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*Introducing geminate writing:  
Plautus' Miles Gloriosus*

**Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to examine how the theme of the Double is presented in Plautus' *Miles Gloriosus*. Underneath the obvious relation between the doubling and comedies like *Miles Gloriosus*, there is something more systematic about this method that deserves to be explored. 'Geminate writing' acquires a multileveled dynamics in Plautus' comic language, characters, plot and performance. We discuss the expression *hoc argumentum sicilicissitat* which is proved to denote the gemination of plots and characters. We are then led to see the gemination of staging. The device of doubles and twins and the story of a dream cause the stage to split into two mirroring halves. We focus on the *skenographia* and we see the temporary stage and its structure, the physical format of which creates mirror reflections. The paper is divided into three parts, covering the textual, theatrical and performance levels of *Miles Gloriosus*, respectively.

Lo scopo di questo studio è quello di esaminare il modo in cui viene presentato il tema del doppio nel *Miles Gloriosus* di Plauto. Sotto la relazione evidente tra il raddoppio e commedie come il *Miles Gloriosus*, c'è qualcosa di più sistematico in questo metodo che merita di essere esplorato. 'Geminate writing' riguarda dinamiche multilivello su linguaggio, personaggi e intreccio comico di Plauto. Viene presa in esame la frase *hoc argumentum sicilicissitat* che indica la duplicazione di trame e personaggi. In seguito viene analizzata la duplicazione di scena. Il dispositivo di doppio e la storia di un sogno dividono infatti la scena stessa in due metà speculari. Concentrandosi sulla *skenographia*, è possibile "vedere" la scena provvisoria e la sua struttura, la cui forma crea "riflessi allo specchio". Lo studio è diviso in tre parti che riguardano, rispettivamente, i livelli testuale e teatrale e i livelli performativi del *Miles Gloriosus*.

Plautus' *Menaechmi* begins with the personified Prologue stepping out onto the stage saying that «because Roman poets want their plays to seem more Greek, they like to tell you that the action takes place at Athens»<sup>1</sup>. But this does not happen in the *Menaechmi*, where the locale is different; it is Epidamnus. The phrase which follows is «though this argument is à la Greek, yet it is not à l'Attic but rather à la Sicilian» and this raises the question of what it might imply.

I bring you Plautus, orally, not corporally  
[...] Now writers of comedy have this habit: they  
always allege that the scene of action is Athens,  
their object being to give the play a more Grecian

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<sup>1</sup> For the chronology of the *Menaechmi* see BUCK (1941). Lines 714f. are considered a reference to Ennius' *Hecuba*.



suggests to a Roman audience a play set in Athens or a play which follows the model of Menander, then the *Menaechmi* comedy that *sicilissitat* promises two innovations: not only is a play set in Sicily, but is also a lively performance that deviates from the Greek, and recalls the farces of southern Italy. We could recall Horace saying (*Epist.* II 1, 58): «Plautus took great pains to imitate Epicharmus of Sicily». The choice of the specific punning word, *sicilicissitat*, plays also on the Sicilians' well-known fondness for punning<sup>7</sup>.

But what about the extra syllable *-ci-* we find in *sicili-ci-ssitat*? We should first review Fontaine's opinion, before constructing a more complete argument. Latin customarily renders Greek verbs in *-ίζειν* by attaching the suffix *-issare* directly to the root. Abnormally, *sicilicissitat* corresponds not to the attested verb *σικελα-ίζει*, but to a *\*σικελικ-ίζει*, *\*σικιλικίζει*<sup>8</sup>. Fontaine's view is that *sicilicissitat* is a comic word formation that combines the meanings of the Greek verb *σικελίζειν* with the Latin noun *sicilicus* (deriving from *sicilis* 'sickle') which, according to imperial grammarians, is a mark above the letter to show that it counted double; it was a diacritical *geminatio nota*, an indication of twinning<sup>9</sup>. Fontaine has argued that Plautus may be making a pun on the *sicilicus* symbol which indicates that something is 'double' or 'counts twice'. As a result, the words *hoc argumentum sicilicissitat* might suggest two things: first, that the plot affects a Sicilian atmosphere; second, that the plot *geminatur*, counts twice due to its twin protagonists. It is not a coincidence that in this comedy, Plautus picked a name for his twin characters which recalls the Syracusan mathematician Menaechmus, famous for his mathematical solution of the problem of the duplication of the cube<sup>10</sup>. Therefore, the fact that the *Menaechmi* affects the Sicilian manner may be linked to gemination in sounds as well as plot and characters.

However, we must note that the natural quality of the vowel in *sicilicissat* is different from the one in *sicilicus*<sup>11</sup>. Therefore, the pun made on the similarity of the two words, disregards the discrepancy between their prosody. In addition, it is doubtful whether the entire audience of Plautus would have caught the reference to *sicilicus* which is a term used by grammarians. But, even if the discussion about the meaning of *sicilicissitat* could seem slightly subtle, one could draw the basic idea to argue for the twinning method.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Cicero's observation *Ver.* IV 95.

<sup>8</sup> FONTAINE (2006, 97f.).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Isidore *Etymologiae* II 27, 29 Lindsay: *sic et ubi litterae consonantes geminabantur, sicilicum superponebant, ut 'cella', 'serra', asseres'*. Cf. Nisus in Keil, *Gramm. Lat.* 7, 80, Marius Victorinus in Keil, *Gramm. Lat.* 6, 8. According to Festus, Ennius was believed to have introduced double consonant-notation (Lindsay p. 374).

<sup>10</sup> 350 B.C. cf. GRATWICK (1993, 138).

<sup>11</sup> FONTAINE (2006, 99).

