

DIDASKALIA 

The Journal for Ancient Performance



*Didaskalia is an electronic journal dedicated to the study of all aspects of ancient Greek and Roman performance*

# DIDASKALIA

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## About Didaskalia

Didaskalia (διδασκαλία) is the term used since ancient times to describe the work a playwright did to teach his chorus and actors the play. The official records of the dramatic festivals in Athens were the διδασκαλία. *Didaskalia* now furthers the scholarship of the ancient performance.

*Didaskalia* is an English-language, online publication about the performance of Greek and Roman drama, dance, and music. We publish peer-reviewed scholarship on performance and reviews of the professional activity of artists and scholars who work on ancient drama.

We welcome submissions on any aspect of the field. If you would like your work to be reviewed, please write to [editor@didaskalia.net](mailto:editor@didaskalia.net) at least three weeks in advance of the performance date. We also seek interviews with practitioners and opinion pieces. For submission guidelines, go to [didaskalia.net](http://didaskalia.net).

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|                   |   |   |
|-------------------|---|---|
| Editor-in-Chief:  | Amy R. Cohen                                    | <a href="mailto:editor@didaskalia.net">editor@didaskalia.net</a><br>+1 434 947-8117       |
|                   |   | <i>Didaskalia</i><br>Randolph College<br>2500 Rivermont Avenue<br>Lynchburg, VA 24503 USA |
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**Note**

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## Dictating Parody in Plautus' *Rudens*

Seth Jeppesen

Brigham Young University

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### Introduction: A Conceptual Tug-of-War

One of the most memorable scenes of Plautus' *Rudens* features a tug-of-war between two slaves, both of whom claim possession of a trunk that has washed up after a storm.<sup>1</sup> It is this scene, rife with the potential for broad physical comedy, that gave the play its name, *The Rope*. In addition to the humor that this scene adds to an already-lively play, the onstage tug-of-war also provides an apt metaphor for the way in which *Rudens* subtly engages with the religious controversy surrounding the proper worship of Venus during the mid-180s BCE.<sup>2</sup> The proposed construction of a second temple to Venus Erycina by Licinus in 184, this time preserving the exotic and erotic elements of the original cult on Sicily, created friction with the previously established Roman worship of Venus as a chaste and maternal protector figure.<sup>3</sup> A conceptual tug-of-war is waged throughout *Rudens* concerning the female protagonists, Palaestra and Ampelisca, and whether they are to be seen as adherents of the traditional cults of Venus at Rome or of the new daughter cult of Venus Erycina, which maintained the original Sicilian cult's connection to prostitution.<sup>4</sup> This conflict is reflected in the ambiguous and liminal status of Palaestra as a *pseudohetaera* who appears to invite the sexual attention of the male characters but whose actual identity as a lost and soon-to-be-recognized citizen daughter militates against such a stereotyped categorization.

A crucial moment in this underlying conflict comes near the end of the play in a scene of ritual dictation in which the slave Gripus and the pimp Labrax parody the prayers in Roman religious ceremonies. The parodic oath in this scene, sworn to Venus, links the play not only with its immediate performance context as part of a religious festival but also to the ongoing controversy at Rome surrounding the worship of Venus. Within the play, this scene and the resultant defeat of the pimp Labrax seem to tip the scale in favor of the traditional worship of Venus at Rome, until Daemones redeems Labrax by inviting him to the wedding feast, thus balancing the debate and leaving to the audience the question of how best to worship Venus. The scene of prayer between Gripus and Labrax parodies religious dictations that would have taken place at the festival at which the play was performed, thus illustrating a connection between the content of Roman comedy and the religious festivals at which these plays were presented. An analysis of this parodic dictation scene, its function within the play, and its connection to religious debates outside the play demonstrates the value of searching for links between the content of Roman comedy and its performance context.

In the following essay, I will begin with a theoretical discussion of how embodied and enacted parody can link a performance to its immediate cultural milieu. I will then contextualize the dictation scene in question by briefly examining how the worship of Venus relates to the religious material throughout *Rudens*. Finally I will analyze the scene itself, comparing it with other examples of religious dictation in Roman culture, both comic and cultic.

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### Connecting Content to Context: The Role of Parody

Making connections between the content and the context of Plautine drama has proven to be particularly difficult because of the lack of detailed information on the dates and venues at which each play was performed. Of the twenty-one extant plays, only two include production notes: *Pseudolus* was performed in 191 BCE during the *ludi Megalenses* at the dedication of the Temple of Magna Mater on the Palatine, and *Stichus* was produced in 200 BCE at the *ludi Plebeii*, though the location of this performance within

the city is unknown.<sup>5</sup> This lack of information about the original productions of most of Plautus' comedies has in large part prevented scholars from applying what is known about the possible occasions and sites of dramatic performance in Rome to the interpretation of these plays.<sup>6</sup> As a result, scholars tend to imagine Plautine comedy staged in some nondescript urban setting, in a theater cut free from its temporal and topographical connections. This notion runs contrary to one of the basic tenets of performance criticism, namely, that performances are embodied enactments of texts, restricted by time and space.<sup>7</sup>

One way of overcoming this problem for Plautus is to focus on the religious parodies in his texts. Linda Hutcheon defines parody as "repetition with critical distance," a definition that is desirable for both its openness and its adaptability.<sup>8</sup> Much of the theoretical work done on parody during the last century has focused on parody as a process through which one text imitates and comments on another.<sup>9</sup> This approach, however, provides an incomplete understanding of parody in a dramatic context because the audience of a play experiences it as a performance and not as a text.<sup>10</sup> The script is only one aspect of a theatrical performance; the confluence of actors and audience at a defined time and in a defined place is also necessary for a performance to occur. Performed parody is thus limited by the factors of time, place, and physical embodiment in a way that is not true of textual parody. Taking into account these additional factors based on performance, one can modify Hutcheon's definition of parody, which, for the purposes of this article, can now read: *performed* parody is *embodied* and *enacted* repetition with critical difference. In this revised definition of parody as performance, not only would the content of a model be repeated, but also the time and place of the parodic performance would ideally be proximate to the time and place of the model performance.

Proximity between the model and the parody is exactly what one finds in the religious context of Roman theatrical performance. It is well known that theatrical performance at Rome was linked to various religious festivals and other occasions of religious importance, such as elite funerals and triumphal ceremonies, all of which would have featured, in the normal course of events, the general models on which Plautus based his religious parodies.<sup>11</sup> In a broad sense, then, religious parodies in Plautus provide a link between the comic content and the religious context of the plays, though one still comes up against the difficulty of not knowing the specific festivals or venues at which most of the plays were performed. In spite of this challenge, we do have a definite list of possibilities for both occasion and location.<sup>12</sup> Using a bit of speculation about where and when the parodies in a given play might be the most effective, one can postulate that a performance would have been most compelling during a certain year or at a certain festival and venue.<sup>13</sup> This approach is not as tenuous as it initially sounds, because evidence suggests that repeat performances of the plays were common, even during a playwright's lifetime, and that the plays were written to be flexible regarding the venues at which they could be performed.<sup>14</sup> Each of the plays in the Plautine corpus could have been performed at a variety of locations and occasions throughout its Roman afterlife.<sup>15</sup> Emphasis on premiere performances should not eclipse the potential efficacy of a subsequent performance of a play.<sup>16</sup>

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### Plautus' *Rudens* and the worship of Venus

Scholarly consensus places the premiere of Plautus' *Rudens* sometime in the mid-180s BCE. Whether this dating is accurate or not, one can safely assume, given the accepted date of Plautus' death in 184, that the play was at least in existence at this time, and, even if it had been written earlier, there easily could have been subsequent performances of the play during this decade. The 180s BCE was a turbulent time for Roman religion, with the burning of the books of Numa and the notorious crackdown on the cult of Bacchus.<sup>17</sup> This decade also saw L. Porcius Licinus' vow to build a new temple to Venus Erycina outside the Colline gate in 184 and the dedication of the same temple in 181.<sup>18</sup> This new cult is of particular note, since a cult and temple of Venus Erycina had already existed at Rome since 215 BCE, when the cult was imported by Q. Fabius Maximus in order to expiate the defeat at Lake Trasimene.<sup>19</sup> Some of the more

exotic features of the original Sicilian version of the cult, such as a connection to prostitution and rites involving sacred doves, were suppressed when the cult was initially adopted in 215.<sup>20</sup> The version of the 180s was referred to by Strabo (6.272) as an ἀφίδρυμα, or “daughter cult,” which means that it closely replicated the rites of the original cult upon which it was based, including the association with prostitution.<sup>21</sup> Though the sources are somewhat sparse on this point, both Galinsky and Amatucci argue that, given the pre-existence of a cult of Venus Erycina at Rome, there would have been considerable public discussion and debate concerning the adoption of a new version of the cult preceding Licinus’ vow of 184.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, Amatucci directly connects this interest in the cult to the characterization of Palaestra and Ampelisca in *Rudens*, arguing that the two female characters represent divergent approaches to the worship of Venus.<sup>23</sup> Whether or not this was the context in which *Rudens* was initially written and performed, a performance of the play during the mid-180s would definitely have lent itself to a debate about the proper way to worship Venus.

