

INTRODUCTION

1 PLAUTUS THE PLAYWRIGHT

The historical Plautus remains elusive.¹ The biographical tradition depends on Varro (116–27 BCE), who lacked reliable sources. Today as in antiquity any detailed account of P.'s life is an obvious scholarly construct. For example, the tantalizingly vague claim that P. earned money 'in the service of stage-personnel' (Gel. 3.3.14 *in operis artificium scaenicorum*) plausibly supports competing notions of P. as a person of the theatre who got his start in Atellan farce or as a touring actor with the Artists of Dionysus.² The dates given for P.'s life, 254–184 BCE, may not be exactly correct (they yield a neat seventy years),³ but match a dramatic career agreed to flourish from the last years of the Second Punic War (218–201 BCE) to the mid 180s BCE. We can accept the testimony of the production notice,⁴ preserved in the Ambrosian palimpsest, that ties *Ps.* to an important occasion at the Megalenses of 191 BCE.⁵ The broader historical context for P.'s work is Rome's ascendancy to Mediterranean 'superpower' status and the social transformations accompanying this early phase of imperialism: increased migration of persons, customs, and ideas to the city-state (especially from Greece), an influx of wealth and property (including a greatly expanded supply of slaves), and inevitable collisions between Roman traditions and external innovations.⁶ Further facts of P.'s professional life are scarce: he seems to have been the first Roman playwright to specialize in one dramatic genre (after Greek practice), and he worked with the famous actor-manager T. Publius Pellio.⁷

¹ Accounts of P.'s life: Leo 1912: 63–86, Gratwick 1982: 808–9, Paratore 2005: 85–7. For the fictionalizing tendencies of ancient biographies see Fairweather 1974.

² Promoting scholarly views of P. as a playwright whose primary influence was either Italian or Greek: Fontaine 2014a: 533–4, 2014b: 416–18. For Atellan farce and the Artists of Dionysus see pp. 6, 11–12 below.

³ 184 BCE, the year of Cato the Elder's censorship, is also suspiciously given as the date of Terence's birth. Cic. *Sen.* 14, which claims P. produced *Ps.* in his twilight years, broadly supports the 184 date; *Cas.* 979–80 refer to the *senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus* of 186 BCE.

⁴ Didascaliae survive for only *Ps.* and *St.* (200 BCE). If adjustments for the errant Roman calendar are made, the debut of *Ps.* was in December 192, not April 191.

⁵ Pp. 9–10, 43–4 below.

⁶ For P.'s cultural-historical context see Gruen 1990 and Leigh 2004.

⁷ The didascalia of *St.* identifies Pellio as producer. A metatheatrical joke at *Bac.* 213–15 (with Barsby 1986: 115–16) indicates that Pellio acted in P.'s plays and another at *Men.* 404 (with Gratwick 1993a: 178) makes him responsible for the stage's construction.

P.'s ironic and self-abasing name hardly clarifies his historical identity. The improbable *tria nomina* Titus Maccius Plautus, 'Phallus son of Clown the Mime-Actor',⁸ appear to be a professional pseudonym,⁹ and we can infer nothing certain about his social status (Roman, freedman, Italian citizen?) from them. Ancient sources give P.'s origins in Sarsina, Umbria. If accurate, this would make the Latin of Rome, along with Greek, P.'s second or third language, and place P. among 'the first practitioners of the new translation literature, who normally inhabited the interstices between three linguistic cultures' (Feeney 2016: 66).¹⁰ While P. certainly should be counted among the *semigraeci* (Suet. *Gram.* 1 (p. 100Re)) driving early Latin literature's creation, there is no compelling reason to accept this geographic claim alone among other obviously fictional details provided for P.'s life; it appears to be a scholarly deduction from Tranio's real-estate pun on *umbra* and *Vmbria* at *Mos.* 770 (*quid? Sarsinatis ecqua est, si Vmbra non habes?*).¹¹ Gellius (1.24.3) cites a charming epitaph (apud Varro), introduced with scepticism that it was written by P.:

postquam est mortem aptus Plautus, Comoedia luget,
 scaena est deserta, dein Risus, Ludus Iocusque
 et Numeri innumeri simul omnes conlacrimarunt.

