

Women of Plautine Comedy: Representative of the Roman Ideal?

Laura E. Floyd
University Undergraduate Fellow, 1990-91
Texas A&M University
Department of Modern Languages (Classics)

APPROVED:

Fellows Advisor *Prof. Ryan*

Honors Program Director *D. H. [Signature]*

Table of Contents

	<u>page</u>
Introduction and Review of Literature	1
Section One: What is said about women in Plautus	9
Section Two: Characterizations of Women in Plautine comedy	45
Section Three: Conclusion	62
Bibliography	70

Latin text and translation:

All translations into English are mine unless indicated. The Latin text is Lindsay's Oxford edition.

I would like to thank Dr. Timothy Moore for introducing me to the delights of Plautus. Without his expert guidance during the past year, this paper would not have been possible.

children; Marcia went willingly and even returned to Cato after the death of his friend (Plut. *Cato Minor* 25.4-5, 52.3-5).

From these and other sources, a clear picture of the Roman ideals of womanhood emerges. A woman was expected to be obedient to her husband and especially to her father (Cf. Williams, 25), the successful manager of her household and slaves (Leffingwell, 51), the bearer of many children, particularly boys, and absolutely faithful to her husband. The view of women as "infirmitas sexus" (the weak sex) is the principle of Roman legal theory which places women under perpetual guardianship (Pomeroy, 150). A woman was under the absolute power, patriapotestas, of her oldest male ascendant, or paterfamilias, and if she had no living relatives she was assigned a tutor to act for her in all legal capacities (Sealey, 103). Even in marriage a woman might remain under the theoretical control of her father rather than her husband if a particular loop-hole in the marriage laws was observed. This kind of marriage occurred not to give a wife more freedom in her relationship with her husband, but to benefit her father financially (Cantarella, 118).

This paper is an investigation of the question: how do the women of Plautine comedy relate to the Roman ideal? Plautus, a Roman comic playwright of the second century BC, left behind some twenty comedies. The women of his plays are immediately noticeable for their vivid characterizations. His female characters are not receding shadows in the background of the home who allow their husbands to control their lives. They are intriguing women, possessing great strength and intelligence.

Because his women seem discordant when compared to the Roman ideal, an exploration of Plautus' possible purposes behind such characterizations is needed, with the objective of determining where his women fit in with traditional Roman ideas of feminine virtues.

A woman like Cleostrata of the *Casina* who discovers her husband's wish to engage in an infidelity with her favorite serving-maid is an exceptional example of a Plautine character inconsistent with the Roman ideal. Cleostrata, according to Roman customs of behavior for wives, would be expected to ignore her husband's infidelities as long as she was well-provided for (Pomeroy, 159), yet she launches an incredible plot to humiliate him as well as prevent him from committing adultery. Women like Cleostrata who triumph over male characters and stand in positions of control will be the subjects of this study as well as women who seem more accurately to portray the ideals of womanhood, such as Alcumena of the *Amphitruo*.

The topic of the relationship between women in Plautine comedy and Roman ideals of womanhood has not been satisfactorily addressed in the large corpus of Plautine scholarship. General studies on women in Ancient Greece and Rome, like the recently published book by Raphael Sealey, Women and Law in Classical Greece, are most useful for establishing the condition of women in the second century BC, particularly their legal status. The study of Roman law by Sealey accurately points out the aspects of law designed to restrain the powers of women. Other general works on women in ancient societies include Sarah Pomeroy's

Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves, Eva Cantarella's Pandora's Daughters, Jane Gardner's Women in Roman Law & Society, and The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives, edited by Beryl Rawson. These works are helpful in a similar way, offering basic information on the status of women in Rome and illuminating the Roman ideals of womanhood. In this task, they often use Plautine comedy as primary source material for the Roman ideals of womanhood, taking for granted that Plautus accurately reflects Roman society in his plays. None make as their point of inquiry the comparison of Plautine women to Roman ideals. Gordon William's article, "Some Aspects of Roman Marriage Ceremonies and Ideals", does discuss ideals about marriage held by the Romans, but is limited by its emphasis on evidence concerning the "Roman" or "Greek" nature of these ideals.

Survey works on Roman drama also fail to address and answer the research question. W. Beare's The Roman Stage is concerned with Plautus' place in the tradition of Roman drama and treats Plautine characterizations in an extremely cursory way. David Konstan's Roman Comedy analyzes six plays of Plautus and two of Terence in terms of the "blocking character", a limited approach for the needs of this study. George Duckworth's The Nature of Roman Comedy is most valuable in any consideration of Plautine comedy, but his evaluation of female roles is very superficial. He views the women of Plautus as lacking depth of character, with a few exceptions like Alcumena. Duckworth's book divides female roles into categories, like the wife and the courtesan, and then discusses women as to how they fit the stereotypes associated

with each category. According to Duckworth, Plautine wives are usually "shrewish, hot-tempered, suspicious, extravagant" (255), but Duckworth is using the words of men about their wives rather than considering the actions of the wives on stage. He finally dismisses the inconsistencies between Plautine wives and Roman matrons by saying that marriage is a "conventional theme for jesting and, as such, bears little relation to the realities of life"(284).

Another work on Plautine comedy is Plautus in Performance, by Niall Slater. Slater's concern in his book is the metatheatrical aspects of Plautine comedy, in other words, the consciousness, within the play, that the play is only a play, not reality. Slater's thesis about metatheatre leads him to speculate on some of the plays of Plautus with particularly metatheatrical aspects. Two of the plays Slater addresses, the *Casina* and the *Bacchides*, are important to this study because of their strong female characters. Slater's observations on women in the *Casina* and the *Bacchides* will be mentioned in the second section of this paper in regard to the characterization of women in Plautus. Slater's other comments on female Plautine characters, while insightful, are not particularly relevant to this paper; Slater approaches the female characters as metatheatrical performers, and he does not consider the incongruity of their behavior in comparison to Roman ideals.

Erich Segal's Roman Laughter offers a very plausible explanation for the appeal of Plautine comedy to the Romans. His thesis is that comedy is the turning over of conventional mores

for a day and that comedy temporarily released Romans from the strictures of their severe morality. Segal sees the women of Plautus as part of the moral institution of marriage, as does Duckworth, and therefore sources of irritation to the men of the plays trying to escape conventional morality. The men often wish for the death or convenient absence of their wives (as will be demonstrated in the first section of this paper). Segal does not examine Plautine women individually or in light of Roman ideals.

Articles on particular aspects of Plautine comedy have proven more enlightening with regard to female characters. One example is Walter Forehand's article "Plautus' *Casina*: An Explication" which discusses one of Plautus' plays most important to his characterization of women. Forehand explains why the matron Cleostrata is allowed to be strong and triumph over her despicable husband Lysidamus. Because Lysidamus is an irredeemable lecher, Forehand concludes that although in Roman society women's rights were subservient to male desires, perhaps there was a limit to what the women were expected to take. He attributes to Plautus a social criticism on "improper and abusive conduct beyond accepted standards of behavior"(254).

Elaine Fantham's article, "Sex, Status, and Survival in Hellenistic Athens: A Study of Women in New Comedy", addresses the picture of reality which can be gleaned from comedy. Fantham is selective in her approach, declaring that "plays such as *Asinaria*, *Mercator*, *Menaechmi*, cannot be used as evidence for the social roles of male or female" (47). Fantham never makes clear why some comedies reflect reality and others do not; after

discounting Plautus' plays as evidence for social roles, she continues to cite evidence from Plautus in support of her conclusions. Susan Treggiari's article, "Digna condicio: betrothals in the Roman upper class", is helpful for its description of the qualities sought after in husbands and wives. Treggiari points out a double standard; puclititia, or chastity, was expected of wives, but wives could only expect puclor, a "certain sexual restraint", from their husbands (436-7).

Another example is Jane Phillip's unique viewpoint in her article "Alcumena in the *Amphitruo* of Plautus: A Pregnant Lady Joke". While most critics have admired Plautus' characterization of Alcumena as true to Roman ideals, perhaps his only such characterization, Phillips emphasizes Alcumena's appearance. Roman comedy employed male actors exclusively (Duckworth, 76) and to have a male actor wearing padding to simulate a pregnancy would certainly undermine the nobility and dignity of Alcumena as a Roman matron. Phillips says that Alcumena is ridiculously funny, that Plautus is not offering a portrayal of an ideal woman; rather, Plautus is using the audience's own ideals as material for a good joke. "So here voluptas, molestum, and virtus are celebrated by a lady who clearly has a generous share of each"(126) laughs Phillips. Phillips contributes to the Duckworth and Segal view, that Plautus characterized his women for comic effect, through her analysis of Alcumena as comic figure instead of ideal matron.

As this brief review of literature indicates, the scholarship related to this paper's area of study either

considers the nature of Roman ideals for women and the historical evidence or the general uses of female characters in Plautine comedy. The task remains to bring the two lines of inquiry together, establishing the relationship between Plautine women and Roman ideals and offering an explanation of Plautus' purposes behind his female characterizations.

The first section of this paper will exhaustively consider what is said about women in Plautine comedy by both male and female characters. Statements about women will be characterized by the gender of the speaker and the kind of woman discussed. The two types of women found most often in comedy are matrons and courtesans, but some statements are made in Plautus concerning women in general. The second section of this paper will examine the actual characterizations of women in Plautus: what they do, rather than what is said about them. It is expected that the characterizations of women will differ greatly from the views of women expressed in Plautine dialogue. Using evidence gathered and analyzed in the previous two sections, the third section will address and answer the thesis question of this paper, "Women of Plautine Comedy: Reflective of the Roman Ideal?", offering an explanation for discrepancies uncovered in a comparison of what is said about women and what Plautine women are really like.

Section One

The first task of this paper is to examine what it said about women in Plautus. This section will be divided into three parts, statements about wives, statements about courtesans, and general statements about women.

I. Wives

A. Insulting remarks by Husbands

1. Death of wives

The most common statements about wives are insults directed toward them by their husbands. Definite categories of insults are easily recognized. The first category is the husband's longing for the death of his wife. The best example of this type of insult comes from the *Trinummus*.

Callicles: o amice, salve, atque aequalis. ut vales,
Megaronides? Megaronides: et tu edepol salve,
Callicles.

CA: valen? valuistin? ME: valeo et valui rectius.

CA: quid agit tua uxor? ut valet? ME: plus quam ego volo.

CA: bene hercle est illam tibi valere et vivere.

ME: credo hercle te gaudere si quid mihi mali est.

CA: omnibus amicis quod mihi est cupio esse idem.

ME: eho tu, tua uxor quid agit? CA: immortalis est,
vivit victuraque est. ME: bene hercle nuntias,
deosque oro ut vitae tuae superstes suppetat.

CA: dum quidem hercle tecum nupta sit, sane velim.

CA: Hello, my friend and comrade! Are you well,
Megaronides? ME: And, by Pollux, greetings to you,
Callicles. CA: Are you well? Have you been well?

