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# Contents

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# Plauti "somnium narratur": Dreams in Plautus' Comedy

Abstract

This article examines the five dream episodes found in Plautus' *Miles Gloriosus*, *Rudens*, *Mercator*, *Curculio*, and *Mostellaria*. Plautus' dreams are the only source for analysing the way dream episodes were performed in Hellenistic dramas. The main argument is that dreams are a scholar's manual for reading Plautus' composition method. These narratives play with the idea of illusion and give the playwright the chance to move further than the text and the stage and to innovate by composing metaplays. The examination begins with the text and its intentional resemblance to Greek tragic pieces. It then focuses on the dreams' key-function within the five comedies, in order to demonstrate that dreams were the most important metatheatrical device that Plautus had at his disposal.

KEYWORDS: Plautus; dreams; *imagines*; metatheatre; mirroring; animal symbolism

A single dream description in Menander's *Dyskolos* and five dreams from Plautus are all that survive from Hellenistic comedy. Terence does not include even one such narrative. For this reason, dreams in Plautus are really the only source we have for analysing the way comic dream episodes were presented in front of the Roman audience. Scholars, however, have never studied these narratives without comparing them negatively with their Greek originals. No studies have been written in English that focus primarily on dreams as a plot mechanism in Roman comedy.[1]

Plautus is influenced by Greek attitudes towards dreams, but this does not exclude the fact that the Romans had their own sensibility for dream narratives.[2] Ennius in his *Annales* depicts the physical sensation of the soul

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[1] See Katsouris 1978a on the use of dreams in the general background of Greek drama. For a study on the 'mirroring' method in relation to dreaming, see Kella 2011.

[2] Cicero's *De Divinatione* and Dido's dream (*Aen.* 4.465-6) were amongst the most significant Roman employments of the dream subject; see Harris 2003: 21.

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travelling in Ilia's dream. Cicero in *De Divinatione* records the belief that the dreamer's soul leaving the body converses with other souls.[3] The Roman interest in the true aspect of dreams is evident through the range of Latin expressions for unravelling the experience. To say *somniare*, the Romans would use any expression centred on the 'visual' aspect: *videre in somnis* or *in quiete* ('to see through/in a dream'), or the passive form *videri*; in Greek the equivalent would be ὄψιν or ἐνύπνιον ἰδεῖν ('to see a vision'), ὄναρ ἰδεῖν ('to see a dream'), ἰδεῖν ἐν τῷ ὕπνῳ ('to see during sleep'), ἐδόκει ὁρᾶν ('seem to see').[4] What the Greeks called εἴδωλον in Latin was defined as *somniorum visa* ('sleep visions'), *quietis visa* ('visions through/in a dream'), *species* ('appearance'), *imago* ('image'), *effigies* ('effigy').[5] However, any Plautine narrative was more a linguistic than a visual event, since it was never enacted on stage.[6] The playwright handled dream episodes as separate dramas within the comedies and this could always stimulate the Roman audience to grasp them and filter them through their own experience. Dream images gave Plautus the chance to move beyond the immediate plot and to innovate by writing metaplays.

This paper will focus on the five dream episodes that can be found in the Plautine corpus, which are divided into two groups. The first three sections will examine the fictitious dreams in *Miles Gloriosus* and *Mostellaria*, which are invented by characters in order to manipulate their opponents' understanding of events. The fourth section will investigate two real dreams (in *Rudens* and *Mercator*), in order to analyse how far Plautus developed the theatrical dimension of the relationship between reality and dream. Due to space constraints, the dream in *Curculio* will be mentioned only in passing. In the light of the following examination, we will try to determine the key function of dreamscapes in Plautus' poetics and style.

The purpose of this paper is therefore to examine dream images as a way of reading Plautus.[7] The reason for not examining Terence is the absence of dream narratives in his comedy, since he faithfully follows Greek concepts and values, whereas Plautus manipulates dreams adding them to

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[3] Cic. *Div*. 1.20, 1.51.

[4] See on this Claflin 1943: 71-9.

[5] The word εἴδωλον meant both 'reflection' as well as 'ghost': εἴδωλον was the spirit-image of a living or dead person. Cf. Bettini 1997: 23.

[6] Dream-visions are performed in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* and in the opening scene of Aristophanes' *Clouds*.

[7] There are opposing views regarding the influences on Plautus: Stärk (1989) and Lefèvre (1995) highlighted the influence of the traditions of the Atellan Farce and judged as un-Hellenic the scenario of Plautus' plays.

the main plot.[8] When writing a dream story, Plautus works on three levels: text, subtext, and metaplay. In other words, he has a threefold vision and he takes account of the dreamer's, the viewer's, and the playwright's perspective. The representation of a dramatic role is linguistically identified by explaining the meaning of a dream (ὑποκρίνεσθαι). Plautus uses the dream as a self-conscious theatre piece, a device whereby a play comments on itself and a miniature or micro-dream (the narration) is incorporated into the macro-dream of comedy.

## The Role of Dreams

In order to gain a complete grasp of the role of dreams on stage, one should start by examining their religious impact on the Roman society.[9] Roman thinking never questioned the "belief in dreams", since important people, including almost "all Roman emperors based important decisions on dreams" (Harris 2009: 123-4).[10] It was generally accepted that dreams came from the gods and were worthy of recording for their prophetic and revealing character. Rome had its paid dream-interpreters (*coniectores*), who practiced the *coniectura* attested in Plautus' comedies.[11] Thus Plautus presents a world in which dream-interpretation is an everyday occurrence, in which anyone can learn to interpret dreams and where all ordinary people may have truth-telling dreams (165-6).

