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In Plautus's *Pseudolus*, the trickster slave Pseudolus, contemplating his next move, turns to the audience and delivers what Niall Slater (2000, 103) has dubbed the "poet soliloquy" (401–5):

> sed quasi poeta, tabulas quom cepit sibi,
> quaerit quod nusquam gentiumst, reperit tamen,
> facit illud veri simile quod mendacium est,
> nunc ego poeta fiam: viginti minas,
> quae nunc nusquam sunt gentium, inveniam tamen.

> But like a poet, when he has taken his tablets, he searches for that which is nowhere in the world. Still he finds it. He makes that which is a lie similar to the truth. Now I will become a poet. The twenty *minae*, which are now nowhere in the world, nevertheless I will find them.[1]

In his influential study, Slater has urged scholars to see Pseudolus, the poet, embracing a metatheatrical stance to the world in order to write the script of the plot.[2] While I agree with Slater that we should view self-conscious theatricality as the strength of Pseudolus and other *servi callidi*, too much emphasis has been placed on scriptwriting as the expression of it. Rather than focusing on how *servi callidi* write plots to ensnare their opponents, I would urge us to consider, through Pseudolus, the importance of improvisation as a different expression of the slave's self-conscious theatricality. We should view Pseudolus's project as *poesis* rather than as a *poema*.[3] The audience is not encouraged to reflect on a perfectly wrought play in order to appreciate the poet's masterful control; instead, we are invited to follow a play in development, lacking a clear path, where the poet must rely on his ability to adapt to shifting circumstances. By emphasizing improvisation, we can view the *servus callidus* in a way that embraces the comic spirit's drive for new ways of approaching a seemingly fixed and finite world.

In the contrast between *poema* and *poesis*, we see opposition between what I will call the *written* and the *improvisatory* modes. Both involve the creation

of scripts, but each takes a different approach to what is at stake with the script. In the written mode, the playwright writes a script that the actors are to produce exactly to the best of their abilities. The emphasis is placed on the text first and foremost. In this mode, the script is produced before performance, and as a result, the script is more or less fixed when it comes to the performance. Such an approach to comedy is more appropriate for a poet like Menander than Plautus, as Sander Goldberg (1995) has noted.[4] The audience is put in a position to enjoy a product that has been worked out fully in advance. Wrinkles in the plot are anticipated from the start, and the action proceeds fairly smoothly towards the marriage at the end of the play.

If the playwright engages the improvisatory mode to create his script, then the emphasis shifts away from the primacy of the text. As C. W. Marshall (2006, 245) has suggested, "Improvisation is a process of composition in which the moment of composition coincides with the moment of performance." Rather than working out all of the details in advance, the playwright sets up a framework within which the action will take place, and the script takes form as playwright and actors work out what should happen within that framework. If we think of the *commedia dell'arte* tradition, the numerous *lazzi* provide scenarios within which the actors may explore potentials. They will have a sense of the cue that starts a particular *lazzo*, and they will have an end towards which they will work. The events in between may take several avenues: some agreed upon from previous rehearsals and performances, others that will arise unexpectedly during the current performance. The key, then, to the improvisatory mode is a different attitude toward the performance of the script than that characterized by the written mode. Because of the way that improvisation creates plots, the improvisatory mode must adapt to the performance circumstances, accepting some lack of control over events.

With these contrasting modes in mind, we can now think about the process of creating Plautine drama. We may take the poet soliloquy as an invitation to see Pseudolus as a reflection of Plautus's playwrighting technique. We should be careful, though, about the extent to which we conflate the playwrighting of Plautus from outside the play with that of Pseudolus within the play. In what follows, I first discuss the way that Plautus can play on the competing scripting techniques of the written and improvisatory modes. I then make the case that we cannot fully equate Pseudolus's technique with Plautus's because Pseudolus can only tap into the improvisatory mode with any confidence that the scheme will succeed. This approach stands in stark contrast to that of scholars who fully conflate the figure of the *servus callidus* with Plautus the playwright.[5]

Plautus can use the written mode's emphasis on the text of the playwright which preceeds action. He has the power to script carefully the plots his trick-

sters will embark upon and the way the dupes will react. He has the power to create the theatrical illusion that Denis Feeney (2010, 288) has described: "The people up there [on stage] look like free agents, but they are not." He knows the expectations of his comic genre, and he knows how he wants to twist them.

Yet Plautus may also employ the improvisatory mode which has implications beyond simply raising the comic level.[6] Marshall (2006, 252) is right to argue for a continuum between truly scripted and truly improvised plays, with Plautus falling somewhere in between. Blending the more scripted Greek New Comedy tradition with the more improvised local Italian tradition, Plautus created plays with a different aesthetic than those of his Greek originals.[7] We can lose track of this if we focus too carefully on the written text. As Sander Goldberg (2004, 385) reminds us, "The script is less a thing in itself than a reminder of that other, bigger thing that was the play, and the authority of the written word over the play's creation is not absolute." If we follow Marshall's argument that significant portions of Plautus were scripted as well as portions for genuine improvisation, then we cannot subsume all improvisatory moments as "illusions" created by Plautus's careful scripting.[8] In the improvisatory mode, the script is not a firm and fixed artifact.[9] It must respond to demands of the moment of performance, and as such, playwrights and actors well versed in it are fully aware that they cannot control all of the elements of that performance.[10]

These principals of the improvisatory mode align well with the way comedy gathers its energy. Recently, Alenka Zupančič (2008) suggested that comedy capitalizes on unforeseen opportunities that erupt suddenly onto the stage— what she calls *surplus potentials*. These surplus potentials are the result of the fact that the world does not neatly add up. Humans are torn between an affinity with the animals (earthbound, mortal, finite) and the gods (celestial, immortal, infinite). We are caught in a gap between the two worlds, never fully fitting in with either. In contrast to tragedy, which bemoans our inability to fully control the world we are thrust into, comedy accepts the gap as an inherent part of our experience. Comedy finds energy in the contradictions that emerge from the gaps (misplaced meanings, mistaken identities, failed expectations), and in turn, comedy urges us to come to terms with the ultimately elusive nature of the world.