Whenever these post-Plautine hexameters were composed,¹² they reflect a received view of P. as a master comedian and musician, who in antiquity was as shadowy a historical figure as he is today.

We may extrapolate some information about P. from his works. First, P.'s command of Greek is deep.¹³ The extent of his familiarity with Greek literature beyond New Comedy has not always been acknowledged.¹⁴ *Ps.* engages intertextually with Greek epic, archaic lyric, philosophy,

⁸ Gratwick 1973: 83.

⁹ Mime actors (pp. 12–13 below) wore phalli, and since they performed bare-foot were nicknamed *planipedes* ('flat-foots'); cf. *plaut-/plot-*, 'flat', and the joke about P.'s 'barking name', *Cas.* 34 (dogs with flat, floppy ears were called *plauti*: *OLD plautus*). For the association of *Maccius* with the clown of Atellan farce (and P.'s 'cook's identity') see pp. 12, 50–1 below, 832n.

¹⁰ As Livius Andronicus, Naevius, Ennius. Culturally, Umbria was not subject to Greek influence, as southern Italy had been for centuries before P. For Umbrian dialect see Adams 2007: 55, 85–8, 176.

¹¹ *Pace Conte* 1994a: 49. For regional humour in P. see e.g. *Capt.* 881–4, *Mil.* 647–8, *Trin.* 545–6, 609, *Truc.* 262, 690–1 (with Adams 2007: 52–4, 119–23).

¹² For the collocation *Ludus Iocusque* see 65n.; for P.'s penchant for personifying abstracts see 292, 669, 736nn.

¹³ As the commentary (*passim*) and Fontaine 2010 amply demonstrate.

¹⁴ Parker 1996 debunks the related construct of P. as the comic darling of an uneducated populace versus Terence, playwright of the philhellenic elite.

and Hellenistic poetry.¹⁵ Moreover, it seems improbable that P. did not have access to texts of classical Greek tragedies, since his contemporaries were translating and performing these in Rome.¹⁶ Where and how P. received his literary education is unknown, but he seems to have been the first Latin poet to specialize in a single literary genre.¹⁷ From P.'s self-representations in prologues we glean a sense of his literary persona, as when he portrays himself as a translator of Greek comic texts: *As.* 11 *Demophilus scripsit, Maccus uortit barbare, Trin.* 19 *Philemo scripsit, Plautus uortit barbare*. The ironic *barbare*,¹⁸ in humorously co-opting a culturally superior, Greek perspective, promotes the legitimacy of P.'s enterprise.¹⁹ At *Cas.* 32–4 *Diphilus | hanc graece scripsit, postid rursum denuo | latine Plautus cum latranti nomine*, the prologist employs the rhetorically neutral *latine*, and in conceiving of P.'s translation programme as 'writing Diphilus' play anew all over again' suggests bold appropriation.²⁰ *Poen.* 54 *latine Plautus patruos multiphagonides* similarly has *latine* instead of *barbare*,²¹ with ironic self-deprecation in the portrayal of P. as 'uncle porridge-eater'.²² The opening of *Truc.* depicts P. as an illusionist seeking spectators' indulgence in transforming his temporary Roman stage into Athens:

¹⁵ Homer: 12, 996nn.; Sappho: 1253, 1258, 1260nn.; the Platonic Socrates: 465, 566nn.; Callimachus: 401, 403, 810nn.

¹⁶ Paratragedy in *Ps.*: 469, 702–6, 702, 703, 707, 834, 835nn. From ca. 207 BCE there was a (non-elite?) guild of writers (*scribae*) and actors (*histriones*) in Rome (Boyle 2006: 16–17); the establishment of a *collegium poetarum* at the Temple of Minerva may postdate P. (Gruen 1990: 87–90, Manuwald 2011: 95–7). For the social, institutional, and literary conditions in which Roman tragedy based on Greek models arose see Gildenhard 2010.

