

CAPÍTULO 05

Rhetoric in the Service of Roman Comedy. Some Remarks on Jokes and Puns¹

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Roman comedy eagerly uses various types of rhetorical figures. And since the main characteristic of Plautus' and Terence's plays is repetition,³ it is not surprising that among the various devices they employ the most popular ones are those that are based on repetition.

One can, therefore, find in their comedies numerous examples of alliterations (repeating the first letter), anaphoras (repeating the first word in a verse or sentence) or epiphoras (repeating the last word in a verse or sentence). Homonyms and paronomasias are also a specific kind of repetition, as they use the same or similar sound of two words possessing a completely different meaning.

1 I owe special thanks to Maria Cecília de Miranda Nogueira Coelho for the invitation to give the paper on which this article is based, and for her helpful comments.

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3 Sharrock, Alison. *Reading Roman Comedy*. Poetics and Playfulness in Plautus and Terence. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 163–249. This characteristic is visible in Terence even in the structure of the comedy itself.

1. Alliterations, anaphoras, epiphoras

The most commonly found device is alliteration, which is usually used to enumerate things, features or phenomena:

compellare aut contrectare, conloquive aut contui (PLAUTUS, *Asin.* 523).

to speak with him or to fondle him, to chat with him or to look at him.⁴

fretus tua, Fides, fiducia (PLAUTUS, *Aul.* 586).

Good Faith, with trust in your faithfulness.

Voluptas, Venus, Venustas (PLAUTUS, *Bacch.* 115).

Pleasure, Charm, Grace.

vietus, vetus, veterosus senex (TERENCE, *Eun.* 688).

a shriveled, lethargic, senile man with the colour of weasel.⁵

crispus, crassus, caesius, cadaverosa (TERENCE, *Hec.* 440–441).

curly-haired, fat, grey-eyed.

tristis, truculentus, tenax (TERENCE, *Ad.* 866).

surly, ill-tempered, tight-fisted.

Alliterations also occur frequently in pairs of synonyms:

sine modo et modestia (PLAUTUS, *Bacch.* 613).

no moderation or modesty.

segnitiae neque socordiae (TERENCE, *An.* 206).

idleness and procrastination.

luxuria et lascivia (TERENCE, *Heaut.* 945).

luxurious living and licentious behavior.

Alliteration is also used in statements of a sententious nature like maxims or proverbs:

4 All quotations from Plautus follow the translation of Wolfgang de Melo. Melo, Wolfgang de. *Plautus*. Edited and translated by W. de Melo. Cambridge; London: Loeb Classical Library, 2011. (v. I–V)

5 All quotations from Terence follow the translation of John Barsby. (BARSBY, John. *Terence*. Edited and translated by John Barsby. Cambridge; London: Loeb Classical Library, 2001. v. I–II).

animast amica amanti (PLAUTUS, *Bacch.* 194).

to a lover his girlfriend is his life.

quod fors feret feremus (TERENCE, *Phorm.* 138).

whatever fortune brings I will bear it with equanimity.

However, the use of alliteration always emphasizes the importance of a statement, and often times points to strong emotions of the character, who uses this rhetorical device.

Here are some examples.

When in *Bacchides*, a play by Plautus, the old man discovers that he has become a victim of fraud, he uses alliteration with passion to express his anger. He feels more stupid than all *stulti, stolidi, fatui, fungi, bardi, blenni, buccones*.⁶

Quicumque ubi sunt, qui fuerunt quique futuri sunt posthac stulti, stolidi, fatui, fungi, bardi, blenni, buccones, solus ego omnis longe antideo stultitia et moribus indoctis (PLAUTUS, *Bacch.* 1087–1089a).

All the **weakheads, thickheads, fatheads, mushrooms, idiots, drongos, cretins**, wherever they are, were, or will be hereafter, all these I alone surpass by far in idiocy and stupid habits.