The plot of *Rudens* centers around the rescue, recognition, and marriage of a young Athenian girl named Palaestra, who, along with her fellow-slave Ampelisca, has become the prisoner of the devious pimp Labrax. Although he has accepted a down payment from an Athenian youth named Plesidippus, Labrax devises, along with his friend Charmides, to steal the money and whisk the girls off to Sicily under the cover of night. Arcturus causes a storm to arise and destroy Labrax’s ship. The various parties wash ashore near the country villa of Daemones, in the coastal outskirts of Cyrene, which borders on the shrine of Venus. The girls enter the shrine as suppliants, and when Labrax finds out where they are hiding, he commits sacrilege by trying to drive them out of the shrine.<sup>24</sup> Daemones comes to the girls’ rescue and protects them from Labrax’ depredations. In the meantime one of Daemones’ slaves, Gripus, fishes up from amidst the wreckage a trunk which, unbeknownst to him, contains tokens that will reveal Palaestra’s true identity. Plesidippus’ slave Trachalio recognizes the pimp’s luggage and manages to have it taken to Daemones. When the tokens are revealed, Palaestra is proven to be Daemones’ long-lost daughter and a marriage is arranged between Palaestra and Plesidippus. In the end the slaves are freed, wealth and status are restored, and the scheming pimp Labrax is even invited by Daemones to attend the marriage feast.

The worship of Venus is quite prominent in *Rudens*, since a shrine and altar to the goddess are depicted onstage, thus allowing the audience to evaluate the attitudes of the various characters toward the goddess, and in turn toward religious observance in general, by their behavior at the shrine. The foregrounding of religious themes begins with a divine prologue delivered by the star Arcturus, who outlines a religious system in which rewards and punishments are meted out by the gods according to the morality of mortal actions, a surprising contrast to the traditional *do ut des* view of Roman religious practice.<sup>25</sup> This system is then immediately put into action as Arcturus explains how he punished Labrax for committing perjury by whipping up a storm in order to destroy his ship and return him to the shrine of Venus for a reckoning.

The question of proper worship of the gods, and especially of Venus, is continued throughout the play in the form of juxtaposed prayers to Venus, all of which build up to Labrax’s onstage perjury of his oath to the goddess in the scene of dictation at the climax of the drama.<sup>26</sup> In the sequence of prayers that are uttered in the play, sincere prayers delivered by Palaestra are followed up by parodic imitations spoken by other characters. Palaestra’s initial lament and prayer to Venus (185–219, 257–8) are parodied by the chorus of fishermen, who coopt her language for their own ribald performance, which they cap with a prayer to Venus (290–305).<sup>27</sup> Later, Palaestra’s prayer as she takes refuge at the altar of Venus (694–701) is immediately parodied by Trachalio in his own prayer to the goddess (702–5), in which he labels Palaestra’s behavior as typical of female emotional extravagance and even refers to the girls using the term *concha*, slang for female genitalia.<sup>28</sup>



The parodies within the play, in the form of the juxtaposed prayers, mirror the way in which the religious material throughout *Rudens* parodies Roman prayer language and religious practices external to the play. In these prayers, Palaestra fashions herself and Ampelisca as adherents of the older, matronal cults of Venus, as evinced by the similarity of her diction to standard Roman prayer language. The priestess Ptolemaia's response to Palaestra's first prayer also emphasizes a connection with the older cults of Venus at Rome when the priestess assures Palaestra that the goddess will give her the aid she requests because she is a "*bonam atque obsequentem deam*" (a benevolent and obedient goddess), 261. This line is certainly a reference to the oldest cult of Venus at Rome, the cult of Venus Obsequens, who, as her epithet indicates, was meant to maintain female sexuality under traditional patriarchal control for the purpose of propagating citizen offspring.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, the language of the fishermen and Trachalio in their respective prayers is further removed from standard Roman prayer formulae, when compared with the language of Palaestra. Additionally, Trachalio's prayer to Venus depicts the women as adherents of the Sicilian cult of Venus Erycina, connected to prostitution, by his use of the word *concha*, as noted above.<sup>30</sup> By labeling the women with this term, he reduces their identity to an image of their sexual function vis-à-vis the male characters in the play.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to these juxtaposed prayers, there are other scenes in which the male characters in the play treat Palaestra and Ampelisca as sex workers, thus pulling them into the world of the Sicilian cult of Venus, in spite of their self-presentation to the contrary. When Ampelisca is seeking water to prepare a bath for the girls at Venus' shrine, the unruly slave Sceparnio accosts her and makes her promise future sexual favors in return for a pitcher of water (414–39), a promise on which Ampelisca manages to avoid making good.<sup>32</sup> Even Daemones, who will prove to be Palaestra's long-lost father, laments that, with his wife watching, he is unable to make any advances toward the young girls whom he has accepted into his care (892–6).<sup>33</sup> This impulse of the male characters is also evinced in the back story of the plot, as seen in Arcturus' description of how Labrax attempted to whisk the girls away into a life of prostitution. Given the conflict at Rome concerning the worship of Venus in the 180s, it is significant that Labrax's ultimate destination was the island of Sicily, home of the Erycinian cult of Venus. Thus the juxtaposed prayers constitute just one element of the struggle over the identity of Palaestra and Ampelisca. The prayers in the play parody ceremonies that were part of the immediate performance context of the various religious festivals at Rome, while on a deeper level, the tug-of-war over how to view Palaestra and Ampelisca mirrored the debate in Rome during the mid-180s over how best to worship Venus.

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### ***Rudens* 1333–56: A Parodic Dictation Scene and its Models**

It is in the context of this internal and external struggle in *Rudens* regarding the worship of Venus that we come upon the scene of dictation between Gripus and Labrax. This scene provides the clearest connection of the comic content of the play to its general religious context, because the practice of religious dictation portrayed therein matches accounts of the *ludi saeculares* that appear in inscriptions. It is not my argument that this play was performed specifically at the *ludi saeculares*, since these games are rare and none took place during Plautus' active career, but rather that the dictated prayers described in the inscriptions would have been similar in form and procedure, if not in content, to prayers performed at the *ludi* at which *Rudens* was performed.

In the scene in question, Daemones' slave Gripus is lamenting that his master did not allow him to keep the money in Labrax's trunk, which Gripus had found at sea and which contained the tokens that revealed Palaestra's true identity. After Labrax overhears him and identifies himself as the owner, the two haggle over Gripus' finder's fee, finally settling on one talent, with which Gripus hopes to buy his freedom. Gripus then requires Labrax to swear an oath to Venus that he will make good on his promise, and, to ensure that the oath is correct, he dictates the words to Labrax, who evidently does a poor job at repeating them correctly. The text of the scene is as follows:

**GRIP:** per Venerem hanc iurandum est tibi. **LAB:** quid iurem? **GRIP:** quod iubebo.

**LAB:** praei verbis quiduis. id quod domi est, numquam ulli supplicabo

**GRIP:** Tene aram hanc. **LAB:** Teneo. **GRIP:** Deiera te mi argentum daturum

eodem die, tui uiduli ubi sis potitus. **LAB:** Fiat.

**GRIP:** Venus Cyrenensis, testem te testor mihi,

si uidulum illum, quem ego in nauis perdididi,

cum auro atque argento saluom inuestigauero

isque in potestatem meam peruenerit,

tum ego huic Gripo, inquito et me tangito —

**LAB:** Tum ego huic Gripo (dico, Venus, ut tu audias)

talentum argenti magnum continuo dabo.

**GRIP:** Si fraudassis, dic ut te in quaestu tuo

Venus eradicet, caput atque aetatem tuam.

tecum hoc habeto tamen, ubi iuraueris.

**LAB:** Illaec aduersum si quid peccasso, Venus,

ueneror te ut omnes miseri lenones sient.

**GRIP:** You have to swear an oath to Venus here. **LAB:** What should I swear? **GRIP:** What I tell you to.

**LAB:** Dictate whatever you want. (aside) I've got a whole stockpile of empty words at home.

**GRIP:** Touch this altar. **LAB:** I'm touching it. **GRIP:** Say that you will give the silver to me

on the same day that you get the trunk. **LAB:** May it be so

**GRIP:** Cyrenian Venus, I call you as a witness for me,

if that trunk that I lost on the ship,

if I shall find it safe with its gold and silver intact

and if it should come into my possession,

then I to this Gripus – speak up and touch me!

**LAB:** Then I to this Gripus – I say it so you, Venus, can hear me –

will immediately give a big talent of silver.



**GRIP:** If you should lie, say that Venus will destroy you,  
your business, your person, and your life.

(aside) I hope you get that anyway after you've made your oath.