Plautus offers further understanding of the popular belief owing to his public role, his religious and psychological presuppositions that do not deviate from those of respectable citizens (178). Hence, when the dramatist makes use of significant dreams featuring comical dream imagery, he produces a comically undignified effect (159): thus, while reflecting the prevail-

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[8] Terence had a Roman forerunner, a model to follow and reflect, whereas Plautus writes an unexampled Roman comedy and has to 'fight' against Greek conventions. Sharrock (2009: 28) notes a self-deprecating joke given that we are dealing with "a genre that presents itself as 'just a copy of Greek comedy'". According to Manuwald (2011: 316-17 and 305), in Terence the synthesis of comic and tragic material is different, since he brings his plays close to tragedy by using serious topics and ways. The comedy of Menander is no longer an alien form to be subverted by Terence but an aesthetic ideal to be imitated (cf. Varro ap. Non. 374.9: "In ethesin Terentius poscit palmam", "in characterization Terence demands first prize").

[9] Harrisson (2013) does not include Plautus' dreams in her discussion. For dreams and experience in classical antiquity see Harris 2009: ch. 3, 4 and Miller 1994.

[10] Cf. Plut. *Sull.* 6, *Luc.* 23.

[11] *Curc.* 246-50, *Mil.* 693.

ing cultural beliefs about dreams, he entertains his audience.[12] It will be argued that his dreamers occupy a place on stage very different from that of the other theatrical *personae*.[13] In *Miles Gloriosus* a woman is empowered to narrate an invented and misleading dream (*Mil.* 380-96). In *Curculio*, a specially concocted incubation scenario makes fun of the widespread 'healing belief', using a lower class character as the dream interpreter.[14] In *Rudens* a typical *senex comicus* ('an old man') is the dreamer admitting that he has not "been able to divine all day what he's to take this dream to mean" (611-12),[15] expecting the Roman audience to fill in the gap about his dream symbolism and purpose. This *senex* dreams the plot of the play and in it the characters are not humans but goats and monkeys.[16] Even though the characters struggle to work out whether their dream is a divine sign and what it means, the audience know what the dream is predicting and are able to interpret it correctly. The dream is designed to be comprehensible to the audience, but not to the characters (Harrisson 2013: 220).

The main textual model for comic dream narrative came from Greek tragedy and epic which Plautus adapted in a mock tragic way (*de fausse noblesse*).[17] Especially in tragedy, the irrationality of women and weak old men was associated with dreams.[18] Nevertheless, underneath the tragic surface of dream-telling scenes lies a new Roman concept of dream interpretation, one influenced by Aristotle. Dreams no longer came from outside, nor were they sent by gods (θεόπεμπτον) to wise kings and privileged dreamers; they were sent to all ordinary people owing to the activity of their subconscious. "Dreams are not divine, for nature is daemonic but not divine" (Arist. *Div. Somn.* 463b). Plautus, in a way that is similar to the Freudian theory of Displacement and Condensation in visions, presents distorted dreams with latent content and allowing multiple interpretations. The viewer who interprets the dream steps into the subtext and gains an insight

[12] For Plautus' audience see Beacham 1991 and Anderson 1993. According to inscriptions from Delos, Romans were beginning to learn new dream-practices of making dedications in obedience to divine dreams (Harris 2009: 179).

[13] Philocomasium (*Miles*), *senex* Daemones (*Rudens*), Demipho (*Mercator*), Philolaches (*Mostellaria*) and *leno* Cappadox (*Curculio*).

[14] Evidence shows that in the second century BC sick people turned to the shrine of Aesculapius which was the scene of incubation dreaming (see Harris 2009: 178).

[15] "nunc quam ad rem dicam hoc attinere somnium, numquam hodie quivi ad coniecturam evadere". All translations from Latin and Greek are by mine. Textual references are from Lindsay's (Oxford 1904) edition.

[16] *Rud.* 593-612, also in *Merc.* 246-73.

[17] Collart (1964), Monaco (1969: 160).

[18] For women cf. Aesch. *Ag.* 276. The chorus of old men claim to have the power of divination, even if they wander around the world as weak as an ὄναρ ἡμερόφαντον (*Ag.* 82, 'daydreaming'). See Björck 1946, Dodds 1951, Gallop 1996, and George 2001.

into Plautus' dramaturgy.

Research has not yet thrown light on the metatheatrical aspect that dream scenes acquire in Plautine comedy.[19] Ziegler has assembled all the dream scenes and undertaken an analysis of their significance and their connection with dream theories. Similarly, Katsouris has considered the symbolism and meaning of each dream, though without referring to their metatheatrical function.[20] Nevertheless, such an examination could demonstrate the metatheatrical impact of dreams on the staging of the Republican period. If metatheatre is defined as playing with the concept of illusion based on the interaction between the audience, the actor, and the playwright, then dreams were amongst the most metatheatrical devices for Plautus' 'Theatre of Mind'.