Fontaine's explanation is only partially adequate. We should not forget that *sicilicissitat* is a comic frequentative verb. The use of *-itat* for *-at* is amply attested in the comedians, sometimes to simply fulfill the requirement of meter. In the *Menaechmi*, however, the word has true frequentative force. In Greek and Latin, we use such verbs to denote that something happens habitually. *Sicilicissitat*, in the context of Plautus' comedy, suggests that the playwright 'is producing twins all the time!'. It denotes Plautus' habitual method of redoubling the Greek plot. And we could collect further evidence for this linguistic emphasis on the geminating method.

In the comedy *Amphitruo*, the slave Sosia declares to his master (785f.): «You've given birth to another Amphitruo; I've given birth to another Sosia. Now if the bowl's given birth to a bowl, we've all doubled»<sup>12</sup>. Once again, there is the notion that the play and its characters are redoubled. The comedy *Amphitruo* is supposed to be a treatment of the myth of Hercules' birth. In Plautus' version the tragedy becomes a tragicomedy, in which not only Jupiter appears as the twin of Amphitruo, but also Mercury as a twin for the slave Sosia. Thus, the verb *congeminio* acquires, apart from the meaning 'to form something of a double size'<sup>13</sup>, the poetical meaning of 'producing twins', in the way we can further detect in other comedies. For example, from Menander's *Δις Ἐξαπατῶν* Plautus takes two sisters and presents them as homonymous and identical in *Bacchides*. What does this change mean for Plautus? He adds a third deception into the scenario and, in this sense, he surpassed his Greek model (*Δις Ἐξαπατῶν*), *The Man Deceiving Twice*. Also, *Bacchides* took its name from the special emphasis on the final scene, where the twin courtesans replace the double-deceiver slave as the dominant characters<sup>14</sup>. The action revolves around the twins, who appear together on stage in the first and last episodes, framing the entire play in a display of their power. Even the title *Bacchides* echoes Euripides' *Bacchae*, a drama which reveals an obsession with doubles.

Does Plautus ever say how he exploits other writers and features of the Greek comic tradition? He nowhere names Menander or any of his comedies that he adapted. Plautus, using his slave characters as mouthpieces, declares his contempt for and superiority to rival playwrights. For instance, the slave Chrysalus despises Menandrian slaves, saying: «I haven't any use for those Parmenos, those Syruses that do their masters out of two or three gold pieces, there is nothing more worthless than a servant without brains»<sup>15</sup>. In *Mostellaria*, the slave Tranio suggests to the audience: «If you are

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<sup>12</sup> *Tu peperisti Amphitruonem <alium>, ego alium peperit Sosiam; / nunc si patera pateram peperit, omnes congeminavimus.*

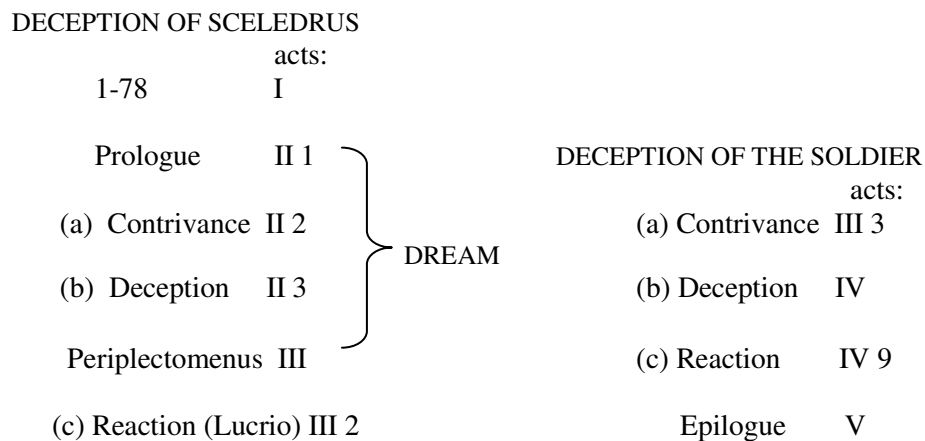
<sup>13</sup> It is used in Apul. *Pl.* I 9 *substantiam mentis (caelestis) huius numeris et modis confici congeminatis*; V. Fl. II 201 *vocem furibunda congeminat, paeana congeminant*; VI 513 *fera sibila congeminat*. See also Stat. *Theb.* I 116, IV 42; *Sil.* XVI 267. Cf. ONIGA (1991) for the use of *congeminio* in *Amphitruo*.

<sup>14</sup> CLARK (1976, 89); OWENS (1994, 404).

<sup>15</sup> *Bacch.* 649f.

a friend of Diphilus or Philemon, be sure to tell them how your slave deceived you. You will be supplying them with first-rate deception routines for their comedies» (1149f.). Plautus seems to patronize the two Greek playwrights by offering to supply them with needed material. I take the thread from where I left it and I suggest that Plautus declares that he geminates ideas (*geminio, pario*) out of simple material he inherits from the Greeks. The intrusion of the slave character who composes tricks “within-a-comedy”, expresses Plautine triumph over plot. Hence, Plautus introduces his program through camouflaged phrases (*sicilicissitat, congemnavimus, peperit*).

What I mean by geminated plots is plot inserted within the main intrigue, conceived by clever slaves and improvised by characters on stage. *Miles Gloriosus* is the typical Plautine comedy, but it has attracted more criticism for its lack of unity rather than for its dramaturgy. Scholars have focused on the comedy’s bipartite structure, saying that it can be divided in two distinct sections. Whether the first part was taken from a second Greek play, or invented and added to the Greek original by Plautus, should not matter for our argument<sup>16</sup>. The story of the deception of the braggart soldier covers acts I, III, IV and V, while an inserted plot of a dream occupies act II. The dream is a deception concocted within the plot against the slave Sceledrus. This “play-within-the-play” equates with the structure of the *Miles Gloriosus*<sup>17</sup>: it mirrors the organization of the whole comedy which is structured around the (a) contrivance, (b) deception and (c) defeat of a *miles gloriosus*.