¹⁷ Livius, Naevius, and Ennius wrote tragedies, comedies, and epics.

¹⁸ Spoken by the anonymous prologist and *Luxuria*, respectively, not (Greek) characters in the plays.

¹⁹ '[P.] positively embraces the implication that he has debased his model by stating that he has translated it into barbarian. The criticisms of the Greek-speaking snob are not deflected, they are made part of the comic experience' (Leigh 2000: 289). McElduff 2013: 69 compares the Roman acquisition of Greek art: 'Plautus presents his work as translator as potentially equivalent to that of a general who brings glory and art back to Rome, and humorously elevates his achievements, even as this setting gives his use of "barbarian" a powerful sting, since the barbarians have clearly won.' Cf. Petrone 1983: 33–7.

²⁰ *Cas.* comes at the end of P.'s career and the wording here (i.e. without *uortit* and *barbare*) perhaps reflects confidence in highly creative translations. Connors 2004: 182 sees playful, programmatic irony in the etymology of P.'s name: 'the echo of *latine* in the sound of the word for "barking" (*latranti*) seems to suggest that Latin itself might be a kind of barbarous barking'.

²¹ The understood verb of the lacuna following the revelation of the Greek title (53) is *uortit*. Cf. *Mer.* 9–10, where the prologist reports Philemon's title *graece* and P.'s translation of it *latine*.

²² See further Giusti 2018: 84–7. For the metaphorical value of cuisine in P.'s poetics see pp. 50–1 below.

perparuam partem postulat Plautus loci
 de uostris magnis atque amoenis moenibus,
 Athenas quo sine architectis conferat. (1–3)

At *Men.* 3–4 *apporto uobis Plautum lingua, non manu, | quaeso ut benignis accipiatis auribus*, the prologist makes the playwright (a metonymy for his comedy) the vehicle of a characteristically Plautine joke conflating the literal and figurative.²³ The persona thus constructed in P.'s prologues is that of a playwright who brings pronounced self-awareness of poetic process and dramatic fiction to his work while reflecting on its place in literary tradition – such creative consciousness comes to the forefront in *Ps.*

2 THE ROMAN APPROPRIATION OF GREEK COMEDY

Latin literature is thought to (officially) commence at the *ludi Romani* of 240 BCE with the performance of at least one play based on a Greek model by Livius Andronicus, a native of Tarentum in southern Italy.²⁴ The timing is significant, as it closely follows the end of the First Punic War (261–241 BCE) and the emergence of Rome as a Mediterranean power. The creation of a national literature in Latin and a literary culture modelling the Greeks' in the wake of imperial expansion is necessarily enmeshed in issues of power and prestige, though scholarly consensus on the motivations and mechanisms behind these beginnings is lacking.²⁵ Plenty of cultural capital stood to be gained by adopting the Greeks' literary tradition and transferring it to Rome. Roman national identity could be enhanced through selective appropriation of Greek cultural goods of various types, including literature, as also social cohesion, primarily among the educated elite. The development of literary culture as an accoutrement of political hegemony might also assert superiority over both Rome's Italian

²³ Pp. 48–51 below. One leg of the joke here, the call for the audience's reception of the play with 'kindly ears', perhaps puns on P.'s name and dogs' ears (p. 2 above).

²⁴ Cic. *Brut.* 72, *Cato* fr. 50, Gel. 17.21.42, Liv. 7.2.8–10, Cass. *Chron.* p. 128 Mommsen; cf. Bernstein 1998: 234–51. 'Literature' here refers to the co-opting of Greek literary genres in Latin; the development of a literary establishment to construct aesthetic hierarchies, canons, etc. came later (see further Goldberg 2005).