In Terence's comedy, *Andria*, the young master, Charinus, discovers that his hopes for marriage have been thwarted. His bitterness and anger can be heard in a sentence full of alliteration, starting with *quibus quidem quam...* It seems as if he is deliberately choosing every word, trying to restrain his anger. On the other hand, the slave Davus, speaking in defense of his master, responds with a fierce and similar

6 Barsby underlines that this "series of seven alliterative synonyms" express rather Nicobulus' self-condemnation. (BARSBY, John (ed.). *Plautus: Bacchides*. Translation and commentary by John Barsby. Warminster: Aris & Phillips; Bolchazy-Carducci, 1986, p. 183). Karakasis takes it as a parody of similarly stylized laments of Roman tragedy. However, the use of such highly colloquial words is proof of passion and anger. (KarakASis, Evangelos. *Terence and the Language of Roman Comedy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 98. [series Cambridge Classical Studies]). See too: Lilja, Saara. *Terms of abuse in Roman comedy*. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1965, p. 24–25.

alliteration, which through the accumulation of the letter “s” is full of hissing threats *si... satis sua sponte...:*

CH. *quibus quidem quam facile potuerat quiesci, si hic quiesset!* **DA.** *age, si hic non insanit satis sua sponte, instiga* (TERENCE, *An.* 691–692).

CH. How easily things could have been kept quiet, if he had kept quiet!

DA. Go on, goad him on, as if he isn't out of his mind **on his own account.**

Alliteration in comedy is so strongly attributed to all violent emotional states that when the slave girl, Pardalisca, from Plautus' *Casina* fakes horror and fear, she also uses this device.⁷ Through the accumulation and repetition of the letter “m” she gives the impression that terror gave her aphasia, or at least caused considerable trouble with articulation. It is easy to imagine that this liquid (*liquida*) consonant gives the actor the opportunity to stammer or stutter when she says:

cor metu mortuom est, membra miserae tremunt (PLAUTUS, *Cas.* 622)

My heart has died from fear, my limbs are trembling, poor me.

But the same consonant “m” can also be used to indicate that a character fights with his anger, like the old man Demea from Terence's comedy *Adelphoe*, when he discovers his son's affair. He tries to calm down, and immediately his language is full of alliterations that give the impression of slowing down his speech, stammering on one letter, which is supposed to soften his anger.⁸ Already Donatus (ad *Ad.*

7 MacCary & Willcock point out, that the slave girl's statement not only looks like a parody of a soliloquy of a distraught female figure in tragedy, but it is closely reminiscent of Andromache's lament in Ennius (81ff Jocelyn). (MACCary, w. thomas; Willcock, malcolm m. *Plautus: Casina*. Edited by W. Thomas MacCary and Malcolm M. Willcock. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 170). Not only palliata, but indeed also tragedy taught the audience about the meaning of alliteration.

8 BARSBY, John. *Terence: The Eunuch, Phormio, The Brothers*. A Companion to the Penguin Translation by John Barsby. Warminster: Bristol Classical Press, 1991, p. 184.

789) commented that this rhetorical device points to the effort it takes for Demeas to stop his rage when he says:

Repressi, redii, mitto maledicta omnia (TERENCE, *Ad.* 795).
I am in control, I am calm. No more harsh words.

Alliteration, although it is often a sign of a strong emotions, does not reflect only negative feelings. You can hear it, for example, in the joyous screams of Phidippus, realizing that he became a grandfather:

Natus est nobis nepos (TERENCE, *Hec.* 639).
We have a grandson.

Essentially, any statements containing alliterations are supposed to channel the viewer's attention towards strong emotions of the characters. It is not surprising, therefore, that Phaedria, madly in love with a girl, at the thought of losing her, decides, stating with force and alliteration:

Persequi aut perire! (TERENCE, *Phorm.* 551).
... to follow her or die.

Other figures using repetition serve similar purposes. Both anaphors and epiphoras appear in comedies to emphasize the emotions of the protagonists. A good example of this is the moment in Terence's *Adelphoe*, when old Demea uncovers the true nature of his son, which almost makes him break down and cry in a lament full of anaphoras:

*Ei mihi, quid faciam? quid agam? quid clamem aut querar?
o caelum, o terra, o maria Neptuni!* (TERENCE, *Ad.*
789–790).

Oh dear! **What am** I to do? **How am** I to act? **What** cry or lamentation can I utter?

Oh heaven, **oh** earth, **oh** seas of Neptune's realm!

The above-mentioned Pardalisca, who pretended fear, also uses anaphoras:⁹

nulla sum, nulla sum, tota, tota (PLAUTUS, *Cas.* 621).

I am dead, I am dead, I've perished utterly, utterly.