Gordon Williams suggested that “it seems worthwhile to enquire whether Plautus’ technique of turning Greek plays, which he has concealed with greater skill in his later plays, is, in this earlier play [the *Miles*] more open to view because less confident and practiced”. Against this opinion, we could say that the Roman addition is visible not

<sup>16</sup> Cf. FRAENKEL (2007, 251ff.).

<sup>17</sup> SAYLOR (1977).

because of Plautus' lack of efficiency in *contaminare fabulas* ('the mixing together of plays'), but because of Plautus' intention to leave his poetic mark on his first comedy<sup>18</sup>.

The slave Palaestrio in *Miles Gloriosus*' prologue recounts that the basic plot is about a braggart soldier, *Ἀλαζών*, who has abducted from Athens the girl of Palaestrio's master. Palaestrio sets out to find the girl, Philocomasium. But he is captured by pirates and sold to that same soldier who kidnapped the girl. The soldier's house in Ephesus happens to be right next door to an old family friend of Palaestrio's master. The slave comes up with a plan to save Philocomasium from the soldier and return her to the Athenian master, who has arrived in the neighbour's house<sup>19</sup>. *Miles Gloriosus*' basic plot is centered upon the braggart soldier whose outrageous character is exposed in the first scene. But soon after the first scene, the soldier disappears and the audience has to wait through more than half the play to see him reappear.

Suddenly the sequence of events in *Miles Gloriosus* pauses and an interlude story turns up. According to this embedded drama, the slave Sceledrus has seen his master's girlfriend, Philocomasium, meeting and kissing her lover in the house next door. Palaestrio assumes the role of a playwright and concocts a scheme, to deceive the slave, which bears his poetic signature (v. 386 *Palaestriionis somnium narratur*). His embedded drama contains a scene, without parallel in Greek comedy, which alludes to a *poeta barbarus* (vv. 209-12): one of the slave Palaestrio's postures, while inventing the trick, reminds the viewer of the non-Greek poet, Naevius, and his treatment in prison by his enemies<sup>20</sup>.

This reference to the un-Greek poet stands as a reflection of the playwright<sup>21</sup>. The *poeta barbarus* is impersonated by Palaestrio, who takes wax tablets on his knees and carves a scenario, a "play-within-the-play". What happens when Plautus takes his tablets to carve his own text while citing the Greek text? The slave invents a fictitious dream that subtly mirrors and distorts reality: his *fabula* consists of the invention of a twin sister for Philocomasium (vv. 200-18). Palaestrio will exploit the theme of gemination which Plautus used many times. What he creates is a theatrically self-conscious theater that refers to Plautus' routine themes. Within Palaestrio's scenario, the choice of words such as *sororem*, *geminam*, *germanam*, *alteram*, and *aliquot* draws attention to the expansion of the plot<sup>22</sup>. Through his prologue in *Miles*, Plautus reveals the points where the Greek scenario stops and gemination starts<sup>23</sup>. It is not usual for a

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<sup>18</sup> WILLIAMS (1958, 102f.).

<sup>19</sup> The purpose of the comedy, accordingly to scholarship, has been to deflate the soldier's superfluous ego and show the 'hero' to be a defeated coward; cf. SAYLOR (1977).

<sup>20</sup> *Mil.* 210-12.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Ps.* 401 *poeta tabulas cum cepit sibi*.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. FRANGOULIDIS (1994, 76).

<sup>23</sup> We could read the following quotation (*Mil.* 84-86, 138) metaphorically and suggest that "here" in 138 does not only mean "here in Periplectomenus' house", but also "in this point of the plot"; an additional

prologue-speaker to give away the secrets of a play, but this is Plautus' opportunity to ensure the attention of his audience by telling them something of the treat in store for them (*Mil.* 84-86, 138 and *Amph.* 53-55).

I shall acquaint you with the plot and name of the comedy we are about to act. The Greek name of this comedy is *Alazon* [...] I have got up a splendid scheme inside here.

I'm a god: I'll change [this argument]. If you want, I'll immediately turn this same play from a tragedy into a comedy with all the same verses<sup>24</sup>.

Close analysis of the *Miles*' prologue has persuaded scholars that there is evidence to catch Plautus in the very act of contaminating his original<sup>25</sup>. The story around a dream and a sister is considered an insertion which redoubles the plot of *Ἀλαζών*. Likewise, in the *Amphitruo*, the 'playwright' Mercury transforms Amphitryon's myth into tragicomedy around the twins Sosias «with all the same verses» (v. 51 *argumentum commutavero*)<sup>26</sup>. So, what is our conclusion for *sicilicissitat*?<sup>27</sup> Plautus succeeds in creating something new by conflating the Greek and Italian tradition; he creates theater that *sicilicissitat* and draws attention to its compositional method. What I call gemination is nothing else but a form of metatheatre. Plautus' metatheatre owes much to the idea of duplication which produces nested plays within the main plot; a microcosm of the theatrical situation.

## 2. Seeming realities

Let us see how a comedy of doubles works on stage. From *Miles Gloriosus*' prologue we could derive a subtitle for the comedy, which would be *ita / faciemus ut quod viderit ne viderit* (vv. 148f.): to make a character believe he does not see what he sees. If we examine Plautus' language, we find that to see a dream figure is equivalent to seeing the

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plot is added to the main plot, in the same way that an additional setting (the secret passage-internal space) is added to the main setting (Periplectomenus' and Pyrgopolinices' houses-external space).

<sup>24</sup> We consider De Melo's Loeb text as *Amphitruo*'s script.