This is not to say that comedy ultimately laughs at us futilely grasping at an incontrollable world. It demands that we be attentive to the shifting circumstances of the moment. In comedy, as Zupančič (2008, 132) argues, "not only do we (or the comic characters) not get what we asked for, *on top of it* (and not instead of it) we get something we haven't asked for at all." The comic hero does not bemoan his inability to manipulate his world perfectly. Instead, he

embraces the unexpected twists and turns that emerge. In contrast to those who cling to the written mode's call for control over the scripted world, the great improvisers are the ones best prepared to embrace each potential setback as an opportunity to explore new potentials that will emerge.

We should not forget that Plautine theater occurred in a setting that demanded actors be flexible in putting on the plays. Because there were no permanent theaters in Plautus's day, troops would have to put to new use everyday space, in essence creating surplus potential for that space.[11] These appropriated spaces lacked the orchestra of Greek and later Roman theaters, and thus the space between actors and audience would have been much more intimate. The smallness of the space may have contributed, as Maria Schiappa de Azevedo (1975–1976, 129) has discussed, to active participation from the audience in the creative process of the play's performance.[12] In light of the circumstances of producing the plays, it is unlikely that Plautine comedy could avoid embracing some of the call of the improvisatory mode.

By looking at *Pseudolus*, we can see the way that Plautus could entice the audience by playing with the tension between his Greek models (more aligned with the written mode) and local Italian traditions (more aligned with the improvisatory mode). When *Pseudolus* came to the stage in 191 BCE, the audience would have been second-generation theatergoers who watched over a decade of Plautine performances.[13] This audience would have expectations not only for *comoediae palliatae*, but also for Plautus's own poetic style.[14] They might believe that they knew what was 'supposed' to happen, and this is precisely what the written mode encourages. If the audience knows the scripts of *palliatae* well enough, then they should be able to predict what will happen.[15] With all of the stock characters in place, *Pseudolus* pretends to present a typical plot, namely that the clever slave will help unite his master with his beloved. Plautus even echoes the tradition as the slave thinks about getting money from the father or using an impostor to dupe the pimp.[16] If we heed the call of the written mode too much, then we will be forced to squeeze Pseudolus into the category of the *servus callidus* despite the many ways he does not neatly fit the model.

The improvisatory mode calls on the audience to engage with the play at the precise moment of performance. Rather than insisting that the tradition is the only way to view the play, the improvisatory mode embraces the possibility that there may be other ways for *servi callidi* to succeed than where their predecessors had. Perhaps we should understand Pseudolus's name as a combination of *pseudo-* (lying, deceitful) and *dolus* (trick).[17] He claims to be full of tricks, but we are pushed to wonder whether or not we should actually trust him. The written mode would have us dismiss the claims that Pseudolus should

not be trusted, believing that we, as Eva Stehle (1984, 246) suggests, "trust that [we] understand what he is doing."[18] The improvisatory mode would urge us to embrace the idea that Pseudolus at times may not know precisely what he is going to do because he himself has not yet figured it out.[19] As Pseudolus embraces the comic spirit and takes advantage of the surplus potentials that will arise in order to get his master's beloved, the audience is encouraged to embrace the unexpected moments and enjoy the process as it unfolds.

We can see Plautus playing on the tension between the written and improvisatory modes in the opening encounter between Calidorus and Pseudolus. Presented with a familiar scene of a young lover in need of the help of his slave, we are invited to set in motion the usual plotlines where the slave will script deceptions in order to help his master.[20] Calidorus has learned in a letter that his beloved Phoenicium will be sold to a Macedonian soldier. An established text sets this play in motion,[21] but Plautus presents us with alternative ways to approach this text (23–30):

> **PS.** ut opinor, quaerunt litterae hae sibi liberos:
> alia aliam scandit. **CAL.** ludis iam ludo tuo?
> **PS.** has quidem pol credo nisi Sibulla legerit,
> interpretari alium potesse neminem.
> **CAL.** qur inclementer dicis lepidis litteris
> lepidis tabellis lepida conscriptis manu?
> **PS.** an, opsecro hercle, habent quas gallinae manus?
> nam has quidem gallina scripsit.

PS. As I see it, these letters are looking to get themselves some kids. The one mounts the other. **CAL.** Now you're playing your game? **PS.** By gum, unless the Sibyl reads these, I do indeed believe that no one else can interpret them. **CAL.** Why do you speak harshly when lovely letters are written on lovely tablets by a lovely hand? **PS.** Oh come on, by golly. What hands do chickens have? You see, we've got chicken-scratches.

Calidorus aligns himself with the written mode and commits to the fixity of the text he believes he is expected to play. He sees his clever slave doing what clever slaves do (*ludis iam ludo*), and he can only see in the letter the loveliness of his beloved (*lepidis litteris lepidis tabellis lepida conscriptis manu*). Shortly after the appearance of the pimp, Pseudolus tries to encourage his despondent master, but Calidorus insists that young lovers are only good if they act foolishly (*non iucundumst nisi amans facit stulte*, 237). Plautus has written a character who demands to play the role that the audience expects of him. Plautus

commits Calidorus to the usual scripts of the *palliatae*, and as a result the young man cannot help himself be anything but the despondent lover.

