READING GREEK AND ROMAN NEW COMEDY THROUGH OSCAR WILDE’S SOCIETY PLAYS

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ABSTRACT

Serena S. Witzke: Reading Greek and Roman New Comedy Through Oscar Wilde’s Society Plays
(Under the direction of Sharon L. James)

This dissertation provides the first extended analysis of the influence of Greek and Roman New Comedy on Oscar Wilde’s Society Plays and of the ways in which Wilde adapted the ancient plays he studied in school. Equally, I argue that reading Wilde’s Society Plays can offer new ways of appreciating themes and conflicts in the ancient material. Wilde—ultimately interested in the individual and his place in society—uses New Comedy to explore the ways in which the individual can develop while mired in the hypocrisies of those around him.

Conventional morality often comes under fire, as Wilde demonstrates the lip service paid to traditional morality. Wilde also interrogates the ancient New Comedies he adapted: these plays were considered not only funny, but mimetic in their day, with valuable messages. Wilde identifies what is amusing in them, but also sees what is serious or thought-provoking—elements that must have been obvious to ancient viewers, but went underappreciated in Wilde’s time, and indeed our own. Wilde questions the value systems in place and draws attention to the psychology underpinning these plays by restaging them in his time.

Chapter 1 outlines Wilde’s classical education and his departure from the values of his tutors, who disparaged New Comedy. Chapter 2 explores the sexual double standard of both antiquity and Victorian England, through philandering husbands and seduced/raped wives in New Comedy and Wilde. Chapter 3 analyzes the successful recognition plots of Menander and
Plautus alongside *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Chapter 4 investigates the superficiality of that recognition plot as it is deconstructed in Terence as well as in *Lady Windermere’s Fan* and *A Woman of No Importance*—the failure of the recognition plot to reintegrate the broken family is symptomatic of deeper societal flaws. Chapter 5 reads Plautus’ clever slave plays against *An Ideal Husband* and suggests that *servi callidi* and dandies have similar functions as provocateurs, that their roles are more integral to the plays than generally credited: *servi callidi* are necessary both for the resolution of plot and as agents of comeuppance, while dandies both facilitate character development and resolve plot.
For my mother, my best friend.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Patrick Dombrowski has been invaluable to me through the editing process: his hundreds of microscopic marginal comments have cleaned up my prose enormously. He will probably point out my errors in this acknowledgement too (update: he did!). T. H. M. Gellar-Goad was a helpful resource on all things Roman Comedy, but I’m sorry Ted, I will not be entitling this dissertation “Plautine Girls Gone Wilde” (I do reserve the right to use the title in any future talks/articles). Thanks are due to Jessica Wise and C. “Josephus” Schmidt for their help in editing several chapters of this dissertation. Emma Buckingham, it should be noted, is a sweetie.

Deepest gratitude goes to Debra and Frank LaCrosse, my parents, who have supported me with love, hope, and funds throughout my time at university. They may not understand the Latin, but they have always understood my passion for academia. My mother has been the greatest support of all, and I am eternally grateful for all that she has done for me. Without her, none of this would have been possible.
PREFACE

This dissertation begins to explore the complex ways in which Oscar Wilde—an Oxford-trained Hellenist—studied and systematically drew on Greek and Roman New Comedy. I argue that this project illuminates not only Wilde's intellectual and creative processes but also those of the ancients. Reading Menander, Plautus, and Terence through Wilde reveals unsuspected depths and challenges in their theatrical programs, and thus has much to offer classical scholars.

All Menander texts and translations are from from G. W. Arnott’s Loeb’s (1979, 1996, 2000), unless otherwise noted. All Plautus texts and translations are from W. de Melo’s Loeb’s (2011a/b/c, 2012, 2013). All Terence texts and translations are from J. Barsby’s Loeb’s (2001a/b). All line numbers for Oscar Wilde’s Society Plays correspond to the New Mermaids editions by I. Small (Lady Windermere’s Fan [1999] and A Woman of No Importance [2006]) and R. Jackson (An Ideal Husband [2009] and The Importance of Being Earnest [1980]).
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Poenulus
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Rudens
Stichus
Trinummus
Truculentus
Terence
Adelphoe
Andria
Eunuchus
Heauton Timorumenos
Hecyra
Phormio
Oscar Wilde
Lady Windermere’s Fan
A Woman of No Importance
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The Importance of Being Earnest
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Hec.
Phorm.
Wilde
Fan
Woman
Husband
Earnest
Prose
CHAPTER 1: OSCAR WILDE, VICTORIAN SCHOLARSHIP, AND NEW COMEDY

“Education is an admirable thing. But it is well to remember that nothing that is worth knowing can be taught.”

(Wilde, A Few Maxims for the Instruction of the Over-Educated)

Oscar Wilde, Classicist

Born Oscar Fingal O’Flahertie Wills Wilde in 1854 in Dublin, Oscar Wilde was the son of an Irish middle-class eye doctor and a revolutionary female poet. Oxford-educated, he established himself as a celebrity aesthete in 1881 and fashioned himself an art critic in London after the publication of his first volume of Poems. He had already gained fame from rumors that he was parodied as a dandy in Gilbert and Sullivan’s Patience by the time he embarked on an American tour in 1882, giving lectures on art and aesthetics. While in New York he attempted to promote his first play, the historical piece Vera, to little success. In 1883, after returning to the UK, Wilde resumed his lectures and tried again to launch a successful career as a playwright.

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1 On Wilde’s parents, particularly the publications of his mother, see Ryder (2013). On his father’s infidelity, see Ellmann (1988: 10-15).
with the *Duchess of Padua*, another melodramatic historical play. Marrying Constance Lloyd in 1884, Wilde became the father of two sons, Cyril (1885) and Vyvyan (1886).

After a brief stint as the editor of *Women’s World* (1887-1889), Wilde returned to writing, this time more successfully. His miscellaneous tales and children’s stories, released in three volumes, established him as a prose author. Wilde followed these up in 1890 with *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*—an exercise in decadence and aestheticism and chock-full of Classical references. After toning down the ambiguously “immoral” elements of *Dorian Gray* for publication as a single novel in 1891, Wilde befriended Lord Alfred Douglas, a young and beautiful Oxford student, and began a relationship with him that Wilde likened to “Greek love,” the love between a poet or philosopher and a young man who wished to be close to that greatness. Though his play *Salomé* was banned from the stage by the Lord Chamberlain in 1892 (it was forbidden to portray biblical characters on stage at the time), Wilde pressed on with his composition, and it was published in Paris in 1893. He began writing his so-called Society

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3 He changed the title from *The Lady’s World* and added articles on education, politics, history, and women’s activities, and reduced the discussion on fashion, to improve the intellectual quality of the publication (Ellmann [1988: 291-94). See also Maltz (2003), Clayton (2013), and Youngkin (2013) on the contents of *The Woman’s World* during Wilde’s tenure as editor. See also Stetz (2013) on Wilde and “The New Woman.”

4 For scholarship on Wilde’s fairy tales, see Killeen (2013).

5 Most texts of *Dorian Gray* available in libraries and bookstores are Wilde’s 1891 edition. Harvard Press recently issued the unexpurgated version (Wilde & Frankel, 2011) that appeared in Lippincott’s magazine in 1890 before Wilde made his changes. Despite Wilde’s revisions, *Dorian Gray* was still considered immoral, or at least amoral.

Plays in 1892, with which he finally found great success, until his legal troubles and the subsequent scandal destroyed his career in England in 1895. Wilde’s property was seized to pay his legal debts, and the contents of his house at 34 Tite St. in London were auctioned off.\(^7\)

In February 1895, Lord Queensberry, Lord Alfred’s father, left a card for Wilde at his club, claiming that Wilde “posed as a sodomite.”\(^8\) Though Wilde sued Queensberry for libel, the defense turned the trial around on Wilde, and Queensberry was acquitted. Because the court ruled that Queensberry had not committed libel in accusing Wilde of “posing as a sodomite,” the charge was seen to be true, and so Wilde himself was then prosecuted under the Labouchère Amendment,\(^9\) to determine if Wilde had done more than “posed.” After a hung jury and re-trial,

\(^7\) The catalogue from the auction of Wilde’s Tite Street possessions includes many volumes of Classics: Jowett’s *Dialogues of Plato* 5; Teufel’s *Roman Literature; Hellenica*, 8 vols; Young’s *Sophocles*; Donaldson’s *Theatre of the Greeks; Horae Hellenicae* [sic] (with Daniel O’Connell’s autograph); Virgil; *Roman Art*, illustrated; de Vere’s *Translations from Horace*; Pollard’s *Odes from the Greek Dramatists*; Aristotle’s *Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*; Morley’s *English Men of Letters, Ancient Classics*; Mommsen’s *History of Rome* 5; Latin and English Dictionary; Newgate Calendar; Cicero; assorted “Classics,” half bound vellum, 2 parcels; Juvenal with plates; Grote’s *History of Greece*, 9 vols (and other books); *Journal of Hellenic Study*; Munroe’s *Lucretius*. See Munby (1971: 371-88).

\(^8\) The card had said, “To Oscar Wilde posing Somdomite” [sic], (the spelling being an aristocratic affectation) but in court Queensberry claimed he wrote “posing as a Somdomite” [sic], since the charge of appearing like a sodomite would be easier to defend in court than a claim that Wilde was a sodomite. See Ellmann (1988: 438) and M. Holland (2013: 199). Queensberry had long been concerned with the relationship between Lord Alfred and Wilde, after having seen the two of them taking lunch together in London in April 1894. Queensberry, who had a violent temper, sent his son an angry letter (included in Ellmann [1988: 417-18]) insisting Alfred stop seeing Wilde. Alfred responded with a telegram, “What a funny little man you are,” and incensed his father further. Queensberry visited Wilde’s home at Tite St. in June 1894, threatening him and warning him to stay away from Lord Alfred, an incident Wilde described in *De Profundis*.

\(^9\) The Labouchère Amendment, as it is known, was Section 11 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885. The Act aimed to prohibit sexual assault of young women, following public outcry raised by journalists who had proven how easy it was to buy young girls on the street. The Act also sought to limit prostitution. Labouchère’s amendment, a last minute addition to the Act, made “gross indecency” a crime, though the term was undefined in the Act itself. The loose
Wilde was convicted in May 1895 and sentenced to two years of hard labor, to his shock. His conviction led to his estrangement from his wife, and he never saw his children again. Upon his release in 1897, Wilde lived in exile in France, briefly taking up again with Lord Alfred, who shortly thereafter rejected the newly impoverished Wilde. His wife Constance died of a spinal injury in 1898, and in November 1900 Wilde himself died of complications from a severe ear infection that had plagued him since prison.

But before Oscar Wilde was the famous aesthete, novelist, critic, lecturer, and playwright of dramas and comedies, including the four Society Plays, he was a young Irish student studying the Classics. In 1871, his final year at the boarding school Portora, Wilde won the Carpenter Prize for the highest mark on the Greek Testament exam, and then won a scholarship to study Classics at Trinity College in Dublin, based on strong marks on his entrance exam, which included the Roman playwright Terence. His personal library and notebooks demonstrate his knowledge of New Comedy at Trinity. In 1874 Wilde won the Berkeley Medal for Greek, his set text being Meineke’s *Fragmenta Comicorum Graecorum*. His notes indicate that he studied Menander in the *Novae* volume and knew the fragments well. At Trinity he studied under Robert Tyrrell, a philologist, and J. P. Mahaffy, whom Wilde called his “best and first teacher” and “the

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11 *Lady Windermere’s Fan* (1892), *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), *An Ideal Husband* (1895) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895).
scholar who showed me how to love Greek things.” His tutor for the Berkeley Medal was John Townsend Mills, another celebrated Classicist.

Following his success at Trinity, Wilde won a Demyship to Magdalen College at Oxford where he would further study Classics. During his years at Oxford, Wilde also made a pilgrimage to Greece under the supervision of his former tutor Mahaffy, a trip that inspired many of his later poems. He performed well on his comprehensive exams, winning a double First despite his cheeky attitude towards his examiners, and his insistent claims that he never studied.

Kottabos published his translations of speeches from Agamemnon in 1877. Wilde translated a number of speeches from Greek tragedy and comedy (selections from the Agamemnon, the Chorus of Cloud Maidens from Aristophanes’ Clouds, and lamentations from Hecuba) and included them in his poetic works, which included a variety of poems on Greek and Roman places (Sonnet on Approaching Italy, Sonnet Written in Holy Week at Genoa, Impression de

12 Ellmann (1988: 28) and M. Holland & Hart-Davis (2000: 561-62). Though scholars have tried to read a homosexual reference into this attribution, Wilde referred to his early instruction by Mahaffy at Trinity College in Greek literature and culture.

13 On Wilde’s education at Oxford, see P. Smith (2013).

14 Wilde travelled to Greece in April 1877 with George Macmillan and J. P. Mahaffy, even though philologists were not encouraged to participate in archaeological excursions while pursuing their degrees at Oxford. He visited Corfu, Olympia, Argos, Mycenae, Arcadia, Athens. Wilde was punished for his lateness in returning, though he blamed the prejudice of the Oxford dons against archaeology (see note 96). Wilde had earlier visited Italy with Mahaffy in 1875. On Wilde’s travels, see Ross (2009).


16 Wilde spent his days engaged in whimsy: watching cricket, picnicking, drinking in his rooms, decorating, going to the theatre. His friend David Hunter Blair commented that Wilde must have stayed up all night to study in order to keep up his carefree pose by day. Ellmann (1988: 41-43).
Voyage, The Theatre of Argos, Italia, Santa Decca, all written while travelling through Greece and Rome) and characters (Endymion, Charmides, Phèdre, Theocritus). In 1878, he won the Newdigate prize for best verse composition with his poem Ravenna, and was awarded a marble bust of Augustus. He also tried for the Chancellor’s Essay prize in 1879 with a paper on Historical Criticism, though he did not win.

After graduation, Wilde struggled to use his Classics pedigree inside and outside academia: he applied to professorial jobs, drafted an essay on The Women of Homer, and proposed to George Macmillan, his traveling companion in Greece, that he translate Herodotus for Macmillan’s publishing house. He also expressed a wish to edit something like Hercules Furens or the Phoenician Maidens, as he had been working on Euripides. Wilde briefly tutored the famous actress Lillie Langtry in Latin and called her “Helen, formerly of Troy, now of London.”

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17 On Wilde’s poetry, see Bristow (2013a).


19 M. Holland & Hart-Davis (2000: 78):

Herodotos I should like to translate very much indeed—selections from that is—and I feel sure that the wonderful picturesqueness of his writings, as well as the pathos and tenderness of some of his stories, would command a great many readers. It is a work I should enjoy doing and should engage to have it done by September 1st next.

I do not know how many Greek plays you intend publishing, but I have been working at Euripides a good deal lately and should of all things wish to edit either the Mad Hercules or the Phoenissae: plays with which I am well acquainted. I think I see what style of editing is required completely.

20 Ellmann (1988: 114, 143). He also called her “the Venus Victrix of our age” (M. Holland & Hart-Davis [2000: 224]).
Disappointed in his attempts to get a professorial job, and reeling from the failure of his first historical play, *Vera*, in England, Wilde turned to aesthetic criticism and lecturing, though Hellenism and the Classics were never far from his mind. He frequently referred to Greek and Roman authors in his letters, *Dorian Gray* contained many allusions to *Suetonius* and *Petronius*, his play *Salomé* was inspired by Aeschylus as well as the Bible, and (as I hope to show) New Comedy provided one of the inspirations for his Society Plays. In prison, however, Wilde abandoned his love of Greek and Latin, complaining that the Classics now gave him a terrible headache.\(^{21}\) It was not until several years later, released from prison, that Wilde thought again of Greeks and Romans. He toyed with the idea of writing a libretto of “Daphnis and Chloe” with Dalhousie Young, and he commented to a friend that he should like to write a life of the emperor Heliogabalus,\(^{22}\) but sadly, Wilde would never complete another work before his death in 1900.

**Oscar Wilde, Hellenist**

Throughout his studies and beyond, Wilde identified strongly as a Hellenist, and he took pains to engage with Classical material in all of his works. His commonplace books are full of notes on Classical material, particularly Greek language and philosophy, and Greek is scattered

\(^{21}\) M. Holland & Hart-Davis (2000: 653): “Thank More for exerting himself for books: unluckily I suffer from headaches when I read my Greek and Roman poets, so they have not been of much use, but his kindness was great in getting them sent.”

\(^{22}\) M. Holland & Hart-Davis (2000: 936 [“I would also like to make some agreement about the libretto of Daphnis and Chloe, if you still desire it”], 943-44 [he proposed the voices for Daphnis, the Shepherd, Priest of Venus, Chloe, and Venus]; 972-73 [“I saw the other day in the museum here a bust of a young man of grave, somewhat severe beauty…On referring to the catalogue I found it was the Emperor Heliogabalus; it was most curious and has filled me with a desire to write his life”]).
throughout his works (especially *De Profundis*). References to Greek tragedy abound throughout his letters, and he makes clear his preference for Greek material in his exams at Oxford: for his *viva voce* he feared Catullus, but got Aeschylus. He also wrote on the *Odyssey* and Aristotle.  

Initially, Wilde was little interested in Rome, unless it allowed him access to Greek material; it took his tutors years to convince him of the value of Latin, but he eventually came around. He was fluent in Latin and quite willing to adapt Roman material when it proved useful: Plautus and Terence inspired aspects of his Society Plays, and references to Latin prose frequently feature in his works. He was fascinated by the lives of the emperors and the decadence of Imperial Rome. Throughout his life he was inspired by Greek social habits and philosophy, likening his relationships with young men to ancient Athenian practices and that culture’s worship of the *ephebe*.  

Wilde’s interaction with Greek material situates him among the other great intellectuals advancing British Hellenism. His interest in Menander was part of the larger British interest in demonstrating a cultural continuity from Greece to Britain. By the late-18th century, interest in Rome began to wane in favor of Greece: everyone who was anyone had been to Italy, Roman-inspired buildings were all over England, and the history of Rome was tied up in Christian history, and as a result Roman culture seemed very familiar and well-known. Greece was still a fan-

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23 M. Holland & Hart-Davis (2000: 19-20). “I was rather afraid of being put on in Catullus, but got a delightful exam from a delightful man—not on the books at all but on Aeschylus versus Shakespeare, modern poetry and drama and every conceivable subject,” and “[I] got a delightful *viva voce*, first in the *Odyssey*, where we discussed epic poetry in general, dogs, and women.”


25 Throughout the Queensberry trial (see notes 8 and 10) Wilde’s interactions with much younger men were questioned: M. Holland (2004). Wilde later expressed his regret for his relationship with the much younger Lord Alfred Douglas in *De Profundis* and his letters. On Victorian homosexuality, see Showalter (1990: 169-84), Beckson (1992: 186-212), and Dowling (1994).
tasy, difficult to visit because of the Turkish occupation there. But once James Stuart and Nicholas Revett had made the journey and their discoveries and drawings were published in England, interest in Greece became mania: Greek art, archaeology, history, and philology occupied the British cultural consciousness.26 Greece was not Rome; Greek culture was not tied up in modern Christian Europe, and was therefore very convenient for the modern writer looking for inspiration. Greece could represent anything: it could be decadent, sensual, or subversive. It could undermine contemporary aesthetics and offer new, secular morality. Hellenism was the new philosophy.27

After the British rediscovery of ancient Greece and her culture there was a growing fascination with re-appropriating her works (Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit), inspiring Shelley (“We are all Greeks”), Swinburne (“Greece is the mother country of thought and art and action”), John Addington Symonds (“All civilized nations were colonies of Hellas”), and Ruskin (“We have lost all inheritance from Florence and Venice, and are now pensioners upon the Greek only”).28 The Romantic Poets reinvented Greek lyric, the novelists paid homage to Homer, and the playwrights and poets resurrected tragedy. Wilde’s affinity for Hellenism and contemporary social comedy indicates that he perhaps had aspirations to bring Menander to the modern stage,


27 See F. Turner (1981: 1-14). It is outside the scope of my dissertation to offer a survey of Victorian Hellenism. For more information on this topic, see dedicated works such as M. Clark (1945) on Greek studies in England; DeLaura (1969) on the new Hellenistic aesthetic; Jenkyns (1980) on the ancient Greek influence on contemporary authors; Stray (1998) on changing pedagogical strategies and practices in Classics; Evangelista (2009) on the connection between the aesthetics of Wilde and his Oxford mentors and ancient Greece; Olverson (2010) on female authors adapting ancient Greek literature with a focus on female characters such as Circe, Medea, Klytemnestra, Kassandra, and Xantippe; and Goldhill (2011) on Waterhouse and Neoclassicism, Sappho’s Victorian renaissance, Classics-themed operas, and Wagner’s interest in the Greeks.

as his school friend Frank Benson had brought Agamemnon to the Oxford stage. There was a veritable fever for Greek-inspired tragic works throughout the Victorian period, finally waning by 1890. Euripides’ Ion and Medea enjoyed great popularity, as well as plays relating to the Trojan War (Hecuba, Trojan Women). Aeschylus’ tragedies were very popular, and were made more so by archaeologically-inspired productions that incited wonder, mystery, and strangeness in their attempt to distance the play from modern trappings and get back to an “original” or “authentic” viewing.

Wilde and New Comedy

This dissertation argues a modest, but overlooked, claim, namely that Wilde drew on ancient New Comedy in designing his society dramas. I do not propose that Plautus, Terence, and Menander were primary or even major influences on Wilde—particularly Menander could not have been—but I do suggest that he systematically studied the ancient comedies whose bourgeois family dramas offered him inspiration alongside the contemporary British and French melodrama and Restoration comedy that also influenced Wilde. This classical influence has been oddly unrecognized, and I hope with this dissertation to bring it to the attention of classicists and Wilde scholars alike. I further propose that Wilde was a more sensitive and perceptive reader of


30 See Hall & Macintosh (2005) chapters 15 “Page Versus Stage: Greek Tragedy, the Academy, and the Popular Theatre” and 16 “London’s Greek Plays in the 1880s: George Warr and Social Philhellenism” on the waxing and waning of the Greek play in late Victorian culture, as well as Ross (2012: 97-122) on Wilde’s enthusiasm for “reconstructions” of Greek theatre and his later rejection of the practice.
the ancient plays than his Oxford tutors had been, and that classicists have much to learn about New Comedy from reading it through Wilde’s eyes.

I argue that Wilde’s interest in Menander, as well as his schooling, encouraged an affinity for New Comedy. Though Plautus and Terence were taught in Victorian schools as a means to access Menander, and Wilde initially may have seen them that way, Wilde came to appreciate both Greek and Roman New Comedy and was influenced by their content. A close reading of Oscar Wilde’s Society Plays against the Greek and Roman New Comedies of Menander, Plautus, and Terence demonstrates Wilde’s deep and abiding interest in the themes of ancient New Comedy. The themes, characters, and social commentaries found in ancient comedy are given modern expression and reevaluation in Wilde’s plays through direct contact with the original material, rather than solely through the indirect western tradition of comedy via Shakespeare and Molière (and their inheritors, Restoration comedy and the French “well-made” play).\(^{31}\)

This is not to suggest that Wilde was not influenced by these forerunners of Victorian drama: Wilde’s interest in the French “well-made” play (la pièce bien faite) pioneered by Scribe and Sardou, and refined by Alexander Dumas fils, was well-known in his own day and ours.\(^{32}\) Such plays featured tight plotting, the use of letters to motivate action, an Aristotelian peripeteia in the final scene, contrived situations, and unrealistic resolutions, all played out in very realistic

\(^{31}\) This is not to say that Wilde was not influenced by Shakespeare and Molière as well. I suggest that Wilde’s influences were complex and wildly varied, and that ancient New Comedy should be included among those acknowledged in Wildean scholarship. On Wilde’s Importance of Being Earnest and Shakespeare, namely A Winter’s Tale, The Twelfth Night, and A Midsummer’s Night Dream, see McCulloch (2002).

\(^{32}\) On Wilde and the “well-made” play, see Mikhail (1968), Tydeman (1982), Ellmann (1988), Powell (1990), Raby (1997), Small (1999), and Gay (2010) to name only a very few.
stage settings and costumes. Kerry Powell has made a thorough case for the influence of British and French melodrama in Wilde’s plays, in particular, the woman with a past (and her melodramatic apology and suicide), wives who narrowly avoid ruination, the conflict between Puritan and dandiacal values, the man with a past and his ruination, and illegitimate children.  

Restoration comedy (approx. 1660-1710) influenced Victorian comedy generally, though there were key differences in tone and organization. Restoration comedy, often called “comedies of manners,” staged the social codes of Britain’s upper class uncritically. These plays, primary of sex and wit, featured fast-paced, over-crowded plots, a hierarchy of wit, vulgarity, sexual intrigue, highly sexual scenes (many plays turned on who bedded whom, and how many cuckolds were made over the course of the play) in the early period, and an interest in married life in the late period. A frequent character in Restoration comedy was the rake, or rakehell, a precursor to the dandy in some ways. Carefree and witty, he often served as a heartless womanizer. The “Truewit” rake would repent his libertine ways, often because of the influence of a witty heroine, and the reform of the rake was a common ending. The philosophical rake (the closest predecessor to the British dandy), exercised self-control, displayed refined behavior, wielded persuasion, and spouted attractive speech. The rake has no ancient equivalent. Wilde incorporated shades of this character into his plays, in the libertine lifestyles of his dandies, but the Wildean dandy was a product of Wilde’s philosophy and not defined by pleasure-seeking alone.

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34 Powell (1990) cites the many (now largely unknown) contemporary influences on Wilde.

35 Cecil (1959), Hume (1977), and Weber (1986) delineate the various character traits of the Restoration rake.
Often Restoration plays involved props such as fans and purloined letters. While Restoration comedy borrowed elements of the ancient New Comedy (props, young men in love, the double plot), the relationship is superficial—it rarely engaged with New Comic tone (the restoration of the family in Menander, the social critique of Terence), specific plots (such as the foundling or the rape and recognition of the young heroine), most New Comic characters, or themes. The burlesque of Restoration comedy has much more in common with the vulgarity of Atellan farce. While Wilde was certainly influenced by Restoration comedy and its partial heritage from Roman comedy, his comedies differed considerably in tone from the Restoration drama, while retaining its hierarchy of wit and some of its characters. Wilde demonstrates a direct engagement with New Comedy that exceeds the influence ancient New Comedy wielded in Restoration comedy alone.

To fully grasp the extent of the similarities between New Comedy and Wilde’s plays, I created an extensive chart in which I identified eighty-one categories of correspondence, broadly divided into four rubrics: character types (helper, meretrix/vamp, young man in love, wealthy matron, harsh father, badly behaved siblings, etc.), plot elements (misplaced children, recognition, marriage, reunion of parent and child, double love plot, seduction, etc.), marriage-related (suspected infidelity, philandering, arranged marriage, divorce, etc.), and miscellaneous (filial disrespect, shirking duty, disparagement of the opposite sex, threats of violence, social commentary, etc.). As the attached charts (Appendix A) demonstrate, there are too many points of commonality to address within the scope of a dissertation, so here my coverage cannot be encyclope-
dic. I reserve these areas for further study, as there remains considerably more evidence for the influence of New Comedy in Wilde’s work than can be incorporated here. My aims are instead to begin laying out the major commonalities in the works of these four playwrights, and then to establish that Wilde actively adapted Menander, Plautus, and Terence in his society dramas, a point that has been suggested, but never conclusively explored. Arnott (1975) notes that Menander indirectly influenced modern comedy, including Oscar Wilde. Sharrock & Ash (2002: 140) dismiss any direct influence of Menander on Wilde, given that Earnest premiered three years before any significant Menander discovery. Guy & Small (2006: 126) observe that Wilde eschewed the wise servant/gullible master trope observed in Plautus (and they fail to recognize that the wise servant role from Plautus is adapted instead for the dandy character [see Chapter 5]). Goldberg (1986) in his chapter “The Well-Made Play” brings in Wilde and Lady Windermere’s Fan to illustrate aspects of the well-made play, only to then demonstrate how Terence deviates from that structure. Ross (2012: 173-82) is the only scholar, to my knowledge, to assert that Wilde engaged directly with Greek and Roman New Comedy, but he limits that influence to the Importance of Being Earnest, and gives more credit to Euripides’ Ion (I discuss Ross’ analysis further in Chapter 3).

I propose that Wilde was an excellent reader of New Comedy, deeply sensitive to the issues it raised, and well in advance of contemporary scholars in his study of the genre. Wilde’s interest in New Comedy, and his nuanced reading of the plays, led to his re-appropriation and adaptation of the material he read there, re-invigorating and re-establishing New Comedy in the Victorian dramatic world. Wilde reinterprets New Comedy for his own purposes, but the germs of New Comedy are firmly established in his work. By reading his interpretation of it, we are forced to think back to New Comedy and view it through a new lens. Reading Wilde can aid the
Classicist in seeing new aspects of New Comedy, or appreciating elements that had previously gone unnoticed.

Wilde focuses on elements of New Comedy that have been underappreciated in academic studies, as he views these aspects from the point of view of a dramatist rather than a scholar. His focus on social values and family structures, deriving from those in New Comedy, makes the reader engage with New Comedy from a fresh standpoint, to consider the issues of marital expectations, the roles of mothers, the dangers of unattached women, the problem of male identity, the bonds of friendship, and the tension between duty and desire (to name a few). Modern scholarship on New Comedy focuses more frequently on Saturnalian aspects, comic technique and Roman innovation, slavery, meter/music and stagecraft, or prostitution. Acknowledging Wilde’s reading, and reading his interpretations of New Comedy in turn, allows the modern reader of New Comedy to appreciate the greater complexities of these undervalued (and often-relegated to niche genre) plays through Wilde’s creative analogies between New Comedy and Victorian society.

38 Most notably see Segal (1968) on Saturnalian (or festival) aspects in Roman New Comedy.

39 Fraenkel (2007, a translation of the seminal German work of 1922) and Fontaine (2010) explore the original Plautine elements and aspects of Plautus’ humor. There are a plethora of articles on the originality of, and Menandrian aspects in, Plautus and Terence. Many of these are cited in the discussion of individual plays in the chapters that follow.

40 On Greek slavery, see Akrigg & Tordoff (2013); on slavery and slave torture in Plautus, see H. Parker (1989), Rei (1998), and Stewart (2012) to name only a few.


**Victorians and New Comedy**

Before we can more closely examine Wilde’s reading of New Comedy, expressed in his Society Plays, we must establish the state of New Comedy at the time of Wilde’s education and the prevailing attitudes about and prejudices against this genre. Plautus and Terence’s plays had long been available for study, but how were the then-fragmentary plays of Menander studied? Which Roman comedies were valued and why? How was New Comedy taught (if at all)? Once we have observed the dominant scholarly position, we can more fully appreciate Wilde’s opposition to the received categories and wisdoms concerning New Comedy.

Victorian interest in New Comedy was varied. From antiquity to the 18th century Roman comedy was valued, and the Latin plays were appreciated in their own right, not as an access point to Greek comedy. G. E. Lessing and Wilhelm Adolph Becker wrote in praise of the Roman playwrights’ free adaptations of their Greek material, giving them credit for significant innovation and the introduction of new material. Through the mid-19th century essays were published praising the free creation of Plautus and Terence, and F. Ritschl produced a well-received critical edition of Plautus. But appreciation for Latin literature and Roman history had waned in favor of Hellenist zeal, as Greece had become accessible to Europeans once again in the early 1800s. With the ability to visit Greece opened up, there was a mania for news of archaeological digs, a renewed interest in staging ancient Greek plays, and new enthusiasm for ancient Greek language and literature. The popularity of the French “well-made” play made scholars more crit-

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45 See E. Richardson (2013: 78-130) on the Victorian zeal for Greek archaeology.
ical of the roughness of Plautus and his inconsistencies in plotting.\textsuperscript{46} Now it became popular to criticize the Roman plays for losing the eloquence of their originals. Roman Comedy was rarely esteemed by the mid-19\textsuperscript{th} century: it was common practice to laud Menander while denigrating the Latin playwrights who inherited his craft, even though these Latin playwrights were considered the best access to Menander.\textsuperscript{47} Symonds, in his \textit{Studies of the Greek Poets}, noted the progression from Menander to Plautus to Terence to the comedy of the modern West.\textsuperscript{48} Mahaffy noted in \textit{Greek Life and Thought}, “We owe Terence to Menander.”\textsuperscript{49} K. O. Müller, a Classicist and literary historian, stressed the usefulness of Plautus and Terence, encouraging students of Menander to project back from the plots that drew on Menandrian originals. He presumed that if one simply excised the particularly Roman material and supplied the Greek, these “perfectly Greek” plays could conjure up the essence of Menander.\textsuperscript{50} After all, it was widely accepted that

\textsuperscript{46} Goldberg (1986: 61-71) discusses the “well-made” play and how Terence’s plotting measures up.

\textsuperscript{47} Plautus and Terence were often dismissed as pale imitations of their sublime precursor Menander, cheap imitators who muddied the beauty of their originals with plots and characters from multiple plays or with extraneous additions of new characters. Plautus’ emphasis on extramarital love, insubordinate slaves, and bawdy humor relegated him to “fringe author” status, while Terence’s elegance assured his popularity as a school text, at least in excerpted form.

\textsuperscript{48} Symonds (1880b: 236). Symonds’ original publications appeared in slightly different form, in 1873 and 1876, and these were Wilde’s volumes. In this dissertation, I cite the page numbers corresponding to the American 1880 edition, as the original UK editions were not available to me.

\textsuperscript{49} Mahaffy (1887: 115-16).

\textsuperscript{50} Müller & Donaldson (1858: 63-64). Contra, Anderson (1993: 3-29), who demonstrates the dangers in this assumption with a test case: parallel scenes from Menander’s \textit{Dis Exapaton} and Plautus’ \textit{Bacchides}. Through side-by-side analysis, one can observe the ways in which Plautus adapts, deconstructs, and re-envisions Menander by elaborating speeches and changing the tone. See also Damon (1992, 1995).
Terence did “hardly more than transpose or mould up two plays of Menander into one.” Wilde himself was encouraged to try his hand at this re-creation: he translated scenes from Plautus’ *Aulularia* (believed to be based on a Menandrian original) “back” into Greek.

The lines of influence, adaptation, and appropriation were obviously much more confused and complex than Müller suggests, but Terence does acknowledge his debt to Menander in his prologues. *Andria* is based on Menander’s *Perinthia* and *Andria, Heauton Timoroumenos* is based on Menander’s play of the same name, *Eunuchus* also drew from Menander’s similarly named play (while also borrowing material from his *Kolax*) and the *Adelphoe* was based on Menander’s *Adelphoe*. Terence’s remaining two plays, *Hecyra* and *Phormio*, were based on plays by Apollodoros of Carystus (and Apollodoros based his *Hekyra* in turn on Menander’s *Epitrepontes*).

As far as style was concerned, Menander, though fragmentary, was held up as a paragon. His Greek was praised for its grace, and it was common practice to bemoan the loss of his fine Attic style, the quality of which Victorians scholars were in no doubt. The content, however,

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51 ‘Article III – Menander’ (1856: 36).

52 See Ross (2012), Appendix F for Wilde’s translation.

53 Plautus and Terence both combined plots (*contaminatio*) and remade single plays in Latin (*vortere, transfero*). This was not an act of simple translation, but a complex adaption and reinterpretation of the original plays, thus rendering any attempt to “roll back” to Menander through their versions a complicated exercise that must be undertaken with caution. See the prologues to Plautus (*As. 11, Trin. 19*) and Terence (*Ad. 6-11, An. 9, 13-14, Eun. 7-8, 19-20, 31-33, Heat. 4-5, 16ff, Phorm. 24-26*) for the playwrights’ acknowledgment of their debts and their innovation with this material. For a summary of the debate on *contaminatio* generally, see Duckworth (1952: 202-208), and in Terence specifically, Brown (2013).

54 Apollodoros of Carystus (not to be confused with Apollodoros of Gela, a contemporary of Menander) was a playwright in the generation after Menander, a contemporary of Machon (the teacher of Aristophanes of Byzantium) according to Athenaeus 14.664a; he is also said to have been a contemporary of Posidippus (the comic poet).
was another thing entirely. Contemporary scholarship varied wildly over the quality of Menander’s (and so Roman comedy’s) contribution to modern understanding of the age. Many were confident of the universalizing nature of Menander’s subject matter. While Aristophanes required considerable glossing, thanks to his numerous contemporary, but now obscure, political references, Menander’s work “was drawn and drew most of its immutable truth from universal human nature, from passions common to all mankind, from follies and vices of all ages; it appeared to reflect only the surface, but in fact reflected the very depths of our experience,” according to the *London Quarterly Review*.\(^{55}\) Furthermore, the fragments (the monostichoi in particular) “embody some striking sentiments, or point with inimitable and undying expressiveness some eternal moral truth.”\(^{56}\) The author goes on at length to wax enthusiastic about the merits of Menander’s discourse on his society and the timelessness of his characters.

Returning to Müller, who had written the definitive volume on Greek literature in the mid-19th century, we see the prevailing view of New Comedy in general and Menander in particular, a view that would be taken up by Mahaffy, Symonds, and Tyrrell a few years later. Menander reigned supreme in style, but that was all that could be said about him without reservation. He was the product of his age (albeit a product of the highest quality), and that age was a degeneration of Athenian culture, thought, philosophy, politics, and life. There were “no mighty impulses, no great ideas” and lax morality had taken over the once-great people of Athens. The best comedy could now do was to ridicule, to teach “people to dread as folly that which they no longer avoided as vice.” In short, Müller was disappointed with the spirit of the age, and its re-

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55 “Article III – Menander” (1856: 47).

56 “Article III – Menander” (1856: 37).
presentatives’ lack of interest in wholesale reforming that age.\textsuperscript{57} Roman Comedy, if one were to speak of it at all, should be viewed as a gateway to Greek New Comedy, not as an imitation, but “a living union.”\textsuperscript{58}

Wilde was exposed to the views of his tutors Mahaffy and Tyrrell while at Trinity, was familiar with Müller’s and Jebb’s scholarship on Hellenistic literature generally, and constantly consulted and studied his volumes of Symonds. At Trinity Wilde frequently toted around Symonds’ first volume of \textit{Studies of the Greek Poets} (1873), and when the second volume came out during Wilde’s time at Oxford (1876), he purchased it immediately.\textsuperscript{59} The two even corresponded for a time.\textsuperscript{60} Symonds ranked Menander among the “pure literature” of the age, but noted what he considered a decline from the great concerns, events, and politics that marked Aristophanes’ work. In contrasting the two playwrights, Symonds wrote, “The audience of Aristophanes listened with avidity to comedies of which politics upon the grandest scale were the substance. Menander invited his Athenians to the intrigues of young men, slaves, and \textit{hetairai}, at warfare with niggardly parents. Athens has ceased to be an empress. She has become a garrulous housewife.”\textsuperscript{61} This criticism could be applied to much of Victorian comedy as well, considered “low-brow” as it was caught up in the manners, clothes, marriages, and petty concerns of a

\textsuperscript{57} Müller & Donaldson (1858: 68-70).

\textsuperscript{58} Müller & Donaldson (1858: 63).

\textsuperscript{59} T. Wright (2008: 69).

\textsuperscript{60} Ellmann (1988: 32).

\textsuperscript{61} Symonds (1880a: 43).
frivolous society (conveyed with farcical humor) instead of important social issues. Nevertheless, one must remember in reading either that a change of focus does not indicate a degeneration of society, but rather a shift in how its members framed social examination and commentary on their mores.

Symonds was less disdainful of Menander’s content in his second volume, in which he compared Menander with his Roman counterparts, to Menander’s favor. He took for granted that Roman critics also found Menander superior to Terence, arguing that their highest praise for Terence was that he was *dimidiatus Menander*, lacking the sparkle, wit, and ease of his source material. Symonds then cited Goethe’s high opinion of Menander, “He is thoroughly pure, noble, great, and cheerful, and his grace is unattainable. It is to be lamented that we possess so little of him, but that little is invaluable.”

Wilde’s Trinity tutor Mahaffy saw a degeneration of Athenian culture in Menander’s time, and noted with disfavor (what he saw were) mild, apolitical plots, and inoffensive themes of New Comedy. While he lauded Menander’s style for its perfect grace and sophistication (though not the sublime Attic Greek of Athens’ heyday), he dismisses New Comedy’s ability to provide insight into the spirit of its age. In *Social Life of Greece from Homer to Menander* (1874), he hardly mentions Menander, despite defining Menander’s work as the endpoint of his study. Mahaffy notes that Menander was a philosophical playwright, given his intimacy with Epicurus, and that his plays were the culmination of the refinement of Greek manners (p. 6), but in this work mentions Menander only twice more: first, to note Menander’s strictures against

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62 For example, Shaw criticized the censorship of his problem play, *Mrs. Warren’s Profession*, which had been delayed for eight years by the censor and denounced the frivolity of most contemporary theatre. See “The Author’s Apology” (Jan. 1902) in Byrne (2002).

63 Symonds (1880b: 233).
marrying for money instead of character, and his typical ending (“almost every play of Menander ended with the happy marriage, not, indeed, of a surly heiress, who despised her husband, but of some simple penniless girl, whose adventures during the play had excited the deep sympathy of the audience” [pp. 287-88]); and second, to remark on the lack of a cook character in Menander’s plays, and what this absence might say about the changing composition of the Greek household in the Hellenistic period (pp. 305-07).64

Mahaffy spent much more time on Menander in his subsequent work, *A History of Classical Greek Literature* (1880, a work in two volumes, each containing two parts). He bases much of his discussion of Menander on insights gleaned from Roman New Comedy, claiming that there were no plots of Menander without the comments of later ancient commenters and the Roman playwrights who had “the unfortunate habit of filling up the incidents of the plot with scenes from a second Greek original,” which “has obscured our best sources.”65 This denigration and dismissal of Roman comedy in its own right was common to Mahaffy, as it was to Müller. He goes on to discuss the plots of Menander’s plays and characters, but draws all his characters from a list of Roman new comic characters supplied by Apuleius (p. 259). Mahaffy was interested in Terence as the true inheritor of Greek New Comedy, after dismissing his “older and ruder Roman master” Plautus as a slave to Philemon instead (p. 264).66 While Terence’s Menandrian works should be further studied, those in which he follows Apollodorus of Carystus should be

64 Mahaffy (1894). Mahaffy thanked Wilde for “having made improvements and corrections all through the book” in his first edition (1874). Wilde was removed from the acknowledgments in subsequent editions.

65 Mahaffy (1891: 257-58). Note that my page numbers correspond to the third, revised edition of Mahaffy’s book.

66 It is true that Plautus was more influenced by Menander’s contemporaries than Terence. Only three or four of Plautus’ works were adaptations of Menander (*Bacchides, Cistellaria, Stichus*, perhaps *Aulularia*).
ignored: *Phormio* has no regard for morals, and *Hecyra* suffers from a dearth of good characters, save Bacchis, the only character here who intrigues Mahaffy since she, “sets herself to restore peace and harmony in the disturbed family, and reconcile her former lover with his new wife…It marks, I think, a real novelty in the New, as compared to the Middle, Comedy, that a harlot should be thus glorified” (p. 262).