Pamphilus' lamentations after finding out that his wife left him, on the other hand, become full of expression thanks to epiphoras ending each of the listed causes to wallow in pain:

an quisquam usquam gentiumst aequè miser? priu' quam hanc uxorem duxi habebam alibi animum amori deditum; tamen numquam ausus sum recusare eam quam mi obtrudit pater: iam in hac re, ut taceam, quoivis facile scitust quam fuerim miser.

vix me illim abstraxi atque inpeditum in ea expeditum animum meum, vixque huc contuleram: em nova res ortast porro ab hac quae me abstrahat. tum matrem ex ea re me aut uxorem in culpa inventurum arbitror; quod quom ita esse invenero, quid restat nisi porro ut fiam miser?

(TERENCE, *Hec.* 293–296).

Is there anyone in the whole world as **miserable as I am**?
Before I married, my affections were engaged
in another affair,
but I never dared refuse the wife my father thrust upon me.
And in such a situation, without my uttering a word,
it must be obvious to anyone how **miserable I was**.
I'd hardly torn myself away, disentangled my affections,
and transferred them to my wife here, when, lo and behold,
some new development has arisen to tear me away from
her as well.

What's more, I suppose that at the end of all this
I'll find either my mother or my wife to be at fault;

9 Sharrock also in this statement sees a clear parody of tragedy. This means, that it is correct to equate alliterations and anaphors in speech with heightened emotional states. (Sharrock, *Op. Cit.*, p. 94).

and, when I do find this out, what's left for me
but still **misery**?

As one can see from this cursory analysis, the plays of both Plautus and Terence are strongly saturated with various types of figures based on repetition. A large part of them appears only to enchant the ear of the viewer with their beauty or ingenuity. But the devices are used just as often to underline the mood and emotions, and sometimes even the character of the protagonists.

2. Homonyms and paronomasias

It can therefore be said that comedies accustom the viewers with never ending series of rhetorical games. One of their special kind are devices which use specific, however not always exact, repetition. This group includes combinations of words that are etymologically different, but which sound identical (homonym) or similarly (paronomasia).

Let's look at some examples.

When the embittered young man of Plautus' *Asinaria* reproaches a Madame that she no longer remembers her previous life "in rags and eating black bread", he uses a juxtaposition of similar sounding nouns – *panis* – "bread" and *pannus* – "rags":

sordido vitam oblectabas pane in pannis inopia (PLAUTUS, *Asin.* 142).

You used to lead your life with coarse bread, in rags because of your poverty.

In Plautus' *Bacchides*, the slave, disgruntled that his master does not want to hear him out, says:

quin tu audi.

Listen.

The master, moved by the fact that he was allegedly robbed by his friend, shouts:

*immo ingenium **audi** haud pernoram hospitis* (PLAUTUS, *Bacch.* 276).

No, I didn't know the true nature of my greedy friend.

Pairing the verb *audi* – “listen” and the adjective *audi* – “greedy” together brings on a comical effect.¹⁰

In Terence's comedy, *Andria*, Birria the slave goes to his master bearing bad news, and one can sense his fear of his master's reaction through a homonym:

*pro hoc **malo** mihi det **malum*** (TERENCE, *An.* 431).

bad news for him means bad news for me.

The first *malum* should be understood as “unhappiness, bad news”, the second – as “punishment”, which usually for a slave in comedy means “whipping”.

A typical comedic pairing of words is *verba* – *verbera* (“words” – “whips”), which is considered a trope, because a slave in the world of Roman comedy, depending on his offenses, could always count on either excuses (*verba*) or corporal punishment (*verbera*). It is not surprising, therefore, that both Plautus (*Men.* 978) and Terence (*Heaut.* 356) use this trope. The pairing of “lovers” and “madmen”, which also appears in their plays, enjoyed a similar popularity. One of Plautus' young masters says he is:

amens amansque (PLAUTUS, *Merc.* 82).

madly in love

In Terence it is the slave, who regrets that his young master and his beloved always come up with ideas worthy of madmen:

¹⁰ Fontaine emphasises that the differences in the pronunciation of *audi* and *avidi* could not have been significant, otherwise basing a joke on the similarity of the sounds would not be possible. (Fontaine, Michael. *Funny Words in Plautine Comedy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 243).

nam inceptiost amentium, haud amantium (TERENCE, *An.* 218).

They're scheming like lunatics rather than lovers.

Similar to the above-mentioned devices like alliterations or anaphoras, homonyms and paronomasias appear to emphasize the statements and thus draw the viewer's attention to them.