<sup>25</sup> WILLIAMS (1958, 100-102).

<sup>26</sup> See *Ep.* 99 *aliquid aliqua reperiundumst*, «some scheme must be found somewhere».

<sup>27</sup> We could set Plautine words like *pergraecamini* and *congraecari* opposite *sicilicissitat* to suggest that Plautus oscillates between Greekness and Romaness in his plays. I note that in *Mostellaria* (v. 22), the word *pergraecamini* is used by the "good" slave Grumio for the "bad" slave Tranio and his comrades, meaning 'to act like a Greek', and Mnesilochus in *Bacchides* (v. 743) is described as able to 'party like a Greek' (*congraecari*). Elsewhere in Plautus, *attic* means something 'first class' (*Poen.* 372) and *Sicilian* implies 'tawdry' (*Per.* 395). However, since *sicilicissitat* refers to Greek farces like Epicharmus, it cannot indicate "Romaness" as opposed to Greekness.

double of a real person, his *simulacrum*, his *imago*, an appearance without substance that reproduces the real appearance. This chapter explores further the ideas expressed by Gianni Guastella in his *Sogni e menzogne nel Miles Gloriosus*<sup>28</sup>.

Plautus' dramaturgy is attuned to the special interest of Romans in the pictures we see during sleep. To narrate a dream, the Romans would use any expression centred on the 'visual' aspect; dreaming is about seeing: *videre in somnis* or *in quiete*, or the passive form *videri* (in Greek the equivalent would be ἐνύπνιον ἰδεῖν, ὄναρ ἰδεῖν, ἰδεῖν ἐν τῷ ὑπνῷ, ἐδόκει ὄρᾱν). The image we perceive is indicated as *somniorum visa*, *quietis visa*, *species*, *imago*, *effigies* and *simulacrum*. All these terms recall the purely visual nature of the double manifested in a dream. The fact that a dream was largely a visual perception had already caused bewilderment among the Greeks, who referred to dreams with words stressing vision and sight: ὄψις, εἶδωλον, ὄραμα, θεωρία, θέαμα, φάντασμα.<sup>29</sup> An ὄνειρος acquired not only the meaning of 'dream as experience', but also of a 'dream figure', a 'person appearing in a dream', a 'double'. This image had a weak material reality, and was identified with σκιά, a living shadow that was cast by something but enjoyed an existence of its own.

A single dream description in Menander's *Dyscolus* and five dreams written by Plautus: these are the only dreams that survive from Hellenistic comedy. Terence does not include even one such narrative. For this reason, the dreams in Plautus are really the only source we have for analysing the way comic dream episodes were presented in front of the Roman audience. On a narrative level, we should always keep in mind that the framing motif of 'dreaming' is wrapped around any "deception-within-the-comedy". Who dreams the dream? Plautine characters are distributed into two classes, those who dream and those who wake<sup>30</sup>; the tricksters are those who wake and have powers, and the sleepers are those who are manipulated.

For instance, the explanation given to Sosia, who has confronted his double, is that he might have experienced a dream (*Amph.* 621-24):

Am. If by chance you'd seen that certain Sosia there, in your dreams.

So. I'm not in the habit of carrying out master's commands sleepily. I saw him wide awake, as I'm seeing wide awake now and talking wide awake. And that man was wide awake when he beat me up with his fists a while ago, and I was wide awake too.

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<sup>28</sup> GUASTELLA (2003).

<sup>29</sup> MESSER (1918, 194-230).

<sup>30</sup> Phaedromus in *Curc.* 183f. is a sleeper. Tranio in *Mostellaria* comments that the old men he has duped are «asleep» (v. 829) cf. *Mil.* 404, 207; *Men.* 393; *Most.* 312, 690-710; *Rud.* 572, 920; *Curc.* 245. Cf. SLATER (1985, 170-72).



Segal proposes that the play *Menaechmi* is a dream of Menaechmus of Epidamnus, who has conjured up a surrogate self in the person of his twin (cf. *Men.* 1046)<sup>31</sup>. We can even detect dreaming motifs framing a whole comedy, when, for example, Acanthio is careful «not to wake the drowsy spectators» (*Merc.* 160). The prologue often awakens his audience, stimulating them, so that they do not relax their vigilance: «To keep you from going astray, I forewarn you both twins have the same name» (*Men.* 48 cf. *Amph.* 142ff. and *Capt.* 37ff.); «Don't you be fooled: one girl today will play a pair» (*Mil.* 150). After all, metatheatre is all about reminding Romans of their position as spectators who should grasp those moments when illusion breaks and the play is called a dream.

On his first entrance in *Miles Gloriosus*, Sceledrus is not sure whether he is asleep or awake, and thus he himself provides the inspiration for the trick against him (with the oxymoron *nisi ambulavi dormiens*, v. 272). He was chasing a monkey, when he accidentally caught sight of the lovers (v. 178). The monkey as the archetypal figure of aping introduces the idea of *simulacra* and a double reality. Seeing double is the result of dreaming, but also the result of drunkenness. Therefore, when Sceledrus is persuaded that his eyes really deceived him, and what he saw was Philocomasium's double, he retires to the wine cellar and vanishes from the plot. Palaestrio calls him out, but in the slave's place the butler Lucrio emerges, saying that Sceledrus is sleeping off a drinking spree in the cellar (*sorbet dormiens*, v. 818)<sup>32</sup>. Sceledrus is thus presented as drawn into illusion, and the entire narrative of the farce dream functions as his own real dream<sup>33</sup>.