ME: I am well and truly, I have been well. CA: How is
your wife doing? Is she well? ME: More than I would
like. CA: By Hercules, it is good for you that she is
well and living. ME: By Hercules, I believe that you
are happy if there is something bad for me. CA: I

desire the same things which I have for all my fiends.
 ME: Look here, you, how's your wife doing? CA: She is
 immortal. She lives and will continue living. ME: By
 Hercules, you report good news! I beg the gods that she
 may successfully outlive you. CA: Certainly, I wish it,
 as long as, by Hercules, she is your wife.
 (Trin 48-58)

Callicles and Megaronides meet on the street and take the opportunity to banter back and forth concerning the misfortune of being married. Callicles inquires whether Megaronides' wife is well and Megaronides responds "plus ego quam volo", (more than I want her to be). From the tone of this conversation, it is evident that both men would prefer their wives were dead. Megaronides finally offers to switch wives with Callicles, but Callicles concludes that a "nota mala" (a known evil) is better than an unknown evil.

More examples of a husband's "death-wish" for his wife are found in the *Asinaria*. In the first scene of the play, Libanus instructs Demaenetus to tell him the truth and threatens him:

si quid me erga hodie falsum dixeris,
 ut tibi superstes uxor aetatem siet
 atque illa viva vivos ut pestem oppetas

If you speak a lie to me today, may your wife outlive you by a lifetime, and with her alive, may you meet death.

(Asin 20-22)

Demaenetus quickly agrees that the threat is strong enough to make him tell the truth. Many men in Plautine comedy hope that their wives will die before them and leave them a few years of peace. In the fifth act of the *Asinaria*, Demaenetus again wishes for the death of his wife. His son Argyrippus asks him "quid ais, pater? / ecquid matrem amas?", (what do you say, dad? do you

love mother at all?). Demaenetus responds "egone illam? nunc amo, quia non adest.", (do I love her? now I love her, because she's not present). Argyrippus then asks "quid quom adest?", (what about when she is here?), and Demaenetus says "perise cupio", (I wish that she were dead). Unfortunately for Demaenetus, his wife Artemona is overhearing this conversation [Asin 899-901; Cf. Asin 43].

In the *Casina*, one of Plautus' most entertaining comedies for its rollicking portrayal of conflict between husband and wife, Lysidamus wishes wholeheartedly for his wife's death. In act 2, scene 3, Lysidamus lyrically describes the feeling of being in love. He has become obsessed with love for his wife's hand-maid, Casina, and is plotting to sleep with her. His one worry is his wife, whom he is afraid will find out about his plan and find some way to stop him. He says: "sed uxor me excruciat, quia vivit.", (but my wife tortures me, because she lives)[Cas 227]. Lysidamus is repeating the sentiments of Callicles and Megaronides, complaining that the only good wife is a dead wife. In the same act, scene six, Cleostrata, Lysidamus' wife, is talking to her slave, Chalinus, and asks him "face, Chaline, certio rem me quid meu' vir me velit", (Chalinus, inform me what my husband wishes of me). Chalinus responds: "ille edepol videre ardentem te extra portam mortuam", (By Pollux, he wishes to see you dead, burning outside the gates)[Cas 353-4]. Although Lysidamus himself does not vocalize his wish for his wife's death in this scene, evidently his desires are well-known to both the slaves and his wife.

One final example of a husband in Plautine comedy wishing for the death of his wife comes from the *Aulularia*. Megadorus, who is not even married but is able to speculate on the horrors of marriage, is exhorted by his sister Eunomia to settle down. He pretends to give in, saying:

ut quidem emoriar priu' quam ducam.
 sed his legibu' si quam dare vis, ducam:
 quae cras veniat, perendie, soror, foras feratur;
 his legibu' quam dare vis? cedo: nuptias adorna.

May I die, before I marry, or I will marry, but under these conditions, if you wish to give someone: let her who comes tomorrow be carried out [dead] the next day, sister; do you wish to observe these conditions? I yield: begin the wedding festivities.

(*Aulu* 154-7)

Megadorus is willing to marry the woman Eunomia chooses for him as long as he dies before the marriage takes place or his bride dies right after the marriage. Megadorus' desire is a subtle variation of the wish for one's wife to die. Megadorus does not even have a wife and he is already wishing for her death or his own, rather than have his freedom limited.

1.A.2. Comparison of wife to animal

The second category of insults toward wives is characterized by a reference to the wife as a type of animal. The most common is the equation of the wife with a dog, a "bitch", which has survived as an insult to the twentieth century. Several instances of the wife as "bitch" occur in the *Casina*. In one case, Lysidamus asks his slave Olympio if Olympio is fighting with his wife Cleostrata. Olympio responds "quam tu mi uxorem? quasi venator tu quidem es: / dies atque noctes cum cane aetatem

exigis", (what do you mean, your wife? You are indeed like a hunter; you spend your life, your days and nights, with a bitch)[Cas 319-20; Cf. Cas 497]. At the conclusion of the *Casina*, Lysidamus finds himself trapped. He has been caught attempting to sleep with Casina and is further humiliated by the fact that a male slave was substituted for Casina in bed. Lysidamus looks around him and sees the "lupi", or wolves, and the "canes", or dogs. On one side of him is a male slave clutching a club, the "lupi", and on the other side are the two women, Cleostrata and her friend Myrrhina, the "canes"[Cas 971].

A different animal metaphor is employed by Menaechmus in Plautus' *Menaechmi*. The *Menaechmi* is the story of two identical brothers who do not know of each other's existence and wreak havoc in the town of Epidamnus as they are confused for each other. Menaechmus is congratulating himself for stealing his wife's dress to give to his mistress, and he plans his escape with a slave, Peniculus, from his wife for the afternoon. He warns Peniculus to move away from the door of the house where his wife might see them and tells him "etiam nunc concede audacter ab leonino cavo", (now bravely depart from the lion's cave)[Men 159]. Instead of a dog or bitch, the wife is now a dangerous lion.

1.A.3. General Insulting Remarks

The third category of insults is a catch-all group of statements which neither express a wish for the wife's death or utilize animal imagery. In the *Asinaria*, Demaenetus, who has already been shown to wish for his wife's death with a particular

vengeance, discusses marital affection. The mistress of his son Argyrippus asks him "don't you like to kiss you wife, then?" Demaenetus replies: "nauteam / bibere malim, si necessum sit, quam illam osularier", (I would prefer, if it is necessary, to drink bilge-water than to kiss her)[*Asin* 894-5]. In the *Amphitruo*, Alcumena, the wife of Amphitruo, has been visited by Jupiter, who has disguised himself as her husband so that she will sleep with him. When Amphitruo returns from battle, Alcumena is understandably confused since Jupiter/Amphitruo had come home to her the previous night. Amphitruo is distressed at his wife's apparent confusion and says "delirat uxor", (my wife is crazy)[*Amph* 727; Cf. *Amph* 818-9]. The definitive insult is offered by Menaechmus in the *Menaechmi*. He has been fighting with his wife over the dress he stole from her to give to his mistress, Erotium. His wife finally tells him not to come home until he brings the dress with him. Menaechmus flippantly says: "male mi uxor sese fecisse censet, quom exclusit foras; / quasi non habeam quo intromittar alium meliorem locum", (My wife reckons that she punished me when she shut me out--as if I did not have a better place where I am admitted)[*Men* 668-9]. Menaechmus does not even care whether his wife will let him come home again. He does not view such a threat as a punishment but rather a reward. Now he can spend time with Erotium without having any obligation to go home to his wife.

One final insult directed toward wives in Plautus is particularly cruel. At the end of the *Menaechmi*, the two brothers have decided that the first brother will sell his

property by auction and move to Syracuse with his brother. In the epilogue, the slave Messenio announces the auction to the audience:

auctio fiet Menaechmi mane sane septumi.
 venibunt servi, supellex, fundi, aedes, omnia.
 venibunt quiqui licebunt, praesenti pecunia.
 venibit--uxor quoque etiam, si quis emptor venerit.

Menaechmus' auction will be held in seven days. Slaves will be sold, the furniture, the farms, the houses, everything. Everything is for sale, for money in hand. Even the wife is for sale, if any buyer desires her.
 (Men 1157-60)

I.B. Wives and dowries

A second group of statements made about wives concerns their dowries. As in many cultures, the women of Rome were given dowries by their fathers to make them more appealing to potential suitors. The suitor carefully investigated the financial position of the bride-to-be, and the dowry was an important subject in the marriage negotiations (Treggiari, 431). However, most rich wives married their husbands in a type of marriage known as usus, whereby the two became married by virtue of co-habiting continuously (Sealey, 101). The wife was not transferred from the authority, or manus, of her father to that of her husband, and as long as she spent three nights away from home during the year, she remained subject to her father's patriapotestas. The husband was expected to see to her property and lands but the dowry itself remained hers and had to be returned in the event of divorce. This fact gave dowered wives a great deal of leverage with their husbands who often had less

money to call their own than did their wives, and the dowered wife could always threaten to have her father instigate a divorce. Even if the marriage placed the dowered wife under the manus of her husband, a large dowry often weakened the husband's actual control (Leffingwell, 46). Many characters in comedy mention the dowry of the wife as reason for fearing her and, in some cases, the wife herself uses her dowry to threaten her husband.

When Megadorus finally agrees to marry, Eunomia tells him she will obtain the richest and best-bred woman available. Megadorus quickly tells her he does not want a rich wife but a modest one. He says he is already a rich man and adds:

istas magnas factiones, animos, dotes dapsilis,
clamores, imperia, eburata vehicla, pallas, purpuram
nil moror, quae in servitutem sumptibus redigunt viros.

I care nothing for those things which force men into servitude with their expense, those great families, haughtiness, costly dowries, applause, commands, ivory carriages, garments and purple.

(Aulu 167-9)

Megadorus lists all the things consistent with a dowered wife and then acknowledges the tendency of such a wife to "reduce a man to slavery". Because Megadorus is a rich, and, he says, practical man, he does not need the benefits of a dowered wife, namely, wealth and property, and therefore is not inclined to suffer the disadvantages of a situation in which the husband is indebted to the wife.

Megadorus makes his views on dowered wives more clearly in his lengthy monologue on the subject. He has decided to marry

the daughter of the pauper Euclio and is asking no dowry of him. Megadorus says that if there were no dowries the state would be a happier place and "invidia nos minore utamur quam utimur", (we would be treated with less disrespect than we are now)[Aulu 482]. He asks that wives leave their fortunes behind when they are married and instead bring a better disposition. If that happened, no wife could say:

equidem dotem ad te attuli
 maiorem multo quam tibi erat pecunia;
 enim mihi quidem aequomst purpuram atque aurum dari,
 ancillas, mulos, muliones, pedisequos,
 salutigerulos pueros, vehicla qui vehar.

For my part, I brought you a dowry much larger than the money which was yours; therefore, it is just for me to be given gold and purple and maids, mules, mule drivers, pages, boys bringing greetings and carriages to ride in.
 (Aulu 498-502)

Evidently, husbands considered wealthy wives a real threat to their power. Megadorus continues in the same vein, listing all the individuals like tailors, hairdressers, weavers, mothers-in-law, that must be paid by the husband of a dowered wife. He concludes with the statement that "dotatae mactant et malo et damno viros", (dowered wives ruin their husbands both with disaster and misfortune)[Aulu 535]. In his speeches in the *Aulularia*, Megadorus finds a way to blame everything that is wrong with Roman society on the dowered wife.