The similarities of the sound with simultaneous semantic differences are a great opportunity to create puns, which provide a comic punchline for the ongoing dialogue. Their appearance always involves equivocation, ambiguity and double entendre. Often, these figures are used in erotic themed jokes.

3. Equivocation, ambiguity, double entendre

The repetition of the same or similarly sounding word with two different meanings is usually calculated to evoke surprise both in the protagonists as in the audience.

This is the case, for example, in one of the last scenes of the comedy *Miles gloriosus*. The soldier, bound and beaten, hears that the slave-torturer (*lorarius*) asks his master, if this punishment was sufficient:

an iam mittis? (PLAUTUS, *Mil.* 1424).

Are you letting him off **in peace** now?

The soldier quickly responds with fear:

mitis sum equidem fustibus (PLAUTUS, *Mil.* 1424).

I am **in pieces** from the cudgels.

The paronomasia, which utilizes the similarity between the verb *mittere* – “send back” and the adjective *mitis* – “softened, tamed” served to construct this joke.¹¹

11 Fontaine is of the opinion that pairing which differ in one letter only are a „recognizable Plautine technique”. FONTAINE, *Op. cit.*, p. 48.

Similarly, in Plautus' comedy *Casina*, the noun *cubitus* – “elbow” and the *supinum* of the verb *cubare* (*cubitum*) – “sleep, sleep with someone, have sex” were paired together. So when a slave complains that the bride is aggressive and elbows him, his master explains this behavior as urging to come to the bedroom as soon as possible:

OL: *paene exposivit cubito. LYS: cubitum ergo ire volt* (PLAUTUS, *Cas.* 853).

OL: She almost **laid me out** with her elbow. **LYS:** Then she wants **to get laid**.

Jokes constructed in this way appear frequently in the *palliata*. Similarly sounding words are always placed in the statements of two different characters and prove that each protagonist has something different in mind. For example, in Plautus' *Bacchides*, the courtesan, wanting to calm the young master, assures him that her bed (*lectus*) is not dangerous. He, however, knows that one should be more afraid of *illectum* – “desire, temptation” than *lectum*.

BACCH. *Quid est? quid metuis? ne tibi lectus malitiam apud me suadeat?*

PIST. *Magis illectum tuom quam lectum metuo* (PLAUTUS, *Bacch.* 54–55).

BACCH. What's that? What are you afraid of? That my **bed** could persuade you to do something naughty at my place?

PIST. I'm more afraid of your **bidding** than your bed.

The ubiquity of rhetorical devices based on repetition, especially puns using sound similarity or double meaning of words prepares the audience for all possible ambiguities. No wonder then, that Plautus and Terence are willing to use them with such a frequency. Often enough, however, their jokes do not even use a verbal repetition, but a combination of words in which one is actually articulated, and the other appears only as an unspoken association in the head of the interlocutor and provokes him to utter an unusual and surprising response. Then there is an unexpected break of logical continuity,

and only the context indicates that each character has something else in mind.

Sometimes the playwright wants to be sure that the viewer has understood the joke, that's why he adds the word that has become the source of ambiguity. One of the most interesting examples of this can be found in Plautus' *Amphitruo*. Mercury, wanting to scare the slave Sosia, boasts that the previous day he put four people (*quattuor*) "to eternal sleep". The servant is afraid now that the god may change his name from Sosia to Quintus. If, however, someone did not understand the joke, which is that Sosia may become the fifth (*quintus*) victim, he adds an explanation:

MER. [...] *homines quattuor*

in soporem collocastis nudos.

SOS. *Formido male,*

*ne ego hic nomen meum commutem et **Quintus** fiam e Sosia;*

***quattuor** sopori se dedisse hic autumat:*

*metuo ne numerum augeam illum (PLAUTUS, *Amph.* 303–7).*

MER. [...] stripped **four** men and put them to sleep.

SOS. I'm terribly afraid that I might change my name here and turn Sosia into Sosia **the Fifth**.

This joke utilizes the double meaning of the word *quintus*, which signifies both the numeral "fifth" but also a given name. Sosia's commentary about not wanting to increase the number of dead is supposed to additionally point out this ambiguity.