Mahaffy asserts that because Terence belonged to a more polished circle than his predecessor Plautus, he was more interested in producing Menander for the Roman stage, but Menander had so little plot to offer in one play that Terence resorted to cobbling two together in each of his comedies (p. 264). With his characteristic disdain, Mahaffy sums up this aspect of Menander, noting that when one considers the plots that come to us through Terence, along with Donatus’ and Aulus Gellius’ comments, Menander’s plays “offer so few distinctive features, they are so homogeneous with the plots borrowed from Philemon, Diphilus, and Apollodorus, that we may safely assert Menander’s superiority did not consist in ingenuity of invention” (pg. 265). Nevertheless, there is “a calm gentlemanly morality about his fragments; he is so excellent a teacher of the ordinary world-wisdom – resignation, good temper, moderation, friendliness – that we can well understand this popularity. He reflected, if not the best, at least the most polite and refined of the age” (p. 265). Mahaffy’s Menander always comes with a *caveat lector*: one should enjoy the style, but not expect much from the substance. He closes his discussion of Menander, and his discussion of Greek poetry at large, with characteristic condescension: while Menander would have been a good school author (had his works not disappeared), Mahaffy would much rather have more Alcaeus, Sappho and Mimnermus if given the choice (p. 268). The subsequently discovered fragments of Menander have proved Mahaffy wrong in his assessment of Menander’s plots.
In *Greek Life and Thought* (1887), all circumspection regarding Menander has disappeared from Mahaffy’s prose. He blusters,

> They [the new comic plays] appear carefully to avoid all the great events of the day, all large political interests, all serious philosophy, and merely to reflect the idlest, the most trivial, and the most decayed gentility of Athens… Starting from a commonplace as old as Aristophanes, the ‘rape and recognition’ of some respectable and therefore wholly insignificant girl, or from the passion for some girl in the hands of a procurer, they added a few other stock characters – the young and fashionable spendthrift, the morose and stingy father, the indulgent uncle, the threadbare parasite, the harpy courtesan, and by ringing the changes upon these constituents of decayed and idle Attic society produced a whole literature of graceful talk, polite immorality, selfish ethics, and shallow character.\(^{67}\)

He finished, “It is usual to lament the irreparable loss of the plays of Menander, but it may be doubted whether, apart from style, history would gain much more from a further knowledge of him.” His opinion of Roman New Comedy was dismal: Mahaffy rejected those plays as rude copies of their originals, unlikely to have deviated much in substance (which he derides as trivial to begin with) from the source material.

Wilde strongly disagreed with his tutor on the value of New Comedy and on Mahaffy’s oft-derisive tone when dealing with this period of Greek history. In his review of the book, Oscar Wilde wrote, “The criticism of the new comedy, also, seems to us somewhat pedantic. The *aim of social comedy, in Menander no less than in Sheridan, is to mirror the manners, not to reform the morals of its day*, and the censure of the Puritan, whether real or affected, is always out of place in literary criticism, and shows a want of recognition of the essential distinction between

\(^{67}\) Mahaffy (1887: 115-16).
art and life” (emphasis mine). Mahaffy had a narrow view of the quality of other Hellenistic material as well, calling the Greek anthology “wearisome and profitless.” Though he took umbrage at contemporary disparagement of his own favored poets, he himself rejected other genres he found valueless (such as Hellenistic poetry and New Comedy), and suggested that others reject them as well. Aesthetic, literary, political (and possibly sexual) differences had incited a break between Wilde and Mahaffy. A month later Wilde would also review Mahaffy’s *The Principles of the Art of Conversation*, again skewering his former mentor. The rift would continue until Wilde’s death, with a short-lived reconciliation in 1893 when Mahaffy attended and praised Wilde’s play *A Woman of No Importance*, and the two corresponded again.

There was little interest in the period for scholarship on Roman New Comedy for its own merit, and few scholars troubled themselves with engaging it for any other reason than to discuss Menander; Robert Yelverton Tyrrell was an exception. Oscar Wilde studied under Professor Tyrrell, a scholar interested in Latin and Greek linguistically the way Mahaffy was interested in Romans and Greeks culturally, and Tyrrell made a career of examining Latin poetry. He oversaw the production of *Kottabos*, a Classics magazine at Trinity, gave lectures on Latin poetry which he published along with a companion volume with edited selections of Latin poetry, collected Cicero’s letters, wrote a monograph on Theocritus and Virgil’s *Eclogues*, developed an edited text of the *Miles Gloriosus* by Plautus with commentary, and assembled the Oxford Clar-

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68 Wilde 1887. His comment is itself an erudite adaptation of Cicero: *I hold the aim of the drama to be to hold up a mirror to our manners, and to give us the express image of daily life*” (*Rosc. Am. XVI*).


endon Press complete edition of Terence with notes. Tyrrell attempted to correct Wilde’s early disinterest in Latin, a prejudice encouraged by Mahaffy.\footnote{Armitage (2003: 16).}

In his \textit{Latin Poetry}, a collection of lectures he had given in 1893 and based on his earlier teaching,\footnote{Tyrrell (1895).} Tyrrell discusses the remains of Roman comedy, focusing on Plautus and Terence. Unlike Müller, Mahaffy, and Symonds, Tyrrell had a respect for Roman comedy for its own sake, though he had only a narrow appreciation for the great treasure trove of themes, cultural commentary, and interests explored by Plautus and Terence. He begins by acknowledging the limited plots of Roman comedy, coming from the decline of Greece, but he has a unique sympathy for characters in the dramas: Tyrrell notes that under the slapstick and humorous surfaces, the plays were actually quite sad. He cites the lack of political life, the isolation of women, the dullness of home life, and the dependence on slaves who become pimps of sorts for their masters, helping them acquire their mistresses (p. 8).

Instead of seeing Roman comedy merely as a vehicle for the dissemination of Menander, Tyrrell appreciated Roman comedy as a legitimate window into Roman society as it actually existed at the time (p. 45). Unfortunately, that appreciation did not equal a nuanced understanding of Roman New Comedy. Tyrrell reduced Plautus to two motifs: cheat or overreach, and love and gallantry (or some combination of the two). He notes that \textit{Captivi} was fine work, but expresses disappointment that Plautus had no further models of strong morality to write up (p. 47). With his chapter on Roman comedy, Tyrrell notes the flaws as he saw them: misplaced prologues in \textit{Miles Gloriosus} and \textit{Cistellaria}, too little of political life, and no real dedication to the portrayal of professional or mercantile life (p. 48-49). Tyrrell finds the women of New Comedy puzzling.
above all. Respectable women were always virtuous, maids and matrons alike, though he found the *uxores dotatae* unpleasant. He begrudgingly allows some of the prostitutes to be somewhat likeable, based on their level of dedication to the young men in love with them. The rest, the prostitutes who reveled in their trade and honestly admitted their goals for the men of the plays, he allowed to be at least entertaining, though not attractive. Tyrrell also lauds Plautus for constantly reminding the audience of the non-respectable status of these women, and for not making them attractive to the audience, unlike the authors of degenerate French novels (p. 51-52). This heavy-handed reading of Plautus’ female characters (and the condemnation of all prostitutes more or less equally) was shared by Classical scholars of the time. Victorian playwrights who wrote about fallen women, the modern analogue of the New Comic *meretrix*, similarly disapproved of them.  

Tyrrell had only a partial understanding of Terence’s characters and their psychology. Though he notes that maidens and *meretrices* are more alike in character (that is, prostitutes are not wholly bad) in Terence than in Plautus, and allows that Terentian wives are more sympathetic than their Plautine counterparts, he completely misunderstands the male characters of Terence’s new comedy. Tyrrell found Terence’s husbands far better morally than Plautine *senes*, as the old men seemed to him to offer much better examples of behavior. He also approved of the sons, who were “lovers instead of libertines” (p. 53-54). One wonders if Tyrrell had actually read *Hecyra* to come away with this impression, though as I noted above, prevailing thought suggested avoidance of Terence’s Apollodorian plays. Nevertheless, Tyrrell offers some of the only contemporary British scholarship on Roman New Comedy independent of Menander. Wilde clearly came to appreciate Roman New Comedy in its own right, and not as a mere means

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73 Bernard Shaw with his *Mrs Warren’s Profession* was a notable exception.
of transmission for Greek comedy, and Professor Tyrrell’s influence may have been partially re-
ponsible.

Who was Wilde’s Menander?

We should begin by asking, who was Wilde’s Menander? Before the Cairo codex was
published in 1907, Menander was a collection of fragments preserved by scholiasts and com-
ilers of linguistic oddities. The monostichoi (often called gnomai, sententiae, or maxims), short
(often one-line) excerptions from his plays, culled from the works of scholiasts and antiquarians
and compiled into commonplace books, comprised the greatest unified section of his works.74
Le Clerc had an edition of the fragments of Menander and Philemon, which was soon amended
by Bentley, with a translation into Latin by Hugo Grotius. Then Meineke revised and reevaluat-
ed all of the Menandrian material and added new material. It was his edition of Menander’s
fragments that Wilde studied. In 1853, the French Academy offered its annual prize, the subject
being Menander, and this contest spawned a variety of entries, essays on Menander’s tone, style,
life, and relationship to the span of Greek comedy from Aristophanes to his own time. The
Academy awarded the prize to two authors, Guizot and Benôit, and in 1856, after both works
were published, the London Quarterly Review issued a review of their essays. The popularity of

74 The phrases and lines collected by ancient commentators were often cited because they con-
tained neologisms, rare word usage, culinary references, or popular sentiment. The form of
“Sententiae Menandri”, as these books were often called, changed frequently, as they were in
constant use by educators from the medieval period to the modern (and even today, students can
learn Greek through collections of Menander’s monostichoi through informal online courses),
who excised and added as they liked. The result was a malleable collection of Menander and
Menander-like quotations. For more information on the creation of the “Sententiae Menandri”,
see Liapis (2007).
Hellenism in the 19th century helped many Greek authors enjoy a renaissance in scholarship and popular appreciation, from which Menander benefited.

Though it is common today to talk about the “Menander-shaped hole in Western dramatic history”75 at least until the discoveries of the 20th century, Victorian scholars confidently wrote about their Menander as a timeless author, accessible through his imitators. They based this assertion partly on the testimony of the ancients themselves: Aristophanes of Byzantium, Caesar, Cicero, Ovid, and Suetonius all sang his praises.76 I include the following chart of published Menander scholarship and editions for reference:77

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75 Sharrock & Ash (2002: 140).
76 Aristophanes of Byzantium, on Syranius’ Hermogenes 2.23; Caes. ap. Suet. Vit. Ter., Cic. ap. Suet. Vit. Ter.; Ovid Am. 1.15.17-18. The anonymous author of the article (“Article III – Menander”) in the London Quarterly Review does concede that the Menander of the ancients seems very different from the Menander of the 1850s (p. 49).
77 For a thorough explanation of the discoveries of Menander in the 19th and 20th centuries, see Arnott (1970b) and Blume (2010) from which this chart was largely compiled. Handley (2011) provides an excellent survey of how the texts were recovered, in what state they exist, how our impressions of Menander evolve with every new discovery, and what images from Menandrian plays can tell us about his work.
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<th>Menander Editions/Scholarship Pre-1892</th>
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**Menander and Wilde**

It has frequently been argued by modern scholars that Wilde had very little Menander to work with, and thus could not have been influenced by him, no matter how tempting it would be to imagine such an influence. But as the chart alone demonstrates, there were contemporary studies on Menander available to Wilde, as well as collections of his extant works. In studying for the Berkeley Prize, Wilde would have become well acquainted with the Menandrian frag-

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78 The year *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, Wilde’s first Society Play, was staged.

ments. He came to know the tone of Menandrian comedy through this material, and gained some knowledge of the plots through the ancient synopses and the scholarship that stressed Terence’s dependence on Menander, as well as contemporary monographs on the playwright.

After leaving Trinity, Wilde continued to be fascinated with Greek literature, and Menander featured again in his interests. Friends noted that Wilde was inseparable from his copy of Symonds’ *Studies of the Greek Poets*. Of Menander, Symonds wrote in his first volume, “[he] is scarcely more to us than a name, or at best an echo sounding somewhat faintly from the Roman theatre.” Beside this epitaph Wilde annotated his text, scribbling, “Over 2000 lines of Menander remain!” Wilde was similarly incensed when the renowned philologist Richard Jebb neglected to mention Menander in his *Encyclopedia Britannica* entry on Greek history. In his review for *Athenaeum*, Wilde called Jebb out on the omission: “In the account of Athenian comedy there is no mention of the remarkable Sicilian influence, and the name of Menander does not occur.”

Wilde also frequently marked out passages in his texts that he especially agreed with. In Symonds’ second volume, Wilde made special note of Symonds’ comment that Menander’s comedy “determined the form of drama in Rome, and, through the influence of Plautus and Ter-

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80 Wilde’s school notes mention Menander, summing him up with “ἀναγνώρισις.” MS Clark Library Wilde W6721M3 E96 [1873?], cited in Ross (2012: 175).

81 Wilde carried around Symonds constantly at Trinity, and bought the second volume immediately at Oxford. See T Wright (2008: 69).


83 Wilde (1880: 301-302). Originally the review was anonymous (a common Victorian practice), but Ellmann (1988: 88, 108) located the magazine’s sources (see note 26 in Chapter 4, and note 9 in Chapter 5).
ence upon the renascent culture of the sixteenth century, fixed the type of comedy in modern Europe.\textsuperscript{84} Wilde would later exemplify Symonds’ remark with his own reinvention of New Comedy in his Society Plays.

Further, Oscar Wilde had an incredible memory—he could quote ancient authors years after he studied them and often annotated his texts with quotes from authors from memory.\textsuperscript{85} For a playwright who had shown repeatedly the ability to assimilate, adapt, refine, and invert elements of hundreds of French and English dramas in his own work, incorporating the convoluted plots of Roman comedy studied ten years earlier, and the disjointed fragments of Menander that he had memorized as a young man would pose little difficulty.

\textit{Roman Comedy and Wilde}

Wilde was very familiar with Plautus and Terence as required reading for his exams at Oxford\textsuperscript{86}—half of Plautus’ corpus and all of Terence’s were on the reading list. Victorian scholars tended to favor Terence over Plautus both for his content (domestic crises, young love between eligible citizens, seemingly conservative family values, and emphasis on father-son relationships, all in an elevated tone, written in clean Latin [that is, without Plautus’ neologisms], with less bawdy humor), and for his debt to Menander. While four of Terence’s six plays were adapted from Menander’s work, perhaps only four of Plautus’ twenty works were.\textsuperscript{87}

\textsuperscript{84} Symonds (1880b: 236), as noted in Ross (2012: 176, note 308).

\textsuperscript{85} T. Wright (2008: 61-63).


\textsuperscript{87} See note 66. On Terence’s adaptations, see pages 17-19.
plays were full of stock characters and situations made fresh and comical through the playwright’s riotous wordplay, irony, and naughty sense of humor. He employed unabashedly mercenary meretrices, cheeky slaves, male buddies young and old, outspoken wealthy wives, lecherous old men, and pure maidens, and turned their lives upside down with plots involving mistaken identity, kidnapping, rape, schemes, and obstacles to love. Young male and female babies were misplaced to turn up later, their identities revealed just in time to save the day; clever slaves and friends embarked on complicated schemes to get a girl or bail a young man out of debt; wives got even with lecherous husbands; and by the end of the comedy everything had sorted itself out to the satisfaction of most parties. Though Wilde’s earlier Society Plays were more subdued than Plautus’ fast-paced farces, they shared many characters and situations. Wilde’s final Society Play, The Importance of Being Earnest, was inspired in part by Plautus’ Menaechmi, including such elements as the misplaced male child, the vampy female characters, the cheeky servants, the food gags, the buddies-turned-brothers motif, the overbearing dowered wife, the tokens of recognition, and the general Saturnalian atmosphere; Terence’s Eunuchus and Adelphoe provided additional inspiration.

After his graduation from Oxford, Wilde requested from the Bodleian stacks a literal prose translation of Terence’s Andria, Heauton Timoroumenos, and Hecyra. Less overtly comical than Plautus, Terence shared Menander’s interest in familial relations, marriage, and the ideologies of his age. They shared a variety of character types, similar plots, and an elegant style. Channeling Menander, Terence wrote lively and witty dramas mirroring the mores of his society, while casting a critical light on the hypocrisy of the upper-middle class families of his day, all

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88 P. Smith (2003: 290). Wilde requested An., HT, and Hec. in literal English prose translation by Jonathan Adair Phillips (1836); he kept it on call from April 1880—May 22 1880.
expressed with a masterly command of urbane and cultured language and polished style.\textsuperscript{89} Although Terence acknowledged his relationship to his predecessor, he frequently took over Menandrian plots and combined them, picking and choosing from among Menander’s works and transforming them. He added speeches and roles, excised others, and skewed the endings of his plays to critique the Menandrian originals’ happy endings, frequently questioning the norms of New Comedy and highlighting the hypocrisies of the pat resolutions found in Menander and Plautus. The defective family and flawed society were common backdrops to his action, and he explored their effects on the younger generation. Though his plays end traditionally (that is, children are restored to their families, rape victims are saved through marriage to their rapists, and young lovers wed), they do not offer the emotional comfort or release of earlier comedy. Fathers and sons are not entirely reconciled, women are forced to be silent and shoulder blame, secrets are hushed up, and friends are not always rewarded for good service. Things do not simply go back to the “happy” way things were before the events of the play. The ambiguities in Terence and his penchant for appropriating and adapting his material in new ways and contexts to highlight negative aspects of middle-class society would have appealed to Wilde’s sensibilities.

Terence’s lucidity and elegance of style ensured his enduring popularity as a school author through the Middle Ages and Renaissance. He has been most celebrated up to our own period for his “sententiae,” extracted witticisms compiled into books of notable quotations. I have already noted Menander’s survival in the collection of his monostichoi, a collection of quotations copied out by schoolchildren in the ancient world and modern. The quotable currency of these short statements lent immortality to their authors, even when the longer works were unknown or

\textsuperscript{89} Quintillian (\textit{Inst. Or.} 10.1.99) called Terence’s writing \textit{scripsta...elegantissima}.
unappreciated. Wilde, ever cognizant of the value of a *bon mot*, would take after Menander and Terence in this respect too.\footnote{90}

Aware of his own appeal as a quotable wit, Wilde did not wait for posterity to extract his aphorisms: he wrote his own collection for the *Saturday Review* and an Oxford journal.\footnote{91} Wilde had earlier collected a variety of his maxims in the preface to the 1891 edition of *Dorian Gray* (Ward, Lock & Co.).\footnote{92} But Wilde employed a twist in his epigrammatic sentiments, much as Plautus and Terence had. He placed his sententious epigrams in the mouths of deluded or hypocritical characters, and transformed the pure, unadulterated truth of the epigram into paradoxes for his provocateurs to utter, turning the meaning of the epigram on its head to reveal new perspectives on “truth.” Terence had employed a similar tack in his comedies: his pompous, hypocritical characters spout *sententiae* and advice for others, without understanding that they needed to work on their own problems. For instance, Chremes in *Heauton Timoroumenos* arrogantly butted into his friend Menedemus’ problems, saying, “I’m human, and I regard no human business as other people’s” (*homo sum; humani nil a me alienum puto*, 77). Extracted in numerous

\footnote{90} Frequently Wilde reused clever turns of phrase he particularly liked. Guy & Small (2006: 55) note, “He seems to have been reluctant to discard any of the material he wrote, and was always alert to the possibility that lines composed for, and then deleted from, one work could at a future date be transposed into another.” Early drafts of *A Woman of No Importance* contain lines from *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* (Small [2006: xxix]), and passages from *An Ideal Husband* were deleted and then taken up again in *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

\footnote{91} Wilde (1894a, 1894b).

\footnote{92} Wilde also shared Menander’s swiftness of production. An ancient anecdote preserved in Plutarch (*Mor.* 347e) has Menander conversing with a friend about the upcoming Dionysia and the deadline for Menander’s play. When asked how far long he was, Menander blithely replied, “Oh, I’ve got the plot…I just need the dialogue!” Wilde similarly wrote in flurries of short-term activity, boasting to have finished *Earnest* in only three weeks (Ellmann [1988: 397]). Unlike Menander, however, Wilde first wrote his jokes and epigrams, fitting them into a plot that developed later. See Guy & Small (2006: 54-55) on Wilde’s composition process.
teaching texts and quotation books, this epigrammatic statement seems philosophical and sympathetic, but considered in context, Terence is making an ironical statement about Chremes’ on affairs: in the course of the play, while Chremes pompously advises his wiser friend, it will be revealed that Chremes harshly ordered his baby daughter abandoned years earlier, verbally abuses his wife, and cannot control the actions of his profligate son. Wilde’s epigrams, excerpted for over a century from their original contexts, are similarly misunderstood. As we will see in subsequent chapters, Wilde’s wit, much like Terence’s, when taken in context displays a far more critical character than the traditional epigram.

Wilde in Opposition

Although Wilde revered his instructors (at least at an early stage in his education), he did not always agree on how Classics should be taught and on the value placed on some ancient au-

93 Plautus employed epigrammatic, moralizing sentiments only in the mouths of characters who were about to dupe the unsuspecting recipient of that “wisdom,” or in the mouths of deluded characters too foolish to avoid being duped. See Moore (1998: 67-90) on Plautus’ use of moralizing statements.

94 There are numerous editions of context-less, excerpted Wildean material. And just as every clever monostichos from the ancient Greek world was attributed to Menander, spuriously or not, every clever sentiment that seems even vaguely Wildean is attributed to Wilde. Dorothy Parker (herself the frequent victim of spurious attribution) wrote, in “A Pig’s-Eye View of Literature: Oscar Wilde” (Sunset Gun [1927]),

If with the literate I am
Impelled to try an epigram,
I never seek to take the credit;
We all assume that Oscar said it.

For a scholarly collection of Wilde’s aphorisms, maxims, epigrams, paradoxes, and quotations, see Conrad (2006).
There were two competing philosophies on Classics at the time: at Trinity, Mahaffy instructed students to use the Classics to engage with the contemporary world. By contrast, Oxford students were encouraged to study the Classics within their original historical context and to deny their connection to the Victorian present. In response to the work of Alexander Grant (part of the Historicist school of Oxford) on Aristotle, Wilde wrote “Grant is quite foolish” in his marginalia to the *Ethics*. A decade later Wilde put Grant on his list of books *not* to read.95

Long before Wilde began adapting New Comedy for his Society Plays, finding contemporary relevance in those ancient works, he had attempted to apply Mahaffy’s philosophy at Oxford. Punished for returning late for term because he was away in Greece, he attempted to defend the trip as academically important. He argued that he was engaging in the academically valid exercise of using archaeology to understand the classical texts, but the Historicists at Oxford disagreed, or so Wilde portrayed it, and he was rusticated. He bemoaned the decision (and its attendant interruption of his funds), saying, “I was sent down from Oxford for being the first undergraduate to visit Olympia.”96

**Wilde’s Reading of New Comedy**

Wilde appreciated the wisdom of his tutors and mentors at Trinity and Oxford, but he had no qualms about disagreeing with the conventional scholarship they disseminated. The tradi-

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95 M. Holland & Hart-Davis (2000: 276-77); T. Wright (2008: 67-72). For an in-depth exploration of Wilde’s academic and philosophic distaste for Grant’s scholarship, see Ross (2012: 143-61).

96 Whatever the dons’ academic stance, Wilde had been given leave for ten days, but he failed to return for a month. Wilde’s unrepentant attitude, combined with his lapse in attendance more than any other academic dissent, encouraged the Magdalen officers to penalize him. Ricketts (1932), cited in Ellmann (1988: 77-78) and M. Holland & Hart-Davis (2000: 47).
tional view on New Comedy, judging by Müller, Mahaffy, Symonds, Tyrrell, and the rest, was that Menander was worth reading, at least for his style, while Plautus and Terence were not. Plautus was vulgar, he frequently passed over Menander for other New Comic playwrights when adapting his comedies, he lacked moral quality, and his style was colloquial. Terence, when seen as an inheritor of Menander, was acceptable, but he too lacked strong moral character. Both playwrights were shallow, repetitive, and, well, Roman. The Augustan Age of England had been eclipsed by Hellenism. But Menander himself was found lacking too, as far as plot was concerned. While it was popular to pay lip service to his glory, Menander seemed to have little else going for him.

I hope to make it clear that Wilde rejected the received wisdom and categories of New Comedy. While Mahaffy, a generally conservative Classicist who upheld the status quo on the hierarchy of genre, was happy to dismiss New Comedy as derivative, to put its composite parts in boxes and file them away, Wilde was not. His “love of Greek things” (and love of contentiousness, art, and drama) included a love of Menander, and from there he developed too a keen interest in the Roman playwrights (made clear from the plethora of elements he borrowed for his own Society Plays, which I will explore in subsequent chapters). Given that he incorporated a great many elements of New Comedy into his own plays, it is clear that he did not share the attitude of his tutors. He re-evaluated a genre that he was told was not worth reading, and he rebelled against the dismissal of the material. He saw the subtler elements of New Comedy that

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97 Plautus frequently adapted material from Diphilus (Casina, Rudens, Vidularia), Philemon (Mercator, Trinummus; probably Mostellaria, maybe Amphitryo), and Demophilus (Asinaria) whose contributions to comedy are noted by ancient commentators, but are not extant aside from scattered excerpts. For fragments and some biographical material, see Rusten (2011).

future scholars would take decades to recognize: social hypocrisies, issues of masculinity, the sexual double standard, the fractured family, and personal identity and individuality. For Wilde, New Comedy had modern relevance, explored the human experience, reflected contemporary fears, and shared universal hopes; New Comedy was an appealing genre for public performance and scholarship, and was the confluence of Life and Art that Wilde increasingly sought in his philosophy.99 He saw the plays, as his instructors did not, as drama, and he appreciated them not simply as words on a page, but living theatre that explored feelings and fears before an audience and brought catharsis to its viewers. Wilde was also interested in Roman New Comedy for its own sake, not just as a vehicle for getting to Menander. The Greek new comic may have been a starting point for Wilde’s interest in the genre, but the number of Roman New Comic elements in his plays suggest a much deeper interest in Plautus and Terence.

Wilde was fascinated by the obscure and the esoteric, he was a voracious reader, and he liked to prove his erudition by incorporating what he read into what he wrote. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he could read both Greek and Latin very well. While George Bernard Shaw had to rely on Gilbert Murray’s translations of Greek tragedy to incorporate Classical elements into his work,100 Wilde could read the ancient material in its original language, and he could appreciate the style and wordplay that were characteristic of Menander, Plautus, and Terence. We can learn much about New Comedy by reading Wilde, and just as much about Wilde by reading New Comedy. Wilde, through his adaptation of New Comedy, puts a modern spin on the ancient material, and helps modern audiences to appreciate the rich themes and human issues being explored in the ancient dramas. In turn, reading New Comedy can tell us how Wilde read, what he

99 “Critic As Artist” and “ Decay of Lying”; see Chapter 5 for Wilde’s aestheticism.

100 Hall & Macintosh (2005: 488-520).
read, and what he valued in his Classical scholarship. We can see how deeply intellectual his plays were, and how attuned and sympathetic to his material Wilde was.

*How Wilde Wrote*

In subsequent chapters we will look at what Wilde valued in New Comedy, based on the ancient tropes, themes, and characters he chose to incorporate into his own plays. Some brief comments on his general writing process are helpful here, before we begin to examine his individual plays in detail. When Wilde composed a play, he sketched out rough scenarios, then wrote blocks of dialogue piecemeal. He did not assign particular lines to specific characters at this early stage, being more concerned with his witticisms and general plot elements than characterization. Once he had shaped a plot to his liking, he created characters that suited the psychologies created by the anonymous dialogue. Wilde was an even more avid playgoer after the failure of his first historical play, *Vera* (first in the UK, and then in New York); he now studied carefully the characteristics of a successful play. He also possessed the gift of quick reading and sharp understanding of literary tropes and standards. In characteristic hyperbole, he claimed

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102 *Vera*, a melodramatic play set in Russia and based loosely on the life of Vera Vasulich, was written in 1881 and intended for British performance, but the Lord Chamberlain denied Wilde a license on account of the “political content” of the drama (see Freshwater [2013: 282]). In 1883 the play was performed in New York following Wilde’s American tour, but the production folded after only a week. Wilde’s disappointment was noted by his wife and friends, and Alfred Bryan sketched for *Entr’Acte* a caricature of Oscar fainting into brother Willie’s arms following the play’s failure. Critics cited the epigrammatic nature of Wilde’s dialogue and questioned his sincerity in the historical setting. Wilde would later realize this style was better suited to comedy than tragedy. See Ellmann (1988: 241-45). Miller (2013) reevaluates the quality of *Vera*, and posits that its revolutionary theme highlights the radical elements through Wilde’s later essays and plays.

Wilde attempted several other melodramatic pieces with historical settings (*The Duchess of Padua* [1882/3, published 1891], *The Cardinal of Avignon* [conceived of in 1882, sketched out
he could read a three-volume novel in 30 minutes and give a plot summary.\textsuperscript{103} After failing with historical dramas, Wilde turned in 1891 to contemporary settings, perhaps remembering the power of the social comedies he had read in school: his Society Plays would be about the leisured class, and would hold up a mirror to the hypocrisies of its members.\textsuperscript{104} He would take the tired genre and reinvigorate it. Considering some years later the impact he had on the dramatic scene, he wrote,

\begin{quote}
I took the drama, the most objective form known to art, and made it as personal a mode of expression as the lyric or the sonnet, at the same time that I widened its range and enriched its characterization: drama, novel, poem in rhyme, poem in prose, subtle or fantastic dialogue, whatever I touched I made beautiful in a new mode of beauty (\textit{De Profundis}).
\end{quote}

Identifying Wilde’s sources is important to understanding how he worked as a playwright. His contemporaries derided Wilde’s plays as derivative pastiches of other works, in 1894, \textit{A Wife’s Tragedy} [late 1880s, surviving only in a manuscript fragment], \textit{Salomé} [1893], \textit{A Florentine Tragedy} [sometime after 1893], and \textit{La Sainte Courtisane} [sometime after 1893]) but only his Society Plays generated interest with theatre producers. He attempted to sketch another comedy, \textit{Mr. and Mrs. Daventry}, in 1894. He sold the premise to Frank Harris, who completed it (1900). Hyde (1956) produced an edition with notes. The aforementioned historical plays are considered minor works by Wilde, and are often dismissed as inferior or ignored altogether in studies of Wilde’s work. On Wilde’s unfinished plays, see Guy & Small (2006: 146-60). Further on \textit{A Wife’s Tragedy}, see Shewan (1982, 1983). On the editions of Wilde’s works, see Jackson (2013).

\textsuperscript{103} Ellmann (1988: 22): “‘When I was a boy at school,’ he told Eugene Field in 1889, ‘I was looked upon as a prodigy by my associates because, quite frequently, I would, for a wager, read a three-volume novel in half an hour so closely as to be able to give an accurate résumé of the plot of the story; by one hour’s reading I was enabled to give a fair narrative of the incidental scenes and the most pertinent dialogue.’”

\textsuperscript{104} Ellmann (1988: 333). He wrote in his letters (M. Holland & Hart-Davis [2006: 626]):

\begin{quote}
Whether a comedy should deal with modern life, whether its subject should be society or middle class existence, these are questions purely to the artist’s own choice. Personally I like comedy to be intensely modern, and I like my tragedy to walk in purple and to be remote.
\end{quote}
and he was frequently accused of plagiarism. He was in the habit of reusing his own material again in other plays, as well as the material of other authors, frequently without citation, in paraphrase or wholesale quotation. At other times he claimed to pull his plots from the headlines of the papers, a technique previously admitted by Wilkie Collins. He was also attracted to the idea of secret lives, and at one point claimed that the famous actress Lillie Langtry’s abandonment of her child was the basis of Lady Windermere’s Fan, while at other points in his life claiming that his plays had no influence but his own imagination. Wilde drew on a plethora of French decadent sources and Victorian gothic inspirations for Dorian Gray. He was satirized by Beardsley, depicted writing a play (probably Salomé) with a French dictionary, the Bible, Ahn’s First Course, Gautier, French Verbs, and Swinburne surrounding

105 When Wilde attempted to gift the Oxford Union with a volume of his poetry in 1881, they voted to return the book. Pearson (1946) recalls Oliver Elton, who spoke against accepting the volume: “It is not that these poems are thin—and they are thin, it is not that they are this or that—they are all this or that; it is that they are for the most part not by their putative father at all, but by a number of better-known and more deservedly reputed authors. They are in fact by William Shakespeare, by Philip Sidney, by John Donne, by Lord Byron, by William Morris, by Algernon Swinburne, and by sixty more.”


107 Ellmann (1988: 376-77). He claimed once to have taken the plot for A Woman of No Importance from the Family Herald (Jopling [1925: 81]).


him. Wilde was famous for his artistic borrowing from many, varied sources for all of his works, including his comedies. Kerry Powell tracked down a variety of contemporary sources for all of Wilde’s Society Plays, but for all that, the full picture of Wilde’s composition process remains incomplete. To fully grasp the extent of his compositional skill and appreciate the subtle nuances of his work, we must acknowledge and study all the rich influences, including New Comedy, that Wilde pulled together to create his most beloved works. No scholarly work to date has explored in detail the incredible amount of ancient New Comic material that inspired Wilde’s work in addition to his contemporary sources.

While the influences of contemporary theatre and literature on Wilde’s creative process cannot be denied, his debt to Classical comedy should not be ignored. He was very familiar with Menander’s tone and general aspects, and revived him through his relationship to Terence. Engaging with Terence and the more exuberant Plautus, Wilde took his place as an inheritor of New Comedy. Like Terence, Wilde adapted and revised the material of his predecessors to reflect contemporary mores, further developing characters inherited from New Comedy, employing traditional themes to new ends, combining various comic plots into a single drama, and problematizing the endings employed by his precursors to comment on his society. For all his reinvention of New Comedy, he consistently drew on recognizable aspects of Menander, Plautus, and Terence, adapting them for a Victorian audience who viewed the texts of antiquity with re-


112 Wilde’s contemporary critics did not acknowledge the influence either.
spect, but who had tired of the now-standard Greek tragic fare. Wilde offered something both new and old.

Wilde was an author and thinker passionately interested in the Classics, both in school and long after graduation, a fact that can be seen throughout his entire oeuvre, particularly in the dramas that would ensure his enduring popularity—his Society Plays—systematically reviving and recreating ancient New Comedy for the modern English-speaking world. Unlike his late-Victorian tutors, Wilde saw the dramatic value of New Comedy, both in Menander and in his Roman inheritors Plautus and Terence. Though he was clearly attracted to the farcical aspects of the genre, Wilde made a nuanced reading and adaptation of the Greek and Roman material, identifying the modern relevance of the age-old themes of male friendship, class warfare, divided families, and the hopeful love of youth. Though Wilde lived and died too early to see the miraculous rediscovery of Menander in the 20th century, or the newfound interest in the social issues in and psychology of Roman New Comedy, his sensitivity to the thematic material proved remarkably correct, and his reading of Plautus and Terence looked ahead to the greater appreciation of Roman New Comedy in the late 20th century. Reading Wilde can enrich our reading of New Comedy: Wilde interpreted the ancient genre for modern audiences with modern relevance, bridging the gap between our modern world and that of the ancients, and making Menander, Plautus, and Terence less alien to our own world and culture.

In the following chapters I will examine a number of motifs, characters, and themes of New Comedy and their analogues in Oscar Wilde, focusing attention on how he adapts New Comedy for Victorian society. Wilde’s nuanced adaptation of the ancient material in turn draws attention to previously underappreciated aspects of ancient comedy, or allows the modern reader

113 See section “Wilde, Hellenist” above for Victorian tastes in Greek literature, and note 30 on the waning interest in Greek tragedy.
to approach the ancient comedies in new ways. Chapter Two explores the sexual double standard in both ancient and Victorian society, particularly through an examination of acceptable male philandering (Menander’s *Epitrepontes*; Plautus’ *Asinaria, Casina, Mercator*; Terence’s *Phormio, Hecyra*) against the condemnation of female rape victims or “fallen” women (Menander’s *Georgos, Heros*; Plautus’ *Cistellaria, Epidicus*; Terence’s *Phormio*); comparing and contrasting the aforementioned plays with Wilde’s *Lady Windermere’s Fan* and *A Woman of No Importance*. I suggest that reading Wilde’s Lady Windermere and her reaction in discovering that her husband has been (allegedly) having an affair allows us to sympathize with the wrong wives of New Comedy and to reconsider their feelings: rather than being upset primarily about the financial loss when husbands philander, these wives are more concerned with humiliation and hurt feelings. Reading Wilde’s interpretation of the seduced wife (Mrs. Erlynne in *Fan* and Mrs. Arbuthnot in *Woman*) draws attention back to the trope in ancient comedy, and the sexual double standard in place there.

Chapter Three focuses on “successful” recognition plots, that is, plots in which the misplaced or unknown (particularly male) child is returned safely to the family and is happily acknowledged by the family group. Here Menander’s *Epitrepontes, Misoumenos, Perikeiroumenae, Sikyonioi* and Plautus’ *Captivi, Menaechmi, Cistellaria*, and *Rudens* are explored in detail against Wilde’s *Importance of Being Earnest*. Reading Wilde’s philosophy of personal development in *Earnest* encourages us to return to *Menaechmi* and consider the effects of false identity and the stifling consequences for development of selfhood that erroneous or ill-fitting identity has, as well as the freedom for development that recognition of family identity can bring.

Chapter Four, by contrast, explores the number of comedies in which recognition (usually of a girl) is flawed, or thwarted by those who should be attempting to facilitate it, with a wider
interest in the damaged societies in which these flawed recognitions took place. Here we will look closely at Terence’s comedies, *Andria*, *Eunuchus*, *Heauton Timoroumenos*, and *Phormio* alongside Wilde’s *Lady Windermere’s Fan* and *A Woman of No Importance*. Flawed recognition highlights deeper problems in a dysfunctional society; when identity is actively rejected or suppressed, it draws attention to selfish motivations of parents seeking to hide their own shame, or self-delusion in children to reject their natal identity because they are unwilling to explore that side of themselves.

Finally, Chapter Five explores issues of plot and character development through the Plautine clever slave (*servus callidus*, seen in *Asinaria*, *Mostellaria*, *Rudens*, *Miles Gloriosus*, *Epidicus*, *Curculio*, *Pseudolus*, and *Bacchides*) and Wildean dandy (featured in all of his Society Plays). Specifically we will examine Lord Goring as a *servus callidus*, and trace aspects of the clever slave play through *An Ideal Husband*. It is generally assumed that servi callidi drive plot, but not character development. Wilde’s dandies are acknowledged to promote character development, but are not credited with actively resolving plot. When these two character types are considered in light of one another, we see that Plautine servi callidi and Wilde’s dandies actually serve both functions: they inspire character development (or at least prompt comeuppance for hypocritical or delusional characters) and they actively contribute to the resolution of the plot.

I attempt to demonstrate throughout how recognition of the New Comic influences in Wilde can help us better appreciate his work, and how reading Wilde can offer a new mode of examination for the ancient comedies. Though Wilde had considerably less Menander than we currently possess, I established above that he was influenced by fragments and scholarship on Menander. Consequently, we will explore plays of Menander to which Wilde had no access, because they influence later Roman Comedy. Wilde was familiar with Plautus and Terence both in
the original Latin and in their English translations. Finally, I conclude each chapter with a “Case Study,” distilling the focus to a particular play and topic that highlights a representative issue explored within the chapter. One may consider these case studies extended examples of the larger issues dealt with in the (often very lengthy) chapters.

\[114\] Wilde may have even seen Roman comedy performed in the Westminster Latin play. On the Westminster Latin Play, see Brown (2008).
CHAPTER 2: THE SEXUAL DOUBLE STANDARD

“Those who are faithful know only the trivial side of love: it is only the faithless who know love’s tragedies.”

(Wilde, The Portrait of Dorian Gray)

Victorian theatre frequently staged melodramatic “problem plays” in which morality featured strongly and social acceptability of behavior was closely monitored. Deviation from convention was noted and punished, as Society policed its own: the plays posed moral questions, then resolved them in ways that confirmed the ethical poses of the audience. The trite, old-fashioned morality in these plays rankled more progressive playwrights, like Wilde and Shaw, but the theater-goers of St. James required productions that represented their mores.¹ With Lady Windermere’s Fan and A Woman of No Importance, Wilde caused a stir by staging the disconnection between the morality his characters preached and the way they behaved.²

Lady Windermere’s Fan features a husband and father suspected of infidelity, a wife who considers sexual transgression, and a mother who fell far in society as a result of her transgres-


² Small (1999: xix) says of Lady Windermere’s Fan, “The blurred morality which early critics had seen as a weakness [in Wilde] becomes a strength if Wilde is understood to be contesting the conventions which he is using, particularly the moral essentialism on which Victorian melodrama invariably resides.”
ions. Society matrons discuss infidelity as commonplace, and offer each other strategies for undermining their husbands’ philandering. Children’s lives and social standing are endangered by the actions of their parents. The loss of her mother changed Lady Windermere’s life and shaped her being, and she nearly ruins her own child’s life. Formerly high-minded, moral to a fault, and certain in her marriage, she must come to terms with a marriage that is deteriorating around her, faced with the apparent betrayal of her husband and the destruction of her illusions about marriage. Though the plot is resolved, all parties must keep secrets to prevent scandal and save face. *A Woman of No Importance* features a woman, seduced as a young girl, who raises her child in secret, inventing a poor but respectable marriage for herself to protect her son, and devoting her life to good works to atone for her “shame.” Like many of the cads of ancient comedy, her seducer abandoned her. Like the vulnerable mothers of Menander, Plautus, and Terence, Mrs. Arbuthnot must save her child from what she perceives as terrible danger, and she must reveal her past in order to prevent disaster, at social risk to herself.

In this chapter, we will examine the ways in which Wilde questioned the double standard of sexual morality in his plays and the social hypocrisies of the characters in them (and through the mimetic features of Society Drama, questioned the hypocrisies of the audience). The damaged societies he depicts offer ideal grounds for exploring issues of the sexual double standard, identity, moral hypocrisy, and stagnation of the self. Wilde contended that there was “no such thing as a moral or immoral book” (preface to *Portrait of Dorian Gray*) and that “All Art is immoral” (“Critic as Artist,” *Prose* 252), but he explored in his works the moral poses of the socie-

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3 Society dramas were expected to represent London Society (elite society) accurately in terms of dress, attitude, and behavior. Clement Scott (*Illustrated London News*, Feb. 27, 1892) railed against *Lady Windermere’s Fan* for “misrepresenting” Society (that is, Wilde depicted them accurately in appearance, but not moral behavior). He wrote, “I will show you a mother who leaves her daughter for ever, un kissed, and goes downstairs to accept the hand of a roué admirer on her deserted daughter’s doorstep.” Cited in Bristow (1994: 58).
ty he depicted, and questioned their validity. Hypocrisy and double standards were particularly abhorrent to Wilde, and he draws considerable attention to them. He does not offer suggestions on appropriate morality, for to dictate behavior to others was antithetical to his philosophy. In “The Soul of a Man Under Socialism,” he wrote, “It is grossly selfish to require of one’s neighbor that he should think in the same way, and hold the same opinions. Why should he? If he can think, he will probably think differently.” Duty and cant were equally repugnant. Why then criticize tolerance of male philandering and judgment of female sexual misconduct? For Wilde, it was hypocrisy to say one thing but do another, to the detriment of others, or to hold people to different, arbitrary standards. So too it was in the ancient comedies. The ancient playwrights highlight the hypocrisies of the “upstanding” senes in their plays who preach morality and then violate it, while mistreating their wives and children.

**Re-evaluating the Sexual Double Standard in New Comedy Through Wilde**

Reading Wilde’s criticism of the sexual double standard in his plays highlights the sexual double standard in the ancient plays and draws our attention to the hypocrisies of the bourgeois societies of Greek and Roman New Comedy. The “fractured family,” damaged by the inappropriate behavior of its male members or the unequal shame attached to its female ones, represents a broken society, whether ancient or Victorian. This chapter pursues the way Wilde and the Roman comic playwrights staged such problems. It is organized in two parts, examining first the flawed men (fathers and husbands), and then mothers. In each section, I consider first the ancient comedies, then turn to Wilde. I attempt to highlight the similarity in treatment in the ancient and Wildean plays, and I suggest that Wilde was influenced in part by the ancient material:
while his morality plots were inspired by Victorian melodrama, his reaction to “type” and criticism of social hypocrisy shares much with ancient drama.

While I aim to make clear that Wilde was inspired directly by scenes, speeches, and characters from the ancient dramas, I also attempt to demonstrate the two-way relationship involved in reception: reading Wilde and his depictions of wronged women can help us read the ancient material more sensitively. I suggest that reading Wilde’s Lady Windermere and her reaction in discovering that her husband has been (allegedly) having an affair allows us to sympathize with the wronged wives of New Comedy and to reconsider their feelings: rather than being upset primarily about the financial loss when husbands philander, these wives are more concerned with humiliation and hurt feelings. Reading Wilde’s interpretation of the seduced wife (Mrs. Erlynne in Fan and Mrs. Arbuthnot in Woman) draws attention back to the trope in ancient comedy and the sexual double standard in place there. Wilde’s departure from convention, that is, having Mrs. Arbuthnot reject reconciliation with her seducer and verbalizing her anger and lack of forgiveness, highlights the disturbing nature of the reconciliation between rapist and victim in the ancient material. The chapter closes with a case study delineating the points of correspondence between Wilde’s Lady Windermere’s Fan and Terence’s Hecyra.