**LAB:** If I commit some wrong against these things, Venus,  
I pray to you that all pimps might be miserable.

– Rudens, 1334–49

Although the lines of dictation are attributed to Gripus alone, it is clear that in performance Labrax would repeat them. Before the prayer even begins, Labrax uses the phrase *praeire uerbis*, which is the technical term for dictation in Latin and here serves as an embedded stage direction for how the scene should be played.<sup>34</sup> Gripus uses the first person to speak of the loss of the trunk, which makes it clear that he intends for Labrax to repeat the words. Furthermore, Gripus commands Labrax to speak, using the imperatives *deiera* and *inquito*, which are additional embedded stage directions for Labrax. Also, there is a change in meter during the lines of dictation, 1338–56, from iambic septenarii to iambic senarii, indicating that the *tibicen* would have stopped playing music during these lines, as is common for scenes of dictation and reading in Plautus.<sup>35</sup> The music picks up again for the finale of the play, which follows immediately after this scene. Of course, understanding this as a scene of dictation involves a rather fluid concept of what the dramatic texts of Plautus represent. Marshall explains quite well how Plautine scripts often provide outlines for what he terms “elastic scenes” that could be expanded or contracted through improvisation based on the dynamics and needs of the specific performance in question, much like *lazzi* in commedia dell’arte.<sup>36</sup> If we approach this scene from *Rudens* with this frame of mind, there is no problem in labeling it a scene of dictation, even though Labrax’s repetition is not written out in the script. In fact, this kind of flexibility between script and performance would allow for much improvisation in the things Gripus might require Labrax to say and do in the dictation and the ways in which Labrax might modify and disobey Gripus’ orders, thus producing a dynamic scene bursting with comic potential.

This is not the only scene in Plautine comedy in which a dictated oath is acted out onstage. There is a similar moment at the end of *Miles Gloriosus* in which the old man Periplectomenus and his slaves make the soldier Pyrgopolynices believe he has been caught trying to commit adultery with his neighbor’s wife. The cook Cario brandishes a knife (1397) and threatens to castrate the soldier for his crime. When Pyrgopolynices swears by Hercules that he thought she was a widow, Periplectomenus dictates the following oath to him:

**PER:** iura te non nociturum esse homini de hac re nemini, quod tu hodie hic verberatu’s aut quod verberabere, si te salvom hinc amitemus Venerium nepotulum.

**Pyr.** iuro per lovem et Mavortem me nociturum nemini quod ego hic hodie vapularim, iureque id factum arbiter; et si intestatus non abeo hinc, bene agitur pro noxia.

**PER:** quid si non faxis? **PYR:** ut vivam semper intestabilis.

**PER:** Swear that you won’t harm anyone on account of this business, because today you were beaten here or will be beaten, if we send you away intact, Venus’ darling grandson.

**PYR:** I swear by Jupiter and Mavors that I will harm no one because I got a beating here today, and I think that I do this rightly. And if I don’t get out of here intestate, then things have gone well in exchange for my crime.

**PER:** And what if you don't do this? **PYR:** Then may I always live detestable.

–Miles Gloriosus, 1411–18

In this scene, the soldier's response is actually written out, and not left for improvisation as in *Rudens*, and thus it provides good evidence for the type of embellishments Labrax could have added in his own scene. Here, Pyrgopolynices follows his captor's language closely, but he deviates in order to specify the deities by which the oath is sworn and to add a joke that puns on the double meaning of *testis* in Latin as both witness and testicle. A Roman in the soldier's compromising situation would hope to retain the right to call a witness, as the primary meanings of *intestatus* and *intestabilis* both indicate, but, given Cario's prior threat of castration (1398–9), the additional comic meaning in these lines—that the soldier may be forced to live without his *testes*—is also clear. Another scene of dictation is to be found at *Bacchides* 729–53, but in this scene it is a letter that is being dictated, not an oath. Nevertheless, the meter in this scene changes from accompanied to spoken verse as in the scene from *Rudens*.

Plautus is not unique among comic playwrights in his humorous use of dictation. In fact, dictation scenes such as this are common in comedy, both ancient and modern, and they play well because they allow one actor to parody another while at the same time parodying a recognizable cultural practice.<sup>37</sup> Aristophanes, for example, uses mock religious dictation to great effect in *Lysistrata* (210–237) when the title character dictates the oath of sexual abstinence to her followers, represented by Kalonike, who then repeats the words on behalf of the crowd.<sup>38</sup> This scene is different from the one in *Rudens* in that the repeated lines are actually written out in the text, along with the occasional humorous comment thrown in by Kalonike (e.g., line 216). Like the Plautine example, this scene gains much of its effect by parodying the format of solemn religious oaths, with detailed prohibitions outlined, gods called as witnesses, and a curse pronounced on the participants should they fail to keep their end of the oath.<sup>39</sup>

In the context of the other prayers in *Rudens*, the scene between Gripus and Labrax follows the pattern previously established in the play of a relatively cultic prayer followed by a parodic one, except that in this instance both prayers are delivered nearly simultaneously, as Labrax repeats Gripus' words, likely with humorous variations, in a fashion similar to the scene from *Miles Gloriosus*. The parody in *Rudens* 1334–49 functions on two levels: textual and performative. First, on the textual level, the words that the characters use closely imitate the standard formulae for oaths in Roman religion. On the performative level, the tableau created by the characters reciting an oath in front of the altar of Venus mirrors the standard practice of religious dictation outlined by Pliny and evinced throughout Livy and in the inscriptions describing the celebration of the *Ludi Saeculares*.

On the textual level, the *Rudens* prayer itself is composed of many of the standard elements expected in a cultic Roman prayer. Gripus first invokes the goddess, using a geographical epithet so as to be specific. He then uses the phrase “*testem te testor*,” which both fits a commonly used formula for oath taking and provides nice alliteration—a hallmark of both Plautine and ritual language.<sup>40</sup> He then proceeds with a carefully laid-out conditional phrase that states the provisions of the oath, an element that is borrowed from the language of vows.<sup>41</sup> He ends the prayer, as is normal in oaths, by urging Labrax to pronounce a curse upon himself if he does not fulfill his sworn promise.<sup>42</sup>

The language and form of this oath initially seem cultic enough, but upon closer examination humorous aspects of the context and delivery of these lines mark them as parody.<sup>43</sup> At various points during the scene, both Labrax and Gripus break from the formal, pseudo-ritual language to give snarky asides, as when Labrax says that he is speaking for Venus to hear and not Gripus (1343). Halfway through the dictation (1342), Gripus commands Labrax to speak up (*inquito*), suggesting that Labrax may have been mumbling through his lines or offering a comic variation of Gripus' words. Additionally, there is the same potential wordplay in this passage as was seen in the passage from *Miles Gloriosus* with jokes based

on the homonymic relationship between Latin *testis* (witness) and *testis* (testicle). Joshua Katz argues, on mostly linguistic grounds, for a connection between oath-taking in the Greco-Roman world and the touching of one's testicles. The possibility of such a connection does provide comic fodder for a humorous rendition of this scene from *Rudens*, especially in connection to Gripus' command that Labrax touch him in order to specify the recipient of the money in question (1342).<sup>4</sup> Whether or not Katz' argument is correct, Gripus' command to the pimp to touch him while swearing the oath (*me tangito*, 1342) definitely opens the door for humorous stage business that would have undercut any perceived sincerity in the mock-religious performance.

When Gripus directs Labrax to pronounce a curse on himself should he default on his end of the promise, Gripus models a specific and straightforward curse. Labrax, on the other hand, responds with the ridiculously general phrase, "may all pimps be wretched" (*ut omnes miseri lenones sient*), 1349. As in the oath from *Miles Gloriosus*, Labrax ends his parodic version of Gripus' prayer with a joke that in this case is metatheatrical, since pimps are always wretched in comedy, losing money, forfeiting possessions, and receiving physical abuse. As in the previous sets of prayers in *Rudens*, Labrax's version of the prayer would have been a parody of Gripus' version

In addition to parody based on the textual similarities between the dictation scene in *Rudens* and cultic Roman prayers, there is also parody in this scene based on the visual aspect of the performance. Since it was common in Roman cult to dictate prayers performed in public, and since the *palliata* were performed only on religious occasions that featured such public prayers, the parodic dictation in *Rudens* would have found a ready model of a performed religious dictation at whatever festival at which it happened to be produced. Pliny (HN 28.11) provides a description of how such dictations were regularly performed, explaining that in important public ceremonies, priests commonly dictated to magistrates the words that they should say so as not to get anything wrong, as in the procedure used for the U.S. Presidential Oath of Office:<sup>5</sup>

videmusque certis precationibus obsecrasse summos magistratus et, ne quod verborum praetereatur aut praeposterum dicatur, de scripto praeire aliquem rursusque alium custodem dari qui adtendat, alium vero praeponi qui favere linguis iubeat, tibicinem canere, ne quid aliud exaudiatur.