Dreams are techniques Plautus used to rouse his audience's self-consciousness, since they copy, simulate, and transform characters into εἴδω-λα, that is, dream images. Every time a dream is recounted on stage we are in the middle of a pivotal moment, during which the audience's power is at its greatest to conceive, interpret, and applaud the intellectual game played by costumes, masks, and characters. Dreams work as metaphorical 'mirrors' of a play informing about the plot and the role of each character. This 'mirroring' method of Plautus plays between the audience's expectation to see a stereotype/stock character as conceived as a dream image and the actual character/construct they finally see on stage.[21]

## The Mirrored Self

*Miles Gloriosus* is considered among Plautus' "apprentice" works (Sedgwick 1930: 105). It features a dream which, in spite of its original metatheatrical aspect, has been neglected by scholars.[22] They have focused on the comedy's separation into two independent episodes, considering the dream scene to be unconnected with the second episode and generally cut off

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[19] Slater (1985) altered the landscape for interpreting Plautus by providing a vocabulary for metatheatre, though he did not discuss dream episodes. Metatheatre is a term coined by Abel (1963) and refers to the ability of stage text and performance to allude to and comment on its own nature as an artistic medium. For recent metatheatrical studies, see Manuwald 2011, Marshall 2006, Moore 1998. For an overview on 'metatheatre' and 'self-consciousness', see Rosenmeyer 2002 and Gentili 1979: 15.

[20] Ziegler 1982, Katsouris 1978a and 1978b. Cf. Averna 1987, Mazzoli 1995.

[21] When discussing Plautine theatricality, Gratwick (1987) supports the view that Terence rejects this interaction between audience, representers, and represented.

[22] Cf. Leo 1912: 178, Fraenkel 1922: 253-62, Guastella 2003: 51.

from the rest of the comedy.[23] However, this scene gave Plautus' audience its first chance to experience composition as a double-layered act – Plautus' play and the invention of a dream within it.

In *Miles* Act 2, Plautus warns, through Palaestrio's prologue, that his comedy involves a game between reality and mirrored "imagines" ("images", 151). According to the plot, the slave Sceledrus has seen his master's girlfriend, Philocomasium, meeting and kissing her lover in the house next door. To avoid the truth being revealed, the clever slave Palaestrio, a parallel for Plautus, invents a fictitious dream that subtly mirrors and distorts reality: Philocomasium's twin sister and her lover *seemed* to have moved into the house next door. The slave Sceledrus, *seeing* the stranger and Philocomasium's sister together, wrongly accused Philocomasium of deceiving his master (388: "suspicionem sustinere", "she was under an enormous suspicion"). Palaestrio creates the dream narrative, puts his *sphragis* on it (386: "Palaestrionis somnium narratur", "Palaestrio's dream is being told") and gives it to Philocomasium to recite it and deceive Sceledrus.

Philocomasium unravels the content of her predictive vision, by acting afraid, with the proper gestures, thus hoping to change Sceledrus' understanding of what he had already seen (383-92). The passive form *videor* which she consistently uses (383, 385, 387, 388, 389), meaning 'seeing' and 'seeming in a dream' (kindred with Homeric εἴδομαι) enables her to refute the vision and opinions of Sceledrus; she misguides him by using the perspective of her own dream world. Hence the Roman spectators can observe the dreamer's paradoxical reaction towards a dream: "I see the truth at last; my eyes were clouded by fog" (405). Sceledrus' eyesight weakens as his speech becomes more befitting for a dreamer: "I saw, but I also had not seen" (402).[24]

Acknowledging a dream after it has been proven true conforms to a tragic *topos* (381: "mi hau falsum evenit somnium", "then the dream wasn't false").[25] Palaestrio, the *architectus doli* ('the architect of the deception'), creates a dream resembling a tragic piece and gains credence by entrusting it to a woman, since female narrators were predominant in tragic dream

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[23] For a recent view on *Miles*'s structure, see Maurice 2007. Regarding the role of sight in the *Miles* see Ehrman 1997: 75-85 and Maurice 2007: 407-26.

[24] "Nunc demum experior, mi ob oculos caliginem opstitisse", "ita quod vidisse credo me id iam non vidisse arbitror". Sceledrus on his first entrance is not sure whether he is asleep or awake, and thus he himself provides the inspiration for the trick against him (272).

[25] Cf. Aesch. *Ch.* 928 οἲ ᾽γὼ τεκοῦσα τόνδ' ὄφιν ἐθρεψάμην, "so this is the snake to which I gave birth."; Eur. *IT* 55 τοὔναρ δ' ὧδε συμβάλλω τόδε, "I believe the meaning of this dream is this".

episodes. The audience hears a solemn recitation with an elevated slow opening of iambic *senarii* (381), long vowel sounds and polysyllables at the end of the verses.[26] The repetition of forms like *somnium*, *somniavi*, *visus est*, due to the alliteration of the sound /s/, gives the impression of a continuous whistle and incantation that would alarm even the most inattentive spectators.[27] This sound provides the sense of a high-pitched voice expressing fear, along with continuous references to the dreamer herself, with archaic words and *homoioteleuta* rhyming in -um/-am.[28] Exactly the same tragic features can be found in the rest of Plautine dream scenes.[29]

Plautus devotes the whole of 2.4 to shaping a narrative which reproduces the previous events but also foretells the scenes that follow (411-595). It is necessary to provide visual proof for the dream's validity (394: "praesens somnium", "there is your dream come true"). Philocomasium – under Palaestrio's tutoring – is impersonating her twin sister, while appearing in her own house too. Sceledrus thinks he sees Dicea, Philocomasium's twin, but what he sees is Philocomasium herself acting as somebody who looks like her (*videtur*). He comes across the image (εἴδωλον) manifested in a dream but not the substantial nature of a double.[30] Hence the *simulacra* of a dream, the *imago* of an identical twin and the falsity all together provoke a psychological effect in the slave who is now transformed into a mad Pentheus.