**Philandering Husbands and Bad Fathers**

A prominent feature of the fractured family in New Comedy is the inadequate husband or negligent father. These men endanger their marriages through irresponsibility, philandering, or cruelty to their wives. Husbands and fathers were supposed to be responsible, civic-minded, and economically conservative. Merrymaking, womanizing, and drinking were the territory of the
irresponsible, unmarried young man, not the settled family man. When a husband shirks his duties, he creates a rift in the family that must be mended, so that social order can be restored.⁴

**Menander’s Husbands**

Menander treats philandering more gently than Plautus and Terence. His husbands flirt with irresponsibility, but in his comedy, order must be re-established, without irreparable damage, by the play’s close.⁵ In *Epitrepontes* (see plot summary in Appendix B), the young husband Charisios abandons his family when he learns that his wife Pamphile was not sexually pure before their marriage. When she has a baby only five months into their marriage, he suspects either that she has been unfaithful or that she was raped before their marriage. Either would be unacceptable to an ancient Greek husband.⁶ Seduction would be too awful to contemplate, but rape was polluting to the household, as well as generally distasteful.⁷ Charisios retreats to a friend’s house and hires an enslaved *hetaira*, Habrotonon, but does not have sex with her. His wife Pamphile, distraught after months of hiding from her husband the rape she suffered at the Tauropolia festival and the ensuing pregnancy, suffers the insult of seeing a *hetaira* usurping her place.⁸ Her

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⁴ In Plautus and Terence there may also be comeuppance for the older generation when duty is ignored for personal pleasure (as in *Asinaria, Casina, Mercator*, and *Phormio*).

⁵ On the restoration of order and the rehabilitation of the father-son relationship, see Heap (1998), Sommerstein (1998), and Lape (2004a).

⁶ Pamphilus has similar suspicions about his wife Philumena in Terence’s *Hecyra*, but Charisios is a much more sympathetic character, and he seems conflicted about what to do. On the negative character of Pamphilus and the more problematic societies depicted in Terence, see Chapter 4.

⁷ See Ogden (1997: 29-32) on the issues of seduction, rape, and pollution. See also Pierce (1997), Sommerstein (1998), and Lape (2001) on rape in Menander.

⁸ On rape, the Tauropolia, and *Epitrepontes*, see Furley (2009) and Bathrellou (2012).
father Smikrines pressures her to dissolve the marriage, so that he can recover her dowry (749-59). He disparages prostitutes, telling her that wives can never compete with the allure of a prostitute: “Pamphile, it’s hard, when you’re a lady born, to fight against a whore. She works more mischief, knows more tricks, she has no shame, she toadies more” (χαλεπόν, Παµφιλη, / ἐλευθέραι γυναικὶ πρὸς πόρνην μάχη· / πλείονα κακουργεῖ, πλείον’ οἴδ’, αἰσχύνεται / οὐδέν, κολακεύει μᾶλλον, 7 Körte-Thierfelder, 566 Kock). Ancient commentators on philandering husbands stressed that mistresses and wives could not be housed under the same roof—it was degradation to the wife, and an inappropriate advancement of the mistress.

By a stroke of fortune, the hetaira Habrotonon solves the problem: she knows a girl who was raped at the Tauropolia, and comes to suspect that Charisios was the rapist. She tricks him into thinking she was the girl he had raped. In a moment rare for Greek social rhetoric, Charisios feels shame for his actions and is distraught for his wife’s situation (though he is unsure whether or not he has the fortitude to remain married to “damaged goods”). He imagines what the higher powers would say to him, hypocrite that he is:

ἐγὼ τις ἀναμάρτητος, εἰς δόξαν βλέπων
καὶ τὸ καλὸν ὅ τι πότ’ ἔστι καὶ ταῖσχρόν σκοπῶν,
ἀκέραιος, ἀνεπίπληκτος αὐτὸς τοῖς βίωι –

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9 This fragment was extant when Wilde was constructing his Society Plays, and he explores the wife vs. mistress theme in Act II (242-325) of Lady Windermere’s Fan in the conversation between Lady Windermere and her would-be lover Lord Darlington.

10 Hall (1997: 121-22). See also Dem. 59.22: “When they got here, Lysias did not bring them [Nicarete and Metaineira, hetairai] to his own house, out of regard for his wife, the daughter of Brachyllus and his own niece, and for his own mother, who was elderly and who lived in the same house.”

11 See Konstan (1995: 145-51) for the view that Charisios’ real source of shame is less rape than fathering an illegitimate child. He now deals with the consequences of producing a nothos (bastard), and so he can better appreciate his wife’s plight. For more on the issue of the recognition of the child in this play, see Chapter 3.
A faultless man, eyes fixed on his good name, a judge of what is right and what is wrong, in his own life pure and beyond reproach—my image, which some power above and well and quite correctly shattered. Here I showed that I was human. “Wretched worm, in pose and talk so bumptious, you won’t tolerate a woman’s forced misfortune. I shall show that you have stumbled just the same yourself. Then she will treat you tenderly, while you insult her. You’ll appear unlucky, rude, a heartless brute, too, all at once.”

Here we see a unique Menandrian exploration of the sexual double standard in Greek society, wherein a man can do wrong with impunity, but a woman is ruined by any sexual indiscretion, forced or not. This hypocrisy is rarely noted in ancient texts, but underlies all rape-and-recognition plays. Women suffered scandal, social ruin, and destroyed marital prospects. Men were free to carry on as they pleased, provided they did not have sex with other men’s wives and daughters.12

All misunderstanding is resolved when Habrotonon demonstrates that Charisios had raped his own wife-to-be at the festival: Pamphile had taken his ring during the assault and left it with her exposed baby. Onesimos recognized it, and Habrotonon conjectured the rest, thus even-

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12 On the sexual double standard operating in Epitrepontes, see Lape (2010: 69-76). On Greek laws on sexuality, see Cole (1984). For the view that Athenian women had more sexual leeway than previously supposed, see Roy (1997), with citations to earlier scholarship on Greek sexual prohibitions.
tually restoring the family.¹³ Through this token, Pamphile’s sexual purity is restored, her baby is legitimized, and Charisios can return to his marriage. Because he did not have sex with Habrotonon while renting her time, he has not insulted his wife and her family beyond repair.¹⁴ Charisios himself is not entirely bad. Although he committed drunken, opportunistic rape, he had the good grace to feel bad about it afterwards, and his guilt forces him to reconsider his wife’s position as a rape victim. Though Charisios’ marriage is threatened, Menander keeps the situation from becoming irredeemable. The worst never happens, but this alternative is sketched out for us: without the restoration, Pamphile would have remained unmarried (a burden to her family to her death), her abandoned son would have been impoverished and enslaved, and Charisios would have lived a dissolute, unrepentant life until he married again, having learned nothing of his own guilt and the damaging double standards of his society (or he would have lived with Habrotonon and the baby, but been unhappy and thus made them unhappy). Rather

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¹³ Her character, the so-called “tart with a heart of gold,” is a recurring type in Menander, Terence, and the ensuing western literary tradition. On the bona vs. mala meretrix type, begun by Plutarch’s Moralia (712C), see Gilula (1980) and Gruen (1991). On Menander’s hetairai, see Henry (1985). The traditional division of meretrices into “good” or “bad” types by modern scholars is a perpetuation of ancient ideologies and is unhelpful when considering the plight of the sex worker in antiquity. This dichotomy is based on the perspective of the men who hire meretrices, not the meretrices themselves, who are trying to eke out a living and are engaged in a mercantile relationship with the men. For a modified assessment of sex workers in antiquity and the economic circumstances that shape their behavior, see Fantham (1975, 2000, 2004) and James (2001, 2003, 2005). On sex work in the ancient world, see Davidson (1997), Kurke (1999), E. Cohen (2006), and Faraone & McClure (2006).

¹⁴ Samia features a similar situation: Demeas cruelly abandoned Chrysis when he believes that she has borne a child after he expressly forbade her do so. He also believes that Chrysis seduced his son and that the child is the product of their union, though in truth, the child is his son Moschion’s, conceived when Moschion raped the neighbor girl Plangon. The misunderstanding is eventually resolved, Moschion marries Plangon, and Demeas’ domestic arrangement with his concubine Chrysis is restored.
than Menander’s happy ending, this sad alternative is the more socially realistic of the scenari-
os.15

Plautus’ Husbands

Plautus pulls no punches with his philandering husbands. Menander is concerned with re-
stor 

of pompous, hypocritical, lecherous, unpleasant husbands gives a rare glimpse of the way they
damage their families and of the feelings of the wronged wives. In this plot type, Plautus deve-
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The uxor dotata, or dowered wife16 always has the
worst type of husband, one who neglects his role as paterfamilias to squander money, corrupt his
son, and indulge his inappropriate desires. His resourceful wife fills the moral void in the house-
hold created by his profligacy and licentiousness; hence he despises her and disdains marriage.17
What Plautus’ jilted wives have in common is their refusal to be made fools in their own homes,
and their willingness to risk divorce rather than be disrespected.

The morally bankrupt senex hates the uxor dotata, claiming that she has usurped his role
as paterfamilias (e.g. Demaenetus in Asinaria: “I took money and sold my authority for the dow-

15 Wilde will experiment with this division of possibility in Lady Windermere’s Fan and A Wo-
man of No Importance. In the former, Wilde preserves the mystery of the play and the myth of
the “good mother,” keeping secrets in order to preserve the social order, as Menander does here
with the restoration of the family—the myth of the happy family. The latter play explores the
more realistic alternative, an exposure of the mystery of the play (the revelation of Gerald’s par-
entage) and the destruction of the myth of the “good father.” In that play, the mother goes into
exile with her son, and the cad who seduced her returns to his profligate ways, unrepentant.

16 Dowered wives in Plautus: Artemona in Asinaria; Cleostrata in Casina (she acts like a dow-
ered wife, but this attribution is uncertain); Matrona in Menaechmi; Dorippa in Mercator.

ry, “argentum accepi, dote imperium vendidi, 88). These cantankerous misogynists (Deaenetus in Asinaria, Lysidamus in Casina, Megadorus in Aulularia) complain about rich, powerful wives, but are always revealed as ridiculous characters. Megadorus’ diatribe about wealthy wives and his preference for a poor wife (162-69) reveals him as a pompous windbag who wants a servant rather than a wife. The plays, however, challenge the misogynistic attitudes of the older generation, often ending with the happy marriage of the younger generation.

While Plautus uses the wealthy wife as an agent of comedy (she is a blocking character, often the object of fun, or the amusing agent of comeuppance in a silly husband), he also acknowledges that she has some right to act as she does. These women are annoyed at the loss of money because of their husbands’ philandering, but they are more upset by the apparent hatred their husbands have for them. Plautus’ sympathetic wives feel humiliation and disrespect on top of financial loss. Though her husband rails against her and bemoans his loss of liberty to her tyranny, Plautus undermines the position of the misogynistic senex. As Moore (1998: 161) notes, “Megadorus’ tirade against dowered wives in Aulularia, Plautus’ longest [diatribe], actually parodies those who deliver such diatribes. Mercator includes both an explicit feminist statement and an implicit acknowledgment that comedy does not treat wives justly. Most significantly, Casina turns comic stereotypes of wives upside down and aligns the audience with a

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18 A dowry protects a woman from abuse or misuse within her new household. It is for this reason that Lesbonicus in Trinummus refuses to marry off his sister to Lysiteles without a dowry (687-94), as marrying without a dowry would dishonor her and put her in a difficult position within the household.

19 Krauss (2004) is of this opinion, as is Moore (1998: 158-80). Schuhmann (1978), I believe incorrectly, asserts that Plautus uses the figure of the uxor dotata to warn men away from wealthy prospective brides.
powerful wife against her husband.” By casting the worst misogynists also as hypocritical wind-bags, Plautus undercuts the antiquated stereotypes they spout.

Among her primary duties, a Roman mother was to uphold moral standards, to display the important qualities of pudicitia and fides, and to provide an exemplum of proper behavior and decorum for her children. Fathers are supposed to do likewise. But in Roman comedy, the inadequate senex does the opposite. While the Roman mother represents uncompromised Roman morals and values, her husband attempts to circumvent her uprightness with philandering, reckless behavior, and profligacy, particularly in spending money on other women, money that ought to be safeguarded for household use or the inheritance of children. But, while the Roman mother was supposed to look out for the interests of the household, she was also supposed to hold her tongue: the best wives did not nag their husbands over infidelity, and the occasional indiscretion should go unmentioned. Plautus, in depicting the responses of wives to husbands’ cheating, problematizes this image of the ideal wife, and depicts her as a person with feelings as well as the moral safeguard of the house.

In Plautus’ Asinaria (see plot summary in Appendix B), the lecherous old man, Demae-netus wants to be his son’s friend rather than his father. He plans to steal money from his wife to give to his son so the young man can buy a yearlong contract with his girlfriend Philaenium, the


21 Later in the chapter I will explore the materfamilias’ Victorian counterpart, the “angel of the house” and the expectations for and duties of the Victorian mother.

22 Valerius Maximus (6.7.1) cites an example contemporaneous to Plautus, wherein he lauds the mother of Cornelia (famous mother of the Gracchi, also known for her feminine virtue), Aemilia Tertia, for refusing to nag her husband Scipio Africanus for his on-going affair with a slave. Moreover, when Scipio died, she freed the girl and married her to a freedman. Dixon (2007: 50) reminds us that the valued qualities in wives are from husband’s perspectives. Plautus, though a male author, gives us a rare glimpse into the female perspective.
free daughter of a *lena*. Demaenetus’ only stipulation is that the boy, Argyrippus, must share the
girl with his father after she has been procured with Artemona’s money. A proper Roman ma-
tron, Artemona controls the family’s money, tries to impart propriety to her son, and attempts to
dictate proper behavior to her husband. She is appalled to find that he has been stealing her mon-
ey to fund their son’s love affair with a prostitute, abandoning their bed, and corrupting the mor-
als of their son (by gallivanting with *meretrices* himself): “He’s ploughing someone else’s field
and leaves his own uncultivated. And this corrupt person then corrupts his son” (*fundum al-
ienum arat, incultum familiarem deserit. is etiam corruptus porro suom corrumpit filium*, 873-5).
Artemona publicly upbraids Demaenetus, asking what kind of father could he be, teaching his
son such things (*istoscine patrem aequom est mores liberis largirier? nilne te pudet?* 931-33).
He has already remarked that his wife is the family’s disciplinarian (*illum mater arte contenteque
habet, patres ut consueverunt* (78-79). Artemona is hurt by his infidelity, and the wound is deep-
ened by the cruelty of his insults towards her, which she overhears (851-909, insults at 893-905
[criticizing her breath, her kisses, wishing her dead]). Artemona is shocked that her marriage is
not what she had thought: “I’m such an idiot! I used to think my husband was better than others,
sober, good, moderate, full of love for his wife!” (*At scelesta ego praeter alios meum virum frugi
rata, / siccum, frugi, continentem, amantem uxoris maxume*, 856-57). Artemona highlights the
standard complaints of the modest wife (her husband wastes money, he corrupts their son), but
she also has less high-minded reasons to be upset. Her husband avoids her bed, and now she
knows why. She has also overheard him repeatedly say he hates her, her kisses disgust him, and
he wishes her dead. Artemona, wounded, turns to the only powers at her disposal—public
shaming and her control of their finances: she crashes the dinner party and drags him back home
(910-41). It is easy to overlook Artemona’s legitimate feelings of betrayal in the party-crashing
scene. She hauls her husband out of the garden and chides him for his remarks, while her son cuddles up once more with his girlfriend, waving farewell to his chagrined father. The humorous staging overshadows Artemona’s hurt feelings, but they are clearly there: her husband’s betrayal has wounded her.

Mercator (see plot summary in Appendix B) features another cheating husband and poor paternal exemplar. Charinus, a profligate youth, brings home the beautiful Pasicompsa, who has been his concubine for two years, under the guise of giving her to his mother as a maid. His father Demipho lusts for her, and immediately sets his friend Lysimachus to buying her from his son and then to hiding her from Demipho’s wife. Charinus cannot admit to his father that the girl is meant to be his concubine, not a maid, so he agrees to sell her. Demipho’s plan goes awry when Lysimachus’ wife Dorippa learns that a beautiful girl has been installed in her home. She berates her husband, and Demipho’s deception becomes known to Charinus, who takes back possession of the girl.

As the play opens, Charinus tells us that he had led his life dissolutely. His father, angry at the expense, pontificated on the duties of adulthood, proclaiming that he had never dreamt of continuing his wild ways past youth (61-78). But Demipho is quickly revealed to be a hypocrite, boasting of duty, appearances, and social standing, all the while using his arguments to effect the sale of Pasicompsa to his own agent: Demipho speaks from both sides of his mouth.\(^23\) His friend Lysimachus purchases the girl, and Demipho is filled with excitement, though he should be well beyond chasing women, a point noted by both Lysimachus (305-15) and Charinus’ friend

\(^{23}\) Demipho argues that a pretty maid would be an annoyance for Charinus’ mother, for men would whistle and yell whenever she left the house. Demipho himself would be embarrassed at the graffiti left on their door, and be the talk of the neighborhood, for everyone would think he were running a brothel (405-11).
Eutychus, Lysimachus’ son (1016-26). Demipho’s wife does not make an appearance, but her outrage is voiced by Lysimachus’ wife Dorippa, who thinks her husband has installed a prostitute in their home.\textsuperscript{24} She wails,

\begin{quote}
Miserior mulier me nec fiet, nec fuit,
tali viro quae nupserim. heu miserae mihi.
em quoi te et tua, quae tu habeas, commendes viro,
em quoi decem talenta dotis detuli,
haec ut viderem, ut ferrem has contumelias.
\end{quote}

\textit{(Merc. 700-704)}

No woman will be or has ever been more wretched than me because I married such a husband. Poor, wretched me! Here is the man to whom you can entrust yourself and your possessions! Here is the man to whom I brought ten talents of dowry! Just in order to see this, just in order to bear these humiliations!\textsuperscript{25}

Dorippa is concerned on one level about her property, but she is equally despairing of the humiliation she suffers, her husband having installed a \textit{meretrix} in her own home. It is easy to see the humor in this scene; Dorippa can be played imperiously, her silly husband doddering after her, flummoxed and hand-wringing. Lysimachus moves around the stage, calling after Dorippa, then

\textsuperscript{24} A pretty maid in the house was a threat to the mistress; the desirability of the slave girl is a common trope in ancient literature. See Chapter 3, note 53. Demipho conveniently leaves out this very valid argument from his list of reasons why Pasicompsa ought not be given to his wife, because it too closely represents his intentions for the girl.

\textsuperscript{25} A note on currency: In these plays, Plautus generally employs Greek terms for currency, as he employs Greek names and places overlaying Roman social concerns, religion, and cultural norms. The “Greekification” of these plays was part of a larger trend in Roman comic drama to uphold the conceit that these were plays merely translated from Greek into Latin, rather than the new, inventive productions inspired by Greek originals that they were—on the Roman-ness of New Comedy, see Leigh (2004), Richlin (2005), de Melo (2011a: lvi-liii) and Franko (2013).

Roman coinage employed \textit{asses}, \textit{sestertii}, and \textit{denarii}, while Greeks used \textit{drachmae}, \textit{minae}, and talents. There were 100 \textit{drachmae} in a \textit{mina}, 60 \textit{minae} in a talent. A talent was a very large sum, considering that the average workman earned 2 \textit{drachmae} a day. Twenty \textit{minae}, the sum at issue here, would be the equivalent of over three years’ salary. Twenty \textit{minae} for a one-year contract is a large amount. In other plays, a young man can purchase a woman outright for 30 to 60 \textit{minae}. Because Philaenium is a free girl (under control of her mother Cleareta, but not enslaved) she can dictate her own terms, and only her time can be purchased. On money in Plautus, see de Melo (2011a: lxxxi-lxxxii).
pragmatically calls into the house, “My wife, hey there, my wife! Even though you’re angry with me, you’d do well to have this here [the cook’s spread] brought inside; this way we can soon have a better dinner” (uxor, heus uxor, quamquam tu irata es mihi, / iubeas, si sapias, haec intró auferrier: / eadem licebit mox cenare rectius, 800-02). But Tim Moore and Sharon James have demonstrated through the staging of Roman comedy at the National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Session on Roman Comedy that these scenes can be played a number of ways, not least sympathetically. By performing this scene of Mercator with Dorippa played assertively\(^{26}\) and also terribly upset,\(^{27}\) they show the possible alternatives of Plautus’ characterization.

When she confronts her husband, Dorippa, like Artemona, learns that he has said terrible things about her in her absence (755-66) and is appalled. She is devastated to learn why her husband avoids joining her in the country (711), and she is horrified by the insults the cook relates to her: her husband hates her like a snake, that he hates his wife in the country (760-61, 765-66). She refuses to be made a fool of, and sends her maid to fetch her father to sanction her divorce and reclaim her dowry (784-89), then exits. Though divorce is an extreme reaction to the situation, if her husband’s hatred of her were true, she would feel it warranted.

Her maid, returning, tells her son Eutychus of his father’s shameful behavior, and then is given a unique monologue by Plautus, on the double standard for husbands and wives:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ecastor lege dura vivont mulieres} \\
\text{multoque iniquiore miserae quam viri.} \\
\text{nam si vir scortum duxit clam uxor suam,} \\
\text{id si rescivit uxor, impunest viro;} \\
\text{uxor virum si clam domo egressa est foras,}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{26}\) http://youtube.com/watch?v=AP8DzGapfyo

\(^{27}\) http://youtube.com/watch?v=pJJzPhL1W5Q
viro fit causa, exigitur matrimonio.
utinam lex esset eadem quae uxor est viro;
nam uxor contenta est, quae bona est, uno viro:
qui minus vir una uxore contentus siet?
ecastor faxim, si itidem plectantur viri,
si quis clam uxorem duxerit scortum suam,
ut illae exiguntur quae in se culpam commerent,
plures viri sint vidui quam nunc mulieres.

(Merc. 817-29)

Women really do live under a harsh and much unfairer law than men: if a man hires a prostitute behind his wife’s back and the wife finds out about it, the husband goes unpunished. If a wife leaves the house behind her husband’s back, the man thereby gets grounds to throw her out of the marriage. Would that there was the same law for the husband as for the wife: a wife who is good is content with a single husband. Why should a husband be any less content with a single wife? If husbands were to be punished in the same way if one hires a prostitute behind his wife’s back just as guilty women are thrown out, I’d bet there would now be more divorced men than women.

Though, as Moore (1998: 164-65) notes, Syra is comical in her advanced age (she moves very slowly, carrying the burden of eighty-four years, 673-75), she also highlights the inequality that exists in the Roman marriage. Further, she offers a female perspective that differs from that of the typical misogynistic senex and demonstrates sympathy for the female experience of marriage.  

Lysimachus, irritated at taking the blame for his friend’s irresponsible behavior, bad parenting, and philandering, runs inside to find his wife and patch things up. His irritation at and blame of Demipho suggest that Lysimachus does not approve of the antics of his friend either. Demipho will have to face his shame when Charinus and Eutychus present a united front against  

28 Krauss (2004: 89) asserts that because the foolish, cheating senex is punished in Asinaria, Casina, Menaechmi, and Mercator, and the wife is in part the agent of his comeuppance, she is an agent of humor and controlling character in the comedy, not a harsh agelast or unsympathetic character. Moore (1998: 165-80) has noted audience alignment with the women of Casina rather than lecherous Lysidamus and his agent.
him for the play’s resolution. While Charinus can be criticized for his irresponsible spending and gallivanting, he is at least a young, unmarried man. Demipho, for all his moralizing to Charinus, is in fact worse: he insults his wife and marriage, abandons his paternal role, and compromises his reputation.

The sexual pursuit of a slave maid by a lecherous old husband drives the plot of Casina (see plot summary in Appendix B). In this play, Casina, a young girl picked up as an exposed infant and raised as a daughter by the matrona Cleostrata, becomes the desired sexual object of four men: Cleostrata’s lecherous husband Lysidamus, her son Euthynicus, and their slaves, Olympio and Chalinus. Lysidamus devises a plot to get the girl for himself via his proxy Olympio, while Cleostrata sides with her son to keep her husband from molesting their pseudo-daughter. Cleostrata dresses Chalinus up as Casina to assault and beat up Olympio and Lysidamus, to humiliate them and teach them a lesson. I will return to Cleostrata and her complaints below.

Plautus’ Menaechmi (see plot summary in Appendix B) features his only tale of a younger couple unhappily married. Menaechmus behaves like the ridiculous senex of Asinaria, Mercator, and Casina, but his unhappiness in marriage came immediately. Dissatisfied with his dutiful wife, Menaechmus has taken up with Erotium, a prostitute living next door. Stealing from his wife to pay his mistress, Menaechmus frequently voices his hatred of Matrona, his wife, whom he threatens to divorce (110-22). He has stolen her cloak and armbands to give to his mistress (130, 531-32).

His wife, however, refuses to be insulted and robbed: “should I tolerate being treated like an idiot here in my marriage, where my husband’s furtively stealing everything that’s at home and taking it to his mistress?” she asks (559-61). Her father, summoned to hear her complaints,
initially sides with her husband, backing up Menaechmus’ right to gallivant and drink where he chooses (787/8-802). Only when he realizes money is involved does he support Matrona—it is one thing to fool around, but it is another thing entirely to waste money (805-06). This play, uniquely, does not end with the triumph of the wronged wife and the reconciliation of the couple. Cruel to the end, Menaechmus leaves his wife without a word, offering her in an auction with the rest of his property, and leaving the country with his brother (1157-62). I suggest that because Matrona is not surprised by her husband’s actions, nor harbors any love for him, she is set apart from the wounded wives of Asinaria, Casina, and Mercator. Her anger is at the public humiliation and the loss of money rather than affection. She makes Menaechmus an object of fun, but she does not triumph at the end of the play. For an examination of the circumstances that hinder Menaechmus’ character development and contribute to his bad behavior, see Chapter 3.

Terence’s Husbands

Terence offers a degenerate father as well as a philandering young man, both portrayed in a way that is critical of their activities. Phormio (see plot summary in Appendix B) follows much of Plautus’ model of the cheating husband, but with a more nuanced social commentary and an overtly sensitive portrayal of the betrayed wife. In this play, two aged brothers return from a trip abroad to find that one of their sons has married a penniless girl in his absence. The young man’s uncle, Chremes, is furious, because he had intended his nephew, Antipho, to marry his illegitimate daughter (the product of his bigamous marriage to a woman in Lemnos). A marriage between cousins would prove very convenient in hushing up affairs secretly. When Chremes and brother Demipho discover that Antipho has married, they seek to annul the union, while Antipho and the titular clever parasite attempt to preserve it. All is resolved when it turns
out that Antipho’s penniless wife is in fact Chremes’ lost daughter. Things would have ended conveniently for all the men involved, had not the parasite Phormio, angry at the brothers, revealed Chremes’ secret to his legitimate wife, Nausistrata.

Earlier Nausistrata had expressed annoyance that Chremes had been badly mismanaging her estates. She exclaimed that she wished she had been born a man, so that she might arrange her own affairs (788-92). When she learns that Chremes’ second family in Lemnos is the reason for the mismanagement of her money, she is devastated (perii misera! 1006) and horrified that Chremes has wasted her money so shamefully (1012-13). She notes sadly that men are old only when they are with their wives (1010). This comment, much like Artemona’s in Asinaria (he plows another’s field and leaves his own untilled), is full of sexual insecurity, often unacknowledged in accounts of Rome’s jilted wives.29 She also comments on the social expectation that men are supposed to become more mature and responsible with age, even though Chremes bucked the trend (1021-24). She shames him, asking him how he can rebuke their son Phaedria, given his own degenerate hypocrisy (1040-42). Like Plautus’ wives, she is disgusted by her philandering husband’s behavior, but Chremes’ crime is far worse: Plautus’ lecherous husbands had attempted to be unfaithful with meretrices and slaves, but Chremes had a semi-legal second family, as well as a second wife, and had funneled money from his first wife to support this family. Terence’s play does not end jauntily, with the rebuked husband accepted back by his triumphant wife, as in Asinaria or Casina. Nausistrata will be haunted by Chremes’ betrayal for the remain-

29 Mostellaria’s Simo has also avoided his wife’s bed. She has a dowry, and he dislikes her for it. She attempts to seduce him with a large lunch, but he figures out her ulterior motive (“the old lady wanted to get me into bed,” voluit in cubiculum abducere me anus, 696-97). He sneaks out to complain about her and her fury. He asserts that all men with old wives hate to go to bed (si quis dotatam uxorem atque anum habet, / neminem sollicitat sopor: omnibus ire dormitum odio est, 703-05). New Comic senes rarely speak of their wives’ sexual needs.
der of their marriage (evidenced by her heartbroken acknowledgment that she is not getting younger or more beautiful, 1040-42). She does not even seek punishment for Chremes herself: she allows her son to pass judgment as she quietly retreats (1045-46). This family is not healed by the resolution of the play, the senex is not rehabilitated, and the traditional authority of the home is not re-established with the responsible male head of house, as would be the case in Menander.

Finally, Terence features a younger cheating husband in Hecyra (see plot summary in Appendix B). Though the young man’s story ends happily for him, the play does not end on a positive note. Pamphilus, a young man in love with the meretrix Bacchis, is forced by his parents to marry Philumena, the young woman living next door to him. Angry, he avoids his wife and treats her abominably for two months. His slave relates that “she put up with all her husband’s unkindness and ill-treatment, and she said nothing of his insulting behavior” (incommode atque iniurias / viri omnis ferre et tegere contumelias, 165-66). Pamphilus prefers the company of Bacchis to his wife, and only comes to appreciate Philumena after Bacchis freezes him out. Furthermore, when Pamphilus finds his wife in labor and learns that she had been raped before their marriage, he refuses to take her back or raise her bastard child. Only through the intervention of Bacchis does Pamphilus learn that he was in fact Philemena’s rapist. Thus the child is his, and their marriage is saved. The play concludes with Pamphilus happily chatting with Bacchis like old friends, asking her not to tell anyone about his shameful little secret.

Terence’s characters underscore the disturbing aspects of this play. The young man is an unfeeling, selfish cad, Philumena is repeatedly a victim, and the older women are also treated badly. Sostrata, Pamphilus’ mother, sacrifices her happy city life to cede her house to the

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young couple and must retire to the country with a husband who hates her. Myrrina feigns that she wanted to break up the couple, thereby undermining her husband Phidippus’ paternal authority in order to protect her victimized daughter. Terence does not make a joke of Pamphilus’ philandering—indeed, the subject receives continuous airing. Phidippus posits Myrrina’s distaste for Pamphilus’ relationship with Bacchis as the reason she sought to drive a wedge between the couple, an admission that such relationships were not approved of (538-39). Even the fathers disapprove of the relationship when they believe it is getting in the way of Pamphilus’ marriage: one may run around while one is young but, once married, a man should grow up and be responsible (684-95). 31 Laches goes so far as to demand that Bacchis refuse to see Pamphilus (727f); she, however, swears that she respected Pamphilus’ marriage and did not receive him once he was married (751-52). Not only did she think of his reputation, but she is also willing to speak to the women to prove that Pamphilus had not been irresponsible in his marriage, so important is it that he seem respectable (756-60).

Despite the social pressure against maintaining sexual relations outside of marriage, this young lover clearly does not regret his behavior, nor does he acknowledge the pain he caused his wife with his early resentment and abuse. He prefers to preserve his reputation and let his father and father-in-law believe that the women were to blame. 32 From Terence’s uncomfortable ending, it is easy to believe that Pamphilus’ marriage will eventually degenerate into the antago-

31 Though apparently responsibility does not extend to respecting one’s wife as a person, as neither Phidippus nor Laches treat their wives very well. The old men are hypocritical in their judgment of their son (not knowing the depths of his cruelty).

32 McGarrity (1980-1981) notes that Pamphilus’ happiness comes only at the expense of others, an expense he is only too happy to pay.
nistic, resentful relationships shared by Laches and Sostrata, and Myrrina and Phidippus.

Though Pamphilus is ostensibly Terence’s “hero,” the author does not seem to approve of him.\(^{33}\)

_Wilde’s Husbands_

By recalling the New Comic wife’s exclamations in Lady Windermere’s earnest demonstrations of grief in _Lady Windermere’s Fan_, Wilde invites us to re-evaluate our perception of the betrayed wife of ancient comedy. Wilde sympathetically portrays the young wronged wife, a woman only two years married, and highlights the many stages of her grieving. Reading back from Wilde, we may feel more sympathy for the wronged wife of ancient comedy, whose grief is often underrepresented in scholarship. Wilde touches on all the reactions to infidelity in the ancient world: the shocked exclamation of the wife, the protestations for the sake of the children, disapproval of wasted money, the sexual double standard, and the advice of others for the insulted spouse. By reframing the “betrayed wife” and (suspected) philandering husband of ancient comedy in a Victorian setting, the reader can see the range of feeling in the ancient scenes, and re-evaluate the seeming frivolity of the ancient plays. While I do not suggest that Wilde was inspired by New Comedy alone in these themes (far from it, as he was strongly influenced by Restoration comedy, the French “well-made” play, and Victorian melodrama as well), he seems familiar with the plays and parallels the reactions of the humiliated wives. Using Wilde’s nuanced examination of the jilted wife, we may look at the wives of New Comedy more sympathetically.

_Lady Windermere’s Fan_ takes up the themes of marriage, divorce, and infidelity. In the first act, Lord and Lady Windermere’s marriage is threatened by several people who try to convince Lady Windermere that her marriage is not all that it seems. Lord Darlington, in love with

\(^{33}\) On Pamphilus’ failings as a lover, see Penwill (2004).
her, sets up an “imaginary instance” in which a woman, married two years (like Lady Windermere), is betrayed by her husband, who has made an intimate friend of another woman. He asks whether or not, in such cases, a woman should console herself by doing the same (I.96-103). Not comprehending Darlington’s barely coded message, Lady Windermere responds that even though husbands may be vile, women should not sink to their level (I.106). Over tea, the Duchess of Berwick, far less discreet than Darlington, tells Lady Windermere that her husband has been visiting a house where a certain Mrs. Erlynne resides, four or five times a week. This woman’s wealth dates to the time she starting seeing Lord Windermere six months before. The Duchess asserts that all of London knows his straying (I.249-270). Now Lady Windermere understands Darlington’s message (I.338-40). Distraught, she wants to believe that her husband could never do such a thing, but the temptation to verify the Duchess’ claims that Windermere has been spending vast sums on Mrs. Erlynne is too strong. She cuts open his bank book to learn the terrible truth: he has given Mrs. Erlynne thousands of pounds (I.349-53). She feels as though their life together has been a lie (I.373-80), and declares their lives separate now (I.497-99). Her shocked response to her husband’s alleged cheating follows the pattern established by the insulted wives of New Comedy. In the sections below I will examine shocked exclamations, protestations for the children, the expense of philandering, the sexual double standard, and solutions for infidelity, drawing on material from both New Comedy and Lady Windermere’s Fan.

**Shocked Exclamations**

Lady Windermere’s horror at her husband’s apparent infidelity recalls the disappointment and betrayal experienced by the jilted wives in Roman comedy. Her shock and surprise echoes the reaction of the New Comic wives, who are shocked that their marriages could have been so
wildly different than they had believed. When Lady Windermere cries, “What I do mind is that you who have loved me, you who have taught me to love you, should pass from the love that is given to the love that is bought! And it is I who feel degraded! You don’t feel anything. I feel stained, utterly stained” (I.373-78), her exclamation is reminiscent of Artemona’s from *Asinaria*: “I’m such an idiot! I used to think my husband was better than others, sober, good, moderate, full of love for his wife!” (856-57). She also recalls Dorippa of *Mercator*: “No woman will be or has ever been more wretched than me because I married such a husband. Poor, wretched me!” (700-704).

From antiquity to Wilde’s time the uneasiness of the relationship between wives and mistresses was noted. Lady Windermere balks at returning with Mrs. Erlynne to her marriage and home:

> It would be a great advantage for you to get me back. Dear Heaven! What a life I would have then! Living at the mercy of a woman who has neither mercy nor pity in her, a woman whom it is an infamy to meet, a degradation to know, a vile woman, a woman who comes between husband and wife!

*(Fan* III.103-08)

She imagines a circumstance such as the one Dorippa believes she faces in *Mercator*, in which her husband has installed a *meretrix* under the same roof: “Goodness, I won’t tolerate being married so badly and prostitutes being brought into my own house before my eyes like this” (*nec pol ego patiar sic me nuptam tam male / measque in aedis sic scorta obductarier*, 785-86). Like Artemona and Dorippa, Lady Windermere is shocked to find her marriage is not what she thought it was, and she is unwilling to put up with a compromised life or to yield her place to a prostitute—she says of Mrs. Erlynne, “Women like you have no hearts. Heart is not in you. You are bought
and sold” (III.140-41). What she does not know, is that Mrs. Erlynne is actively working on her behalf, such as Habrotonon in Epitrepontes, or Bacchis in Hecyra. 34

Lady Windermere’s distress and betrayal are palpable. She has been depicted as overly harsh in her black-and-white opinions. In her opening dialogue with Lord Darlington she admits them:

> You think I am a Puritan, I suppose? Well, I have something of the Puritan in me. I was brought up like that. I am glad of it...[Aunt Julia] taught me, what the world is forgetting, the difference that there is between what is right and what is wrong. She allowed no compromise. I allow of none.

*(Fan I.73-80)*

What sets Lady Windermere apart from her New Comic counterparts is that she is wrong about her husband’s intentions. Her rigid, unyielding belief in what her husband should be and how he should behave, as well as her own self-righteousness, stands in the way of the development of their marriage and her self-improvement. Her disillusionment with her marriage allows her to see more clearly the unsustainability of her previous outlook on life. It is her husband’s supposed betrayal that sends her on a course of moral development. So too for Plautus’ wives, in a sense. After their husbands’ misbehavior, they may no longer harbor illusions about their own marriages, but this betrayal will make them more watchful in the future, and causes the women to compromise their high standards in marriage. A necessary process, to be sure, but painful nonetheless, as Terence demonstrated with Nausistrata in Phormio.

Lady Windermere is convinced now that the whole world behaves as badly as she believes her husband does. A woman of extremes, once her belief in “good” has been compromised, she sees only “bad.” Confronting her husband, she says, “Why should you be any dif-

34 Lena in Cistellaria noted the uneasy relationship between respectable women and prostitutes in antiquity (23-37). See Fantham (2004) on the competition between them as well as women’s networking.
ferent from other men? I am told that there is hardly a husband in London who does not waste his life over some shameful passion” (I.455-57). The audience may pity Lady Windermere’s still dichotomous worldview, but is given evidence for the ubiquity of cheating spouses throughout Acts I and II. The Duchess of Berwick’s husband is a philanderer, as was her sister’s husband (I.294-304). Wilde also intimates an adulterous relationship between Lady Plymdale and Mr. Dumby in Act II.\textsuperscript{35} Frequently, in ancient comedy, the pain of the jilted wife is overshadowed by the farce being played out around her (just as the audience is distracted from Lady Windermere’s crisis by the amusing comments of the fashionable people at her party in Act II). It is easy to dismiss Artemona or Dorippa as nagging old wives, or Matrona as a shrewish young wife, as many scholars have done,\textsuperscript{36} but it is equally plausible that they were played with sympathy. Wilde’s sympathetic portrayal of Lady Windermere’s struggle may allow the reader to revisit the insulted wives of New Comedy with better understanding.

I noted above the ideology for Roman wives: moral compasses of the home, concerned for children, morality, and finances, but ideally quietly and inoffensively concerned. Victorian society had a similar ideology for Victorian wives, the “Angel in the House,” after Coventry Patmore’s poem of the same name. It referred to the feminine ideal of the wife and mother, childlike herself, devoted to husband and children. She was the fantasy of perfect domesticity, did not question her husband, stood for purity and goodness, and took to her duties in the home

\footnote{\textsuperscript{35} See Small (1999: 39) note on line 216: “My dear Laura only in 1\textsuperscript{st} ed. T (in a ms revision) and CI have: ‘My dear child’. Both forms emphasize the illicit (because adulterous) intimacy between the two.”}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{36} Krauss (2004: 2) note 1 has an extensive list of scholars who perpetuate the stereotype of the shrewish wife in their work, such as Duckworth (1952), Segal (1968), Grimal (1970), Schuhmann (1976, 1978), Slater (1985), Moore (1998).}
as her responsibility as much as external affairs were her husband’s.\textsuperscript{37} Plautus upheld some of the ideologies about Roman wives while rejecting others. His insulted wives are very concerned about the immoral behavior of their husbands, but not only for wasting money and corrupting their sons. They are also cognizant of the insult to themselves, and thus do not keep their pain to themselves, but rather lash out at husbands. Wilde found the Victorian ideology abhorrent, and like Plautus, deviated from it in his characterization of the wronged wife. Lady Windermere, previously a great proponent of the ideal, a childlike helpmeet in her home, is forced, with the apparent unfaithfulness of her husband, to reevaluate her beliefs. Unable to keep silent herself, she is now aware of the double standard in effect in her society. She must develop beyond rigid characterizations to become a fully functional person.\textsuperscript{38}

Protestations for Children

Told of Lord Windermere’s philandering, Lady Windermere is bewildered. She exclaims, “It’s impossible! We are only married two years. Our child is but six months old” (I.280-82). A common theme in New Comedy is youthful misadventure versus responsible maturity. The \textit{senes} wanted their sons to grow up and be responsible, marry respectably, and settle down, giving up parties and chasing women. The Victorians similarly believed that marriage and fatherhood were supposed to temper a man. When faced with what she believes is her husband’s infidelity, Lady Windermere cannot see how a man married with a child, especially one so young, could consider straying. But she commits the same error when she attempts to leave her hus-

\textsuperscript{37} See Gorham (1982) on the expectations of Victorians wives, mothers, and daughters.

\textsuperscript{38} I treat in detail the evolution Lady Windermere’s development in Chapter 4.
band, to avenge his betrayal with betrayal of her own. Mrs. Erlynne must remind her of her place in the family—even if her husband has forgotten his place, she must not:

You have a child, Lady Windermere. Go back to that child who even now, in pain or in joy, may be calling to you. God gave you that child. He will require from you that you make his life fine, that you watch over him. What answer will you make to God if his life is ruined through you? Back to your house, Lady Windermere—your husband loves you! He has never swerved for a moment from the love he bears you. But even if he had a thousand loves, you must stay with your child. If he ill-treated you, you must stay with your child. If he abandoned you, your place is with your child.39

(Fan III.164-76)

In ancient New Comedy, betrayed wives accuse their husbands of forgetting their duty to their children. *Phormio’s* Nausistrata shamed Chremes for setting a bad example for their son: Chremes has rebuked Phaedria for running around with a music girl, yet he himself had two wives. A hypocritical father should never lecture a misbehaving son for a much milder crime (1040-42).40 In *Casina*, Cleostrata too reminds her husband that he should be looking to the happiness of their son, not his own happiness (262-63), while in *Asinaria*, Artemona stresses the potential for corruption of a son by the corruption of a father (931-33), and indeed, Artemona may feel justified, given that her son was lounging at a brothel with her husband. In *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, the destructive effects of a husband’s apparent betrayal are so great that the wife must be reminded of her child’s welfare: her grief and desire for revenge momentarily blind her to the proper matron’s duty. Mrs. Erlynne knows well the price of betraying her husband and child. Her words to Lady Windermere are both a warning and repentance. Philandering in men was tolerated by Victorian society. The straying of a wife could never be forgiven or forgotten.

39 Though ironically, Mrs. Erlynne did not take her own advice, leaving her child and husband, thus learning the consequences of such actions.

40 On hypocritical fathers in Roman New Comedy, see Chapter 5.
The Expense of Philandering

A regular concern for the insulted wife of New Comedy is the expense of her husband’s affair. In *Menaechmi*, Menaechmus stole constantly from his wife: her *palla*, bracelets, and various other expensive objects, all to give to his mistress Erotium. Matrona looks to her father for intercession, but he takes an interest only when she mentions the financial aspect. Chasing girls is one thing, but wasting dotal funds is quite another! In *Asinaria* too, Artemona learns that her husband has been stealing from her, and is horrified—she had blamed the thefts on her innocent maids (888-89). Nausistrata in *Phormio* is probably the most insulted of the lot: her husband stole from her properties for over a decade to support his second family (1013). All these women suffer the twin blows of infidelity and theft.

