

## POENULUS I, 2 AND ROMAN WOMEN

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The *Poenulus* has been one of Plautus' more problematical comedies.<sup>1</sup> Textual problems, combined with what might appear to be logical inconsistencies, have led scholars to conclude that the received manuscript represents an uneven blend of revisions and conflation.<sup>2</sup> Attempts to identify Plautus' source have further complicated the problem;<sup>3</sup> the belief that the play represented extensive conflation of

<sup>1</sup> G. E. Duckworth, *The Nature of Roman Comedy* (Princeton 1952) 154, calls it one of Plautus' "least successful plays." Compare W. G. Arnott, "The Author of the Greek Original of the *Poenulus*," *RhM* 102 (1959) 252–62, who assesses it as "that rather poor Plautine play" (252). G. Maurach, "Milphio und der Bau des *Poenulus*," *Philologus* 108 (1964) 247–61, begins his article, "Der *Poenulus* gilt allgemein als schlechter Stuck . . ." (247); here, however, and again in his recent commentary, *Plauti Poenulus* (Heidelberg 1975), Maurach attempts to disprove the negative assessments of his predecessors. The text of Plautus used in this paper is that of W. M. Lindsay, *T. Macci Plauti Comoediae* (Oxford 1910); for Livy, I have used W. Weissenborn–M. Müller, *Titus Livius, Ab Urbe Condita* IV (Leipzig 1909). This paper was originally presented at the 1978 Annual Meeting of the American Philological Association in Vancouver, B. C.

<sup>2</sup> The prologue, for example, has two conclusions (121–27); Hanno's opening monologue is written twice in Punic and once in Latin (930–60), and the play itself has two conclusions (1371 and 1422). No satisfactory explanation has been found for the duplication in lines 124–27, which most text editors excise. Regarding the three versions of Hanno's monologue, cf. A. S. Gratwick, "Hanno's Punic Speech in the *Poenulus* of Plautus," *Hermes* 99 (1971) 25–45. The second conclusion of the comedy itself (lines 1371–97), Maurach suggests (*Plauti Poenulus*, 394–98), may have been inserted by an editor or actor, using material out of 1322 ff., and hence the repetitions.

<sup>3</sup> A process of elimination (particularly the discovery of *P. Oxy.* 2654, which gives a passage from Menander's play which implies a different plot from that of Plautus' play), combined with Arnott's demonstration of echoes of Alexis in Plautus' version, has persuaded most scholars that Alexis, rather than Menander, was Plautus' source; cf. Maurach, *Plauti Poen.* 58 ff.; A. W. Gomme and F. H. Sandbach, *Menander: A Commentary* (Oxford 1973) 7, 408–409; T. B. L. Webster, *An Introduction to Menander* (New York 1974) 153–54.

several Greek comedies was finally disputed in 1922 by Eduard Fraenkel, who argued that Plautus had added only one scene (I,2) from a second Greek comedy to his Greek original.<sup>4</sup>

In this scene, the young man Agorastocles and his slave Milphio eavesdrop on a conversation between Adelphasium, the Carthaginian courtesan loved by Agorastocles, and her sister Anterastilis. Fraenkel excluded this scene because it served only to outline the characters of the participants without advancing the plot of the play, which was concerned with cheating the *leno*. He believed that the purpose of this scene, like the Lucrio scene in the *Miles*, was to enrich the drama.

A close examination of this scene with reference to contemporary events at Rome suggest that, if this scene was not Plautus' invention, it was cleverly adapted to the Roman situation, for it corresponds to some very heated issues of the period in which the play was produced, roughly the decade following the conclusion of the Second Punic War. Herein, I believe, lies a clue to much of the humor of the play, humor which has tended to evade us from a distance of so many centuries but which would have been evident to Plautus' audience.

The issue which is particularly suggested by this scene is the concern at Rome during this period over the growing wealth and power of Roman women. This concern is cleverly interwoven with Roman uneasiness over the rapid Carthaginian recovery from the Second Punic War. The latter concern is most readily suggested by the presence of Carthaginians on the Roman stage so soon after the bitter conflict between the two great powers. The later the date assigned to this play, as will be seen, the more ironic that presence becomes, particularly in the context of this comedy, where the main Carthaginian characters, Hanno and his daughter Adelphasium, represent the sort of conservative wisdom we expect to find in a Roman

<sup>4</sup> E. Fraenkel, *Plautinisches im Plautus*, Philol. Unters. 28 (Berlin 1922) 271 ff. (2nd ed. = *Elementi Plautini in Plauto*, Firenze 1960). Fraenkel's theory was not universally accepted; G. Jachmann, *Plautinisches und Attisches*, Problem. 3 (Berlin 1931) 195 ff., adhered to the earlier theories of Leo *et al.*, arguing the rough blend of Greek texts was evidence of Plautus' early workmanship. Maurach, by contrast, believes that the entire scene is Plautus' invention (*Plauti Poen.* 229). Cf. G. Williams, "Evidence for Plautus' Workmanship in the *Miles Gloriosus*," *Hermes* 86 (1958) 98 ff. The assumption that Plautus took considerable freedom with his sources has tended to be confirmed by more recent discoveries of Menander's fragments. Cf. E. W. Handley, *Menander and Plautus: A Study in Comparison* (London 1968); V. Poeschl, *Die neuen Menander-papyri und die Originalität des Plautus* (Heidelberg 1973).