What the audience is about to watch is not really a dream: "Don't you be fooled: one girl today will play a pair" (*Mil. Gl.* 150).[31] After all, metatheatre is all about reminding the Romans that they are spectators of an enactment, of an illusion, a dream. What kind of playwright is Palaestrio? Moreover, what kind of plays is he capable of? His play-within-a-play imitates the Plautine plot of the *Miles*. At the beginning of the comedy, the slave Sceledrus was chasing a monkey, when he accidentally caught sight of the lovers. The monkey, as the archetypical figure of aping, introduces the idea

[26] Iambic senarii are used in the dream narratives in *Rud.* 597-8, *Merc.* 229, 233, *Most.* 433, 502, *Curc.* 30, 432-6, 260-1.

[27] *Merc.* 225-6, 228-9, *Rud.* 597, *Mil.* 383-5, 387-9, *Curc.* 260.

[28] In Ilia's dream, frequent references are made to the dreamer's part in the vision: "me . . . meus . . . mihi" (Cic. *Div.* 1.40). See Collart 1964: 156-9.

[29] Cf. Sharrock (2009: 167-78) on the importance of alliterations and other iterative devices which cause doubling on the linguistic level in Plautine comedy.

[30] Aeschylus draws a parallel between the seeming presence of Helen in the house and her presence as a dream-reality (*Ag.* 410-27). In *The Uncanny*, Freud (1919) presents games of mind in the form of doubles, shadows, portraits, reflections in a dream.

[31] "et mox ne erretis, haec duarum hodie vicem et hinc et illinc mulier feret imaginem". Philocomasium's role is a challenging one that calls for an actor of unusual comic versatility, since he has to succeed in portraying the free born/prostitute dichotomy. See Marshall 2006: 105-7.

of two scenarios, a double reality, two girls, two playwrights alike.[32] The monkey is the inspiration for the ringmaster Palaestrio to create a scenario identical to that of the *Amphitruo*, the *Menaechmi* and the *Bacchides* of Plautus, which also employ doubles.[33] Nevertheless, the *simia* also symbolizes an inferior parodic duplication of the original script.[34] Palaestrio, with this fake script, reconstructs reality to blind the enemy and to gain control of his mind. After the dream Sceledrus withdraws once and for all from the comedy and falls asleep drunk.

## Haunted Theatre

The play between doubles continues in the dream in *Mostellaria*, which is a second fictitious story set in the play's core and carefully woven by an ingenious slave (476-505).[35] Tranio, the schemer, intends to keep Theopropides, Prophecy's son, father of Philolaches, from finding about his son's mismanagement of the family property and his debauches with courtesans in his absence. On the spur of the moment, a strategy is conceived. The slave seals up the family house by inventing the occurrence of a crime and a dream of a haunting spirit. The deception is framed by a dream pattern.[36] Amid the farrago of negative criticism and the controversy about *Mostellaria*'s original,[37] one fact should be underlined: Plautus "mostelli somnium" ("ghost dream") is the earliest extant haunted story in Greek and Roman literature and suggests a whole performance based on dream patterns. The motif appears when Callidamates withdraws to sleep just before the narrative (312) and wakes up only after the very end of the dream-intrigue. The *senes*, Theopropides and Simo, are sketched as sleeping and ignorant of the deceit (829: "quam arte dormiunt", "how fast they are asleep").[38] Simo completes the pattern with his discourse on Sleep and its harmful effect on the elders (690-710).

According to Tranio's scenario, the previous owner of Theopropides'

[32] For the concept of geminate writing in Plautus, see Kella 2015.

[33] Cf. the evocation of a twin occurred in Atossa's dream of the two sisters (Aesch. *Pers.* 181) and in the omen of two eagles representing the Atreidae (*Ag.* 109).

[34] Scholarship has explained the metaphor underlying the presence of *simiae* (McDermott 1936; Cleary 1972; Connors 2004).

[35] For *Mostellaria* indicatively see Lowe 1985a, Felton 1999a, and 1999b, Perutelli 2000, Milnor 2002, and Sharrock 2009: 101-5.

[36] The motif of sleep as deception is noted by Slater (1985: 168-74).

[37] Sturtevant (1925: 82) attributes lack of dramatic structure, much irrelevant detail and inconsistency to the scene.

[38] The use of the word *somnium* is common in Terence in the sense of 'delusion' or day-dream'; cf. Harris 2009: 140.

house killed his own guest, stole his gold and buried the body on the premises. Tranio's suspicion of a murder (483: "quapropter suspicamini", "what makes you suspect") was allegedly aroused when Philolaches experienced an oracular dream about the victim Diapontius, revealing the crime committed against him and warning the owners to evacuate the accursed house (490: "ait venisse illum in somnis ad se mortuom", "he said that that dead man had come to him in his sleep"). Consequently, the schemer comes up with a passive type of dream (χρηματισμόν), the kind most frequent in Homer, in which a message is conveyed orally by an εἴδωλον, in the same way that Patroclos' ψυχή ("soul"), reaches Achilles (*Il.* 23.65). In Homeric references, only a dead man's reality coincided with his εἴδωλον; no other 'self' of Patroclos is left 'behind' when he appears in Achilles' dream.