But where the squandered funds are a concern for the ancient matrons, for Lady Windermere the money is nothing next to her compromised ideals and the destruction of her worldview. She says, “I think that you spend your money strangely. That is all. Oh, don’t imagine I mind about the money. As far as I am concerned, you may squander everything we have” (I.371-73). It is the money, however, that initiates her doubts about Lord Windermere and draws the notice of Society gossips. When Lord Windermere visits Mrs. Erlynne, everyone assumes (rightly) that he paid for it (I.255-67). Lady Windermere opens his bank book when she discovers he has a second, hidden account. She notes three sums, £600, £700, £400, before throwing the book from...

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41 Matrona tells her father she is being ridiculed (782-83), that her husband visits the prostitute next door (790), that he drinks there (792), and her father rebuffs and chides her for each complaint. Finally, she says, “But he’s stealing my gold and mantles from my chests from home, he’s robbing me, he’s secretly carrying off my jewelry to prostitutes” (*at ille suppliât mihi aurum et pallas ex arcis domo, me despoliât, mea ornamenta clam ad meretrices degerit*, 803-04) To which her father responds, “He behaves badly if he behaves like this” (*male facit, si istuc facit*, 805).
herself in horror (I.351-53). We learn later that Mrs. Erlynne proposes Lord Windermere give her an additional £2500/year (II.439). For both the ancient matrons and the Victorian, the mismanagement of familial funds is both a barometer for problems in the home and a sign of deeper problems. For the matrons of Roman comedy, the money was a blow, and the one thing they could control as a means to get even, but it was not the sole reason for their anger. As I noted above, the insults they hear from their husbands and the humiliation of being displaced by other women were weightier emotional blows. Lady Windermere suffers financial loss, but for her too, the blow is emotional: she is shocked and appalled by her husband’s secrecy, and can think of no other explanation for it.

Though Lady Windermere claims not to care about the money, other characters in Wilde’s plays are more traditional in their values, at least financially: Lady Plymdale, when discussing Mrs. Erlynne’s notoriety with Mr. Dumby, suggests he go dine with Mrs. Erlynne for the gossip, and to take her husband along. Lady Plymdale snidely jokes that he is too tight with money to be in any danger.42 The Duchess of Berwick is pragmatic on this point as well: men will stray, but money wasted is a different thing; Berwick, her husband, “was so extremely susceptible [to young women]. Though I am bound to say he never gave away any large sums of money to anybody. He is far too high-principled for that!” (I.277-79). Though Wilde is making a cutting remark about the morals of his society—it is high-principled to refuse to pay for one’s sexual misadventures, but principles do not apply to having the affair in the first place—he also notes the constant in both ancient society and his own: wasting family money on prostitutes or fast women is a faux pas. Though Lord Windermere is not, in fact, spending the money on Mrs.

42 See Small (1999: 40) note on line 232: “thing for him after this sentence T and LC have” ‘He never parts with a penny, so she won’t get anything out of him.’” Lady Plymdale’s motivations in putting her husband in Mrs. Erlynne’s orbit are selfish and corrupt: she is possibly carrying on an adulterous affair with Mr. Dumby and wants her husband out of the way.
Erlynne in return for sexual favors, his spending money and the mismanagement of household funds does reflect a deeper problem in the Windermere household: Lord Windermere keeps secrets from his wife because he knows she is not socially or morally mature enough to deal with the harsh reality of the world. But by sheltering his wife from such realities, he perpetuates her stunted development.

Sexual Double Standard

Both societies have oppressive standards for women and unfair lenience for men. In Roman New Comedy, there is a consistent “boys will be boys” attitude, and an expectation that young men will misbehave, and a lenience towards that behavior as long as the young men eventually grow up. In *Menaechmus*, Matrona’s father is unsurprised at her husband’s soliciting prostitutes (791-92), blaming such activity on his daughter’s officiousness (*industriam*). This attitude is rather extreme (Laches and Phidippus were annoyed at Pamphilus’ continued solicitation of Bacchis after his marriage in *Hecyra*), but not unknown. Fathers expected their sons to behave extravagantly in unmarried youth. Even violent rapes are forgivable growing pains for young men.  

Men, in short, are expected to be bad. Nevertheless, one is expected to outgrow such behavior. Fathers berate sons for refusing to marry and give up profligate lives (for ex-

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43 Hegio, the champion of Sostrata and her raped daughter Pamphila in *Adelphoe*, justifies Aeschines’ bad behavior, reasoning that it was dark, he was drunk, he was full of youthful ardor, and he did feel badly afterwards (470-73). “It is human” (*humanumst, 471*), he allows. Chaerea is forgiven his youthful folly in *Eumuchus*. Callicles in *Truculentus* is angry at Diniarchus for the insult to himself, not his daughter’s feelings. Only in *Hecyra* do we get a sense that rape was shameful and might carry judgment on the rapist, as Pamphilus insists no one find out about his raping his wife before they were married.

44 And lecherous, old married men were the objects of mockery in Roman comedy: *Asinaria*, *Bacchides*, *Casina*, *Mercator*. 

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ample, Clitipho in *Heauton Timorumenos*, who spends large sums on the prostitute Bacchis, and refuses to marry until threatened with disinheritance).

In Victorian society too there was a stereotype that young men were expected to misbehave (“they expect us to be bad, and we are bad”\(^\text{45}\)). “Purity feminism” of the 1880s rejected the social conditioning of men to behave lewdly and women to accept it as natural. Powell (2003: 127-34, 2009: 49-52) examines the purity feminists’ attempted deconstruction of performative masculinity; these women sought to undermine the idea that male lewdness was a manifestation of innate character flaws, and asserted rather that lewd behavior was taught and socially reinforced. These women very vocally reacted to the sexual double standard in effect in Victorian society, and called instead for equal laws for men and women, that both sexes be chaste and pure. Powell argues that this discourse found its way into Wilde’s plays, as purity feminism was both widely talked of in the general media, and in Wilde’s own magazine, *Women’s World*, when he served as editor from 1887 to 1889. Wilde, despite his feminist leanings while working for the magazine, considerably toned down the rhetoric in his Society Plays, as purity feminism was just as rigid, inflexible, and damaging to development of the self as was the sexual double standard. Though sympathetic to the inequality experienced by women, Wilde’s credo was moral flexibility, not equal opportunity stricture.

Wilde’s society matrons discuss glibly men’s “badness” in common terms for the time, in keeping with the stereotypes purity feminists sought to undermine. Lady Windermere asks, “Are all men bad?” and the Duchess of Berwick replies, “Oh, all of them, my dear, all of them, without any exception. And they never grow any better. Men become old, but they never become good” (I.289-92). The Duchess gently chides Lady Windermere for her innocence in disbeliev-

\[^{45}\text{A young soldier, quoted by Josephine Butler in her pamphlet } Truth Before Everything, cited in Powell (2009: 49-50). On purity feminism, see also Caine (2013).\]
ing her husband capable of straying: “Pretty child! I was like that once. Now I know that all men are monsters” (I.314-15). For women of the hypocritical Society set, monstrousness in men was not necessarily negative. The Duchess considers Lord Darlington’s dandified pose of wickedness charming in *Lady Windermere’s Fan*; Illingworth is a social delight to the ladies of Hunstanton, as is Lady Caroline’s infamous brother Lord Henry Weston in *A Woman of No Importance*.46

The expectation of male misbehavior is evidenced well enough in the ancient comedies, but no ancient playwright actually endorses such behavior in married men. Nor does Wilde. The Duke of Berwick is presented as a ridiculous, absent character (he has never even spoken to his daughter’s beau, whom she will soon marry, II.370-73). The women too who condone misbehavior in men while judging women are not portrayed in a positive light: the Duchess is a mercenary and controlling mother, and the ladies at Hunstanton are all flawed, hypocritical characters. Wilde’s dandies, who play at wickedness, do not actually behave infamously (with the exception of Lord Illingworth, who is fashioned more after the Restoration rake than a Wildean dandy).47

But while men are expected to be bad, women are expected to be good, as they do not enjoy the same freedom or lenience for behavior. This double standard is remarked upon both in the ancient literature and in Wilde. While Lady Windermere is particularly hard on women who have “fallen” (given her inflexible, Puritan character), she believes men and women should be judged equally for their sins (in recognizable Purity Feminist terms):

*Lord Darlington*: Do you think seriously that women who have committed what the world calls a fault should never be forgiven?

*Lady Windermere*: I think they should never be forgiven.

46 But Wilde makes careful distinction between his dandies who pose, and the men who genuinely harm women.

47 See Chapter 5.
Lord Darlington: And men? Do you think that there should be the same laws for men as there are for women?
Lady Winderemere: Certainly!

(Fan I.123-29)

In a *Woman of No Importance*, the American Hester Worsley shares such views:

Let all women who have sinned be punished…It is right that they should be punished, but don’t let them be the only ones who suffer. If a man and woman have sinned, let them both go forth into the desert to love or loathe each other there. Let them both be branded. Set a mark, if you wish, on each, but don’t punish one and let the other go free. Don’t have one law for men and another for women. You are unjust to women in England. And till you count what is a shame in a woman to be an infamy in a man, you will always be unjust…

(Woman II.287-98)

In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, when Jack believes Miss Prism to be his (unmarried) mother, he exclaims:

Why should there be one law for men, and another for women?

(Earnest III.408-409)

These women both share the sentiments of Mercator’s Syra, quoted above (p. 63). They remark on the unfairness of limiting women while allowing men carte blanche, with no repercussions other than the temporary retribution of the wife. Wilde used, and then reused the line “All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That is his” (Woman II.454-56; Earnest I.625-26). Women were expected to be reproductions of their well-behaved mothers (the “Angel in the House”) while men had freedom to act out. For Wilde, the expectation of women to be good was limiting to self-development, as was the expectation of men to be bad (though to a lesser extent, as men’s limitations still allowed freedom). It is worth noting that all the characters who speak out against the sexual double standard hold somewhat liminal positions in their societies. Syra can espouse such views because she is a slave, not a matron. While Dorippa may certainly agree with Syra’s opinion on the unfairness of sexual double standards,
she cannot comment on them herself. Lord Darlington, who suggests women should be forgiven for past impropriety, is a dandy, and his subversive attitudes and opinions are undermined by his status as an outsider character: dandies speak the truth and suggest flexibility and sympathy, but their views are witty and amusing, not taken seriously by the earnest characters.\footnote{Small (1999: xxviii-xxix).} Lady Windermere was raised as a Puritan, and she is gently mocked by her more “worldly” friends, who consider her views radical (I.73-137). Hester Worsley is an American, an oddity to the English ladies with whom she is staying, and a Puritan to boot. Her views are immediately dismissed or ignored by her hostess and friends (e.g., II.301-02). Jack in Earnest is a foundling on the edge of “good” society, and before his identity is fully restored, his words can have no social weight. But because these characters stand outside the social order to some degree, they may speak outside the dominant opinion.

In Asinaria, Casina, and Phormio, the wife takes back her wayward husband. In none of these plays would a man accept the infidelity of a wife. In Windermere, after Lady Windermere believes she has been wronged by her husband, Lord Darlington suggests she get back at him by doing the same (I.96-105; II.293-306). Lady Windermere knows this would be a scandal to ruin her family: “He shall have a scandal. He shall have the worst scandal there has been in London for years. He shall see his name in every vile paper, mine on every hideous placard” (III.56-58). She also knows that after she has written a letter to her husband telling him she has left him, he will never take her back: “Arthur would never take me back! That fatal letter! No! Lord Darlington leaves England tomorrow. I will go with him—I have no choice” (III.20-23). Though she believes Windermere has wasted their money, taken a mistress, and has let all of London know about it, she knows that Society would not accept the same in her: a woman’s fall is irre-
parable. Mrs. Erlynne is evidence of that principle. Though she has managed to climb back into the lower rungs of Society, she has done so only through clever rebranding of her character; but, without patronage and marriage, she will never rise high. As we will see in the following section, women who have “fallen,” through rape or seduction, have difficulty taking a place in their own societies, and must often withdraw completely from public life.

Solutions for Infidelity

Neighbors and friends in both ancient comedy and Wilde’s comedy offer “helpful” suggestions for dealing with husbands’ infidelity. Myrrina in Casina advises letting the husband have his way—it is better than divorce, and if a woman wants for nothing, why make trouble? (204-07). The Duchess of Berwick too advises not to “take this little aberration of Windermere’s too much to heart. Just take him abroad, and he’ll come back to you all right” (I.304-07). She tells Lady Windermere not to make a scene, as husbands hate such things (I.311). Her own husband’s head was often turned by young women, a problem that started shortly after their honeymoon (I.273-77, 295-98), but she feigned illness and took him out of town. One should, however, nag one’s husband when one gets the chance, just to remind him that a wife has the legal right to do so (I.176-79). Though her advice is flippant, and she herself comes off as jaded by the

49 Lord Windermere explains this to Lady Windermere when he insists she invite the woman to her party: “She has been to several houses—not to houses where you would go, I admit, but still to houses where women who are in what is called Society nowadays do go. That does not content her. She wants you to receive her at once” (I.423-27). Mrs. Erlynne asks Lord Windermere to introduce her around, because she cannot make addresses to the women alone: “By the way, you must pay me a good deal of attention this evening. I am afraid of the women. You must introduce me to them” (II.149-52). She later explains to Lady Windermere how terrible it is to live in scandal (III.145-59).
amorality of her society, the Duchess notes poignantly that it is very hard for “good women” and wives to compete with the more interesting “women with pasts” (I.174-76; II.335-36), a point that is validated by the commentary of the dandies in Lord Darlington’s rooms in Act III: a good wife is important to have, but a naughty woman is more fun to be around (III.220f). The long-suffering, cynical wife knows that wicked women will briefly entertain their husbands, but the husbands will always come back (I.309-11).

A Menandrian fragment that Wilde read as a youth at Portora parallels the Duchess’ advice on husbands and infidelity, as the problem with men and pretty servants was a long-standing one. Aulus Gellius cites passages from Menander’s *Plokion (The Necklace)*, one of which describes the dismissal of a housemaid because a wife thought she was too pretty:

ἐπ’ ἀμφότερα γὼν ἡπίκληρος ἢ κ'<αλή>' 
μέλλει καθευδόσειν. κατεῖργασται μέγα 
καὶ περιβόητον ἐργον· ἐκ τῆς οἰκίας 
ἐξέβαλε τὴν λυπούσαν, ἢν ἐβούλετο, 
ἳν' ἀποβλέπωσιν πάντες εἰς τὸ Κροβύλης 
πρόσωπον ἢ τ' εὔγνωστος οὐσ' ἐμὴ γυνή 
δέσποινα.

<μὰ τὸν> Δία

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50 Lady Plymdale is jaded as well; she notes that wicked women are useful to a woman’s marriage, as they keep husbands from bothering their wives: “[my husband] has become a perfect nuisance. Now, this woman [Mrs. Erlynne] is just the thing for him. He’ll dance attendance upon her as long as she lets him, and won’t bother me. I assure you, women of that kind are most useful. They form the basis of other people’s marriages” (II.230-367).

51 The more optimistic (or naïve) wives will try to police their husbands instead, like Lady Caroline in *A Woman of No Importance*, who constantly seeks attention from her husband if he bestows it elsewhere, cossets him unnecessarily, and hunts him down every time he is outside her presence (I.11-13, 116-22, 158-63, 377-80; II.430; III.181-86, 354-57). Her anxiety over his possible philandering draws the attention of other characters in the play, who ridicule her surveillance (I.381-86; III.187-90). Her concern is warranted, as it is subtly implied that Sir John pays undue attention to the lovely Lady Stutfield. R. Cave (2006: 217) notes the irony in Lady Caroline’s constant concern: she is indulgent towards her brother, but is not prepared to allow her husband the same leeway. She is so deluded in her opinions that she is unaware of her own hypocrisy.
Now my fine heiress is going to sleep
Soundly on either side. Great is the deed
She’s done, the talk of the whole town. She’s thrown
Out of the house the girl who troubled her,
As she intended, so that all may look
Upon the face of Krobyle and know
The wife is mistress here…
…By all the gods in heaven, I’ll not
Put up with it. The girl was, sure enough,
Ready to serve and a fast worker. But
Away with her! There’s nothing to be said.\(^{52}\)

The Duchess of Berwick acted just as Laches’ “fine heiress” Krobyle did:

In fact, before the honeymoon was over, I caught him winking
at my maid, a most pretty, respectable girl. I dismissed
her at once without a character.

\(\text{(Fan I.297-99)}\)

The Duchess, like Krobyle and Dorippa of Mercator, draws the line at condoning hanky-panky
between the slaves/maids and their husbands. The ladies of A Woman of No Importance mention
the dangers that pretty governesses pose as well:

Lady Hunstanton: I remember poor Charlotte Pagden making
herself quite unpopular one season, because she had a French
governess she wanted to recommend to everyone.

Lady Caroline: I saw the governess, Jane. Lady Pagden sent her
to me. It was before Eleanor came out. She was far too good-
looking to be in any respectable household. I don’t wonder Lady
Pagden was so anxious to get rid of her.

\(\text{(Woman I.109-15)}\)

Wives may not be able to control what their husbands do with mistresses and prostitutes, but in
the home they reign supreme, taking charge of household affairs, like the supervision of the

maids (as Cleostrata in *Casina* claims is her right: “If you were doing the right and proper thing, you’d let me look after the female slaves, which is my job,” *si facias recte aut commode, me si-nas curare ancillas, quae mea est curatio*, 260-61). The Duchess’ bemused retelling of the events—some sympathy for the maid combined with a flippant dismissal of the consequences the lack of character would have for the poor girl⁵³—recalls Artemona’s confession of torturing her maids for theft, only to find out that her husband was the thief. She shows regret for her mistaken actions, and some sympathy for the maids, without questioning her right to wield power over them: “Good god, he’s the one who was robbing me! And I suspected my maids and tortured the poor creatures even though they were innocent” (*Ille ecastor suppilerabat me, quod ancillas meas / suspicabar atque insontis miseris cruciabam*, 888-89).

One of Wilde’s themes in *Windermere* is “manners before morals” (IV.135), an implicit criticism of his society’s values.⁵⁴ Any amount of deceit and scandalous behavior may be condoned behind the scenes, but everyone must put on the outward appearance of goodness and purity. The “pose” as Wilde called it, could be useful, in the case of the dandies, who used their insouciant posturing and epigrammatic speech to question social norms and the hypocrisies of “polite” Society. The “pose” was negative when held at the expense of others, such as the preening morality of the Society ladies, who utter worldly speech, but have inflexible moral standards.

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⁵³ Defined in the OED (14.c. under “character”): “A formal testimony given by an employer as to the qualities and habits of one that has been in his employ.” A character was a recommendation letter that servants received from one household in order to work at another. To be dismissed without a character would ensure that a servant could not get a comparable job, and might have to take up other work. It could, for women particularly, result in serious trouble.

⁵⁴ See Small (1999: xxviii-xxxii). R. Cave (1997) notes, “Wilde is perfectly in control of his dramatic artistry: what he is depicting is a society that is all surface in respect of its manners and *mores*; there are no secure values for coping with what lies behind the façade. The tonal insecurity has precise satirical purpose.”
Wilde makes the hypocrisy of the Society women clear: Lord Windermere’s assumed infidelity is acceptable until everyone learns of it. Mrs. Erlynne is tainted by her past, but uses her connections and her strategic marriages to hide it; the women approve of her when they are sufficiently flattered and amused by her. Lady Windermere technically “falls” by intending to leave her husband for Darlington, and the women who once considered her a paragon of virtue would shun her as they once shunned Mrs. Erlynne. Only by hiding one’s sins can a happy ending be achieved. Plautus’ and Terence’s endings are often achieved by forgiving faults and moving on: Cleostrata must take back Lysidamus, Artemona brings Demaenetus home, and Nausistrata is stuck with her bigamous husband. Wilde highlights the tenuousness of these endings by recalling their plots while focusing carefully on the responses of wives in the face of infidelity. “Keeping up appearances” and “manners before morals” both allow an emotional exploration of the negative space in these endings. Lady Windermere has been too idealistic, the Duchess is too cynical, and neither course is right, but Wilde’s exploration of the feelings of the wives, even misguided ones, encourages us to read back into ancient comedy the perspective of the wronged wife.

Compromised Mothers: Rape/Seduction and Single Mothers

The counterpoint to the negligent, philandering father is the raped or seduced mother, a figure shunned or shamed by society for her “fall.” While a philandering father/husband damages the family by wasting money, setting a bad example for his children, and shaming his wife be-

55 The Duchess of Berwick notes in Act I (162-66) that Lady Windermere’s house is one of the few places in London she can safely take her daughter Agatha. The Duchess enjoys clever talk, but does not want her daughter corrupted (or educated) by it.
fore the neighbors, his behavior nevertheless is condoned by the society in which he lives. A
sexually compromised mother, on the other hand, must withdraw from society or hide her
“shame,” and if her secret is discovered, it could destroy her family. We saw above with Me-
nander’s *Epitrepontes* that Pamophile’s rape nearly broke up her marriage (as with Philumena in
*Hecyra*). It was saved only by the revelation that her husband was her rapist. Such is the hypo-
crisy in antiquity: rape was a forgivable offense in men, but it was ruin for a raped woman. A
number of plots in ancient comedy show a raped mother attempting to make a life for her chil-
dren and hide her misfortune from a world that would pity, but shun, her. When her children’s
lives are endangered, she must make public her “shame” in order to save them from terrible mis-
fortune. Wilde employs this theme in the mother-son relationship in *A Woman of No Im-
portance*.

In antiquity, the sexual ruin of a marriageable girl eliminated her hopes of marriage to
anyone save the rapist. A rape was an insult to her *kyrios*, the male relative on whom she was
dependent. Rape was also considered a religious pollution to a household, and it was a social
stain the girl could not remove. Seduction was considered by some an even worse crime than

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56 Provided the rapist make reparations, the crime was overlooked, with no consequences for the
young man. Only in *Adelphoe* does a father scold his son for the crime of rape (“In what cou-
try, may I ask, do you think you’re living? You raped a girl you had no right to touch,” *in qua
civitate tandem te arbitrare vivere? / virginem vitiasti quam te non ius fuerat tangere*, 685-86) but
lessens the severity of his criticism by noting that while it was serious wrongdoing, it was
human, and many good men have done the same (*at humanum tamen. / fecere alii saepem
boni*, 687-88), as Hegio had remarked (see note 43). Micio’s issue is rather with Aeschines’
waiting ten months without telling his father or marrying the girl, which was the worse betrayal
(688-95). A woman, on the other hand, was ruined by a rape, if the young man could not be
forced to marry her. If only monetary reparations were made, the woman would remain unmar-
ried (as in *Epidicus*).


rape: in rape, a woman’s mind remained pure, though the body was compromised. Seduction tainted a woman’s mind as well as her body: the seducer worked upon her insidiously, turning her against husband, family, children, and responsibility. Such a woman could not be redeemed, so she suffered ostracism; banned from remarriage and participating in public cult, she was effectively cut off from any society save her close family, if they did not shun her too. Seduction could not be used as a comic plot device in antiquity, as it would turn the audience against a woman, and the broken family could not be saved. Therefore rape was a necessary plot device to create the pregnancies that motivated the drama, creating endangered children and vulnerable mothers. The playwrights display sympathy for their dramatic victims through descriptions of the violence suffered and female response to it, in addition to offering salvation through dramatic necessity: raped women will always find their rapists and legitimize their children, offering a “happy ending” (though one that is repugnant to modern sensibilities).

Seduced and fallen women were a staple of Victorian theatre, particularly melodrama, and late 19th century French drama. In both Fan and Woman, Wilde explores the social consequences of seduction (a more palatable crime to Victorians than rape). Most Victorian drama featuring “fallen” women prescribed a socially acceptable end for their wicked ways: penance, then early (often tragic) death. Powell (1990: 18) observes, “Shooting herself or contracting a

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59 Lysias 1.32-33 gives a long explanation for this reasoning, which Ogden (1997: 32-36) explores further. See also E. Harris (1990) and Carey (1995). While rape (the use of force, bia) corrupted the body, seduction (moicheia) employed persuasion and turned the mind of a woman against her kyrios. On rape, seduction, and consent in ancient Athens generally, see D. Cohen (1991) and Omitowojo (2002). For the perspective of rape as a lived experience for the victims, see James (2014).

60 On the dramatic necessity of rape, see Pierce (1997: 166), Sommerstein (1998: 105), and Cox (2012). See also Fantham (1975: 53-54).

disease is sometimes the only expiation a repentant mother can make, although in some cases she is permitted to work out her shame as a nurse or in a convent.” In *Fan and Woman*, Wilde responds to the traditional Victorian model and the typical new comic ending of the rape plot, and overturns them. I do not suggest that he was influenced by New Comedy alone here—far from it, as Powell has demonstrated the plethora of Victorian influences on Wilde. Rather, I suggest that Wilde was aware of the conventions of New Comedy, and is in part responding to them. Reading Wilde and New Comedy together may offer fresh perspectives on the characters and themes of each. First we will look at the typical characterization and plot progression for “ruined women” and the ancient rape plot; then we will examine how Wilde appropriates and deviates from the new comic material, while allowing for sympathetic reinterpretations of the original ancient material.

*Menander’s Older Generation Rapes*

In ancient comedy, the older generation rape (that is, the rape of a woman some years before the time of the play, resulting in children who are the focus of the play), follows a general pattern: a young woman was raped, bore her children secretly, and has moved on with her life either by remaining in seclusion, or hiding the rape in order to marry. By the time of the events of the play, her children have reached sexual maturity and are now in danger themselves. Menander has five such older generation rapes: in *Georgos, Heros, Hiereia, Phasma,* and *Fabula Incerta 6*. In *Georgos* and *Heros*, the raped mother’s daughter also suffers rape.

In the fragmentary *Georgos*, it appears that Myrrhine was raped as a young woman and bore a boy and girl.⁶² She raises the children alone, and her son Gorgias supports them by work-

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ing at the neighboring farm. When the boy next door rapes her daughter Hedaia, Myrrhine is distraught. The young man asks to marry Hedaia, even though his father has chosen another girl for him.\(^6^3\) Myrrhine is in a very vulnerable position—she is a single mother, and her daughter’s marriageability is tenuous. Meanwhile, Kleainetos, the wealthy old farmer next door nearly dies and is saved by Gorgias. The drama is complicated when he offers to marry Hedaia, not knowing she was raped and impregnated by another man.

Myrrhine is understandably very agitated (22-88): her daughter must marry, and to refuse Kleainetos will mean making public her daughter’s shame. But if she forces her daughter to marry Kleainetos, she must expose the baby and lose the chance for the rapist to marry his victim. She has no means to force the neighbor boy to marry her daughter should his father’s will prevail, and she must work against her son, who would champion the match with Kleainetos. Somehow during the play, her daughter’s rape as well as her own must be made known, and her children must be legitimized, according to dramatic convention. If she has indeed been raped, as the text suggests, it is very likely that Kleainetos is the long-ago rapist. Myrrhine would then marry him, her children would be legitimate, and she would have male protection in arranging marriage with the neighbor boy for her daughter. Public exposure of Myrrhine’s rape would potentially harm her children: her daughter cannot not marry unless the boy’s family were in full support of the match—any scrutiny of her parentage could destroy Hedaia’s chances of a good marriage. Lacking his parents’ support, she cannot push the marriage without revealing buried secrets.

\(^6^3\) His circumstances are similar to those of the Moschions of *Samia* and *Kitharistes*. 
The Myrrhine of *Heros* was raped as a young woman and had twins.\(^6^4\) She made sure they were fostered safely nearby, and later married her rapist Laches, though neither knows that Laches committed the rape. Years later, the children grown up, their foster father falls into debt and dies. The children fall into debt bondage, coming to work at Myrrhine’s house. At some point, Myrrhine recognizes her daughter Plangon, who has also been raped. The neighbor boy who committed the crime wishes to marry her, but Laches has other plans for his debt slave: a marriage to a household slave named Daos. Such a marriage would render Plangon a permanent slave, and her children would be born into bondage as well.\(^6^5\) To make matters worse, Laches discovers the pregnancy and threatens to turn Plangon out on the street with nothing.

Myrrhine recognizes the choice before her. To save her children, she must make her rape public and claim them as her own. This would destroy her marriage, scandalize their society, and stigmatize the children as well as the mother, but the alternative is just as bad. She makes a painful confession to Laches that she was raped before their marriage (55-97). Perspiring and frightened, she haltingly describes the rape. Laches begins to remember his earlier transgression, and it must come out that he is Myrrhine’s rapist, so that their children are legitimate, and Plangon can marry her own rapist. Modern audiences have difficulty understanding the cost of such a confession. Myrrhine has been hiding her “shame” for nearly two decades. She is comfortably married and has a place in society. To admit the rape, even one that occurred so long ago, would potentially destroy her life, throw her children into confusion, and upend everyone’s lives. Only

\(^{6^4}\) On the plot of *Heros* and extant fragments see Arnott (1996: 2-47) and Webster (1974: 146-49).

\(^{6^5}\) Daos admires the citizen-like qualities that shine through in Plangon, and his misconception regarding her status makes him believe she is a fellow slave, available to him. See Traill (2008: 46-50).
the direst of circumstances can drive her to the revelation. Laches bears the news rationally, dragging the details out of her until something jogs his memory, and he realizes that he himself is the rapist. While this revelation cannot be pleasant for Myrrhine, as she must accept that her attacker—the man who nearly ruined her life—is her own husband, the revelation means that her children are legitimate and therefore safe. Laches can use his power to ensure the marriage between Plangon and her own rapist, and everything will end, to ancient Greek minds anyway, happily.

Menander has no shortage of “woman with a past” plots. In Hiereia, a woman is raped, fosters the child with a neighbor, and becomes a priestess.\(^66\) The synopsis indicates she later marries her rapist and reclams the child so that he may marry the girl he loves.\(^67\) In Phasma, a woman is raped and hides her daughter next door, making a hole in the party wall so that she may see her.\(^68\) When the woman’s stepson sees the girl and falls in love with her, the mother must somehow reveal the girl’s origins so that the boy may marry her.\(^69\) The rape must come out, and she must marry her rapist to legitimize the girl. Though these plays are fragmentary, they follow the general plotline of older-generation rape: 1) a quiet cover-up and possibly subsequent marriage, 2) crisis for the younger generation (e.g., in Hiereia the young man needs legitimation), 3) revelation, 4) legitimation through older generation marriage, and 5) younger generation marriage. This type of plot creates poignant family drama to draw in the audience, and then a careful rehabilitation of the family in line with social ideologies and norms. These dramas

\(^{66}\) On the plot of Hiereia, see Arnott (2000: 619-23) and Webster (1974: 149-51).

\(^{67}\) P. Oxyrhynchus 1235 (O.i) lines 14-102.


\(^{69}\) Donatus, ad Ter. Eun. prol. 9, offers this synopsis.
allow for impassioned outbursts of thwarted love from the younger generation, agonized confessions from the older generation, and always-entertaining scandal, all neatly tied up at the end, in a society recognizable as the audience’s own.\(^7\)

**Plautus’ Older Generation Rapes**

Plautus employs a number of mothers for the pathos they bring to a plot, but fewer older generation rape victims than Menander. For Menander, the type is useful for establishing a family drama that can be resolved within the play. Plautus is far less interested in family conflict, confrontation, and reintegration, and so he employs the double jeopardy plot (raped mothers, endangered children) less often, using the character of the raped mother only in *Epidicus* and *Cistellaria*. His characteristic playfulness comes out in *Epidicus*, where Philippa is a flirty, manipulative woman akin to Plautus’ worldly *meretrices*. In *Cistellaria*, Phanostrata’s overwrought exclamations, combined with the slapstick humor of the abduction and search for the titular casket add comic relief.

*Epidicus* (see plot summary in Appendix B) features the typical boy-likes-prostitute-turned-citizen plot, but with a twist: the lost daughter is actually the boy’s half sister, whom he cannot marry, so he must make do with a music girl he had previously purchased. When the *adulescens* Stratippocles purchases the captive Telestis in war-torn Epidaurus, her mother Philippa is terribly anxious. Unsure who bought Telestis and where the girl would ultimately end up, Philippa trails Telestis to Athens, where she hopes to enlist Telestis’ father (who had im-

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\(^7\) *Fabula Incerta* 6 also features an older generation rape. A young man opens a container of tokens, and finds inside a moth-eaten cloak. This likely belonged to his mother, stolen from her rapist, and offered up with the boy as a child so he might find his parents again. See Arnott (2000: 505-27).
pregnated Philippa by rape) for help. Philippa’s anxiety and struggle provides a counterpoint of pathos to the farcical action of substituted music girls and manipulated old men in the play.

Act IV finds Philippa wandering the streets anxiously (526-32). Having learned that Telestis’ father lives in the area, she hopes to enlist him in the search for their lost daughter. Uncertain of how Periphanes will receive her, Philippa tests him out when she meets him on the street. She does not overtly accuse him of rape, abandonment, and neglect, but hints at her earlier misfortunes and uses manipulative speech to soften him (“now I have to use my woman’s cunning,” muliebris adhibenda mi malitia nunc est, 546).71 When Periphanes claims to have her daughter inside the house, however, she drops all pretenses and voices her relief (“now at last my spirits are returning,” remigrat animus nunc demum mihi, 569).

After she has joined forces with Periphanes, Philippa is no longer a friendless, isolated foreigner. Accordingly, her speech changes with her authority. When Periphanes presents her with Acropolistis, her “daughter,” Philippa immediately becomes humorless and direct. She first accuses Periphanes of insanity (tu homo insanis, 575), and exasperated she asks him if he even knows what his own daughter looks like (595-96). When Periphanes reveals that he does not, Philippa’s crushing anxiety returns, and she becomes extremely emotional (perii misera! 601). Periphanes dismisses her womanly display, orders her into the house, and tells her he will take care of it (603-04). This is the last we see of Philippa.

Periphanes has stated his intention to marry Philippa, precisely to legitimize their daughter. At the beginning of the play he discusses this possibility with his neighbor (166-80). Here Philippa’s respectability is noted (she comes from a good family), so there is no scandal in his marrying her. The previous obstacle had been his wealthy wife, who has now died. There was

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71 On the speech of mothers in Roman New Comedy, see James (forthcoming 2014).
less danger in marrying an older rape victim than in being married to a younger one (as is Pamphilus’ problem in Hecyra): there is no possibility in her bearing further children to interfere with the legitimate ones, and the legitimacy of previous children is not questioned. How Philippa lived in Epidaurus is uncertain. Most likely she lived with her family (or at least her mother), as Periphanes notes that after he raped and got her pregnant, he “eased her poverty” and her mother’s (555-56). The slave Epidicus later asks Telestis if she remembers him bringing her toys, indicating that at some point Periphanes had sent further gifts with the slave to see to Philippa and Telestis’ wellbeing (639-40). If she lived with only a poor but genteel mother, with an illegitimate child herself, it was likely in obscurity in Epidaurus. A poor mother and a byproduct of rape would not lend themselves to making a marriage for Philippa.

In Cistellaria (see plot summary in Appendix B) the role of the vulnerable, anxious mother is expanded to fill nearly the entire play. In this play, the young man Alcesimarchus is in love with the courtesan-in-training Selenium. Selenium pleaded with her mother Melaenis to give her to Alcesimarchus, because she did not want to be called a prostitute, and her mother indulged her obedient daughter in the request (83-85). When the play opens, Alcesimarchus is supposed to marry another girl, and Melaenis is ordering Selenium to have no more to do with the young man and come home. Over the course of the play it will be revealed that Selenium is in fact the long-lost sister of the very girl Alcesimarchus is supposed to marry. Her birth mother Phanostrata is the most vulnerable of Cistellaria’s mothers. In a delayed prologue (149-87), the god Auxilium announces that Phanostrata was raped as a girl in Sicyon by a visiting merchant. She gave birth to a daughter, whom she gave to a slave to expose. Her rapist Demipho married

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72 See Fantham (2004) for the mother-daughter relationships among the prostitutes in Cistellaria.

73 On the honorable nature of Melaenis, see Konstan (1983: 96-114).
another woman, and many years passed. After his wife’s death Demipho returned to Lemnos and married the girl he had raped. They begin seeking their exposed daughter. Their slave Lampadio had seen Lena pick up the girl, and Lena reports that she gave the baby to Melaenis (123-44).

Once safely married, Phanostrata can search for her lost daughter. Lampadio’s information makes her anxious (554-55), as she must face the possibility that her daughter became a prostitute (an, amabo, meretrix illa est quae illam sustulit? 564). She exclaims “servate di me, opsecro!” (573) and begs Lampadio to take care of the matter for her (594-96). When Phanostrata sees the titular casket with Selenium’s tokens lying in the street, she becomes frantic, speaking in exclamations (663-70). Her overwrought concern for her daughter is typical of mothers in the genre, as we have seen. Like Philippa, Phanostrata faced the shame of rape, but unlike Philippa, Phanostrata apparently did not have the means or family approval to raise the child, so she exposed the girl to die (164-66). She is still single years later when Demipho comes to find her (he apparently saw her clearly during the rape), indicating that after the rape, marriage to another man was not a possibility for her. As in Epidicus, the marriage of an older rape victim is unproblematic. Realizing that he is to blame for Phanostrata’s misfortunes, Demipho belatedly recognizes his duty to marry her and legitimize their child, should they find her. Phanostrata’s life was horribly altered, and she was forced into retirement from society with the rape, but she was not irretrievably lost. Her daughter, on the other hand, is in a precarious situation, having been raised by a prostitute. Dramatic conceit, however, dictates that Selenium must have slept with only one man and can therefore be married to him, and Selenium is saved.
Terence’s Older Generation Rapes

In *Phormio*, Chremes (under the pseudonym Stilpo) has an entire second family in Lemnos. His illegitimate wife grows anxious about him when he stays away for a long time (he was ill, 569-74). She packs up her household and travels to Athens to find him (569-72). When the play opens, the Lemnian woman has died, leaving her daughter in the care of an old woman (750). When the *adulescens* Antipho asks about the beautiful girl, the old woman bristles, warning him away unless he marries the girl (112-17). This old woman then makes an insecure marriage for the daughter, Phanium, her only option for keeping the girl safe from poverty (733-34, 751-53). The boy’s father Demipho rejects the secret marriage, having intended the boy for Chremes’ secret daughter, not realizing that the very marriage he was seeking to promote has already happened.

The convoluted affairs of the younger generation are of secondary interest here. More fascinating is Terence’s deliberately confusing explanation of the relationship between Chremes/Stilpo and the unnamed Lemnian woman. It is clear is that they produced Phanium, and that he continued to visit the woman and child after the birth, supporting them financially (1012-13). Beyond that, the details break down, and the story changes depending on who is telling it and their motivation for doing so. The slave Geta explains to Antipho that his uncle “had a secret affair with her [Phanium’s] mother on Lemnos long ago” (*cum eius consuevit olim matre in Lemno clanculum*, 873), a fact he learned through eavesdropping on Chremes and Demipho (875-76). Later Demipho tries to defuse the situation with Nausistrata, Chremes’ wife, when she learns of her husband’s duplicity: “He didn’t do it out of disregard or dislike of you. He forced

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74 The marriage is insecure because the girl’s husband’s parents could contest and dissolve the marriage made without their permission, and because Phanium has no relatives of authority to protect her.
himself on the poor woman when he was drunk, some fifteen years ago, and the girl was born. But he never touched her after that” (nam neque neglegentia tua neque odio id fecit tuo. / vinolentus fere abhinc annos quindecim mulierculam / eam compressit inde haec natast, neque postilla umquam attigit) (1016-18). Now the relationship has been downgraded to an opportunist-tic rape where the sex was never repeated.

We must unpack both of these explanations and consider why they were given. Rape was shameful in the ancient world, seduction was off-limits as plot material when respectable women were involved, and respectable citizen daughters (in order to be respectable citizens) need respectable citizen mothers. Chremes/Stilpo recognized his duty, this much is clear. He supported the family (as did Periphanes in Epidicus). Chremes seeks the daughter out before the death of his legitimate Athenian wife, in order to marry her off secretly to his brother’s son, since “keeping it in the family” would eliminate inconvenient questions. At some point, depending on who tells the story, he lived at least part-time with the Lemnian woman as a spouse. It is clear from the old woman’s tale that the Lemnian woman believed herself to be a wife. What did Chremes believe? It is in Demipho’s best interests to downplay the relationship to Nausistrata, Chremes’ legitimate wife—drink, rape (compressit), one-time deal. Geta, trying to get Chremes into trouble, recounts a long-term relationship (consuevit). He knows that Chremes is married in Athens, so he cannot class the second relationship as a true marriage.

Several plausible scenarios can be constructed: (1) Chremes raped the Lemnian woman (compressit), married her under the fake name Stilpo, and had a long term (consuevit) relation-

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Selenium in Cistellaria was “seduced,” but she is a pseudomeretrix (a meretrix-in-training, but not yet practicing), not an established citizen of a respectable family when the play begins: Alcesimarchus met Selenium at the festival of Dionysus, and approached her and her mother on friendly terms with flattery, services, and gifts (89-93). The young man swore to Melaenis that he would “marry” her daughter, and on those terms she allowed them to cohabitate (at ille conceptis iuravit verbis apud matrem meam / me uxorem ducturum esse, 98-99).
ship with her. (2) It is also possible that there was no rape at all, that Chremes simply proposed bigamous marriage to the Lemnian woman under a false name and Demipho made up the rape to make Nausistrata feel better. Finally (3), there may have been a rape and subsequent visitation by Chremes/Stilpo (as with Philippa and Periphanes in *Epidicus*). Chremes has clearly gone back regularly to Phanium and her mother: Phanium knows him very well, and the Lemnian woman was confident enough seek Chremes/Stilpo when he stayed away too long.

If Chremes had premeditated designs on the woman, rape would have been the only way to force marriage on a respectable girl, if her family would not consent to marriage in the first place—seduction is out of the question. Even if the rape was not calculated to force marriage, her family would have insisted on the marriage post-rape, since it is clear from subsequent circumstances that the girl recognized her rapist during the rape, unlike the Myrrhinias of Menander. Chremes may have proposed the marriage (hiding his bigamy) to free him from the legal consequences of the rape.

Terence presents Chremes’ actions with disdain. We are meant to feel sorry for the duped Lemnian woman, and to feel anger and indignation on Nausistrata’s behalf, as discussed above. The uncertainty of the Lemnian woman’s marital situation and the utter necessity of her action on her daughter’s behalf is stressed. She needs Chremes’ financial support, as well as the protection he gives her and her daughter. Her daughter is in a very tenuous position without Chremes’ support—without parental protection, misfortune such as her mother suffered could befall her as well. Terence presents Chremes’ role critically through Nausistrata’s anguish, the suffering of the Lemnian mother, and the trials faced by Phanium. Demipho is not entirely approving, and Phormio reveals Chremes’ duplicity to Nausistrata to punish him. Chremes (as well as Demipho) comes off as a lecherous old fool and incompetent husband/parent. In short, while
Plautus allows Periphanes his misconduct, Terence does not provide Chremes the same indulgence and makes clear the impropriety of his actions—he has clearly interfered with the life of the Lemnian woman.

Seduction in Wilde

_A Woman of No Importance_ (see plot summary in Appendix B) features a woman, seduced as a young girl, who bears and raises her child in secret, inventing a poor but respectable marriage for herself to alleviate suspicion about her son, and devoting her life to good works to atone for her “shame.” Like many of the rapists of ancient comedy, her seducer abandoned her, pregnant and poor. Mrs. Arbuthnot has lived in social retirement, so as not to draw attention to herself, only visiting the women of nearby Hunstanton rarely. Like the vulnerable mothers of Menander, Plautus, and Terence, Mrs. Arbuthnot must save her child from (what she perceives as) terrible danger, and she must reveal her past in order to prevent disaster, at social risk to herself. In the sections below I will examine aspects of the raped/seduced mother in antiquity and Wilde, particularly the parallels in the social retirement of the fallen mother, shame in women/character in men (the sexual double standard), revelation under duress, and the resolution, highlighting Wilde’s material with examples from the ancient material.