In contrast, Plautus aligns Pseudolus with the improvisatory mode. The letter handed to the *servus callidus* ceases to be a fixed record of Calidorus's loss. Pseudolus foregoes similes in order to transform the letter through three jokes.[22] He spontaneously spins surplus readings out of a seemingly fixed text (letters giving birth, cryptic messages of the Sibyl, and chicken writing).[23] He encourages his master to realize that there are other ways to respond to the proposed script so long as his master abandons the fixity of the written mode.

Plautus also emphasizes Pseudolus's alignment with the improvisatory mode by having him deliver more soliloquies than any other Plautine character, as well as being the only character in this play that breaks the fourth wall.[24] Allowing only Pseudolus to speak directly to the audience, Plautus suggests that this *servus callidus* is not bound to the scripted world of the play like other characters. He is fundamentally different from those who never step out of the script. Where Calidorus insists that the script has determined what he might be (i.e., a foolish lover), Pseudolus may step outside of the plot and twist the role he is expected to play.

This discussion helps us think a bit through Plautus's method of constructing the play, but if we want to think about Pseudolus as a playwright, we have to make an important distinction between him and Plautus. Whereas Plautus may play with both modes, as he does with Calidorus and Pseudolus, Pseudolus cannot exist fully outside of the performance, nor can he precede the script in any real sense. As a character within the drama, he may employ the improvisatory mode in any script he might craft (performance and text simultaneously generated), but he cannot truly partake in the written mode (text preceeds performance) with any certainty that all of the other characters will follow his directorial mandates.

The poet soliloquy gives us reason to suspect that Pseudolus aligns his plot(s) with the improvisatory mode. Borrowing from the language of weaving (399–400) and poetry (401–5), he reveals his lack of a clear plan for acquiring the needed money.[25] The rhetorical emphasis of both the weaving and playwright metaphors places this craftsman at the beginning of his process.[26] In contrast to Palaestrio in *Miles* who will not, as his accomplice notes, "serve up [the plot] uncooked, but will give it well done" (208), Pseudolus informs the audience that he "does not have a first spot from where he may begin to weave nor certain limits for removing the warp" (399–400).[27] He is in the process of creating (*poesis*), crafting a work of indeterminate length, rather than in a position to look back upon his masterful creation.[28] Rather than crafting a script that anticipates all of the wrinkles in the plot to follow, Pseudolus's creative

process will capitalize on overlooked opportunities that emerge from events going contrary to what is expected.

Through numerous soliloquies, Pseuoldus displays his strength in improvising. In these soliloquies, he frequently announces that a plot is in danger of failing or that it actually has failed (394–408, 562–8, 600a–2, 667–86, 908–10, 984–5, 1019–36). We cannot privilege his ultimate success to the complete exclusion of his many failures. Zupančič (2008, 130) is right to warn us against dismissing as simply temporary all of the misses of comedy ("misencounters, misunderstandings, miscalculations, mistakes, misstatements, misrepresentations, misplacements, mismovements, misjudgments, misinterpretations, misdoings, misconducts, and misfiring"). Comedy encourages us to engage with the performance in development precisely by thinking about these misses as a fundamental aspect of the experience.[29] I would argue that all of Pseudolus's misses are precisely what define this *servus callidus*. Because of his commitment to the improvisatory mode rather than the execution of perfectly crafted script, he is prepared to find surplus potentials that emerge when it looks as if a plot has failed. Rather than bemoaning his failures, he ultimately welcomes each new moment as a chance to play his role slightly differently.[30]

Whatever scheme may have emerged from Pseudolus becoming a playwright is curtailed by the arrival of Calidorus's father. Since the clever slave suggests that Simo will be the source of cash (412–3), the audience may expect a plot like *Bacchides* or *Epidicus*.[31] Pseudolus blusters his way through the scene, insisting that the money will come from Simo, but when the old man departs, Pseudolus says to the audience (562–8):

> suspicio est mi nunc vos suspicarier,
> me idcirco haec tanta facinora promittere,
> quo vos oblectem, hanc fabulam dum transigam,
> neque sim facturus quod facturum dixeram.
> non demutabo. atque etiam certum, quod sciam,
> quo id sim facturus pacto nihil etiam scio,
> nisi quia futurumst.

It's my suspicion that you now suspect that I am promising these great deeds so as to entice you while I act out this play. You suspect that I may not do what I said I would. I will not budge, and I still know for sure that I still have no clue how I might do this, except it is just going to happen.

Pseudolus confronts us with our suspicion that he will fail to play the role that we expect of him, but we have a *servus callidus* who relies on the improvisatory

mode. In the vacillation at the end of this passage, he is firm in his knowledge that he does not know how he will get the money, except that he will. This could be the motto of the comic improviser. Since comedy trusts in a world that does not neatly add up, there will always be new opportunities for new plots. There will always be opportunities for a craftsman who embraces the process over the final product (*poesis* over *poema*).

At each moment that we might expect Pseudolus to present a fully developed script to guide the plot, he discovers that he needs to abandon his current plan for a new opportunity. After a brief time off stage, Pseudolus returns, brimming with confidence, promising tricks (*duplicis, triplicis dolos*, 580), and boasting about the ease with which he shall overcome his adversaries (583). Exhibiting the verbal exuberance of the *servus callidus*, he promises that he will "ballistify Ballio" (585). This is the precise moment for Pseudolus to deliver a fully developed plan, but the arrival of Harpax leads to more improvisation. Whatever those tricks and plots were, they are quickly replaced, as Pseudolus remarks (601–2):

> novo consilio nunc mi opus est,
> nova res haec subito mi obiectast: 601a
> hoc praevortar principio; illaec omnia missa habeo quae ante agere occepi.