By having Tranio invent such a story, Plautus puts him in the position of a playwright who plays with *simulacra* ('simulations'), *umbrae* ('shadows') and *imagines* ('images'), in the same way that Palaestrio did in *Miles*.[39] However, the tradition of a ghost appearing on stage follows the trend of a ghost appearing in a dream, delivering a speech while the dreamer sleeps and then disappearing as soon as the dreamer wakes up.[40] This pattern is repeated in Euripides' *Hecuba*, where Polydorus' ghost is embodied by an actor who delivers a speech (1-58) while Hecuba is asleep and disappears when she wakes up. Likewise, in Aeschylus, Eumenides are asleep on stage and dreaming, while Klytaemnestra's ghost, embodied by an actor, is seen on stage standing over the Erinyes (*Eum.* 94-142). Still the trend is shattered in Plautus' *Mostellaria* and thus leads the audience to question: is this a dream? Is it a physical presence? Is it fantasy or reality?

Plautus' innovation in *Mostellaria* is that the ghost 'remains' on stage after the dream and starts acquiring subtle physicality through Tranio in order to frighten the old man. Tranio needs to infuse life into his scenario and reenacts the dream account onstage. Thus he begins transmitting the ghost's words in direct speech, as if the ghost is visually present (Kella 2015: 218). The slave, when reenacting the ghost's revelation, switches to an ominous voice while handling the technique of προσωποποιία, of 'impersonation', to enliven the tortured spirit.[41] "Habitatio" ("lodging"), used only

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[39] Cf. *Ps.* 401: "poeta tabulas cum cepit sibi", "when a poet takes writing tablets". Sharrock (2009: 116-30) reads plotting and playwrights in Plautus with reference to the *locus classicus* for the metatheatrical reading of the slave which is Slater (1985) following Wright (1975).

[40] See for example *Il.* 2.6-34, *Od.* 4.795-841. Cf. Achilles' attempt to embrace the likeness of Patroclos (*Il.* 23.99-101) and Odysseus' to embrace the shade of his mother.

[41] Quint. *inst.* 11.1.39. The Latin word *larva*, with no precise Greek equivalent, meant both a 'mask' and a 'ghost'; it derived etymologically from *lar*, the household god connected with the after-life in Roman culture. See Wiles 1991: 129.

in this Plautine passage, is phrased in two different ways echoing Homer's elevated expressions for the highest value of ξενία, of "hospitality" (498, 504). Diapontius, 'the other Polydorus' or 'Pacuvius' other βιαιοθάνατος (murdered) Deiphilus', appears in a dream set in the border-region between sleeping and waking ("in somnis" and "vigilanti" coexist in line 493).[42] A phantom could either put in a personal appearance or be just a dream figure. While playing with Theopropides' superstitious nature, Tranio is testing his audience's response to the ghost's reality. According to the traditional belief, the dead person could converse with the living in his sleep, while a physically present ghost was mute (Felton 1999a: 134). Yet, even though Diapontius appears in a dream, he also appears in person to the inhabitants of the house (505: "monstra", "evil sign").

Beyond the tragic paradoxes lies a whole comic conspiracy which deviates from the expected narrative sequence and motivates the rest of the play.[43] The spectators would watch the author, Tranio, performing a role on stage and persuading his second audience, Theopropides, that whatever has a visual presence (490) is real and is wandering around them (509: "me accersunt mortui", "the dead are taking me"). Playing upon φάσματα and σκιαί ('ghosts' and 'shadows'), the slave infuses life into his scenario up to the point that the *senex* is taken in completely.[44] When the dramatic illusion fails and his dramatic devices are at risk, the slave complains in an aside: "Those people in there will soon be dishing my whole performance" (510).[45] Tranio, like Palaestrio in *Miles*, is inspired by dreams to write a scenario which tests dramatic illusion and dramatic devices (550: "techinae meae", "my tricks", 685: "mea consili", "my plans"). As the comedy comes to an end the slave praises his own contribution in the script: "If Diphilus or Philemon find out about my trick-dreams, they will be furnished with the best scenes on the comic stage" (1149).[46]

## Symbolism and Simulation

This section focuses on real dream narratives that constitute part of the main plot. As mentioned above, the dream in *Curculio* will not be examined

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[42] Eur. *Hec.* 25-30, Cic. *Tusc.* 1.44.106. Cf. Sychaeus' ghost in *Aen.* 1.353-60.

[43] The sequence of traditional ghost stories is recorded by Pliny in *Ep.* 7.27.7 and satirized by Lucian (*Philops.* 31).

[44] The dream reflects Tranio's waking preoccupations: he intends to get rid of Theopropides, who is a merchant like Diapontius, and then to steal his gold.

[45] "Illisce hodie hanc conturbabunt fabulam".

[46] "Si amicus Diphilo aut Philemoni es, dicito is, quo pacto tuo te servos ludificaverit: optumas frustrationes dederis in comoediis."

in detail. It should be noted, however, that no scholar has chosen to examine why so much space (252-79) in this comedy was allocated to a dream experience in the temple of Asclepius, to the dreamer *leno* who seeks a remedy and to the ὀνειροκρισία ('dream-interpretation') of his healing vision.[47] A boastful cook loaded with his spoon and his kitchen utensils takes over as the leading interpreter for a brief incubation dream which has no equivalent in Middle and New Comedy. The dreamer, absorbed by his dream, is unable to *see* the deception against him. He wanders around the scene like a sleepwalker without a substantial role: he loses the girl, his money and gets beaten up. The most notable success of Plautus is the rude awakening of the viewers within the dream episode, when he calls them to turn their eyes to the Capitol and to substitute in their mind the Roman Jupiter Maximus for Asclepius. Rome penetrates the *comoedia palliata* while the playwright invites the audience to search the Capitol for sleepwalking dreamers.