Social Retirement of the Raped/Seduced Mother

The seduction plotline in _A Woman of No Importance_ begins like many in ancient comedy: a seduction (more socially acceptable in Victorian drama than rape), a father urging the aggressor to marry the ruined girl (II.559-61, as in _Adelphoe_, 685-95 [see plot summary in Appendix B]), the girl bearing a child in secrecy, the girl’s retirement from society, and so forth. When
the child grows up, the story resembles many of the “vulnerable mother/endangered child” plots of ancient drama: the seduced woman’s son is endangered, and only the revelation of her sexual past prevents disaster. But Wilde deftly reworks many traditional elements to speak to his own society and its hypocrisies, surprising the audience with his innovations.

In ancient comedy, when the seducer and seduced (raped and rapist) meet years later, the seducer/rapist should be anxious for his victim, chagrined about his past conduct, and willing to marry her, as with Phanostrata in Cistellaria, Philippa in Epidicus, and the Menandrian mothers mentioned above. A tearful reconciliation and marriage or the tragic death of the wronged woman were plot devices Victorian audiences had come to expect from melodrama.76 Lord Illingworth, by contrast, offers Mrs. Arbuthnot nothing initially. Instead of helping his victim, reuniting their family and legitimizing their child, Illingworth wants to take Gerald away. He reasons that since English law keeps him from legitimizing his son (IV.355-61), he can do the next best thing by giving the young man money and lands. He does so not from any feeling of duty or goodwill, however—he merely wishes to have his son around for the novelty of the thing.77 Nor does he feel any duty towards Mrs. Arbuthnot: he remarks that he has no obligation to marry her (IV.423-26), and he finally offers marriage only in a bargain to get Gerald. Illingworth will re-

76 See Powell (1990: 55-72).

77 In this sense Lord Illingworth is much like Chremes in Terence’s Heauton Timoroumenos, who had rejected his child years before (considering his finances ill-equipped to handle a daughter, telling his wife Sostrata to abandon it), but now invites her back into his life simply because now he feels like having a daughter and his circumstances have changed (666-67). Lord Illingworth similarly argues with Mrs. Arbuthnot, the mother of his child, that he had few prospects as a young man, and he needed to marry a wealthy wife. It is only now, after he has suddenly come into unexpected wealth and title (II.378-408) that he may do something for his child (II.413-17, 557).
store her good name with his own if she willingly gives Gerald to him for six months out of the year, a perversion of the bargain Hades made with Demeter for Persephone.

Mrs. Arbuthnot differs, like Lord Illingworth, from her New Comic counterparts. Unlike those mothers, who accepted money and support after a rape, even when marriage was not a possibility, so that they could care for their children (like Philippa in Epidicus, and possibly like the Lemnian woman in Phormio), Mrs. Arbuthnot refused the £600/year offered by Illingworth’s mother if she would just give up her insistence on marriage (II.556-58). Like the mothers of ancient comedy, she knows that children suffer from the pasts of their mothers (II.576; III.332-33), but she is unwilling to compromise her dignity, preferring to raise her son with purer values in a humble upbringing (presumably to teach him morals better than his father’s).

Like the raped mothers of ancient comedy, Mrs. Arbuthnot lives a life of social retirement. She declines to dine out, socializing only occasionally at the house of her neighbor Lady Hunstanton (I.365-66). Mrs. Arbuthnot herself notes to her hostess that she lives “so much out of the world, and see[s] so few people” (II.355-56). She created a fictitious marriage and widowhood so that her son could grow up among good people and have some claim on society, so that he would not share the taint of her past. Later she tries to explain to her son the extent to which a shamed woman must go to protect the reputation of her child, giving up all the good things in life, and devoting herself to others: while Gerald had made many friends and visited good households, she could not risk joining him there, staying at home instead with her secret, as “honest households” were out of her reach (IV.231-38). Sostrata in Hecyra agrees to go into similar exile for her child: thinking Pamphilus’ marriage is endangered by her presence, she de-
cides to go into the country with her cruel husband, giving up “friends and relatives and public festivals” (*tuas amicas te et cognatas serere et festos dies*, 592).\(^78\)

Shame in Women, Character in Men

As in ancient comedy, men of the Victorian upper class are praised for their sexual exploits and naughty behavior while women are shamed and rejected by “polite society.” This society enjoys tittering over gossip, playfully scolding men who do wrong, and making scandalized comments about women who walk the line of respectability but have not yet departed from it. The oppressive double standard noted in *Fan* is fully in place in *Woman*, where one woman, Mrs. Arbuthnot, has “sinned” with another man. He is welcomed in society while she is forever on its fringes. And he is not the only one: their society is filled with such men. The American Hester is appalled that Lord Henry Weston is a man with a hideous past, and yet no London dinner party is complete without him—he has ruined so many women, and they have been shunned (II.282-88), while he enjoys lovely parties and the best company. Hester, being a Puritan, initially thinks that fallen women should be judged harshly and shunned, but she believes ruination should be equally applied (I.290-300; III.322-27), as Lady Windermere had believed (I.127-29). She is the only one to think so. Lady Caroline responds, “I regard Henry as infamous, absolutely infamous. But I am bound to state, as you were remarking, Jane, that he is excellent company,

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\(^78\) Festivals offered women an opportunity to socialize, and giving them up would be a major blow to one's social life. On women’s cult activity in the Republic, see Schultz (2006).
and he has one of the best cooks in London, and after a good dinner one can forgive anybody” (II.327-31). 79

The hypocrisy in the moral code of the elite is blatant. The fashionable ladies of Hunstanton fawn over bad men and scandalous behavior in women (so long as it is fantasy, not reality), while claiming to uphold manners and morals and policing the female ranks to make certain no one actually violates propriety. 80 Lord Illingworth has a terrible reputation for debauchery and dandyism, he swears he will never be reformed, and yet the women revel in his company and wit (I.190-96). Women are ruined by sexual escapades, while men become more interesting. Mrs Allonby and Lord Illingworth elegantly flirt, each topping the other in scandalous remarks and witty badinage, building upon his reputation for badness, reveling in his turpitude. He tells Mrs. Allonby that “one can live down anything except a good reputation” (485-86). She delights in his immoral qualities and even goads him to make a conquest of the upright American girl, just for the amusement of seeing her disgust, or the triumph of seducing her over to their value system (I.449-60).

Only Mr. Kelvil judges Lord Illingworth for his disrespectful attitude towards women, saying that the man, “regards woman simply as a toy” (I.334-35). 81 The women take no real note

79 R. Cave (2006: 215-18) notes the hypocrisy in the ladies’ opinion, pointing out that while the women will associate with men who ruin women, fallen women are conspicuously absent from the party.

80 On women’s role as enforcers of social values and morality, see Sinfield (1994a: 43-44). Gerald, when beseeching his mother to marry her seducer, reasons that if not for him, she should do it as a duty to other women in the world. Mrs. Arbuthnot retorts, “I owe nothing to other women. There is not one of them to help me. There is not one woman in the world to whom I could go for pity, if I would take it, or for sympathy, if I could win it. Women are hard on each other” (IV.173-76).

81 But Kelvil is a hypocritical character as well. A politician, he endorses the “beauty of English home life” as the “mainstay of our moral system in England,” but takes every opportunity to
of his opinion, turning talk towards his family and dismissing his contributions to the conversation. The women prefer instead to banter and gossip, making a joke of morality, but clearly defining its boundaries. Lady Stutfield remarks that the world was made for men and not women, and Mrs. Allonby protests that things are better for women because they are forbidden more things than men (her insinuation is that women are lucky to have more ways to break with convention and be naughty)—but there is no reality to her statement (I.148-51). These women are still bound by the code that keeps Mrs. Arbuthnot on the edges of good society: they talk a big game, but can never truly play it.  

Mrs. Allonby, still a member of the group, but clearly its most questionable participant, is said to have run away twice before getting married (I.31-35). Lady Caroline, with haughty wit, responds, “You know how unfair people often are. I myself don’t believe she ran away more than once” (I.33-35). Later, Lady Caroline jokes, “Is that the only thing [her clever tongue], Jane, Mrs. Allonby allows to run away with her?” Lady Hunstanton, “I hope so, Caroline, I’m sure” (I.309-311). Mrs. Allonby provides the group with entertainment, but each member reinforces the status quo: Mrs. Allonby’s insider status will be revoked if her actions catch up to the gossip.  

They turn their sharp tongues on other women who have transgressed openly. A certain avoid being with his wife and eight children (I.326-49). See Raby (1997a: 152). Roman comedy offers plenty of examples of men who endorse marriage for their sons, but hate their own wives and the marriage state generally. See Chapter 3, note 75.

We saw this behavior in the Duchess of Berwick in Lady Windermere’s Fan, who enjoyed the naughty talk of Lord Darlington, but did not wish for her daughter to hear it (I.152-53).

R. Cave (1997) wonders whether Mrs. Allonby’s daring speech is a pose or not: “Mrs. Allonby can keep pace with every arabesque of Lord Illingworth’s badinage with a decided brio that suggest she is a very knowing woman; we can never learn whether her forthrightness is the outcome of clever cerebration or the fruit of direct experience. Is it all an artful pose or shameless daring? Does Mrs. Allonby too have a past, which only her apparently safe marriage and her skillfully contrived manner shield from investigation? Is that manner the product of an otherwise bored
tain Lady Belton eloped with a Lord Fethersdale, and the women joke that her husband died of joy or gout when he learned of it (I.131-36). Lady Belton, no longer a member of polite society, is now open to judgment and mockery. The remarks hit closer to home when they explore the rules of the game. Lady Caroline notes that “young women of the present day seem to make it the sole object of their lives to be always playing with fire” (I.139-41). Mrs. Allonby rejoinis, “It is the people who don’t know how to play with it who get burned up” (I.143-44). Knowing how to play means understanding the rules: the game is one of talk, not action. Mrs. Arbuthnot lost as soon as she acted on her desires, giving in to Lord Illingworth’s seduction when she was but a girl.

When Mrs. Arbuthnot learns that Lord Illingworth has designs on her son, she seeks to convince Gerald of the man’s degenerate past. She tells Gerald the pitiable story of a girl seduced by Lord Illingworth, a girl he made to love him, to whom he promised so much, even marriage, to get what he wanted. He put off the marriage, she begged him not to wait, and then she bore a child.\(^{84}\) She explains the ruin and shame a woman suffers when a man scorns her after he has seduced her:

> Her life was ruined, and her soul ruined, and all that was sweet, and good, and pure in her ruined also. She suffered terribly—she suffers now. She will always suffer. For her there is no joy, no peace, no atonement. She is a woman who drags a chain like a guilty thing. She is a woman who wears a mask, like a thing that is a leper. The fire cannot purify her. The waters cannot quench her anguish. Nothing can hear her! no anodyne can give her sleep! no poppies forgetfulness! She

\(^{84}\) Had Mrs. Arbuthnot wished to make the scandal public, she could have sued George Harford (for he had not come into his title yet) for breach-of-promise, as he was of age (21) and had made a legitimate proposal of marriage to Mrs. Arbuthnot. See Frost (1995) and Phegley (2012).
is lost! She is a lost soul! That is why I call Lord Illingworth a bad man. That is why I don’t want my boy to be with him.\textsuperscript{85} 

(Woman III.450-58)

She is saddened and defeated when Gerald responds that the girl was as much to blame as Lord Illingworth, that no nice girl would go away with a man and live as his wife without being married (III.459-64). Gerald, yet unconvinced of Illingworth’s wickedness and a defender of the sexual double standard that ruined his mother (unknown to him), absolves Illingworth and places the blame on the woman.

Revelation Under Duress

\textit{A Woman of No Importance} is an intriguing mash-up of a number of New Comic tropes. It has an older generation rape plot, an endangered/unidentified child, a young man in love, and a degenerate father attempting to usurp his son’s girlfriend plot. As in \textit{Asinaria}, \textit{Bacchides}, \textit{Casina}, and \textit{Mercator}, wherein the lecherous old man character competes sexually with his son, Lord Illingworth makes an attempt on Gerald’s love interest Hester.\textsuperscript{86} He has already expressed his interest in Gerald, and Mrs. Allonby knows of Gerald’s affection for the girl, yet she proposes that Illingworth make a game of seducing Hester, and Lord Illingworth agrees. The proposal occurs during their flirtation in Act I (446-92), and serves as the climax of that exchange. Illingworth makes good on his promise to kiss Hester in Act III, an event that catalyzes Mrs. Arbuthnot’s revelation to her son about his parentage. At the end of the act, Hester goes to fetch Gerald, who is speaking with Illingworth. She remains on the terrace with Lord Illingworth while

\textsuperscript{85} The melodramatic characterization of Mrs. Arbuthnot makes her a one-dimensional character, rather than the heroine the title implies. Wilde creates a victim, using her to explore other character relationships within the play. See Small (2006: xxxiv).

\textsuperscript{86} Father-son sexual competition is discussed further in the Case Study in Chapter 4.
Mrs. Arbuthnot tries to convince Gerald that Illingworth is rake and a womanizer. Gerald refuses to be convinced, and says, “As for Lord Illingworth, I don’t believe he is capable of anything infamous or base. I can’t believe it of him—I can’t” (III.468-70). Immediately following, Hester’s cries drift in from the terrace: Lord Illingworth has seized her and “horribly insulted” her. Gerald is “beside himself with rage and indignation,” according to the stage notes, and threatens to kill the man. Mrs. Arbuthnot rushes forward, grasping at him, trying to get his attention. He struggles with her, and her only way to stop him is to proclaim, “Stop, Gerald, stop! He is your own father!” (III.484).

When Gerald threatens to kill his father, he puts in action the “endangered child” plot that had begun with Illingworth’s job offer to Gerard. This plot failed to be fully realized with a recognition scene because Mrs. Arbuthnot had given in to Gerald’s wishes to go off with Illingworth: the loss of Gerald was not enough to prompt a revelation from her. The threat of violence against Illingworth by his own son (patricide, a terrible crime) finally motivates Mrs. Arbuthnot to reveal her son’s origins. This scene is reminiscent of the revelations in Menander, Plautus, and Terence, in which vulnerable mothers reveal past misfortunes to ensure the survival and salvation of their children. Georgos’ Myrrhine cannot allow her daughter to marry anyone other than her rapist, and when she learns that the old man Kleainetos has asked for her daughter in marriage, she becomes agitated:

(<Mv>) ἄλλαί ὡς πρὸς εὖνουν, ὦ Φίλιννα, τοῦς λόγους ποιομένη σε πάντα τίμιοτής λέγω· ἐν τοῖς ἐγώ νῦν εἰμι.

(Εo 22-24)

(Myrrhine: Philinna, it’s because you’re sympathetic I’m talking to you, telling all my problems. I’m [in] this trouble now.

(<Φι>) τί πέπονθας, τέκνον;
τί περιπατεῖς τρίβουσα τὰς χεῖρας; (Φι) περὶ τίνος; <Μυ> ἡ παῖς ἐστι τοῦ τόκου, φίλη, [ὁμοῦ] τοδὲ

(Philinna:) What’s the matter, my child? [Why] are you walking up and down, Wringing your hands? (Myrrhine:) You ask? I can’t think what to do Just now, Philinna. (Philinna:) What [about]? (Myrrhine:) Her baby’s [due], my dear…

Though fragmentary, the scene suggests Myrrhine’s anxiety and panic at the choices that lay before her. The Myrrhine of Heros must keep her daughter from being ejected onto the street, and so she is forced to reveal to her husband Laches that Hedaia is her daughter, and by consequence, the rape that led to the girl’s birth:

Laches: My mind was made up long ago, I’m going To do it! (to himself) Sweating, nonplussed! Myrrhine, by Zeus, I well deserved a shepherd with a bleating.
Myrrhine: How poignant! I alone must suffer blows So bad that no one could imagine worse!
Laches: Grit’s the best [antidote to] tragedy. [But] did a man [misuse] you once, by force? Myrrhine: [Yes. He was drunk.] Laches: Any idea who [he was?]
Terence’s Sostrata (*Adelphoe*) faces a different kind of threat to her child’s well-being, but she is no less anxious and resolute than Menander’s Myrrhines. She threatens to make her daughter’s rape public in order to force her rapist to marry her. When Getas suggests she let the matter go to save her daughter’s reputation, Sostrata balks:

SO. ah minime gentium: non faciam.
GE. quid ages?
SO. proferam.
CA. hem, mea Sostrata, vidē quam rem agis.
SO. peior res loco non potis est esse quam in quo nunc sitast. primum indotatas t; tum praeterea, quae secunda <ei> dos erat, perit: pro virgini dārī nuptum non potest. hoc relicuomst: si infittias ibit, testi' mecum est anulus quem miserat. postremo, quando ego consciā mihi sum a me culpam esse hanc procul neque pretium neque rem ullam intercessisse illa aut me in-dignam, Geta, experiar.

*(Ad. 342-50)*

*Sostrata*: No! Not in all the world! I won’t do it!
*Geta*: What will you do?
*Sostrata*: I’ll make it public.
*Canthera*: What! Sostrata dear, watch what you’re doing!
*Sostrata*: Matters couldn’t be worse than they are now. First, she has no dowry. Then she’s lost the next best thing: she can’t be given in marriage as a virgin. There’s only one thing left: if he insists on denying it, I have in my possession as evidence the ring he sent. In the end, since I know in my heart that no blame attaches to me in this and that no money or anything else has changed hands which would be unworthy of her or me, Geta, I shall go to court.

Like Menander’s mothers, Mrs. Arbuthnot must protect a child from its own father, unknown to him, who is causing that child pain (a bad marriage, a slave marriage, or poverty). Wilde’s Mrs. Arbuthnot exhibits many of the characteristics of these ruined, vulnerable New Comic mothers who attempt to protect their offspring by publicly revealing their own misfortune.

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87 There would be consequences for raping a freeborn girl. The *lex Julia de vi publica* outlawed the rape of women and boys (Late Republic), but there were previous laws in place against rape (*Rhet. Her. 4.8.12*). See J. Gardner (1986: 113-21) and Fantham (1991).
The Resolution

Ancient New Comedy features a number of rapes that end in marriage: Menander’s Georgos, Heros, Hiereia, and Phasma all likely featured older generation rape victims who married their rapists or discovered that they had already unwittingly done so. Epidicus implies the marriage of Philippa to her rapist Periphanes (166-80). In Cistellaria Phanostrata marries her rapist after his wife dies (173-79). Phormio’s Chremes married his rape victim bigamously (see above). The younger-generation rapes always end in marriage: Menander’s Epitrepontes, Georgos, Heros, Kitharistes, Samia; Plautus’ Aulularia, Truculentus; Terence’s Adelphoe, Eunuchus, Hecyra. In Victorian drama as well, all ruined women either disappeared in their shame, or married their seducer. Wilde draws on this expected progression to set up his break with convention. In Act IV, Gerald writes a letter to Illingworth demanding that he marry Mrs. Arbuthnot, considering it atonement for the wrong done her, and a bow to duty and convention (IV.123-209). He acknowledges that (unlike the marriages between rape victims and rapists in antiquity) the marriage will not legitimize him (IV.138-41), but it will give Mrs. Arbuthnot a deserved name and a better future (IV.154-56). Wilde rejects this repugnant resolution, as none of his models did: he refuses to make Mrs. Arbuthnot marry her seducer, the cause of her life’s despair. When Gerald asks her “what mother has ever refused to marry the father of her own child?” she responds, “Let me be the first then. I will not do it.” Despite Gerald’s pressure, as well as so-

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88 Very few women turned down the opportunity to marry their seducer. See Powell (1990: 55-72).

89 By rejecting Lord Illingworth, Mrs. Arbuthnot does not quite live up to her self-presentation as a martyr, but rather a woman who lives by her emotions, as Lord Illingworth accuses (IV.440-41), notes Bristow (1994: 61).
cial (and traditional dramatic) pressure, Mrs. Arbuthnot stands firm. She offers a counter-
argument that the New Comic rape victims likely wished they could:

How could I swear to love the man I loathe, to honor him who
wrought you dishonor, to obey him who, in his mastery, made me
to sin? No: marriage is a sacrament for those who love each other.
It is not for such as him, as me.

(Woman IV.196-200)

But Mrs. Arbuthnot’s society has not progressed so far that a woman can refuse to marry
her seducer and still remain within that society. That act of daring was still beyond her. Wilde,
while freeing Mrs. Arbuthnot from the conventions of ancient drama and the sensation plays of
his own time, reminds his audiences that her freedom does not extend beyond her family: the
double standard remains in play and her seducer still remains a valued member of his society
(and consequently, any important society). Illingworth turns to leave, unmoved by her impas-
sioned accusations and rejection, remarking, “Quarter to two! Must be strolling back to Hun-
stanton. Don’t suppose I shall see you there again. I’m sorry, I am, really. It’s been an amusing
experience to have met amongst people of one’s own rank, and treated quite seriously too, one’s
mistress, and one’s—” (IV.481-85). He is not allowed to finish, but he leaves to return to society
that must shun Mrs. Arbuthnot. She is superior in her morality, and has won the support of her
family, but she can choose only exile.90

Therefore, she goes into voluntary exile in America, and along with her goes Gerald. In
ancient comedy her child would have reaped the benefits of his newfound parentage.91 New

90 Bristow (1994: 62) notes the bleak alternative of this exile. While Lord Illingworth may be a
“man of no importance” (IV.496), and the morality of the Hunstanton set hypocritical and repug-
nant, a permanent sojourn to America (often the object of mockery in Wilde’s bons mots) with
her self-righteous son and his Puritan wife does not sound like a happy future for Mrs. Arbuth-
not.

91 See Chapter 3 on successful recognition comedies.
Comedy would not stand for Selenium to reject her wealthier, socially established parent’s claim and exile herself with her adoptive mother Melaenis, but Wilde again breaks with that tradition: Gerald makes an advantageous marriage and sojourns to America with his mother and new wife, rejecting Society rather than reinforcing its values. In most New Comic plays, the Saturnalian aspects were overturned at the close of the play. In Wilde, the inversion of tradition stands, for some of the characters at any rate. Illingworth may remain, though a villain, a respected member of his society, valued and sought after. As Mrs. Arbuthnot says, “The ending is the ordinary ending. The woman suffers. The man goes free” (IV.150-51). The latter statement is true, at least.92

Let us return to Lady Windermere’s Fan, in which one woman is seduced and another nearly is. In this play Wilde breaks with the conventions of the “soiled woman, protective mother” story: for two acts, Mrs. Erlynne has more in common with New Comedy’s meretrices and Victorian drama’s adventuresses than the modest, shamed mothers of ancient comedy or contemporary sensation fiction.93 When she does finally take up the role of the anxious mother, she does not show the characteristics of the repentant, retiring mother. Ruined by her indiscretions (leaving her husband and baby for a man who then abandoned her [I.400-06; IV.181-83]), she has reinvented herself for re-entry into society through her relationship with Windermere (whom she is blackmailing [IV.192-97]) and her flirtation with Lord Augustus, who wishes to marry her should she show gain even the smallest social footing (going so far as to ask Windermere to arrange for his wife to invite Mrs. Erlynne into society [II.64-68, 88-91]).

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92 Small (2006: xxvii) observes, “Mrs. Arbuthnot’s banishment both during and at the end of the play, and Lord Illingworth’s continued social celebrity, despite his sexual philandering in the past, illustrate the perverse nature of Victorian society’s values.”

93 On sensation fiction, see Wynne (2001), Gilbert (2011), and Pickett (2011).
In ancient comedy Mrs. Erlynne would have been a rape victim who raised her daughter in seclusion, jumping at the chance to reunite with her child’s father in marriage. Wilde transforms the rape into the seduction of a married woman, the abandonment of the child, and the refusal to accept a retiring lifestyle—in short, the opposite of what the trope expects. In fact, Mrs. Erlynne would have very little in common with the anxious, ruined mothers of antiquity if she were not possessed of concern for her daughter, in Acts II and III. When Mrs. Erlynne discovers her daughter’s damning letter to her husband, she becomes the anxious mother of ancient comedy, working herself into a frenzy of compassion and action, full of exclamations:

…No, no! It would be impossible! Life doesn’t repeat its tragedies like that! Oh, why does this horrible fancy come across me? Why do I remember now the one moment of my life I most wish to forget? Does life repeat its tragedies? Oh, how terrible! The same words that twenty years ago I wrote to her father! and how bitterly I have been punished for it! No; my punishment, my real punishment is tonight, is now!

(Fan II.463-70)

What can I do? What can I do? I feel a passion awakening within me that I never felt before. What can it mean? The daughter must not be like the mother—that would be terrible. How can I save her? How can I save my child?

(Fan II.488-91)

Here Wilde’s play recalls the ancient motif of double jeopardy for mothers and daughters: the most vulnerable mothers in ancient comedy, the ones who suffered in their youth, are the ones whose daughters have now been raped, lost, or kidnapped.\(^94\) Life certainly does repeat its tragedies, at least in ancient comic drama. Now Mrs. Erlynne becomes like Menander’s Myrrhine in *Georgos*, Myrrhine in *Heros*, the priestess in *Hiereta*, the wife in *Phasma*; (Plautus) Philippa in *Epidicus*, Phanostrata in *Cistellaria*; (Terence) Lemnian women in *Phormio*.

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\(^94\) Wronged mothers whose children are now in danger: (Menander) Myrrhine in *Georgos*, Myrrhine in *Heros*, the priestess in *Hiereta*, the wife in *Phasma*; (Plautus) Philippa in *Epidicus*, Phanostrata in *Cistellaria*; (Terence) Lemnian women in *Phormio*. 
rhines: “The daughter must not be like the mother—that would be terrible. How can I save her? How can I save my child?” (II.488-92). She will risk her recently regained social position and reputation to prevent her daughter’s suffering. For the sexually compromised mothers of ancient New Comedy, as we have seen, the prevention of suffering meant admitting the rape to a husband or other authority figure (like an important family friend or neighbor) and facing social ruin. It meant saving her children from a terrible fate, but potentially exposing them to social rejection as well. Rushing to Darlington’s rooms to keep her daughter from running away with him, Mrs. Erlynne understands the risks to herself should she be seen, but considers her daughter’s safety more important. When she reveals herself to the men in his rooms, so that her daughter may sneak away unseen, Mrs. Erlynne believes herself to be sacrificing her newfound place in better society, her potential marriage to Lord Augustus, and all respectability, like Myrrhine admitting her rape to Laches in Heros, or the painful admission Myrrhine of Georgos must have made if indeed she was a rape victim in that play. A woman alone and sexually compromised, we are reminded again and again, is an anathema.

Several characters note the importance of society and relations (relatives of good standing) in determining respectability and the danger to women who disregard these cultural strictures. These remarks serve as a warning of the danger to Lady Windermere and a reminder of the tenuousness of Mrs. Erlynne’s position. In Act I, the Duchess of Berwick says, “Augustus is completely infatuated with her. It is quite scandalous, for she is absolutely inadmissible into society. Many a woman has a past, but I am told that she has at least a dozen, and that they all fit” (I.118-22). Lord Windermere summarizes Mrs. Erlynne’s story with pity, emphasizing the fragility of female respectability:

Ironically her involvement in the Windermere’s life in the first place is what endangered her daughter.
Mrs Erlynne was once honored, loved, respected. She was well born, she had position—she lost everything—threw it away, if you like. That makes it all the more bitter. Misfortunes one can endure—they come from outside, they are accidents. But to suffer for one’s own faults—ah!—there is the sting of life. It was twenty years ago, too. She was little more than a girl then. She had been a wife for even less time than you have.

(Fan I.399-406)

One misstep and a woman is ruined in the eyes of her society forever. Lord Darlington, even while entreating Lady Windermere to abandon her marriage, admits that to run away with him would be disastrous to her reputation: “I won’t tell you that the world matters nothing, or the world’s voice, or the voice of society. They matter a great deal. They matter far too much” (II.283-86). Lord Augustus is fond of Mrs. Erlynne and wishes to marry her, but knows the problems her questionable past creates: [speaking of Mrs. Erlynne] “Who is she? Where does she come from? Why hasn’t she got any demmed relations? Demmed nuisance, relations! But they make one so demmed respectable” (II.65-68). Part of Glycerium’s problem in Andria was Chrysis’ lack of family and her outsider status. Glycerium’s marriage to Pamphilus is impeded by her status: she cannot trot out the symbols of respectability (citizen status and the relatives to prove it). The added pressures put on women by society are full in Mrs. Erlynne’s mind when she contemplates her daughter’s ruinous actions in running to Darlington: “A moment may ruin a life. Who knows that better than I?” (II.492-3). Finally she is brutally direct, spelling out for Lady Windermere what it means to have fallen from society, in language as true for antiquity as it was for her own Victorian period:

…You don’t know what it is to fall into the pit, to be despised, mocked, abandoned, sneered at—to be an outcast! to find the door shut against one, to have to creep in by hideous byways, afraid every moment lest the mask should be stripped from one’s face, and all the while to hear the laughter, the horrible laughter of the world, a thing more tragic than all
the tears the world has ever shed. You don’t know what it is.

(Fan III.145-53)

But Wilde rejects for this compromised mother a retiring life like her ancient counterparts. Mrs. Erlynne, though she will nod to convention and make a marriage, will not marry her child’s father. She also refuses to disappear to satisfy those who disagree with how she chose to live her life:

I suppose, Windermere, you would like me to retire into a convent or become a hospital nurse, or something of that kind, as people do in silly modern novels. That is stupid of you, Arthur; in real life we don’t do such things.

(Fan IV.245-48)

Mrs. Erlynne refuses to die literally or figuratively (that is, a social death) after saving her daughter, like the mother figure Chrysis in Terence’s Andria, who fell ill and died after turning from poor respectability to prostitution to care for her ward Glycerium (74-79, 286-98). But a compromised mother who fails to regain her respectability must be removed somehow. Wilde nods at this convention by removing Mrs. Erlynne through her marriage to Lord Augustus, an effective exile for her too-questionable character. In this she has much in common with Melaenis from Cistellaria, who saves her adoptive daughter Selenium by giving her up to a more respectable life. Mrs. Erlynne allows her daughter to retain her illusions about her saintly, lost mother.

96 On the conventional death of the fallen mother, see Powell (1990: 14-32).

97 The couple will live outside of England where Mrs. Erlynne will be less the subject of gossip and be prevented from damaging Lady Windermere’s reputation. On the exiles in Fan, see Raby (1988: 87-88).
She will not be reunited with her daughter in the tearful meeting common to recognition comedies,98 telling Lord Windermere,

Oh, don’t imagine I am going to have a pathetic scene with her, weep on her neck and tell her who I am, and all that kind of thing. I have no ambition to play the part of a mother. Only once in my life have I known a mother’s feelings. That was last night. They were terrible.

(Fan IV.221-27)

In both Victorian England and the ancient world, private lives played out in very public ways. Neighbors watched, men talked, women policed one another, and public activity was monitored. To reject the social structures in place, the manners and morality of the dominant society (a society founded on sexual inequality), meant ruin for women. Wilde highlights the risks to Mrs. Erlynne in allowing her concern for her daughter to outweigh her new adherence to social codes. In his text it is clear what a vulnerable mother risks for an endangered daughter, and the deft way male authority must be handled to ensure a daughter’s safety. Mrs. Erlynne is much like Philippa in Epidicus: her anxiety for her daughter motivates her action, she is beset with grief and discomfort, but takes careful advantage of her situation. She manipulates a male authority figure (Lord Augustus) with clever speech, resolves the vulnerability of her daughter’s situation, and remedies her own through late marriage. Wilde preserves some of the conventions of the mother-daughter story from antiquity while rejecting others. He will explore the more traditional recognition scene in The Importance of Being Earnest, discussed in Chapter 3.

98 Here Mrs. Erlynne seizes the plot that has tried to define her character and turns it around to suit her vision of herself rather than the expectations of conventional plot structure. On Mrs. Erlynne as director of her own plot, see Jacobs (1992: 17-18). See also Chapter 4 on flawed recognition plots.
Case Study: Hecyra and Lady Windermere’s Fan

Lady Windermere’s Fan is a variation on Terence’s Hecyra plot (based on a play by Apollodorus,99 who had in turn based his Hekyra on Menander’s Epitrepontes).100 The two plays share basic elements: a young couple is separated by mistaken beliefs of infidelity by both parties, and then reunited by a woman with a checkered past and notorious reputation, by means of a recognition token. To protect feelings and reputations, the characters must keep dark secrets, and thus the normal recognition plot is impeded. As we have seen, in New Comedy a token identifies a long-lost citizen who is then reunited with his or her family, so that the tension or conflict in the play is resolved.

But in Fan, the fan, the token that identifies Lady Windermere to her husband, will not reveal her identity. If Lady Windermere were to be discovered in Lord Darlington’s rooms, her reputation would be ruined. Similarly, the identity of Mrs. Erlynne cannot be revealed to Lady Windermere, lest the infamous truth destroy the young woman’s idyllic fantasy of her mother and the reputations of both women. The potential recognition tokens of their shared name, Margaret, and the photo of Lady Windermere’s mother (the only thing of her mother’s she has) will not reveal Lady Windermere’s parentage. Wilde thus inverts the recognition plot, so that secrets are kept instead of revealed, and in doing so, rejects the superficiality of the recognition plot. In Wilde’s plays and philosophy, there is an awareness that not all secrets can or should be re-

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99 See Chapter 1, note 54.

100 See Kuiper (1938) and Sewart (1974) for possible reconstructions of Apollodorus’ play.
revealed. Terence also breaks with tradition and thwarts recognition, keeping identity from becoming general knowledge.\textsuperscript{101}

The characters of both plays must bury their guilt and secrets: Lady Windermere never learns why her husband gave Mrs. Erlynne so much money, and Lord Windermere never learns how nearly his wife betrayed him. In order to spare Lady Windermere, Mrs. Erlynne must accept the revulsion of Lord Windermere for something she did not do. The mothers of Pamphilus and Philumena are blamed for their children’s troubles, and must swallow the truth and their indignation, in order to hide the scandal of the rape from the fathers.\textsuperscript{102}

But like Bacchis and Pamphilus in \textit{Hecyra}, Mrs. Erlynne and Lord Windermere share a secret. They agree to keep their dealings hidden: Lord Windermere will not tell Lady Windermere that Mrs. Erlynne is her mother, Mrs. Erlynne will abide by the terms of her arrangement with Lord Windermere (to take money and leave). Pamphilus does not want the world to know everything at the end, as is usually the case in comedy:

\begin{quote}
neque opus est. adeo muttito. placēt non fieri hoc itidem ut in co-
moedis omnia ōmnes ubi resciscunt. hic quos par fuerat resciscere
sciant; quos non autem aequomst scire neque resciscen neque sci-
ent.

\textit{(Hec. 865-68)}
\end{quote}

There’s no need to [tell], not even a whisper. I don’t want what happens in comedies to happen here, where everybody finds out everything. In this case those who need to know known already; those who don’t must not find out or ever know.

Similarly, Mrs. Erlynne does not wish to play the contrite mother expected of melodrama, and so she will keep her secrets: “Oh, don’t imagine I am going to have a pathetic scene with her, weep on her neck and tell her who I am, and all that sort of thing. I have no ambition to play the part

\textsuperscript{101} On thwarted or flawed recognition scenes in Terence, see Anderson (2000, 2002).

\textsuperscript{102} See McGarrity (1980/1981) and Slater (1988).
of a mother” [IV.222-25]. She goes on, “Don’t let us talk any more about it—as for telling my daughter who I am, that I do not allow. It is my secret, not yours” (IV.279-81).

Terence and Wilde highlight the hypocrisy of the upper class and the lengths to which people will go to defend the moral strictures of their society, as well as the double standards practiced by it. Wilde was well aware of the social conventions that forced women to retain the blame for perceived moral lapses (both in antiquity and his own day). By making Mrs. Erlynne keep her secrets, he nods at those conventions—but he also bucks tradition by saving her anyway. Instead of condemning her to obscurity, Wilde rewards her for helping her daughter by marrying her off to a wealthy bachelor. Terence too ensures Bacchis’ safety for helping Pamphilus and Philumena, providing her with the patronage of Pamphilus’ father.
CHAPTER 3: SUCCESSFUL RECOGNITION PLOTS

“Strange, that we knew so little about ourselves, and that our most intimate personality was concealed from us!”

(Wilde, The Portrait of Mr. W. H.)

In most, if not all, of his prose works, Oscar Wilde is preoccupied with identity, the self, and the individual’s role in relation to his society. These issues are central to his interest in critiquing his contemporary world on stage. Each of his Society Plays explores elements of these themes, and Wilde’s constant rumination on identity and the individual recognition of identity, as well as the concealed self has prompted many scholars to look to his personal life (his homosexuality in particular) for possible inspirations or motivations for his creations;¹ but autobiographical reading underestimates Wilde’s philosophical mind and vast study of literature. While his interest in the subject of identity and the concealed self is clear in his works, what has not been noticed is how extensively his understanding of identity is informed by Classical antiquity. We should include ancient new comedy in the list of Wilde’s literary influences in his reading of identity, as the issue of identity and the importance of belonging to the social group permeate nearly all ancient new comedies.

In the previous chapter we saw how Wilde interacted with the “problem play” of his own time and with the dramas of the ancient playwrights examining aspects of morality and sexual double standards. We turn now to his interest in a popular plot device of ancient comedy, the “recognition plot.” There is no question that Wilde employed a great many sources and had many influences in his writing; he was an active, voracious reader and playgoer, and he absorbed what he read and saw like a sponge. He was known to his contemporaries and modern scholars as an anthologist (if one was feeling generous) or a plagiarist (if one was not). Wilde himself claimed, with his trademark irony, “Of course I plagiarize. It is the privilege of the appreciative man…All the best Hundred Books bear my signature in this manner.” But in “The Critic as Artist” he also established that any art is a jumping-off point for a new interpretation of that art, one that reflects the interpreter (the critic) more so than the original work and creates something new. And so with his Society plays, Wilde adapted the ancient plays he read and made them his own.

Although Restoration comedy, the French “well-made” play, and Victorian melodrama played a large part in influencing Wilde’s plots and characters, as I noted in Chapter 1, the evidence that he engaged directly with New Comedy is too compelling to ignore: there are many parallels in plotting, characterization, and philosophy. While I claim that Wilde was directly inspired by New Comedy, he was no more slavishly dedicated to the recreation of his models than were Plautus or Terence to Menander. Instead, he thought carefully about the ancient texts and adapted their characters, plots, and elements in new ways. Many of these elements were learned directly at school in his Classics studies, while some were passed down through the dramatic tradition. Restoration comedy and the “well-made” plays of France were certainly influenced by the

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2 Danson (1997: 88).

3 Ellmann (1988: 376), citing a conversation between Wilde and Max Beerbohm (Letters to Reggie Turner [1964: 86]).
dramatic inheritance of ancient comedy in the West, but Wilde had direct exposure to the source of those traditions, through the fragments of Menander, and the plays of Plautus and Terence (and Victorian scholarship and monographs on these authors).

Ancient drama employed a number of “types”—characters with easily identifiable accouterments and characterization readily accessible by the audience—which could be used and adapted to suit the purposes of the playwright. Wilde rejected “types” and categorization in drama, and in his Society Plays he set about undermining the conventions of characterization almost as soon as he had begun to employ them.\textsuperscript{4} Good/evil, manly/womanly: such dichotomies limited the playwright and prevented him from engaging with nuanced views of personality, morality, and the individual’s role in society. Wilde rejected tidy categorizations, and used “types” as jumping-off points for new interpretations of them.\textsuperscript{5} Instead of adapting characters and plots wholesale, Wilde provides an interpretation of the ancient model. A main tenet of Wildean philosophy was the development of the self and ever-evolving identity. For Wilde, identity is becoming, not being. How can we then reconcile ancient and Wildean engagement with “identity?”

The answer lies in the progression of “type” and “identity” as a plot device in Plautus and Terence. Both authors adapted and reinvented what “identity” and “recognition” meant for them, their plays, and the fictive societies they created in response to their own. By investigating Menander’s take on the recognition plotline, we can see the ways in which Plautus and Terence deviate from their model. A very general dichotomy can be observed in recognition comedies of

\textsuperscript{4} For a thoughtful analysis of Wilde’s characters and characterizations, see R. Cave (1997). On his use and simultaneous mockery of “types” see Jackson (1997: 172-73).

\textsuperscript{5} Kiberd (1994) cogently summarizes Wilde’s rejection of “types” and considers how Wilde’s identity as an Irishman living among English Society informs his iconoclastic dramatic creations.
Menander, Plautus, Terence, and Wilde: the recognition plot device is used as a ludic strategy for exploration of the self, or as an attempt to reintegrate and restore a broken society. Menander portrays successful recognition comedies in which society was reintegrated. By the end of the play, wealth is spread around through the marriage of an impoverished girl to a wealthy boy, families (particularly fathers and sons) are restored, and young men are allowed to take part in Athenian citizen society. These plays were presented with sincerity, and the emotional reunions of lost daughters or sons with their natal families were staged earnestly.

Plautus, while also staging successful recognition plays, rejected the “sincere” model established by Menander. Uninterested in confessions of love or tearful family reunions, Plautus suppressed the emotional elements of Menander and focused instead on the errors and amusing coincidences that drove the recognition plot. A missing boy or girl was a pretext for plotting by the servus callidus or comedic interplay resulting from mistaken identity. Much is made about “identity” and the seriousness of restoring it, but all the time the playwright rejects indulgence in the themes that necessitate that seriousness. Marriage is a second or third thought, restoration of society is merely a side effect of resolution (a lack of identity is symbolic of a flawed society, but Plautus is not interested in healing that society or even pointing out its flaws beyond the obvious), and restored “identity” is merely a means to an end.

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7 Heap (1998) and Sommerstein (1998). Lape (2004a: 23) asserts, “Menander’s romantic comedies are thoroughly homosocial: that is, the citizen’s love for a woman operates to produce and strengthen bonds between men rather than between men and women.”
Terence in turn rejected ludic play with the recognition plot, and returned to the sincere model of Menander, with his own purposes and results. By staging flawed or unsuccessful recognition comedies, Terence highlights the flaws in his own society. His recognition scenes are flawed or subverted because the society he depicts is hypocritical, families are deceitful, and fathers are cruel or ignorant. When characters hide important aspects of themselves, or attempt to suppress others from developing, they stifle both character and the restoration of their broken society. Terence’s plays end on bittersweet notes, at best.

Wilde staged both successful and unsuccessful recognitions, adapting the Plautine and Terentian exploration of the recognition plot. For Wilde, “recognitions” are formal dramatic devices that symbolize internal issues of identity. Identity, the self, is not stable, but fluid and ever-changing, or ought to be, according to Wildean philosophy. Identity in the traditional sense, that is, one’s place in the family or society, is a starting point, but should not be an end point: recognitions succeed when characters are not limited in their perceptions of themselves and continue to develop (or at least show the promise of it) after natal identity is restored, as in The Importance of Being Earnest. Flawed or failed recognitions are symptoms of failed self-understanding. Characters who are staunch in their socially-defined moral values and their ideas of the innate, unchanging self can go only so far with a recognition. Indeed, the recognition will fail altogether, as in Lady Windermere’s Fan, or change circumstances without changing self-understanding, as in A Woman of No Importance.

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8 Terence was alone in the stylistic tradition of the in Roman palliatae for rejecting ludic play in his dramas, as convincingly argued by J. Wright (1974).
Wilde saw the ancient new comic plays as drama and as received text. Ancient enthusiasts of Menander, Plautus, and Terence felt that the plays represented life accurately and had valuable things to say about contemporary middle-class life. Looking back on these plays today, we find it hard to see the “realism” at work in the material. Wilde interrogated the New Comic plays available to him: he saw the material as not only stageable, but also as a productive way of exploring social and moral issues. As we saw in Chapter 1, Wilde’s tutors considered the material frivolous and not worth studying. Wilde saw the fun in New Comedy, but his interrogation of the genre also allowed him to explore the more serious issues of New Comedy: by drawing attention to various aspects present, but overlooked or underrated, Wilde encourages readers to appreciate the nuance in New Comedy that can be missed in a cursory reading or viewing.