Most often, the characters do not repeat the word that is the source of ambiguity, the reaction of the interlocutor and the situational context are supposed to be enough. For example, in Plautus' *Casina*, when the slave and his master discuss a shopping list for a feast, they also among other fish mention the sole (*soleae*). Another servant listening to them on the side understands the word *soleae*, as sandals, not fish. This is evidenced by his ironic conclusion that it is better to buy clogs (*sculponeae*), because they are better for beating people

over the head.¹² When, a moment later, the slave proposes to buy fish called *lingulacae* – a name that can be associated with the word *lingua* – “language”,¹³ the master protests because, as he explains, he has a wife at home and she is talkative enough for him:

CHAL. – *soleas.*

LYS. *qui quaeso potius quam sculponeas,
quibus battuatur tibi os, senex nequissime?*

OL. *vin lingulacas?*

LYS. *quid opus, quando uxor domi est?*

(PLAUTUS, *Cas.* 495–497).

CHAL. – *soles.*

LYS. Why only those, please, rather than entire **clogs**
to smash your face with, you worthless old man?

OL. Do you want **tongue**?

LYS. What’s that necessary for, since I have a wife at home?

A good example of this kind of jokes in Terence’s comedies is the dialogue in which old Simo informs his son, Pamphilus, that he ordered to tie up the slave Davus. The young man, remembering how much he owes to his servant, exclaims in horror:

pater, non recte vincitust.

Father, that’s not proper.

The father answers:

haud ita iussi (TERENCE, *An.* 955).

I told them to tie him properly.

This joke does not require the repetition of the word in its second meaning.¹⁴ Simo’s answer reveals that he understood the expression *non recte* as “not very strongly”, that is an ineffective deprivation

12 It was understood in Roman comedy that women used their own shoes to beat slaves on the head, e.g.. *Eun.* 1028. (MACCary; Willcock, *Op. Cit.*, p. 154).

13 MacCary; Willcock, *Op. Cit.*, p. 155 confirm (Pompejuszem Festusem (104 L), that the word *lingulaca* was used to denote a genus of fish as well as a talkative woman.

14 Noticeably the translation repeats the expression in order to underline the play on words.

of liberty of Davus, whereas for Pamphilus the very idea of this punishment seemed wrong, that is why he uttered *non recte* – “not good”.

This way of building a joke – without the verbal repetition of the word, but only by suggesting to the viewer that it can be understood differently – is used most readily in *palliata*. It also works great in the case of obscene jokes, because omitting the repetition reduces somewhat the sharpness of the expression.

For example, in the comedy *Aulularia*, old Euclio tries unsuccessfully to persuade the slave to give back the stolen urn (*aulala*) with gold. In the end, he even orders him:

pone! (PLAUTUS, *Aul.* 637).
Let me have it!

But the slave understands this imperative of the verb *ponere* as an adverb meaning “behind”, which he mistakes for a proposal to have anal sex.¹⁵ The audience can infer this from his indignant answer:

id quidem pol te datare credo consuetum, senex! (PLAUTUS, *Aul.* 637).
I’m sure you’ve learnt to love providing that service, old boy.

This frequency of jokes based on repetition, ambiguity and double entendre makes the audience particularly sensitive to any expressions that can be used to build such types of word games. Viewers understand them also without verbal repetition. The playwrights have already practiced this kind of device and educated their audience to see hidden meanings of the words coming from the stage. Therefore, it of-

15 This meaning of the joke was suggested by Thomas (THomas, E. J. T. *Macci Plauti Aulularia*. Edited by E. J. Thomas. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933, p. 30), Wagner (Wagner, Wilhelm T. *Macci Plauti Aulularia*. With notes critical and exegetical and an introduction by Wilhelm Wagner. New York: Arno Press, 1979, p. 149), Stockert (Stockert, Walter T. *Maccius Plautus: Aulularia*. Herausgegeben und erklärt von Walter Stockert. Stuttgart: Teubner, 1983, p. 171), Melo (MELO, *Op. cit.*, p. 326, n. 42). Ussing before them did not notice in these lines a sexual joke. (Ussing, Ioannes Ludovicus. *T. Macci Plauti Comoediae*. Rec. et enarr. Ioannes L. Ussing. Kopenhagen: Libraria Gyldendaliana, 1875).

ten happens that the ambiguity of a word is not even commented on. This situation transfers the responsibility for understanding the joke to the recipient. On the one hand, this serves as proof of his intelligence, sense of humor and knowledge of the genre, on the other – it removes the responsibility for the joke from the poet, especially in the case of obscene ones, because understandably the playwright cannot be responsible for someone else’s mental associations.