This section is mainly based on two apparently identical dream narratives, each of them respectively covering a whole scene, in *Rud.* 593-612 and in *Merc.* 225-70. Their resemblance is striking, considering that the original texts of the two comedies are different: *Mercator* deriving from Philemon's Ἔμπορος, *Rudens* from Diphilus. Thus, Leo, followed by Enk, argued that there has been a separate model for each dream in the Greek texts.[48] Nevertheless, according to Fraenkel, the dream in *Rudens* derived from its Diphilean original, while the dream in *Mercator* was also an imitation of Diphilus.[49] Without excluding either of these possibilities it seems preferable to consider the alternative: Plautus, when writing *Mercator*, used the original of Philemon, manipulating it so as to recall the metatheatrical technique he had already used in the dream in *Rudens*.

In both the dream-telling scenes, an old man occupies an empty stage to report the prophetic dream he had the night before.[50] Interestingly, the figures acting in his vision are neither gods nor humans but animals. Animal symbolism was frequent in dream pieces in tragedy and epic, in which case the identifying characteristics that the dramatic *personae* shared with the animal symbols created dramatic tension.[51] Likewise, the animal fables in *Rudens* and *Mercator* are essential for dramatic economy; they foreshadow the role of the comic *personae* as well as the resolution of the plot by giv-

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[47] Williams (1958) and Fantham (1965) claim that Plautus substitutes, as briefly as he can, a large section of the Greek original which dealt with a *coniectura* by a professional priest of Asclepius.

[48] See Leo 1912: 163, Enk 1932: 7-21.

[49] See Fraenkel 1922, Marx 1959: 139, Katsouris 1978a.

[50] Like the ἀδολέσχης and δεισιδαίμων in Theoph. *Char.* 3.5, 16.24. Cf. Theoph. *On Sleep and Dreams.*

[51] Aesch. *Ch.* 523, Eur. *Hec.* 90.

ing 'key words' for the subtext. The dreamer and the audience have to compare the characteristic qualities of the animals (the signifying part) with the characters, their typical behaviour, their masks and costumes (*modus agenda*, 'the performance').

In *Rudens*, the *senex* Daemones walks onto stage to recount how it seemed to him that a talking monkey failed to climb up to a swallows' nest and so he approached him to ask for a ladder. The old man defended the swallows, because he considered them to be his fellow citizens. In retaliation, the monkey took Daemones to court, but Daemones caught the monkey and put him in chains. The dream account is enclosed in a sleep pattern. A moment before Daemones appears on stage, Charmides looks for a place to take a nap (572). After the account, Gripus, the fisherman, talks about his lack of sleep (920).

The dream scene functions as a delayed prologue (according to the structure: events-dream-events), since the audience has already been informed about the past, the present and the future events of the comedy by Arcturus in the prologue. The god informs the spectators that Daemones' daughter, who had been lost, escaped from her procurer after a shipwreck and is approaching Daemones' house along with a slave girl. The audience sees the *senex* Charmides calling the procurer Labrax "a dirty animal" ("impurata belua", 543), and the young Pleusidippus describing him as "a curly-haired, hoary, old rascal" ("hominem crispum, incanum videris, malum, peiiurum, palpatorem", 125), while the slave Trachalio talks about "an old Silenus with a fat belly and beetle brows" ("ecquem recalvom ad Silanum senem, statutum, ventriosum, tortis superciliis", 317). Thus the audience would immediately identify the procurer Labrax with the monkey and the two *puellae* with the swallows; Plautus' fans knew that bestiality was his way of forming metaphors and similes for his characters.[52] Dream narratives therefore function as descriptions influencing the audience's expectations for Plautine characters.

The dream of the monkey serves as a concise version of the action in the play, just as the monkey can be viewed as "a distorted version of a person" (Connors 2004: 195). The way the monkey threatens the swallows looks ahead to the threats of the procurer Labrax to deprive the young girl Palaestra of her freeborn parentage. The monkey's second attack foretells Labrax's effort to kick the two girls out of the temple of Venus (648), while Daemones will be sending his slaves to protect them (782). As the dream anticipates, Labrax (not Daemones) will be brought to court where Palaestra will be recognized as an Athenian citizen (1283).

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[52] According to Sharrock (2009: 219), Plautine theatricality "plays with the gap between the character/construct you see and the stereotype/stock character you expect".

This reinforcement of information puts the spectators in a strong position since they have already seen the characters. Their perspective is empowered, in contrast to the dreamer's who is ignorant. Not until the fourth scene of the third act does Daemones reach the conclusion that the *simia* ('monkey') signifies Labrax and the *hirundines* ('swallows') signify Palaestra and Ampelisca, thinking of the symbols metaphorically as Artemidorus does in his *Oneirocriticon*: the *simia* symbolizes "a scoundrel and a cheat" (ἄνδρα πανοῦργον καὶ γόητα); the swallow "is not grievous unless it sould suffer something inauspicious" (οὐκ ἔστι πονηρά, εἰ μή τι ἄτοπον πάσχοι ἢ διαλλάσσοι τι χρῶμα παρὰ φύσιν ὂν αὐτῇ).[53] Searching for the dream interpretation, Daemones is ingenious and active, unlike the tragic model of the old and passive receptor of dreams. In his search, Daemones – a name related with the divine – sees the dream fulfilled and verifies the spectator's interpretation.[54] Exactly in the middle of the comedy, the idea of this dream-centred drama is revealed: "men are changed into different kinds of animals; Labrax is being changed to an imprisoned ringdove" (886-7).[55] The whole plot is thus based on semiotics, on sign language, on metaphors, in a comedy crammed with fortune-tellers (1139).

