

THE SPLENETIC *LENO*: PLAUTUS, *CURCULIO* 216–45\*

nam iam quasi zona liene cinctus ambulo,  
 geminos in ventre habere videor filios.  
 nil metuo nisi ne medius disrumpar miser. (Cur. 220 8)

This scene in Plautus' *Curculio*, in which Cappadox the pimp stumbles onstage from the Temple of Aesculapius in obvious pain and is mocked by the slave Palinurus, introduces the possibility of a complex, multifaceted pun on *lien* and *leno* that has so far gone unnoticed.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this note is to examine the jokes that Plautus may have intended, and to consider their importance for the overall humour of the play and the audience's appreciation of it.

First, we must address a phonological peculiarity that some would say prevents the possibility of such punning. In other Latin authors, the word for 'spleen' is usually *liēn*, while the text of Plautus seems to offer the only exceptions to this prosody. The *OLD* notes that in Plautus the word is *liēn* except in synizesis, while *TLL* adds that this is perhaps the result of iambic correption. All five occurrences of the word in *Curculio* are to be scanned either with synizesis or iambic correption, effectively obscuring the true quantity of this vowel.<sup>2</sup> If indeed the word is properly *liēn* in Plautus—and this seems not at all certain<sup>3</sup>—we must address the argument that the differing vowel quantities would prohibit such a pun. This notion persists despite

\* I have followed the 1895 6 edition of Friedrich Leo in citing the text of Plautus. I am grateful to Richard J. Tarrant and Jeanne M. Neumann for reading earlier versions of this note, and to the journal's anonymous reader for several useful suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> There is no mention of the joke in three collections of Plautine wordplay: J. Brinkhoff, *Woortspeling bij Plautus* (Nijmegen, 1935); C. J. Mendelsohn, *Studies in the Wordplay of Plautus* (Philadelphia, 1907); E. B. T. Spencer, *Adnominatio in the Plays of Plautus* (Rome, 1906), though Spencer's focus is slightly different from this sort of joke. Brinkhoff and Mendelsohn, however, both notice the pun on *leno* and *leo* at *Per.* 594 (where *leo* is not expressed). Commentators have preferred to read this passage literally (so see J. L. Ussing, *Commentarius in Plauti Comoedias*, ed. A. Thierfelder [Hildesheim, 1972], 570: 'Liene quasi zona sibi pressus videtur et intestinis distentus'). The sole mention of a potential metaphorical reading is found in A. Inowracławer, *De Metaphorae apud Plautum Usu* (Rostochii, 1876), who considers this a reference to the punishment of slaves ([metaphorae] petitae) 'a vita servili vel poenis; Curc. 240. *lien dierectus* est, tanquam sit servus ad crucem tollendus et vapulaturus aut supplicio afficiendus', 43; see too 23. Note that Inowracławer followed Acidalius in placing line 244 after 239). Inowracławer does not connect *lien* with *leno*.

<sup>2</sup> W. M. Lindsay, *Early Latin Verse* (Oxford, 1922), 203, considers the word to be *liēn* and scans with synizesis, citing Priscian's testimony and comparing *rien*. At *Cas.* 414, *lienosum*, and the sixth occurrence of *lien* in Plautus (*Merc.* 124) must both be scanned with synizesis.

<sup>3</sup> C. W. F. Müller, *Plautinische Prosodie* (Berlin, 1869), observed that the vowel *e* in *lienosum* is regularly short; his remark about *lien*, however, has been ignored ('Ich finde aber wohl überall die Behauptung, dass *e* in *lien*, auch im Nominativ, lang sei [Prisc. I p. 149 7, Phoc. V p. 415. 1], aber nirgends einen Beweis dafür,' 273). H. Leppermann, *De Correptione Vocabulorum Iambicorum* (Monasterii Guestfalus, 1890), observes that all of Müller's examples can be explained by correption, thus concealing the true length of the vowel; his opinion appears to be, on the basis of the connection between *lien* and *σπλήν* and the testimony of the Grammarians, that the vowel *e* is here long. I find the insistence of the *OLD* and *TLL* on a short *e* in Plautus alone to be unconvincing. Perhaps the manuscript reading of line 236 is correct (*lien necat*), and we should disregard the testimony of Varro *Ling.* 7.60 (*liene negat*); the transmitted text preserves a long vowel *liēn* in a line of regular iambic senarii. Although long by position, the vowel would most likely be long by nature as well. To accept a long vowel here, which aligns the Plautine prosody with that attested elsewhere in Latin, is particularly attractive for this analysis, for it would demonstrate that the pronunciation known by Plautus' audience was not *liēn*, but *liēn*, connecting spleens and pimps (*lēno*) even more closely in phonology.

successful attempts to show otherwise.<sup>4</sup> In Plautus, puns occur freely on words with different vowel qualities; no satisfactory explanation exists why Plautus would not therefore have recognized and put to good use the possibility of such wordplay, where the two words differ in vowel quantity alone.<sup>5</sup> The blurring of the two vowels into one by synizesis in this passage makes such punning even more plausible.