These kind of jokes can be found quite frequently. The best example rests on the ambiguity of the verb (*ac*)*cubare*, *cubitare* – “to lie”, because it can be understood as “lying down during a feast”, that is, eating a meal, and “lying in bed”, that is, having sex. Plautus repeatedly uses this double meaning, but never adds a comment suggesting that he is inserting a joke. Only the context can be helpful to an attentive viewer. That is why it is no surprise to hear such sexual allusions coming from the old Demaenetus, who is in love with a young girl. When his wife catches him at a feast thrown by the courtesans, she does not allow him to take a seat at the table, but immediately takes him home, where, as she says, he will have to “lie on the bed he made for himself”. The old man, seeing that he would miss all the fun, the feast, and the courtesan’s bed, sighs:

male cubandum est! (PLAUTUS, *Asin.* 937).

I’ll have to recline wretchedly.

The same verb is used in a similar fashion by a young man in Plautus’ *Bacchides*, when he asks the courtesans, how will he be able to “satisfy his appetites” with them:

ubi ego tum accubem? (PLAUTUS, *Bacch.* 81).

where would I lie then?

Though Terence uses word games more sparingly, he does not avoid jokes based on ambiguity. Like Plautus, he leaves them without a comment that would suggest their hidden meaning to the audience. He also understands, there is no need for it. Above all, the viewers

of palliata were prepared to look for “double meaning”, and the situational context was usually enough to impose this “duality” of meaning on the spectators.

For example, when the slave Parmeno from Terence’s *Hecyra* reports to his master the condition of his wife Philumena, he uses the verb *pavitare* – “to tremble”:

uxorem Philumenam

pavitare nescioquid dixerunt (TERENCE, *Hec.* 320–321).

They said that your wife Philumena had some sort of a fever.

The protagonists comment on some unknown disease which has befallen the girl, so the slave’s description can be understood as “shivering with fever”. Since the beginning of the plot, however, almost all characters suggest that Philumena fell out with her mother-in-law, so “shivering” can also mean “tremble in fear”.

In the same comedy, one of the old men, Laches, informs his neighbor, Phidippus, that Philumena is expecting a son (*expectare filium*) – of course, he means his son, Pamphilus, who should return from a trip any day. Phidippus himself understands this as well. Pamphilus, however, who is eavesdropping on them, thinks that both fathers know about his wife’s secret pregnancy, and he takes *expectare filium* as an announcement of the birth of a child (*Hec.* 451).

One can find a lot of examples of this kind of puns, whose ambiguity is not emphasized by the characters on stage – both in the plays of Plautus and Terence. The audience, consisting of native Latin speakers, did not have any problems with understanding the “double entendre”. The only trouble arises when modern readers are confronted with it. This is especially true when it comes to dirty jokes. In those cases, there is doubt as to whether the ambiguity was intended to result in frivolous connotations. Then one is dealing with the so called *iocus dubius*.

4. *iocus dubius*

It is plausible to suspect that both playwrights introduced comical sexual allusions in their plays. Modern readers and researchers have often pointed out passages which they understood to be such dirty jokes. If they were introduced by the authors deliberately, this practice of hiding explicit material under cover of ambiguity certainly allowed them to balance on the edge of good taste, because only the audience can be responsible for their own obscene mental associations.

Plautus has often been suspected of planting such hidden sexual jokes, because his plays are already strongly saturated with eroticism and ambiguous allusions. One of the examples might be found in the play *Casina*. The old man thanks the trusted overseer of his country estate for his help to arrange a tryst with a girl, and wanting to show his joy and gratitude, tries to embrace him and kiss him. The overseer initially kindly accepts this, but when the old man's affections intensify, he protests and defends himself, clearly suggesting that he sees it as homosexual advances:

ultra te, amator, apage te a dorso meo! (PLAUTUS, *Cas.* 459).
Away with you. lover, get off my back!

Another slave overhears this conversation and infers that the overseer owes his position to this kind of *quid pro quo*. He explains that he also got a proposal of a promotion to “doorkeeper”:

facere atriensem voluerat sub ianua (PLAUTUS, *Cas.* 462).
He also wanted to make me the doorkeeper down by the back entrance.