Wilde’s problematizing of “identity” is a useful comparandum for looking at identity in Plautus and Terence. Reading Wilde into ancient comedy offers a fresh way to re-examine the successful or flawed recognitions in ancient comedy beyond their constituent elements or the Aristotelian precepts on *peripeteia*. With Wilde’s standards of character development and self-understanding as well as the rejection of the static self in mind, we can reconsider nuances of character in Menander, Plautus, and Terence, reconsider the behavior of all involved characters throughout the recognition process, and investigate the ways “identity” plays a different role in their individual lives. In particular, reading Wilde’s philosophy of personal development in *Earnest* encourages us to return to *Menaechmi* and consider the effects of false identity and the stifling consequences for development of selfhood that erroneous or ill-fitting identity has, as well as the freedom for development that recognition of family identity can bring.
In turn, reading the ancient comedies, charting the individual aspects of the recognition plot and how they turn out in each playwright’s work, and examining what the recognition plot meant to each author allows us to put Wilde into the progression of the “recognition” plot, and we are encouraged to trace the pedigree of this aspect of ancient comedy through his plays. Wilde crafted himself as an inheritor of tradition, not a victim of biographical processes. Here, with Wilde’s experimentation with the recognition plot, we find yet another influential source for Wilde’s work, and a new dynamic for appreciating his writing process.

Although Wilde did not have any large fragments of Menander from which to work, there were over two thousand lines of Menander extant, numerous monographs on him, a variety of discussions in his tutors’ work, and the tradition of Menander in the Roman comic playwrights’ work, as established in Chapter 1. The extent to which Wilde tried to adapt Menander’s fragments cannot be known, but I hope to show that he did engage with the tradition of the recognition comedy in his own works, by drawing Menander’s legacy and on Plautus and Terence in his approach to drama. Because there is no single work that surveys “recognition” from Menander to Terence, I have done so here in Chapters 3 and 4. I hope to establish the basic elements of the recognition play set out in Menander and his contemporaries (early separation from family and society group, couples torn apart by mistaken identity, recognition tokens, reunions, reintegration of the individual into the family, the re-establishment of the proper ordering of that society), and the ways in which the Roman playwrights adapted, adhered to, or deviated from this pattern to explore issues important to their dramatic programs.

Finally, this study allows us to see how Wilde inherited the tradition of the “recognition comedy” and adapted it to explore his own society and his personal philosophies. In Chapter 3 I

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9 The stress and shock of prison, however, had Wilde vacillating between “agent and author of influences and his writing process” and “victim of his circumstances” in De Profundis.
will explore the “successful” recognition comedies of Menander and Plautus and examine the ways in which Wilde adapts and interacts with this type of recognition comedy in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. In Chapter 4 I will turn to the flawed or unsuccessful recognition plots in Terence and Wilde’s *Lady Windermere’s Fan* and *A Woman of No Importance*. Throughout, I will attempt to look at the ancient comedies with Wilde’s philosophy of identity in mind: to what extent did the playwrights consider identity a static or dynamic aspect, and how did their interpretations of the recognition plot adhere to or reject the general model of the recognition comedy? Wilde, as we shall see, is particularly adept at considering the ramifications of the identity plot on characters other than the protagonist, and so I will pay special attention to how the ancient playwrights explore this aspect of the identity play in their comedies: who benefits from the recognition of a lost child? How are other members of the family affected? When attempts are made to stifle recognition, who benefits and why? How does the recognition plot differ depending on the gender of the missing child? In the Wilde section, we will see how he employed ancient elements of the recognition plot surveyed here in his own plays, and how he adapted them to suit his philosophy, style, and program.

*Overview of Recognition Comedies*

It is safe to say that Menander used the recognition plot device, *anagnorisis*, frequently. Kidnapped girls are discovered by their parents, young men discover convenient citizenship that allows them to marry the girls they desire, and abandoned babies turn out to be citizens of good families. Eight of Plautus’ twenty-one comedies involve hidden identities, long-lost children,
and recognition. Five of Terence’s six comedies use this plot type (see the chart below, with genders of the identified persons indicated).

I define “recognition comedies” as those involving hidden identity that is resolved at some point in the play by the revelation of the hidden identity to at least one person in the play. In ancient new comedy, identity can be obscured in a variety of ways. Babies are exposed at birth, to be rescued by pimps, kindly prostitutes, or neighbors looking for free labor. Children are misplaced during natural disasters or shipwrecks. In some cases they are kidnapped during wartime. These children will be saved from slavery, prostitution, or poverty by the existence of “tokens,” little items that may reveal their parentage. In a few instances, children are given up to other families to be raised because of poverty or the death of a parent. Other comedies involve hidden identity involving rape—women are the victims of sudden, violent, anonymous rape by drunken young men in the dark of night at festivals. In these cases one party has stolen an item from the other that will reveal identities later in the play, and the recognition will be of the rapist or the girl, and the parentage of the baby that inevitably results from rape.

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Though the section of Aristotle’s *Poetics* discussing comedy is lost, scholars base their examinations of recognition comedies on his descriptions of *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis* in tragedy. T. Cave (1990) provides an extensive survey of *anagnorisis* in ancient tragedy and traces the plot device through Renaissance, Shakespearean, and Victorian literature. Notably absent, however, is a discussion of recognition in ancient comedy, or an examination of the recognition plot in Wilde, though he is quoted on the cover of the book and in the introduction.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Recognition</th>
<th>Menander</th>
<th>Plautus</th>
<th>Terence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>male</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accidentally lost children</td>
<td>Misoumenos Sikyonioi</td>
<td>Captivi Menaechmi Vidularia</td>
<td>Eunuchus Andria</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Plautus' only play including both male and female recognition. For a plausible reconstruction of <em>Vidularia</em>, see Dér (1987) and de Melo (2013: 387-95).</td>
<td>Phormio</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abandoned children</td>
<td>Epitrepones</td>
<td>Truculentus</td>
<td>Heauton Timoroumenos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children given to good</td>
<td>Perikeiromene Sikyonioi Hieriea</td>
<td>Perikeiromene Phasma</td>
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<tr>
<td>homes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unidentified rapist</td>
<td>Epitrepones Georgos Heros</td>
<td>Georgos Heros</td>
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11 Sex of lost or unidentified child.

12 *Vidularia* appears to have a double recognition of a young man and woman. The play is too fragmentary to comment further, but it seems to be Plautus’ only play including both male and female recognition. For a plausible reconstruction of *Vidularia*, see Dér (1987) and de Melo (2013: 387-95).

13 In *Epidicus*, as in *Misoumenos*, the girl is lost as a teenager. Her mother knows who the father is, but Telestis and her father have never met in person.

14 Callicles’ daughter has been raped by her fiancée Diniarchus, gives birth, and gives the child to Syra, the hired hairdresser (who is also slave to Phronesium’s family) to take away. She and her mother attempted to keep the secret from Callicles, but he tortures his slaves to discover it (796-809). In both *Truculentus* and *Hecyra*, the abandoned boy does not get far before his identity is discovered. In *Truculentus*, the slaves are all aware of the child’s identity and that of the rapist, so the boy is not at risk for long. In *Hecyra*, the women have not yet been able to abandon the child at all before discovery.

15 This play is known through a papyrus containing summaries of Menander plays in alphabetical order. Either the priestess has been raped, or she was married but her husband left her, and she gave away her son to a neighbor to be raised. Gomme & Sandbach (1973: 694-95) suggests that the former is more likely, while Körte (and Webster [1974: 149] following him) argues for the latter.

16 Plautus has two plays in which a young woman is raped and (1) becomes pregnant (*Aulularia*), or (2) has given birth (*Truculentus*), but in both the father of the child is known to the woman (i.e. not stranger-rape).
In ancient comedy, recognition comedies frequently illuminate gendered relations among families and highlight the differences in the particular vulnerability of the sexes. Misplaced girls outnumber the misplaced boys of Roman comedy, while in Menander’s comedies both sexes are equally at risk. In Roman comedy, boys generally go missing by means of some kind of terrible misfortune—an earthquake at a festival (Menaechmi) or kidnapping (Captivi)—while girls are more often misplaced through exposure (Casina), a practice by which undesired children, particularly superfluous girls, could be removed from the household. In historical ancient Greece and Rome, a parent or slave would leave a newborn child at a spot in the city designated for such deposits, where it would either die, or be collected by a slaver, pimp, or family looking for future unpaid labor. In the world of sentimental ancient comedy and tragedy, the child also could be adopted.

In several ancient comedies, women become pregnant and are forced by their husband to give up the female children, as girls were less desirable to a family line than boys. The high number of misplaced girls in Roman comedy seems to be a carryover from Greek historical practices,\(^{17}\) as superfluous girls were not a Roman problem. The source of upper-class Roman wealth was different, inheritance laws differed, and cultural sexual relations were at odds with Greek values. As a result, girls were unlikely to be exposed in Rome simply for being girls.\(^{18}\) The endangered girl is therefore more a literary feature than a historical one, but she appears so frequently in Roman comedy because she inspired sympathy from Roman audiences, who under-

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\(^{17}\) But this practice does not show up in Menander’s plays, as the chart indicates. On the discrepancy between Greek historical and dramatic practice regarding the vulnerability of citizen girls, see James (n.d.).

\(^{18}\) On the exposure of infants in Greece and Rome, particularly girls, see Golden (1981), Patterson (1985), and W. Harris (1994), some of the most recent in a long line of scholarly debate over the practice. Exposure of infants was a common practice in new comedy for dramatic practices, but hardly quotidian in Greek and Roman society, as Patterson notes.
stood the vulnerable sexual position of an unmarried citizen girl. An unprotected girl could be ruined in a moment, rendering her unmarriageable for the rest of her life. Thus she was an object of anxiety to parents, potential parents, and marriageable males.\(^\text{19}\) Audiences could enjoy the poignant position of the endangered girl and appreciate even more her salvation, resulting in marriage, in the course of the play.

The return of a missing child affects members of its natal family differently. Mothers are overjoyed at the return of a daughter, especially when they had suffered terrible anxiety throughout the play while searching for her (see, e.g., Philippa of \textit{Epidicus}, Phanostrata of \textit{Cistellaria}, Sostrata of \textit{HT}, and the unseen Daedalis of \textit{Rudens}, whose delighted shrieks are evidently heard from off-stage). Some fathers are pleased to find daughters whom they had long hoped to locate (e.g., Daemones of \textit{Rudens}, Chremes of \textit{Andria}, Kichesias in \textit{Sikyonioi}), while others view newfound daughters as a mixed blessing (Chremes of \textit{HT}): a missing child returns to the family, but brings the expense of a dowry and the need to marry her off immediately (Krateia in \textit{Misoumenos}, Glykera in \textit{Perikeiromene}, Palaestra in \textit{Rudens}, Antiphila in \textit{HT}). Brothers are threatened with a diminished inheritance (Clitipho in \textit{HT}), and in three plays are robbed of the object of their sexual interest (Moschion of \textit{Perikeiromene}, Therapontigonus of \textit{Curculio}, and Stratippocles of \textit{Epidicus}). Slaves benefited greatly from a child’s return if they played a role in her recovery, often earning their freedom and monetary rewards (Trachalio of \textit{Rudens}, the titular \textit{Epidicus}). Male babies bring families together, often reuniting a raped young woman with her rapist, a young man of a good family to legitimize the child (e.g., \textit{Epitrepontes}, \textit{Hecyra}, \textit{Samia},

\(^\text{19}\) See James (forthcoming 2014) on this subject.
Adult males will come into wealth and excitement without the inconvenience of a stern, now-deceased father (Menaechmi), avoid the debt of their foster family while earning the privileges of a superior citizenship (Stratophanes of Sikyonioi), or be reunited with a beloved (but otherwise childless) father from whom they will inherit (as must be the case in Heros, Hiereia, Georgos).

**Euripides’ Ion**

The recognition scene can be found in nascent form in Euripides’ Ion, the tragi-comic precursor to the New Comic genre. In this play, Creusa, daughter of Erechtheus, was raped by Apollo and bore a son, Ion, whom she abandoned; Ion was raised instead by the priestess of Delphi. By the end of the play, Apollo tricks Creusa’s husband Xuthus into thinking he is the father, thereby hiding Apollo’s own crime, and ensuring that his son will inherit power and wealth. The recognition comes about in a convoluted way. Creusa and Xuthus travel to Delphi to seek a cure for their childlessness. The oracle tells Xuthus that the first person he encounters after stepping outside the temple will be his son. Encountering a young man, Xuthus names him Ion (“the one coming”), and assumes he is a by-blow from a particularly wild night at a Bacchic festival. He

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20 On rape as a means of circumventing socio-economic inequality, breaking the lines of wealth in society (wealthy son of good family marries girl of good but poor family), see Lape (2001, 2004a).

21 This last pattern is particularly Menandrian, as he was most interested in the restoration of the father-son relationship in his comedies, using the marriage plot as a means to explore not the love relationship between young man and beloved, but to reintegrate the family group through the resolution of tension between father and son. On this relationship, see Heap (1998) and Lape (2010). See also Grant (1986).

22 Several scholars have noted Euripides’ influence on Menander. See Andrewes (1924), Katsouris (1975), and Arnott (1986). See also Scafuro (1990) on Euripides’ rape and recognition plots.
will bring Ion back to Athens and make him his heir. Creusa is made to think she is being betrayed by her husband and his bastard son, and tries to kill Ion with poison. Failing, she is hunted by a mob of Delphinians and takes refuge at the temple. While she waits there, the temple priestess brings Ion the cradle in which he was found. Seeing the cradle, Creusa realizes that Ion is not Xuthus’ illegitimate son, but her own. Ion, skeptical, asks her to name the tokens in the basket. By these tokens of recognition—some weaving with a Gorgon pattern, a golden necklace in the shape of snakes, and an undying garland of leaves—Creusa proves her relationship to Ion (1412-34). They embrace, and Athena appears to speak for Apollo: the god is indeed Ion’s father, but no one should tell Xuthus. Ion gains Athenian citizenship and a family, and he will rule the people.

The convoluted nature of the plot, Ion’s constant misunderstandings, Creusa’s misguided murder attempt, Xuthus’ obliviousness, and Apollo’s chagrined refusal to appear (asking Hermes and Athena to explain the situation for him) provide humor and a prototype for the ridiculously complicated scenarios in ancient New Comedy. Apollo, a terrifying deity and some-time rapist, is too embarrassed to take responsibility for the problems he caused, so he manipulates events to avoid dealing with the problem of Ion’s parentage directly. To save face, he sends emissaries, refusing to step in even when mother and son are about to kill one another.

The poor orphan, the quick turnaround from strife to affection, and the tidy resolution (bookended by explanations by the gods) are all recognizable elements of New Comedy, as are the anxious mother and bamboozled father. The characters and events, however, take place firmly within the realm of Greek mythology: gods, kings, queens, and semi-divine children involved in rape, murder, royal succession, and oracles. By the time New Comedy develops in the Hellenistic period, these elements will give way to the middle-class citizen family and its concerns,
hopes, and fears. The recognition play, with its layered misunderstandings and stock element of recognition tokens, would become a staple of the New Comic genre. The recognition scene, in which a long-lost citizen child is reintegrated into the family, the community, and the citizenry, was satisfying for ancient audiences.

The importance of such a scene is lost on audiences without a keen understanding of ancient social dynamics. In modern drama, if an orphan child recovers his parents, the focus is on the emotional ramifications of identity (are they the same person? transformed?), family, and integration, but legal and social consequences are largely unimportant to such plots. In the ancient world, citizenship and status determined every aspect of life: one’s livelihood, marital prospects, political involvement, religious participation, and social status were determined by blood identity.\(^{23}\) To be unaware of or cut off from one’s family, without concrete proof of citizenship in a time without public records, when only longstanding family connections could prove one’s identity, caused complete alienation from social life. The restoration of such a person was a powerful dramatic act and very satisfying to ancient audiences.

**Identity Crises: Recognition in New Comedy**

*Menander*

Of Menander’s extant plays, a significant number feature recognition plots, evenly split along gender lines. Unlike his Roman successors, Menander combines male/female recognition plots, and these plots allow us to see the stark differences in “identity,” its benefits, and its rami-

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\(^{23}\) See Fantham (1975), J. Gardner (1986), Just (1991), Lape (2004a), and Levick (2012), to name only a very few, on social and legal status in the ancient world.
fications for men and women in ancient society.\textsuperscript{24} Most often, from what can be ascertained from extant texts of Menander, the alienated character is an adult, not a child, who must be identified. While the consequences of not having a family identity are ultimately the same for both children and adults, the sympathies of the audience may be touched in different ways by presenting one or the other. Infants run the risk of early death following abandonment, and the ancient audience can feel distraught for the child unfairly dispossessed of his birthright (because when infants are to be recognized in the course of a play, they are always male children, never female, resulting from rape).\textsuperscript{25} A different kind of sympathy is at work for the adult, who is recognized by the audience to have only limited knowledge of the one thing in the world he should know: himself.

It would appear that audience sympathies treat women differently, and that viewers were willing to extend a sense of complete vulnerability beyond puberty. As a result, abandoned babies who are recovered as children or infants in Greek and Roman comedy are always male, never female. This stricture stems from the nature of that child’s production, and the integration necessary to resolve the plot. Abandoned babies in New Comedy nearly always result from rape (only in Terence’s \textit{Heauton Timoroumenos} and Plautus’ \textit{Casina} is a married woman forced to abandon her child, but the recognition happens after the child was grown up). To resolve the plot, the rapist must marry his victim, as this is her only option for marriage after the violation of her purity through rape. Rape victims always become pregnant from their rape, and this pregnancy will ensure the marital union of the two parents. A male child is necessary to cement this union: a male heir links the two families and ensures the continuation of the male line. Female

\textsuperscript{24} Menander dramatized social patterns that were naturalized to his society; though he did not necessarily intend to write social critiques of his society, he nevertheless dramatized norms that we find problematic.

\textsuperscript{25} As in Men. \textit{Epit.} and \textit{Sam.}; Plaut. \textit{Truc.}; and Ter. \textit{Hec.}
children were less desirable to Greek families generally, and would not necessarily ensure a union. Thus unidentified babies must be male, while unidentified adults could be of either sex. Unidentified adult females could be used in the comic plot to generate sympathy and provide the obstacle for the plot: a young man wants to marry the girl, but is prevented by her unknown parentage. If he cannot protect her, she risks poverty or prostitution. Adults, male and female, evoke another type of sympathy than the male babies discussed above: unfair enslavement (debt-bondage in Heros), poverty (Georgos), separation from a beloved (Stratophanes of Sik.), forced concubinage (Peri., Mis.), all encourage the audience to recognize the vicissitudes of life for displaced citizens, and to appreciate the benefits of family and social integration.\(^{26}\)

**Epitrepontes**

In Epitrepontes (see plot summary in Appendix B) we see the sole recognition of a male infant in Menander’s extant plays.\(^{27}\) In this play there has been an exposure of a child in order to hide a pre-marital rape and pregnancy from Pamphile’s husband, who, upon learning of the rape, cannot accept a wife who has been sexually compromised.\(^{28}\) To Charisios’ credit, he is conflicted about his distaste for his wife’s misfortunes. He has taken into his home a harp-girl, Habrotonon, whom he has hired from a pimp, but he will not have sex with her. After he is led to believe that he himself is a rapist (he mistakenly thinks he raped and fathered a child on Habrotonon be-

\(^{26}\) The forced prostitution and sexual abuse of lost daughters who have become slaves would have been a social reality in ancient Greece, but it is invisible in extant Menander. See James (n.d.).

\(^{27}\) In Samia, the girl Plangon knows her rapist, and he wishes to marry her to legitimize the child. Her mother and the neighbor Chrysis are also aware of the child’s parentage. Thus the child need not be “recognized” in the course of the play.

\(^{28}\) Odgen (1997: 29-32).
fore hiring her), he berates himself for being a hypocrite (blaming his wife for violence done to her, when he has similarly ruined the life of another girl) and curses his own terrible actions as a rapist (878-925). 29 Ironically, Charisios is a rapist, just not Habronon’s, having raped his own wife before they were married. Although Charisios’ self-awareness and shame are unusual for ancient comedy, the events leading up to the abandonment of the child are not. With events established to alienate the child, the playwright can work towards reestablishing the baby as the son and heir of Charisios. Such plays generally feature a crucial scene in which the child is recognized as the mother’s by means of tokens, and the rape plot is resolved with the identity of the rapist revealed as the father of the child. Here Menander divides the action of the scenes, establishing an arbitration scene in which the tokens are named, but postponing the identification of the mother and father, while subdividing those scenes further. 30

The token scene (238-376) in Epitrepontes is one of the earliest extant in Greek New Comedy. Daos the shepherd found the abandoned baby, and gave it to a neighbor slave and his wife. Daos kept the tokens, however, robbing the baby of his birthright. Syros, the adoptive father, wants to make a public case, and they call upon Smikrines to decide the matter (238-39). Ironically, Smikrines is the baby’s grandfather, and in this scene he unwittingly decides the fate of his own blood relation. Daos argues that the finder should keep the tokens as a reward for a good deed, while Syros claims that the tokens should belong to the baby to guard his future prospects (338-340). In his speech, Syros highlights the importance of identity tokens. Without

29 See Konstan (1995: 145-51) for the view that Charisios’ real source of shame is less rape than fathering an illegitimate child. He now deals with the consequences of producing a nothos (bastard), and so he can better appreciate his wife’s plight.

30 A number of scholars have dedicated chapters to each of Menander’s plays. For the recognition plot in Epitrepontes, see Goldberg (1980: 59-71). For gender in the play, see Konstan (1995: 141-52), and on women specifically, see Traill (2008: 177-244). On the sexual double standard in Epitrepontes, see Lape (2010: 69-76).
public records, only unique items linking mother and child can safeguard proof of the relationship. He also cites mythological cases in which recognition tokens helped famous gods and kings to avoid terrible wrong and to realize their birthrights.

teθέσαι τραγωδούς, οἴδ' ὅτι, και ταύτα κατέχεις πάντα. Νηλέα τινὰ Πελιάν τ' ἐκείνους εὑρὲ πρεσβύτης ἄνηρ αἰτόλος, ἔχων οἶαν ἔγω νῦν διφθέραν, ὡς δ' ἤσθετ' αὐτοὺς ὄντας αὐτοῦ κρείττονας, λέγει τὸ πράγμ', ὡς εὑρέν, ὡς ἄνειλετο. ἐδωκε δ' αὐτοῖς πηρίδιον γνωρισμάτων, εξ οὔ μαθόντες πάντα τὰ καθ' αὐτοὺς σαφῶς ἐγένοντο βασιλεῖς οἱ τότ' ὄντες αἰτόλοι. εἰ δ' ἐκλαμβὼν ἐκείνα Δάος ἀπέδωτο, αὐτός ἴνα κερδάνει δραχμὰς δώδεκα, ἀγνώτες ἄν τὸν πάντα διετέλουν χρόνον οἱ τηλικούτοι καὶ τοιούτοι τῶν γένει.

οὔ δὴ καλῶς ἔχει τὸ μὲν σὼμι ἐκτρέφειν ἐμὲ τούτο, τὴν [δὲ] τούδ' τῆς σωτηρίας ἐξελπίδα λαβόντα Δάον ἀφανίσαι, πάτερ. γαμόν ἀδελφὴν τῆς διὰ γνωρίσματα ἐπέσχε, μητέρ' ἐντυχὼν ἔρρυσατο, ἐσῳ' ἀδελφὸν. ὅντ' ἐπισφαλῇ φύσει τὸν βίον ἀπάντων τῆι προνοία δεῖ, πάτερ, τηρεῖν, πρὸ πολλοῦ ταῦθ' ὀρῶντ' εξ ὧν ἔνι.

(Epit. 325-45)

You have been to the plays, I’m sure, and know all that—those heroes like Neleus and Pelias, discovered by an aged goatherd with a jerkin just like mine now. When he noticed that they were his betters, he revealed their story, how he’d found and picked them up. He handed them a pouch of keepsakes, and from that these boys, then goatherds, truly learnt their history in full, and so turned into kings. If Daos though, had taken these tokens, selling them to gain twelve drachmas for himself, men of such splendid birth would have remained unknown forever! **It’s not fair that I should tend this infant’s body, sir, while Daos grabs his prospect of escape, and smashes it!** One man avoided marrying his sister through tokens, one man found his mother and saved her, a third his brother. **Nature, sir, makes human life precarious. One must guard it with foresight, and forestall events by all means possible.**
Smikrines, judging Syros right, decrees that the child should have what belongs to him (353-54). Daos goes off empty-handed, and the audience breathes a sigh of relief that the child’s safety and identity will be protected until proper recognition can be made. Menander takes pains to establish the uniqueness of the objects, as they must be recognizable enough to the parents to determine the identity of the child. Syros notes (384-90) a scrawny cock (rooster charm) set with precious stones, an axe (probably a small charm in the shape of an axe), a gilt iron ring with a stone carved with a bull or a goat on top, fashioned by the artist Kleostratos, as well as a torque and crimson cloth (404-405). The specificity of the ring, as well as the combination of objects, will identify the child to his mother should he ever find her again. The resolution of the plot will turn on the ring.

In order for a recognition scene to take place, the tokens must be brought to the attention of the child’s parents. Here the slave Onesimos acts as an intermediary for the recognition of the baby. Coming across Syros showing the tokens to his wife, he recognizes the ring as the property of his master Charisios (393), and argues that it should be taken to his master immediately, as it proves (having been found with an abandoned infant) that Charisios fathered a baby on some unknown girl, likely by force (445-50). He recalls that the ring was lost at the Tauropolia (450-57), and “rape at the festival” was apparently such a well-known occurrence—at least in ancient comedies—that events could be correctly conjectured.31 Once the child is partially identified, his

31 Of all the rapes/seductions with details, festivals feature prominently; with one exception (Terence’s Eunuchus) they happen at night. Women typically did not wander at night in ancient Greece and Rome, unless they were travelling to or from a festival, and indeed, there was significant male anxiety about what women did at these festivals—wine, sex, and women at festivals were a common fear, as can be noted in the stories about the Bacchanalia (Livy 39.8-18), the Bona Dea scandal (Cic. Att. 1.13; Plut. Caes. 9-10; Cass. Dio, Roman History 37.45 and Suet. Jul. 6.2 and 74.2), and the Thesmophoria (Ar., Thesm.). In Lysias 1 the unfaithful wife is said to have met her seducer at a funeral.
mother too must be found, so that the parents can be united for a proper citizen life. Habrotonon exclaims, “Ah! Poor thing! Well, if it really is your master’s baby, could you see it brought up as a slave? You’d merit death for that!” (αἳ, δόσιμος· ἕτε· εἰ τρόφιμος ὡντως ἐστί σου, / τρεφόμενον ὅψει τοῦτον ἐν δούλου μέρει, / κούκ ἃν δικαίως ἀποθάνοις; 468-70). The slaves Syros, Onesimos, and Habrotonon all highlight by their presence the importance of establishing the child’s identity. Without legitimation, he could end up a slave to Chairestratos, who owns Syros.\(^{32}\) The enslaved characters feel all the more the necessity of the child’s recognition because they suffer from the effects of non-citizen status themselves.

The recognition and restoration of a lost child has implications for the entire family group. The discovery of a child and its freeborn mother would be positive for the family inside the tidy confines of the drama, in which the mother will conveniently already be married to her rapist. In “real life,” such a convenient outcome was unlikely. Onesimos highlights the very real consequences that a wife could suffer, should she be childless and her husband father a male child on another woman:

\[

\begin{align*}
\text{νῦν ἐπισφαλὴ} \\
\text{tà πράγματ' ἐστὶ tà perì tήν κεκτημένην·}
\text{ταχέως ἐὰν γὰρ εὐρέθη πατρὸς κόρη}
\text{ἐλευθέρου μήτηρ τε τοῦ νῦν παιδίου}
\text{γεγονοῦτ', ἐκείνην λήψεται ταῦτην[}
\end{align*}
\]

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Rapes with locations: Men. \textit{Ep.}: Tauropolia, \textit{Sam.}: Adonia; Plaut. \textit{Aul.}: vigil for Ceres; \textit{Cist.}: Phanostrata was raped at the Dionysia in Sicyon, her lost daughter was seduced at the local Dionysia; Ter. \textit{Ad.} (darkness, love, wine, youthfulness, 470 [likely a festival]), \textit{Hec.} (darkness, wine, a girl alone in the street [likely at a festival], 822-28). For a survey of literary precedents for rape and seduction at the festival generally, and for the Tauropolia in \textit{Epitrepontes} and the Adonia in \textit{Samia} specifically, see Furley (2009) and Bathrellou (2012).

\(^{32}\) Had the child been female, she might have ended up like Habrotonon, owned by a pimp (a terrible fate). Habrotonon notes her dissatisfaction with her lot. She sees an alternative to seducing Charisios and takes it: she will provide the service of identifying the parentage of the child, in the hopes of gaining her freedom (538-49).
My mistress’ position is at risk now. If some girl is found, who’s both a free man’s daughter and the mother of this present child, he’ll marry her, and [by][divorcing] Gömistress [hope] to wriggle free of her domestic [contretemps (?)].

Trouble could arise even if the first wife had borne a son. Should the father choose to favor the new child, the inheritance of the first child is at risk. 34 Smikrines, before he learns that the child is his grandson and the mother is his own daughter, not Habrotonon, highlights the problems that arise when a man favors a mistress over a wife: two bills for the festivals, the waste of money, the neglect of the wife (waiting at home with dinner, while the mistress is picnicking with her husband, 749-59). He explains that it is impossible for a wife to compete with a whore—the latter knows all the tricks and how to turn them: “Pamphile, it’s hard, when you’re a lady born, to fight against a whore. She works more mischief, knows more tricks, she has no shame, she toadies more” (χαλεπόν, Παµφίλη, / ἐλευθέρα γυναικὶ πρὸς πόρνην μάχη· / πλείονα κακουργεῖ, πλείον’ οἶδ’, αἰσχύνεται / οὐδέν, κολακεύει μᾶλλον, 7 Körte-Thierfelder, 566 Kock). 35 His plea to Pamphile to leave her husband is echoed in Lord Darlington’s similar entreaty to Lady Windermere:

You would feel that the look in his eyes was false, his voice false, his touch false, his passion false.

33 Bracketed text indicates fragmentation or corruption of the source text and the editor’s reconstruction based on fragmentary lettering or context-based supposition.

34 Such was the case when the Athenian citizen Euctemon fell in love with the former sex worker Alce, and she convinced him to adopt her son and introduce him to Euctemon’s phratry as a citizen. Despite protests, he managed to bribe his legitimate sons to accept Alce’s children and the adoption, and would have succeeded, had his sons-in-law not protested the will after Euctemon’s death (Isaeus 6.17-24).

35 This fragment was extant when Wilde was constructing his Society Plays.
He would come to you when he was weary of others; you would have to comfort him. He would come to you when he was devoted to others; you would have to charm him. You would have to be to him the mask of his real life, the cloak to hide his secret.

(Fan II.258-65)

…In a week you will be driving with this woman in the Park. She will be your constant guest—your dearest friend.

(Fan II.312-14)

Fortunately for this Menandrian family, wife and mother are one and the same. The child’s place in society is saved, and in the process he saves his mother and father’s marriage. Charisios can be free of his guilt for abandoning his wife, because she is unsullied by another man and he can take her back (conveniently no longer having to deal with his conflicted conscience).36 Pamphile can reclaim her child and salvage her marriage (though one wonders how she feels upon learning that her husband is a violent rapist).37 Smikrines too feels the relief of the tidy resolution. After spending the play angry with Charisios for wasting Pamphile’s dowry on wine and an enslaved hetaira (134-37, 1065-66), and annoyed with his daughter for putting up with such treatment, he finally learns the truth, long after the rest of the characters, while haranguing Pamphile’s poor nurse. As punishment for his ill-temper during the resolution, Onesi-

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36 Shortly before he learns that Pamphile is the mother of his child, he says, “Look at me, the villain. I myself commit a crime like this, and am the father of a bastard child. Yet I felt not a scrap of mercy, showed none to that woman in the same sad fortune. I’m a heartless brute” (894-99). Charisios appears remorseful, or at least self-pitying. In 1980 when Menander’s Epitrepontes was resurrected on the Greek stage, the director Spyros Evangelatos interpreted Act IV in the style of Oscar Wilde, making Charisios melodramatic in his emotional fit. See Kiritsi (2014).

37 The rape was indeed violent: Habrotonon recalled Pamphile’s disheveled state when she returned to the party; her hair was a mess, she was crying, and her fine cloak was torn to shreds (486-90). On Habrotonon and the ventriloquizing of Pamphile’s rape, see H. Gardner (2012).
mos reminds him that Smikrines himself is to blame for the improper way in which Charisios’
heir came to be:

παχύδερμος ἦσθα καὶ σὺ, νοῦν ἔχειν δοκῶν.
oῦτως ἐτήρεις παῖδ᾿ ἐπίγαμον; τοιγαροῦν
tέρασιν ὄμιοι πεντάμην παιδία
ἐκτρέφομεν.

(Epit. 1114-17)

You were a blockhead, thought you were so smart!
Was that the way to guard a teen-age girl?
That’s why we’ve babies four months premature
to care for—freaks!

Though the child’s future was temporarily at risk, the child (and its parents’ marriage) suffers no
permanent damage. The child was saved by kindly slaves connected to the family, and was well
cared for until the resolution. In other plays, Menander will show the consequences of lost iden-
tity on adults, where the results have been long term and will continue to harm the dispossessed
children after their identification and reintegration into the familial group.

_Misoumenos_

Menander’s _Misoumenos_ (see plot summary in Appendix B) features another lost child,
this time an adult daughter displaced by war.³⁸ Separated from her father and brother, Krateia is
captured by the soldier Thrasonides, who is in love with her. Her supposed foreign status and
unknown parentage limit his options, so he takes her as concubine (that is, he bought her and
promised her freedom, made her his housekeeper, gave her slaves, jewelry, and clothes, and
treats her as a wife, 37-40).³⁹ Krateia makes do until she mistakenly concludes that Thrasonides

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³⁸ See E. Turner (1977), on the fragmentary beginning of _Misoumenos._

See also Sommerstein (2014a) on the characteristics of the _pallake_ (concubine).
has killed her brother in war. Meanwhile, her father Demeas is in town searching for her. Successful resolution turns on two features: Krateia’s identity and the truth of her brother’s death. We do not know how the brother’s mistaken death and return are explained, but Krateia’s recognition is preserved, as are the reactions from the other affected characters.

Formerly a virgin (707) protected by father and brother, Krateia has lost her freedom, personhood, and protection, and must either become Thrasonides’ concubine, or reject him and face a worse fate. She chose the former; he considered her his wife and was called her man (40, 707-09), but the “marriage” was not her decision, nor was it arranged by her father via the privilege of citizenship. The indignity of her situation would have been difficult to bear, but Krateia makes the best of her situation, because she has had no other choice. Thrasonides’ speech suggests that the discord in their relationship is “new,” the “polar opposite” of the way things have been (43-45), and that they had previously lived together as happily as circumstances allowed. Krateia can accept being Thrasonides’ concubine, but not being the “wife” of her brother’s killer. In rejecting him, an emotional rather than rational action (since he has treated her well, and is the only thing standing between her and a much worse fate), Krateia shows her true citizen nature—only free girls have the right to refuse.41

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40 If she treated Thrasonides with hostility consistently, Thrasonides likely would not have freed her and given Krateia the run of his house. Their relationship has been characterized as good by Thrasonides and Getas. Whether Thrasonides initially raped Krateia is a matter of conjecture. He notes that she was a virgin when he took possession of her, and he treated her well (707-09, 805). When she rejects him at the opening of the play, he does not storm the house and take her by force, as a rapist might (even though he “knows his rights” [9-10]). For the view that Krateia is a rape victim, see Marshall (2013).

41 Krateia’s status must be debated. Though Thrasonides suggests that he gave her freedom, she does not seem to have the right to leave him. Concubinage could have been a stipulation of her manumission, but it is uncertain if Thrasonides officially manumitted her. Indeed, her father seeks to pay her ransom, and Getas remarks that he would have refused to ransom her (715-18). See Traill (2008: 25-28).
Luckily for Krateia, her father Demeas—determined to ransom her, even though she is no longer marriageable—is not far behind her. Fragments of the recognition scene are preserved (609-39). Having gone to Thrasonides’ house to inquire about his son’s sword, Demeas is shocked to find his daughter at the door with her nurse. They exclaim, they embrace, and they explain to Getas the situation. Getas is initially suspicious, but accepts quickly the change in Krateia’s status. He remarks on the turmoil of war and how it brings changed situations, and then runs off to call Thrasonides.

Krateia’s re-established identity should be a boon for Thrasonides—he may now ask for permission to legally marry the girl—but the complication of her brother’s death remains a barrier. Neither Demeas or Krateia responds to his pleas for her hand, despite his argument that he has treated her well and with respect. Getas relates their conversation, calling Demeas and Krateia cold-blooded and hard for snubbing Thrasonides while he wept before them (685-723). Getas remarks that he would have refused to ransom the girl as punishment for the lack of reciprocity (715-18). Thus far, Krateia’s recognition is a disappointment for Thrasonides, a not-unlikely real-life outcome. In such cases, the captive’s parents might not have wished to leave a daughter with a captor, even if affective bonds had been formed. Within the tidy confines of New Comedy, however, all social problems must be solved and all families must be reunited. Krateia has been sexually compromised, so her options are limited. The fortunate arrival of the supposed-dead brother clears Demeas’ barriers to the marriage. Thrasonides, who had been lamenting his abusive treatment (805-06), is overjoyed when Getas tells him that Demeas has relented (960-71). He does not understand how it came about, but he learns that Krateia has agreed to marry him (969-70). The families meet, and Demeas pronounces the engue, the formula betrothing Krateia to Thrasonides, while also promising two talents in dowry (974-76). Thrasonides gains
everything he had desired from her recognition, but she must remain in his possession, though with more rights and protections from her family as a legitimate wife than she had possessed as a concubine. Though her father asks her if she wishes to marry Thrasonides, she would have been left with little choice: marry her former captor, or be an unmarriageable burden on her father. The pressure on Krateia might not have been appreciated by ancient audiences, who would have been satisfied with the tidy resolution of marriage.\textsuperscript{42}

\textit{Perikeiromene}

The three remaining Menander plays with extant recognition scenes feature both male and female recognition, all of adult children.\textsuperscript{43} I will discuss here \textit{Perikeiromene} and \textit{Sikyonioi}.\textsuperscript{44} These plays highlight the stark contrasts between men and women with respect to recognition. \textit{Perikeiromene} (see plot summary in Appendix B) features the recognition of a “misplaced” citizen girl, and, through the revelation of her own origins, the recognition of her brother.\textsuperscript{45} Glykera, abandoned as a baby but raised gently by an old woman who took her in, was given to a hot-tempered soldier. She knows she came from a good family, but has only her tokens and a tale to prove it. The divine prologue says the old woman gave Glykera away “like a daughter”

\textsuperscript{42} Few scholars note the pressure placed on the young women in these plays to marry their rapists or captors. For consideration of the young women, see Traill (2008), Marshall (2013), and James (2014).

\textsuperscript{43} On aspects of Menander’s recognition comedies, particularly \textit{Perikeiromene}, see Furley (2014).

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Heros} features a recognition scene of Myrrhine’s rapist (who will turn out to be her husband Laches), and by consequence the paternity of her children, but it is fragmentary and we can only guess as to how the reunion of parents and children played out (we can only be certain of this much from the hypothesis, lines 10-12).

[130]); Polemon treated her as a wife (489). Like Krateia, she has made the best of a bad situation (poverty with no protection or a non-legal relationship with the soldier). Her twin brother Moschion is much better off. Taken in by a wealthy family, he has grown up privileged and wild. He motivates the action of the play by embracing Glykera, planning to seduce her. The divine prologue (120-71) explains the situation, and the speaker notes that Moschion is not truly bad, but she has made him this way to move things along so that the children may be recognized (164-67).

The recognition scene employs the usual elements. When Glykera shows Pataikos various articles, he is startled, claims to be her father, and then explains how they came to be separated. Her tokens are some embroidery (a stag, a winged horse, 768-773) made by Pataikos’ late wife. Pataikos abandoned her and her brother out of grief for his wife, who had died in childbirth, and because he was faced with poverty after his merchant ship was destroyed (802-12). He inquires after her brother’s tokens, and Glykera describes them: necklaces, a charm set with stones, a crimson belt with dancing girls embroidered on it, and a transparent cloak (815-23). Pataikos embraces her, and Moschion rushes out. He has overheard their conversation, so the details need no repetition.

Glykera behaves as one might expect: she is shocked and disappointed that her father could have given up his children so easily, even for poverty (801). She is sympathetic to the tragedy he suffered, but the betrayal, and the knowledge that her life could have been much better, must have some effect on her.46 We do not see how the rest of the scene plays out upon Moschion’s arrival, as the text breaks off, but the resolution as it stands would have been ac-

46 Part of her too must have been angered by Moschion’s happy situation as the son and heir of a wealthy family, while she was forced into a non-legal marriage with a soldier.
ceptable to ancient audiences, who require re-integration of the family, not an exposé of the emotional responses to that reunion.

Both children will be given a spouse, but their futures are very different. Glykera, like Krateia, has been sexually compromised. She has no recourse but to marry Polemon, or remain with her father as a burden in his home. As a free woman, she has some latitude in making her own decisions, but with the return of her kyrios, she must do as he wishes. Directly after finding her father, she accepts reconciliation with Polemon. Her father praises her (1006-09) and immediately goes to his friend Polemon to speak the *engue* (1012-14). Relieved to have sorted out the business easily, Pataikos interrupts Polemon’s joy that Glykera found her kin. He offers three talents as a dowry to seal the deal (1015). Polemon’s previous violence (the angry shearing of Glykera’s hair\(^47\)) is passed over, with Pataikos remarking only that having the dowry money should prevent Polemon from having to be a soldier and also prevent future violent behavior towards his wife (1016-17). Glykera too allows Polemon’s actions to be forgiven, saying, “Your monstrous act has now become for us the start of good experiences” (νῦν μὲν γὰρ ἡμῖν γέγονεν ἀρχὴ [πραγμάτων] / ἀγαθῶν τὸ σὸν πάροινον, 1021-22). The social circumstances do not allow for any other outcome.

Moschion too will be given a spouse (Pataikos ends the play musing about his friend Philinos’ daughter, 1024-26), but his reintegration into the family unit has different consequences. While things end positively for him in that his adoptive mother no longer has to worry about his being disenfranchised, Moschion himself would likely wish for a different outcome. He has gone from one wealthy family (142) to another (Pataikos has the resources to provide three ta-

\(^{47}\) On the cultural implications of the Glykera’s cropped hair, see May (2005). She notes that cropped hair in Greek culture can indicate mourning or a loss of status, either from enslavement, or as a punishment for adultery, infidelity, or prostitution.
lents of dowry, so he has clearly overcome the poverty that prevented him from raising his twin children), one sexual prospect to another (an affair with Glykera to a marriage with Philinos’ daughter), but he is not very happy. Comical and misguided, he has spent most of the play chasing after his sister (whom he believes is a hetaira48), making himself the object of fun for the viewers, who are aware of the relationship. Even once he has learned his true identity, he thinks not of that revelation, but of the fact that now he cannot have Glykera, because she has turned out to be his sister. Fortunately, despite his foolishness, his life will continue to be good. He has been recognized and has twice the family connections now. He will make a good marriage, and continue to be a part of the society in which he was raised. It is only Glykera who must make the most of her limited options.

Poor Myrrhine, Moschion’s adoptive mother, will not benefit from the recognition of her “son.” Now that he has been restored to Pataikos, he will no longer be an heir for Myrrhine’s husband. They will lose the comfort of a son to inherit, as well as the protection of a caring child for their old age.49 For Menander, the reintegration of the natal family, the reunion of father and son (and daughter), is the important resolution of the play. He has no concern for what this outcome will mean for Moschion’s adoptive family.

48 On the varied impressions of Glykera’s status by the characters in the play, see Traill (2008: 33-46).

49 A similar fate awaits Mrs. Arbuthnot in A Woman of No Importance, should Lord Illingworth get his way and win over Gerald.
Sikyonioi

Sikyonioi (see plot summary in Appendix B) employs two recognition scenes involving two different families. Philoumene, her slave Dromon, and her nurse were kidnapped by pirates when she was four years old (354-57). They were sold as slaves in Caria to a wealthy Sikyonian officer (5-15) who took them to Athens where he and his wife lived as metics. Their son Stratophanes returns from war after their death. He has taken possession of Philoumene, moving her and Dromon to his house. Moschion, the boy next door, lusts after Philoumene, as the Moschion of Perikeiromene lusted after Glykera. Since she has slave status and cannot prove her citizenship without her father, she is in danger from Stratophanes, who also loves her (200-66, 397-99). At best, he (like the soldiers in Perikeiromene and Misoumenos) can free her and make her his concubine. At worst, he can make her a slave in the house and rape her when he wishes.