We see that the highest magistrates pray using exact prayers, and, so that one word is not omitted or spoken out of order, one person dictates from a written source, while another is given as a guard to listen carefully and another is provided to bid people to keep quiet. The piper (tibicen) plays, so that nothing else is heard.

– Pliny, *Historia Naturalis* 28.11

Although Pliny is much later than Plautus, he claims that public prayers had been dictated in this fashion at Rome for some 830 years (HN 28.12).<sup>6</sup> If evidence from Livy can be trusted on this account, then Pliny's boast is not too far off. There are nine different passages in Livy that deal specifically with dictation in a variety of rituals, ranging in date from 436 BCE to 172 BCE. These specific passages are chosen because of

their use of the technical *praeire verbis*. Taken together, they show that dictation was used for an array of religious purposes and that the standard format was for a religious official, such as the Pontifex Maximus, to dictate the words of a prayer to a magistrate or someone in a special position of authority. A breakdown of these passages can be found in Table 1.

**Table 1 - Passages in Livy Involving Ritual Dictation (based on the use of the phrase *praeire verbis, vel sim.*)**

| Passage  | Year      | Person Dictating                | Person Dictated to        | Notes   |
|----------|-----------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|---|
| 4.21.5   | 436-5 BCE | duumvir                         | populus Romanus           | <i>obsecratio</i> dictated to people to avert plague and invasion                                 |
| 8.9.4    | 340 BCE   | M. Valerius (Pontifex)          | Decius                    | Decius performs a <i>devotio</i> and sacrifices himself on behalf of his army                     |
| 9.46.6   | 304 BCE   | Cornelius Barbatus (Pont. Max.) | Gnaeus Flavius (Aedile)   | Dedication of Temple of Concord in the Volcanal   |
| 10.28.14 | 295 BCE   | Pont. Max.                      | Publius Decius            | Pub. Decius, son of Decius performs a <i>devotio</i> and sacrifices himself on behalf of his army |
| 31.9.9   | 200 BCE   | Licinius (Pont. Max.)           | Consul                    | Games vowed in return for a successful outcome in Macedonian war. cf 34.44.6                      |
| 36.2.3   | 191 BCE   | P. Licinius (Pont. Max.)        | Manlius Acilius (Consul)  | <i>Ludi magni</i> vowed to Jupiter, words of the prayer listed.                                   |
| 39.18.3  | 186 BCE   | sacerdos in the Bacchic cult    | initiates of Bacchic Cult | members of the Bacchic cult who swore a dictated oath but did not commit any crimes were released |
| 41.21.11 | 174 BCE   | Q. Marcius Philippus (Pontifex) | Populus Romanus           | a <i>supplicatio</i> dictated to the people during a severe plague, <i>feriae</i> vowed           |
| 42.28.9  | 172 BCE   | Lepidus (Pont. Max.)            | C. Popilius (Consul)      | Games vowed if republic should be safe for ten years cf. 31.5.4                                   |

Fortunately, one need not rely only on later literary evidence from Pliny and Livy to establish the antiquity of the practice of religious dictation. The Iguvine Tablets, which date to sometime between the third and first centuries BCE, give a clear example of religious dictation in an augural ceremony, the content of which Plautus parodies at *Asinaria* 259–61.<sup>47</sup> The ritual described in the Iguvine Tablets involves an augur who dictates to an attendant the list of birds that should be observed during the ritual and the location at which they ought to appear.<sup>48</sup> Plautus borrows language from this ritual in *Asinaria* when Libanus runs through virtually the same list of birds, but in a comic context. Though dictation is not directly involved in Libanus' parody, these lines indicate that Plautus was familiar with the Umbrian ceremony of taking the auspices, with its concomitant reliance on dictation:

impetritum, inauguratumst: quouis admittunt aues,  
picus et cornix ab laeua, coruos, parra ab dextera

consuadent; certum herclest uostram consequi sententiam.

Then it is decided, confirmed by augury. The birds everywhere say so: the woodpecker and crow on the left, the raven and jay on the right advise it [to the birds] by Hercules I'll be sure to follow your advice!

– *Asinaria* 259–61

Poultney dates the tablet in question to the mid-first century BCE, on the basis of the use of the Latin instead of the Etruscan alphabet and references to various sums of money that only make sense after the devaluation of the Roman *as* following the Social War.<sup>49</sup> He does, however, note that this ritual, described in detail in Tablet VIa, is the same ceremony described more perfunctorily in Tablet I, which dates to the mid-third century BCE, when Plautus would presumably have been spending his youth in Umbria. Regardless of the date of the tablet itself, Plautus' reference to the ritual in *Asinaria* proves that he was familiar with it, whether he encountered it as a native of Umbria or whether he witnessed a Romanized version of the same ritual after migrating to the city.<sup>50</sup>

The scene from *Rudens* presents a comic uncrowning of the type of ritualized dictation described in Pliny, Livy, and the Iguvine Tablets. Instead of a priest dictating words to a magistrate in solemn ceremony on behalf of the state, there is a slave dictating an oath to a pimp regarding the acquisition of money from a waterlogged trunk.<sup>51</sup> After he has reclaimed possession of the trunk and subsequently refused to pay Gripus the agreed-upon sum, Labrax draws attention to the parodic discrepancy in this scene by jokingly responding to Gripus' complaints with the line "*tun meo pontifex peiurio es?*" (What, are you the priest to my perjury?), 1377. Thus, in case the point were lost on the audience, Plautus emphasizes the fact that, in this dictation, Labrax is no magistrate and Gripus is no priest.

It is, however, quite unlikely that the audience would have failed to pick up on this parody. Although the main players in such official religious dictations were usually priests and magistrates, it was also common for at least some portion of the Roman populace to be involved, either as spectators or as participants. For example, when announcements were made advertising upcoming public debates (*contiones*), it was customary for an augur to dictate a prayer to the consul in the presence of a representative portion of the Roman populace as part of the proclamation.<sup>52</sup> Another, less-frequent example, but one that involves the people more directly, was the practice of dictating the words for vows or propitiatory offerings to a representative portion of the plebs gathered in the forum on extreme occasions of war or plague (Livy 4.21.5; 41.21.11).<sup>53</sup> One such instance is recorded by Livy as having taken place in 174 BCE, thus placing the practice in the same general time period as Plautus' career, though this particular instance occurred after his death. This evidence suggests that common members of Plautus' audience, not just magistrates, might at some point have had the opportunity not only to witness but also to participate in a genuine ritual of dictation, playing the part that Labrax parodies in *Rudens*.

Furthermore, there is evidence suggesting that religious dictation was an important part of the festivals at which Roman comedy was presented. This means that the audience of *Rudens* could have witnessed an actual ceremony of dictation at some other point during the *ludi* at which the play was produced, an occasion that would have provided a temporally and spatially proximate model on which to base this parodic dictation scene. The evidence comes from an inscription describing the celebration of the *ludi saeculares* of 17 BCE and 204 CE, in which both the textual and the performative aspects of the ritual are expressed. Though these records are much later than Plautus, these games were said to have been based

on earlier iterations that went back at least to 249 BCE.<sup>54</sup> For the games of 17 BCE, the text of the inscription reads:

Deinde CX matribus familias nuptis, quibus denu[n]tatum erat...M. Agrippa] praeit in haec verba. Iuno regina, ast quid est qu[o]d meli[us] siet p. R. Quiritibus...matres familiae] nuptae genibus nixae te u[ti]...maiestatem p. R. Quiritum duelli domique auxis, utique semper Latinum nomen tueare, incolumitatem] sempiternam victoriam [valetudinem populo Romano Quiritibus tribuas faveasque populo Romano Quiritibus legionibusque p. R.] Quiritium remque publi[cam] p. R. Quiritium salvam serves, uti sies volens propitia populo Romano] Quiritibus, XVvir s. f. no[bis]...Haec matres familias CX populi Romani]Quiritium nuptae geni[bus] nixae quaesumus precamurque].