The equation of dowry with power for the wife is evident in the *Asinaria*. Demaenetus and his slave, Libanus, discuss Demaenetus' son and his mistress. His son has asked Demaenetus for money to give to his lover, and Demaenetus wants to give it

to him, but as Libanus explains, he has less money to give than do the slaves of the house. Demaenetus' wife controls the purse-strings (Cf. Konstan, "Plot" 215). Demaenetus ruefully agrees and concludes "argentum accepi, dote imperium vendidi", (I accepted the silver; I sold my authority for the dowry)[Asin 87]. His wife Artemona is fully conscious of her position in the fifth act. Demaenetus, his son Argyrippus, and the courtesan Philaenium are enjoying a dinner party together. Unknown to any of them, Demaenetus' wife Artemona is witnessing the entire scene and watches Philaenium kissing her husband. When Philaenium inquires whether Demaenetus likes to kiss his wife and he responds he would rather drink "bilge-water", Artemona is furious. She says to herself "sine, venias modo domum, faxo ut scias / quid periculi sit dotatae uxori vitium dicere", (If only you come home, I will make sure that you know what danger there is to say bad things about a dowered wife) [Asin 897-8]. Artemona is fully conscious of her special status as a dowered wife and knows that she has Demaenetus in a bad position (Fantham, 73). She can threaten to leave him and take her property with her, leaving him a pauper, if he does not stop dallying with other women. Her special status as a dowered wife is recognized both by her and by her husband.

Other statements made about dowered wives are insulting in nature, rather than indicating the power of the dowered wife. Periplectomenus in the *Miles Gloriosus* is another confirmed bachelor like Megadorus of the *Aulularia*. Periplectomenus offers his views for not marrying to his young protege Pleusicles. He

says that he is a wealthy man, by the grace of the gods, and could have married a well-dowered wife "sed nolo mi oblatratricem in aedis intro mittere", (but I do not wish to send a woman who barks inside my walls)[*Miles* 681; Cf. *Most* 274-81]. Wives are referred to again in dog-vocabulary, a "barker", and thus a "bitch". Periplectomenus is pleased with the freedom he enjoys and considers his bachelor status preferable to the joys of raising children. A final insult toward dowered wives is levied by Simo in the *Mostellaria*. Simo describes the wonderful meal he has been fed by his wife, but he has discovered his wife's hidden motive--she wanted him to sleep with her. Simo sneaks out of the house and ponders the situation.

quom magis cogito cum meo animo:
 si qui' dotatam uxorem atque anum habet,
 neminem sollicitat sopor: [in] omnibus
 ire dormitum odio est, ..."

The more I consider it in my mind, if anyone has a wife both dowered and old, sleep seldom disturbs him. In such a case, it is distasteful to go to sleep.
 (*Most* 702-5)

Either a dowered wife demands too much sexually from her husband, or she is too old to attract him and fulfilling her needs is a terrible burden.

I.C. Statements concerning wifely character--ideal and real

1. Female speaker

A third type of statements made about wives is comments about their behavior and character, what it is, should be or should not be. The most famous statement in all of Plautus regarding this subject is said by Alcumena in the *Amphitruo*.

Alcumena, the wronged wife of Amphitruo, is furious and disappointed that he does not believe in her innocence. She is in the middle of being interrogated by her husband Amphitruo and Sosia when she describes her character:

non ego illam mi dotem duco esse quae dos dicitur
 sed pudicitiam et pudorem et sedatum cupidinem,
 deum metum, parentum amorem et cognatum concordiam,
 tibi morigera atque ut munifica sim bonis, prosim
 probis.

I do not consider that as my dowry which is said to be a dowry, but modesty, and chastity and well-controlled passion, fear of the gods, love of parents, harmony of family, obedience to you, and generosity to friends and goodness to virtuous men.

(Amph 839-42)

Alcumena's speech serves to illustrate the qualities good wives were expected to possess and which, in fact, Alcumena does possess. A positive picture of the wife is finally found in Plautus; it is not unrevealing that the wife herself offers it. No wife is ever described by her husband in this fashion. A different version of the ideal wife's behavior is given in the *Casina*. The male slave Chalinus has been dressed up as the object of Lysidamus' lust, *Casina*, and is about to be "married" to Olympio, Lysidamus' overseer. Lysidamus has arranged this marriage so that he can sleep with *Casina* but has no idea that his wife has out-smarted him by installing Chalinus in the place of the girl. One of Cleostrata's partners-in-crime, Pardalisca, gives marital advice to the disguised Chalinus. She tells him to be careful not to trip over the threshold:

uti viro tuo
 semper sis superstes,
 tuaque ut potior pollentia sit vincasque uirum victrixque

tua vox superet tuoque imperium: vir te vestiatur, [tu] sies,
 noctuque et diu ut viro subdola sis, virum despolies.
 opsecro, memento.

May you always stand over your husband, so that your power is superior, that you defeat your husband, that you are the victor; that your word and authority reign; let your husband clothe you, you despoil you husband; and remember, I beg you, be cunning to your husband day and night.

(Cas 816-24)

Pardalisca has a very different idea of what a wife should do. She should not be the obedient, modest and chaste Alcumena, but rather a stern taskmaster dominating her husband. Pardalisca's comments on recommended behavior for wives could be an expression of feminine desire to turn the tables on overbearing husbands.

A third statement by a woman on what wives should be is also found in the *Casina*. Earlier in the play, Cleostrata visits with her good friend Myrrhina and complains of her husband's behavior. She is well aware that he is planning to share *Casina* with her new husband and is only feigning concern for the girl's well-being. Myrrhina does not listen very sympathetically, to the surprise of a modern audience. She does not take the side of her own gender but instead tries to argue Cleostrata out of her bad attitude. She tells her:

tace sis,
 stulta, et mi ausculata. noli
 sis tu illic advorsari,
 sine amet, sine quod lubet id faciat, quando tibi nil
 domi delicom est.

Why don't you be quiet, silly woman, and listen to me. Please don't keep acting as an adversary to him; let him love, let him do that which pleases him, so long as nothing is lacking for you at home.

(Cas 204-7)

up to. Of course, Menaechmus' wife is right to be suspicious of her husband since while he is complaining about her behavior, he is concealing the dress he has just stolen from her to give to his mistress. Comments on wives' behavior are also found later in the *Menaechmi*. Menaechmus' wife has complained to her father of her husband's behavior and asks him to come give Menaechmus a strong lecture. Her father does not wish to interfere in the domestic dispute but finds himself in the middle anyway. He tells his daughter, "quotiens monstravi tibi viro ut morem geras, / quid ille faciat ne id observes, quo eat, quid rerum gerat" (How many times have I told you to bear your husband's ways, not to watch what he is doing, where he is going, what business he is seeing to)[*Men* 787-9]. This statement by the father is very similar to what Menaechmus tells his wife: wives should not inquire into their husbands' affairs. The father finally says, echoing Menaechmus, "quando te auratam et vestitam bene habet, ancillas, penum / recte praehibet, melius sanam est, mulier, mentem sumere" (Since he gives you gold jewelry and clothes, and furnishes you with maids and food, it is better to assume a sensible attitude, woman)[*Men* 801-2]. Both men, Menaechmus and his father-in-law, feel that it is the husband's duty to provide for his wife, and if he fulfills his obligations he is entitled a respite from her nagging.

In the *Stichus*, two sisters, Pamphila and Panegyris, have been separated from their husbands for three years. They are apprehensive that their father, Antipho, will make them return home and remarry, since their husbands are presumed lost. They

discuss with their father the esteem they feel for their husbands, second only to the respect they have for him as their father. He responds, "bonas ut aequomst facere facitis, quom tamen apsentis viros / perinde habetis quasi praesentes sient" (You are acting as is proper for good women to do, when you consider your husbands in absentia in the same way as if they were present)[Stic 99-100]. An additional aspect of expected behavior for a wife has been revealed. She should show her husband the same respect whether he is present or absent.

II. Courtesans

In Plautine comedy, female characters are usually of four different types--the matron, the young maiden, the slave and the courtesan (Duckworth, 253). Nothing of interest is said about slaves or maidens; the two most interesting kinds of women for the purpose of this study are the matrons and the courtesans. The subject of wives has been fully explored and the topic of inquiry shifts now to the courtesans. The statements made about courtesans are loosely grouped into those made by courtesans and those made by male characters. Plautine matrons do not comment on courtesans, except to accuse their husbands of keeping mistresses.

II.A. Courtesan as speaker

Many courtesans compliment themselves on their skill in deception. Cleareta in the *Asinaria* compares herself to a fowler, scattering grain far and wide to attract birds to his traps. She says:

itidem hic apud nos: aedes nobis area est, auceps sum

ego,

esca est meretrix, lectus inlex est, amatores aves;
 bene salutando consuescunt, compellando blanditer,
 osculando, oratione vinnula, venustula.
 si papillam pertractavit, haud est ab re<d> aucupis;
 savium si sumpsit, sumere eum licet sine retibus.

So it is here among us, my house is the threshing floor,
 I am the bird-catcher. The courtesan is the bait; her
 lovers are the birds. They become accustomed to
 greetings, by her flattering and urging, by her kisses
 and by her speech, charming and pretty; If he fondles
 her breast, that just helps the cause of the bird-
 catcher. If he takes a kiss, he is permitted to take it
 without a trap.

(Asin 220-5)

Cleareta's simile proclaims the courtesan as a smart and clever woman, yet one perceived negatively because she "ensnares" her prey, like a fowler. Cleareta is not ashamed of what she does or for forcing the life of a courtesan on her daughter. The realities of Roman society made whores of those who could not support themselves in any other way (Pomeroy, 191,202), and Cleareta is proud of her skill in succeeding in a difficult profession [Cf. *Miles* 355-6].

The *Truculentus* is a play rich in statements made by and about courtesans. The title character is a slave who is worried that his young charge, Strabax, is being seduced into spending all of his money on the depraved courtesans of the town. Truculentus himself does not prove impervious to their charm and finds himself seeking their services once he has some pocket money. The courtesan of the *Truculentus*, Phronesium, and her saucy maid, Astaphium, are full of wisdom regarding the life of a prostitute. Astaphium complains in act one of the young men who come into the house as a group and try to steal the furnishings.

If the prostitute is to support herself, she cannot be sentimental [Cf. *Truc* 712].

Phronesium has more advice for courtesans. On their behavior she offers: "blitea et luteast meretrix nisi quae sapit in vino ad rem suam; / si alia membra vino madeant, cor sit saltem sobrium" (A courtesan is silly and of loose morals unless she is wise to her own interest while drinking; if her other parts are soaked with wine, her judgement, at least, should be sober)[*Truc* 854-5]. The importance of a prostitute looking after her own interests first established by Astaphium is repeated by Phronesium. A courtesan, unlike a matron, must protect herself and her property; she cannot rely on any man to do so for her.

In the *Mostellaria*, the elderly maid Scapha tries to convince Philematium, a young courtesan, that she is stupid for sleeping with only one man, Philolaches.

Scapha: equidem pol miror tam catam, tam doctam te et
bene eductam
nunc stultam stulte facere. Philematium: quin mone
quaeso, si quid erro.
SC: tu ecastor erras quae quidem illum exspectes unum
atque illi
morem praecipue sic geras atque alios asperneris.
matronae, non meretricium est unum inservire amantem.

