

Konstan – Roman Comedy

Aulularia (Plautus)

Most comedies have a social obstacle to marriage (lack of citizenship on part of girl) overcome through a recognition or revelation of the girl's true status. Some however have a different obstacle – a miser or misanthrope who doesn't engage in society in the normal way. This is only overcome through a change in the misanthrope's character.

In *Aulularia*, Euclio, a poor man, has gotten a pot of gold and he obsesses over keeping it safe, to the point that he essentially ostracizes himself from the community. Not trusting it to his house, after a while he tries leaving it in the temple of Fides, but not trusting Fides, he finally takes it outside the city completely to a grove of Silvanus. A slave follows him and digs up the gold when he leaves. The slave's master is Lyconides, who raped Euclio's daughter Phaedria. His uncle Megadorus wants to marry Phaedria for lust, not for dowry, thus abrogating the traditional social conflict. Lyconides finds his love for Phaedria rekindled. He tells Euclio and moves to marry the girl. When he finds out his slave stole the gold, he returns it to Euclio, who gives it to him as a dowry. There may be some criticism on Plautus's part on the repeal of a law governing female behavior to keep it from being too ostentatious and wanton.

Asinaria (Plautus)

Argyrippus is the young man in love with a prostitute. Another guy, Diabolus, also loves her and plans to hire her for an entire year. The slave Libanius tells Argyrippus's father Demaenetus, who is very supportive of indulging his son and rails against the typical stern father. But he is entirely in the pocket of his wife Artemona, who has all the money. So he, Libanius, and the slave Leonida, need to defraud her somehow. There is this long and pointless scene where the two slaves try to get a merchant boy to turn over some money meant for the wife to pay for some asses, before finally taking him to Demaenetus, whom he trusts. But when Demaenetus is on the verge of giving the money to Argyrippus, he demands a night with the girl first. This is an abrupt switch of plot-lines shifts from the standard young man getting help, to young man putting father in his place, and highlights how messed up Demaenetus is. Humiliated, he is forced to play his proper role in the Roman household.

Captivi (Plautus)

Play of discovery, not action. There was a war between Aetolia and Elis. One of the prisoners sold was Philopolemus son of Hegio of Aetolia. His father tries to buy as many Elean captives as he can, in hope of finding one to exchange. He manages to buy Philocrates, a doctor, and his slave Tyndarus. But Philocrates and Tyndarus have switched identities, and Hegio sends the

citizen instead of the slave. But Philocrates does bring back the son. Then it is revealed that Tyndarus is actually another son of Hegio.

The play presents us with a conflict of morality. Tyndarus has responsibilities to both Hegio and Philocrates, and he can't fulfill his duties to one without violating the other. He chooses loyalty to Philocrates, for which most scholars praise him, but Hegio is also right to be upset at the deception. On a deeper level, the play reveals the problems with the status of slaves.

Rudens (Plautus)

Takes place in Cyrene. Plesidippus buys a girl from Labrax, but Labrax takes the money and skips town for Sicily. He is shipwrecked, and the girl Palaestra and her friend Ampelisca escape to shore in a boat. Labrax and his pal Charmides also escape. A slave, Gripus, goes out at sea and finds a treasure chest containing Labrax's money and tokens showing that Palaestra is really the daughter of Daemones, Gripus's master. Gripus gets into a fight with Trachalio, Plesidippus's slave over who gets the chest. Meanwhile, the girls have wound up in Daemones's house, and Daemones is called in to arbitrate the dispute over the chest. The basic premise of Gripus is that since he fished the chest out of the sea, it is his. But there are legitimate property rights, that Daemones, as a good citizen, wants to uphold in the face of anarchy. During the arbitration, it is revealed that Palaestra is Daemones's daughter. Daemones proves himself worthy of moral law. Labrax and Daemones finally come to an arrangement. The city state is utopia for its justice and fair-play.

Cistellaria (Plautus)

Set in Sicyon. Alcesimarchus is in love with the courtesan Selenium. But his dad wants him to marry a citizen, and when Selenium finds out she runs off at the behest of her mother, leaving another, more hardened courtesan named Gymnasium to explain. Gymnasium's mother has lots to say about prostitutes and how good they are, being a procuress herself. Of course, Selenium really turns out to be a citizen, a baby who was abandoned, etc. The slave of the real parents, Lampadio, tells the foster mom Melaenis, about it. Everything moves swiftly to a conclusion, despite a lot of missing text. The central theme of the play is the role of non-citizens in a polis, and how they were kept separate from citizens in terms of rights. But Plautus's concern for the courtesan class may have been his way of telling Rome to treat its allies well, as the prologue seems to indicate.

Phormio (Terence)

Parasite play. Two Athenian brothers, Demipho, and Chremes, with sons Antipho and Phaedria. Phaedria is in love with a prostitute, Antipho with a poor girl, Phanium. Phormio the parasite fixes up the marriage using legal trickery – an Athenian is obliged to marry his nearest relative when she is an orphan. So he swears this in court. Phaedria's girl Dorio wants to sell

herself to someone else if he can't cough up some cash. Then Demipho and Chremes come back. Chremes is in a bigamous marriage and has had a daughter, whom he wants to marry to Antipho. The daughter is of course Phanium. But before they find this out, Phormio extorts money from Chremes to divorce Phanium, which he give to pay for the other girl. Everything is finally revealed and all live happily ever after. This play is unusual because instead of the girl moving up in class, she moves sideways.

Hecyra (Terence)

The mother-in-law. Very unusual play, in that it starts with a legitimate marriage and has no happy resolution. Pamphilis has ditched his mistress Bacchis and married Philumena (although he doesn't want to touch her), who quarrels with his mother Sostrata when he is away. But Philumena bears a child from being raped. Pamphilis, in an effort to get out, pleads that because Philumena quarreled with his mother, it isn't pious to remain with her. This gradually breaks down, especially after word of the child leaks out. The mistress is called in and swears it is over between her and Pamphilis, and it is revealed that Pamphilis raped what's her name. The emphasis in the play is on the opposition between love and filial duty and Pamphilis is a subtle manipulator of the moral tradition.

Truculentus (Plautus)

This play reveals the triumph of sordid and materialistic passions. It has lots of conflicts, reversals, and a recognition. Diniarchus has been drained of all his money by the courtesan Phronesium, who dumped him for a Babylonian soldier and pretended to have a child by him. He is thus the young lover, but he is not oppressed or poor or under a father's thumb like the usual examples. Phronesium has no procurer or love, she just wants money. There is another young lover, Strabax, and he has a slave Truculentus. Phronesium pretends she still likes Diniarchus. The Babylonian soldier, Stratophanes, is actually a very limited version of the typical miles gloriosus. Strabax is a prodigal son type. Truculentus wants to tell the father, but is seduced by a slave of Phronesium. Then some more people come in and it is revealed that Diniarchus is actually the father of the baby by another girl, whom he marries. This also gives him leverage over Phronesium. Phronesium is like the hero in an Aristophanes play, who refashions the world around her own desires.