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50 For another examination of Sikyonioi, see Lloyd-Jones (1966).

51 This reconstruction is hypothesized by Arnott (2000: 206-207), who notes that Stratophanes’ adoptive parents either lived in their native Sikyon, or lived as metics in Athens. Arnott finds the latter more likely, as Stratophanes’ birth parents gave him up to the Sikyonian couple who wanted children, and they would have to have been around in Athens for at least some time in order to adopt the child.

52 Arnott (2000) frag. 4 suggests that Philoumene was “raised apart as fits a girl who’s free.” The education she received only trained her for concubinage or marriage, as Traill (2008: 18-20) remarks, so it is unlikely Stratophanes would have freed her legally. If she is free, she is only nominally so, like Krateia in Misoumenos. Stratophanes intends to keep her in a non-legal relationship and seeks her out when she tries to leave his household.

53 Concubines, women who were treated as wives though they did not have legal status as such, could be given the privileges of wives: care of the household, servants, nice clothing and jewelry (as Krateia is given in Misoumenos and Chrysis in Samia). Though they were expected to participate in a sexual relationship, they had something to show for it. Slaves had no privileges, no household status, and could be raped at will. On the sexual desirability of slaves and concubines in Greek literature, see Agamemnon and Chryseis in Homer’s Iliad (1.111-15) and Phoenix with Amyntor’s concubine (9.447-54), as well as Laertes and Eurykleia in the Odyssey (1.429-33). Euphiletus’ wife accused him of having fooled around with the slave girl (Lysias 1.12); see also
way, she will be ruined for legitimate marriage if she does not manage to find her father before she is sexually compromised (just as Krateia and Glykera have no option other than to marry their soldiers). The play is fragmentary, so the impetus for Philoumene’s flight from Stratophanes’ house is unknown. She may fear Moschion’s attempts to make her his mistress or Stratophanes’ suit to make her his concubine, or she may be fleeing the Boeotian to whom Stratophanes’ late father owed money (133-35); he may have come to town to take possession of that man’s goods to recoup his losses. However it happens, she flees to the sanctuary of Demeter and Persephone at Eleusis, hoping to convince the citizens there to give her refuge and help prove her citizenship (189-90).

Given that Philoumene believes herself to be an Athenian citizen, and she is in Athenian territory, an appeal to the citizenry is smart. They are moved by her story and wish to protect her against the lusty Moschion (190-210). Stratophanes wins their goodwill by giving up his claim on her and asserting his own citizenship, while stating his intentions to make her a wife, not a mistress: he seeks time to find her father to ask for her hand in marriage (224-58). Moschion, when he appeals their decision, becomes the object of their derision, as he comes off as an impudent troublemaker trying to take advantage of a good girl (258-66). Philoumene has temporary protection from the priestess and the mob, but her status is tenuous. Her future and sexual safety turn on her ability to find a family member who can recognize her and validate her citizenship.

Meanwhile, Stratophanes’ belief in his own identity is destroyed when he receives a letter from his mother. He had just lost his father, and now he has lost his mother as well. The sudden

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Dikaiopolis and Thratta in Acharnians (lines 271-76). In Latin literature, see Ovid Ars 1.382-98, Am. 2.7/8, and Horace Odes 2.4.

54 Moschion appears to the assembly to have a guilty conscience, and they suspect him of dishonorable intentions. See Gomme & Sandbach (1973: 655).
destruction of Stratophanes’ family coincides with the disintegration of his identity, and makes even sweeter the restoration of his true status and living family. His recognition comes in two parts: first, his old identity is overturned with the evidence of the Sikyonian woman’s letter; then he must be recognized by his true parents. A messenger comes with the information about Stratophanes’ mother:

(Pu) ἀλλ' ἐν πράγμασιν,
Στρατοφάνη, κ' ἀναφέρει σὺ σφόδρα τ' ἀνελπίστοις τισίν.
οὐ δοκεῖς οὐκ ἥξεις ὑδρός, ώς ἐοικεν.
(Στρ) ἀλλὰ τοῦ;
(Pu) [ ] τελευτῶσ' ἐνθαδί τὸ σὸν γένος
[ ἔγραψεν.
(Θη) ἀποθημήσκων οὐ φθονεῖ
οὐδενὸς τοῖς ζῷοιν ἀγαθοῦ· τοὺς ἐαυτοῦ σ' ἀγνοεῖν
οὐκ ἐβούλετο.
(Pu) οὐ μόνον δ’ ἦν τοῦτο. καὶ δίκην δὲ τοι
ὡρλεν ὁ πατήρ, ώς ἐοικε, ζῶν ὁ σὸς Βοιωτίωι
(Στρ) ἐπιθόμην.
(Pu) πολλῶν ταλάντων, Στρατοφάνη, κατὰ σύμβολα.
(Στρ) ἰλθε περὶ τούτων ἀπάντων μοι τὸ τ' εὐθὺς γράμματα
τήν τε τοῦ πατρὸς τελευτήν ἁμα λέγοντ' εἰς Καρίαν.
(Pu) δὴν ἀγώγημον σε τούτωι πυθομένη τῶν τοὺς νόμους
εἰδότων τήν τ' οὐσίαν σου, τοῦτο προύνοεῖτό σου
καὶ τελευτῶσ' ἀπεδίδου σε τοῖς ἐαυτῶν εὐλόγως.
(Στρ) δὸς τὸ γραμματείδιον μοι.
(Pu) καὶ ταδ' χωρίς γ' ἔχω
τῶν γεγραμμένων ἐκεῖνος. Στρατοφάνη, γνωρίσματα
καὶ τεκμηρί', ώς ἐκείνην ἔφασαν οἱ δόντες λέγειν
ζῶσαν.

(Sik. 127-44)

Pyrrhias: You’ll be in a new position [Stratophanes], one that’s unexpected too. Very much so! You [were not her] son, it seems.

Stratophanes: Whose am I, then?

Pyrrhias: [ ] here’s where she wrote down details of your family
on her deathbed [ ].

Theron: People, when they die, don’t grudge [any] boon to [those]
surviving. She’d no wish to hide from you knowledge of your kin.

Pyrrhias: It wasn’t just that—when your father was still alive, he
lost a suit with some Boeotian, so it seems.

Stratophanes: So I heard.
Pyrrhias: Stratophanes, by interstate agreements his debt was many talents.

Stratophanes: At the time a letter quickly reached me in Caria about all that, with news too of the death of my father.

Pyrrhias: When she learnt from legal experts that this man could distrain you and your goods, she planned ahead for you, and tried shrewdly at her death to give you back to your own family.

Stratophanes: Let me have the letter.

Pyrrhias: And I’ve these here, in addition to what they wrote—they’re evidence and tokens of identity. That’s what those who gave them claimed, she said, Stratophanes, when she was alive.

Normally in the ancient world, discovery of erroneous citizenship would be catastrophic. In this case, his status benefits Stratophanes greatly: he avoids several talents of debt and the interest on it and can retain his goods (138-40). Provided he can find his true parents, he also stands to gain the advantages of Athenian citizenship: political involvement, family, civic identity, and legitimate marriage. The letter and tokens lead Stratophanes to Smikrines, who has learned what had happened between Stratophanes, Philoumene, and Moschion at the sanctuary.

When the fragmentary play resumes, Smikrines, his wife, and Stratophanes are meeting and examining the tokens: the letter written by his birth parents, and half of a woman’s dress folded double, dyed green on each side with crimson in between (280-85). The dialogue is fractured, but the characters may refer to a rape. Arnott conjectures that Smikrines raped his wife before they were married, and she gave the child away to a Sikyonian woman who lived next door who

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55 Arnott (2000: 236-37) note 23 determines that there must have been an agreement in force between Sikyon and Boeotia that allowed a Boeotian to confiscate the property of a Sikyonian in his debt at the time of death. If Stratophanes is an Athenian citizen inheriting a Sikyonian’s goods, he is not bound by any such agreement.

56 On identity, citizenship, and democratic society, see Lape (2004a: 202-42).
was known to want children (281-82). Stratophanes accepts his new family happily, but is disconcerted that Moschion is apparently his brother (309-11).

Now Philoumene must be recognized. Theron suggests hiring someone to claim the girl is freeborn (55-62), and he miraculously comes across her actual father, Kichesias, who refuses to be bribed, thinking that Theron is mocking his pain with the details of the ruse—Theron cites the very tragedy Kichesias himself suffered (343-60). Upon seeing Dromon, Kichesias faints, realizing the girl he was supposed to pretend was his own in fact actually is his own. Kichesias is overjoyed to find his daughter again, but the cold facts of ancient society assert themselves immediately. It is not enough that Philoumene be found—Kichesias fears the worst, that she has been violated sexually:

\[(\Delta \rho) \; \varepsilon \varsigma \tau i \; \sigma o i \; k a i \; \sigma w i \zeta e t a i \]  
\[t o \; \theta u g a t r i o n.\]
\[(K i) \; k a l w o s \; d e \; \sigma w i \zeta e t a i, \; \Delta r o m o n,\]
\[\eta \; \sigma w i \zeta e t \', \; a u t o \; t o u t o;\]
\[(\Delta \rho) \; \pi a r \theta e n o s \; \gamma \; \dot{e} \pi i,\]
\[\acute{a}p e i r o s \; \alpha n d r o s.\]
\[(K i) \; \acute{e} v \; g e.\]

\(S i k. \; 370-73\)

*Dromon*: Your daughter is alive, and safe as well.  
*Kichesias*: Decently safe, Dromon, or just safe?  
*Dromon*: She’s a virgin still—no man has touched her.  
*Kichesias*: Good.

Though he is not explicit on this point, Philoumene’s sexual status is of utmost importance. Kichesias is clearly not wealthy (Theron had selected him for bribery, after all), and Phi-

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57 Arnott (1997 and 2000: 265-67). If Smikrines raped her, she was not his wife at the time and only became his wife later, after giving up the baby, making Stratophanes the elder son. Equally plausible is the poverty of Smikrines and his wife, who might have chosen to give away their first son (Stratophanes) while raising another (Moschion) when their circumstances had improved (as Pataikos in Perikeiromene had given up his children because of poverty). Gomme & Sandbach (1973: 661) choose not to speculate at all: “there is nothing here to indicate why Stratophanes’ parents had wished, or been willing, to part with him.”
loumene’s ability to marry is very important. If she has been raped or has been made a concubine, she is no longer marriageable, and she will be discovered a citizen only to become a burden on Kichesias’ house. The short, understated exchange between Dromon and Kichesias highlights the tenuous status of citizen women in Greek society. Their reputations were fragile, and many factors could tarnish them irreparably. Recognition would do little for a woman who could not be saved through legitimate marriage as well. When Kichesias is satisfied of Philoumene’s status, his mind turns immediately to her marriage: the faster she can be settled into legitimate marriage, the better, lest anything further happen to her before she can be passed off to her husband. We never learn how Philoumene feels about the long-awaited reunion with her father or her immediate transfer back into Stratophanes’ power. Does she desire the marriage as well? Was Stratophanes’ citizenship the only barrier to her happiness with him? Krateia was allowed to speak her consent (such as it was, given no other options), but Philoumene’s words (if she were assigned any) are lost.

Once recognized by her family, Philoumene owes Stratophanes a debt of gratitude for keeping her in prosperity and safety: his adoptive family purchased her and kept her clothed, fed, and sexually pure for over ten years. The close proximity of Stratophanes and Philoumene in his house, whether there was sexual contact or not, would cast doubt on Philoumene’s virginity and discourage other suitors. Kichesias likely cannot afford her upkeep or a sizable dowry to attract another husband, and he too seeks to gain from an amicable relationship with Stratophanes, who

58 Kichesias answers Dromon when he asks how his master is: “Alive. That’s all, Dromon, that I can tell you. When you see a poor old man alone, all else must be bleak” (373-76). He may simply be referring to his familial status, but the implication of his monetary worth is there too.

59 Though she will need a dowry, Kichesias could presumably dower her for far less than the cost of keeping her till her death in his own home.
has become wealthy from soldiering. While Stratophanes benefited greatly from his newfound identity, and Philoumene (regardless of her feelings) has re-established her status and made a successful marriage, Moschion loses out. He no longer has any hope of making Philoumene his mistress or of raping her. Likewise, he can hardly appeal to her father for her hand. He must also now share his parents with his newfound brother, who is the older child of Smikrines, and a rival for Moschion’s inheritance. Even if Stratophanes does not intrude financially on Moschion’s future prospects, he will become an active presence in Moschion’s life. While wallowing in his disappointment, Moschion bitterly imagines the wedding that will soon occur:

(Mo) νῦν οὐδὲ προσβλέψαι σε, Μοσχίων, ἢτι πρὸς τὴν κόρην δεῖ· Μοσχίων [λευκὴ σφόδρῃ, ἐυόφθαλμῳ ἐστὶ· οὐδὲ[ν] λέγεις· ἀδέλφῳ ὁ γαμὸν· μακάριος ἐκ· οἶνον γάρ – οὔτος, ἢτι λέγεις; οὐκ[ν]τ[ι] πράγμα ἐστὶ· ἐπαινεῖν χάριν ἐν.· ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐρῶ γε· μὴ γάρ στανοσσύ[ν] παροχήσωμαι δηλονότι καὶ κ[τίτὸς] μετ’ αὐτῶν, ἄνδρες, οὐ δη[ν]σομαι

(Sik. 397-405)

No [more] may you so much as eye the girl now, Moschion. You’ve no luck, Moschion. She’s pale, she’s lovely eyes. [You’re] no[body]. Your brother is the groom, blissful and [rich]. What tosh you’re babbling still! I’ll have to praise him face [to face,] thanks (?) [ ] But I won’t speak—don’t you, sir!—all [ ] Of course I’ll be best man, and [ ] the gooseberry beside them. Gentlemen I’ll [not] be able.

He must grit his teeth and watch his own brother with the girl with whom he is infatuated. Moschion unhappily thinks of Philoumene’s charms and tortures himself with the “perfect” image of his hated brother who will now enjoy her. Moreover, Moschion will be forced to participate and

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60 We may imply his wealth from his possession of the courtesan Malthake at his residence and the presence of the parasite Theron, as well as Stratophanes’ general conformity to the character type of the wealthy soldier.

61 If Arnott’s reconstruction is sound (see note 51).
escort Philoumene to her wedding to another man.⁶² Though he uses these resentful characters for comic relief, Menander highlights the varying responses to the successful recognition of previously unidentified characters within his plays: not everyone benefits from the happy ending.

*Plautus*

Though most of these Menandrian plays were too fragmentary in Wilde’s time to provide a direct model, they were fully intact when Plautus was constructing his plays. Of Plautus’ twenty-one canonical plays, eight feature recognition plots. Menander used the mistaken or lost identity plot to symbolize social breakdown and the dangers of the fragmented family. Plautus took up this theme, and used it to stage the fears of the Roman middle class.⁶³ To downplay the seriousness of the underlying message, Plautus increased the slapstick humor of these plots, expanding the number of comical misunderstandings as his characters seek their true identities. The identification, in most cases, does not fundamentally change the expectations of the characters involved. The men’s innate characters are not affected by the change in their family identity—one gets the feeling that *Captivi*’s Tyndarus is unlikely to eschew his rascally character once he has been returned to his father, and Menaechmus we are assured will not change; his recognition gives him leave to act even worse than he did before. For Plautus, the promise of humor trumps any serious reintegration of the family or society. When women are identified (and when Plautus includes them in the action of the play), they disappear as soon as their identities are revealed. *Cistellaria*’s Selenium and *Rudens*’ Palaestra, formerly characters in their own right, no longer have speaking roles. Rescued from dire circumstances they may be, but their


⁶³ By which I mean not the very elite, nor the very poor, but the swath of citizenry who existed in between, the wealthier *plebes* and *equites*.
new identities effectively erase their old ones. Like Wilde, Plautus seems to comment on the effectiveness of the recognition plotline. It promises a tidy resolution, but it belongs in the realm of fantasy. For Plautus, the recognition plot is merely another element of the ludic atmosphere of comedy.

Unlike Menander, Plautus did not combine the recognitions of male and female children, but made distinctly different plays depending on the gender of the child to be recognized. Male recognition plots explore (with humor) the restoration of lost adult sons, who take the central role in such plays (Captivi, Menaechmi). When the recognition of female children forms the basis for the plot, these women do not play central roles, but are the love interests of men who wish to marry them. In most cases such a woman has been acquired by a pimp and has been trained in sexual arts, but remains sexually intact, or has had sex only with the man who will become her husband after the recognition takes place. In all cases, she has lost her status because of kidnapping or exposure and subsequent enslavement.

Captivi

Plautus’ two male recognition comedies, Captivi and Menaechmi, deserve examination at length. Captivi is Plautus’ most serious comedy—one that is tonally most like Menander

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64 Vidularia, perhaps, featured a male/female double recognition, but the play is too fragmentary to make confident assertions.

65 Miraculously, she will be identified as a citizen right before she is forced into sexual service. The nick-of-time rescue is a contrivance of the plot, but her intact virginity is perhaps not. Marshall (2013: 180) argues that it made economic sense for a pimp to delay putting a sex slave to work at a young age. If she remained intact until her teens, she might command a much higher price for resale outright than she could earn on small commissions for her pimp.

66 Amphitryon features the mistaken identity of a man, through the doubling of Jupiter, who steals his identity to gain access to his wife, rather than a temporary loss of status.
and bears some resemblance to Wilde’s *A Woman of No Importance*—though it incites much laughter through the clever slave plot (as *Woman* does with the dandy episodes). In both *Captivi* and *Woman*, a son’s identity is hidden from his father, who behaves inappropriately towards his son. In *Captivi* (see plot summary in Appendix B), the honorable young Tyndarus, formerly free, but now a slave of Philocrates’ family, is devoted to his master. When they are captured by Aetolians, Philocrates and Tyndarus switch clothes and mannerisms: they will play each other (231-49). Tyndarus is now the master, the child of a good family who will be well-loved and ransomed. When the two discuss the switch, the audience enjoys the dramatic irony, knowing that now Tyndarus is closer to his true identity than he could ever realize, as when Tyndarus tells Hegio that he was once as free as Hegio’s own son (310-16). Tyndarus convinces Hegio to free his “slave” Philocrates to return to his family and bring back Hegio’s son. Again, the irony lies in knowing that Hegio already has his son, and that when Philocrates returns, he will be restoring not one, but two children to Hegio.

Although this play is unusually somber (Tyndarus faces death and is tortured for helping his master), Plautus employs some humor in the secondary recognition scene between Tyndarus and Aristophantes (533-658). The latter is a countryman of Philocrates, and recognizes Tyndarus immediately as the slave, not the master. His cover blown, Tyndarus tries to convince Hegio that Aristophantes is a lunatic and an epileptic. Plautus draws out the episode, with Tyndarus and Aristophantes making their own claims, and Hegio caught in between confused. Aristophan-

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67 The troupe at the close of the play notes that it does not have the typical elements of a Plautine comedy (amatory fondling, a love affair, cheating someone out of money, setting a prostitute free, etc.), and that it is one of the few comedies in which the good become better (1029-36). While the sincerity of the *grex* could be questioned, this play nonetheless remains one of Plautus’ older, more serious plots.

68 On the characterization of Hegio, see Gosling (1983).
tes utters another ironically true line when he says, “Just shut up. I’ll make sure, you false Philocrates, that you’ll be discovered to be the true Tyndarus today” (*tace modo. ego te, Philocrates / false, faciam ut verus Hodie reperiare Tyndarus*, 609-10). The audience knows how prophetic this statement will be: Tyndarus *is* a false Philocrates, and will shortly become his true self.

The misunderstanding of Tyndarus’ true identity leads Hegio to abuse him terribly, reducing Tyndarus as far as possible before he will be restored to citizen status through recognition.

Not realizing his error, Hegio sentences Tyndarus to shackles, torture, and the stone quarries, where he will toil until he drops dead (721-26). Aristophantes, finally recognizing his mistake, urges Hegio not to punish him. After sending Tyndarus to his punishment, Hegio explains to Aristophantes the loss of his two sons, not knowing he has lost his second son all over again (751-65). Luckily, Philocrates is a man of his word, and he returns with Hegio’s son Philopolemus, as well as the wicked Stalagmus. Hegio is overjoyed to see his son. When he questions Stalagmus, the slave reveals that Hegio’s son was sold to none other than Philocrates’ father (973). The recognition of Tyndarus comes through the piecing together of Stalagmus’ information and that of Philocrates. The boy was originally called Paegnium, but was then called Tyndarus and given to Philocrates (983-92). When Hegio finally understands, he exclaims:

\[
et miser sum et fortunatus, si <vos> vera dicitis;\]
\[
eeo miser sum quia male illi feci, si gnatus meust.\]
\[
eheu, quom ego plus minusque feci quam <me> aequom fuit.\]
\[
quod male feci crucior; modo si infectum fieri posseit!\]

(*Capt. 993-97*)

I’m both wretched and lucky if you two are telling the truth. I’m wretched because I treated him badly, if he’s my son. Dear me, I

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70 Similarly, in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the lost child of General Moncrieff has a new name when he is found, and the participants of the recognition scene must scramble to discover the foundling’s original name.
did both more and less than I ought to have done. I'm in agony because I treated him badly; if only it could be undone!

The reunion is short. Hegio greets Tyndarus as his son. Philocrates fills in his former slave on his new condition. Tyndarus finally regains some of his memories: “Now at last I begin to remember hearing, through a fog, as it were, that my father’s called Hegio” (nunc edepol de-mum in memoriam regredior audisse me / quasi per nubulam, Hegionem meum patrem vocarier, 1023-24). There are no tokens of recognition, no marriage plans, no tearful reunion, but this remains, nonetheless, a recognition play. Tyndarus/Paegnium will return to his proper social sphere (though damaged from his time as a slave and the torture he suffered under Hegio), and the family is reintegrated. Philopolemus’ feelings about the return of his brother are unknown, though he is likely to be pleased along with his father, as both had grieved for Tyndarus when he was kidnapped.

Plautus is uninterested in the psychology of recognition and its effect on the emotions of the family. He fully exploits the humor of the recognition plot (with the exchange between Tyndarus and Aristophantes and then Hegio and Ergasilus in Captivi) to full effect in Menaechmi. While Captivi had serious subject matter, which tempered some of the potential for humor, Menaechmi avoids any attempt at sincerity. The play is a series of humorous mistaken identity gags, and it ends with no happy reunion of father and son, but a promise of two brothers behaving badly who will continue behaving badly. In Menaechmi we see the effects of superficially forcing a role and identity upon a man, and the subsequent release when he is freed from a false “identity” that stifled his innate self.
Menaechmi

*Menaechmi* is a classic tale of mistaken identity and misadventure (see plot summary in Appendix B). Shakespeare reworked it for his *Comedy of Errors*, and it has remained one of Plautus’ most popular plays. Though it shares several elements with *Captivi* (the missing boy, the search for a lost relative, the recognition scene), it pushes the humor much further by employing more of the stock characters and situations of Plautine New Comedy. Here we have no emotional reunion with parents, but brothers setting off to misbehave abroad; a marriage is dissolved rather than preserved; there are a *meretrix* and a parasite; and the Saturnalian atmosphere of the play apparently is not dissolved at the conclusion. *Menaechmi* is tonally as far from *Menander* as New Comedy can get,\(^7\) and yet it remains at its core a successful recognition comedy about the search for family and an acceptable social identity.

The society in which Menaechmus lives is flawed, because he is not supposed to be a part of it. Kidnapped as a child, he was made the heir of a rich man and forced into a life he did not ask for. He dislikes his civic duty, defending his clients in court (one of the key duties of the Roman *patronus* in relation to his *clientela* in the *patrocinium* relationship), and bemoans the fraudulence that he must by necessity defend (itself a symbol of this broken society, 571-95). At the same time, his irritation at his duty stems from its getting in the way of his enjoying a *meretrix* and a decadent lunch with her, rather than from a genuine moral objection (596-601). Menaechmus is hardly upstanding: he steals from his wife and argues with her constantly (110-24), and he spends most of his time with a parasite who flatters him (96-103). He also has a long-standing relationship with a sex worker who gives him attention only while he continues to bring her ex-

\(^7\) Contra, Haberman (1981).
pensive goods. Typically young men in New Comedy plays are obsessed with a love relationship, and once that marriage is arranged, the young man is incandescently happy. Menaechmus is unique among the young men of New Comedy: he has gotten the girl, but he does not want her. In his contentious relationship with his wife, Menaechmus resembles more the unhappy older generation of Roman comedy, the lecherous old men who pursue young girls and seek to undermine or deceive their wives, and whose wives actively attempt to limit their bad behavior.

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72 Such is the necessary economic relationship between prostitute and client. See James (2003).

73 The only exception is Pamphilus (Ter. Hec.), who was unhappy with the marriage his father made for him (because it interfered with his relationship with the Bacchis), but over the early months of his marriage came to love his wife Philumina. He is overjoyed at the close of the play when their conflict is resolved and he can remain married to her.

74 On characterization in Menaechmi, see Leach (1969b).

75 See Asinaria and Casina on this theme. It does indeed seem to have been considered bad behavior for the Roman senex to chase after prostitutes and shirk his duties to family and social position. Involving oneself in a love relationship with a sex worker disrespected one’s wife, wasted money, and made old men act like young men, though they ought to know better. Asinaria, Casina, and Mercator suggest, in their treatment of the lecherous old men, that such behavior was considered inappropriate. Eutychus at the end of Mercator gives a speech shaming old men who behave in such a way (1015-1024). In Bacchides, the indulgent old man Philoxenus notes that young men often chase girls and grow out of it; he and his neighbor Nicobulus are shamed by the prostitutes who fleece them in their old age. In Stichus, Antipho wants his sons-in-law to give him enslaved meretrices and the cost of their food and board for no charge, and the young men think he is quite ridiculous.

On the general unhappiness of the Roman senex with wives (particularly authoritative, wealthy ones) and marriage, see Asinaria (Demaenetus, married to a wealthy wife), Aulularia (Megadorus, not married, who does not want a wealthy wife), Bacchides, Casina (Lysidamus, married to a wife who he feels nags him and reigns him in too much), Epidicus (Periphanes, who hated his now dead wife), Mercator (Demipho and Lysimachus, both married to authoritative, dowered wives), Miles Gloriosus (Periplectomenus, who has avoided marriage into his old age because he hates wealthy, authoritative women), Mostellaria (Simo, married to a wealthy wife, who tries to escape whenever possible), Rudens (Daemones, who cannot bring the refugee meretrices into his house without upsetting his wife, who annoys him with her observance), Adelophoe (Micio, who has eschewed marriage, and Demea, who is happy that his wife has died), Heauton Timoroumenos (Chremes, upset with his wife), Hecyra (Laches and Phidippus, upset with their wives), and Phormio (Chremes, who is annoyed with his wife’s interference in his business).
Perhaps Menaechmus’ disenchantment with his society and his place in it stems from an innate character flaw, but one may more generously attribute his alienation and unhappiness to the falsity of his identity. Kidnapped as a child of seven from his rightful family and twin brother, he was made what his abductor desired in a child and heir (24-33, 57-62), given a marriage he did not want, and thrust into a life he was not intended for. 

Thus, although *Menaechmi* is a humorous, slapstick play, it is based in the same broken society that underpins other recognition comedies. Only Menaechmus’ reasserted identity and restoration to his proper family will bring the fragmented society back into balance (even if this balance is counter-intuitively achieved by the dissolution of a marriage and the abandonment of civic duty). Viewed in this light, the Saturnalian atmosphere of the play is in fact dissolved at the play’s climax: Menaechmus’ flight from Epidamnian marriage and duty is a rejection of his false identity, and he is restored to his proper family and place in Syracuse. What seems to be an oddly uncharacteristic ending is in fact a conventional one. Menaechmus’ inner self, the self he expressed through misbehaving in Epidamnian society, can now develop unhindered by the obligations of his false life. But Plautus does not dissolve the fantasy atmosphere of his play while righting the wrongs of his society: the brothers remain unabashed in their pursuit of fun and pleasure, and we are invited to identify with them, not the sincere characters of Matrona and her father.

The recognition scene in this play does not involve tokens, but employs other characters corroborating a speaker’s version of events. These facts in quick succession become verbal tokens of recognition:

Messenio.Esti tibi nomen Menaechmo?

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76 The speaker of the prologue notes with some humor that a rushing river snatched the child snatcher and dragged him to a deserved bad end (63-66).
Messenio: Is your name Menaechmus?
Menaechmus: I admit it.
Mess: Is it also yours?
Sosicles: Yes.
Mess: Do you say that your father was Moschus?
Men: Yes, precisely.
Sos: Mine too.
Mess: Are you from Syracuse?
Men: Certainly.
Mess: What about you?
Sos: Naturally.
Mess: The signs have been in perfect agreement so far. Continue to pay attention.

... Mess: How many sons did your father have at that time?
Men: As I remember it now, two.
Mess: Which of you was older, you or he?
Men: We were both exactly the same age.
Mess: How can that be?
Men: We were both twins.

...
Mess: Tell me, did you have the same name?
Men: Certainly not: I had the name I have now, Menaechmus; people called the other one Sosicles at the time.
Sos: I’ve recognized the signs, I can’t refrain from embracing you. My true twin brother, my greetings.

...
Men: What was our mother’s name?
Sos: Teuximarcha.
Men: Correct. My greetings, my unhoped-for brother, whom I see after so many years.
Sos: And mine to you, my brother, whom I’ve been looking for with much hardship and toil until now and whom I’m happy to have found.

Messenio and Sosicles both speak of signa, signs, by which the recognition comes to pass (these verbal signa stand in for the physical symboli of other comedies). By means of this verbal back-and-forth, Menaechmus and Sosicles come into recognition of one another, and together they reintegrate their natal family. Immediately, Sosicles asks his brother to journey back to their home country together (1151-52). Menaechmus overlooks Sosicles’ borrowing of his meretrix girlfriend and the trouble he caused with his wife, as these things are inconsequential in the face of finding his lost family and freeing himself from his ill-fitting life at Epidamnus. The potential emotional value of the scene, however, is undercut by the sheer amount of time it took the brothers to realize that they are twins and the comical repetition of the word “brother” (frater) throughout the recognition scene: the two characters say it seven times in 29 lines (1125-54).
Wilde will echo this humorous repetition at the end of The Importance of Being Earnest when he
reunites the previously warring brothers seemingly in competition for each other’s women (on this, and the many other parallels between Menaechmi and Earnest, see below).

The remainder of Plautus’ recognition comedies highlights the difficulties for unprotected women in a patriarchal society. All six (Casina, Cistellaria, Curculio, Epidicus, Poenulus, Rudens) have women, either the victims of kidnapping or enslavement as children, serving as slaves or sex workers-in-training for their masters. I will discuss here Cistellaria and Rudens as recognition comedies, but I will return to Casina, Curculio, Epidicus and Poenulus in the following chapter on flawed recognition comedies. In all of these plays, save Casina in which the enslaved girl works in a household, and in Epidicus in which Telestis is war booty (but intended to be a private concubine, not a sex worker under a lena or leno), the girls are pseudomeretrices, sex workers- (or sex slaves) in-training. There is a great difference between the status and social situation between lost boys and missing girls. In Captivi, Tyndarus is a favored companion slave to his master Philocrates. In Menaechmi, Menaechmus is kidnapped by a wealthy man and made his heir. Girls are never kidnapped and then made favored (and sexually safe) companions, nor will they be made heirs to a wealthy family. In nearly all cases, female children are taken and forced into prostitution. One of the rules of the genre is that this woman, the pseudomeretrix, will be at the cusp of taking up the profession, or will have had sexual relations with only one man with whom she is in love. Upon her recognition, she will marry him. This nick-of-time re-

I use the term pseudomeretrix to refer to sex workers (or sex workers-in-training) who are citizens, though they are not aware of the fact or cannot prove it until their recognition in the play.

The exception is Casina, where we are told in the prologue that Cleostrata’s slave encountered a woman exposing a female child and asked for it. He gave it to his mistress who raised the girl in her household like a daughter. But even a favored female slave is not safe in a house of men: Casina, upon reaching sexual maturity, is pursued by two slaves and their masters for possession of her (39-56), and she is treated like a slave: sexually accessible, the movable property of her master.
scue from a life of sex labor is unrealistic, but necessary for the dramatic conceit of the play, which requires a citizen marriage at the close of the plot, and cannot countenance the marriage of a professional prostitute-turned-citizen.

**Cistellaria**

*Cistellaria* and *Rudens* follow the single-client-prostitute plot. In these plays, Selenium and Palaestra are involved with only one man, her beloved who wishes to marry her. Selenium has been playing house with Alcesimarchus and has had sex with him alone, and Palaestra appears to be a virgin. Of course, without established citizenship, marriage is an impossibility: the men may free their girlfriends and enter into concubinage with them, but they cannot marry. In *Cistellaria* (see plot summary in Appendix B), Selenium and Alcesimarchus have been living in just such a relationship. Selenium’s mother, a former prostitute (38-39), was approached by Alcesimarchus after the festival of Dionysus (89-93). After Alcesimarchus swore to marry her adopted daughter she allowed them to keep house (83-85, 98-99). Now that Alcesimarchus has been ordered into an arranged marriage by his father, Melaenis refuses to let her daughter live as his mistress (440-519).

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79 In this type of relationship, however, there is an imbalance of power. Freed, the girls would ostensibly have the power to leave their “boyfriends,” but their freedom likely came with restrictions or obligations: they may no longer be slaves, but they are expected to remain with the men who freed them (as must be the case for Philematium in Plaut. *Most*). See Marshall (2013: 193-94).

80 *Cistellaria* is the most damaged of the Palatine manuscript plays (after *Vidularia*), and much of the Ambrosian palimpsest is illegible. There is doubling in the speeches of Lena and Auxilium, and large chunks of dialogue are missing (for summary, see de Melo 2011b: 125-26). On doublets in *Cistellaria*, see Goldberg (2004). See further Lange (1975) on the relationship of this play to Menander’s *Synaristosai*. 

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A happy resolution for this plot requires Selenium to turn out to be the daughter of a citizen family. The delayed prologues (120-202) assure us this will happen, and in fact, Selenium will be discovered the daughter of Alcesimarchus’ neighbor, the sister of the very girl his father is pressuring him to marry. The recognition of Selenium takes up the majority of the next three acts and relies heavily on tokens of recognition, which are passed around among Melaenis, the slave Halisca, and Selenium’s birth mother Phanostrata, who had exposed her after having been raped by a man who took seventeen years to find and marry her.

Once Phanostrata has the tokens, and knows who her daughter is, we might expect a recognition scene between parent and child, or a happy scene in which Alcesimarchus learns that he can marry his love. But Plautus, generally uninterested in such emotional moments, eschews the full recognition scene, relying on the information that came before to suffice (782-83; he used a similar praeteritio in Casina, summing up the recognition scene in the concluding speech to the audience rather than staging it, 1012-14). Her mother, Phanostrata, we can surmise from the scenes that came before, is overjoyed, and her father is suspicious but curious (774-81). We know that Alcesimarchus will marry Selenium and not his Lemnian fiancée. Selenium, we may conjecture from her sadness at the opening of the play, is pleased to be married to Alcesimarchus. Nevertheless, we cannot know how she reacts to her recognition and intended marriage to Alcesimarchus, because she never returns to the action of the play. Her identification as a citizen effectively terminates her identity as a speaking character with opinions and feelings.

Few people consider Melaenis, who can only suffer from the joy of others, as she must give up her daughter and all hope of safety in her old age, unless Phanostrata’s family agrees to be her patron and keep her housed and fed.81 While Selenium enjoys the reintegration of her na-

81 A similar situation occurs for Bacchis in Terence’s Hecyra, and Thais in Eunuchus.
tal family through her off-stage recognition, her other family is eradicated. When Selenium is identified as a citizen daughter, Melaenis’ identity as a mother is stripped from her. Though her family had been flawed, like Menaechmus’ adoptive family in *Menaechmi*, Melaenis is a sympathetic character. She did not kidnap Selenium, but raised her and kept her “well and chastely” to adulthood and treated her like a daughter (*dat eam puellam meretrici Melaenidi, / eaque educavit eam sibi pro filia / bene ac pudice, 171-73*). When Selenium grew up, she did not wish to be a prostitute, and her mother (despite the loss of income⁸²) agreed to let her live chastely: “since I didn’t want to be called a prostitute, my mother humored me and obeyed me, her pleading, obedient daughter, so that she allowed me to live with the man I was madly in love with” (*quia ego nolo me meretricem dici, / opsecuta est, gessit morem oranti morigerae mihi, / ut me, quem ego amarem graviter, sineret cum eo vivere, 83-85*). Selenium was intimate with that one man alone (87-88). Her mother has allowed her to live as though she were a citizen girl, and has made a “marriage” for her as best she could, something Selenium’s prostitute friend’s mother would not allow (42-45).⁸³ Melaenis champions her daughter when Alcesimarchus seems to have abandoned her, and she resolutely and consistently works throughout the play on behalf of Selenium’s best interests. When it becomes clear that Selenium has a chance at a citizen life, she bravely sacrifices her relationship with the girl, saying, “Although I’m reluctant to be separated from you, I’ll bring myself to look after your interests rather than my own” (*quamquam invita te carebo, animum ego inducam tamen / ut illud <quod minus meam> quam tuam in rem bene con-

⁸² Lena tells Selenium that she did not choose the prostitute’s life for her daughter out of pride, but rather out of necessity so that their family would not starve (40-41).

⁸³ Scholars unhelpfully perpetuate the *mala/bona meretrix* dichotomy by judging Selenium and Gymnasium on their relationships with men in this play rather than on socio-economic necessity, e.g. Gilula (2004). On family dynamics in this prostitute society, see Fantham (2004).
ducat consulam, 633-34). As we saw with the Menandrian plays, recognition plots do not benefit every character in the play. Roman society must favor the legitimate, upstanding family over the “immoral” prostitute family, and we are left to wonder about Melaenis’ fate.

Rudens

A recognition clearing the way for the marriage of a pseudomeretrix and her lover is repeated in Rudens, which provides a full-fledged recognition scene with verbal questioning, tokens, and an emotional reunion. We also witness the subsequent marriage agreement. In this respect, Rudens is more Menandrian than Plautus’ other recognition plays, despite being based on a play by Diphilis. Plautus promotes comedy with the addition of a crotchety pimp (doubled by the addition of a rude friend to the pimp), a truculent slave, a vivacious and attractive companion for Palaestra, and an assault on a temple. Rudens’ trunk scene, however, involving the titular rope, recalls the arbitration scene of Epitrepones. The recognition scene provides resolution, a happy reunion, a marriage arrangement, and an unhappy ending for the villains, all important features of the recognition plot resolution. Here, more than in any other Plautine play, we can see the treatment of the recognition plot in every component aspect.

The prologue speaker summarizes the peripeteia and anagnorisis to come: displaced Athenian Daemones lost his young daughter to piracy; she was purchased by a pimp and has now ended up in Cyrene, the very place to which Daemones moved in exile (39-41). Following the wreck of the pimp’s ship (which he had tried to use to steal Palaestra away from her new owner Plesidippus, who loves her), Palaestra and her friend Ampelisca swim to shore. 84 Ironically, Daemones sees them struggling, but tells his slaves to mind their own business and get back to

84 On depictions of the sea and natural landscape in Rudens, see Leach (1974).
the repair of his house, unwittingly denying aid to his own daughter (177-84). The girls find temporary safety in the temple of Venus and Ampelisca meets up with Trachalio, Plesidippus’ slave. She explains to him (and the audience) that the wicked pimp has locked Palaestra’s recognition tokens in a box, now lost at sea (388-93). Trachalio runs off to find Plesidippus, and the pimp besieges the temple to retake the girls, beating the priestess in the process. Daemones steps in, finally, insulted by the impiety of the pimp, and plenty of humorous pimp-beatings ensue.

Gripus, a grumpy slave of Daemones, has located the trunk containing Palaestra’s basket, and Trachalio tries to take it from him. After much bickering (906-1044) the slaves agree to let Daemones arbitrate. This scene echoes that of Epitrepontes: in that arbitration scene, a grandfather unwittingly decided the fate of the tokens that would prove his grandson’s identity and future. Here, a father decides the ownership of tokens that will determine his daughter’s identity and future. Trachalio asks only for the tokens, but Gripus refuses to relinquish even these (1081-87). Palaestra initiates the recognition scene herself, volunteering to name everything inside the box for the company gathered. The recognition scene begins and the tokens serve their purpose:

PAL. Ensiculust aureolus primum litteratus.
DAE. Dice dum, in eo ensiculo litterarum quid est?
PAL. Mei nomen patris. post altrinsecust securicula ancipes, itidem aurea litterata: ibi matris nomen in securiculast.
DAE. Mane. dic, in ensiculo quid nomen est paternum?
PAL. Daemones.
DAE. Di immortales, ubi loci sunt spes meae?

... 

DAE. Loquere matris nomen hic quid in securicula siet.
PAL. Daedalis.
DAE. Di me servatum cupiunt. Filiam meam esse hanc oportet, Gripe.

...

PAL. Post sicilicula argenteola et duae conexae maniculae et sucu-

la.
...  
PAL. Et bulla aurea est, pater quam dedit mi natali die.  
DAE. Ea est profecto. contineri quin complector non queo. filia mea, salve. ego is sum qui te produxi pater, ego sum Daemones, et mater tua eccam hic intus Daedalis.  
PAL. Salve, mi pater insperate.  
DAE. Salve. ut te amplector libens.  
...

DAE. Age eamus, mea gnata, ad matrem tuam, quae ex te poterit argumentis hanc rem magis exquirere, quae te magis tractavit magisque signa pernovit tua.  

(Rud. 1156-81)

*Palaestra:* First there’s a little sword made of gold with letters on it.  
*Daemones:* Tell me, what letters are on this sword?  
*Palaestra:* My father’s name. Then on the other side there’s a little two-headed axe, also made of gold with letters on it. There, on the little axe, is my mother’s name.  
*Daemones:* Wait. Tell me, what’s your father’s name on the little sword?  
*Palaestra:* Daemones.  
*Daemones:* Immortal gods, where are my hopes?  
...

*Daemones:* Tell me what your mother’s name is on the little axe.  
*Palaestra:* Daedalis.  
*Daemones:* The gods want me saved. This girl must be my daughter, Gripus.  
...

*Palaestra:* Then there’s a little sickle made of silver and two little connected hands and a little sow.  
...

*Palaestra:* And there’s a golden locket, which my father gave to me on my birthday.  
*Daemones:* It really is her. I can’t keep myself from embracing you. My daughter, greetings to you. I am the father who brought you up, I am Daemones, and look, your mother Daedalis is inside.  
*Palaestra:* Greetings to you, my unhoped-for father.  
*Daemones:* Greetings. How happy I am to embrace you!  
...

*Daemones:* Come on, my daughter, let’s go to your mother, who will be able to find further proofs of this from you; she handled you more and knows your characteristics better. 

Palaestra offers a verbal account of her recognition tokens and parentage, while the physical objects themselves prove her story. The drawn-out explanation of the objects makes her
account certain, and allows for an emotional response from Daemones, as he slowly comes to grips with the dawning truth that Palaestra is his daughter. His joy is clear and obvious. Palaestra, having been through an abduction, years of training for prostitution, sale to her beloved (whom she must love out of necessity more than choice), removal from her beloved, a shipwreck, a gang fight in the temple, the theft of her precious recognition tokens, and an arbitration for her property, is more reticent. By this point, likely suffering from post-traumatic shock, Palaestra agrees to go inside with Daemones to meet her mother (1182-83). For her, recognition means no longer having to move at Labrax’ word, but it brings a number of unknowns: what will her new life be? Will she be married (and can she even be married)? Will her parents accept her even given her previous situation as a prostitute? Now that the longed-for situation has finally arrived, Palaestra is swept along on the actions of others.