Cato. During the decade following Hannibal's defeat at Zama, Carthaginian fortunes recovered uncomfortably quickly, largely because of the measures imposed at Carthage by Hannibal himself. Rome, meanwhile, was easing its own stringent, wartime measures, particularly its sumptuary laws. Increasing liberality at Rome was especially upsetting to more conservative Romans when it involved women, as is shown by the great uproar that arose in 195 B.C. over the proposal to repeal the Oppian Law, the only sumptuary law passed during the war which was still in effect. The Oppian Law had been passed in 215, just after the disaster at Cannae. It was directed at Roman women, and was intended to limit not only their wealth, but also their display of wealth. This law forbade them to wear parti-colored garments, particularly those trimmed in purple. It also forbade them to ride in carriages within a mile of Rome or in Roman country towns except for religious festivals, and limited the amount of gold Roman women could possess to one-half ounce.<sup>5</sup>

On the day of the debate, we are told, the Capitoline was crowded with supporters and opponents of the Law. Roman matrons blocked the approaches to the Forum and begged the men coming there to permit the restoration of their *pristinus ornatus* (Livy 34.1.5). Livy presents arguments for and against the repeal of the Law. His speakers are Marcus Porcius Cato, who argues vehemently for its retention, and Lucius Valerius Flaccus, who argues in support of the repeal. Cato argues that this Law removes the shame of poverty—*pudor paupertatis*—since it requires that all women dress in equally simple fashion. He characterizes the movement to repeal the Law as a *sedition muliebris* (34.3.8). Women wish to glitter in purple and gold, he charges, and to be conveyed in carriages on common days as well as on festal days, so that they may exult in their triumph over the defeated Law. They wish also to exult in *captis et ereptis suffragiis vestris*—the voting power they will have snatched away from Roman men. “*Ne ullus modus sumptibus*,” they cry, “*ne luxuriae sit!*”: “Let

<sup>5</sup> *tulerat <Oppiam legem> C. Oppius tribunus plebis Q. Fabio Ti. Sempronio consulibus, in medio ardore Punici belli, ne qua mulier plus semunciam auri haberet neu vestimento versicolori uteretur neu iuncto vehiculo in urbe oppidove aut propius inde mille passus nisi sacrorum publicorum causa veheretur* (Livy 34.1.3). For specific reference to the restriction of purple, cf. 34.3.9; 34.7.3, *et passim*. Other Plautine references to this Law have been detected in *Aul.* 475 ff. (see below) and *Epid.* 224 ff. Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 3.34; Val. Max. 9.1.3; Oros. 4.20.14; Zonaras 9.17.1, and discussions by D. Daube, *Civil Disobedience in Antiquity* (Edinburgh 1972) 27–29, and S. B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves* (New York 1975) 177–81, 207.

there be no limit to expenditures and extravagance!" (34.3.9).<sup>6</sup> The feminine desire to spend money is like a disease which can only be restrained—it cannot be cured. This Law, Cato advises, provides Roman men with the only possible *modus sumptibus*. Once it has been removed, he warns, you will never be able to set a limit to women's expenditures (34.4.18).

Cato also warns of another kind of victory women anticipate with the repeal of the Law. At the present time, all women are similarly attired (*aequato omnium cultu*, 34.4.12). Once they are allowed to engage in a clothes-contest, they will either feel shame—*pudor*—in the presence of other women who can outdress them, or conversely, they will delight in a rather base victory as a result of extending themselves beyond their means. "Do you really want to inflict this sort of contest on your wives?" he asks.<sup>7</sup>

Lucius Valerius, who supports the repeal of the Law, follows his own substantive arguments with a defense of Roman womanhood against Cato's insinuations and charges. In response to Cato's charge that there would be no rivalry among individual women if they did not own anything, he reminds his audience of the *dolor* and *indignatio* experienced by Roman women when they see the wives of Latin allies wearing ornaments of which they have been deprived. "This could wound the minds of *men*," he exclaims, "What do you think it will do to the minds of *mulierculae*, whom even little things upset? Since women cannot enjoy the satisfactions of holding office or priest-hoods or triumphs or the spoils of war, we should allow them to enjoy what our ancestors called the *mundus muliebris*, which consists of *munditiae et ornatus et cultus*, for these are the *insignia* of women."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Quid honestum dictu saltem seditione praetenditur muliebri? 'Ut auro et purpura fulgamus' inquit 'ut carpentis festis profestisque diebus, velut triumphantes de lege victa et abrogata et captis et ereptis suffragiis vestris per urbem vectemur; ne ullus modus sumptibus, ne luxuriae sit' (34.3.8–9).*

<sup>7</sup> *vultis hoc certamen uxoribus vestris inicere, Quirites, ut divites id habere velint, quod nulla alia possit, pauperes, ne ob hoc ipsum contemnantur, supra vires se extendant? ne eas simul pudere, quod non oportet, coeperit, quod oportet, non pudebit (34.4.15–16).*

<sup>8</sup> *universis dolor et indignatio est, cum sociorum Latini nominis uxoribus vident ea concessa ornamenta quae sibi adempta sint, cum insignes eas esse auro et purpura, cum illas vehi per urbem . . . virorum hoc animos vulnerare posset; quid muliercularum censeatis, quas etiam parva movent? non magistratus nec sacerdotia nec triumphi nec insignia nec spolia nec dona aut spolia bellica iis contingere possunt; munditiae et ornatus et cultus, haec feminarum insignia sunt, his gaudent gloriantur, hunc mundum muliebrem appellarunt maiores nostri. Quid aliud in luctu quam purpuram atque aurum deponunt? (34.7.4–9)*