Leo argued that this dream-telling scene is unsuccessful for two reasons (1912: 162-5). Firstly, in Greek comedy and tragedy dreams should come at the beginning of the play, and when Daemones enters for the first time, he says nothing about his dream. Secondly, Daemones experienced a storm the previous night, an inopportune time for dreaming. This author would suggest the need for a more modern perspective. Plautus' technique startles the audience and arouses their enthusiasm with a framing pattern of wonder by presenting the unexpected (593: "miris" and 596: "mirum").[56] Even though it is not at the beginning of the play, the dream is still tragic, followed by tragic elements like Palaestra's sanctuary and her violent pursuit. The main function of the dream soliloquy is to draw the attention to a self-referring character, that is to say a dramatist, a mouthpiece of Plautus. The audience's understanding of the plot depends on his speech, which is responsible for the comedy's unity. Daemones is not a typical *senex lepi-*

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[53] The image of a swallow could be an *appellatio blanda* ('a charming name'), in the same way that it was used in *Asin.* 694 where Libanus begs Philenium "Call me your . . . little sparrow" ("Dic igitur med . . . columbam"). Simia in *Pseudolus* is the proper name for "an unfair and cunning" slave (724, "malum, callidum, doctum").

[54] Marx (1959: 141) argued that Plautus, in imitation of the passages in *Rudens* and *Mercator*, was the first who used the word *coniectura* metaphorically.

[55] "credo alium in aliam beluam hominem vortier: illic in columbum, credo, leno vortitur".

[56] The formula ἀλλόκοτος ὄνειρος ('wondrous dream') was used by Menander (*Dys.* 407).

*dus* ('pleasant gentleman'); he is charged with testing the spectators' oneiric imagination, calling them to identify riddling images with the action.

Plautus manipulates the tragic pattern of animal symbolism and uses his own dream figures. The monkey, present in half of his comedies, is a metapoetic image talking about doubles, imitation, and authenticity. Through Daemones' monkey dream, Plautus comments on his own production and pokes fun at his own metadramas. Therefore, the opening lines of Daemones' narration suggest that this dream is a comedy staged by gods before our eyes, a play-within-the *Rudens* (593).[57]

Plautus expands his technique as far as possible in *Mercator* in a dream narrative twice as long as the one in *Rudens*. In spite of the playwright's hallmark phrase by which he repeats himself (225), this dream is an ἀλλη-γορικὸς ὄνειρος ('allegorical dream') that may have been modelled on the dream in *Rudens*, but goes one step further. The critics Leo and Fraenkel considered the text less polished than the one in *Rudens*.[58] Leo appreciated solely the paratragic aspects of Demipho's dream narrative (the dreamer accounts and interprets his dream during his first appearance on stage) while deeming its content a boring and artless imitation of *Rudens*.[59]

The dreaming motif is introduced early, when Acanthio is careful "not to wake the drowsy spectators" (160).[60] The dream narrator in his opening speech is given a scene of fifty lines to deliver an episode enacted by animals characterized by lust and sexual nature. The picture of a *simia* and *hirunda* is now altered into one of a *simia* and *capra*. Demipho bought a beautiful she-goat and committed her to the custody of a monkey to avoid upsetting another she-goat in his household. The beautiful she-goat ate the monkey's wife's dowry and the monkey complained to Demipho. A young he-goat arrived who laughed at him and stole the she-goat from the monkey.

There is a smooth transition from dream to reality. As soon as Demipho narrates his ὄνειρον ('dream'), he attempts to reveal the symbolism of the central figure (253: "suspicor", "I suspect"). The remaining images are left to the viewers to interpret. Yet, this time the animal symbols are not related metaphorically to the characters as in *Rudens*. The viewer has to work with analogies between the dream and the comedy's content to identify the animals with the personae. Therefore, guided by the adjective "formosa", "beautiful", the spectator pairs the "capra", the "goat" in the dream with the "forma eximia meretrix", "the concubine of magnificent beauty", Pasicompsa whom the young Charinus has bought (13). The second *capra* who has a

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[57] In *Amph*. 621 the comedy is a dream sent by gods.

[58] See Leo 1912: 163-4 and Fraenkel 1922: 200.

[59] Leo (1912) citing Aesch. *Pers*. 176, Eur. *IT* 38-55 and Aristoph. *Vesp*. 15.

[60] "Dormientis spectatores metuis ne ex somno excites?"

dowry corresponds with the *uxor dotata* ('endowed wife') Dorippa, the wife of the old Lysimachus (703). The μωρολογία ('senseless words') of Demipho in the dream of his love for the *capra* tallies with the μωρολογία of his son Charinus for Pasicopsa at the beginning of the comedy; hence, Demipho (the *hircus*, 'male goat') becomes a rival for his son (the *haedus*, 'young goat') for Pasicompsa's (the *capra*'s) love.