²⁵ Overview of the issues in Gildenhard 2010: 158–60, Manuwald 2011: 30–40. Much, often polarizing, debate surrounds the role of shadowy (oral rather than literary) native traditions in the creation of the national literature: see e.g. Habinek 1998: 3–68, Wiseman 1998. For Livy's problematic account (7.2.3–13) of drama extending back to 364 BCE see Oakley 1998: 37–72, Bernstein 1998: 119–29, Feldherr 1998: 178–87.

neighbours²⁶ and rival Mediterranean city-states. Less abstract, practical considerations figured as well. Roman armies stationed in Sicily and southern Italy during the war developed a taste for Greek-style arts and entertainment, especially drama. Ambitious magistrates envisioned occasions for sociopolitical self-promotion in presenting drama at public venues, and bilingual poets and playwrights found professional opportunities for themselves there as well. What role the state, embodied by the senate, played in the creation of a national literature, versus the efforts of these various individuals, is uncertain.²⁷ Regardless, the vast appropriation of Greek literary genres following the First Punic War marks an ideological and cultural achievement unparalleled among Rome's neighbours in the ancient Mediterranean. This Roman translation project also marks a significant milestone in the critical analysis of literature.²⁸ As the European tradition's first vernacular translators (of literature) and literary critics, Latin writers transformed the 'secondariness' of their project into a creative strength, so successfully that the study of Latin literature now focuses on its extraordinarily innovative engagement with Greek intertexts.²⁹

2.1 *From Athens to Rome*

Unlike the fantastical and satirical Old Comedy of fifth-century Athens built around contemporary Athenian personages and public institutions, Greek New Comedy (floruit *ca.* 325–250 BCE) was cosmopolitan and accessible to audiences in other city-states.³⁰ More quietly centred

²⁶ For the Roman figuring of Italians as *barbari* among the peninsula's dominant, Latin-speaking people see Dench 1995: 68–70, Feeney 2005: 236–40.

²⁷ Cf. the conclusion of Most 2003: 388, 'The Romans recognized themselves from the beginning as latecomers in the highly competitive market-place of the Hellenistic Mediterranean, and seem to have decided early that a program of intense translation was the best strategy for catching up: given that it was the Greeks who dominated that market-place, it was inevitable that it was to Greek literature that the Romans should from the very beginning have primarily oriented their translating activity. In the absence of a Ministry of Culture, the decisions involved were individual, unsystematic and largely the work of poets.'

²⁸ 'The first producers of the texts that became "Roman literature" were considered by Suetonius, at least, as *grammatici*, who taught Greek and Latin authors (*Gram.* 1.2). The conditions in the Greek world in which these first authors of Latin literary texts trained were conducive to self-consciousness about what was involved in codifying and organizing an institution of literature in Greek, against which it was possible to conceive of measuring a corresponding institution in Latin' (Feeney 2005: 228–9).

²⁹ For Latin intertextuality see Conte 1994b, Hinds 1998; Sharrock 2009: 18–21, 201–19 makes the case for reading P. intertextually.

³⁰ Useful overviews of Greek New Comedy, as it is represented mostly by Menander (*ca.* 342–290 BCE), include Blanchard 2007, Lowe 2007: 63–80, Ire-

on domestic rather than civic life, Greek New Comedy depicts the drama of everyday mistakes, misconceptions, and ignorance within or between families, especially tensions related to finances, patriarchy, citizenship, and marriage. In contrast to the chaotic comedy of Aristophanes (d. 386 BCE), New Comedy observes unities of time and place, usually has an expository prologue delivered by a deity, is carefully organized into five acts, and features naturalistic dialogue and nuanced soliloquies in iambic trimeters. Old Comedy's musical and linguistic exuberance, including its aggressive obscenity, is muted, with the chorus relegated to non-integral performances between acts (marked ΧΟΡΟΥ, '(song) of the chorus', in texts). In the comedy of manners that evolves in the fourth and third centuries in Athens an aesthetic premium is placed on plausible representation of situation and character. While the characters (household slaves, soldiers, pimps, prostitutes, young men in love, professional types such as cooks, etc.), like New Comedy's romantic plots, are stereotyped, they are endowed with psychological nicety and their costumes and masks made them appear similar to real people.³¹ Apart from sporadic addresses to spectators, collectively as ἀνδρες ('gentlemen'), dramatic illusion is carefully respected in Greek New Comedy. Plays move towards harmonious resolutions of everyday conflicts ('domestic tragedies'), often secured with a marriage, and so traditional family values, as those of Athenian citizenship and the *polis*, ultimately prevail over personal desire and youthful irresponsibility. Such in broad outline are the dramas of Greek New Comedy that probably reached Italy by the middle of the third century BCE through 'classic' performances by itinerant, professional companies such as the 'Artists of Dionysus'.³²