Now I need a new plan. This new matter has suddenly been tossed my way. Let me start from this beginning. I consider all those other things gone, the ones that I began to do before.

Scrapping his plot, Pseudolus embraces the improvisatory mode as he allows the plot to develop as the action proceeds. As a character within the play, he cannot simply force the play to conform to his vision of how things should happen.[32] By taking on a new role in a new plot, he avoids the mistake of other would-be tricksters who try to force their plots on the play's plot (cf. Tranio in *Mostellaria* and Milphio in *Poenulus*).[33] Because he improvises rather than demanding that a strict script dictate what will happen, Pseudolus proves himself more comic. He embraces the surplus potential of this moment.

Beyond improvising new plots as new potentials emerge, Pseudolus even improvises as he works his way into new plots.[34] Rather than locking himself into a completed script (*poema*), he chooses to finesse his role continually. Involved in a project of *poesis*, he stands in contrast to other *servi callidi* who are more aligned with the written mode. When others use false identities (cf. Palaestrio in *Miles* recasting female assistants, and the eponymous Curculio pretending to be a soldier's messenger), the roles have been prefabricated

before the target is engaged. In contrast, Pseudolus's alignment with the improvisatory mode becomes clear since he has not yet figured out exactly how to play his false identity.

As Pseudolus engages Harpax, we see Pseudolus constantly creating some wiggle room around his identity (605–9):

> **PS.** quisquis es, compendium ego te facere pultandi volo;
> nam ego precator et patronus foribus processi foras.
> **HARP.** tune es Ballio? **PS.** immo vero ego eius sum Subballio.
> **HARP.** quid istuc verbist? **PS.** condus, promus sum, procurator peni.
> **HARP.** quasi te dicas atriensem. **PS.** immo atriensi ego impero.

> **PS.** Whoever you are, I want you to cut short your knocking. You see, I am the intercessor and patron of these doors, and I have come forward. **HARP.** You're Ballio? **PS.** Nope. Actually I am his Subballio. **HARP.** What is that word you are using? **PS.** I store it, pour it, and procure the provisions. **HARP.** It's like you're saying you're a butler. **PS.** Nope. I order the butler.

Whenever Harpax seeks to define Pseudolus's identity (Ballio, butler), Pseudolus proposes an alternative (introduced by *immo*). Here we have the anti-comic and the comic both playing off of each other. While Harpax seeks to close up the loopholes, Pseudolus insists on surplus ways to understand his role.[35] At each moment of definition, the clever slave reinvents himself, hoping to convince Harpax of his importance within Ballio's household.

So long as Pseudolus is improvising, he has the upperhand, but when he shifts modes in trying to compel Harpax to fulfill the role of dupe, we see the limitation of a script. Pseudolus can convince the messenger that he really is Ballio's slave, but he cannot compel him to play along and hand over the money. When Pseudolus attempts to define Harpax's intentions (echoing Harpax's *quasi*), Harpax is able to return fire with an echo of Pseduolus's own terms (*immo vero*): **PS.** *quasi tu dicas me te velle argento circumducere. /* **HARP.** *immo vero quasi tu dicas quasique ego autem id suspicer* (**PS.** It's as if you are saying that I want to cheat you out of the money. **HARP.** Nope. Actually it's as if you are saying it and I, moreover, am suspecting it, 634–5). The roles have become reversed. Though we might expect Harpax, as a faithful slave, to be an easy dupe, he escapes because he refuses to follow Pseudolus's script. Harpax has read this script well, and he sees the danger of playing along. He crafts his own way, leaving a sealed letter for the pimp. A script is only good so long as all play along, but when one character goes off script and improvises, then the

desired plot comes unraveled. At the end of the scene, Pseudolus remains without the cash.

For a plotter committed to a finished *poema*, this failure might be seen as tragic, but for a skilled improviser like Pseudolus, it provides that unasked for surplus, which Zupančič suggests is at the heart of comedy. The success of a clever slave lies less in his ability to anticipate every obstacle than it does in capitalizing on surplus potentials. In a rare moment for Plautine slaves, Pseudolus reflects on his failure to get cash from Harpax (679–82):[36]

> atque hoc verum est: proinde ut quisque Fortuna utitur,
> ita praecellet atque exinde sapere eum omnes dicimus.
> bene ubi quod scimus consilium accidisse, hominem catum
> eum esse declaramus, stultum autem illum quoi vortit male.

And this is true. Just as anyone enjoys Fortune, so he will excel, and from that we all say that he is wise. When we know how his plan has succeeded well, we proclaim this man to be clever. Moreover, the guy whose plan turns out badly, we call him a fool.

The letter may be the key for Pseudolus's success, and yet he realizes that he may have to invent another scheme still.[37] Thanks to two previous failures to secure the money which were immediately followed by new opportunities, Pseudolus can remind us that the failure of one script is not the end. If Pseudolus is lucky, this will be the final plot; but should misfortune arise, whether in the form of a knowledgeable father or an uncooperative messenger, he may improvise a new plot.[38] In time, a surplus potential will arise that will help him reach his goal, and at that point improvisation will give way to celebration.

But before the letter plot can get underway, Plautus reminds us again about the ever-adapting nature of Pseudolus's plotting. Calidorus returns with his friend Charinus, fulfilling Pseudolus's request for an assistant (385–6).[39] The problem is that Charinus is a free member of society with an established identity, and identity can limit potential roles (e.g., Calidorus's firm commitment to being an *amans*). Pseudolus wants a new helper, preferably a slave (724–8). Charinus happens to have a slave that is perfect for Pseudolus's style of play-writing. He is unknown in Athens (729–31), adaptable to the situation (739–42), and has a name that fits a shifting imitator, Simia (744).[40] For a playwright of the improvisatory mode like Pseudolus, no better actor could be found.