It is generally recognized that these speeches are Livy's fabrication, no doubt influenced by Cato's later works and by the moralizing tendency of L. Calpurnius Frugi.<sup>9</sup> The depiction in this speech of Cato's point of view, however, is consistent with what we know from other sources about Cato's attitude toward such "luxury" property as women's dresses and jewels and expensive vehicles: as censor, he directed the assessors to list them at ten times their actual value and then to be taxed at three *asses* per thousand, or about 30% of actual value. He also delivered a censorial speech "Concerning Clothing and Vehicles," in which he presumably argued for his taxation of these "luxuries."<sup>10</sup>

Cato took strong public stands against a great many other excesses, including undue concern with food. Long after his censorship, he opposed the repeal of another sumptuary law, the *Lex Orchia*, which limited the number of guests at banquets. He also opposed the erection of statues to two cooks, and was said to have replied to a well-known epicure that he "could not live in company with a man whose palate was more sensitive than his heart."<sup>11</sup> Again, in a speech reported by Polybius, he warned the people of Rome "that they

<sup>9</sup> Cf. K. Latte, *Der Historiker L. Calpurnius Frugi* (Berlin 1960). Regarding Valerius' speech, cf. H. Nissen, *Kritische Untersuchungen zur 4. und 5. Dekade des Livius* (Berlin 1863) 154, and D. Kienast, *Cato der Zensor: seine Persönlichkeit und seine Zeit* (Heidelberg 1954) 138, note 14. Regarding Cato's speech, E. Pais, "L'orazione di Catone a favore della lex Oppia," *Atti della R. Accademia di Archeologia di Napoli*, N.S. I (1910) 123–27, believes Livy has captured the arguments, if not the words, of Cato, and that Livy had Cato's speech before him when he wrote. M. Krüger, "Die Abschaffung der lex Oppia (Liv. 34.1–8, 3)," *NJAB* 4 (1940) 65–81, believes that Cato's speech is Livy's composition, designed to convey Cato's character, and that Valerius' speech is a parody of that of Cato. F. Hellmann, "Zur Cato- und Valerius-Rede," *NJAB* 4 (1940) 81–86, argues that Livy composed this pair of speeches to assist Augustus' attempted reform of Roman *mores*. H. H. Scullard, *Roman Politics 220–150 B.C.* (Oxford 1951) 257, rejects Pais' theory in support of his own view that it reveals no trace of Cato's style and contains some anachronisms, including a reference to the Romans in Asia (34.4.1). Kienast, 20–22, disregarding Scullard's anachronisms, maintains Livy had Cato's speech before him when he composed this one, and that Livy's version is rich with elements of Cato's style as well as with Stoic trains of thought which coincide with other speeches of Cato. The more widely accepted opinion, however, is found in H. Malcovati, *Oratorum Romanorum Fragmenta* (Turin 1952) 14, and also in A. E. Astin, *Cato the Censor* (Oxford 1978) 25–27 and 297 n., both of whom conclude that Livy's speech is a fiction.

<sup>10</sup> Livy 39.44.1 ff.; Plut. *Cato Maior* 18.2 ff.; Nepos *Cato* 2.3; Astin 83. In his *Carmen de moribus*, Cato complains about unnecessary expense in dress with reference to ancestral modesty: *vestiri in foro honeste mos erat, domi quod satis est* (Astin 93).

<sup>11</sup> Malcovati, *ORF* 139–46; Plut. *Cato Maior* 9.7; Astin 91.

would see the state changing for the worse, especially when it was found that good-looking boys were being sold for more than fields and jars of pickled fish for more than a teamster."<sup>12</sup>

The extent to which Plautus is burlesquing views of this sort, as opposed to merely carrying over arguments found in his Greek predecessors, is at issue here. Most of these quotations from Cato, to the extent that they can be dated, post-date Plautus' life-time, but they are nonetheless a good indication of the more conservative attitudes of that period. As Astin observes, Cato was no doubt not alone in his hostility to luxury and extravagance.<sup>13</sup> The fact that sumptuary laws were passed, with prior recommendation from the Senate, indicates fairly widespread support for these views, which appear to be burlesqued in several of Plautus' comedies.

We know that Menander and his contemporaries experienced the sumptuary measures and regulation of women established by Demetrius of Phaleron.<sup>14</sup> It is frequently assumed that any reference in Plautus to such matters is merely an echo or translation of what appeared in the Greek original. Webster, for example, explains a statement that Megadorus should be made *moribus praefectus mulierum* (*Aul.* 504) as a reference to the *gynaikonomoi* recently established at Athens.<sup>15</sup> Yet, as Fraenkel argued long ago, Plautus' audience would probably not be familiar with that Greek institution. The suggestion to a Roman audience, on the other hand, that there should be such an office would be an amusing comment on those conservative elements of Roman society of which Cato was certainly an outstanding example.<sup>16</sup> Wagner argued that Megadorus' tirade on the extravagance of women (*Aul.* 475 ff.) is a burlesque of Cato's point of view in the Oppian debate, particularly his references to purple, gold, and expensive vehicles, all of which are forbidden by the Oppian Law:

<sup>12</sup> Polybius 31.25.5a; Astin 92.