Then [?Marcus Agrippa] dictated to the one hundred and ten married women, mistresses of households, who had been commanded [to assemble on the Capitoline,] the formula of the prayer as follows: “Juno Regina. If there is any better fortune [that may attend the Roman people, the Quirites, we one hundred and ten mistresses of households of the Roman people, the Quirites,] married women on bended knee, [pray] that you [bring it about, we beg and beseech that you increase the power] and majesty of the Roman people, the Quirites [in war and peace; and that the Latins may always be obedient; and that you may grant] eternal [safety], victory [and health to the Roman people, the Quirites, and that you may protect the Roman people, the Quirites, and the legions of the Roman people], the Quirites; and [that you may keep safe and make greater] the state [of the Roman people, the Quirites; and that you may be favorable and propitious to the Roman people,] the Quirites, to the quindecimviri sacris faciundis, to us, [to our houses, to our households. These are the things that we one hundred and ten mistresses of households of the Roman people, the Quirites], married women on bended knee, [pray, beg and beseech.]”<sup>55</sup>

Despite the lacunose nature of the text, the most important parts for the present study are still clearly legible. The officiator dictated the words of the prayer to the group of matrons just as Gripius dictated the prayer to Labrax (*praeit in haec verba*; cf. *Rudens* 1335: *praei verbis quiduis*). The overly officious language, full of repetitions and clarifications, is similar to the humorous clarification in Gripius’ prayer when he



instructs Labrax to speak up and touch him (*inquito et me tangito*, 1342). The presence of an altar for the prayer of the matrons is also made clear a few lines earlier (ILS 5050.119), where it is explained that the prayers to Juno were preceded by a sacrifice to her performed on the Capitoline. Gripus, in his scene, instructs Labrax to hold the altar (*tene aram hanc*, 1336). The language of the prayer from the *ludi saeculares* does not mirror the language of the dictation scene in *Rudens* as closely as it could, because, although dictation is present in both prayers, the two texts ultimately represent two different classes of prayer: an oath (*Rudens*) and a petitionary prayer (*ludi saeculares*).<sup>56</sup> The language in the inscription is, however, similar to the language that Palaestra uses earlier in the play when she prays to Venus at her altar (694–701).<sup>57</sup> The image that Palaestra and Ampelisca presented at the altar would also have been similar to the attitude of the women in this ritual, as both are described as being on bended knee (*genibus nixae*), which was not the standard posture for prayer in Roman religion.<sup>58</sup>

There were no known performances of the *ludi saeculares* during Plautus' active career (the two closest occurrences were in 249 and 146 BCE), but this should not pose an insurmountable obstacle to accepting these inscriptions as evidence in the present discussion. In Livy's account of the first performance of the *ludi Apollinares*, he mentions that a group of matrons offered a solemn prayer as part of the ceremonies (*matronae supplicaverunt*, 25.12.15), a statement that could be shorthand for the type of ritual described in the inscription of the *ludi saeculares*, especially if one accepts the etymology of the verb *supplicare* as being connected to the idea of bending one's knees.<sup>59</sup> If this were the case, then both groups of matrons, as well as Palaestra and Ampelisca within the play, would appear on their knees (*genibus nixae*). Celia Schultz, in her work on women's participation in Roman religion, notes that such female involvement in state cult was quite normal. Many rites intended to expiate prodigies involved the participation of all adult Romans, both male and female, though often the sources are not explicit about this involvement when they record the observance of such rites.<sup>60</sup> Likewise, sources are not often explicit about the use of dictation in the performance of official prayers, but fortunately the occasional use of the phrase *praeire verbis*, combined with Pliny's description of the constant reliance on this procedure in Roman cult, help us to see these aspects of Roman ceremonies that were doubtless so commonplace to the Romans themselves that they did not require comment. In the inscription of the *ludi saeculares*, dictation is mentioned only for the prayer of the matrons out of the eight prayers described, possibly because they were the only celebrants who were not magistrates, not because this was the only prayer at the ceremony that featured dictation.

By comparing the mock dictation ritual from *Rudens* with evidence from Pliny, Livy, the Iguvine Tablets and the inscriptions detailing the *ludi saeculares*, it becomes apparent that this comic scene is a parody, a repetition with critical distance, not only of the language used in official Roman cult, but also of the embodied performance of various rituals of dictation, some of which would have been performed at the same festival as the play. The inscription from the *ludi saeculares* also speaks to the temporal and spatial proximity of the religious performances to the theatrical performances at the *ludi*. The events of each day of the festival, as outlined in the inscription, begin with sacrifices and prayer, followed by the performance of plays (*ludi scaenici*) in various theaters around the city. The order of events listed for each day indicates the temporal proximity of the plays to the religious rituals – i.e., they were performed on the same day. One further portion of the inscription also hints at the spatial proximity of the theatrical and religious performances. This part reads:

iuxta eum locum, ubi sacrificium erat factum superioribus noctibus et theatrum  
positum et scaena, metae positae quadrigaeque sunt missae.



Next to the place where sacrifice had been made on the previous nights and the theater and stage had been placed, the turning posts were placed and chariots were sent forth.

– ILS 5050.153

This passage suggests that the sacrifices took place in roughly the same area where the temporary theater had been set up, which means that the audience could have watched both the religious and the theatrical performances from the same viewing area. Again, this evidence is firmly connected only to the *ludi saeculares*, but if, as is likely, the procedure indicated in the inscription was common to other *ludi*, it does suggest that for the plays of Plautus there was a strong temporal and spatial connection between the comic and religious performances at the festivals.

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### Conclusions: The Parodic Dictation Scene and the Worship of Venus at Rome

The dictation scene between Gripus and Labrax would have provided an embodied repetition of dictated prayers witnessed by the audience during the same *ludi* at which the play was performed, possibly even from the same viewing area.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, this scene is more than just a humorous reflection on Roman religious practices exterior to the play; it is also intimately connected with the play's overall question of how Venus ought to be worshipped. When Labrax violates the oath he has sworn to Gripus, he trespasses against Venus, whose priestess and altar have protected Palaestra and Ampelisca throughout the play. Labrax is punished for this transgression by forfeiting his possession of Palaestra and losing the talent he has sworn to Gripus.<sup>65</sup> In the world of the play, Venus upholds the oath sworn to her, favoring the girls' interests over those of Labrax.<sup>66</sup>

Though the defeat of the pimp seems to tip the scales in favor of the sanitized, state cult of Venus Erycina, Plautus oddly makes Daemones' treatment of Labrax the most benign treatment a pimp receives at the end of any of his plays: a surprise, since Labrax is one of the more brutal characters on the Plautine stage. Not only does Daemones return half of the talent of silver to Labrax; he also invites him to the wedding feast. This somewhat shocking ending, however, makes sense when one considers that it is Plautus' way of maintaining the balance and neutrality with which he has presented the competing attitudes toward Venus throughout the play. When the pimp is defeated and Palaestra's identity is made known, it would seem that the playwright initially favors the Capitoline version of the cult, but then Daemones returns the money to Labrax and invites him to the wedding feast, as though it were a celebration of the *dies lenonum* (day of the pimps), which is what April 24, the day following the celebration of Venus Erycina, came to be known as.<sup>67</sup> Balance between representations of the two cults within the play is restored and Plautus again refers the question to the audience, who is left to decide which version of the cult is preferable.

It may initially seem that in a polytheistic system the decision to worship one aspect of a deity as opposed to another would be a choice with little consequence, but here one must remember the religious climate of the 180s BCE in Rome. The fallout of the Bacchanalian affair proved that for those who chose to worship Bacchus according to the new fashion, such an apparently benign religious preference could have dire consequences. History has since proven that no similar blowback followed the introduction of the Sicilian version of the cult of Venus Erycina, but at the time that *Rudens* was produced, probably shortly before the cult was officially sanctioned by Licinus' vow of 184 BCE, the decision of how to worship Venus was one that could have had grave repercussions. By using parody to remain playfully aloof, Plautus can discuss issues of serious political and religious import and yet avoid aligning himself too vehemently with one side of the debate or the other.

So far, our discussion has focused on the internal function of parody within *Rudens* and how it creates humor and meaning in the play by providing a comic reflection of contemporary debates concerning innovations in the worship of Venus at Rome. Externally, these parodies engage in cultural work by subtly criticizing the practice of adopting foreign cults into the Roman religious system. When importing a new cult, Roman officials had to decide how much of the original rites would remain unchanged and how much would be removed. The two cults of Venus Erycina provide the only example in which two different responses to this question can be analyzed for the same god. For the cult of Venus Erycina of 215 BCE, the one placed on the Capitoline in the heart of the city, many of the identifying traits of the Punic goddess were excised, including the association with prostitution, while the “daughter cult” (ἀφίδρυμα) of 181 BCE based outside of the Colline Gate mirrored as much as possible the practices of the “mother cult” at Eryx in Sicily.<sup>6</sup>

The women in *Rudens* present themselves as representatives of the initial adoption of the cult in 215 BCE, and by extension the practice of sanitizing elements from foreign cults that do not fit within traditional Roman practices. The parodic echoes of the women’s prayers to the goddess throughout the play undercut the validity of their position, poking fun at what could be seen as a puritanical or self-righteous strain in Roman religious practices. In the hands of Plautus, however, the other side of the debate does not fare much better. The men in the play continually side with the new “daughter cult” of Venus Erycina and its emphasis on keeping foreign religious practices unchanged, a position best fit for exiles, foreign slaves, and pimps, as indicated by the characters who espouse this version of the cult throughout the play. By mocking both sides of the debate, Plautus avoids saying anything too serious about Roman religious practices, but instead self-consciously points out some of the humorous imperfections in the system of Roman religion and makes them the object of laughter.

In Plautus’ *Rudens*, religious parody provides a humorous depiction of a serious debate. The parodic dictation scene between Gripus and Labrax constitutes an important episode in the comic tug-of-war regarding the proper worship of Venus. In the world of comedy that exists during the festival, it is possible to make light of such matters, but, when the stage is taken down, it is up to the audience in the real world to decide what to do about the issue.