Simia quickly establishes his affinity with Pseudolus. When Pseudolus tries to hurry him into action (920), he demands the opportunity to play his part as he wishes (*immo otiose volo*, 920). Just as Pseudolus refused to be defined by

Harpax, so too does Simia insist on the creative flexibility to play the part of Harpax as he sees fit.[41] In response to attempts at direction, he confidently proclaims (927–30):

> sic ego illum dolis atque mendaciis
> in timorem dabo militarem advenam,
> ipsus sese ut neget esse eum qui siet
> meque ut esse autumet qui ipsus est.

> Thus, by my tricks and lies, I will give that foreign military guy a fright so he himself would deny that he is who he is and would claim that I am his very self.

Just as Pseudolus had earlier proclaimed that he would produce twenty *minae* out of thin air, so Simia proudly boasts that he can replace reality with fiction.[42] In spite of Pseudolus's request for clarification about how Simia will accomplish this magnificent feat (930), Simia is able to steer the conversation toward a discussion of acting style. As a result, he, like Pseudolus before (cf. 388 and 721), refuses to reveal the details of his methods. By leaving the details unmentioned, Simia can follow his teacher in embracing the surplus potentials of any given moment, aligning himself with the improvisatory mode.

When the final deception begins, we see clear evidence that Pseudolus does not craft his plots in the written mode. He has failed to provide Simia with a complete script. Simia knows that he is to get the girl from Ballio by using the letter and pretending to be the soldier's messenger, but he has not been told the soldier's name. This lack of information introduces a surplus potential in which Simia can display his improvisatory skills. When Ballio asks about the soldier's identity, Simia is able to twist the question around (986–91):

> **SIM.** nosce imaginem: tute eius nomen memorato mihi,
> ut sciam te Ballionem esse ipsum. **BAL.** cedo mi epistulam.
> **SIM.** accipe et cognosce signum. **BAL.** oh! Polymachaeroplagides
> purus putus est ipsus. novi. heus! Polymachaeroplagidi
> nomen est. **SIM.** scio iam me recte tibi dedisse epistulam,
> postquam Polymachaeroplagidem elocutus nomen es.

> **SIM.** Recognize the seal. *You*, tell me the name so I know that you really are Ballio. **BAL.** Give me the letter. **SIM.** Take it and recognize the seal. **BAL.** Oh, Polymachaeroplagides. Plain and simple. I know it. Hey, his name is Polymachaeroplagides. **SIM.** Now I know that I rightly gave you the letter after you said the name Polymachaeroplagides.

Simia turns the question of his identity into a question of whether or not Ballio is really Ballio. By redirecting the conversation, Simia highlights the advantage of the improvisatory mode. All Simia needs is for Pseudolus to establish the framework for the scene (pimp gets cheated out of a girl), and he can rely on his improvisatory abilities to create a script that will lead to a fruitful conclusion.

Here we can also see the limits of the written mode. A script that preceeds performance in its entirety is seriously deficient in accounting for all the details of a performance, particularly how the intended audience will respond. Through improvisation, actors are able to work around the pitfalls in the script written for them and so the audience buys into the plot. We see here that the improvisatory mode is particularly appropriate for characters working within a play since they cannot script the reactions of their targets as Plautus can. Pseudolus and Simia want Ballio to quickly hand over the girl, but he proves more suspicious than anticipated. When Simia twists the conversation and Ballio must prove that he recognizes the soldier's seal to prove he really is the pimp, the trickster is able to turn a suspicious Ballio into a money-eager Ballio. Ballio forgets that he is on the lookout for one of Pseudolus's tricks, and he becomes energized by the prospect of successfully escaping Pseudolus's grasp by delivering Phoenicium to the right man.[43]

When the real Harpax arrives, we are reminded again about the limits of the written mode. Ballio takes his turn at playing the trickster (*hic homo meus est*, 1124), confident that this messenger is actually an agent of Pseudolus (1162). He encourages Pseudolus's master to join in, and Simo agrees, borrowing on theatrical language as he urges the pimp to make Harpax *ludi* (1167–8). The two masters enter the world of the playwright and, befitting masters who believe they control their world, they begin to fashion a script in the written mode.

Convinced they are dealing with an impostor, the masters have a clear sense of how they think the action should go, and they seek to impose their vision of the plot on Harpax. The two 'playwrights' take turns redefining Harpax's valor as the work of an inveterate scoundrel. Harpax says that he had been the high commander in his country (1170–1) to which Ballio suggests his country must have been a prison (1172).[44] Simo rewrites Harpax's swift travel from Sicyon as the consequence of strength training from shackles (1175–6). This abusive playwriting ends with Ballio making two suggestions that Harpax is the sexual plaything of his master (1180–1, 1189). Though the two masters can talk the talk of the playwright, they fail to recognize the need for their target to buy into their plot as reality. Because these playwrights aim at abuse rather than trickery, they commit to their script, ignoring how Harpax will respond.[45]

We see the failure of Ballio in the written mode when he confronts Harpax

about being an agent of Pseudolus. When he asks how much Harpax was paid, the messenger responds with ignorance about who Pseudolus is. Ballio begins desperately trying to maintain his fiction (1197–9):

> **BAL.** proin tu Pseudolo
> nunties abduxisse alium praedam, qui occurrit prior
> Harpax. **HAR.** Is quidem edepol Harpax ego sum. **BAL.** Immo edepol esse
> vis.