<sup>13</sup> Astin 93–94.

<sup>14</sup> *RE* VII.2089–91 s.v. Γυναικονόμοι (Boerner); *RE* Suppl. XI.516 s.v. Demetrios von Phaleron (F. Wehrli). Cf. C. Wehrli, "Les gynéconomes," *MH* 19 (1962) 33–38.

<sup>15</sup> T. B. L. Webster, *An Introduction to Menander* (New York 1974) 5.

<sup>16</sup> Fraenkel 138–40; cf. W. Wagner, *De Plauti Aulularia* (Bonn 1864) 24, and *idem*, *T. Macci Plauti Aulularia* (Cambridge 1866) 132, 135. Cato first stood (unsuccessfully) for censor in the elections of 189 B.C.; cf. Astin 73 ff.

- ME: nulla igitur dicat, 'equidem dotem ad te attuli  
maio rem multo quam tibi erat pecunia;  
enim mihi quidem aequomst purpuram atque aurum dari,  
ancillas, mulos, muliones pedisequos,  
salutigerulos pueros, vehicula qui vehar!'
- EUC: ut matronarum hic facta pernovit probe!  
moribu' praefectum mulierum hunc factum velim.  
(Aul. 498-504)

Megadorus' willingness to marry without receiving a dowry in order to avoid being under the thumb of a wealthy wife may, it is true, be a reflection of a similar situation in an earlier Greek comedy. The power which Roman women wielded over their spouses, however, was also a serious concern after the Second Punic War, as Cato's speech (of unknown date and circumstance), *de dote*, and, again, his opposition to the Lex Voconia illustrate. The Lex Voconia (169 B.C.) was intended to regulate the disposal of property by will. In particular, it precluded women from being named heir to property valued at more than 100,000 *asses*. It also precluded any individual, man or woman, from receiving more by legacy than the amount which went to the heir or heirs. A comparison of Cato's sentiments in support of this law and of Megadorus' assessment of the too-well dowered wife shows that Megadorus' concern was as much a Roman as a Greek attitude.<sup>17</sup>

principio vobis mulier magnam dotem adtulit; tum magnam pecuniam recipit, quam in viri potestatem non conmittit, eam pecuniam viro mutuam dat; postea, ubi irata facta est, servum recepticium sectari atque flagitare virum iubet. (ORF, Fr. 158)

Megadorus' references to purple, gold, and *vehicula* strongly suggest he is burlesquing Cato's position in the Oppian debate. Euclio's *praefectus mulierum* could imply Cato's self-appointed role as overseer of *mores* as well as refer to the *gynaikonomoi* of Menander's time. By thus making Greek allusions relevant to the Roman situation, Plautus heightens the humor of the original allusion, if indeed it did appear in an earlier Greek comedy.

In the *Poenulus*, there appears to be a parody, if not of the Oppian debate itself, then certainly of the kinds of arguments which were

<sup>17</sup> Gomme and Sandbach 184 ff.; C. Herrmann, *Le rôle judiciaire et politique des femmes sous la République romaine* = Coll. Latomus 67 (Bruxelles 1964) 80 ff., and Astin 113 ff.

raised on this issue. The parody, as will be seen, is found in the exchange between Hanno's daughters, and also in the very personalities of these two women, who embody the views Livy has assigned to Cato on the one hand, and to Valerius on the other.<sup>18</sup> Adelphasium is the learned, wise sister—the *sapiens*. We are supposed to deduce this from her conversation with her sister, Anterastilis, and are further reminded of her *sapientia* by other characters in the play.<sup>19</sup> Yet the conversation between the sisters revolves almost exclusively around the rather mundane topic of their appearance and their clothes.

Adelphasium quickly reveals a point of view which is in fact remarkably similar to that of crusty old Cato. The first thing she does when she comes on stage is to castigate the attention and expense lavished upon women's appearance. A man who wants trouble, she grumbles, should get himself a ship and a woman, for no two things will give him more trouble when he tries to outfit them:

ADE: Negoti sibi qui volet vim parare,  
navem et mulierem, haec duo comparato.  
nam nullae magis res duae plus negoti  
habent, forte si occeperis exornare,  
neque umquam sat istae duae res ornantur  
neque is ulla ornandi satis satietas est. (210–15)

From the moment women awake, she says, they never stop being bathed, rubbed down, wiped dry, or polished, smoothed, painted, and made fashionable. As her lengthy harangue on the endless rubbing and scrubbing draws to a close, she exclaims, *modus muliebris*

<sup>18</sup> Maurach 193–94 interprets the initial exchange between the sisters (210–60) as a typical confrontation with the “good *hetaira*” designed to prepare the audience for her eventual marriage to “a nice man,” and the subsequent discussion (261–409) as a contrast between a materialistic and a more refined sister. Such a contrast, which is analogous to the contrast between the virtuous girl and the worldly advisor (e.g., the discussion between Scapha and Philematium, *Most.* III, 1, or the opening scene of *Cist.*) is Greek in origin. But the contrast in the *Poen.* is somewhat different. If Adelphasium is “good,” her sister is not “bad” or conniving. They are both innocent in their own way, and the two extremes which they represent will be moderated by the play's end.

<sup>19</sup> Anterastilis, for example, reprimands her sister's “foolish” complaints about bathing, *quae tam callida et docta sis* (234). Compare also the exchange between Agorastocles and Hanno about her wisdom (AG: *ut sapit!* / HA: *ingenium patris habet quod sapit* . . ., 1197a–1200).