Rather than highlighting the connection to drama – the way Leo did – we could instead examine Demipho's dream in the context of Hellenistic dream-literature. Plautus' comedy followed the Hellenistic tendency of attributing dreams to the irrational, stemming from Aristotle's theory of the unconscious.[61] Demipho's condensation of images recalls Herondas' eighth mimiamb, or Theocritus' twenty-first idyll, where an ἐνύπνιον ('a vision') with a golden fish is explained. Apollonius (*Argon.* 4.1733-42) presents Euphemus recounting his obscure dream of a virgin growing from the cold in his palm and from streams of milk. In *Amores* 3.5 Ovid, dreaming of birds, heifers, bulls and cows, cries out in desperation for an interpretation.

A Freudian *ante litteram* would be an apt description of Plautus in *Mercator* (Arnaldi 1956: 8). Demipho's narrative is compatible with what Freud calls the work of Displacement, the distortion of the dream's content provoked by the censorship of the subconscious.[62] In the dream, the monkey is blamed for the *flagitium* and *damnum* ('shameful crime' and 'harm') when he brings the *capra* to his house and the *capra* eats his wife's dowry. In the drama, however, the loss happens to Lysimachus, the monkey, and not to the powerful *uxor dotata* ('endowed wife') who could preserve her dowry in case of a divorce. Demipho subconsciously avoids being linked to his own shameful act of adultery and clears himself of the crime. A modern dimension of the *modus conjiciendi* ('means of deciphering') is exploited for the blurry images of Demipho's dream on which the whole comedy is centred. The viewers have to think of Demipho's out-of-dream monologue (252-70) as if it preceded the dream narration, in order to find out the interpretation. In this way, if the monologue comes before the dream, then it is obvious that Demipho carries out an auto-analysis the way Freud suggests: someone has to think what happened on the day he experienced the dream in order to understand it (Freud 1900: 150-65). Therefore, the dream, by this interpretation, proves to be an ἐνύπνιον, a wishful thought of Demipho that arose when he first met the beautiful girl Pasicompsa at the port. [63]

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[61] The ὄνειρος ('dream') in Homeric texts is never a product of a personal unconscious. However, Penelope's dream informs her of something she has long wished for (*Od.* 19.535).

[62] Freud 1900: 178.

[63] For dreams reflecting daytime thoughts cf. Hdt. 7.16 ἐνύπνια τὰ ἐς ἀνθρώπους πεπλανημένα ("roving dreams that visit men"), Lucr. 5.724 "rerum simulacra vagari" ("images of things are roaming everywhere"), Emp. 31 B 108 D.-K.

The dream constitutes a second nucleus for the comedy since it func-tions as a complementary prologue. The verb *videor* repeated at the be-ginning or at the end of the verses appears as an inverted pattern offering multiple interpretations. The difficulty is that the dream spawns duplicat-ed characters. The *senex amator* ('lecherous elder') is Demipho but also Ly-simachus who guards the girl (Demipho-Lysimachus-*hircus*). Charinus is the *adulescens amans* ('the young lover') but his friend Eutychus is the one who steals Pasicompsa for Charinus' sake (Charinus-Eutychus-*haedus*). Demipho's portrait continuously switches purposely, from a he-goat, into a "musca" ("a fly", 361), an "ovis" ("a sheep", 524) and finally a "vervex" ("a castrated ram", 567). The text (bracketed by Leo) at 276 reveals the possibil-ity that Demipho's wife could also play the part of a *simia*. The ambiguities of Demipho's sign-language illustrate the even bigger difficulty that Ro-mans had when trying to realize the content of the dream. Questions prob-ably remained unanswered for the spectators when they left their seats and returned to reality.

The Plautine use of dream in *Mercator* tests the audience's attentiveness and capacity to understand the iconography of characters, by rearranging animals and their expected performance. The stories of *Rudens* and *Merca-tor*, with their respective ape and swallow, and ape and goats, are paired as 'delayed prologue' but differentiated as a hermeneutic matrix actively pur-sued to fulfillment by Daemones; over against a 'displacement' narrative of Demipho left for the audience to complete.


## Conclusion

The five scenes examined in this paper provide strong moments of metat-heatre and make a contribution to the state of knowledge regarding Plau-tus' use of dreams. They demonstrate that where Plautus employs dreams there is a metatheatrical layer of understanding as well as special stag-ing of the dreamers: Philocomasium, Cappadox, Daemones and Demi-pho. A dream is a centrepiece that condenses Plautus' compositional meth-od: three perspectives, three different interpretations according to *who* (the dreamer, the audience, the playwright) is observing *what* (the text, the sub-text, the metaplay). With the dream as the manual, one can examine the way the tragic text becomes a dramaturgical piece and is then transformed into a metatheatrical scene with an infusion of Roman concepts. Common experience is distilled into a set of stock situations and characters: dreams created by clever slaves constructing double realities and *ludi* played by gods that feature monkeys and goats are all performed on a stage 'within the stage'.

Dreaming is an important metatheatrical conceit which suggests a dreamlike quality to experience throughout the Plautine corpus.[64] Plautus' characters are divided into ingenious playwrights and dreamers, into victimisers and victims of illusion. Calderón (*Life is a Dream*) and Shakespeare (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) would later be aware of the thin line between dream and theatre in the same way as Plautus. Romans probably reached for their dream interpretation handbooks after the show, as if they had just awoken from a night's dream filled with doubles, ghosts, and grotesque animals.

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[64] *Somniare* from Plautus onwards meant 'to have illusions'. Further references to dreams: *Mos.* 757, 954, 1013, 1122, *Rud.* 343, 773, 1327, *Mer.* 950; Slater (1985: 170) argues against this dreamlike experience.

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