> **BAL.** Go on and announce to Pseudolus that another has taken the booty, a
> Harpax who came by beforehand. **HAR.** That Harpax is indeed by golly me.
> **BAL.** Nope, by golly. You want to be him.

We hear Ballio echo Pseudolus's and Harpax's earlier uses of *immo*, but there is a crucial difference here. In the previous examples, the speaker of *immo* used it to introduce a redefinition of himself (Pseudolus not butler, but order butler; Harpax not saying, but suspecting). Here, Ballio seeks to maintain control of his fiction by redefining Harpax against the reality that he really is who he says he is. Because his plot cannot respond to this unforeseen potential, it must unravel. Committed to the script he has crafted, Ballio makes himself a target for comedy. He fails to embrace the spirit of improvisation, and he departs the stage, proclaiming his birthday a death day (1237).

It is not that the *servus callidus* is able to create an imaginary world in which the dupes suddenly find themselves trapped. Rather, as Thomas Jenkins (2005, 370) suggests, it is through the "manipulation of *others*' voices . . . that Pseudolus creates his own, 'improvised,' comic world."[46] Like a skillful jazz musician trading fours, riffing on the cues provided by his fellow musicians, the Plautine slave appropriates and redirects the words and expectations of his dupes.[47] Rather than knowing what will happen before others do as if everything has been pre-scripted, Pseudolus commits to the challenges of the present moment. Reflecting demands placed on Plautine actors, he embraces the opportunity to see where the performance will take him, crafting temporary plots out of those surplus potentials in which he finds comic potential.[48] If we emphasize only the finished project of uniting lovers, then we overlook the creative energy that comes from these potentials that unexpectedly explode onto the stage.[49]

Through *Pseudolus*, Plautus turns the comic project inwards on his favorite creation, the *servus callidus*, discovering a clever slave who can capture our imagination in spite of his frequent failures. Rather than celebrating through the plots of the *servus callidus* mastery over the unforeseen (the written mode), *Pseudolus* demands that we be present in the moment, that we respond to the

unexpected, and that we continue to move forward in spite of the setbacks (the improvisatory mode). In place of a mechanical process in which Pseudolus succeeds merely because he dons the role of the *servus callidus*, Plautus urges us towards a more comical world in which not only do we not get exactly what we expected, but we also get something in addition. Thanks to the relentless energy of improvisation, we can embrace Pseudolus in his failures along with his ultimate success.[50]

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Notes

1. I follow Lindsay 1905 for Plautine texts unless otherwise noted. All translations are my own.

2. Slater 2000, 118: "In his control of the theatrical Pseudolus has, in a sense, been Plautus all through the play."

3. In this regard, I follow Schiappa de Azevedo 1975–1976, 102 who draws a contrast between the use of the image of the poet in *Casina* and here in *Pseudolus*. In *Casina*, the ending is practically revealed to the spectators from the beginning, whereas here in *Pseudolus* we are kept guessing.

4. Goldberg 1995, 35: "Menandrean comedy in particular not just poses and solves a specific problem, but offers its audience the pleasure of watching (or reading) an action develop in the certainty that . . . the end will be consistent with the beginning."

5. Sharrock (1996, 186) argues: "Things exist because Pseudolus creates them, and the audience is privileged to view the ramifications of his power even when he is not present." She has extended this approach to the *servus callidus* in Plautus more broadly, suggesting: "The playwright is the god of his fictive world" (2009, 132) and "The playwright has to be a slave, then, precisely because he is in some sense 'really' a god" (2009, 133). See also Wright 1975; Hallett 1993; Jenkins 2005, 370; Hunter 2006, 81–3; and Feeney 2010, esp. 287. The possibility that Plautus may have played the role of Pseudolus is an intriguing one, but the strength of the connection is meaningless if we think about revival performances after the time of Plautus.

6. Contrast Zagagi 1995.

7. Goldberg (2004, 386–7) reminds us that this aesthetic shift requires us to evaluate Plautine comedy from a different perspective than the coherence of plot.

8. See Marshall 2006, esp. 262–3. Marshall contrasts his approach with Slater (2000), who speaks of "Plautus' literary imitation of . . . features of improvisational theatre" (9–10), and with Goldberg (1995), who denies genuine improvisation in Plautus (36). Barsby (1995) welcomes improvisatory moments as harking back to a time of genuine improvisation (62–3), although he ultimately sees these as scripted imitations of improvisation.

9. Fischer-Lichte (2003, 3112) notes that the material artifact of theater is likewise not fixed and autonomous in the same way as a painting or literary text might be.

10. Citing *Trinummus* 705–6 and *Pseudolus* 1275–8 on encores, Goldberg (2004, 393) argues: "The fact that there *were* such demands from the audience and that they came frequently enough to be familiar parts of the theatrical environment encourage belief in a spirited, fluid world of performance and the kind of partnership among author, actors, and audience that enlivens the show but ultimately works against the integrity of the text."

11. Cf. *Curculio* 466–82 where the Choragus provides a comic tour of the forum. *Pseudolus* was initially performed for the inauguration of the Temple of the Magna Mater at the *Ludi Megalenses*, and if we follow Goldberg 1998, the steps of the temple were likely appropriated for seating. The fact that certain sites were likely reused for theatrical performance does not negate the argument that festivals would have transformed spaces into something very different than their usual use throughout the rest of the year. As a graduate student, I lived near a large city park that was used for a three–day festival each summer. During the course of the ComFest, the park held only a vague resemblance to the way I experienced it throughout the rest of the year.

12. Cf. Goldberg 1995, 37.

13. Handley 1975, 126. Plautine chronology is notoriously difficult and speculative. For dates of Plautine plays see Buck 1940 and de Lorenzi 1952.