Scapha: By Pollux, I wonder that such a sharp girl, as skilled and well-educated as you, now acts so foolishly.
Philematium: But I beg you, point it out to me, if I am erring.
SC: By Castor, you who await only one man and humor him chiefly and spurn all others, are doing wrong? Matrons, not courtesans, should be devoted to one lover.
(*Most* 186-90)

Philematium is an atypical courtesan in that she is totally in love with one man and refuses to sleep with any other. Scapha's advice reflects the reality of a courtesan's life. A wife can

have only one lover because she is in a secure position, whereas a courtesan has to prepare for when her lover loses interest in her.

This section on statements made by and about courtesans in Plautus closes with a somewhat unique comment made about courtesans in the *Poenulus*. Anterastilis, Adelphasium's sister, is complaining to her that they are poorly dressed in comparison to some other courtesans. Adelphasium tells her: "meretricem pudorem gerere magi' decet quam purpuram: / magi'que id meretricem, pudorem quam aurum gerere, condecet" (It is more fitting for a courtesan to wear modesty than purple and it becomes a courtesan more to wear modesty than gold)[*Poen* 304-5]. Adelphasium's statement is contradictory to previous comments about courtesans. The other courtesans advise that they must look after their own interests and plunder as quickly as possible, while Adelphasium says a prostitute should have "pudor" (modesty). An explanation for her anomalous statement is that the two sisters never actually become courtesans; they are kidnapped from Carthage and sold to a pimp, but they are saved before they actually have to ply their trade. Adelphasium's statement then, is an idealized picture of a courtesan held by someone who has not experienced a courtesan's life.

II.B. Male speakers

1. Complimentary remarks

Some statements made about courtesans in Plautine comedy by men are complimentary and similar to those made by the courtesans themselves when they pat themselves on the back for being so

clever. These complimentary statements are found in the *Miles Gloriosus*, in which courtesans are instrumental in tricking the swaggering soldier. Palaestrio, the slave who orchestrates the plan to deceive his master, Pyrgopolynices the soldier, relies on the help of Philocomasium, Acroteleutium, and Milphidippa, all of whom are courtesans. In the second act Palaestrio convinces the old man Periplectomenus that Philocomasium will easily be able to convince a slave that he did not see what he actually saw. He tells him that "os habet, linguam, perfidiam, malitiam atque audaciam, / confidentiam, confirmitatem, fraudulentiam" (she has a shameless countenance, a glib tongue, treachery, roguish and bold, self-confidence, obstinacy and a disposition to swindle)[*Miles* 188-9]. These are high words of praise from a slave as clever and cunning himself as Palaestrio. He does not insult Philocomasium by saying she is all of these typically negative qualities; he means to compliment her [Cf. *Miles* 591]. Later in the *Miles Gloriosus*, another courtesan, Milphidippa, is called upon to play a scene with the soldier in which she convinces him that her mistress, really another courtesan, is dying for love of him. Palaestrio listens to her performance, concealed from the eye of the soldier, and is so amused that he has to restrain himself from laughing. When the two schemers meet up with one another again, the following conversation ensues:

Milphidippa: quid agis, noster architecte? Palaestrio:
 egone architectus? vah! MI: quid est?
 PA: qui<a> enim non sum dignus prae te palum ut figam
 in parietem.
 MI: heia vero! PA: nimi' facete nimi'que facunde

The *Truculentus* provides a rich commentary on the ways of prostitutes, beginning in the prologue. Here the speaker indicates the house in which the courtesan Phronesium lives and says:

haec huius saeculi mores in se possidet:
 numquam ab amatore [suo] postulat--id quod datumst,
 sed relicuom dat operam--ne sit relicuom,
 poscendo atque auferendo, ut mos est mulierum;

She possesses the customs of this age in herself: never does she claim from her lover, that which was given, but he gives the remainder, so there is nothing left; she begs and carries it off, as is the custom of women.

(*Truc* 13-6)

The grasping image of the courtesan who shows her lovers no mercy is found throughout the *Truculentus*. In the opening scene to the play, Diniarchus laments his situation. He used to be the primary lover of the courtesan, Phronesium, but he has since lost his fortune and consequently no longer receives her favors. He compares a courtesan to a fisherman who casts his net, ensnaring the fish and making sure they do not get away. He elaborates on their taking ways, saying:

priu'quam unum dederis, centum quae poscat parat:
 aut periit aurum aut conscissa pallula est
 aut empta ancilla aut aliquod vasum argenteum
 aut vasum ahenum aliquod aut lectus laptiles
 aut armariola Graeca, aut--aliquid semper <est>
 quod petra debeatque amans scorto suo.

Before you give one thing, she is ready to ask for a hundred: either a gold object is missing or a little cloak is torn or a maid has been purchased or some silver vase or some bronze dish or a couch or little Greek chests or--there is always something which a lover owes to his mistress.

(*Truc* 51-56)

Diniarchus' attitude toward courtesans does not change with time. Later in the *Truculentus* he calls courtesans "vultures" who can predict three days ahead of time when they are going to have a good meal. Diniarchus is jealous that Phronesium is after the rich soldier and refuses to sleep with him. He sees her household as waiting with gaping mouths, eager to feed on the soldier once he arrives. At the end of his monologue he sees the door of the household opening and calls it a whirlpool "quae obsorbent quidquid venit intra pessulos" (which gulps down whatever comes within the bolt)[*Truc* 351]. Statements made about courtesans in Plautus often employ the rich metaphors of Diniarchus who calls courtesans "vultures" and "whirlpools" [Cf. *Truc* 568-71]. Other comments made about courtesans in the *Truculentus* are less dramatic. In a conversation with Phronesium's maid, Astaphium, Diniarchus considers the merits of female and male prostitutes. He concludes that male prostitutes are shameless but courtesans are "nequam et gloriosae" (good for nothing and conceited)[*Truc* 157; Cf. *Truc* 2.2].

An indignant assault upon a courtesan is located in the *Asinaria*. A young lover has been ejected from a courtesan's house because he is out of money, a common situation in Plautus. The mother of his love has refused to let him see her and Agyrippus yells back at her:

at malo cum tuo, nam iam ex hoc loco
 ibo ego ad trisviros vostraque ibi nomina
 faxo erunt, capiti' te perdam ego et filiam,
 perlecebrae, permities, adulescentum exitium.
 nam mare haud est mare, vos mare acerrimum;
 nam in mari repperi, hic elavi bonis.

Curse you! I'll soon let the magistrates know you are
 swindler and thief, of young fellows the slaughterer!
 Oh, I'll bring ruin on you and your daughter there!
 Sea's no more sea when compared with your treachery!
 There I got gain which I lost by your witchery.

[Asin 130-5 (trans. G. Duckworth)]

Argyrippus echoes Cyamus in the *Truculentus*, who calls the courtesans a bottomless sea, never content or filled to overflowing [Truc 568-71]. He also calls her a witch, swindler and thief and even threatens to take her to court [Asin 127-52].

The final comments about courtesans are from the *Bacchides*, a play in which twin sisters assert control over the men who love them and are even able to sway their fathers who come to castigate them for ruining their sons. The two *Bacchides* are incredibly skillful in their seductions. Pistoclerus is another Plautine youth who is in love with a courtesan but who complains constantly her behavior. In the first act he comes across the two sisters speaking and asks: "quid in consilio consuluistis?" (what are you planning?) to which Bacchis responds "bene" (something good). Pistoclerus sharply replies "pol hau meretriciumst" (by Pollux, that is hardly likely of prostitutes) [Bacc 40]. Even though Pistoclerus knows the courtesans are up to no good, he finds himself powerless to remove himself from their power, as he admits later in the same scene. Bacchis asks for help in a scheme against the captain who has purchased her sister's services. When Pistoclerus proves reluctant she asks him:

Bacchis: quid est quod metuas? Pistoclerus: nihil
 est, nugae. mulier, tibi me emancupo:
 tuo' sum, tibi dedo operam.

Bacchis: what is it which you fear? Pistoclerus: it is nothing, trifles! Woman, I transfer myself into your possession. I am yours; I will help you.
(Bacc 92-3)

The words Pistoclerus uses are a Roman expression for slavery, for Pistoclerus recognizes that he is Bacchis' slave. There is no other expression for their relationship since he is totally aware of her real feelings toward him but is unable to leave her.

Pistoclerus' tutor, Lydus, also has some strong feelings about courtesans. He understands Bacchis' hold over his master and is ashamed of him. After seeing Pistoclerus at the home of the Bacchides, he calls the door of their house "ianuam hanc Orci" (this door of Hell) and says "apage istas a me sorores, quae hominum sorbent sanguinem" (sisters, keep away from me, you who suck up human blood)[Bacc 372]. Two new images of courtesans emerge: bloodsuckers and demons. Two scenes later Lydus relates the folly of Pistoclerus to Mnesilochus, one of Pistoclerus' friends. Lydus describes Bacchis to Mnesilochus as "atque acerrume aestuosam: apsorbet ubi quemque attigit" (and she is a vigorous whirlpool; she sucks in everyone she glances on)[Bacc 471]. Lydus' comment is reminiscent of other characters who have equated courtesans with the sea.

At the end of the *Bacchides*, the two fathers, Nicobulus and Philoxenus, go to the home of the two courtesans to remove their sons and save them from certain ruin. The two men start out with the best of intentions and are determined to be strong. The Bacchides quickly seduce the two and welcome them inside to join their sons. The two men follow the courtesans inside and

Nicobulus says "ducite nos quo lubet tamquam quidem addictos", (Lead us wherever it is pleasing, since, indeed, we are bound to you)[Bacc 1205]. Nicobulus echoes the words of Pistoclerus in the opening of the play.

III. General Statements about women

A. Male Speakers

1. Positive remarks

The final statements about women to be enumerated are observations made about women in general, and are not applicable particularly to wives or courtesans. The one positive statement about women is found in the *Miles Gloriosus*. Palaestrio, the clever slave, openly admires the skill of the courtesans in manipulating the soldier's vanity. He extends that admiration for the courtesan to general admiration of the female gender with the comment "neque eques neque pedes profectost quisquam tanta audacia / qui aeque faciat confidenter quicquam quam mulier facit." (Really, there is no cavalryman or infantryman who does anything as confidently and with such boldness as a woman)[*Miles* 464-5]. A woman is compared favorably to a soldier, the highest expression of bravery.

III.A.2. Negative remarks

Palaestrio's compliment toward women is matched against a number of unfavorable viewpoints found elsewhere in comedy. One such viewpoint is in the *Persa*. Saturio is a male character who pretends his daughter is a slave to make money in a scheme. Saturio's daughter, who is not given a name, is horrified at the scandal that might incur and begs her father not to participate

in the scheme. Saturio and his daughter argue back and forth until Saturio says "virgo atque mulier nulla erit quin sit mala, / quae praeter sapiet quam placet parentibus" (There is no girl or woman who is anything but worthless, who is more wise than is pleasing to her parents) [Persa 365-6]. Saturio makes another point about women; they were expected to be retiring and not talk back to their fathers.

In the *Rudens* a comment similar to Saturio's order to his daughter is found. Trachalio, the slave of Daemones, Daemones, and Gripus, a fisherman, discuss objects Gripus found in the sea which Trachalio say prove the identity of the two women who have suddenly appeared on the island. Gripus says the women should speak for themselves and asks why they are not talking. Trachalio responds "eo tacent quia tacita bonast mulier semper quam loquens" (they are quiet because a woman is good when silent, rather than when talking)[*Rud* 1114].

