

***WILTON  
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***THE DRAMATIC  
VALUES IN PLAUTUS***

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# **The Dramatic Values in Plautus**

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# **Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

1918

## **Foreword**

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This dissertation was written in 1916, before the entrance of the United States into The War, and was presented to the Faculty of the University of Pennsylvania as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Its publication at this time needs no apology, for it will find its only public in the circumscribed circle of professional scholars. They at least will understand that scholarship knows no nationality. But in the fear that this may fall under the eye of that larger public, whose interests are, properly enough, not scholastic, a word of explanation may prove a safeguard.

The Germans have long been recognized as the hewers of wood and drawers of water of the intellectual world. For the results of the drudgery of minute research and laborious compilation, the scholar must perforce seek German sources. The copious citation of German authorities in this work is, then, the outcome of that necessity. I have, however, given due credit to German criticism, when it is sound. The French are, generically, vastly superior in the art of finely balanced critical estimation.

My sincere thanks are due in particular to the Harrison Foundation of the University for the many advantages I have received therefrom, to Professors John C. Rolfe and Walton B. McDaniel, who have been both teachers and friends to me, and to my good comrades and colleagues, Francis H. Lee and Horace T. Boileau, for their aid in editing this essay.

Wilton Wallace Blancké.

1918.



# **PART 1**

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## **A Résumé of the Criticism and of the Evidence Relating to the Acting of Plautus**

### **Introduction**

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This investigation was prompted by the abiding conviction that Plautus as a dramatic artist has been from time immemorial misunderstood. In his progress through the ages he has been like a merry clown rollicking amongst people with a hearty invitation to laughter, and has been rewarded by commendation for his services to morality and condemnation for his buffoonery. The majority of Plautine critics have evinced too serious an attitude of mind in dealing with a comic poet. However portentous and profound his scholarship, no one deficient in a sense of humor should venture to approach a comic poet in a spirit of criticism. For criticism means appreciation.

Furthermore, the various estimates of our poet's worth have been as diversified as they have been in the main unfair. Alternately lauded as a master dramatic craftsman and vilified as a scurrilous purveyor of unsavory humor, he has been buffeted from the top to the bottom of the dramatic scale. More recent writers have been approaching

a saner evaluation of his true worth, but never, we believe, has his real position in that dramatic scale been definitely and finally fixed; because heretofore no attempt has been made at a complete analysis of his dramatic, particularly his comic, methods. It is the aim of the present dissertation to accomplish this.

I doubt not that from the inception of our acquaintance with the pages of Plautus we have all passed through a similar experience. In the beginning we have been vastly diverted by the quips and cranks and merry wiles of the knavish slave, the complaints of love-lorn youth, the impotent rage of the baffled pander, the fruitless growlings of the hungry parasite's belly. We have been amused, perhaps astonished, on further reading, at meeting our new-found friends in other plays, clothed in different names to be sure and supplied in part with a fresh stock of jests, but still engaged in the frustration of villainous panders, the cheating of harsh fathers, until all ends with virtue triumphant in the establishment of the undoubted respectability of a hitherto somewhat dubious female character.<sup>1</sup>

Our astonishment waxes as we observe further the close correspondence of dialogue, situation and dramatic machinery. We are bewildered by the innumerable asides of hidden eavesdroppers, the inevitable recurrence of soliloquy and speech familiarly directed at the audience, while every once in so often a slave, desperately bent on finding someone actually under his nose, careens wildly cross the stage or rouses the echoes by unmerciful battering of doors, meanwhile unburdening himself of lengthy solo tirades with



great gusto;<sup>2</sup> and all this dished up with a sauce of humor often too racy and piquant for our delicate twentieth-century palate, which has acquired a refined taste for suggestive innuendo, but never relishes calling a spade by its own name.

If we have sought an explanation of our poet's gentle foibles in the commentaries to our college texts, we have assuredly been disappointed. Even to the seminarian in Plautus little satisfaction has been vouchsafed. We are often greeted by the enthusiastic comments of German critics, which run riot in elaborate analyses of plot and character and inform us that we are reading *Meisterwerke* of comic drama.<sup>3</sup> Our perplexity has perhaps become focused upon two leading questions; first: "What manner of drama is this after all? Is it comedy, farce, opera bouffe or mere extravaganza?" Second: "How was it done? What was the technique of acting employed to represent in particular the peculiarly extravagant scenes?"<sup>4</sup>

There is an interesting contrast between the published editions of Plautus and Bernard Shaw. Shaw's plays we find interlaced with an elaborate network of stage direction that enables us to visualize the movements of the characters even to extreme minutiae. In the text of Plautus we find nothing but the dialogue, and in the college editions only such editorially-inserted "stage-business" as is fairly evident from the spoken lines. The answer then to our second question: "How was it done?", at least does not lie on the surface of the text.

For an adequate answer to both our questions the following elements are necessary; first: a digest of Plautine

criticism; second: a résumé of the evidence as to original performances of the plays, including a consideration of the audience, the actors and of the gestures and stage-business employed by the latter; third: a critical analysis of the plays themselves, with a view to cataloguing Plautus' dramatic methods. We hope by these means to obtain a conclusive reply to both our leading questions.

## **§1. Critics of Plautus**

Plautine criticism has displayed many different angles. As in most things, time helps resolve the discrepancies. The general impression gleaned from a survey of the field is that in earlier times over-appreciation was the rule, which has gradually simmered down, with occasional outpourings of denunciation, to a healthier norm of estimation.

Even in antiquity the wiseacres took our royal buffoon too seriously. Stylistically he was translated to the skies. [Sidenote: Cicero] Cicero<sup>5</sup> imputes to him "iocandi genus, ... elegans, urbanum, ingeniosum, facetum." [Sidenote: Aelius Stilo] Quintilian<sup>6</sup> quotes: "Licet Varro Musas Aelii Stilonis sententia Plautino dicat sermone locuturas fuisse, si latine loqui vellent." [Sidenote: Gellius] The paeon is further swelled by Gellius, who variously refers to our hero as "homo linguae atque elegantiae in verbis Latinae princeps,"<sup>7</sup> and "verborum Latinorum elegantissimus,"<sup>8</sup> and "linguae Latinae decus."<sup>9</sup> [Sidenote: Horace] If our poet is scored by Horace<sup>10</sup> it is probably due rather to Horace's affectation of contempt for the early poets than to his true convictions; or we may ascribe it to the sophisticated metricist's failure to realize the existence of a "Metrica Musa