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## notes

<sup>1</sup> This essay is an expanded and revised version of a paper delivered at the Ancient Drama in Performance II conference at Randolph College, Oct. 6 2012. Unless otherwise noted, all texts are taken from the OCT and all translations are my own.

<sup>2</sup> Sedgwick and Amatucci both place *Rudens* in the 180s BCE. Sedgwick follows Buck’s dating, which relies largely on stylistic analysis of the meter, while Amatucci considers the treatment of Venus in the play to be reflective of innovations in the cult of Venus in the 180s. See W. B. Sedgwick, “Plautine Chronology,” *The American Journal of Philology* 70, no. 4 (January 1, 1949): 3793; A. G. Amatucci, “Per la Cronologia del *Rudens* di Plauto,” in *Mélanges de Philologie, de Littérature et d’Histoire Anciennes Offerts à J. Marouzeau* (Paris, 1948), 1-6; A. G. Amatucci, “L’amicizia di Palestra e il Culto di Venere nel *Rudens* di Plauto,” *Giornale Italiano di Filologia* 3 (1950): 206-10.

<sup>3</sup> G. Karl Galinsky, “Plautus’ ‘*Poenulus*’ and the Cult of Venus Erycina,” in *Hommages à Marcel Renard*, ed. Jacqueline Bibauw, vol. 101, Latomus (Brussels, 1969), 358-64; Eric Orlin, “Why a Second Temple for Venus Erycina,” ed. Carl Deroux, *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History X* (2000): 70-90.

<sup>4</sup> Eleanor Windsor Leach sees *Rudens* as a reenactment of the mythological birth of Venus, noting themes and imagery in the play that are also present in the cults of Venus Erycina and Venus Verticordia, which were new to Rome during Plautus’ day. These similarities are also noted by Amatucci and Galinsky.

Though there were festivals to Venus Erycina and Venus Verticordia at Rome, neither of these festivals involved the presentation of *ludi scaenici*, which means that *Rudens* could not have been performed at either of them. Eleanor Winsor Leach, "Plautus' *Rudens*: Venus Born from a Shell," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 15, no. 5 (January 1, 1974): 925–6; Galinsky, "Plautus' 'Poenulus' and the Cult of Venus Erycina," 360; Amatucci, "L'amicizia di Palestra e il Culto di Venere nel *Rudens* di Plauto."

<sup>5</sup> These are the only two Plautine comedies for which there are *didascaliae*, or production notes, and both notices come from the Ambrosian palimpsest (A), as indicated in Lindsay's OCT.

<sup>6</sup> Notable exceptions are Goldberg's discussion of *Pseudolus* performed in front of the Temple of *Magna Mater* and Moore's and Marshall's analyses of the choragus speech from *Curculio* as performed in the forum. See Sander M. Goldberg, "Plautus on the Palatine," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 88 (January 1, 1998): 1–20; Timothy J. Moore, "Palliata Togata: Plautus, *Curculio* 462–86," *The American Journal of Philology* 112, no. 3 (October 1, 1991): 343–62; C. W. Marshall, *The Stagecraft and Performance of Roman Comedy* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 40–43.

<sup>7</sup> Slater emphasizes that audience and actors have an equal share with the author's text in the creation of a play. Alexander explains from a social-science perspective how performances are temporally sequenced and spatially restricted events. See Niall W Slater, *Plautus in Performance: The Theatre of the Mind* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 4; Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance between Ritual and Strategy," in *Social Performance: Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual*, ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander, Bernhard Giesen, and Jason L. Mast (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 36.

<sup>8</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (University of Illinois Press, 2000), 6, 18. Simon Dentith defines parody as "any cultural practice which provides a relatively polemical allusive imitation of another cultural production or practice." Rose says that ancient parody was a device for comic quotation with a change to the original, while she describes the modern concept of parody as "the comic refunctioning of performed linguistic or artistic material." Genette maintains that parody is created when one places base content in a noble context, as opposed to travesty, which is the placing of noble content in base style. Hutcheon's is the best of these definitions because it is the most basic, though in the definitions of Rose and Dentith the core idea of repetition with difference is also to be seen. See Simon Dentith, *Parody* (London: Routledge, 2000), 9; Margaret A. Rose, *Parody: Ancient, Modern and Post-Modern* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 32, 52; Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 1–22.

<sup>9</sup> See for example the work of the Russian formalists such as Bakhtin, who see parody as the process through which new genres of literature are born: Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, 25; Rose, *Parody*, 103 ff. Margaret Rose takes a step toward including performance in her definition by stating that parody is "the comic refunctioning of performed linguistic or artistic material" (emphasis added), but the examples that she provides all come from texts, not performances. Simon Dentith's work on parody is similar in that he refers to parody as a "cultural production or practice," which leaves the door open for talking about performance, but ultimately he does not give any significant examples that are not textual. Linda Hutcheon perhaps comes the closest to including performance in her theory of parody by keeping a very broad definition and including discussions of parody in music and the visual arts, but detailed consideration of parody in theatrical performances is lacking from her analysis. Genette is the most textually based of all, as evinced in his terminology of "hypertext" and "hypotext" to refer to a parody and its model. *Ibid.*, 52; Dentith, *Parody*, 9; Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, 6–25; Genette, *Palimpsests*, 1–22.

<sup>10</sup> Performance is a key component in both Aristotle's and Quintilian's discussions of parody, as also evinced in the etymology of the word itself. In Greek *παρωδία* means a song sung (i.e., performed)

alongside another. See *Poetics* 1448a ff. and *Inst. Orat.* 9.2.35.

<sup>11</sup> Marshall, *The Stagecraft and Performance of Roman Comedy*, 16–48; Gesine Manuwald, *Roman Republican Theatre* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 41–9.

<sup>12</sup> Plautus' plays could be presented at the *ludi Romani*, *ludi plebei*, *ludi Apollinares*, or *ludi Megalenses*, all of which were annual public religious festivals. In addition to these regularly occurring festivals, plays were also performed at one-time events such as elite funerals, triumphal ceremonies, and temple dedications. Since there were no permanent theaters at the time of Plautus, plays were performed in temporary structures, ideally set in front of the temple of the deity to whom the festival or event was dedicated. Locations frequently connected with theatrical performance are the forum, Palatine hill, Circus Maximus and Campus Martius / Circus Flaminius. See Manuwald, *Roman Republican Theatre*, 41–68; Marshall, *The Stagecraft and Performance of Roman Comedy*, 17–20, 31–48.

<sup>13</sup> This is very similar to the approach used by both Flower and O'Neill to posit a performance of *Amphitruo* connected to the triumph of Fulvius Nobilior. See Peter O'Neill, "Triumph Songs, Reversal and Plautus' *Amphitruo*," *Ramus* 32, no. 1 (2003): 1–38; Harriet I. Flower, "Fabulae Praetextae in Context: When Were Plays on Contemporary Subjects Performed in Republican Rome?" *The Classical Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (January 1, 1995): 170–90.

<sup>14</sup> The best evidence for revival performances within the playwright's lifetime comes from *Bacchides* 214–15, in which the wily slave Chrysalus says, "etiam Epidicum, quam ego fabulam aequae ac me ipsum amo / nullam aequae inuitus specto, si agit Pellio (Even Epidicus, a play I love as much as myself, / I watch most unwillingly, if Pellio is playing the lead)." The line would make no sense if plays were performed only once at the debut and there was no opportunity for other actors to play the role later. For flexibility in venue, see Marshall, *The Stagecraft and Performance of Roman Comedy*, 48.

<sup>15</sup> For the importance of subsequent performances of seminal works of drama, see Jonathan Miller, *Subsequent Performances* (E. Sifton Books / Viking, 1986).

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of the political impact of revival performances during the late republic, see Cicero *Pro Sestio* 118–125 and *Philippics* 1.36. See also Cornelia C. Coulter, "Marcus Junius Brutus and the 'Brutus' of Accius," *The Classical Journal* 35, no. 8 (May 1, 1940): 460–70; Manuwald, *Roman Republican Theatre*, 113.

<sup>17</sup> Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome: Volume 2: A Sourcebook* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 260–61, 288–91.

<sup>18</sup> *Livy* 40.34.4

<sup>19</sup> *Livy* 22.9.10; 23.30.13. See also Eric Orlin, *Foreign Cults in Rome: Creating a Roman Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 74–6; Orlin, "Why a Second Temple for Venus Erycina."

<sup>20</sup> Orlin, *Foreign Cults in Rome*, 75; Robert Schilling, *La Religion Romaine de Vénus, depuis les Origines jusqu'au Temps d'Auguste*. (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1955), 248–54.