The *Miles Gloriosus* contains many insulting statements about women said by men. The slave Sceledrus rightfully suspects Philocomasium, his master's slave, of kissing a neighbor. He mulls over the situation and asks himself "quid peius muliere aut audacius?" (what is worse or more bold than a woman?)[*Miles* 307, Cf. *Miles* 456]. Another insulting statement is said by Philocomasium's lover, Pleusicles. Dressed as a sailor, Pleusicles comes from the direction of the harbor and starts to muse on the nature of women.

mulier profecto natast ex ipsa Mora;
nam quaevis alia, quae morast aequae, mora
minor ea videtur quam quae propter mulieremst.

hoc adeo fieri credo consuetudine."

Surely, woman was born from delay; for any other delay, which is equally a delay, seems less of a delay than that which is on account of a woman. I believe they do this out of habit.

(Miles 1292-5)

Men in the *Miles Gloriosus* describe women as worthless, audacious, untrustworthy, and sources of delay.

The next comment, from the *Amphitruo*, affirms the perception of women as untrustworthy. Alcumena protests her innocence to her husband and she swears to him that no other man has touched her.

Amphitruo: vera istaec velim.

Alcumena: vera dico, sed nequiquam, quoniam non vis credere.

AM: mulier es, audacter iuras.

Amphitruo: I wish these claims of yours were true.

Alcumena: I speak the truth, but it's no use, seeing that you do not wish to believe. AM: A woman will swear anything.

(Amph 834-6)

Even though Amphitruo earlier in the play calls Alcumena the woman whose virtue all the men of Thebes praise, he now lumps her with all women and says her promise is not worth anything. Other negative remarks about women are located in the *Epidicus* and the *Trinummus*. In the *Epidicus*, the title character, a slave, discourses at length on the ways of women. He discusses with his master Periphanes the woman who is ruining his master's son. Epidicus discusses her extravagant clothing and when Periphanes marvels at his description of her Epidicus responds:

quid istuc tam mirabile est?

quasi non fundis exornatae multae incedant per vias.
at tributus quom imperatus est, negant pendi potis:

illis quibu' tributus maior penditur, pendi potest.

Why is this so remarkable? As if many women did not proceed through the roads adorned with entire estates. But when a tax is ordered, the men deny that they are able to pay; but they are able to pay a greater tribute, which is paid to their wives.

(Epid 225-8)

Epidicus' observation is similar to those made about the grasping ways of courtesans earlier and the excessive demands of dowered wives.

III.B. Female Speaker

This last part of the first section of the paper contains comments made by and about women. In the *Aulularia*, Eunomia speaks to her brother Megaronides with the hope of convincing him to settle down and get married. She prefaces her advice with an interesting statement about classical views toward women.

Velim te arbitrari med haec verba, frater,
meai fidei tuaique rei
caussa facere, ut aequom est germanam sororem.
quamquam hau falsa sum nos odiosas haberi;
nam multum loquaces merito omnes habemur,
nec mutam profecto repertam nullam esse
<aut> hodie dicunt mulierem <aut> ullo in saeclo.

My brother, I wish you would consider those words of mine to be said for the sake of my loyalty and your sake, as is appropriate for a sister. Although it has hardly escaped my notice that we are considered annoying: deservedly, for we all are held to be too talkative by far, and they say never was there found a silent woman today or in any lifetime.

(Aulu 120-6)

Eunomia's words indicate that the women were well aware of the insulting things men said about them and serves to perpetuate the image of women as garrulous nags. The *Cistellaria* pursues another perception about women. Selenium and Gymnasium are

discussing Selenium's heartaches over her lover and when Selenium exclaims "at mihi cordolium est" (But I have such a heartache!),

Gymnasium responds:

quid? id unde est tibi cor? commemora opsecro;
quod neque ego habeo neque quisquam alia mulier, ut
perhibent viri.

What's this? Where did you get a heart? I beg you, tell me about it, that which neither I nor any other woman has, the men maintain.

(Cist 65-6; Cf. Miles 786)

Gymnasium's response is obviously sarcastic, repeating the insults no doubt many a customer has uttered to her over the years.

Adelphasium of the *Poenulus* compares women to ships. She says that a man who wants to bring trouble to himself should buy two things, a ship and a woman, because neither are ever sufficiently fitted out. "Apage sis, negoti quantum in muliere una est" (How much trouble there is in one woman!), Adelphasium says, "sed vero duae, sat scio, maxumo uni / poplo quoilubet plus satis dare potis sunt" (But in truth, two of them, I know well enough, are able to give more than enough trouble to an entire people, anywhere you want)[*Poen* 225-7]. She goes on to describe the bathing and dressing which occurs throughout a woman's day. Adelphasium offers additional insight into the nature of women later in the *Poenulus*. She and her sister Anterastilis are analyzing their visit to the Temple of Venus. Adelphasium says to her sister "multa sunt mulierum vitia, sed hoc e multis maxumumst, / quom sibi nimi' placent minu'que addunt operam uti placeant viris" (Many are the faults of women, but this is the

greatest of many: when they please themselves too much and increase their effort to please men too little)[*Poen* 1203-4]. It is somewhat unusual for a woman in Plautus to admit that women do not do enough to try to please their men. However, this viewpoint is often expressed by male characters in Plautus.

Two female characters from the *Miles Gloriosus* and the *Truculentus* have something to say about the skill of women in deceit. Acroteleutium of the *Miles Gloriosus* has been engaged to pretend she is in love with the soldier, and she is very confident that she will perform admirably. When the male characters insist on reminding her several times of what she is to do, Acroteleutium responds with wisdom on the abilities of women:

si quid faciundum est mulieri male atque malitiose,
 ea sibi immortalis memoriast meminisse et sempiterna;
 sin bene quid aut fideliter faciundumst, eo deveniunt
 obliviosae extemplo uti fiant, meminisse nequeunt.

If a woman must do something wickedly and maliciously, it is an immortal memory which she remembers forever; but if something good or honest must be done, they fall immediately into forgetfulness as soon as it happens, and are unable to remember.

(*Miles* 887-90)

Acroteleutium's picture of women is not very flattering, and her image is extended through the comments of Phronesium in the *Truculentus*. Phronesium is conducting a scheme to convince one of her lovers that she has given birth to his son and, therefore, to extract a lot of money from him. As she pretends to be suffering from the aftermath of childbirth, she turns to the

audience and reveals what she is really doing. She tells them that she is only pretending and comments on her behavior.

male quod mulier facere incepit, nisi <id> efcicere
 perpetratur,
 id illi morbo, id illi seniost, ea illi miserae
 miseriast;
 bene si facere incepit, eius rei nimi' cito odium
 percipit.
 nimi'quam paucae sunt defessae male quae facere
 occeperunt
 nimi'que paucae efciciunt si quid facere occeperunt
 bene:
 mulieri nimio male facere melius onus est quam bene.

If a woman starts to do something bad and doesn't carry it through to completion, she feels sick, she feels worn out, she feels just plain miserable. If a woman starts to do something good, she soon becomes disgusted with it. Very few women grow weary of doing something bad, and very few finish doing anything good; it's much less burdensome for a woman to do wrong than to do right.

[Truc 465-70 (trans. G. Duckworth)]

Phronesium completes Acroteleutium's thought; not only do women remember to do evil and forget to do good, but they never get tired of doing evil.

Anterastilis of *Poenulus* draws an interesting comparison between women and pickled fish. Pickled fish, she says, are too salty unless they are soaked in a lot of water for a long time. Women are like pickled fish "insulsaе admodum atque invenustae / sine munditia et sumptu" (quite tasteless and unattractive, without elegance and expense)[*Poen* 246-7]. A man like Lysidamus of the *Casina* might be expected to call a woman a pickled fish, but it seems unusual that a woman would say such a thing about herself.

In the *Cistellaria*, the Procuress discusses the matron's dislike for the courtesan, a subject which is not addressed

elsewhere in Plautus. All of the matrons remain silent on any hatred they might feel for courtesans. The Procureess says that it is appropriate for women of their class to imitate the friendships of the matrons but they will never be liked by them. The matrons are warm and friendly in public and "aquam frigidam subdole suffundunt" (spread cold water cunningly on us) in private [Cist 35]. The matrons accuse courtesans of sleeping with their husbands and try to crush them. According to the Procureess, women are jealous of one another and insincere.

Two statements, from the *Persa* and the *Amphitruo*, contradict the prevailing viewpoint previously expressed that women were supposed to remain quiet and not contradict their husbands and fathers. In the *Persa*, Saturio's daughter is horrified at the potentially scandalous scheme her father is participating in, and when he tells her to be quiet and obey the wishes of her parents, she responds: "virgo atque mulier nulla erit quin sit mala, / quae reticet si quid fieri pervorse videt" (there is no girl or woman who is not worthless, if she remains silent when she sees something done wrongly)[*Persa* 367-8]. Saturio's daughter asserts the right of women to speak out when an injustice occurs, as does Alcumena of the *Amphitruo*. Alcumena is having trouble with her husband Amphitruo, who will not believe her when she says that she has not committed adultery. When she swears her innocence, her husband responds that a woman will swear to anything. Alcumena is incensed and exclaims: "quae non deliquit, decet / audacem esse, confidenter pro se et proterve loqui" (it is fitting that she who has not done wrong is bold, confidently

speaking boldly on her behalf)[*Amph* 836-7]. Saturio's daughter and Alcumena both share a firm belief in the moral strength possessed by women.

The two daughters of Antipho answer the question "what should a woman be?" Antipho tells his daughters, Pamphila and Panegyris, that he is looking for a wife and inquires from them what qualities a good woman possesses. They respond that a woman should not be gossiped about, must be able to restrain herself from temptation, have foresight, and be able to keep her head and maintain her dignity [*Stic* 1.2]. Antipho concludes the discussion by giving his daughters a compliment by saying that they have just described themselves. It is interesting to note, that Pamphila and Panegyris do not say a woman should be quiet or obedient.

It is appropriate that the most enlightened and remarkable statement in Plautus about women end this section of the paper. Syra of the *Mercator* is a slave-woman who offers a diatribe on the inequality between men and women. Her speech is worth quoting in full:

Ecator lege dura vivont mulieres
 multoque iniquiore miserae quam viri.
 nam si vir scortum duxit clam uxorem suam,
 id si rescivit uxor, impunest viro;
 uxor virum si clam domo egressa est foras,
 viro fit caussa, exigitur matrumonio.
 utinam lex esset eadem quae uxori est viro;
 qui minu' vir una uxore contentus siet?
 ecator faxim, si itidem plectantur viri,
 si quis clam uxorem duxerit scortum suam,
 ut illae exiguntur quae in se culpam commerent,
 plures viri sint vidui quam nunc mulieres.

My goodness! It's a harsh law that women live by, and much more unfair, poor things, than the men's. If a man

secretly takes a harlot, and his wife finds it out, the man goes unpunished. But if a wife even goes out of the house without her husband's knowledge, the man has grounds for divorce, and she's driven out. There ought to be the same law for husbands as for wives! For a good wife is satisfied with one husband; why shouldn't a man be satisfied with one woman? Goodness me, if men who secretly took harlots were punished in the same way as women who are divorced for committing some fault, I'll wager that more men would now be living alone than women.

[Merc 817-29 (trans. G. Duckworth)]

This is the only statement in Plautus calling for equality before the law for both men and women. Its uniqueness causes difficulty in interpretation. An isolated instance of support for "equal rights" cannot be generalized as the Plautine viewpoint, but does indicate that Plautus had some sympathy for the situation / position of women.

