

VIII.—The Reverse Comic Foil in Plautus

JOHN N. HOUGH

OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

When a *senex* or *adulescens* cracks a joke for which a character of lower social rank has acted as foil, the comic foil may be said to be in reverse. Such jokes, as well as others given to roles higher in the social scale, appear more frequently in Plautus' later plays; the quality of the humor improves, the types are more variegated, and they are employed with greater dramatic effect. *Senes* are used proportionately more often than *adulescentes*. These details add to the general picture of increasing variety in humorous technique which marks Plautus' dramatic development.

When Plautus employs puns, word plays, distortions of meaning, or other forms of verbal humor he usually puts them in the mouths of characters belonging to the lower social ranks, to whose language and position these varieties of humorous technique are most suitable. For the reader who has not consciously observed Plautus' method, the general impression is that all such jokes are spoken by slaves, parasites, *militēs gloriosi*, or *lenones*, either in monologue or dialogue amongst themselves, or, if in conversation with a character of higher social station, that the latter feed the lines to the former who in turn speaks the comic lines and wins the laughs. This is a true impression, for the relation between the two persons involved is very similar to that prevailing in the running dialogue on the vaudeville stage, where the straight man, easily recognized by clothes, speech, or action as the social superior of the two (even without any tradition to this effect), acts as a foil and creates situations for the comic who, as easily distinguished by his clothes, speech, or action, actually cracks the jokes. This is no more than is to be expected, but sometimes the standard situation is reversed and the lower class character becomes the foil for the other's jokes. Occasionally, too, *senes* and *adulescentes* act as foils for each other's jokes, with or without slaves partaking in the dialogue, and sometimes a joke is placed in the mouth of a *senex* or *adulescens* in monologue or in dialogue without previous preparation by any foil whatsoever. In all these cases the speaker of the joke is a character, freeborn and of superior social station. This represents the unusual in comic technique, and in view of the overwhelming amount of similar material given to lower class characters an in-

vestigation into this apparent reversal of the normal Plautine method is warranted. It is needless, perhaps, to point out that although the roles and lines of inferior characters outnumber those given to higher persons, the proportion of verbal humor and clever repartee given to *senes* and *adulescentes* is far below their proportionate number of lines. The mere lack of opportunity, therefore, does not explain the small number of passages; neither can they be dismissed as accidental, as a study of their distribution will shortly demonstrate. Other reasons for or explanation of their number must be sought.

There are forty-three reverse foils¹ in the plays of Plautus; twenty-three foils by *senes* for *senes*;² and thirty-three passages in which *senes* or *adulescentes* crack jokes without the use of the foil technique.³ These ninety-nine passages constitute the data treated in this paper.⁴ The first point to determine is the relative frequency of these passages throughout the plays. They appear in eighteen of the twenty⁵ plays: the *Persa* contains no character of upper social rank⁶ and consequently has no examples; the *Asinaria*, though suitable opportunity exists, has none.

¹ *Aul.* 635; *Bacch.* 50, 53, 78, 738; *Capt.* 182; *Cas.* 326, 498, 527, 730, 758, 852 (variously attributed by editors to Lysidamus and Olympio); *Cist.* 234, 778; *Curc.* 48, 184, 314, 600, 705; *Men.* 391, 403; *M.G.* 575; *Most.* 721; *Poen.* 279, 295; *Pseud.* 711, 738, 745, 746, 748; *Rud.* 1217, 1271; *Stich.* 595; *Trin.* 531, 887, 909, 988, 1092; *Truc.* 154, 332, 360, 422, 948.

² Or *adulescentes* for *adulescentes*, or mixed. *Aul.* 136, 564; *Bacch.* 1159; *Capt.* 578; *Cas.* 191, 264, 608; *Merc.* 601; *Most.* 375 (*bis*), 845, 1000, 1002, 1007, 1022; *Poen.* 569, 729, 1146, 1168, 1196; *Trin.* 51, 58, 345.

³ *Amph.* 722; *Aul.* 455, 633; *Bacch.* 285, 596; *Capt.* 160, 255, 726, 767; *Cas.* 810, 968; *Curc.* 691; *Epid.* 119; *Men.* 191, 267, 295; *M.G.* 648, 787; *Most.* 253; *Pseud.* 90, 436, 465, 1176; *Rud.* 102; *Stich.* 144, 611, 630; *Trin.* 42, 100, 851, 1127; *Truc.* 782, 809.