The content of Philocomasium's dream, as presented to Sceledrus, is the following: «Last night in my sleep my twin sister seemed to have come from Athens to Ephesus with a certain lover of hers (*in somnis mea soror visa venisse*); they both seemed to have come on a visit, stopping in this house next door. I seemed glad to have my sister come (*ego laeta visa*), but owing to her I seemed to be subjected to a perfectly dreadful suspicion (*suspicionem sum visa sustinere*). For in my dream, it seemed that my own servant charged me, me, just as you are doing, with having kissed some strange man, when it was that twin sister of mine kissing her own lover (*arguere in somnis me meus mihi familiaris visust*). This was my dream-that I was falsely accused, wrongfully» (vv. 383-92).

Like Ilia in Book I of Ennius' *Annales*, Philocomasium makes frequent reference to her own participation in the dream by repeating forms of the first person singular

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<sup>31</sup> SEGAL (2001, 115-26). Also, both old men who tell their dreams in *Mercator* and *Rudens* say in identical couplets that the gods send dreams like plays (*ludi*) to men (*Merc.* 225f. = *Rud.* 593f.).

<sup>32</sup> There is a similar drunken scene in *Mostellaria* before the dream-deception. In *Miles*, Sceledrus risks double death, having seen what he was not allowed to witness (*ut pereas dupliciter*, v. 295).

<sup>33</sup> The confusion of Sceledrus is revealed by the successive expressions: *nescio*, *arbitror vidisse*, *credo* (*nescio quid credam egomet mihi iam, ita quod vidisse credo me id iam non vidisse arbitror*, v. 402).

pronoun and adjective (*me... meus... mihi*, v. 389)<sup>34</sup>. The employment of the verb *videre* is frequent in *Miles*, but, of more than a hundred occasions, around three quarters are concentrated in the part of Sceledrus' deception (there are sixteen variations of the phrase "not to have seen what you saw"). The active and the respective passive voice of the verb imply different subjects. Therefore, the verbs *videre* and *videri* would normally have an intersubjective relationship, just like the actions of *videre* and *apparere* ('to appear'). But, in *Miles Gloriosus*, these intersubjective relationships get broken. Philocomasium is both the subject and the object of vision. The *spectator* will turn *spectacle*: "She sees a dream"; "she appears in the dream"; "she seems to be a dream figure on stage". The passive form *videor* which she consistently uses, meaning 'being seen' and 'seeming in a dream' (kindred with Homeric εἶδομαι) enables her to misguide Sceledrus by using the perspective of her own dream world.

vv. 473-75: Pa. But no one can ever make her anything but our  
girl's twin sister. Yes, by gad, it was her you saw kissing here (*eam videras*)  
Sc. You are right, it is clear enough she was the one (*palam est eam esse*)  
vv. 532f. Per. Well, then? Is she this one? (*Eanest?*)  
Scel. She is, and yet she isn't, sir. (*Etsi east, non est ea*)  
Per. But you saw that one (*Vidistin istam?*)  
Sc. I saw...her and your guest, sir, and she was hugging and kissing him.  
Per. But is she this one? (*Eanest?*) Sc. I don't know. (cf. vv. 416-19)

We note the repetition of the indicative pronoun *ea*: «We will make Sceledrus see the same woman, but twice, in two different places, without being able to know of a possible way between the two places» (vv. 242-44). The audience's vision is split in two (*non vidi eam, etsi vidi*, v. 407), following Philocomasium's splitting (*etsi east, non est ea*, v. 532). Plautus takes his *materia* from the dream and he expands it so that we have a seeming reality (*videor*) instead of reality (*sum*), a fruit of simulation instead of the actual girl (*ea*)<sup>35</sup>. Therefore, the twin Dicea passes the barrier of narration and enters in the reality.

With the pun *Dicea-Adicea* (v. 436), Plautus shows the splitting of good and bad self<sup>36</sup>. The imaginary twin sister, Dicea, the 'just', sets herself up as the dispenser of justice and avenges the one who accused her sister. Her part recalls a rhetorical speech attributed to pseudo-Quintilian, where a twin appearing in the court replacing her sister obtains justice and avenges her rape<sup>37</sup>. Philocomasium, on the other side, appears as the evil twin, a character "who loves playing comedy" (*philo-comasium*). We could recall

<sup>34</sup> *Annales* I 29; see SKUTSCH (1985, 193f.). Cf. Cic. *De divin.* I 40f.

<sup>35</sup> GUASTELLA (2003, 52-54).

<sup>36</sup> Vv. 436-38 Phil. *Diceae nomen est. / Scel. Iniuria es, falsum nomen possidere, Philocomasium postulas; / ἄδικος es tu, non δικαία, et meo ero facis iniuriam.*

<sup>37</sup> *Declam. Min.* 270.

the ancient retellings of the story of Helen of Troy and her phantom double (εἶδωλον), whose doubleness becomes the distinguishing mark of her tradition. What about the motif of a sister as confidante, or as 'second self' for a female dreamer? In tragedy and epic, the irrationality of women and their excess of emotion were associated with dreams. In the *Odyssey*, Iphitime appears as in a dream, as ἐναργὲς εἶδωλον created by Athena, to reassure her sister Penelope that her son is still alive<sup>38</sup>.

On a metatheatrical level, the game of *simulacra* comments on the doubling of roles. Would Plautus cast the roles of twins to a single or two actors? What happens when the same actor plays two characters or when two actors play the same character? What are the audiences' expectations? Plautus perfects the method of double roles that started with Sophocles' introduction of the third actor, and was followed by Menander's 'rule of three actors'. *Miles Gloriosus* demonstrates the theory (suggested by Benjamín García-Hernández<sup>39</sup>) of 'the split double' where one equals one + one (Philocomasium = Philocomasium + Dicea). One person is mistaken for two. Philocomasium is a character split into two roles (v. 532).

Scel. *etsi east, non est ea.*  
She is, and yet she isn't.