The evidence provided in this first section indicates that a generally negative view of women is expressed in the comedies. The few positive statements about women are in praise of either the mischievous nature of courtesans (a questionably positive quality), or of particular women who can be admired on an individual basis, not as representative of their gender. The statements about women in this section will be shown in the conclusion of this paper to be illustrative of the tension present in Roman society between long-standing ideals of womanhood and reality. The statements made about women in Plautus indicate an awareness of the discrepancy between real-life and ideal women.

Section Two

The statements made about women by both male and female characters in Plautus have been shown to be primarily insulting. It might be expected that the female characters in Plautine comedy would behave in accordance with what is said about them. Fortunately, the women of Plautus are far more complex than the impression given through a study of remarks about women. The actual characterizations of women, as opposed to what is merely said about and attributed to the female gender, illustrate many women who are to be admired and praised. The task of the second section of this paper is to describe these actual characterizations of women in Plautus, leaving a sense of how these women are to be judged and considered. The third section of this paper, then, will tie together what is said about women and their actual characterizations to answer the thesis of this paper: "Women of Plautine Comedy: Reflective of the Roman Ideal?"

Cleostrata of the *Casina* is an example of a particularly strong characterization of a woman. Cleostrata is established early on in the play as a character to be admired and indeed, the audience is urged through her soliloquy (lines 149-64) to take her side against her husband (Slater, 75). Lysidamus, her husband, is not given the chance to reveal his side of the argument. The plot of the play concerns Lysidamus' lust for a

young serving girl and Cleostrata's best efforts to keep him from satisfying that lust.

When Cleostrata discovers Lysidamus' plan to marry Casina to his overseer so that he can have access to her, she first complains to a neighboring matron, Myrrhina, who shows herself to be unsympathetic with Cleostrata's predicament. Myrrhina advises Cleostrata that she should ignore her husband's insignificant dalliances (Cf. Treggiari, 437), as long as she is well-clothed and fed (lines 204-7). Cleostrata responds negatively to this advice and Plautus indicates that Cleostrata will not be a character with the obedience and meekness supposedly possessed by the ideal woman. Cleostrata is soon placed in the role of servus callidus (clever slave), a character usually responsible for the scheming and plotting in a comedy (Cf. Forehand, 247). She plots to substitute her own male slave Chalinus in the place of Casina in the marriage ceremony. After the successful substitution, she, Myrrhina and a female slave, Pardalisca, sit outside the house where the honeymoon is taking place to watch the results of their scheme.

Olympio, Lysidamus' slave, emerges from the house utterly humiliated (lines 875ff) and is followed by Lysidamus himself, who is more concerned about being caught than any feelings of humiliation. Lysidamus is not put off by "Casina's" lack of the proper sexual equipment and "her" bristly chin, but Chalinus finally jumps up and chases him out of the room. Cleostrata stands ready outside of the house to complete her subjection of her husband. Lysidamus attempts a lie, saying he was possessed

by the Bacchantes (lines 979-81), but ends up having to tell the truth and beg his wife's friend to intercede on his behalf (Cf. MacCary, 402). Cleostrata is in a position of extreme power as she now gets to decide whether or not to take back her husband. Surprisingly, she does accept his apology, indicating another aspect of her characterization. Cleostrata is not a shrew, nagging her husband for his occasional indiscretions (Forehand, 251). Rather, she is a woman who has honestly been wronged and acts to correct the situation, not for the sake of argument, but for the sake of justice. A matron who was not married did not have many options; and while Lysidamus appears a reprobate without much hope for improvement, Cleostrata nobly takes another chance on the husband to whom she has committed herself.

The other women in the *Casina* are more typical characters. Myrrhina espouses the reality of a Roman marriage where men were allowed to cheat on their wives without suffering retribution. However, she does become a willing cohort in Cleostrata's scheme, indicating that perhaps she did feel some sympathy toward Cleostrata and, in a larger sense, felt that it was high time for a man to get what was coming to him. Pardalisca is a saucy young slave girl who skillfully manipulates Lysidamus into thinking *Casina* has gone crazy (lines 621-719). Her characterization is important mainly for its depiction of women as clever and intelligent creatures, triumphing over their supposed masters.

The *Amphitruo* offers the characterization of one important woman, Alcumena, the wife of Amphitruo. Alcumena is created by Plautus to illustrate all the ideal womanly virtues. She is

honest, obedient, loving, and kind, but unappreciated through no fault of her own. The *Amphitruo* is the story of Alcumena's seduction by Jupiter disguised as her husband and the resulting misunderstandings. The main conflict in the play comes about when Amphitruo greets his wife upon returning from battle, only to be told that they spent the night together just last night. Of course, Alcumena slept with Jupiter, not Amphitruo, but her husband is very confused at what he sees as a radical change in the behavior of his wife. The sweet woman he left behind, he concludes, has gone totally insane, and what is worse, she continues to protest her side of the story even when told by a man, her husband, that it is untrue.

The nobility of Alcumena's character is revealed during the scenes she is alternately suspected of adultery and insanity. She refuses to back down from what she has seen, and when her husband tells her that she should believe him and his slave Sosia, she responds that she would do better to believe her own eyes (lines 756-7). In the face of her husband's disbelief, Alcumena says she will leave and take with her not what is considered dowry, but her innocence, honor, purity and temperance (lines 839-42). Alcumena's calm, confidently bold protestations of innocence establish her as a woman of strength. This characterization is further revealed when Jupiter comes to her as Amphitruo and admits that he was playing a joke on her and that he really did sleep with her last night. Alcumena is not amused, to say the least, and demands an apology, calling him her enemy.

She does not easily forgive him and threatens to leave him, taking honor with her as her only companion (lines 925-9).

The play concludes with Alcumena giving birth to twins, one mortal, one the half-divine Hercules, without any pain. Jupiter feels guilty for the havoc he has wreaked in the family and allows her a painless birth as a reward. He also reveals the deception to Amphitruo, who does not seem very disturbed about his wife's adultery considering the reverence of chastity as an institution (Segal, 185-7). The *Amphitruo* gives a definite impression of a very noble wife and a somewhat bemused husband treated cruelly by inconsiderate gods. Alcumena's characterization is even more interesting since she is able to preserve her sense of dignity in the face of accusation and insult.

One critic, Jane Phillips, needs to be mentioned here in connection with the characterization of Alcumena. Phillips concludes that Plautus uses Alcumena as a source of humor, not to reveal the nobility of the matron. Phillips concentrates on the physical appearance of Alcumena, saying that the picture of a male actor stuffed with pillows to resemble a pregnant woman would have been highly comic. This appearance would undermine Alcumena's dignity regardless of the high-sounding words she speaks. Phillips summarizes:

Plautus, then, is not abandoning comedy in the character of Alcumena so that he can offer us a serious portrait of the ideal Roman wife and mother, as has been claimed. Instead, he is using his audience's understanding of its own ideals as the material for a joke. (126)

Phillips' observations disregard Alcumena's noble qualities which cause the audience to feel sympathy, not amusement, at her predicament.

The *Miles Gloriosus* contains three very similar characterizations. Philocomasium, Acroteleutium, and Milphidippa are all saucy courtesans, skillful in deceit. The story of the *Miles Gloriosus* revolves around Philocomasium, a courtesan who was abducted by the soldier, Pyrgopolynices. Philocomasium's lover, Pleusicles, is notified by his slave Palaestrio of the girl's location and comes to reclaim his love. The house next-door to the soldier's home just happens to belong to a friend of Pleusicles and he takes up residence there, meeting his love through a hole cut between the shared wall of the two houses.

Palaestrio, the servus callidus, formulates a plan to remove Philocomasium from the soldier's clutches. He tells the soldier that the neighbor's wife has fallen in love with him and desires him so greatly that she has divorced her husband. The soldier cannot resist this appeal to his vanity, and when the wife proves willing to pay for his services, he prematurely sends Philocomasium home only to discover too late that the whole thing was a trick. Palaestrio's plan is totally dependent on the skills of the women involved, Philocomasium herself, Acroteleutium, who plays the part of the neighbor's wife, and Milphidippa, who acts as go-between between Acroteleutium and the soldier. Each woman plays her part with the utmost in skill and professionalism despite the doubts of the men in the play, who wonder whether the women can successfully complete their duties.

Their characterizations reveal the three women as strong, independent characters whose intelligence is to be admired.

Philocomasium convinces Sceledrus, another slave of the soldier, that he did not see what he actually saw. Sceledrus, on the roof chasing a monkey, sees Philocomasium kissing Pleusicles and accuses her of infidelity. She explains that he saw her twin sister, Honoria, and by moving through the hole in the wall she totally confuses (lines 411-80). Philocomasium also puts on a winning performance at the end of the play when the soldier sends her home. She swoons and begs to touch him just one more time and talks him into sending Palaestrio home with her (line 1329). Acroteleutium, the courtesan who plays the part of the wife in love with the soldier, executes a convincing performance, appearing to be almost mad with love as she threatens to break down the doors to get to the soldier. Milphidippa's characterization is the most impressive of the three as she skillfully works upon the soldier's vanity to make him interested in Acroteleutium. Her success is so evident that Palaestrio himself compliments her and holds her in very high esteem, saying his skill is nothing compared to her own (Cf. Slater, 159-60).

The women of the *Truculentus* are similar in characterization to the women of the *Miles Gloriosus*. Phronesium, the courtesan, and Astaphium, her saucy maid, are also skillful manipulators of the men in the play who use their intelligence to construct the best way to get into their customers' money-purses. In the *Truculentus*, Phronesium has several lovers, Diniarchus, a lover just about out of money, Strabax, a wealthy country lad, and a

soldier. She pretends to the soldier she is pregnant with his child and borrows a baby to make her story more real. Cleverly, she ignores the gifts of the soldier who is overwhelmed by his new son, until in desperation he hands over his entire money belt. Then, the soldier has to wait outside while Phronesium has sex with Strabax indoors because while she is sure of the soldier's gift, she has to earn Strabax's contribution.

Astaphium's wisdom is revealed through some of the comments she makes regarding the nature of prostitution. She knows prostitutes are considered thieves but wonders why this is true when their victims hand over their money willingly (lines 95-111). Considering the charge of greediness levied against courtesans, she asserts that a man can always leave them so they must provide for their future as they can (lines 209-55). She visits Strabax's home and runs into Truculentus, a gruff old slave who is horrified at how Strabax has been spending his money. Her charms are so successful, however, that Truculentus finds himself attracted to her and indeed, by the end of the play, he visits the brothel with his own money sack.

Diniarchus is a male character who is fully aware of the behavior of Phronesium yet powerless to do anything differently. Phronesium has swept all "wisdom" from his mind (line 78), and although he knows he is being used, he allows himself to be manipulated. At the end of the play, the baby Phronesium has been using in her deception turns out to be the illegitimate child of Diniarchus. She is able to convince him to let her continue to use his son in her scheme to bilk the soldier.

Although Phronesium and Astaphium do not come across as characters with whom one would like to have a business relationship, their business sense, savvy, and native intelligence cannot be denied.