⁴ See table below. All passages are taken from the plays proper and from the roles proper; none come from prologues, epilogues, or from passages spoken out of character (e.g. *Rud.* 1422). Distribution between *senes* and *adulescentes* will be given later under discussion of that point. *Matronae* are classified as *adulescentes* if married to an *adulescens* (*Stichus*), as *senes* if married to a *senex* (*Casina*, *Amphitruo*).

⁵ The *Vidularia* has none, but because of its fragmentary condition and the uncertainty of the attribution of lines it is not considered in this investigation.

⁶ The *virgo*, though freeborn, is the daughter of a parasite and it seems best to consider her position the same as his. She makes two jokes (630, 658), but only in those lines in which she is pretending to be a slave. So also the *meretrices* of the *Menaechmi* and *Truculentus*, though apparently free, are more like parasites than *matronae*. In all following discussions such roles are considered as of lower social rank, both in regard to their making jokes and acting as foils. *Meretrices* who by anagnorisis are proved well born might well offer a serious problem to such a study as this but they are not involved in any of the passages.

The student of Plautus is fortunate in being able to compare five plays which practically all scholars agree are among the earliest of our corpus with five others similarly believed to be late.⁷ Without entering upon the controversial ground concerning the specific dates of production of these or other plays, we can still observe a general difference in distribution between early and late groups. The five early plays total but ten examples whereas the five late plays have forty-six. Here is *prima facie* evidence for a progression toward greater use of the reverse foil and joke-making by *senes* and *adulescentes*. The remaining forty-three examples are scattered irregularly through the other ten plays whose exact relationships to early and late plays and to each other are matters of dispute. The figures for all plays are given in the table below in an order, not fixed for individual plays, but according to groups which I postulated in 1934 and have supported since in several other studies.⁸ The progression can be easily seen by comparing five arbitrary groups of four plays each; this gives totals as follows, beginning at the earliest: six, seventeen, nineteen, thirty, twenty-seven (the last figure includes only three plays because the *Persa* falls in this group). Division between the first and last halves of ten plays each gives twenty-seven to seventy-two. With the possible exception of the *Poenulus* and *Menaechmi*, which will be discussed later, the perceptible increase begins about half way through the extant plays (*Captivi*), and maintains a higher level to the end. If one desires to translate this into terms of years by reference to the recent work of C. H. Buck,⁹ the progression, though less regular, is none the less apparent. Buck dates all plays except the early five mentioned above, in 194 B.C. or later. Thus fourteen plays, assigned to the last ten years of Plautus' life contribute eighty-nine examples, or an average of 6.35 per play, while the ten examples in the five early plays average only 2.0 per play. The trend is so clear that it will not be obscured by minor displacements of disputed plays. That Plautus should develop in this direction is not at all surprising,

⁷ The early *Asin.*, *Merc.*, *M.G.*, *Cist.*, and *Stich.*; the late *Trin.*, *Truc.*, *Pseud.*, *Bacch.*, and *Cas.* See table in text and note 9.

⁸ *AJPh* 55 (1934) 346-364; *CPh* 30 (1935) 43-57; *AJPh* 60 (1939) 422-435; *TAPhA* 70 (1939) 231-241; *TAPhA* 71 (1940) 186-198, in which see especially page 188, note 5.

⁹ C. H. Buck, Jr., *A Chronology of the Plays of Plautus* (Baltimore, 1940). Buck's list of dates appears on page 105. Following his order the distribution of our ninety-nine passages is: 0, 1, 3, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 7, 9, 1, 7, 3, 6, 12, 7, 1, 5, [0 *Persa*], 11.

as will appear in later discussion of the conclusions of this investigation.

The kind of humor found in these passages varies. Forty-three are puns; the remainder are jokes, verbal distortions, humorous repetitions or imitations, comic compounds, and many unexpected words or turns of phrase which achieve a comic effect by a change of sense at the last moment, all familiar variations of Plautine comedy, well known to Plautus' readers. Only the puns are of sufficient quantity to necessitate separate treatment; of the others the totals only are given in the following table. Distribution between *senes* and *adulescentes* and the use of the foil are also shown.