The seemingly innocent noun *ianua* can be understood as an euphemism for the anus.¹⁶ This whole scene, filled with homosexual suggestions, imposes such an interpretation. And although no one

16 MELO, *Op. cit.*, v. II, p. 60, n. 18; ADAMS, James N. *Seksualizmy łacińskie*. Przeł. J. Janik. Kraków: Homini, 2013, p. 126.

comments on the slave's statement, one can assume that this double meaning was intended by Plautus.

In *Miles gloriosus* one can find a similarly constructed joke. Clever Milphidippa along with the slave Palaestrio are plotting how to convince the soldier that his neighbor has fallen in love with him and is ready to do anything in order to gain his affection. This scene takes place in the fourth act of the comedy, so everyone already knows that the title character is sensitive to feminine charms and will not miss any opportunity to exploit them. That is why it is easy to see a joke in Milphidippa's question to her accomplice:

*quo pacto hoc Ilium appeli
velis* (PLAUTUS, *Mil.* 1025–1026).
How do you want this Troy attacked?

The only question is how the viewer understands the noun *Ilium*. Usually, researchers see it as a metaphor: a fortress, which must be obtained by trickery.¹⁷ If, however, one accepts that *Ilium* is not only a proper name, but also a common noun *ilium* – meaning “groin, penis”,¹⁸ then there is a possibility of a joke. The same descriptor referring to the amorous soldier appears in the comedy *Pseudolus* (PLAUTUS, *Pseud.* 384). The play *Casina* brings an ironic comparison of the lustful old Lysidamus to *Hector Ilius* (PLAUTUS, *Cas.* 995), which was probably also supposed to be strongly associated with the obscene term *ilium*.¹⁹

17 Melo writes: “Troy was taken through a clever trick: Greek soldiers hid in a wooden horse and only came out once the horse had been brought into Troy. Pyrgopolinices also loses his mistress through a trick”. (MELO, *Op. cit.*, v. III, p. 251, n. 43) Hammond gives a similar interpretation. (Hammond, Mason; Mack, arthur m.; Moskalew, walter. *T. Macci Plauti: Miles gloriosus*. Edited with an introduction and notes by Mason Hammond, Arthur M. Mack, Walter Moskalew. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963, p. 155–156).

18 Fontaine also argues for this interpretation of the word. (FONTAINE, *Op. cit.*, p. 225–226).

19 The opinions on this matter are divided. MacCary & Willcock see no sexual allusions and even suggest, that for modern staging purposes Hector could be as well exchanged for Julius Cesar (MACCARY & WILLCOCK, *Op. cit.*, 208). Fontaine notes a similar joke authored by Marullus, a poet from the mid II century AD, who also used a comparison to Hector of Ilium, which speaks for interpreting the passage as a dirty joke. (FONTAINE, *Op. cit.*, p. 225).

Although nowhere in the presented examples does Plautus comment on the obscene ambiguity of *ianua* or *ilium*, these words do appear in a dialogue, which is entirely made up of various types of sexual allusions. This somehow prepares the ground for such mental associations.

The situation presents itself somewhat differently with Terence, who tries to suggest all erotic content to the audience through understatement and veiled expressions. He does not name things by name, but only enigmatically defines them:

numquidnam amplius tibi cum illa fuit? (TERENCE, *An.* 325).

Hey, tell me, is there anything more between you?

etiamne amplius? (TERENCE, *Eun.* 143).

Has he done more than that?

Sometimes he does not even finish a statement. He leaves it hanging mid-sentence just before he would have to name a sexual activity:

itan Chrysis? hem (TERENCE, *An.* 803).

Has Chrysis really – ?

quemquamne animo tam communi esse aut leni putas qui se vidente amicam patiatur suam...? (TERENCE, *Heaut.* 912–13).

Do you reckon anyone could be so generous or easygoing that he would stand by and watch his mistress being – ?

ego illum eunuchum, si opus siet, vel sobrius... (TERENCE, *Eun.* 479).

I know what I'd do to that eunuch, even when sober, if it came to it!