*nullus est!*(230). Shortly thereafter, she advises her sister on the value of setting a *modus* for all things:

ADE: ita est. verum hoc unum tamen cogitato:  
modus omnibus rebus, soror, optimum est habitu. (237–38)

We might compare the tirade of Livy's Cato about the feminine desire to remove any *modus sumptibus et luxuriae*, and his repeated descriptions of the Oppian Law as the only *modus sumptibus mulierum*.<sup>20</sup> An added note of humor in Adelphasium's harangue, of course, is that she would like to set, even more than a *modus sumptibus*, a limit to bathing.

According to Livy's Cato, the Oppian Law cannot be repealed because Roman women have already been corrupted by having formerly experienced *luxuria et avaritia*. Like wild animals who have once tasted blood, woman can no longer be trusted to restrain themselves from rushing into an orgy of extravagance:

et hominem improbum non accusari tutius est quam absolvi, et luxuria non mota tolerabilior esset, quam erit nunc, ipsis vinculis, sicut ferae bestiae, irritata, deinde emissae. (34.4.19)

The feminine desire to spend money, Cato suggests, is insatiable, like an incurable disease (34.4.18). As soon as her husband is unable to meet his wife's infinite demand for more money, she will find other ways to satisfy her need:

miserum illum virum, et qui exoratus et qui non exoratus erit, cum, quod ipse non dederit, datum ab alio videbit. (34.4.17)

Adelphasium raises a similar issue, and even engages in a debate of sorts with her sister, over the matter of satiety with respect to their clothing and adornment. In her initial complaint, Adelphasium laments the impossibility of satisfying women's clothing (as well as bathing) needs.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Livy 34.4.10 *et passim*.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Megadorus' statement, which may allude to the intent of the Oppian Law and to Cato's defense of it: *quorum animis avidis atque insatietatibus / neque lex neque tutor capere est qui possit modum* (Aul. 487–88). The frequent references to bathing may

neque umquam sat istae duae res ornantur  
neque is ulla ornandi satis satietas est. (214–15)

Shortly thereafter, she defines “*satis*”:

nam pro erili et nostro quaestu sati’ bene ornatae sumus.  
non enim potis est quaestus fieri ni sumptus sequitur, scio,  
et tamen quaestus non consistet, si eum sumptus superat, soror.  
eo illud satiust ‘satis’ quod satis est habitu; <hoc> plus quam  
sat est. (285–88)

Her refusal to spend money beyond the means of her “master” (the pimp Lycus) or beyond the requirements of her profession would surely please—and perplex—her austere Roman mentor.

Adelphasium’s pride in her own character, moreover, which is characterized by *pudor* as opposed to a desire for wealth, is also consistent with Cato’s desire to preserve feminine honor and modesty (*pudor*) while protecting Roman women from feeling shame (*pudor*) at their poverty (relative to their wealthier peers). “Envy and malice,” she tells her sister, “were never innate qualities in me. I prefer to be adorned with *bono ingenio* rather than with gold. I prefer to be called *bonam* rather than prosperous (*beatam*). It is becoming for a *meretrix* to wear *pudor* rather than purple. It is even more becoming for a *meretrix* to wear *pudor* rather than gold” (300–305). Adelphasium’s denunciation, in effect, of the *mundus muliebris* directly supports the restrictions of the Oppian Law.

If Adelphasium’s attitude is consistent with Cato’s austere precepts, the perfect representative of Valerius’ *mundus muliebris* is Hanno’s other daughter, Anterastilis. To Adelphasium’s initial objection to the endless rubbing and scrubbing, Anterastilis replies that such cleanliness is necessary if they are to acquire lovers:

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suggest a link with the cult of Fortuna Virilis, whom *humiliores* (courtesans and prostitutes, and possibly plebeian women in general) worshipped at the public baths in April. During the war with Hannibal, the aristocratic counterpart, Venus Verticordia, also worshipped on April 1, was introduced as an admonition against adultery. Cf Val. Max. 8.15, Pliny *H.N.* 7.120, Solinus 1.126; W. Ward Fowler, *The Roman Festivals* (London 1908) 67–69; Pomeroy 208.

nam quom sedulo munditer nos habemus,  
vix aegreque amatorculos invenimus. (235–36)

She then argues that women are like salted fish, which must be soaked endlessly in order to be edible. “We are the same way,” she says, “unless we are very clean and very costly:”

ANTE: soror, cogita, amabo, item nos perhiberi  
quam si salsa muriatica esse autumantur,  
sine omni lepore et sine suavitate:  
nisi multa aqua usque et diu macerantur,  
olent, salsa sunt, tangere ut non velis.  
item nos sumus,  
eius seminis mulieres sunt,  
insulsa admodum atque invenustae  
sine munditia et sumptu. (240–47)<sup>22</sup>

Anterastilis soon exhibits *dolor* such as Valerius describes, moreover, as she contemplates the sorry state of the two sisters’ clothing (*paenitet / exornatae ut simus*, 283–84), and she quickly tries to disprove her sister’s definition of “*satis*”:

sati’ nunc lepide ornatam credo, soror, te tibi viderier;  
sed ubi exempla conferentur meretricum aliarum, ibi tibi  
erit cordolium si quam ornatam melius forte aspexeris. (297–99)