Play	Total	Puns	Other types	Rev. foil	Other foil	No foil	Total use of	
							<i>senex</i>	<i>adul.</i>
<i>Asinaria</i>	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
<i>Mercator</i>	1	1	—	—	1	—	—	1
<i>Cistellaria</i>	2	—	2	2	—	—	2	—
<i>Miles G.</i>	3	2	1	1	—	2	3	—
<i>Poenulus</i>	7	3	4	2	5	—	3	4
<i>Menaechmi</i>	5	4	1	2	—	3	—	5
<i>Stichus</i>	4	3	1	1	—	3	—	4
<i>Epidicus</i>	1	1	—	—	—	1	—	1
<i>Rudens</i>	3	1	2	2	—	1	2	1
<i>Amphitruo</i>	1	1	—	—	—	1	1	—
<i>Captivi</i>	6	4	2	1	1	4	4	2
<i>Mostellaria</i>	9	3	6	1	7	1	6	3
<i>Aulularia</i>	5	2	3	1	2	2	5	—
<i>Trinummus</i>	12	4	8	5	3	4	12	—
<i>Truculentus</i>	7	3	4	5	—	2	2	5
<i>Curculio</i>	6	1	5	5	—	1	—	6
<i>Pseudolus</i>	9	5	4	5	—	4	3	6
<i>Bacchides</i>	7	2	5	4	1	2	2	5
<i>Casina</i>	11	3	8	6	3	2	11	—
[<i>Persa</i>]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	99	43	56	43	23	33	56	43

When thus broken up into groups the figures, even though much smaller, still point to some very significant trends. Of the total of twenty-seven examples in the first ten plays, the puns amount to sixteen, or 59 per cent of the whole, whereas in the last ten, though increased in number, they are proportionately much less, twenty-seven out of seventy-two, or only 38 per cent. The puns dwindle

noticeably in the later plays in proportion to the whole body of wit. The pun, still the lowest form of wit, was certainly not otherwise in Plautus' time; a most casual glance at the other types of humor employed will settle any doubts on that matter. This shift away from the pun in the mouths of persons of higher rank is actually a tendency to put into the mouths of *senes* and *adulescentes* (but more particularly the *senes*, as will be shown later) a brand of humor more appropriate to their standing in society.

No less significant in view of the tendencies so far observed is the fact that the poorer jokes, even the poorer puns, and in general that lower quality of humor seems to occur more often in the earlier plays.¹⁰ This only serves to corroborate the hypothesis just made, that the increase is an improvement in quality and distribution as well as in numbers.

The proportion of foil and non-foil jokes to be found in early and late plays is significant. Of the forty-three true reverse foils, thirty-three appear in the last ten plays (*Captivi* to *Persa*), or 77 per cent; of other foil jokes eighteen out of twenty-three, or 78 per cent, both very high proportions. But of the passages given to *senes* and *adulescentes* in which no foil technique is employed but twenty-two out of thirty-three passages, or only 67 per cent, appear in the last ten plays. This is a much greater drop than is apparent considering the fact that the passages as a whole increase throughout the plays. Obviously the non-foil technique does not increase with anything like the rapidity of the foil. How clearly the foil technique involves the greater comic element, especially the reverse foil, since it has, over and above the actual joke in question, the added humor inherent in the incongruity of the unexpected, i.e., laughs coming from the wrong man (the *senex* instead of the slave). It is clear,

¹⁰ It is no doubt a highly subjective matter thus to judge the quality of jokes, but let those who care to do so examine such examples as these, and their doubts will be set at rest. Poor quality in *Poen.* 295, 1146, 1168, 1196, *Men.* 295, *Stich.* 144; puns whose edge is worn off by having been used already by slaves or parasites, *Men.* 267, 391, and, somewhat similar, *Rud.* 1217, the *licet* scene, in which the humorous "licets" are spoken half by the slave Trachalio and half by the *Senex* Daemones, but Trachalio's come first; the *censeo* scene paralleling the last (*Rud.* 1271) in which all the "censeos" are spoken by Trachalio except the last; puns given to a *senex* only to introduce another by a slave, thus in reality retaining the *senex* as the foil, *M.G.* 787; see also note 18. From later plays we can take out proportionately fewer: *Most.* 253, *Truc.* 154, 332, *Curc.* 48, *Bacch.* 596. Conversely the best and most subtle humor is found largely in the later plays; cf. especially *Aul.* 635, *Bacch.* 1159, *Most.* 1000, 1002, 1006, 1022; *Trin.* 42, 52, 57, *Truc.* 809, *Cas.* 191, 730.

then, that those types which have the greater humorous effect increase at a greater speed than those with less, the non-foil passages. This bears out from a different point of view, the observations made above regarding improvement in quality throughout the plays.