The only other occurrence of *lien* in Plautus (*perii, seditionem facit lien, occupat praecordia: Merc.* 124) suggests that these two words occupy semantic realms that make such punning quite likely. The other example of *seditio* in Plautus appears at *Amph.* 478, where its quasi-military sense is applied to the internal unrest in the house of Amphitruo and Alcmena. In Terence, *seditio* has a similar meaning of marital unhappiness (*An.* 830). The connection between romantic strife and the role of the *leno* in comedy is obvious. We need not insist on reading this example in *Mercator* as a pun on *leno*; it rather indicates that the semantic realm, connected vocabulary, and imagery of *lien* and *leno* are similar to such an extent that a joke is indeed possible. From these considerations of phonological and semantic connections, we shall now turn to the question of what sorts of jokes about spleens and pimps Plautus might have made.

A simple and somewhat superficial pun could involve one of comedy's common phrases, for example, *lenocinium facere* (*Epid.* 581, *Merc.* 411), playing off the parallel sounds of *liene cin-* and *lenocin-*. Yet we should not assume that Plautus intended only one pun, to the exclusion of other possibilities. Another possible joke would involve the substitution *leno cinctus*. In addition to the literal reference to the *zona* of his costume, there is a connection between the *zona* and standard phrases of the sort *gladio cinctus*. The near-ubiquity of the plot to deceive the *leno* and deprive him of his money and property has made the pimp prepared to defend himself. Here the pimp's weapon is very specific: his wallet. Ever the businessman, the pimp relies not on physical might or mental adroitness, but rather money to get him out of difficulties.

There are three other occurrences of *lien* in this scene (line 236, in a list of complaints about specific bodily pains, and line 244 twice). The final two examples in this scene should conclusively demonstrate that Plautus intended a joke on *lien* and *leno*. The jocular tone here is confirmed in line 245, with Cappadox's response *auffer istaec*, which is the standard Plautine signal to end the comic banter and get down to business.<sup>6</sup> What, then, is the joke?

Line 244 is printed in Leo's edition as follows: CA. *lien dierectust*. PA. *ambula, id lieni optumumst*. In Cappadox's line we might expect an imaginative bit of stage business where Cappadox begins to point to himself (implying *leno dierectust*), but soon moves his hand to indicate his side and the corresponding pain his spleen is causing (*lien dierectust*).<sup>7</sup> The destruction of the pimp's fortunes and lifestyle for the benefit and enjoyment of the other characters is well known. Cappadox's

<sup>4</sup> The most recent of these is M. S. Fontaine, 'The sophisticated Παρὰ Προσδοκίαν in Plautus', Diss. (Brown Univ., 2003), 12–15.

<sup>5</sup> For a survey of Plautine word play, see e.g. G. E. Duckworth, *Nature of Roman Comedy* (Princeton, 1952), 331–60. I cite as an example of different vowel qualities *Mil.* 639–40 *amoris ... umorisque*. For different vowel quantities, cf. *Men.* 979 *nimioque edo lubentius mōlītum quam mōlītum praehibeo*.

<sup>6</sup> *Capt.* 964, *Poen.* 1035, *Trin.* 66, *Truc.* 861

<sup>7</sup> H. Bosscher, *De Plauti Curculione Disputatio* (Lugduni-Batavorum, 1903), 20, also imagined similar action, though perhaps too literally: 'leno non respondens iocis servi fingendus est subito dolore lienis affectus et ut opinor manu eam corporis partem, ubi lien est, premens et vultu pleno doloris lamentans: "lien dierectust"'.

complaint then looks forward to the anticipated resolution of the plot, offering a comment similar to Toxilus' at the end of *Persa* (*leno periit*, 858).

Palinurus plays off these jokes with a response that is superficially a bit of medical advice. Recognizing the need for a joke here, commentators have read in his answer a humorously incorrect prescription for Cappadox's ills. Ussing read two senses into *ambula*: an exclamatory *abi* and medical advice for Cappadox's condition.<sup>8</sup> This explanation seems lacking, for it is simply not funny enough. Bosscher recognized this objection,<sup>9</sup> but retreats from the question by arguing that the interpretation advanced by Goetz and Ussing, sufficiently refined, is funny. Bosscher's conclusion is disappointing and un-Plautine: the joke lies not in the echoing of advice similarly preserved in Celsus, but rather in that Palinurus offers advice suited only for the spleen, when Cappadox in fact has pains in many other parts of his body (20). A final explanation offered by Mercklin depends upon revision of the text that has not met with general approval. He suggested rearranging the lines according to the conjecture first proposed by Acidalius, to move line 244 after 239, making *facile est miserum inridere* a response to Palinurus' medical advice, and *aufer istaec* an answer to the jokes about *salsura*.<sup>10</sup> These explanations do not convince, and we are left unsatisfied with the suggested humour of this passage. Certainly, mock medical advice may be a part of the joking, but it does not have widespread appeal and depends rather too much on technical knowledge. We want something more humorous.