14. Tornau (2005, 46) emphasizes that the conventions of Plautine comedy are neither entirely Greek nor Italic, but of Plautus's own making in blending the two.

15. Unlike their Greek counterparts, Romans watching *comoediae palliatae* could not help recognizing the artificial and constructed nature of the drama before them. Watching translations of Greek plays in Greek dress set in Greek settings, the Romans would have sensed the stock nature of this genre, what Fraenkel (2007, 261) describes as "an arbitrarily assembled artifact." Cf. Schiappa de Azevedo 1975–1976, 100; Lefèvre 1980, 894; Petrone 1983, 6; Leigh 2004, 54.

16. In these ways, *Pseudolus* resembles other Plautine plots. Cf. *Bacchides* where the slave Chrysalus gets money from the young lover's father, or *Curculio* where the eponymous parasite is able to use a forged letter to get the banker Lyco to pay the pimp. In addition to connections with *Curculio*, Paratore (1963) has observed the parallel between the helper Simia and the prostitutes from *Miles*.

17. Tornau (2005, 47) suggests that we should "die griechische Wurzel ψευδ- im Namen des Pseudolus wörtlich zu nehmen und ihn mit dem Attribut 'der Blender' zu versehen." For further discussion of the meaning of Pseudolus's name, see Pascucci 1961, Salanitro 1981, and Sharrock 1996, 170.

18. Görler (1983, 92) suggests that these warnings mark a novelty for the audience unseen in earlier comedy. Danese (1996, 16) has highlighted the parallel between Simo's friend Callipho and the audience. Like the audience, Callipho trusts that the deception will succeed, but is interested in the ways that it will be achieved.

19. Tornau (2005, 49) reminds us that Pseudolus seems to play not only with his fellow characters, but also with his audience, testing us through his failures.

20. The use of masks would further enhance the sense of a familiar plot, as Questa (1984, 36) suggests. We immediately expect a *miles* or *leno* to be the antagonist. We expect an *adulescens* or a *virgo* to appear as lovers. Masks were a shortcut for communication between playwright and audience.

21. Slater (2000, 98) notes that this letter acts as a script or script outline, providing the information that could make for a prologue. Monaco (1965, 340) highlights the unusual nature of this letter as the only one in Plautus not used for trickery.

22. Fraenkel (2007, 17–44) sees transformations in place of similes as one of the clearest signs of Plautine innovation. Frankel uses as a prime example *Mercator* 361 (*muscast meu' pater, nil potest clam illum haberi* [My father is a fly: nothing can be kept secret from him]).

23. Ammannati (2001) has examined these three jokes as poking fun at Greek writing in particular. Jocelyn (1993, 127) suggests that we might see in the contrast between this letter and the later letter from the Macedonian soldier a commentary on the educational status of Phoenicium. I would suggest that the most pressing issue is the way these jokes find room for play in a static text.

24. Cf. Feeney 2010, 286. Moore (1998, 94) has highlighted the ways in which Pseudolus's monologues coopt the typical monologues of *servi callidi*.

25. For other Plautine slave monologues revealing a lack of definite plan, see *Asinaria* 249–66, *Captivi* 516–32, *Epidicus* 81–103, *Mostellaria* 348–62, and *Trinummus* 717–28. In *Asinaria*, Libanus claims to have a plan confirmed by bird omens (259–61) before calling into question the meaning of a sign from the woodpecker (262–4). Epidicus bemoans his situation before committing to needing to find something somewhere (100) before stepping aside to eavesdrop on his young master's conversation. In these two instances, as in *Pseudolus*, the audience is not provided with firm details of the plot to follow. This stands in contrast to the work of Palaestrio in *Miles* who rehearses his two plots onstage before enacting them.

26. Farrell (1991, 298) has discussed connections between the poet soliloquy and the prologue of Callimachus's *Aetia* where, in both cases, the concern is with the process of *becoming* a poet rather than the practice of *being* a poet.

27. *Miles* 208: *incoctum non expromet, bene coctum dabit*, and *Pseudolus* 399–400: *neque exordiri primum unde occipias habes, / neque ad detexundam telam certos terminus*.

28. Willcock (1987, 113) clearly explains the metaphor as covering the whole range of the weaving process.

29. Fischer-Lichte (2003, 3114) notes that we should separate out the text of performance from the text of the drama. The former takes form only as the production occurs, and includes the text of the drama along with the other features of theater (actors, costumes, masks, etc.). If we focus too much on the text of the drama, then we may privilege the final outcome over the total effect of the text of performance.

30. Exploring *Curculio*, Goldberg (1995, 35) suggests that Plautine craftsmanship often involves plots that "may suddenly change direction, abandon or leave unrealized certain promising directions while introducing other ones as the need arises." Rather than bemoaning the abandoned opportunities as losses, comedy encourages us to welcome the surplus potentials of the new directions.

31. Williams (1956, 447–8) finds a further parallel with *Bacchides* when Simo suggests Pseudolus may have outdone Ulysses and the Trojan trick (1243–4). For this scene as evidence of Plautine reworking in order to further elevate the triumph of Pseudolus, see Lefèvre 1977, esp. 450–1, and 1997, 56 where he explains the function as "Einerseits ist Pseudolus wiederum als unablässig tätiger *architectus doli* glorifiziert; andererseits wird dadurch, daß der Alte gewarnt ist, seine Aufgabe erschwert."

32. Given Pseudolus's tendency to abandon plots, I disagree with Sharrock 1996, 163: "Only Pseudolus has the right to make offers with confidence, because only Pseudolus 'knows' the script."