The distribution of these passages to specific roles is as follows: Of the forty-three true reverse foils nineteen involve a *senex* and twenty-four an *adulescens*, but of the twenty-three other foil passages thirteen utilize two *senes*, six a *senex* and an *adulescens*,¹¹ and only four two *adulescentes*. The thirty-three non-foil passages are divided as follows: twenty-one to *senes*, twelve to *adulescentes*. In all the *senex* is used fifty-six times, the *adulescens* forty-three. There are a number of special circumstances in individual plays which govern and control these assignments; concerning them we shall speak later. For the present the general observation can be made that the greater use of *senes* than of younger men is somewhat surprising in view of the fact that *adulescentes* might be expected to indulge in this type of humor more than their elders; Plautus himself indirectly suggests that joking is not part of an older man's language (*M.G.* 642). That in spite of this, the number of passages involving *senes* should increase four-fold in the second ten plays while those given to *adulescentes* do not even double their number, is significant evidence that Plautus is definitely moving toward greater use of *senes* in this branch of his comic technique. The difference of thirteen between the two total figures looms larger when one notices that the increase is greater in the *senex* column,¹² and the distinction is the more important because the incongruity (and consequent comic effect) of the use of *senes* is stronger than in the case of *adulescentes*.

In addition to the general conclusions concerning the number and attribution of these passages, certain specific situations in particular plays shed light upon Plautus' workmanship. All previous conclusions, in fact, may be modified slightly by special considerations in any given play, but the trend as a whole is not to be denied. On the contrary, most of the special cases demon-

¹¹ In three of these the *senex* acts as foil for the *adulescens*; in three, *vice versa*.

¹² It is true that the *Trinummus* and *Casina* are largely responsible for this increase, but it is equally true that no opportunities for *senes* occur in *Curculio* and little in the *Truculentus*, and that the larger proportion of *adulescentes* in the *Pseudolus* and *Bacchides* are due to special circumstances to be discussed later.

strate that Plautus' technique is not confined to mere numbers and roles, but that he takes every advantage of local circumstances to achieve the greatest comic effect from his use of this formula. He does not use them indifferently or without purpose, at least not in the later plays. In the majority of cases he concentrates them in scenes or in roles, or in both, in which they are especially effective. Examples may be found in almost every play in which more than five or six passages occur.

In the *Casina* all but one of the eleven examples are put in the mouth of Lysidamus, the most disreputable and loathsome *senex* in all Plautus and not one whit above the level of his slave conspirator Olympio. This might seem to vitiate the argument of this paper, for if this is an explanation of the excessive number of examples in the *Casina*, it might be presumed that the chronology of the plays has nothing to do with it. But, aside from the overwhelming nature of all the other evidence, a moment's reflection will show that this is not so, for two other *senes*, hardly less coarse than Lysidamus and having similar amorous desires, appearing in the early *Asinaria* and *Mercator*, never indulge in this kind of humor. Of the *Trinummus*' twelve examples four are given to Charmides, an extremely pleasant old gentleman, and all are in his scene with the *sycophanta*. It is to be noted that he himself states (896) that he will have some fun with that impostor. The *Mostellaria* has one of the most delightful *senes* of all Plautus' plays, Simo, who in conversation with the slave Tranio, with whom he is on most excellent terms, indulges in a typical slave pun (721), and in less than twenty-five lines conversation with Theopropides turns his phraseology into entertaining and unexpected channels no less than four times (1000, 1002, 1007, 1022). These are among the best examples of this type of incongruous and very superior humor. The drunken Callidamates appropriately gives us two examples in the same line (375). Five of the seven examples in the *Bacchides* are given to Pistoclerus, three of them in an otherwise not very entertaining scene with the Bacchis sisters at the (present) opening of the play. Though perhaps Pistoclerus is no different from Mnesilochus (who does not joke), the placing of these three passages in an otherwise neutral scene suggests that possibly Plautus is doing the same thing with the foil technique in regard to *senes* and *adulescentes* as he did with Greek words and expressions, namely, to use them in scenes or parts of scenes which needed some comic

element to leaven a dull spot.¹³ In the *Captivi* there is another of the kindly pleasant old gentlemen, Hegio, who has four of the six examples in this play; he can joke when he pleases and hold his own with the expert Ergasilus, the parasite. The *adulescens* Charinus in the *Pseudolus* jokes four times in his scene with Calidorus and Pseudolus, so successfully that the latter congratulates him on his skill. Charinus is an unusual character in other ways, and one is tempted to believe that, if it is true that his role has suffered through Plautus' particular method of adaptation from the Greek, this humorous quality of his may be something of a deliberate compensation. The moderate, kindly Simo in this play is allowed to joke three times, twice in one scene (436, 465).