<sup>21</sup> Galinsky, "Plautus' 'Poenulus' and the Cult of Venus Erycina," 361; Orlin, "Why a Second Temple for Venus Erycina," 83. A connection to prostitution does not mean that sacred prostitution was practiced at this temple, but rather that the cult itself was associated with the trade. See Stephanie L. Budin, "Sacred Prostitution in the First Person," in *Prostitutes and Courtesans in the Ancient World*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Laura K. McClure (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 77–92; Mary Beard and John Henderson, "With This Body I Thee Worship: Sacred Prostitution in Antiquity," *Gender & History* 9, no. 3

(1997): 480–503.

<sup>22</sup> Galinsky, “Plautus’ ‘Poenulus’ and the Cult of Venus Erycina”; Amatucci, “L’amicizia di Palestra e il Culto di Venere nel Rudens di Plauto”; Amatucci, “Per la Cronologia del Rudens di Plauto.”

<sup>23</sup> Amatucci argues that Palaestra represents a celeste approach to worshipping Venus, which is in accord with the chaste cults of Venus prior to the 180s, while Ampelisca represents a terrestre approach (“Per la Cronologia del Rudens di Plauto,” 210). Leach takes this line of argument even further, arguing that Ampelisca is a foil to Palaestra and is open to the advances of the male characters of the play (“Plautus’ Rudens,” 924). I, on the other hand, argue that both Palaestra and Ampelisca try to align themselves with the chaste cults of Venus, while the male characters in the play attempt to drag them into the world of the Sicilian cult of Erycina.

<sup>24</sup> For the ritual aspects of this scene, see F. S. Naiden, *Ancient Supplication* (Oxford, 2006), 375–7.

<sup>25</sup> Niall W Slater, “The Market in Sooth: Supernatural Discourse in Plautus,” in *Dramatische Wäldchen: Festschrift für Eckard Lefèvre zum 65 Geburtstag*, vol. 80, *Spudasmata* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2000), 351; J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion* (Oxford University Press, 1979), 39 ff.; W. Jeffrey Tatum, “Religion and Personal Morality in Roman Religion,” *Syllecta Classica* 4 (1993): 13–20.

<sup>26</sup> For a full discussion of parody and prayer in Rudens, see Seth A. Jeppesen, “Performing Religious Parody in Plautine Comedy” (Ph.D., University of California, Santa Barbara, 2013), 154–240.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 171–84.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 190–98; Dorota Dutsch, *Feminine Discourse in Roman Comedy: On Echoes and Voices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 128–40.

<sup>29</sup> L. Richardson, *A New Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 409. For Schilling, the epithet *obsequens* emphasizes Venus’ ability to fulfill vows. *La Religion Romaine de Vénus*, 28–30.

<sup>30</sup> This rare word is also used twice in the fishermen’s chorus earlier in the play (296, 304). Its primary meaning is “shell,” and in the fishermen’s chorus it refers mainly to the shellfish that are among the marine creatures hunted by the hungry fishermen (cf. Cic. *In Pis.* 67; Martial 5.39.10, 7.78.2, 13.7.1; Juv. 3.293; 14.131; Hor. *Epodes* 2.49; Petron. 119.35.). Yet, given the word’s sexualized use later in the play and the prayer to Venus that the fishermen utter during their scene, it is possible that the fishermen could have used gesture or intonation to invoke the inherent double entendre in the word before Trachalio’s definite use of the word in its sexual sense. *Concha* is not included in Adams’ list of words that refer to the female genitalia, probably because, according to the TLL, Rudens 704 is the only place where it is used in such a sense. There do, however, appear to be connections between *concha* and the Greek obscenity κύσθος, which according to Adams may be etymologically related to the more common *cunnus* in Latin. (J. N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990, 81). Both κύσθος and *concha* can be used in a non-vulgar sense to refer to either the murex shell or the scarlet dye taken from it. Relationships between sexual terms in Plautus and the corresponding terms in Greek are seen elsewhere in the play. For example, in *Daemones*’ dream he sees the two girls represented as swallows. The noun *hirundo* in Latin generally has no sexual valence behind it, but the Greek word from which it derives, χελιδών, does. See Arist. *Lys.* 770, Adams 82. Leach notes the erotic associations with *conchae* in art: “Plautus’ Rudens,” 920–1.

<sup>31</sup> Reducing the women to mere *conchae* in this way recalls one probable etymology of the word *scortum*

(prostitute) which literally means “skin” or “leather,” and could have originally been a slang term for the female pudenda that was then used to refer to prostitutes through a *pars pro toto* construction (Donatus, *ad Ter. Eun.* 424). But since *scortum* also is used to refer to male prostitutes, Adams argues that the term must have arisen from the metaphorical use of the language of leather working to describe sexual intercourse: “Words for ‘Prostitute’ in Latin,” *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 126, no. 3/4 (January 1, 1983): 322–4.

<sup>32</sup> Sceparnio never returns to the stage to collect on his promise, but it is likely that the same actor played Gripus later in the play. See Michael Fontaine, *Funny Words in Plautine Comedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 162. When Ampelisca makes her final exit, she uses the same word with which she promised future sexual favors to Sceparnio, *voluptas*, to refer the joy she gets from seeing Palaestra finally rewarded for her piety. The force of the rejection of the promise to Sceparnio is more pronounced because Gripus is left alone on the stage. See Jeppesen, “Performing Religious Parody in Plautine Comedy,” 185–90.

<sup>33</sup> Jeppesen, “Performing Religious Parody in Plautine Comedy,” 198–200; Leach, “Plautus’ *Rudens*,” 927 ff.

<sup>34</sup> Oxford Latin Dictionary, s.v. *praeire*. Pliny *NH* 28.11 gives a description of what a religious dictation would look like.

<sup>35</sup> This is the only scene of religious dictation, but there is a scene in which a letter is dictated in *Bacchides*. The music stops here as well. In *Bacchides* and *Pseudolus* there are examples of scenes in which letters are read, accompanied by similar metrical changes from accompanied meters to spoken *diverbia*. See Marshall, *The Stagecraft and Performance of Roman Comedy*, 221–2; Timothy J. Moore, *Music in Roman Comedy* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 15–6. There is no direct indication that Gripus would somehow produce a written text to read from, as would have been the case in the general model on which the parody was based, according to Pliny, but such a decision would add humor to the scene and immediacy to the parody. Plautus often playfully discusses and depicts ideas connected to the relatively new technologies of reading and writing in Latin. One such moment occurs at the beginning of this scene, when Gripus says he will advertise the find of the trunk in letters one cubit tall (1294–6).

<sup>36</sup> Marshall, *The Stagecraft and Performance of Roman Comedy*, 137, 192–202, 271–3.

<sup>37</sup> For modern examples see Mel Brooks’ *Blazing Saddles* (the oath dictated by Hedley Lamar to his band of villains) and *The Producers* (The oath dictated to Max and Leo by Franz Liebkind). Note how the humor in both dictation scenes depends on certain physical aspects of the performance, such as gestures, not only on the text.

<sup>38</sup> Matthew Dillon, “By Gods, Tongues, and Dogs: The Use of Oaths in Aristophanic Comedy,” *Greece & Rome, Second Series*, 42, no. 2 (October 1, 1995): 137.

<sup>39</sup> These procedural details are very similar to the Roman practice of swearing oaths. See Frances Hickson, *Roman Prayer Language: Livy and the Aeneid [sic] of Vergil* (B.G. Teubner, 1993), 127–9.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 122–3; Kathleen McCarthy, *Slaves, Masters, and the Art of Authority in Plautine Comedy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 140.

<sup>41</sup> Vows employ conditional phrases that mimic legalistic language stipulating the conditions under which the vows must be fulfilled. Hickson, *Roman Prayer Language*, 92–3.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 127–9.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 109–110.

<sup>44</sup> Katz makes many interesting points about the Umbrian word *urfeta* from the Iguvine Tablets, but he ultimately fails to prove conclusively that this word means testicle, and the only example that he gives of a person swearing an oath while touching human genitals comes from the book of Genesis, where the word in question is usually translated as “thigh,” not “loins.” Even in this example from Genesis, it appears that the person swearing the oath touches the thigh/loins of the one to whom the oath is sworn, not his own. Joshua T. Katz, “Testimonia Ritus Italici: Male Genitalia, Solemn Declarations, and a New Latin Sound Law,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 98 (January 1, 1998): 183–217.

<sup>45</sup> John Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion* (Indiana University Press, 2003), 97–8. The person giving the dictation can be a *duumvir* (Livy 4.21.5), *pontifex maximus* (Livy 9.46.6; 10.28.14, et al.), one of the lesser pontifices (Livy 8.9.4, Varro 6.61), an *augur* (Varro 6.95), a *sacerdos* (Livy 39.18.3–2; CIL XIII 1752–4). Other, less-orthodox examples include soldiers dictating the *sacramentum* (oath of fealty) to one another (Tac. Hist. 1.36), the governor of a province dictating oaths to his subjects (Pliny, Ep. 10.52, 10.96.5), and one example in which the one dictating is simply referred to as a *scriba* (Val. Max. 4.1.10). The person reciting the dictated formula is often the *consul* (Livy 31.9.9; 36.2.2–5; 8.8.4; 10.28.14; 42.28.7–9; Varro 6.95), but could also be an *aedile* (Livy 9.46.6), a group of citizens or soldiers (Livy 4.21.5; Livy 41.21.11; Tac. Hist. 1.36; Pliny, Ep. 10.52, 10.96.5), or individuals performing private religious rituals (Livy 39.18.3–2; CIL XIII 1752–4).