In the *Bacchides*, the female characters, the two Bacchides, are not the real stars of the play. The servus callidus, Chrysalus, is by far the most impressive character, and the women are almost incidental to his scheme, although they do play their parts admirably. The two sisters are the lovers of Pistoclerus and Mnesilochus. Unfortunately, the second Bacchis has promised her services to a soldier for a year. Chrysalus plots to get the money from Mnesilochus' father Nicobulus to pay off the soldier and allow Mnesilochus to be with his love. The character of the two sisters is best revealed at the conclusion of the play. Nicobulus has learned the truth from the soldier, and he and Pistoclerus' father Philoxenus go to confront their sons at the home of the courtesans. Skillfully the two women flatter the old gentlemen until they find themselves shamefully bitten with desire. The Bacchides are the successors of Chrysalus, who controlled the action of the play up until this point, as they shepherd the "sheep" inside their home (Slater, 115). Slater even suggests that Bacchis and Chrysalus were played by the same actor (116n36). The two women, while secondary in plot to Chrysalus, carry out their roles with great vigor and skill, in the same way as Acroteleutium and Milphidippa of the *Miles Gloriosus*.

The five plays just discussed, the *Casina*, *Amphitruo*, *Miles Gloriosus*, *Truculentus*, and the *Bacchides*, are those most important for their characterizations of women. The characterizations of women in the other plays of Plautus will now be considered.

The *Asinaria* concerns three women of interest, Cleareta, Philaenium and Artemona. Cleareta is the mother of a courtesan Philaenium who acts as a sort of pimp. She refuses to allow Philaenium to see her lover Argyrippus who has no money to give. Argyrippus attempts to sway her resolve, but she is full of strength in her dealings with him and refuses to let his protestations of love change her mind. Prostitutes cannot afford to sleep with men for free and her business sense will not allow her to make an exception in Argyrippus' case. She explains that their house is a customs house which opens only when money is proffered (lines 241-2). Her characterization is that of a woman firmly grounded in reality who is determined to provide for herself and her daughter and knows well the inconsistent behavior of men. David Konstan would disagree with this interpretation because he views Cleareta as "selfish and corrupt authority", using her daughter as an "instrument of avarice" ("Plot" 220). Konstan misses Cleareta's subtleties by subjecting her to the same moral standards as a matron.

Her daughter, Philaenium, is a fascinating character. In modern times she would be known as the "hooker with a heart of gold" because she seems truly to love Argyrippus and is unconcerned with whether or not he has money. She says she will

go hungry if necessary and ignores her mother's advice to love only the men who give her presents (lines 535-6). Her characterization is one of the few of courtesans in Plautus which depicts a prostitute caring more about her lovers than their pocketbooks. Her mother, Cleareta, is understandably horrified at Philaenium's attitude, which she sees will only end them up in the poor-house. Artemona is the third female character in the *Asinaria* and the least interesting in terms of her characterization. Like Cleostrata of the *Casina*, she discovers her husband cavorting with another woman. Similarly, she confronts him with his behavior, but, instead of being humiliated, her husband asks her if he can finish his dinner with the prostitute before coming home (line 935; Cf. Konstan, "Plot" 217). Artemona has the potential to be a strong woman but her characterization is not complete enough to consider her an equal to Cleostrata.

The woman of interest in the *Aulularia* is Eunomia, sister to the confirmed bachelor Megadorus. She is worried about her brother and wants him to marry. Although Megadorus does not want to get married, he listens to his sister and finally agrees. Eunomia wants to find him a bride of a wealthy old family, but Megadorus prefers a poor young woman whom he is able to control. The characterization of Eunomia is hardly three-dimensional, but the impression is reached that Eunomia is a woman whose advice Megadorus respects and who is very concerned and loving toward her brother.

Saturio's daughter in the *Persa* is one of Plautus' most compelling creations. Her father is willing to pretend to sell his daughter as part of an intrigue for the sake of his hungry stomach. Saturio's daughter, who is not given a name of her own, is portrayed as a woman who possesses all of the virtues of a Roman senex. She is concerned about the potential disgrace of the situation and worried that the scandal might end her chances of ever getting married. Saturio advises her that daughters do well to keep their mouths shut when commanded by their parents, but she responds that it is her duty to tell him when he is behaving foolishly (lines 365-8). Her strength of character is evident even when she loses the argument, Saturio having asserted his patriapotestas (see introd., 2), and is forced to participate in the scheme. In the pretend "sale", she makes comments about the city which sound like the sentiments of a learned Roman philosopher. She speaks vaguely so as not actually to lie, and she calls herself "Lucretis" to appeal to the buyer's greedy nature (line 624). The realities of her situation prevent her from absolutely refusing to obey her father, but she plays her role in the scheme while preserving her dignity. The noble characterization of Saturio's daughter can be compared favorably to that of Alcumena in the *Amphitruo*.

Menaechmus' wife in the *Menaechmi* is characterized by him as a nagging wife always wanting to know where he is going and what he is doing. The *Menaechmi* depicts more infidelity by husbands, with Menaechmus stealing off next-door to visit his mistress Erotium. While Menaechmus' wife is upset that he is seeing a

mistress, she is more upset at his insulting behavior toward her. Menaechmus steals her clothes and jewelry to give to his mistress, an unpardonable offense in his wife's eyes. Menaechmus' behavior and his wife's reaction are comparable to the situation in the *Casina* except for Menaechmus' wife's solution to the matter. Instead of plotting like Cleostrata to take her revenge, she calls in her father and demands that he do something. For this reason, her characterization is considerably weaker than that of Cleostrata. Menaechmus' wife is not independent or strong. She does do something about the injustice done to her, but her solution is passive and juvenile, relying on her father's intervention.

Two stronger women, Panegyris and Pamphila, are located in the *Stichus*. The husbands of these two sisters have been missing at sea for over three years. They are worried that their father Antipho will make them come home again and get remarried. They know that they cannot actively oppose their father's wishes without bringing scandal and disgrace to the family, so they decide to implore him. The strength of their characterizations lies in that even though they have been deserted they still want to remain faithful to the husbands they married and are willing to take care of the financial affairs of their households. These women, unlike Menaechmus' wife, do not want to go home to Daddy, but instead want to take care of themselves. It is possible, too, that they have become accustomed to the freedom they have with no male supervision and are unwilling to give it up. In their conversation with Antipho, his two daughters tell him that

they will obey his wishes by staying married to the husbands he originally gave them to and he agrees (lines 85-8).

The female characters of the *Rudens* are not particularly noteworthy. The two shipwrecked girls, Palaestra and Ampelisca, end up on shore ready to give up hope for their lives. What follows, however, is a tearful reunion as they find each other and regain hope. Their characterizations are fairly one-dimensional and the two girls do not come across as strong characters. The only thing they demonstrate is the strength of feminine friendship. The other woman of the *Rudens* is a priestess of the Temple of Venus who welcomes the bedraggled girls and offers them a place of refuge. The priestess of the *Rudens* is the only priestess shown on stage in Plautus, but no conclusions can be drawn about her because her role is fleeting and undeveloped.

Philematium of the *Mostellaria* is another hooker with a heart of gold. She has been set free by her lover Philolaches and is concerned about how to repay him. Her characterization illustrates a woman with a strong sense of obligation and duty to others. In contrast, Scapha tells Philematium that she is behaving stupidly. Scapha is a wise old woman who explains that men discard their lovers when they get old and gray, and women must make the most of their charms while they are still young. Watching Philematium dress and perfume herself for Philolaches' visit, Scapha offers sound advice to the girl, telling her that she does not need rouge or powder since she is already so beautiful. Cleverly, since Philematium has touched a mirror,

Scapha warns her to wipe her hands so Philolaches will not think his love has been touching silver from another man (lines 267-9). Scapha's characterization is another in a long list of installments from Plautus of the worldly courtesan with a keen business sense, whereas Philematium's characterization is the more unusual one of the good courtesan who has genuine feeling for her lovers.

In the *Cistellaria*, the procuress and two courtesans discuss their profession. Selenium, one of the courtesans, has a genuine heartache. The procuress tells both of them that such behavior is appropriate for a matron but folly for a courtesan. A married woman should have only one lover but a courtesan needs a whole city full (lines 78-81). The procuress then warns her daughter Gymnasium never to fall in love, because then she will start thinking of someone else's interests rather than her own. With respect to their characterizations, the procuress is the wise savvy business woman grounded in reality, whereas Selenium is a courtesan similar to Philematium who is actually in love. The procuress offers other wisdom concerning class behavior. She says that the matrons are friendly to courtesans and other lower classes in public, but in private they hate them and want to crush them. However, the procuress also says that the courtesans should imitate the close friendships of the matrons, even though they will never be able to reach the same level of society (lines 22-37).

Plautus characterizes two sisters, Adelphasium and Anterastilis, in the *Poenulus*. Anterastilis is embarrassed by

the poor quality of their clothing compared to the rest of the courtesans they saw at the temple, but Adelphasium has a very different attitude. She tells her sister that it is better for a courtesan to have modesty and a good disposition rather than clothes of purple and gold (lines 300-7). This comment by Adelphasium is atypical of the courtesans in Plautus. An explanation for her unusual sentiments is revealed when the sisters are discovered to be freeborn Carthaginians, stolen from their father. They were bought by the pimp Lycus and have not actually sold their services at the point in which the play begins. While a courtesan would not prefer modesty to gold, a young maiden would.

The *Curculio* is not noteworthy for its characterization of women. The only interesting female character is Leaena, a stock figure of a drunk woman. Leaena will do anything for wine, a fact which the male characters manipulate to gain access to the courtesan Planesium. The *Epidicus* has many female characters but none of particular interest. Acropolistis is a saucy young girl used in the intrigues of Epidicus and is successful in irritating the male characters of the play. The *Mercator* contains two important women, Dorippa and Syra. Dorippa is another strong matron who believes she has caught her husband cheating on her. Although her husband is not actually guilty, but is instead a victim of circumstance, Dorippa manages to attack him until he is totally at a loss. He cannot even come up with a good lie to explain the presence of the young woman in their house and admits that he is stuck. Syra is a slave-woman who offers important

observations on the nature of inequality. She says that women live by a harsher law than men since men can take whores and go unpunished. Women can be divorced merely for leaving the house without her husband's knowledge. Syra says that men, like women, should be satisfied with one partner and concludes that the law should apply equally to both men and women (lines 817-29). The characterization of Syra as a noble and enlightened slave woman in favor of equal rights is unique in Plautus.

Section Three

After considering what is said about women and analyzing their individual characterizations, one question remains: are these Plautine women representative of the Roman ideal? The Roman ideal for womanhood, as established in the introduction, calls for very specific behavior. A woman was to be loyal, meek, faithful, chaste, honest, and, above all, obedient (Cf. Williams, 25; Pearce, 20); all the qualities Alcumena claims for herself. Where are these women in Plautine comedy?

In their place Plautus substitutes women with entirely different qualities. Plautine women are strong, intelligent, independent, clever, shrewd in financial matters, and powerful. Above all, they are not obedient. Even Alcumena, who claims to be the ideal wife, could hardly be called obedient or meek; her behavior when suspected of adultery by her husband is not conciliatory, but conviction in her version of the situation.

The answer to the question, "where are these ideal women in Plautine comedy?", is that they are not present. The women of Plautine comedy are not representative of the Roman ideal. In the dialogue of Plautus, men and women say some pretty awful things about women. Women are bossy, nagging, selfish, sexually demanding, greedy, bitchy and merciless. The characters of Plautine comedy obviously view the women of Plautus as less than ideal. The actual characterizations of women also reveal they

are not ideal Roman women, but instead of that being a negative fact, these Plautine women are positively admirable characters for different abilities and qualities than obedience and meekness.