All these are plays in the second half of the list as given in the table above. It is very difficult to find a similar concentration of grouping among the earlier plays, and when one does it is not in such numbers. In the *Stichus* the young men announce that they intend to have some fun with the parasite Gelasimus (578), and do so, but employ only two puns (611, 630) and neither uses the reverse foil technique. We have seen what Charmides in the *Trinummus* did under the same circumstances. The *Poenulus* is numerically in the highest position among the early plays, and we should expect to find some meaningful concentration in it. We do, but under such circumstances as to suggest all the more that it is exceptional, perhaps a harbinger of the fully developed technique to come. Two of the seven passages in this play are given to Hanno, a character who in many ways shares the qualities of Hegio in the *Captivi* and Simo in the *Mostellaria*, special cases which have already been considered. Here we find in both earlier and later plays employment of the same technique; apparently attribution of humor to such *senes* is part of their characterization as pleasant and genial souls. As if to emphasize their purpose, both of Hanno's jokes (and one of Agorastocles')¹⁴ are in the scene directly preceding that in which Hanno's delightful qualities are most vividly expressed, when he participates in the temporary deception of his daughters. Four jokes are given to Agorastocles, an *adulescens*

¹³ Cf. "The Use of Greek Words by Plautus," *AJPh* 55 (1934) 346-364. It may not be accidental that the reverse foil at *Cas.* 730 is part of a Greek speech, that two of Simo's jokes in the *Pseudolus* (436 and 465) occur in a scene which is decorated with Greek words and references, one of which is identical with Simo's joke 465, or that the Greek references in *Bacchides* 53 constitute one of Pistoclerus' passages.

¹⁴ *Poen.* 1146, 1168, and 1196.

far above the level in activity and intelligence of the usual young lover (cf. Pleusicles and Argyrippus also in early plays). His nearest rival is Pistoclerus in the *Bacchides* who, we have already seen, has five of the seven in that play. This comparison with situations elsewhere supports the argument that these passages in the *Poenulus* are special cases whose disproportionate number is more apparent than real. The slave Milphio himself seems to point to the existence of an unusual situation when he twice (280, 296) comments in semi-critical tones on the fact that Agorastocles is cracking jokes; other similar comments occur only in situations already shown to be somewhat unusual.¹⁵ From all this it is increasingly apparent that not only is the *Poenulus* a special case but that Plautus was probably aware of it and took advantage of the situation to add even more to the humor by commenting upon it through the mouth of Milphio.

The only other play among the earlier group which has a sufficient number of passages to call for comment is the *Menaechmi*. Here, rather than any great concentration, we find that some of the jokes are so placed as to detract greatly from their value, for two of the five are identical with jokes previously made by slaves or parasites. In one case the slave joke occurs but three lines earlier (264, 267) and is merely repeated by Menaechmus; in the other, although the first occurrence was at line 77 and the repetition in 391, the situation is such that Menaechmus Sosicles, who does not know either Peniculus or the very existence of such a name, makes a perfectly genuine mistake, naturally thinking that a "brush" is meant. The joke, really a natural misunderstanding, depends upon Peniculus' explanation of his name in line 77 for its point. Such repetition by *adulscientes* (or *senes*) of jokes employed before by lower class characters exists nowhere else in Plautus. Another of the passages in this play is a very elaborate joke which derives much more of its humor from its topical reference to the actor Pello, than by the pun on the word pello,¹⁶ and still another has already

¹⁵ See discussion in "The Understanding of Intrigue," *AJPh* 60 (1939) 435 concerning Plautus' habit of commenting on something which is unusual. Two other passages in which he comments on a *senex* or *adulscens* indulging in jokes are *Pseud.* 743, the scene between Charinus and Pseudolus in which Charinus jokes four times and Calidorus once, and *Cas.* 528, directly after the irrepressible Lysidamus has annoyed his friend Alcesimus with a joke.