Although Athenian New Comedy's interest in familial relationships and familiar persons and situations accounts for its exportability, the genre's earliest adaptors felt no compulsion to scrupulously translate its forms and formats to Roman stages. Roman (literary) comedy or the *fabula palliata* as it came to be known³³ involved a radical restructuring of its Greek models, in large part owing to the influence of native Italian (unscripted) drama. Most strikingly, New Comedy became much more

land 2010; important topical studies: Wiles 1991, Rosivach 1998, Lape 2004, Traill 2008, Petrides 2014a.

³¹ These qualities are best exemplified by Menander. Other famous Greek playwrights include Diphilus of Sinope (born ca. 350 BCE), Philemon (ca. 360–265 BCE), and Apollodorus of Carystus (first play produced in 285 BCE).

³² For the diffusion of New Comedy post-Menander see Nervegna 2013, Le Guen 2014.

³³ 1275n. Overviews of the *palliata*: Gratwick 1982, Lowe 2007: 81–96, Manuwald 2011: 140–56; images in Bieber 1961: 147–66.

musical in Rome: only about a third of lines in P. are spoken, with the rest either in musically accompanied measures (mainly trochaics) or song (*cantica*).³⁴ This modal transformation alone undermined Greek New Comedy's emphasis on realistic representation of its characters' words and thoughts by substituting more stylized comedy (cf. modern musicals and operas). Act divisions and the choral *entr'actes* of Greek New Comedy were eliminated, as Roman comedy features continuous action,³⁵ its overarching structural principle instead consisting of repeated sequences of spoken-sung-accompanied ('recitative') verses.³⁶ There was no three-actor rule in Rome, which allowed for more dynamic interactions among cast members. Roman playwrights seem to have introduced more physical comedy and stage business, probably under the influence of native Italian forms of drama. Certain roles, as those of the clever slave and the comic prostitute, are amplified in Roman comedy, not only by P., where they are most farcically developed, but perhaps from the start of New Comedy in Rome.³⁷ The Roman tradition, as it is most vigorously evidenced by P.'s corpus, shows an enlargement of various verbal effects, perhaps unsurprisingly in that linguistic self-consciousness is often a concomitant of translated literature. Finally, while Greek settings (usually Athens) are nominally preserved in the Latin plays, the *palliata*'s world shares many points of contact with contemporary Roman society.³⁸ To theatregoers conversant with the norms of Greek New Comedy, Roman comedy presented a very different spectacle. It must have created interesting tensions for spectators, as they – individually rather than as the monolithic block modern scholarship too often theorizes them to be – in varying degrees saw themselves and their own social lives, in terms of both sameness and difference, unmasked in Greek alterity.

Whereas Athenian comedy was stably ensconced in annual civic festivals, funded by a combination of contributions from wealthy citizens and public monies and held in the Theatre of Dionysus – where perhaps

³⁴ Unlike the choral interludes of Greek New Comedy, the musically accompanied *cantica* are fully incorporated into plays. For operatic song as the definitive transformational element of Roman comedy see Fontaine 2014b: 405–7.

³⁵ For Roman adaptations of Greek act divisions see Barsby 1982.

³⁶ Pp. 31–2, 52 below.

³⁷ In his study of the fragments of early Roman comedy Wright 1974 demonstrates that many of the linguistic features and comic conventions associated with P. were present from the beginning. Terence, in adhering more closely to the aesthetic and dramaturgical preferences of a Menander, may be an outlier within the *palliata* tradition, as the conclusions of Karakasis 2005 suggest.