Anterastilis is all too ready to engage in the very clothes-contest against which Cato warns, but which Valerius so valiantly defends.<sup>23</sup>

It is not unlikely that the admittedly stereotyped arguments presented in Livy’s two speeches were made in Rome before, during, and after the debate over the Oppian Law’s repeal. The feminine concern with clothes appears in a number of other Plautine comedies,

<sup>22</sup> We might here recall Cato’s undated lament about the value the Romans placed on pickled fish (πλείον εύρίσκωσιν . . . τὰ κεραμία τοῦ τάριχου τῶν ζευγηλατῶν, Polyb. 31.25.5a), but note also Athenaeus’ comment about the Athenians, that they “thought so highly of salt-fish (περὶ τὸ τάριχος) that they enrolled the sons of the salter Chaeriphillus as citizens, witness Alexis in *The Epidaurian* . . .” (3.119 ff.); cf. J. M. Edmonds, *The Fragments of Attic Comedy* II (Leiden 1959) 404–405.

<sup>23</sup> Livy 34.4.15; 34.7.14.

and was probably a common topic in the Greek sources, perhaps influenced by measures at Athens to regulate women and their mode of dress. In other Plautine comedies, however, this concern tends to be either taken for granted, as part of the feminine stereotype, or, when actually discussed, to occur in the context of worldly advice to a virtuous young woman. In the *Miles Gloriosus*, for example, Palaestrio as a matter of course included Philocomasium's *aurum et ornamenta* (981, 1147) in the items the soldier must yield to her.<sup>24</sup> The *Mostellaria* (I,3) contains a discussion of women's clothing. Here the admonition that clothes add nothing to natural beauty is expressed by the experienced old nurse, Scapha. In the *Poenulus*, by contrast, the discussion of clothes is between a prematurely pragmatic young woman, Adelphasium, and her foolish sister, whose judgment turns on frills and fluff. *Munditiae et ornatus et cultus* are feminine necessities without which Anterastilis, like Valerius' *mulierculae*, feels pain and indignation. For Adelphasium they are an harassment as well as, both in her view and in the conservative view Cato represents, a source of corruption for women. Adelphasium, like Livy's Cato, stresses the need for the proper kind of *pudor*, and for a *modus sumptibus*.

In the *Aulularia*, Cato's viewpoint is echoed by an austere old man, not too different in personality from Cato himself. Why would Plautus have chosen in the *Poenulus* to put a parody of the arguments over the issue of feminine attire in the mouths of two young Carthaginian women? Perhaps their nationality provides the clue. While we have no reason to assume that the earlier Greek version was presented to an audience which was hostile to Carthage, the attitude at Rome during the post-war decade would be considerably more complex.<sup>25</sup> This ambiguity is perhaps reflected in the structure of this portion of Livy's history. Livy's account of the debate (which ended with the Law's repeal) is preceded by an account of the situation at Carthage after the war, including the austerity measures imposed for the specific purpose of paying off the Carthaginian war-debt. His account of the debate is followed, moreover, by Rome's preparation for war with Antiochus—including the shocking offer by Carthage to pay off her war-debt in order to help Rome provide for this new war. The offer would have startled Romans, for it meant

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Duckworth's observation (p. 89) that *ornamenta* and *ornatus* both tend to be employed in the sense of "garb" or "attire."

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Gomme and Sandbach 409.

that their former enemy had recovered financially from that devastating war forty years sooner than they had anticipated. In addition, Carthage offered to supply grain to the Roman army without charge, and, finally, to provide ships for the Roman fleet.<sup>26</sup>

Livy tells us that the Roman Senate refused the offer (36.4.9), but later in the narrative Carthaginian ships are a prominent part of the Roman fleet in the encounter with King Antiochus (36.42.2, 5). The Carthaginian offer, despite the Senate's *pro forma* refusal, would have caused quite a stir at Rome. Buck detects three allusions in the *Poenulus* to the offer, two of which occur in the so-called "Punic" scene, where Milphio acts as the "translator" of Hanno's Punic statements. One of these allusions, Buck suggests, could have been interpreted as a humorous allusion to the "prodigality of the Carthaginians:"

MIL: Tu qui zonam non habes,  
quid in hanc venistis urbem aut quid quaeritis?  
HAN: Muphursa. AG: Quid ait? HAN: Miuulec hianna.  
AG: Quid venit?  
MIL: Non audis? mures Africanos praedicat  
in poppam ludis dare se velle aedilibus. (1008–1012)

"African mice" would of course have no place in the games, but their opposite in size, elephants, would be an extravagant contribution. Such inverted hyperbole would be humorous. It also would remind the audience of those huge animals Hannibal had only recently led into Italy.

Buck believes that lines 1018–22 may be an allusion to the offer of grain, accompanied by a reference to the secretive nature of the Carthaginians:<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> *item ab Carthaginiensibus et Masinissa rege legati venerunt. Carthaginienses tritici modium \* milia, hordei quingenta ad exercitum, dimidium eius Romam apportaturos polliciti; id ut ab se munus Romani acciperent, petere sese, et classem [suorum] suo sumptu comparaturos, et stipendium, quod pluribus pensionibus in multos annos deberent, praesens omne daturos* (Livy 36.4.5–7). Cf. C. H. Buck, Jr., *A Chronology of the Plays of Plautus* (Baltimore 1940) 93–95.