Plautus explicitly suggests that a female character is the perfect embodiment of duplicity, being herself the paradigm of the double speaker, skillfully performing the lines of both parts (v. 466).

Pal. *Ut utrubique orationem docte divisit suam.*  
The skilful way she did get off the lines of both parts.

How is the stratagem of splitting the young woman into a twin fulfilled? Her disguise happens offstage; she gives herself the appearance of a freeborn *puella* ready to honour the gods after she has been rescued from dangerous waters. She wears the same mask and long, flowing garment that signify her status, while, as Philocomasium, she could be dressed in a saffron-coloured mantle signaling greed, a trait for the character type of courtesans. The only risk she runs of being exposed is if the soldier asks to see her and her sister Dicea together (v. 250). On a metatheatrical level, we can see that the same Roman actor is been called to play two female roles. Philocomasium's role is a challenging one that calls for an actor of unusual comic versatility, since he has to succeed in portraying the free born/prostitute dichotomy.

In *Amphitruo*, the concept of the 'added double' is put into practice. Two different people are mistaken for one. In this comedy Jupiter appears as Amphitruo's, and

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<sup>38</sup> *Od.* IV 841.

<sup>39</sup> GARCÍA-HERNÁNDEZ (2003, 99-111).

Mercury as Sosias's, double. In this instance, two characters share the same identity and the same role and compete with each other. This is a situation of antagonism since the doubles appear together on-stage, fighting for their identity. Plautus reveals the stage properties (*signa*) that will make it easier for the external audience to distinguish the divine doubles from the real Amphitryon and Sosia. In the actual performance, each of the two sets of identical characters must be played by a different actor. The reason is the simultaneous or nearby appearance of the divine and mortal double. So, two actors play the same character (*Amph.* 566f.):

Do you dare to tell me a thing which no one's ever seen before and which is impossible, namely that one and the same man can be in two places simultaneously at the same time?

In the *Menaechmi*, Menaechmus of Epidamnus and Menaechmus of Syracuse function as a complementary dyad. They work as alternatives to each other, replacing and being mistaken for each other. The plot ends with the completion of a whole personality, a single role through the interaction of two halves. Each of the twins reveals only one or two aspects of a personality, and since these aspects are different for each twin, they are regarded as separated halves of one complete self<sup>40</sup> (*Men.* 1062s.).

He is the very image of you!  
He's as like you as can be!

Metatheatrically, we see the regular technique used in twin comedies in Rome. Whenever the company of actors was smaller than the number of characters demanded by a plot, the same actor would play both siblings<sup>41</sup>. According to the theory of the "harmony of roles", two roles with similar moral and physical qualities were played by one actor<sup>42</sup>. Plautus carefully organized stage movement so that the single 'star' actor can play both Menaechmus of Epidamnus and Menaechmus of Syracuse. Plautus spends most of the play having an actor wearing one mask playing both brothers, only to reveal at the last moment that the troupe has all along had a second identical mask<sup>43</sup>. By reserving the use of a second Menaechmus until the final recognition scene, Plautus maintains comic suspense around the duplication of the leading character.

Seeing double was considered 'madness' and 'schizophrenia' in ancient drama. In Roman comedy this witty game of vision creates a whole new chapter on humour. Identical figures are readily available as metaphors for the self in conflict or for any

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<sup>40</sup> LEACH (1969, 33).

<sup>41</sup> MOORHEAD (1953). The *palla* served as a valuable identifying stage property between the two brothers.

<sup>42</sup> PRESCOTT (1923); MARSHALL (2006).

<sup>43</sup> MARSHALL (2006, 126-58).

duality. Twins are employed in a performance to question relationships and binary oppositions. Complementary couplings, like *dominus-servus*, and antithetical relations like *liber-servus*, *meretrix-matrona*, *iustus-iniustus* are ruptured<sup>44</sup>. Gods and mortals are brought to equal levels. Every sequential relationship is inverted; especially the linear logic of cause and effect (*actio-factum*). Time and space are distorted.

The double causes the bilocation of the doubled, so that the latter seems to be present and absent at the same time. Sosia declares to his master the paradox he experiences: «I'm at home, I'm telling you, can't you hear me? And I, the same Sosia, am here with you» (v. 577). If space limits are confused, then time boundaries are non-existent and facts are made non-facts (v. 884 He [Amphitruo] is shouting that what has happened has not happened, cf. *Mil.* 227 so that what's been seen will be unseen, and what's done undone).

The mix-up of look-alike figures throws every sequential relation into confusion and this creates comedy: to be somewhere before arriving there, to receive what has not yet been given<sup>45</sup>. When Sosia was just sent home from the harbour before dawn, his second self was standing in front of the house long before he got there. The sequence is reversed and the perfect clause comes before the imperfect (vv. 602f.).

When you sent me ahead home from the harbor, a  
while ago, before sunlight –  
[...] I was already standing in front of the house way before I  
got there<sup>46</sup>.

A character is simultaneously the subject and the object of his own action (*Amph.* 617f.) «Who forbade you [to enter the house]? So. That Sosia I've been talking about all this time, the one who beat me up. Am. Who is that Sosia? So. It's me, I say». «So. At first I didn't believe my own self, Sosia, until that other Sosia made me believe him. Milk doesn't resemble milk more than that me resembles this me» (vv. 597f., 601).

Since dreams are thought to be about doubling, the theme of dreaming redoubles Philocomasium. Like Pentheus in the *Bacchae*, Sceledrus sees what he is not permitted to witness, in a place where he is not entitled to be, and thus he becomes the victim of altered vision. No wonder that the Romans preferred Plautus' plays to exhibitions of tight-rope walking, boxing, acrobats, and paid interpreters of dreams in the surrounding area, on the same day of the performance. The Roman audience flocked to Plautus' spectacles which blurred, crossed or even eliminated the line between stage and reality. As William Harris states, it was the decision of the Roman population at large, not of an

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<sup>44</sup> See GARCÍA-HERNÁNDEZ (2003).