³⁸ While this is obviously the case for P., even Terence's Atticizing comedy is firmly rooted in the social and cultural milieu of Rome in the 160s BCE: Starks 2013.

as many as 17,000 Athenian inhabitants and some foreigners gathered for competitions associated with the Greater Dionysia – early Roman comedy was a more transient affair. In Rome, annual religious festivals (*ludi sollemnes*) included drama among other entertainments staged in honour of the deity celebrated. Performances were also held on special occasions such as funerals for prominent aristocrats, fulfilment of a victorious general's vow to a god, or the inauguration of temples and cults.³⁹ There thus was no fixed public venue for early performances, nor did a single god preside over Roman theatre. Festivals were state-funded, and sponsoring magistrates, usually aediles, provided additional support (the same held true for temple dedications, which were important civic occasions). The religious, political, and social character of the festivals was immediately visible in the grand parades (*pompae*) of magistrates, performers, priests, and cult statues with which they began. Very few details related to the production of *ludi scaenici* are known: actor-managers, the *actores* who headed a troupe (*grex*), probably negotiated contracts on behalf of playwrights with the magistrates.⁴⁰ A *choragus* was in charge of costumes and props,⁴¹ companies were small,⁴² and acting, a respected profession in Greece, was a low-status occupation,⁴³ perhaps employing mostly slaves and freedmen, although there was some form of competition among individual actors and troupes.⁴⁴ Elite spectators perhaps found themselves complexly distanced from, yet drawn to, the actors' social otherness. It is unknown how many plays were performed at a particular event or on a single day; the number might vary owing to the practice of *instauratio*, the 'repetition' of a performance following some disruption of ritual.⁴⁵ Nor do we know what happened to scripts after public performances, as the Roman state did not require official copies to be made (as Lycurgus had in fourth-century Athens), nor did it keep theatrical records in P.'s day.

³⁹ Franko 2014: 411 charts *ludi* featuring dramatic performances. By 200 BCE there probably were at least eleven days of theatrical performances annually (Taylor 1937: 291).

⁴⁰ The *actores* apparently maintained ownership of the playwrights' scripts (Brown 2002).

⁴¹ Metatheatrically referred to at *Cur.* 464–86, *Per.* 159–60, *Trin.* 857–60. Cf. 1184n. Charinus serves this function in *Ps.*' play-within-the-play.

⁴² P.'s plays require four to six speaking parts plus mute characters and a musician to play the *tibia*. At least nine actors appear onstage in Scenes 2–3 of *Ps.* (133–264n.). For actors' associations see Jory 1970.

⁴³ Actors were counted among the *infames*: Edwards 1997.

⁴⁴ *Am.* 69–74, *Poen.* 37–9.

⁴⁵ Bernstein 1998: 282–91.

The contingent and ephemeral nature of early theatre was manifest in performance spaces themselves, which remained temporary in Rome, where they were constructed for specific occasions in the forum, circus, or before temples, until the dedication of Pompey's fabulous stone theatre on the Campus Martius in 55 BCE. The Romans could easily have built permanent theatres on the model of the Greeks,⁴⁶ but avoided doing so for reasons still debated.⁴⁷ Some scholars accept aristocratic contentions that large stone structures would provide venues for political protest (as they later did) and contribute to the corruption of public morals. Others stress that the senate and magistrates saw the construction of temporary structures as a means of reminding the populace that the institution of theatre depended on their munificence.⁴⁸ Religious scruple also fuelled the resistance to building stone theatres, as these might unduly 'secularize' performances – Pompey's theatre featured a temple of Venus Victrix, prominently located among the upper tiers of seating.⁴⁹

These temporary structures bore significant consequences for adaptations of New Comedy produced in Rome.⁵⁰ What we glean about Rome's impromptu performance spaces comes from extant texts, as no visual evidence or detailed descriptions survive. A wooden backdrop, the *scaena*, depicted up to three houses (as in Greek New Comedy) with individual doors through which characters access the actors' space, the *proscenium*. Characters also enter and exit from side wings, which by convention usually lead to either the forum or to the harbour/country. Early Roman theatres had no orchestra, and the spectators' space, the *cauea*, varied according to the space available at individual venues. Beginning in 194 BCE, senators were granted the privilege of segregated seating near the stage.⁵¹ We know from the surviving *didascaliae* that *Ps.* was performed in connection with the dedication of the Magna Mater's

⁴⁶ These existed in Italy from the fourth century BCE; for theatrical traditions outside Rome see Rawson 1985.