33. Frangoulidis (1997) focuses on Tranio to show what happens to a poet-trickster who fails to write a script that conforms to Plautus's own vision. Frangoulidis divides the subplots of Plautine slaves into factual and fictional depending on whether or not they align with Plautus's intentions for the plot. For more on Milphio's failure, see Bungard 2012.

34. Pseudolus is not alone as a *servus callidus* who has not fully developed his plot. Slater (1993, 115–6) has highlighted parallel moments with Chrysalus in the *Bacchides* in the letter-writing scene.

35. There are two earlier moments when Pseudolus refuses to be constricted by his interlocutors, suggesting this scene is an extension of Plautus's characterization of his title figure. At line 30, in response to Calidorus's command that Pseudolus read (*lege*) Phoenicium's letter, Pseudolus replies that he will read through them (*pellegam*). Pseudolus later adopts the guise of the Delphic oracle in order to respond to Simo's questions (479) and twice replies in Greek (483–4), but when Simo suggests that Pseudolus is planning to steal the money from him, Pseudolus temporarily switches back into Latin in indignation (486) before being compelled by his master to resume his Greek guise (488). For more on the echo of *immo* in the encounter between Ballio and the cook and the one between Ballio and Harpax, see Bungard 2013.

36. Chiarini (2007, 228) notes that this is the first and last time that a *servus callidus* reflects on his failures. Chiarini finds in this reflection on the role of Fortuna Plautus's mourning over the loss of a friend. Whether this is true or not, we must acknowledge the impact that this speech has on how we understand Pseudolus's current project.

37. Many scholars have viewed this as the precise moment that the 'real' or 'true' plot embarks; cf. Taladoire 1956, 140; Willcock 1987, 13; and Sharrock 1996, 166. I appreciate Marshall's (1996, 36) suggestion that we view this shift in plot as a "reset button," since the metaphor leaves room for potentially more resets.

38. Slater (2004, 176) notes that through improvisation *servi callidi* "can steal others' texts and write them into [their] own plots or compose his own texts, true and false." I would agree that improvisation is key here, but I would disagree with Slater inasmuch as this interpretation of the *servus callidus* gives him too much power in creating authoritative texts that other characters will be compelled to follow.

39. Echoing Willcock 1987, Lefèvre (1997, 55) is right to point out that Pseudolus cannot have known the exact nature of the assistant he would have needed when he made the request for help earlier. He similarly is correct in suggesting that the addition of this request by Plautus puts Pseudolus in the position of a manager to oversee the plot (63); but I would advise that we should be cautious about the precise nature of this management. It can be tempting, as I have argued throughout the article, to give Pseudolus too much control as a manager of the plot. He manages events as they arise, rather than fully seeing all of what must happen in order to succeed.

40. For a Roman ear, the name Simia would quickly create a verbal echo with *similis* and *simius*. Connors (2004) has explored shifting attitudes towards the imitative qualities of monkeys in Greek and Roman culture. Rather than denigrating the monkey, Roman authors celebrate it for its ability to produce alternative meaning through imitation.

41. Marshall (1996, 36) sees Simia's insistence on delay as a reflection of Pseudolus's own delays. To some extent, Simia seems to be more of the *servus callidus* that we have expected all along. Wright (1975, 413) argues: "The result [of Pseudolus's request for an

assistant] is a splendid *servus callidus* so full of wickedness that he terrifies his creator, whom he immediately starts to insult, and to whom—an almost bewildering twist—he even, by implication, begins to give lessons in stagecraft." Stärk (1988, 154) refers to Simia as a Super-Pseudolus.

42. It is the subversion of reality by the imaginary that Questa (2004, 120) highlights in his read of the poet soliloquy.

43. Danese (2013) emphasizes the exceptional visibility of Pseudolous in the first half of the play. He concludes that Pseudolous's trick rests in his careful control over how much his adversaries see him, do not see him, or think they do (39).

44. It is possible that this line belongs to Simo. As Willcock (1987, 133) notes, there is not manuscript authority to assign it one way or the other.

45. The famous *flagitatio* scene (357–75) provides an interesting parallel. Building on Wright 1975, Slater (2000, 102) rightly points out that Ballio is the focus of power in this scene. Though *flagitatio* should shame Ballio into acting differently through the prescribed list of disgraceful abuses, it cannot account for a member of society who would embrace those abuses as compliments. As with the Harpax scene at the end of the play, the attackers must ultimately leave frustrated.

46. As Slater (1993, 120) has suggested, we might think about improvisation through the lens of Greenblatt 1980 (esp. chapter 6) on the "mobile sensibility" of Renaissance Europe. Summarizing Greenblatt, Slater writes: "One understands the thought of another not as a perception of truth but rather as an ideological, therefore constructed, therefore manipulable system. Although the other understands his own perception as simple truth, one possessed of the 'mobile sensibility' stands outside of this perception and can therefore manipulate and control the other."

47. I came to the jazz metaphor independently of Marshall 2006, who uses the relationship between composers and interpreters as a useful comparison to Plautus and his actors.

48. Marshall (2006, 263) correctly observes that nods to improvisation within the dramatic world of the play only make sense if improvisation was really a potential way to produce the *palliatae*.

49. Goldberg (1995, 39) notes a similar problem in thinking about *Curculio*: "If we describe the *Curculio* as the story of how Phaedromus frees Planesium from a *leno* and is able to marry her, we wind up ignoring most of what actually entertains us in the course of the performance and most of what, as an audience, we are most likely to remember afterwards. Plot has become simply the frame on which Plautus hangs his entertainment." I agree with Marshall 2006, 277 when he asserts that the Plautine audience would expect creativity and inventiveness of the actors, and I would suggest that this is precisely what we see reflected in the character of Pseudolus.