<sup>45</sup> GARCIA-HERNANDEZ (2003, 107).

<sup>46</sup> *Nam ut dudum... me praemisti domum, / ... prius multo ante aedis stabam quam illo adveneram.*

intellectual elite, that the Latin *somniare*, from Plautus onwards, was used as metaphor and meant 'to have illusions'<sup>47</sup>.

### 3. Splitting images

A man with practical backstage experience of theatre, like Plautus, could not but know how to use the dualism of the scenery structure to bring a comic result to perfection. What are the opportunities offered by stage scenery for double seeing? I will briefly refer to some views about masks and stage. We should begin by looking at a mosaic that has been recently unearthed, not yet published. The mosaic represents an act of Menander's *Philadelphoi*, which has been the model for Plautus' *Stichus*. In *Stichus*, we find a pair of sisters, a pair of brothers married to the two sisters, and a pair of slaves who are brothers, all distributed in two households. The picture reveals the way in



which the artist conceived doubling in performance, and for this he might have been influenced by a Plautine production. The image of two symmetrically confronted players is evocative enough to energise theatrical memory<sup>48</sup>.

The stage appears as two mirroring halves, with the father placed in the center and his two daughters occupying the two ends of the stage as contrasting dynamics.

Only the sisters' colour of hair differentiates their otherwise identical appearance. The character on the right can be mirrored in the left one, in the same way that the right side of the scene reflects the left side. Here we could recall the *Menaechmi* in which the two sides of the stage represent a battle between *industria* and *voluptas*, and where each twin occupies a certain side<sup>49</sup>. The house of Menaechmus A stands at the exit nearer to the forum from where the character keeps entering the stage after fulfilling his civic

<sup>47</sup> HARRIS (2003, 139). *Somniare* was used as a by-word for falling victim to the insubstantial and the deceptive; for delusion and day-dream. Cf. *Cist.* 291 «What I want to know is whether you are insane or dreaming on your feet». See *Amph.* 696f.; *Men.* 394f.; *Capt.* 848; *Merc.* 950; *Curc.* 546.

<sup>48</sup> See VARLIKLARI – MÜDÜRLÜĞÜ (2008). In the picture the copy of a genuine mosaic of Menander's *Philadelphoi* appears. It was withdrawn from an auction in Paris (Drouot 29/05/08). The real one was found near the theater in Daphne outside Antioch (3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD *terminus ante quem*). It was found, along with the dramatic panels of *Perikeiromene*, *Philadelphoi*, *Synaristosai*, *Theophorosmene*, and all together formed a floor pavement, typical of other Antioch mosaics from the imperial period.

<sup>49</sup> SEGAL (1969, 116).

obligations. Menaechmus B always exits left to the harbour and he is located across the stage in Erotium's house.

The system of masks used by Plautus is another medium to intensify the comic effect of doubles. In *Miles Gloriosus*, two characters are represented by the same mask (*et hinc et illinc mulier feret imaginem*, v. 151). In Roman comedy the variety of masks is limited, following the example of the Atellan farces and the rural Fescennine verses of Italy. Plautus has to assemble all the themes available in Greek drama, to domesticate and represent them, by narrowing the characters down into a stock system. Hence, if there is a limited variety of masks, the chances are greater for two characters to appear on stage wearing identical masks, functioning as each other's *speculum*. The mask, or else πρόσωπον, signifies 'something that turns itself to somebody else's gaze', and this dialogic power becomes greater between identical persons. For instance, in the great dialogue between god and the slave Sosia, in *Amphitruo*, Mercury, a divine character from Attic drama σικελικίζει\*, becomes identical with a slave from the Italian farce; and then the two πρόσωπα correspond to each other (*Amph.* 441ff.).

So. Yes, definitely, when I look at him and consider  
my own looks, what I'm like (I've often looked into the  
mirror), he's extremely similar to me; he has a hat and  
clothes just like me. He's as similar to me as I am. Leg,  
foot, height, haircut, eyes, nose, lips, cheeks, chin, beard,  
neck: the whole lot.

Moreover, in *Miles*, the plot foregrounds a particular configuration of the stage which is to be used for all Plautine comedies. The plot establishes that there is a hole in an interior common wall through which Philocomasium can crawl. The architecture of the comedy reflects the architecture of the stage (vv. 142f.).

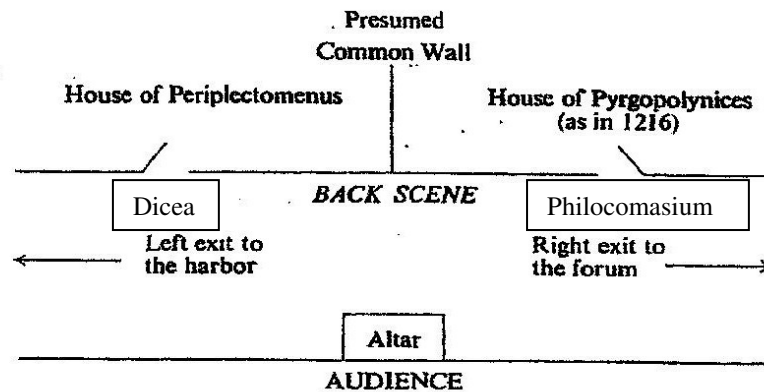
Pal. and I dug a hole through the wall of this room, so providing a secret passage  
for her from this house into that one.

As Marshall states «of course for the actors there is no interior wall, it is only a feature of the off-stage dramatic world»<sup>50</sup>. However, there is a possibility that the fiction of the plot mimics the stage reality. Philocomasium's metamorphosis is said to be fulfilled in the backstage of the secret tunnel («But it's a marvel how she could pass from here to here, if it really is she!», v. 377)<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> MARSHALL (2006, 105).