⁴⁷ Overview in Manuwald 2011: 55–63.

⁴⁸ E.g. Gruen 1992: 209.

⁴⁹ Cf. Goldberg 1998: 12: 'In the case of the original Megalesia [where *Ps.* debuted], the temple was itself an integral part of the production space. In effect, the *scaena* was temporary but the *cauea* was a permanent fixture. A separate, free-standing theatre threatened to disrupt this connection between temple and festival.' For Roman 'theatre-temples' see Hanson 1959b.

⁵⁰ Slater 1987 and Wiles 1991: 36–67 discuss differences between Greek and Roman theatrical spaces.

⁵¹ This directive of the censors generated controversy: Gruen 1992: 202–5, Moore 1994, Gilula 1996. The prologue of *Capt.* highlights differences in seating and status among audience members (with Moore 1998: 195–6).

temple in 191 BCE.⁵² Goldberg's 1998 analysis of the excavated site on the Palatine shows that a stage must have been erected on the plaza before Cybele's temple (above the Circus Maximus), with spectators sitting on the steps leading up to the raised podium. Even allowing for tight seating arrangements and crowd overflow into areas of the precinct affording a view, Goldberg estimates that less than 2,000 spectators attended the debut of *Ps.*⁵³ These intimate accommodations, along with early Roman theatre's permeable, sociopetal space between actors and audiences, facilitate Pseudolus' monologues, wherein he communicates directly with spectators, and help foster an illusion of improvisatory performance.⁵⁴ Given limited seating and the occasion of the Palatine temple's dedication, the audience that assembled for *Ps.* might have included a higher percentage of the elite than usual, which perhaps influenced P.'s decision to present a play so concerned with esoteric matters of poetics. In 191 BCE Marcus Junius Brutus, the *praetor urbanus et inter peregrinos* tasked with the Megalenses, no doubt hoped to enhance his social capital;⁵⁵ still the audience of *Ps.* represented a cross-section of the populace, including slaves.⁵⁶

There was no curtain in early Roman theatre. A herald (*As. 4 praeco*) signalled the onset of a performance. Stage properties were used sparingly, but effectively: the most important props in *Ps.* are Calidorus' writing tablet and Harpax's letter.⁵⁷ The actors wore masks and costumes according to

⁵² The cult of Cybele was brought to Rome in 204 BCE following a prophecy that this was a precondition for Hannibal's removal from Italy. The Magna Mater resided in the Temple of Victory on the Palatine until her temple could be built. *Ludi Megalenses* were established in 194 BCE, an enhanced version of which was held for the new temple's dedication in 191. During the festival, Cybele's eunuch priests no doubt presented visual reminders of the strangeness (to Romans) of her Phrygian cult, although *Ps.* makes no allusion to this (cf. the performance of Terence's *Eunuch* at the Megalenses of 161 BCE, with Christenson 2013).

⁵³ 1998: 13–14.

⁵⁴ Pp. 34–5 below. The orchestra of Greek theatre promoted more definitive separation of actors' and audiences' spaces, as did the theatre's monumental scale itself. For proxemics, the study of space in theatrical communication, see Elam 1980: 56–69.

⁵⁵ See further 1231n., Christenson 2020: 88.

⁵⁶ The prologue of *Poen.* (esp. 5–35) represents a wide spectrum of society (admission to festivals was free) in attendance, i.e. rich and poor, slave and free, male and female. Accounts of the diversity of Roman audiences: Beare 1964: 173–5, Manuwald 2011: 98–108, Richlin 2017: 1–20.

⁵⁷ 3–132, 594–666, 647nn.; overview of the functionality of props in P. in Marshall 2006: 66–72.