While there are few retiring, obedient women in Plautus, women of the same character as Cleostrata of the *Casina* are numerous. From Cleostrata's characterization as a servus callidus, strong and hardly submissive, and Myrrhina's initial portrayal as an upstanding matron collapsing to a spirited participation in Cleostrata's schemes, to Artemona in the *Asinaria* who forthrightly confronts her husband while he cavorts with a prostitute, the women of Plautus demand respect. Other examples include Alcumena's defiant defense of her behavior, Saturio's daughter's rebellious attitude toward her father's demands, and Panegyris and Pamphila, the two sisters who insist on remaining in their own homes instead of returning to their father's patriapotestas.

Shrewd and clever courtesans like Philocomasium, Acroteleutium, and Milphidippa, of the *Miles Gloriosus*, Phronesium and Astaphium of the *Truculentus*, the Bacchides, Cleareta of the *Asinaria*, and the procuress of the *Cistellaria* are more non-ideal Plautine women. They look out for their own interests, and although they are accused of greediness, they have to make a living. These women are admirable for their independence, cleverness, success in accomplishing their goals, and lack of sentimentality. It is of course true that these women, as courtesans, were already outside of society and not

subject to the stringent standards governing the behavior of matrons (as evidenced by the fact that liaisons with courtesans were not accepted as threatening to legitimate marriages-- Pomeroy¹⁵⁹). Such a fact does not diminish Plautus' strong characterizations of courtesans, but makes them less important in a consideration of whether Plautine women are reflective of the Roman ideal.

Since it has now been established that Plautine women are not reflective of the Roman ideal, the reason why Plautus created such women still remains to be explored. Did Plautus try to create ideal women and fail? Are the women in Plautus merely examples of the overall failure of his comedy, a fact asserted by Plautus' most intense critic, Gilbert Norwood? Norwood calls Plautus "the worst of all writers who have ever won permanent repute" (4; Cf. 55-6). These questions have to be answered negatively. Plautus did not fail in his creation of female characters; rather, he had a different goal in mind than to depict ideal Roman women.

It is the assertion of this paper that Plautus created his women to portray the dichotomy present in current Roman society (second century BC) between the ideal of womanhood and real women. His women are reflective of actual Roman women, not their lofty idealized sisters of the past. The Roman ideals for women date back to the XII Tables and 445 BC when women were labeled the "infirmity of sex". The reality of the position of women in Rome was very different. As is customary, ideals take a long time to catch up to reality, and the ideals concerning women

continued to be perpetuated even past the day of Plautus in Augustan legislation which rewarded women for bearing children.

This assertion concerning Plautine women can be examined from two different perspectives, the nature of comedy and the historical evidence regarding the mythologizing tendencies of the Romans and the actual position of women in the second century BC. Comedy, as an art form, relies upon a basic premise for its success; it must depict a world and characters with which its audience can feel a sense of familiarity. M. M. Henderson aptly describes this necessity: "...comedy must have some point of reference for its audience if it is going to be funny; you cannot joke about the unknown"(4-5). The Roman audience would not find the comedies of Plautus amusing if they were a presentation of unknown situations which they could not understand. Scott Shershow in his book on the theory of comedy, Laughing Matters, further elaborates: "comedy degrades the world it depicts, but not beyond recognition"(12). The Romans had to be able to recognize their world on the Plautine stage in order to consider it humorous. Shershow quotes Cicero's famous words, that comedy is "imitatio vitae, speculum consuetudinis, imago veritatis (an imitation of life, a mirror of custom, an image of the truth)"(12).

Successful comedy, as has been shown, must contain that "imitatio vitae". If Plautus' comedies were successful, they must fulfill that requirement of depicting the world, admittedly skewed, but not beyond recognition. Were Plautus' comedies successful? To that question, the positive evidence is

overwhelming. It is well known that Plautus was an extraordinarily successful writer of comedy. Plautus' name attached to a play guaranteed a hit show and it is documented that unscrupulous producers often attributed the creation of their plays to Plautus (Segal, 2). Plautus, the first known professional playwright, had to satisfy his audience in order to make a living; unlike his successor, Terence, he did not have an income subsidized by aristocrats (Segal, 1). In discussing the tendency of plays to be erroneously ascribed to Plautus, Walter Chalmers concludes that such a tendency "implies that Plautus knew how to appeal to the taste of his audience" (22).

The evidence thus indicates that Plautus' comedy was indeed successful. The conclusion already reached--that successful comedy is an imitation of life--combined with this evidence, logically indicates that Plautus' comedies are imitations of life; Plautus is even attributed a "Hogarthian realism" by Alan Little (208). His characters, including his female characters, must have been recognizable to the Roman audience, since "you cannot joke about the unknown". The women of Plautine comedy are therefore recognizable representations of women in Roman society. If a woman who was clever, intelligent, powerful, and strong, was unknown in Roman society, the Roman audience hardly would have found such characters amusing on the Plautine stage; the strong woman, in that case, would have been a figure incomprehensible to the audience, not a subject for laughter.

The remaining evidence supporting the assertion of Plautine women as reflective of Roman society is equally clear. The

ideals held by Romans regarding women were merely mythological and inapplicable to their current society. Several scholars document the mythologizing tendencies of the Romans. Erich Segal says the Romans created "an impossible ideal and transferred it to the past, making myths out of the men who were their forefathers"(11). It is logical that such a statement would be true for Roman women, for whom an "impossible ideal" was created and transferred to the past, as if such ideal Roman women had actually existed. Sarah Pomeroy argues that sentimentalizing of the past is always a feature of a conservative society, which Rome certainly was, and she applies the results to Roman women (149). Pomeroy says the Romans idealized their heritage to such a degree that:

...historical events were scarcely distinguishable from legends, and the legends of the founding of Rome and the early Republic were employed in the late Republic and early Empire for moral instruction and propaganda. The result was that wealthy aristocratic women who played high politics and presided over literary salons were nevertheless expected to be able to spin and weave as though they were living in the days when Rome was young.
(149)

She concludes her thought by saying that the mythologizing in place created a tension between the ideal and the real Roman woman (149), an observation extremely helpful in understanding the women of Plautus. The tension between the ideal and the real Roman woman is visible in Plautus through the comparison between what is said about women in Plautus and how they are characterized. The ideals shared by Roman men and women about what a woman should be are reflected in the insults hurled toward

women in Plautine comedy (as documented in section one). Statements like Olympio's comparison of Cleostrata with a bitch [Cas 319-20], Menaechmus' equation of his wife with a lion [Men 159], and Demaenetus' acknowledgment that he loves his wife only when she is not present [Asin 899-901], indicate frustration on the part of the men in the comedies with their wives' failure to live up to the ideal woman who does not nag, bark or scold, and who is obedient to her husband. In The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives, Beryl Rawson considers this frustration:

The apparent conflict between ideal and practice in married life ought to be more closely examined. Writers on modern marriage often blame unrealistic ideals for difficulties which spouses, especially wives, experience. Both men and women seem responsible for fostering 'the romantic ideal' of marriage, but it is apparently wives who have suffered most disappointment when everyday marriage has failed to conform to that ideal. In Rome, it may have been the husbands who were disappointed when their wives declined to assume the limited, domestic role that they were told had been that of their ancestors.

(26-7)

The conflict between ideal and practice seems clearly evident in the inconsistencies between how women are viewed in Plautus (i.e. what is said about them) and how they are characterized. Women like Alcumena are aware of the qualities they are supposed to possess [Amph 839-42], yet find themselves unable and unwilling to accept such strictures. Myrrhina in the *Casina* repeats such ideals for women when she tells Cleostrata to look the other way when her husband cheats on her [Cas 204-7], but she cannot resist thumbing her nose at such ideals by joining in Cleostrata's scheme to get the best of her husband. Eunomia

knows women are considered to talk too much, but that does not stop her from giving her advice to her brother Megadorus [Aulu 120-6].

While the answer to the thesis question of this paper, "Women of Plautine Comedy: Representative of the Roman Ideal?", is a resounding "no", Plautine comedy has been revealed to be important in understanding a vital tension in Roman society in the second century BC. Plautine women, created to be recognizable to a Roman audience, were reflective of a more real Roman woman. Plautus contributes toward a realization on the part of both Roman and modern audiences that, while Romans still held antiquated views of women, their women had changed dramatically.

Bibliography

- Beare, W. The Roman Stage. 3rd ed. London: Methuen & Co., 1964.
- Cantarella, Eva. Pandora's Daughters. Trans. Maureen B. Fant. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987.
- Chalmers, Walter R. "Plautus and His Audience." Roman Drama. Eds. T. A. Dorey and Donald R. Dudley. Studies in Latin Literature and Its Influence. New York: Basic Books, 1965. 21-50.
- Duckworth, George E. The Nature of Roman Comedy: A Study in Popular Entertainment. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1952.
- Fantham, Elaine. "Sex, Status and Survival in Hellenistic Athens: A Study of Women in New Comedy." Phoenix 29 (1975): 44-74.
- Forehand, Walter E. "Plautus' Casina: An Explication." Arethusa 6 (1973): 233-56.
- Gardner, Jane F. Women in Roman Law & Society. London: Croom Helm, 1986.
- Henderson, M. M. "The Comedy of Plautus." Akroterion 20 (1975): 2-13.
- Konstan, David. "Plot and Theme in Plautus' Asinaria." Classical Journal 73 (1978): 215-21.
- . Roman Comedy. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1983.
- Leffingwell, Georgia Williams. Social and Private Life at Rome in the Time of Plautus and Terence. Columbia University Studies in Politics, Economics and Law 81,1. New York: Columbia UP, 1918.
- Little, Alan McN. G. "Plautus and Popular Drama." Harvard Studies in Classical Philology XLIX (1938): 205-28.
- MacCary, W. T. "The Bacchae in Plautus' Casina." Hermes 103 (1975): 459-63.
- Norwood, Gilbert. Plautus and Terence. New York: Longmans, 1932.
- Pearce, T. E. V. "The Role of the Wife as custos in Ancient Rome." Eranos 72 (1974): 16-33.

- Phillips, Jane E. "Alcumena in the *Amphitruo* of Plautus: A Pregnant Lady Joke." Classical Journal 80 (1985): 121-6.
- Pomeroy, Sarah B. Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves. New York: Schocken Books, 1975.
- Rawson, Beryl. "The Roman Family." The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives. Ed. Beryl Rawson. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986. 1-57.
- Sealey, Raphael. Women and Law in Classical Greece. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina Press, 1990.
- Segal, Erich. Roman Laughter: The Comedy of Plautus. Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature 29. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1968.
- Shershow, Scott Cutler. Laughing Matters: The Paradox of Comedy. Amherst: U of Massachusetts Press, 1986.
- Slater, Niall W. Plautus in Performance: The Theatre of the Mind. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985.
- Treggiari, Susan. "Digna condicio: Betrothals in the Roman Upper Class." Echos du Monde Classique / Classical Views 3 (1984): 419-51.
- Williams, Gordon. "Some Aspects of Roman Marriage Ceremonies and Ideals." Journal of Roman Studies 48 (1958): 16-29.