is no sign of homosexual relationships between slaves and their masters. Although caution is necessary because of the fragmentary form in which New Comedy survives, I think that the more or less complete plays of Menander and Terence's six plays ought to afford us a sufficiently accurate total perspective.

The manifest difference between the type of homosexual allusions made in the plays of Plautus and those found in New Comedy and in Terence would suggest that the passages in Plautus' plays where the relations of slaves to their masters are characterized by a markedly homosexual element are his own addition. Without paying any attention to homosexuality, Fraenkel was the first to believe that the above-mentioned scene in the *Asinaria* (591ff.) is partly Plautine.<sup>17</sup> Cody's detailed analysis of the homosexual encounters in the *Casina* indicates (476) that they were inserted by Plautus himself. For my own part I shall show in my future book that the scene in the *Asinaria* is in many respects a close parallel to the encounters in the *Casina*. In addition to these examples taken from the *Asinaria* and the *Casina*, I have mentioned earlier in this

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<sup>16</sup> Titinius was Terence's younger contemporary, and Afranius still younger; Pomponius *floruit* about 100—85, and Novius somewhat later; Decimus Laberius died in 43 B.C.

<sup>17</sup> See Fraenkel (*op. cit.* in n. 13) 116 and 215f.



paper (pp. 57 and 60f.) that the homosexual joke in Rud. 1074f. was thought Plautine by Jachmann, and that Fraenkel considered the soldier's homosexual comment in Mil. 1111—13 to be inserted by Plautus. There will be more examples in my book.

Why is it that Plautus' plays abound in allusions to homosexual relationships between slaves and their masters, though there was nothing like this in New Comedy? Wilkinson's explanation is that "whereas Solon had forbidden slaves to partake in homosexual practices, at Rome it was only slaves and other noncitizens who could legitimately be used for them".<sup>18</sup> It is well known that the slave was regarded at Rome as a piece of property, a thing, and therefore, as Wilkinson continues, "could be used without restraint". An obviously Plautine passage in the Curculio, where Palinurus is instructing his young master, is illustrative: *dum ted apstineas nupta, vidua, virgine, / iuventute et pueris liberis, ama quid lubet* (37f.). If Wilkinson's remark that "there was something sacred about the person of a Roman citizen" is correct, then a Greek of free status was singularly sacred, since it was unthinkable to consider that he would condescend to associate with a slave. Wilkinson does not give any references, but is probably thinking of the passage where Aeschines, in his speech against Timarchus (§§ 138f.), quotes from a law which debarred slaves from the use of gymnasia and prescribed "punishment for a slave who falls in love with a boy of free status".<sup>19</sup>

It is obvious that the *pueri* in Truc. 150ff. (see above, p. 60) refers to slaves who are male prostitutes as is the anonymous *puer* of the procurer Ballio in the Pseudolus (767ff.). What about the status of the *pueri* mentioned in Quintilian's comment upon Afranius' plays (see above, p. 61)? Considering that, according to Donatus (on Ter. Eun. 57), the role of slaves in the *togata* was inferior to that in Plautus' plays, and that the

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<sup>18</sup> L. P. Wilkinson, From the point of view of antiquity (Classical approaches, IV: Homosexuality), Encounter 51,3 (1978) 20—31. The quotations are from p. 29.

<sup>19</sup> The prosecution of Timarchus is discussed in detail by Dover (op. cit. in n. 9) 19—109; on Aesch. Tim. §§ 138f., see 48f. and 60 (the quotation is from p. 60).

*Atellana* was certainly concerned with free citizens,<sup>20</sup> I think that Afranius' *pueri* may have been free. Relativity of time seems to be the decisive factor in changing views on matters relating to homosexuality, but that is a topic to be treated in more detail in my future book.

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<sup>20</sup> Note esp. *civem* and *ipsus orans ultro* (Ribbeck 148f., or Frassinetti 154f.) as well as *centuriatim* (R 153, or F 149).