The solution, I believe, is simpler than what has been suggested. If we read into this line a jesting on the *lien/leno* parallel, the jokes become funnier by far. Palinurus' choice of words is particularly appropriate for the reviled *leno*. Beyond its frequent and most literal interpretation of 'go for a walk', *ambula* can often have a tone of 'get lost' (*Poen.* 717, *Ps.* 263). Perhaps even more significant for the *leno* and for this pun in particular is the legalistic sense found in the phrase *ambula in ius*, 'to go to court',<sup>11</sup> which is perfectly suited for the *leno*, who has obstructed the resolution of the romantic plot by illegal means and therefore must be taken to court. Furthermore, the ring composition of *ambula* here and *ambulo* (220) reminds us of the jokes advanced at the beginning of Cappadox's speech. This line should thus be understood as an artful joke meant to suggest *leno dierecstus*: *ambula, id lenoni optumumst*, with many possible connotations.

Plautus offers in this scene an extended pun on *lien* and *leno* written on several levels, with many possible interpretations. I have offered several of these interpretations, but by no means should this be considered an exhaustive list. Rather, the

<sup>8</sup> Ussing (n. 1), ad loc.: '*Ambula* ambigue dicitur, nam et "abi" significat, vid. ad Asin. 107. Pers. 251. 748, et lienoso recte ambulationem commendare potuit, nam, ut ait Celsus IV, 9, "hoc vitium quies augeat; itaque exercitatione et labore opus est." So too A. Thierfelder, 'De Morbo Hepatiario', *RhM* 98 (1955), 190–2, who recognized two possible senses of *ambula* (*abi* and *spatiare*) but considered that to be the entire joke of this line.

<sup>9</sup> Bosscher (n. 7), 18: 'qui quaeso potest Palinurus inridere miserum, cui saluberrima dat praecepta?'

<sup>10</sup> L. Mercklin, *Symbolae Exegeticae ad Curculionem Plautinam* (Dorpati, 1862). To supplement the jokes about *salsura* (which are not well understood), Mercklin suggests that the fragment attributed to Plautus in Serenus Sammonicus (*dulcia Plautus ait grandi minus apta lienī*, 425) belongs here.

<sup>11</sup> OLD s.v. *ambulare*, 7b. In Plautus, see *Rud.* 860. *Ambula in ius* is the regular command in Plautus by which a plaintiff tells a defendant that he is being taken to court. The sense of the idiom and its standard response are best elucidated at *Per.* 745, where Saturio informs the pimp Dordalus that he is bringing him to the praetor for judgment: SAT. *age ambula in ius, leno.* DOR. *quid me in ius uocas?*

breadth of possibilities here listed should show that there is something humorous for everyone in the crowd, whatever kind of joke an audience member might wish to find in this scene. This flexibility and breadth of humour is a tribute to Plautus' comic genius, and the mark of a very fine playwright indeed.

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### CICERO, *DE IMPERIO CN. POMPEI* 21\*

Cicero is praising the achievements of L. Lucullus in the Third Mithridatic War. Mithridates had come to an agreement with Sertorius, and was planning a naval attack on Italy; but Lucullus defeated him and destroyed his fleet (*De Imp. Cn. Pomp.* 21):

[Dico. . .] ab eodem imperatore classem magnam et ornatam quae ducibus Sertorianis ad Italiam studio atque odio inflammata raperetur superatam esse atque depressam.

atque odio *H: om. cett.*

A fleet that is *inflammata* is not likely to get very far—let alone from Pontus to Italy: it is scarcely conceivable that Cicero could be so blind to the literal meaning of his metaphor. He wishes to give the impression of a fleet that would have presented a serious danger to Italy if Lucullus had not intercepted it. *inflammata* works against this impression, suggesting instead a fleet that was likely to burn up without any intervention on Lucullus' part.

If we accept that the word is damaging to the sense, then the necessary correction is surely *inflata*. *inflata* is in fact the word Cicero uses in the parallel passage at *Mur.* 33, where he is describing a further naval victory in the same campaign:

Quid? illam pugnam navalem ad Tenedum, cum contento cursu acerrimis ducibus hostium classis Italiam spe atque animis inflata peteret, mediocri certamine et parva dimicatione commissam arbitraris?

For a scribe to copy *inflata* as *inflammata* would be a natural enough mistake, particularly if the word was preceded by *odio* (cf. *Mil.* 78: *odio mearum inimicitarum inflammatus*; *Phil.* 8.21: *inflammati odio*). Indeed, only a few pages further on, at §45, most manuscripts of our speech give *inflammatum* in error for *inflatum*:

Huius adventus et Mithridatem insolita inflatum victoria continuit. . .

inflatum *H $\pi$ : inflammatum cett.*

For *inflatus* used with words denoting emotions (*studio atque odio*), compare, in addition to *spe atque animis inflata* at *Mur.* 33 (and *inflatum. . . spe militum* at *Mur.* 49), *inflati laetitia atque insolentia* at *Phil.* 14.15. In our passage, *studio* means much the same as *animis* at *Mur.* 33, and so there would be no difficulty with *studio inflata*. *odio inflata* might be thought more difficult; but then there is an element of doubt as to whether the words *atque odio* belong in the text at all. On

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