<sup>27</sup> For a bibliography of earlier attempts to translate the Punic passages in this play, as well as his own analysis of this section, cf. M. Sznycer, *Les Passages Puniques en Transcription Latine dans le "Poenulus" de Plaute* (Paris 1967). A more recent treatment is A. S. Gratwick, "Hanno's Punic Speech in the *Poenulus* of Plautus," *Hermes* 99 (1971) 25–45, who raises the interesting point that, from the point of view of Plautus' audience, the Punic passages could very well be gibberish (in whole or in part), since they would not be understood by the audience. The dramatic situation, the gestures,

HAN: Palu mirga detha.      AG: Milphio, quid nunc ait?  
 MIL: Palas vendundas sibi ait et mergas datas,  
       ad messim credo, nisi quid tu aliud sapis  
       [ut hortum fodiat atque ut frumentum metat.]  
 AG: Quid istuc ad me?      MIL: Certiorem te esse volt,  
       ne quid clam furtim se accepisse censeas. (1017–22)

Buck, finally, suggests that a reference to Roman *rowers* (*tum autem plenior / ali ulpicique quam Romani remiges*, 1313–14) is an allusion to the Carthaginian offer of ships. Adelphasium's initial comparison (210 ff.) of the troubles involved in outfitting a woman and a ship may add further weight to Buck's argument. When Rome was preparing its fleet for the war with Antiochus, an unusual number of seamen would have been noticed at Rome. Adelphasium's earlier complaint about the trouble involved in outfitting a woman and a ship may provide further evidence of preparations for war with Antiochus, in which the Roman fleet was a major factor. If this comparison had been drawn solely from a Greek original, one would expect Adelphasium to be much more explicit in her details about ship-building, as, for example, in the *Miles* (915–21), where Acroteleutium includes extensive detail about the construction of a ship.<sup>28</sup> References to ships in Greek literature reflect the intimate knowledge that seafaring people had of ships and the sea. Adelphasium's account of the outfitting of a ship (or a woman), moreover, is almost entirely in terms of cleaning or refurbishing (*lavari aut fricari aut tergeri aut ornari, / poliri expoliri, pingi fingi . . . etc.*, 220 ff.), reflecting perhaps the Roman practice of neglecting their fleet between wars. Restoring those neglected ships would be an onerous chore, especially for land-oriented Romans. Adelphasium's complaint would thus strike a responsive chord in her Roman audience, many of whom may have been engaged in refurbishing ships uncared for since the previous sea-battles. The comparison of outfitting a ship and a woman would thus have humorous overtones which might be lacking for a Greek audience, for the Greeks would have kept their ships intact in peacetime as well as in time of war.<sup>29</sup>

and of course the translations, would convey their "meaning" to the audience.

<sup>28</sup> P. Pomey, "Plaute et Ovide, architects navals!" *MEFR* 85 (1973) 483–515, reconstructs a "shell-first" ship-building technique from this passage.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. J. H. Thiel, *Studies on the History of Roman Sea-Power in Republican Times* (Amsterdam 1946), esp. ch. I. For numerous examples of the detailed references a Greek audience might expect, cf. J. S. Morrison and R. T. Williams, *Greek Oared Ships*,

Anterastilis' comparison, on the other hand, of women to salt-fish could of course be a contemporary allusion to the Roman fondness for food, so frequently deplored by Cato and his ilk, but it could also have been drawn from a great many Greek sources. The frequent emphasis on food in New Comedy suggests that Plautus may have drawn some portion of Anterastilis' speech from a Greek original, perhaps even from one of Alexis' comedies,<sup>30</sup> and fitted it to Adelphasium's speech, which appears to have been created by Plautus, since it reflects a Roman rather than a Greek attitude toward ships.

It is clear that the relationship between Carthage and Rome is a major contemporary factor underlying this comedy. We might compare the humor in post-World War II comedies in this country in which German characters are presented in a humorous fashion. The war-time propaganda lingers, quite apart from any reliable information it may convey. The vanquished enemy is made to look foolish, but remnants of the old threat remain. If, as in the cases of Germany and Carthage, the vanquished enemy is perceived to be rising from the ashes, the laughter grows tense. If the playwright in such a situation makes the nationalistic allusions overbearing, he will weaken the bite in the humor. It is sufficient in this play that the main characters are Carthaginian, a fact which is made quite clear in the introduction and again in the so-called "Punic" scene. Neither Agorastocles nor his two female cousins, who were abducted to Calydon at very early ages, can be representative of contemporary events in Carthage. Their mere presence on the Roman stage, on the other hand, would inevitably remind Romans of the recent conflict between Rome and Carthage. The ascetic strength of Adelphasium would further arouse that old familiar dread of the inherited, innate toughness which brought Hannibal so close to victory over Rome.

The later the date one assigns to the *Poenulus*, the more incisive the humor becomes.<sup>31</sup> If it was first presented prior to 195, this

900–322 B.C. (Cambridge 1968).

<sup>30</sup> A quick glance at the fragments of Alexis shows what appears to be an inordinate preoccupation with food, especially fish, in his comedies, including many references to salt-fish (ἰσχυρὸς). In one fragment, he even discusses the preparation of salt-fish (186 Edmonds), although he does not emphasize, as Anterastilis does, the washing of it. We might also note another fragment in which he gives a recipe for treating burned pork by soaking it in vinegar (124 Edmonds). Cf. Edmonds 373–521.