<sup>51</sup> For the setting of the *Miles* cf. HAMMOND – MACK – MOSKALEW (1963).



The tunnel allows her to dash back and forth from one house to the next, one moment appearing as herself entering one door, the next posing as her twin sister exiting from another door. Philocomasium's dream is a story of moving from one house to another adjoining house. Palaestrio's emphasis on this alludes to backstage communication between at least two doors on stage. It was important to Plautus to maintain a consistent onstage geography, and to remind his audience that his world is the stage.

Many lines stress that there is no apparent communication between the two houses—neither by balcony nor through a garden. Sceledrus supposes that by standing in front of his own house-door he can make it impossible for Philocomasium to slip out and enter the other house. We see him there with his back to the audience and his arms spread wide, when he is told to 'look to the left' and is astonished to see Philocomasium appearing from the other house<sup>52</sup>. We could support the use of the mechanism called *angiportum* which was the central entrance to an alley<sup>53</sup>. This *angiportum* was situated between the two doors, and could also be a stage street that made the backstage movement of characters possible. Metatheatrically we are transferred in the actors' dressing room, where the doubling of roles is accomplished.

In the Rome of Plautus, a hybrid form of temporary stage exists, mixing Hellenistic and native structures to meet the needs of the contemporary repertoire. According to R.C. Beacham, this type had a facade (scene building) and two projecting wings (the *paraskenia*), containing doors, on either side. A central pavilion was connected by low partitioning walls to two flanking side doors<sup>54</sup>. The presence of two ceilings—the one over the pavilions, the other over the entire stage—created an enclosure within an enclosure. This type of stage was based on the repetition of geometric

<sup>52</sup> V. 360 cf. BEARE (1954). RAMBO (1915, 412) suggested that each brother used a separate wing in the *Menaechmi*, to help the audience distinguish their roles.

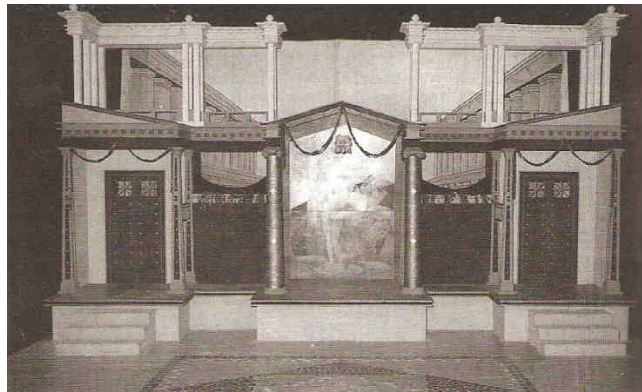
<sup>53</sup> *Pseud.* 960-71.

<sup>54</sup> BEACHAM (1990, 80).



forms<sup>55</sup>. Perfect symmetry was also accomplished in scenic painting (*scenographia*), which acquired imposing, three-dimensional perspective. The stage was divided into two parts by an axis, and these two zones accommodated different activities. Doors were *indices* (or metonymies) of households and *symbols* of individual characters. There was a symbolic symmetrical antithesis between the doors, since one household was the mirror image of the other.

On the basis of textual and material evidence taken together, we can trace a mirroring effect imposed on Plautus' audience, by the way it is introduced in the *Miles Gloriosus*. On the one hand we, the readers, are enabled through the plot to contemplate the bipartite structure of Plautus' scenic design. On the other hand, the Roman audience, when coming across the Plautine stage, is able to 'read' the plot before hearing the prologue, because the implicit narrative within the stage set betrays a play with a tendency to geminate<sup>56</sup>.



What is "new", then, in Plautus' New Comedy? In the phrase *hoc argumentum sicilicissitat* we find our missing link, Plautus' poetic program. Plautus uses the *sicilicus* symbol to denote the gemination of his plots, his characters and his stage. In his earliest play, the *Miles Gloriosus*<sup>57</sup>, in the first part of his comedy, in his first prologue and argument, Plautus introduces the way doubles function. Firstly, gemination creates plays-within-the-play and characters who act as playwrights. Secondly, when Plautus focuses on two roles, he economizes with his casting and presents heroes 'who make divisions of themselves' and appear as dream figures. Thirdly, all these happen on a stage whose physical format creates mirror reflections. Plautus furnished Italian

<sup>55</sup> Even if the stage structure was not exactly as mentioned, the projections, enclosures and symmetry must have been traits of its overall construction. See the painting from The Room of Masks and from a room in Villa of Oplontis near Pompei (BEACHAM [1990, 73]).

<sup>56</sup> In the picture we see a replica temporary stage, built and used under Prof. Beacham's guidance at the University of Warwick (BEACHAM [1990, im. 12]).

<sup>57</sup> The release of Naevius from prison is considered as a *terminus ante quem*. Cf. BUCK (1940). The play remained a favourite long after its performance: cf. Cic. *De Off.* I 137.

Renaissance and Shakespearean comedy with a comic idea which has survived and regeminated without significant modification. This investigation could throw light on the obscure era of Middle Comedy, and to lost plays in which the motif of identical twins formed a part, like the (pseudo-)Plautine *Trigemini* or Naevius' *Quadrigemini* and to titles surviving from farces, like *The Twin Maccuses*, or from mimes, like Liberius' *Gemelli*; like Posidippus' *Ὅμοιοι* and the lost *Δίδυμοι*. Plautus becomes a trickster on his stage as he pleases and fools the audience, by performing sleights of hand. The original element Plautus incorporates, establishes him as "same and other", a non-identical twin, a genuine writer amongst doubles.

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