With such a remarkable delicacy of expression, it is surprising that a whole range of obscenities has been suspected in the text, though they are hard to noticed. The main reason for this invisibility of double entendre is not only the lack of reaction to it from other

characters, but also the absence of any other erotic jokes in their immediate vicinity. In Plautus, every ambiguous statement appears surrounded by other jokes, which helps the audience realize that it just might be another dirty joke. Terence, after introducing an ambiguous statement (or even an unambiguous sexual allusion) breaks the continuity of communication and changes the subject. In this way, the playwright not only dulls the spectator's vigilance, but also deprives him of the certainty whether the association was intentional or just the product of his dirty mind.

When Phaedria, succumbing to Tais' pleas and urges, moves away to the countryside, he says *mos gerundust Thaidi* – which in love slang means that Tais can do whatever she wants – also in a purely sexual sense (TERENCE, *Eun.* 188). Of course, it is difficult to determine whether the double meaning is intentional because no one on stage comments on this ambiguity.

Similarly, it happens in passages suggesting *fellatio* and *irrumatio*. In *Hecyra*, the courtesan Philotis complains about the soldier, that she was allowed to speak with him only about the things he liked. This statement is met with the slave's retort:

*haud opinor commode
fnem statuisse orationi militem* (TERENCE, *Hec.*
95–96).

I don't imagine you enjoyed having the soldier regulate your speech.

Of course, the literal meaning of this statement refers to the previously mentioned characteristic of the soldier who did not let the courtesan speak her mind. But whenever courtesans are mentioned on stage there is always a high probability of sexual jokes. It is therefore possible to suspect that Parmeno not only regrets the cruelty of the soldier who wanted to restrain the proverbial talkativeness of women, but also alludes to the practice of *irrumatio*. It is worth not-

ing that after this statement the characters change the subject, because the courtesan inquires about the fate of the main protagonist of the comedy. So there is no clear evidence that it is a sexual allusion, but it also cannot be ruled out.

A similar situation happens during the conversation scene of Laches and Bacchis. When the courtesan promises to do everything possible to clear her former lover Pamphilus of the accusation that he still has relations with her, Laches, happy with her statement, shouts:

facilem benivolumque lingua tua iam tibi me reddidit
(TERENCE, *Hec.* 761).

Your words have filled me with generosity and good will towards you.

As before, here too, the basic meaning of the statement should be understood in such a way that the words of Bacchis ensure her kindness on the part of Laches. But already in the commentary Donatus notes that Laches “*lingua tua*” *consuetudine magis quam ratione dixit* – “he [Laches] said *your tongue* more out of habit than intentionally”. On the one hand, Donatus assures us that the expression “*lingua tua*” should only be understood as “your words”, on the other hand it signals how dangerous it is to connect a courtesan with the word “tongue” as it might easily bring to mind the practice of *fellatio*.

Another example of a certain ambiguity is found in *Adelphoe*. When the procurer Sannio complains that he “took it in the face from Aeschinus”, the slave Syrus instructs him that it would have been wiser to give the young man what he wanted (*adulescenti morem gestum oportuit*; TERENCE, *Ad.* 214). The expression *morem gerere* (mentioned above in connection to Tais, *Eun.* 188) means “giving in to someone’s wishes”, which was often used in the sense of fulfilling someone’s sex-

ual fantasies.²⁰ It is possible that the procurer also understood this double meaning as he answers:

Qui potui melius, qui hodie usque os praebui? (TERENCE, *Ad.* 215).

How better than by offering him both cheeks?

Philologists²¹ are inconsistent in their interpretations of this riposte as an allusion to *irrumatio*, but one cannot rule out completely the indicated ambiguity. Here also, as in *Hecyra*, the conversation immediately switches to a different topic.

This blurring of all sexual allusions and the lack of reaction from other characters makes it difficult to explicitly consider these statements with potential sexual connotations to be a purposeful act of the playwright. There is always uncertainty as to whether we are not prone to over-interpretation.

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20 Parker compiled in his article examples of all the uses of these ambiguous statements found in other authors (Plautus, Lucillius, Martial) as proof, that their double meaning was often utilized in comedic genres. (Parker, Holt. N. Slips of the Tongue. Three Double Entendres in Terence. (Adel. 215, Hec. 95, 761). *RhM*, Gainesville, v. 141, n. 2, p. 173-175, 1998).

21 Büchner sees obscenities in this exchange, Martin, however, doubts this interpretation. (Büchner, Karl. *Das Theater des Terenz*. Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1974, p. 373; Martin, Ronald H. *Terence: Adelphoe*. Edition and commentary by Ronald H. Martin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 137).

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