<sup>46</sup> J. A. North explains that rituals and procedures in Roman religion were preserved with a level of punctilious conservatism that is sometimes surprising, as is evinced by similarities between rites described by Cicero and those recorded on the *Lapis Niger* from the fifth century BCE: “Conservatism and Change in Roman Religion,” *Papers of the British School at Rome* XLIV (1976): 3–4.

<sup>47</sup> Iguvine Tablets VIa 2–18. Poultney notes the similarity to the list of birds in *Asinaria* and suggests that Plautus was familiar with this ritual from his native region of Umbria, but the fact that Plautus replaces the *pica* with *corva* could suggest an adaptation of this ritual specific to the wildlife visible in and around Rome. See Pliny HN 10.78 and James Wilson Poultney, *The Bronze Tables of Iguvium* (American Philological Association, 1959), 228–9. For the most recent general treatment of the Iguvine Tablets, see: Simone Sisani, *Tuta Ikuvina: sviluppo e ideologia della forma urbana a Gubbio* (Roma: Quasar, 2001).

<sup>48</sup> Tablet VIa 2–3: “*stiplo aseriaia . parfa . dersua . curnaco dersua (3) peico . mersto . peica . merst . a . mersta . auuei . mersta . angla . esona*” (Demand that I may observe a **parra** in the west, a **crow** in the west, a **woodpecker** in the east, a **magpie** in the east, in the east birds, in the east divine messengers). The translation is Poultney’s.

<sup>49</sup> Poultney, *The Bronze Tables of Iguvium*, 24.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Occasions for the dictation of official oaths included declarations of war, entrance upon military or civil service, departure from office at the end of the year, and various forms of legal actions. Hickson, *Roman Prayer Language*, 111–12.

<sup>52</sup> Varro 6.95

<sup>53</sup> The first instance took place in 436–5 BCE, when a *duumvir* dictated an *obsecratio* to the people in order to avert plague and invasion. The second recorded instance is in 174 BCE, when the *pontifex Q. Marcius Philippus* dictated a *supplicatio* to the people in response to a severe plague, vowing to celebrate *feriae* if the plague dissipated.

<sup>54</sup> Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome: Volume 1: A History* (Cambridge University



Press, 1998), 71–2, 201–6; Michael C. J. Putnam, *Horace's Carmen Saeculare: Ritual Magic and the Poet's Art* (Yale University Press, 2001), 52–3. This evidence, however, must be taken with a grain of salt, since Augustus, who organized the games of 17 BCE, was notorious for introducing innovations under the guise of renewing ancient practices that had been forgotten.

<sup>55</sup> ILS 5050.123–131; translation by Beard, North, and Price (vol. II, p 142). The lacunose nature of this portion of the inscription is immediately apparent, but it should not cause too much consternation. The text of this inscription was originally supplemented by Mommsen (*Monumenti Antichi I*, pp. 618ff., 1892), working from related inscriptions, especially the nearly identical prayer dictated to a similar group of matrons in 204 CE (CIL VI 32329, 10–13). The supplementation has since been corroborated by Pighi (1965) and Beard, North, and Price (1998).

<sup>56</sup> In her taxonomy of Roman prayer, Hickson includes the following types of petitionary prayers: simple petition, vow, oath, and asseveration. In addition to petitions there are also gratulatory prayers (i.e., prayers of thanksgiving); Hickson, *Roman Prayer Language*.

<sup>57</sup> Rudens 694–701: Venus alma, ambae te obsecramus,/aram amplexantes hanc tuam lacrumantes, genibus nixae,/in custodelam nos tuam ut recipias et tutere;/illos scelestos, qui tuom fecerunt fanum parui,/fac ut ulciscare nosque ut hanc tua pace aram obsidere/patiare: lautae ambae sumus opera Neptuni noctu,/ne indignum id habeas neve idcirco nobis uitio uortas,/si quippiamst, minus quod bene esse lautum tu arbitrare. (Nourishing Venus, we two beseech you,/ embracing this your altar in tears, on bended knee,/ that you receive us into your custody and guard us,/ and those criminals who made light of your shrine,/ make it so that they are punished, and allow us to sit at this your altar/ in peace. We two have been washed this night by the work of Neptune./ Do not consider it unworthy or reckon it a fault of ours, /if in any degree we are less well washed than you think best.)

<sup>58</sup> Celebrants usually prayed standing up with arms stretched upwards. Gérard Freyburger, “La Supplication d’Action de Graces Dans La Religion Romaine Archaïque,” *Latomus* 36 (1977): 292.

<sup>59</sup> The two competing etymologies for supplicare are 1) sub – plicare – to fold under (i.e. at the knees) or 2) sub–placare – to thoroughly appease. (See Naiden, *Ancient Supplication*, 241; Freyburger, “La Supplication d’Action de Graces Dans La Religion Romaine Archaïque,” 298.) The verb supplicare does not necessarily refer to the ritual known as “supplication” (*supplicatio*), which involved the citizens' praying in the temples throughout the city in order to give thanks or seek a favor from the gods. *Supplicare* is often used in prayers to refer to sincere petition. Schultz enumerates four instances in which female participation in the ritual known as the *supplicatio* is specifically noted: during the third Samnite War in 296, after the defeat at Lake Trasimene in 217, following a victory in 209, and in a special ritual performed by a chosen group of youths in 190. Women also participated in yearly expiatory rites as part of the worship of Juno Regina. See: Celia E. Schultz, *Women's Religious Activity in the Roman Republic* (Univ of North Carolina Press, 2006), 29–36.

<sup>60</sup> Schultz, *Women's Religious Activity in the Roman Republic*, 29–36.

<sup>61</sup> Though this inscription provides some information that can readily be mapped onto other *ludi*, such as the proximity of the religious and theatrical performances, other elements of the record seem unique to this instantiation of the Saecular Games, which was part of Augustus' politically charged revival of traditional Roman religion. For instance, the *ludi saeculares* could be divided into two halves, the nighttime celebrations and the daytime celebrations. At night, sacrifices were made to Dis Pater, Proserpina, and the Fates, after which plays were performed on a temporary stage without attached seating, in the old fashion (5050.90–102). This part of the festivities seems to have taken place on the Campus Martius by the banks of the Tiber, possibly incorporating the partially constructed theater of

Marcellus. See John A. Hanson, *Roman Theater Temples*, Princeton Monographs in Art and Archaeology (Literary Licensing, LLC, 1959), 23. In the daytime, sacrifice was made on the Capitoline to Jupiter, Juno, and Ilithyia and plays were performed in both a temporary wooden theater and in the Theater of Pompey (Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome* Vol. 1, 201–6). Given the order of events in the inscription, the dictated prayer of the matrons most likely happened on the Capitoline following a sacrifice to Juno, after which the crowd moved to the theater to watch the games. The passage that mentions the proximity of the sacrifices to the theater (5050.153–4) seems to refer specifically to the nighttime celebrations, for which there is no explicit mention of dictation. There is in the inscription, however, an account of a sacrifice and prayer to the Fates that would have been performed by Augustus just before the nighttime plays were presented (5050.90–101). If we follow Pliny’s logic, this prayer would have been dictated to Augustus by a priest, though on this point the inscription is not explicit. The nighttime celebrations were supposedly more similar to the old-fashioned second-century BCE performances, using a temporary stage without formal seating attached to it. See Manuwald, *Roman Republican Theatre*, 55–68, esp. 57.

<sup>62</sup> Technically, Labrax has already lost Palaestra before this scene, but given Labrax’s repeated acts of sacrilege against Venus throughout the play, the loss of his would-be courtesan represents a monetary punishment for maltreatment of the gods, of the type described by Arcturus in the prologue (20).

<sup>63</sup> Boris Dunsch argues that prayers spoken in earnest by characters in Plautus get answered during the course of the play, as is the case with Dorippa’s prayer in *Mercator* (689–91). This brings up the question of the ontological status of prayers and rituals on the stage: whether they were seen as merely imitative or as an expression of real (echt) requests to and answers from deity. “Religion in der Römischen Komödie: Einige Programmatische Überlegungen,” in *Römische Religion im Historischen Wandel* (Steiner, 2009), 36–43.

<sup>64</sup> Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome* Vol. 2, 44–5; H. H. Scullard, *Festivals and Ceremonies of the Roman Republic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 108.

<sup>65</sup> Strabo (6.272); Orlin, “Why a Second Temple for Venus Erycina,” 83.

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