¹⁶ *Men.* 403. The reference to Pello is suggested by T. Frank, *AJPh* 53 (1932) 248-251.

been cited among those of poorest quality in Plautus. All these considerations, such as cannot be found in later plays, adequately explain the presence of an unusually large number of passages in the *Menaechmi*.

Finally, it is pertinent to point out certain late plays which for one reason or another do not permit the wide use of the foil and joke by *senes* or *adulescentes*. The *Persa* we have seen has no passages because it cannot; the *Truculentus* might well have more had the *senex* Callicles a larger part (in his one scene he has two); the *Curculio* had but one character available for the use of this technique, the *adulescens* Phaedromus.¹⁷ Conversely, certain early plays which, in spite of situations which would invite the use of the reverse foil technique, fail to employ them are equally significant. We have already noted that the *senes* in both the *Mercator* and the *Asinaria* seem perfect types for this technique, but are not so used. Periplectomenus, *senex* in the *Miles* who boasted of his youthful ability to crack jokes in 642, makes but one bad pun (648) immediately thereafter; elsewhere he twice jokes (575, 787) but the latter is only in order to build up for another joke by a slave. Periphanes in the *Epidicus* is on his own evidence an *ex-miles*, yet he seems to have retained none of the linguistic flavor of men of that ilk; his nearest attempt at a joke (201) is, as in the *Miles*, actually a foil in itself for Epidicus' following pun.¹⁸ The *Amphitruo* is not such as to invite the use of this technique, although Alcmena, surprisingly enough, does once tease Sosia (722) with a humorous word-repetition. The first play of the second group, the *Captivi*, already discussed in regard to the concentration in the role of Hegio, is also an example of Plautus' failure to use this technique even when opportunity presents itself, for Philocrates in an aside by Tyndarus (276, 282) is congratulated for his skillful assumption of a slave's characteristics and language, yet he does not indulge in this type of humor in his role as slave. Tyndarus the slave, when pretending to be an *adulescens* does so once (578). That the centrally located *Captivi* should appear as an example both of skillful concentration and also of sparse use where it would be

¹⁷ If it should be felt that the banker Lyco should be included among the high class characters (a doubtful suggestion) he would add four passages to the *Curculio*'s number: 392, 406, 450, 537.

¹⁸ *Epid.* 201, a reverse foil, but without humorous effect, is a borderline case. Its addition to our list of examples would not alter the statistics appreciably, for the *Epidicus* is in a neutral position relatively near the center of the list.

expected, is in itself important to the argument of this paper. Apparently opportunities for the employment of the reverse foil technique are not taken because Plautus is not yet fully ready to do so; conversely, in later plays he was ready and skilled in the technique but some exigencies of plot (*Amphitruo*) or of roles (*Persa*, *Truculentus*, and perhaps *Curculio*) prevented him from employing this technique as frequently as in other plays of the same period.

The conclusions of this study may be here summarized. From consideration of ninety-nine passages, their speakers, and the situations in which they appear, it is clear that Plautus gradually, and specifically after about 200 B.C., gave more opportunities to persons of respectable freeborn rank, especially *senes*, to share in the verbal humor of his plays and to encroach on the slave's province of getting the laughs. The usual relationship of slave to freeborn, that of comic to foil, is sometimes reversed, or freeborn characters act as foils for each other, or are given comic passages without the use of the foil technique at all. In doing this Plautus used at first mainly puns, but later increased both the quantity and the quality of the humor by employing other forms of jokes. He further improved upon the technique by placing them in especially suitable situations and by attributing them to certain roles fitted by their characteristics to receive them. Such a progressive development is not surprising. With a Roman audience to amuse, a successful experiment would naturally be continued as a regular practice. It befits the opportunistic genius of Plautus to add such a successful variation (as indeed it must have been) to his numerous methods of achieving humorous effects. He added this as he added others with his growing experience over the years of his literary activity. To his skill in the use of Greek words, Roman topical allusions, obscene jokes, and direct address to the audience¹⁹ is now added another detail, no doubt unimportant in itself, but contributing to a now growing understanding of the machinery of his comic skill. Only in recent years have we begun to be aware of the evidence for this gradual change by specific additions to his natural talent, but the picture is becoming clearer as such details as this are added to it.

¹⁹ These and other non-humorous techniques are discussed in my articles cited above in note 5. There is a marked increase in the use of each of these in the later plays except in the case of Greek words; there the change is in the skill with which they are used (see above note 13).