<sup>31</sup> The date of the first production of the *Poenulus* is uncertain. K. H. E. Schutter, *Quibus annis comoediae plautinae primum actae sint* (Groningen 1952) 125, concludes that it was produced either between 197 and 192, or between 189 and 184. Schutter based his conclusions on (a) lines 663–66, a reference to Attalus, who died toward the

aspect of the humor would be limited to the mere presence of Carthaginians on stage shortly after the end of the Second Punic War. If it is assigned to a period later than the debate over the repeal of the Oppian Law, it acquires a delightfully ironic twist from the parallels between the arguments of the two sisters and the positions subsequently assigned to Cato and Valerius. If, as a number of scholars now believe, it belongs to 191 or later, that is, after the Carthaginian offer to pay off their war-debt and also to aid the victor, the irony is further compounded. In this case, the benefits of the conservative views expounded by Cato, views which Adelphasium embodies, are in fact being realized, not by Romans, however, but—both on the stage and in real life—by Carthaginians.

In the course of the comedy, Plautus moderates the extremes which the two sisters embody. The “wise” sister frequently suppresses her sister’s foolishness. For example, when the latter justifies their need for *munditiae* by comparing women to salted fish, Adelphasium silences her with, “Please, it is enough that *others* say those things to us; let us not talk ourselves into the same faults” (250–52). “Others” would of course include well-intentioned male chauvinists like Valerius. Conservative asceticism, on the other hand, is also subjected to humor, for Adelphasium’s positions are, if anything, even more austere than those of her conservative mentor. Instead of merely doubting the ability of women to limit their expenditures,

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end of 197; (b) lines 693 ff., a reference to Antiochus, with whom Rome went to war in 191; (c) lines 524 ff., the country is said to be now at peace, which would refer either to the peace of late 190/early 189, or mid-197, the period following Cynoscephalae; (d) line 524 corresponds to *Truc.* 74 ff., which is thought to be a late play; line 524 provides evidence that these two plays were produced in near proximity to each other; *Truc.* is usually dated post-189 B.C. Duckworth originally thought *Poenulus* was an early play, but in a later edition accepted 191 B.C., the date proposed by C. H. Buck, Jr., *A Chronology of the Plays of Plautus* (Baltimore 1940) 92–93, a date also accepted by W. B. Sedgwick, “Plautine Chronology,” *AJP* 70 (1949) 376–83. Maurach, *Plauti Poen.* 41–43, would assign a date consistent with Schutter’s earlier time-block, “around the time of the Antiochus war or shortly before.” For some interesting discussions of topicality in Plautus, cf. K. M. Westaway, *The Original Element in Plautus* (Cambridge 1917), esp. pp. 16 ff.; G. K. Galinsky, “Scipionic Themes in Plautus’ *Amphitruo*,” *TAPA* 97 (1966) 203–235; and A. Arcellaschi, “Politique et Religion dans le *Pseudo-lus*,” *REL* 66 (1978) 115–41. It is of course impossible to identify topical allusions in Plautus with certainty, a problem which undermined Buck’s attempt to establish a chronology on the basis of historical allusions alone; cf. J. N. Hough, *CP* 37 (1942) 345–47; Duckworth, *AJP* 64 (1943) 348–52 (reviews of Buck). Much of the humor of topical allusions, on the other hand, lies in their very ambiguity; we must attempt to identify them if we wish to appreciate what was obviously very funny to Plautus’ audience.



Adelphasium denies the existence of any *modus muliebris* whatsoever. The exaltation of *pudor* by this (Carthaginian) *meretrix*, and her concomitant denigration of purple and gold, perversely mimic Cato's exhortation that the state protect Roman matrons from feeling shame at their poverty by continuing to impose poverty equally on all of them. The remarkable recovery of Carthage as a result of her self-imposed austerity measures would provide excellent, albeit ironic, evidence of the efficacy of Cato's austere orientation. It would also provide a strong contrast to the financial straits which the Romans now face as a result of their decision to wage war with Antiochus. The contrast between the wealth of her defeated enemy and Rome's current solicitation for funds would in itself be painfully ironic. To be reminded now of Cato's austere precepts—precepts which were ignored at the very time the Carthaginians were imposing effective austerity measures on themselves—by a Carthaginian *meretrix*, no less, would make for grim irony, indeed, were it not eased by the generous contributions of ships and grain by their former foe.

The conclusion of the clothes-contest in the *Poenulus* provides one more bit of irony, for the *pudor* which finally determines the sisters' simple attire leads to their triumph over the other, more ornately attired courtesans. The sisters emerge, later in the play (1174 ff.), from the temple of Venus, where they have been formally introduced along with the other new courtesans. Instead of worrying about their plain attire, however, Anterastilis is now exultant, and she joyfully gushes over their *victoria*:

ut volup est homini, mea soror, si quod agit cluet victoria;  
sicut nos hodie inter alias praestitimus pulchritudine. (1193–94)

The Roman concern to “protect” women from such unseemly *certamina*, paralleled in Adelphasium's refusal to stoop to contending in the manner of the other courtesans, has here been undermined in an unexpected way. Simple attire, in keeping with the sentiments expressed by Adelphasium and, later, by Livy's Cato, has now become a strategic advantage, since it sets these two young women in contrast to the other, more gaudily attired courtesans. They have thus unintentionally engaged in the clothes-contest, and have emerged victorious. The contest continues forever. Yet, for the moment, a balance has been achieved between the feminine desire for beauty and the austere standards which the likes of Cato would impose upon womankind.