Daemones moves quickly from joyful newfound father to stern patriarch, like most newfound fathers in ancient new comedy. Like Menander’s father characters in Misoumenos and Perikeiromene, he turns immediately to the matter of marriage. Despite his earlier embraces and excitement during the recognition scene, he expresses annoyance at the caresses and embraces between mother and daughter: “What do I see? My wife is clinging to our daughter’s neck and holding her back. Her petting is getting on for being out of place and tedious. It’s better to put a stop to your kissing at some point, my wife” (quid conspicor? / uxor complexa collo retinet filiam. / nimis paene inepta atque odiosa eius amatio est / aliquando osculando meliust, uxor, pausam fieri, 1202-05). She must put a stop to her kissing because Daemones has plans to remove their daughter from her new home only moments after she has regained it. He says that he has found his daughter today, unexpectedly, and that the gods have fulfilled his wishes (1191-96), and with his next breath he begins making marriage plans for her: a freeborn young man
from an excellent Athenian family, and as soon as possible (1197-98). He tells Trachalio that he plans to marry his newfound daughter to Plesidippus (1213). Having settled the matter for himself, he may turn to other problems, dealing with the pimp and his slave Gripus.

Before the recognition of her “true” identity, Palaestra had an identity of her own making, and one that the pimp crafted for her. A citizen now, Palaestra must cease to be who she was, and be who she is now told she is. Palaestra’s identity, sex slave or citizen, is constructed by the inclinations of others, Labrax or her father. Palaestra, the girl whom we came to know through her dialogue in the play as a strong and resourceful woman considerate of her friend and full of anxiety about her future, is muted through her recognition. While the young men of Captivi and Menaechmi were freed by their recognitions to “become” rather than to be, as Wildean philosophy has it, Palaestra ceases even to be. Relegated offstage, she loses subjectivity and agency, becoming the object of others’ conversation and planning. Now a proper citizen girl, she no longer speaks. We see Plesidippus’ rejoicing (1265-81), but nothing from Palaestra.

Palaestra’s recognition has brought about the peripeteia of the play, facilitating the happy ending. She is reintegrated into her family unit, Plesidippus is welcomed into Daemones’ extended family, and through his daughter’s marriage to an Athenian (a relative, even), Daemones

85 “The contemplative life, the life that has for its aim not doing but being, and not being merely but becoming—that is what the critical spirit can give us” (“Critic as Artist,” Prose, 256).

86 The only citizen girl who speaks is Virgo in Persa, who speaks when she is playing the role of a meretrix. On female speech in Roman comedy, see J. N. Adams (1984), Dutsch (2008), and James (forthcoming 2014).

87 Plautus does not allow the emotional atmosphere of the recognition scene to have the last word, and extends the action to include an additional, humorous scene with Daemones, Gripus, and Labrax regarding the trunk and Ampelisca. Gripus is unhappy, the pimp is unhappy, and Daemones gets to tease them further. He invites the pimp for dinner, a particularly benevolent act, considering how Labrax attempted to defraud Plesidippus (Daemones’ future son-in-law), enslaved Palaestra (Daemones’ daughter), and attempted to remove any hope of Palaestra finding her parents by taking the tokens.
regains social stature after having been exiled from Athens years before (35). Even Ampelisca’s status is improved through Palaestra’s recognition: Daemones buys her and frees her, though the price of this freedom is that she must immediately marry Trachalio, who is also freed. This marriage is preferable to forced prostitution, but Ampelisca (like Palaestra) is not consulted in the matter of her marriage. Here we see yet again how recognition and restored identity affects the genders differently. Men gain a rich life with many possibilities, and the freedom to be themselves and develop a new life. Women are restored to their natal homes only to be immediately passed off into marriage.88

Conclusions

“Successful” recognition comedies, as established by Menander and Plautus, employed a basic structure with typical elements, only some of which need be present to identify the plot type. There will be a foundling, either male or female, who is hindered from the life he or she wants, a relative missing the absent foundling, tokens of recognition (either physical objects, or the names and places of relatives, and/or a nurse to verify identity), a recognition scene in which the tokens establish the “true” identity of the foundling, an emotional family reunion, and a marriage betrothal for the recognized person. Playwrights may deviate from a full rendering of all aspects in order to innovate, to emphasize other elements of the story, or to promote more humor (Captivi and Epidicus end without a marriage, and Menaechmi ends with the dissolution of one, as Plautine plays frequently downplay an emotional family reunion). The recognition plot can be

88 The only exception to this pattern is Epidicus, in which the newfound citizen daughter is not married off immediately after being found. This play is unique in its ending, as there is no citizen boy next door to whom Telestis will be married (the neighbors play only a trivial role in the play), and the boy the audience assumed Telestis would marry (her captor, given the conventions of the genre), cannot. Goldberg (1978) has compellingly argued that this play is a completely original Roman production, with no Greek antecedent.
played with sincerity, with the aim of reintegrating the ruptured family unit, or with ludic frivolity, with the recognition plot serving to furnish episodes of humorous misunderstanding. Investigating the recognition plot of antiquity with Wildean philosophy in mind, we may observe some nuances in the recognition plot outlined above. Different outcomes are observed for men and women. Males who are recognized may take up their new identity and explore their newfound freedom to be what they wish. Women are removed from the plot and relegated into marriage. Not every character is pleased to see a recognition take place, and some members of the family may be harmed or disappointed by a successful reunion. We may observe this last point with frequency in Terentian comedy, and in Wilde’s *Lady Windermere’s Fan* and *A Woman of No Importance*, explored in chapter 4. With the basic elements of the successful recognition plot established, we turn now to Wilde’s iteration of it in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, to consider the ways in which Wilde adapts the ancient recognition plot for nineteenth-century theatre.

*Identity Crises: Recognition in Wilde*

Three of Wilde’s four Society Plays, *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, *A Woman of No Importance*, and *The Importance of Being Earnest*, employ a recognition plot. For Wilde, an Irishman and a social climber, the theme of identity had deep-seated meaning and importance. In Victorian society, as in Greek and Roman society, identity, affiliation, family, and social place meant

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89 In the “Star Child,” a children’s story from Wilde’s second collection of tales, *The House of Pomegranates* (1891), there is a fight between two woodcutters over the titular foundling child’s recognition tokens that bears striking similarity to a scene in *Epitrepontes* where two slaves argue over a foundling child’s recognition tokens. Though Menander’s play was largely lost to him, Mahaffy and others had written about the basic elements of Menandrian comedies, as seen in Chapter 1. Wilde was clearly interested in the new comic tradition of recognition tokens and foundlings preserved in Roman comedy and the scholarship on Menander. These plot elements were also transferred through the ages via the oral tradition of Irish folklore. See Killeen (2013).
everything to how one could function in the world, and the heights to which one could reach. Wilde explores the ancient recognition theme in stages throughout his work, first with a thwarted recognition in *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, then a partial but flawed outcome recognition in *A Woman of No Importance*, and finally through the full, successful recognition in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Through the ancient plot device, Wilde explores and negotiates ideas of identity, one’s place in society, and moral values, playing with the form of the successful “recognition” comedy as much as Plautus did.

As I noted in Chapter 1, scholars have been hesitant to suggest that Wilde was directly influenced by Greek and Roman New Comedy. Hall & Macintosh (2005: 151) remark that Arthur Verrall’s new translation of Euripides’ *Ion* likely suggested the recognition scene with tokens in *Earnest*. Iain Ross, in his reading of *Earnest*, provides a cogent argument in favor of their remark. He notes the presence of three tokens (blanket, necklace, and olive-wreath, in an unmil-dewed basket), Creusa’s embrace of the resisting Ion (as Jack embraces Miss Prism), and Ion’s questioning of Creusa (was the rape a rape, or a seduction?), then goes on to discuss the influence of Euripides on Menander. Ross highlights some of the other New Comic elements in *Earnest* (doubling, mistaken baby name, escaping responsibility by going off into the city or country), but uses Mahaffy’s list of New Comic traits (stock characters such as the harsh father, injured maiden, braggart captain, knowing slave, doubling of love plots, etc. mentioned in Chapter 1) to deny that Wilde’s other plays were influenced by New Comedy. Ross’ demonstration of the *Ion*’s influence on *Earnest* and Wilde is sound, but his rejection of New Comedy as an influence on *Earnest* (and the rest of Wilde’s Society dramas) requires some revision. As I note here

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90 Ross (2012: 173-74).

91 Ross (2012: 178-79).
and in other areas of this dissertation, Wilde’s use of “types” was innovative: he transforms many of New Comedy’s stock characters into new creations with a pedigree in antiquity. Doubling of the plot was common in Terence, but not in Menander or Plautus, and as we continue to see, the themes and plot devices of New Comedy frequently turn up in Wilde. I suggest that Wilde was directly inspired by Greek and Roman New Comedy in his Society Plays, and so here I offer my own interpretation of New Comedy’s influence on Earnest.

The Importance of Being Earnest

The Importance of Being Earnest premiered at St. James’s Theatre on Valentine’s Day 1895 to an enthusiastic audience. Unlike Wilde’s earlier society plays, which were “problem plays” and social commentaries punctuated with wit and dry humor, Earnest was overtly farcical, subordinating more serious themes for outright comic appeal. This is his least realistic dramatic world, and by consequence, his funniest. Wilde eschews any attempt at a morality plot and limits himself to poking fun at social conventions (mercenary marriages, the importance of a distinguished family) and certain character types (the debt-ridden upper class man; the domineering, marriage-making mother; the young man in love; the cheeky ingénue). Wilde employs these character types in order to break them down, expand them, and individuate them, making this work more complex than the subtitle (A Trivial Comedy for Serious People) implies. He also turns once again to one of New Comedy’s most dynamic plot types, the recognition plot, in order to individuate and innovate that old plot device alongside the “types” that he employs and subverts. Critics and scholars have long noted the literary pedigree of Earnest: Lestocq and Robson’s The Foundling had a similar plot structure (foundling, thwarted love, the christening), Il ne faut jurer de rien by Musset (Cécile, pupil of a clerical tutor falls in love with a man under pre-
tense), *Celimare le bien-aimé* by Labiche and Delacour (imaginary invalid), *A Husband to Order* by John Maddison Morton (a character disguised as his own brother), Gilbert and Sullivan’s *Engaged* (and *The Pirates of Penzance*), Pinero’s farces, Haddon Chambers’ and Sydney Grundy’s society comedies.  

But Wilde’s innovation speaks for itself: of *Earnest* and all its Victorian predecessors, only *Earnest* (and Wilde) remains a household name, while the others have fallen into obscurity. *Earnest* also displays the more literary influence of *Menaechmi*, *Adelphoe*, *Eunuchus*, and a number of female recognition plots in New Comedy, as well as the male foundling plots of Menander inherited by Plautus and Terence. Though the play is largely pure fantasy, it engages persistently with issues of identity, both who one really is and who one attempts to be.

We must first ask, is this a successful recognition comedy? It succeeds according to Menandrian standards: a young man’s family identity is restored, he may marry the girl he loves, and he may take his place in the society of his new-found relations. The tone of the drama indicates that the ludic atmosphere of the play will continue after it has ended. But what does it mean that Wilde’s only “successful” recognition comedy is based in a world of utter fantasy, a world with little basis in our own reality? The play fulfills Miss Prism’s requirements for fiction,

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93 On Wilde’s innovations in *Earnest* and the decline of his theatre rivals, see Raby (1994), Jackson (1997), and Powell (2013). Gilbert and Sullivan’s operas continue to see revivals.

94 On fantasy vs. seriousness in *Earnest*, see Jacobs (1992). Gregor (1966: 514-20) contends that the calculated unreality of the characters and plot allows the characters to speak perfectly and avoid any internal criticism. The internal insulation of the characters allows the author’s voice through each character to apply to the audience’s world instead, and this is what makes *Earnest* a perfectly constructed play. Raby (1997a: 159) says, “He first made his people ‘real,’ and then took his audiences through the looking-glass into a world which seemed to reflect modern life, but which was a surreal improvisation upon it.”
with the good ending happily (for “that is what Fiction means,” Act II), but it is still fiction. 95 In this play, as in Lady Windermere’s Fan and A Woman of No Importance, Wilde’s engagement with the recognition plot reveals its inherent problems: it can succeed only in fantasy, for in the real world, issues of identity and self- hood are far more complex. And even within the fantasy of Earnest, the discovery of a static “identity,” that of Ernest Moncrieff, does not define the hero Jack Worthing. His creation of identity had been well on its way before the pat resolution of the farce, and even with “identity” restored, Jack remains a divided person: John Worthing, the artificially dour landowner, Ernest, the semi-fictional alter ego that can be worn or discarded at will, and Jack, who must negotiate between the two. Even in this play of most easily observable ancient pedigree, Wilde innovates the New Comic material and problematizes it, as Plautus had done with Menaechmi, where static “identity” had not restored society or matured its hero, but rather sent him further on the trajectory of dissipation and Saturnalian fun he had already begun. Here is the “successful” recognition comedy at its most frivolous and superficial, but also its most demonstrative: appearance dominates substance, and language can create “reality.” 96 Jack became Ernest before Ernest was a “reality,” and he will continue to play with his identity even after the revelation of the “self” established by his family affiliation, which will define him no more than the other roles he created for himself.

The plot of Earnest turns on recognition in a variety of ways. Jack does not know his true parentage, so he has constructed two different identities for himself: John, the moral,

95 Miss Prism’s comment on the nature of fiction has layered meanings. Her definition is appropriate for “fiction,” as the good do not always end happily in real life, nor the bad unhappily, but at the same time it is a bad definition for “fiction,” as the best fiction will not follow such a trite, moralistic structure. Her definition of “fiction” is what Wilde would consider the worst fiction of all (see “Decay of Lying”).

96 “Critic as Artist,” (Prose, 231).
upstanding country dweller,\textsuperscript{97} and Ernest, the profligate city dandy (I.203-11). In the first act his two alter egos are established, as is the history of his adoption. When his friend Algernon, who had always known Jack as Ernest, finds Ernest’s cigarette case inscribed to “Uncle Jack,” he questions his friend, and Jack must reveal that his name is not Ernest, as he had allowed everyone in town to believe. This is the first instance of cards and identity playing an important role in the construction of (false) identity in the play: if Jack’s cards say “Mr Ernest Worthing, B.4. The Albany,” then such must be his identity (I.157-67).\textsuperscript{98} Algernon keeps the card as proof in case Jack tries to deny his identity in the future (and as a talisman to allow himself to take on the identity of Ernest as well). Jack establishes that Ernest is his fictional brother, the point at which the audience must differentiate Jack from Ernest, and also recognize that Jack is not really John either, but some mediation between the city dandy and the country prig. Through the mutual borrowing of this constructed identity, Ernest, Jack and Algernon become fictional brothers. At this point in the play we do not know yet how true their playacting will turn out to be.

When Jack reveals the duality of his constructed self, he launches a \textit{Menaechmi}-like plot (a male recognition comedy). Jack plays his two other roles, and Algernon will also adopt the

\textsuperscript{97} I argue that this John “identity” should not be equated with the Jack character any more than Ernest should be. Dour landowner John is a pose, as is city dandy Ernest. The viewers really see “John” only when Jack comes on stage in Act II dressed in mourning and sporting a sententious attitude. When “Ernest” appears, Jack drops the pose of John once more.

\textsuperscript{98} At several other points in the play, Wilde uses full addresses as proof of identity, however tenuous it is: Jack cites the location in which he was found (a hand-bag, Victoria Station, cloak room, Brighton Line, I.559-67); Cecily’s identity is vouched for with her relationship to the late Thomas Cardew, with his addresses at 149, Belgrave Sq., S.W.; Gervase Park, Dorking, Surrey; and the Sporran, Fifeshire, N.B., III.130-32), and Lady Bracknell confronts Miss Prism about the location of the baby lost from Lord Bracknell’s house, Number 104, Upper Grosvenor St., III.341-32). In the fanciful, superficial world of \textit{Earnest}, a fashionable address is as good as a birth certificate.
name Ernest, as Sosicles took up the name of his lost brother Menaechmus. Algernon is very much a Sosicles, in that with the loss of his elder brother (which we learn at the end of the play), he was forced into a life he did not want to lead. In *Menaechmi*, Sosicles was forced to take the name of his missing brother by his grandfather, so great was the old man’s grief at the loss of Menaechmus. One can conjecture that Sosicles’ life at that point was to be lived in the shadow of the missing Menaechmus: his father died of grief, his grandfather was doubly bereft, and he had to carry around the name of his lost twin (34-42). By the time he reached adulthood, the psychological effects of being second best must have taken their toll, and Sosicles sailed out in search of the missing twin (to redeem his twin or reclaim his own individuality, we cannot know, 69-71). Algernon makes it clear that he is dissatisfied with being an only son and the responsibilities that attend it. Constantly called upon to dine with his Aunt Augusta (to even out her table and talk to tedious guests rather than for his own merit, as both he and Lady Bracknell note [I.240-48, 331-32]), Algernon has invented an invalid named Bunbury\(^99\) so that he might escape the duties of Society and his family, to retire to the country (I.227-33), just as Sosicles will travel the seas searching for Menaechmus, as much to find his brother as to avoid being at home in Syracuse (by the time of his entrance, Sosicles has been at sea for six years, 226-64)\(^{100}\). Both men are forced to adopt an identity not initially theirs, and develop their characters in

\(^{99}\) On the possible real-life inspiration for the name Bunbury, see Mackie (1998).

\(^{100}\) Both Algernon and Sosicles initially eschew women and love. Algernon finds love romantic, but is quite cynical about the relationship once it gets serious (I.73-78) and insists that one needs an escape plan like Bunbury (I.261-75). Sosicles avoids women, chastising his slave Messenio for being a lover of women, while he himself is hot-tempered with easily stirred up emotion (268-69). Algernon will come to love and propose to Cecily (Act II), while Sosicles will have sex with Erotium (Act II, scene iii) and relax his temper by the end of the play, his dour “self” transforming into a man similar to the real Menaechmus (not the performative Menaechmus who behaves as a proper, upstanding Epidamncean, but the Menaechmus who shirks his duties and avoids his wife). The twins are as similar as “milk to milk” (*Men.* 1089) after all, much as the dandies Algernon and Jack are to one another in *Earnest.*
reaction to that identity. Jack and Menaechmus are also forced to act under identities that are not their own. Menaechmus, heir to a rich man, forced to do business in the forum and married to a woman he dislikes, takes every opportunity to avoid his duties and escape to the company of Erotium or his parasite, as we saw above. Jack, made the heir of Thomas Cardew, longs to escape the responsible, priggish existence of John Worthing, the self he cultivated for Cardew.

In Plautus’ play, the identical names, as well as the identical faces of the twin brothers (unknown to each other) create a number of opportunities for slapstick false recognition. The original Menaechmus sets up a variety of events that Sosicles blunders into, not understanding why everyone seems to know him and his name. He enjoys the meretrix, eats the lunch Menaechmus planned for himself and his parasite, steals Menaechmus’ gifts back from the meretrix, gets into an altercation with Menaechmus’ wife, fights with her father, falls out with the parasite, and all the while cannot understand why all of these people seem to know him intimately. These details are strikingly like elements in Earnest, enough to suggest that Wilde is borrowing directly from Menaechmi here. In Earnest, Wilde includes a number of scenes in which one of the two “brothers” claims to be Ernest or rejects someone else’s claim that he is Ernest. First is the scene in Act I with the cigarette case, where Jack rejects his identity as Ernest in order to regain his property from Algernon. At this point, Jack threatens to kill off his imaginary brother (and his other self) when Algernon’s questions begin to annoy him (I.255-60). Destroying Ernest will prove more difficult than he imagines, because in the creation of his dual self, he has given life to Ernest that goes beyond his creation, and beyond the power of the “severe chill” Jack plans to kill off poor Ernest (I.649-59). “Ernest” has been integrated into the society and experiences of Algernon, Gwendolen, and Cecily, and his existence has become bigger than Jack’s control. As Gregor (1966: 516) points out, this is a play full of plot-makers: the men actively change their
“identities” to suit their needs, and the women actively invent romantic lives with a character they have shaped independently of his creator. Everyone has a fantasy of what, and who, Ernest is. The recognition plot serves two purposes: to give Jack a family identity, and to reify “Ernest.”

In Act I, Jack proposes to Gwendolen, and attempts to dissolve his Ernest persona, only to be informed that only the name “Ernest” will do for Gwendolen (I.420-29). For the time, Jack must keep up his charade, as well as the psychological burden of his multiple selves. But as Jack attempts to disassociate himself from the character of “Ernest,” Algernon steps into that role at Jack’s country house, using the card left by “Ernest” to prove his false identity (II.100-19). Algernon then is also Ernest, which leads to Menaechmi-like confusion. When Jack arrives back from town early, bearing news of Ernest’s death, the two “brothers” come face to face. Jack denies having a brother, but is forced by the weight of his earlier lies to play along with Algernon (II.305-46). In his short time at Jack’s house, Algernon learns that “Ernest” is engaged to Cecily (II.456-75). Algernon has a mirror conversation with Cecily of Jack and Gwendolen’s earlier conversation: again, only the name “Ernest” will do (II.513-32).

The misunderstandings continue when Gwendolen and Cecily meet, both believing they are engaged to “Ernest” (II.644-50). The women disabuse each other of the identity of their respective betrotheds when the men arrive: neither of the men is, in fact, “Ernest” (II.724-59). Again Jack attempts to deconstruct the existence of Ernest in a speech heavy with irony, given the resolution of the play: “I will tell you quite frankly that I have no brother Ernest. I have no brother at all. I never had a brother in my life, and I certainly have not the smallest intention of ever having one in the future” (II.771-74). But despite the men’s inability to fully claim the identity of Ernest, they both continue to attempt to inhabit it, as they plan a joint christening to
become “Ernest” (III.52-57). It is only with the resolution of the play, Jack’s recognition as
“Ernest John,” that either brother can keep the identity of “Ernest.” Jack must continue to be his
dual self, being both Ernest and Jack/John, and Algernon may stop being the only son, forced
to go Bunburying to escape his responsibilities. The recognition of Menaechmus as Sosicles’
brother enacted a similar resolution: Menaechmus could be Syracusan Menaechmus, the prodigal
son, the beloved stolen child, and Sosicles could reclaim his original name and pursue an identity
individuated from the ghost of his missing brother. For both pairs of brothers, the assignment of
“identity” is both a monolithic pronouncement of who and what they are, and also a new begin-
ing from which the self can develop.

As in Menaechmi, the recognition of Jack’s identity is underscored by the repetition of
“brother”—the word is said nine times in Jack’s speech, and seven times in the excited reunion
of Menaechmus and Sosicles:

Algy’s elder brother! Then I have a brother after all. I
knew I had a brother! I always said I had a brother!
Cecily,—how could you have ever doubted that I had a
brother. Dr. Chasuble, my unfortunate
brother. Miss Prism, my unfortunate brother. Gwendolen,
my unfortunate brother. Algy, you young scoundrel, you
will have to treat me with more respect in the future.
You have never behaved to me like a brother in all your life.
(Earnest III.420-28)

Jacobs (1992) has argued for the power of appearance and language in Earnest for creating reali-
ty. The characters in Earnest (as in Menaechmi) are all performing a transformative act of mind
over matter: public action, epigram, posing, and the performance of a fictional identity go
further than “reality” in creating identity. In short, “if I say it, it must be true.” Jack’s mantra of
“brother brother brother” has the effect of conjuring the relationship into reality more so than

101 Jack being “a notorious domesticity for John” (I.424).
Lady Bracknell’s pronouncement of Jack’s identity. The same could be said of the fantasy world of *Menaechmi*, where children’s identities are changed with an abrupt shift of residence or a swap of a name. The repetition of *frater* between Menaechmus and Sosicles when Menaechmus’ history is revealed performs a similar function. The former adversaries (for Sosicles angered Menaechmus’ wife and father, alienated his parasite, had sex with his girlfriend, and ate his lunch) are conjured into brothers. With the “brother brother brother” of Earnest, Algernon and Jack, adversaries as well (for Algernon stole his card, pretended to be Ernest so that he could meet Jack’s ward, threw the household into confusion, and ate his luncheon [as well as all the muffins]) are transformed into brothers as well.

Thus Wilde partially enacts much of the *Menaechmi* plotline. I have elsewhere argued that the plot structure of *Earnest* adapts the country/city brothers of *Adelphoe*, and the rape/re cognition/marriage aspects of *Eunuchus*. I briefly sketch that argument in the case study closing the chapter, so I will not examine it in this section. I will focus instead on the recognition plot elements featured in *Earnest* that more typically appear in female recognition ancient comedies, and the way in which Wilde’s subtle adaptation and alteration of the recognition plot reflect typical elements of the genre, while at the same time revise them into something new.

The “missing brother” element, as I have noted, appeared in Plautus’ *Captivi* and *Menaechmi*, but the “missing male” and “adoption of a boy” motifs were first made popular in Me-

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102 Cecily, thinking Algernon was Ernest, invited him in to lunch like Erotium invited Sosicles (II.169-71). Cecily remarks that “Ernest” is in the dining room when Jack arrives (II.302-03). Over an agitated tea Algernon also deprives Jack of his muffins (II.823-92). On the significance of food and etiquette, as well as its consumption in Wilde, see Guy & Small (2006: 127-31) and Ruff (2013).

103 Witzke (2014).
nander (Aspis, Epitrepontes, Hiereia, Misoumenos, Sikyonioi). Roman adaptors were fonder of the “missing citizen daughter” (Plaut. Cas., Cist., Curc., Ep., Poen., Rud.; Ter. An., Eun. HT, Phorm.). For Earnest and A Woman of No Importance Wilde employed the earlier tradition of the boy’s hidden parentage, while in Lady Windermere’s Fan he employed the more common Roman tradition of the lost daughter. Earnest, however, also contains elements of the lost daughter plot from ancient comedy, particularly in the marriage plot.

Early in the play we learn more of Jack’s past: he was adopted as a little boy by Mr. Thomas Cardew, who made him the guardian of Cardew’s granddaughter Cecily (I.189-92). During his interview with Lady Bracknell, Jack reveals that his adoption was the result of his losing his parents, not euphemistically, but literally, as he was a foundling (I.544-48). The wealthy Cardew happened upon the baby in a cloakroom at Victoria Station—the Brighton line (I.559-67). He named the child after the ticket he held in his pocket, for the seaside resort of Worthing in Sussex, making the boy his heir (I.552-54). In this aspect Menaechmi and Earnest share further similarities: in the former, the wealthy old man from Epidamnus snatched the young Menaechmus from a festival in Tarentum, a seaside town in southern Italy, then adopted him, making the boy his heir (26-68). Both wealthy men adopted the boys they found, both re-located the children to their homes in other places (Epidamnus and the Manor House, Woolton, Hertfordshire), both put the young men in charge of women (Menaechmus given the wealthy Matrona as a wife, Jack made the guardian of Cecily), and both wealthy men die before the opening of the play (the young men having grown up and integrated themselves into their respective societies).

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104 Small fragments of these plays were available to Wilde in Meineke (1839-1857).
The romance and recognition of Jack will be central to the plot of *Earnest*. In many of the missing daughter plots, the unidentified young woman is involved in a romance with a man she wishes to marry, but her citizen status is a stumbling block. In ancient Athens, whose laws dictate the conventions of subsequent Roman comedies, a man could not marry a non-citizen woman, making family identity crucial to one’s future. In Victorian England, family identification was not a legal barrier, but it was certainly a social one. Because Lady Bracknell will not allow her daughter to marry a foundling (I.592-96), Jack’s family identity will be crucial to the resolution of the marriage plot. In this respect, *Earnest* has much in common with the female recognition plots of ancient comedy. As I noted, in many of those plays, a young man is in love with a girl, but cannot marry her until her citizenship is established. This gender reversal in *Earnest* diminishes some of Jack’s power, and allows Gwendolen to become a dominant player in their courtship. She grants or refuses marriage, initiates further contact by visiting Jack at his country house, dictates the boundaries of their physical relationship, and establishes the parameters of their non-marriage relationship (she will write to him daily, marry [and marry often],

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105 Pericles had instituted in 451 BCE that citizenship was conferred only on those with a citizen mother and father, which prevented aristocrats from marrying wealthy foreigners as had been the practice (Plut. *Per.* 37.2-5; Aristot. *Ath. Pol.* 26.4). He later regretted the legislation when his legitimate sons were killed in the plague of Athens and he petitioned to have his son by his concubine Aspasia, Pericles the Younger, made a citizen of Athens.


107 Powell (2003: 141) notes, “Jack Worthing—imaginative, androgynous, unearnest—exhibits a manhood that negotiates its path between traditional understandings of masculinity on one side, and a new feminist reading of the male, on the other.” This deconstruction of gendered identity stems from Josephine Butler’s assertion of gender, that “the gendered body is brought into being by gestures and enactments that create the illusion of an organizing gender core, an illusion ‘discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality’” (132).
and offer eternal devotion, I.706-22), much like the young men of ancient Roman comedy pursuing the young women who lack citizenship. These men must settle for lesser relationships too, the terms of which they dictate, often while marrying other people chosen by their families, as Lady Bracknell will do for Gwendolen.108

After denying time and again the existence of “Ernest,” and after a failed attempt to kill off his alter ego, as well as a foiled attempt to use the church to legitimize his other self, Jack experiences a traditional recognition scene in Act III of the play. Lady Bracknell, after issuing a final denial of Jack’s appeal for Gwendolen’s hand, recognizes Miss Prism’s name, and then her person, much as the clever slave in Cistellaria recognizes Selenium’s adopted mother Melaenis and the slave Halisca. In that play, the slave and Phanostrata chase Melaenis and Halisca through the streets, attempting to find them and sort out the parentage of Phanostrata’s daughter, the misplaced Selenium. Lady Bracknell does not turn out to be Jack’s mother, but Miss Prism is much like the distracted and bumbling Halisca who loses the tokens in the street. Miss Prism recounts her mistake:

On the morning of the day you mention, a day that is for ever branded on my memory, I prepared as usual to take the baby out in its perambulator. I had also with me a somewhat old, but capacious hand-bag in which I had intended to place the manuscript of a work of fiction that I had written during my few unoccupied hours. In a moment of mental abstraction, for which I can never forgive myself, I deposited the manuscript in the bassinette, and placed the baby in the hand-bag.109

(Earnest III.353-62)

108 The Saturnalian atmosphere of this comedy is increased by the role reversal in the lovers’ courtship. On the “marrying mommas” in Wilde, see Bochman (2005).

109 Miss Prism’s memory is clearly not as good as she proclaims, as she seems to have put the events completely out of her head until this day 28 years later.
Miss Prism came to be at the Worthing residence three years prior to the events of the play when she was engaged as a tutor for Jack’s ward Cecily. This feature of convenience is akin to that of ancient comedy, in which the old nurse is frequently left in the company of the misplaced child to vouch for her identity years later. Through her recollections, Jack becomes certain that the hand-bag recognition token he keeps in his rooms is the very same one Miss Prism lost. He brings it down to the assembled party so that Miss Prism, his nurse from long ago, can verify the “tokens” (in the same fashion as the nurse sent for in *Eunuchus* to vouch for Pamphila’s identity, see Chapter 4). She notes damage on the bag from “the upsetting of a Gower Street omnibus in younger and happier days,” a “stain on the lining caused by the explosion of a temperance beverage,” and her initials on the lock (III.391-400).

With Miss Prism’s assessment of the bag’s authenticity complete, Jack’s recognition by his family may be completed. Miss Prism points him to Lady Bracknell for confirmation: he is the son of her sister, Mrs. Moncrieff (III.416-19). Lady Bracknell stumbles over the name of the child lost, however, much like Crito in *Andria*, when he attempts to assert Glycerium’s true identity. She has since been renamed by Chrysis’ family (as Jack has been named by Thomas Cardew after the rail ticket he purchased), and her true father Chremes will drop his suspicions only if Crito can provide the original name of the child. In that play Glycerium’s lover Pamphilus chimes in to provide the correct name “Pasibula,” whereas in *Earnest*, Jack himself must discover his original name himself, through clues provided by Lady Bracknell. Through the hint

110 Nurses in ancient comedy: Menander: *Dyskolos*, Simiche; *Georgos*, Phillina; *Heros*, Sophrone; *Perikeiromene*, Doris; *Sikyonia*: old woman; Plautus: *Cistellaria*, Halisca; *Poenulus*, Giddenis; Terence: *Eunuchus*, Sophona; *HT*, Nutrix; *Phormio*, Sophrona.

111 Ross (2012: 178) notes the similarities of the Pasibula/Glycerium, John Ernest/Jack name problem in *Earnest*. We saw in *Captivi* how the child’s recognition turned on reconciling the renamed child with his former name Paegnium/Tyndarus.
that his father was a General having the last name “Moncrieff,” and he was named for his father, Jack is able to locate the Army Lists and discover his Christian name: Ernest John (III.446-69). With Jack’s parentage established and his name restored, he may now be with his beloved Gwendolen; like the restored daughters of New Comedy, Jack is now rendered marriageable. Like Charinus in Andria, Algernon benefits from the recognition of the lost child: since Gwendolen is now free to marry Jack, the limitations on Algernon’s romance have been removed as well, and he may marry Cecily (just as Charinus may marry Chremes’ other daughter now that she is no longer in danger of being married off to Pamphilus). The recognition scene ends with the jubilation of all involved (except, perhaps, Lady Bracknell, who is as nonplussed about the restoration of her nephew as Chremes was by the restoration of his daughter).

Earnest is Wilde’s only “successful” recognition plot, insofar as the recognition takes place and the child is restored to its natal family publicly and to the approval of all parties. By invoking the full recognition plot in his most fantastical, unrealistic Society Play, Wilde comments on the legitimacy of the recognition plot and its relation to the greater Victorian world his plays mimic: the recognition plot with its happy ending, reintegration of the family, and restoration of the individual to the whole, only exists in the realm of fiction. In their conversation in the garden, Cecily and Miss Prism discuss the relative merits of memory. Cecily contends that “memory” (that is, realism, “truth,” or fact) is responsible for things that cannot possibly have happened, the stories that fill the three-volume novels of the lending libraries. She echoes Wilde’s philosophy on the destructive influence of “realism” in art from “The Decay of Lying”—there is no such thing as static “truth,” and slavish devotion to “facts” stifles the development of the self. We may bring to mind Gwendolen’s rejection of Jack’s assertion of her perfection:
Jack: You’re quite perfect, Miss Fairfax.
Gwendolen: Oh! I hope I am not that. It would leave no room for developments, and I intend to develop in many directions.

(Earnest I.296-98)

Miss Prism responds in defense of the three-volume novel, noting that she wrote one herself, in which “The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means” (II.37-55).

Miss Prism is sincere, but she inadvertently makes a wise pronouncement on how morally ambiguous the real world is. Only in the realm of fiction, the realm of the fantasy of this play, can such things actually happen.

And so Wilde deliberately trivializes the ending of his play. When Jack discovers his name and identity, he rushes into Gwendolen’s arms. His exclamation of affection prompts the other lovers to exclaim:

Chasuble: Laetitia!
Miss Prism: Frederick! At last!
Algernon: Cecily! At last!
Jack: Gwendolen! At last!

(Earnest III.482-85)

Lady Bracknell watches the effusive couples with distance, and remarks, “My nephew, you seem to be displaying signs of triviality” (III.481-86). Observant viewers will note that this climax spoofs Victorian melodrama and appeals directly to Gilbert and Sullivan’s Engaged for its formula, the triviality of which Lady Bracknell has noted. But this scene’s degeneration into melodrama reveals the triviality of the recognition plot itself: identity, Wilde seems to point out, is all-

112 Raby (1994: 146) asserts that throughout Wilde’s farce, he deviates from and defies expectations of what that farce should be, that Wilde “constructed the glittering, uncompromising idyll of his last great fiction, with a full complement of apples and serpents” and that the triviality of the play masks the fact that, “the charm of the dialogue has all the practiced artifice of experience and the serpent’s irony makes itself felt in every phrase and cadence.” Jackson (1997: 171-72) contends that Earnest was “defiantly artificial:” his “attack on earnestness undermines not only the well-established ‘high moral tone’ of Victorian plain living and high thinking” and that he also “refuses to join in the earnest struggle for intellectual respectability that marked many of our theatres in the nineties.” That is to say, like Plautus, Wilde could and did thumb his nose at the expectations of his society.
ways fractured, and one’s identity is slippery; it cannot be statically defined and pinned down with a family name. R. Cave (1997) notes that every character in Earnest has a secret life, another self: Algernon is always Bunburying, Jack invents an alter ego named Ernest, Gwendolen pretends to be submissive to her mother while hiding a will of iron, Cecily is a wild romantic (a fact known only to her diary), Prism and Chasuble hide their affections for one another, even Lady Bracknell is not the pillar of high society she pretends to be (having married into the peerage although having no fortune). Wilde highlights this mutability of identity with his undermining of the climactic scene and his unwillingness to resolve Jack’s identity in monolithic terms. Jack is “Ernest John,” and so there is no tidy resolution of which self he “is.” He is all three: Jack, Ernest, and John. His self is no more determined by the resolution of the play than Menaechmus’ or Sosicles’ characters could be defined by their shifting identities.

*Earnest* is the most Plautine and least mimetic of Wilde’s society plays: his other two recognition comedies have much more in common with the social diagnostics of Terence, who created thwarted recognition comedies set in flawed social worlds. Reading and understanding Wilde’s individual society plays, and the messages they offer about the worlds they seek to represent, can help us revisit the dramatic social worlds of Menander, Plautus, and Terence, and better appreciate their relationships to their own historical worlds, as we have seen with Plautus’ *Menaechmi* above. Oft-studied for its farcical humor and relationship to Shakespeare’s *Comedy of Errors*, *Menaechmi* can yield a more nuanced reading of its surprising depths when the Wildean philosophy of identity and the self is brought to bear upon it.
Case Study: Eunuchus and Adelphoe in The Importance of Being Earnest

Modern critics cite the influences of Lestocq and Robson’s play the *Foundling*, De Musset’s *Il ne faut jurer de rien*, Gilbert’s *Engaged*, and Maddison Morton’s *A Husband to Order* on *Earnest*. Wilde was also accused by contemporary critics of stealing wholesale from the Scribe-Sardou tradition of the “well-made” play, as they had used elements of recognition tokens, the woman with a past, a man caught between two women, and the helpful friend. Equally important, however, are the numerous plot elements drawn from ancient comedy, of which *Earnest* is a veritable pastiche. Present are the plot elements of the missing child, the double love story, disguised identity, recognition and tokens, and formidable wealthy women, all common to the New Comedy tradition. The many parallels between New Comedy and Wilde are too specific to ignore.

This play is primarily indebted to Plautus’ *Menaechmi* (as we saw above, so I do not reproduce the analogues here) as well as Terence’s *Adelphoe* and *Eunuchus*, both adapted from Menander’s plays of the same names. Though Terence’s plays survive while Menander’s are fragmentary, Wilde was taught to see Menander in Terence’s originals. *Eunuchus* is generally considered to be faithful to Menander’s original in the basic essentials of the plot, while significant changes have been made to expository speeches, entrances/exits, four-actor adaptations, and depth of the blocking characters. The ending of *Eunuchus* has been hotly debated: Terence

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114 Mikhail (1968).

115 Lowe (1983), Barsby (1993), and Konstan (1995: 131-40). It is impossible to know for certain, however, what was really Menander and not original to Terence, as there are very few extant fragments of Menander’s *Eunouchos* and Donatus is largely unhelpful.
may have adapted it from Menander’s *Kolax*, along with the soldier and parasite characters. The ending of Terence’s *Adelphoe* and its relationship to Menander’s *Adelphoi B* has also been contested, though scholars now mostly agree that Terence remained close to his original.

The *Adelphoe* has two brothers, Aeschinus and Ctesipho, who go back and forth between city and country to see their respective lady-loves, and a mistaken assumption (that one brother has abandoned his lady for the other woman) creates tension. Both brothers enjoy running around the city getting into various scrapes, as Algernon and Jack do. When one brother gets into trouble, the other brother has to bail him out and take the blame. At the end of the play, after various obstacles are removed, both young men can enjoy their girlfriends, one in marriage, the other in a long-term arrangement with his music girl.

The influence of *Adelphoe* is apparent in the characters of Algernon and Jack. Just as the titular *Brothers* do, dandies Algy and “Ernest” go back and forth from city to country, getting into trouble along the way. Like Ctesipho, Jack behaves very politely and stoically in the country (playing the “John” role), but freely gads about town as “Ernest.” Algernon frequently invents excuses to get out of his responsibilities in the city to spend carefree time in the country. In one scene in *Adelphoe*, the more responsible Aeschinus gets into an altercation with a pimp, who threatens legal action for the theft Aeschinus had performed on his brother Ctesipho’s behalf, and the pimp must be bought off. In a deleted scene in *Earnest*, the more responsible John/Jack gets into an altercation with a debt collector over the unpaid bills of his brother “Ernest” (Algy in disguise), and the debt collector must be bought off.

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117 Grant (1975) and Lord (1977).
In *Eunuchus* a young man, Phaedria, is in love with the *meretrix* Thais, who is looking after her ward, the suspected-citizen girl Pamphila. He cannot patronize Thais exclusively, however, because of the impediment of a wealthy soldier who has contracted her. The soldier (or “rival” in the Menandrian original) adds the further complication of ownership of Pamphila. He has given the girl to Thais as a gift, but on the condition that Thais stay away from Phaedria. When Phaedria’s brother Chaerea sees Pamphila, he immediately falls in love and dresses up as the eunuch Phaedria had brought for Thais in order to gain entrance to Thais’ home. He is led inside, in the eunuch’s place, and then rapes Pamphila. After her identity and citizen status are revealed, Chaerea may marry her. Pamphila’s guardian Thais is put under the protection of Phaedria’s family, and Phaedria is allowed access to her once more.

This play’s disturbing plot is lightheartedly adapted for *Earnest*: a younger brother (Chaerea/Algermon) dresses up under pretence to meet a girl (Pamphila/Cecily) connected to his brother (Phaedria/Jack), who is frustrated in love with his own girl (Thais/Gwendolen). In *Earnest* a double engagement replaces the rape and family protection, and in both plays an engagement is facilitated by the identity-recognition of one of the characters. Both plays also feature a wealthy blocking character preventing access to the elder brother’s girl. In *Eunuchus*, comedy is increased when the soldier attacks Thais’ house to remove her ward and pick a fight with Thais, who he believes has betrayed him. Terence notes in his prologue (lines 30-33) that this character was imported from Menander’s *Kolax*. In *Earnest* the braggart soldier is replaced with the imposing wealthy matron Lady Bracknell. The soldier’s comical threats of violence

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118 The bowdlerization of *Eunuchus* had been ongoing throughout the nineteenth century. See Brown (2008).

119 Both blocking characters are pompous and threatening, but neither has any real power, and each is undermined throughout their respective plays. In the end, both characters are mollified by solutions of-
are replaced by Lady Bracknell’s arch and cutting wit as she bursts in on the lovebirds, throwing cold water on amorous affections and delivering some of the funniest lines in the play.

At the climax of Earnest, Miss Prism identifies the handbag in which Jack was found by three of its characteristics (a clever wink at New Comedy’s recognition tokens), and Jack’s identity as the missing baby is revealed. In Eunuchus, Pamphila is discovered to be a citizen, recognized by her brother and her former nurse. Miss Prism, Jack’s former nurse and the current tutor of his ward Cecily, is herself a pastiche of ancient “nurse” tropes. Like the identified children of ancient New Comedy, Jack can take his place in proper society (for the ancient world, citizen society; for the modern, “Society”) and make a good marriage.

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120 These characteristics were a scuff from the overturning of an omnibus, a stain from the explosion of a temperance beverage, and her initials.
CHAPTER 4: FAILED RECOGNITION PLOTS

“To reject one’s own experiences is to arrest one’s own development. To deny one’s own experiences is to put a lie onto the lips of one’s own life. It is no less than a denial of the soul.”

(Wilde, De Profundis)

Where Menander’s comedies end happily with reintegrated families, Terence refuses to restore domestic harmony (if it ever existed in his drama): fathers and sons are not contritely reunited, women are blamed and insulted, and a sense of unease for the family’s future happiness pervades the endings of Terence’s dramas.¹ Those who achieve their aims are happy at the expense of others, whose sufferings are acknowledged by the playwright, who thus troubles the “happiness” of the ending. Whereas Plautus downplays the emotional issues in favor of comedy, Terence asserts seriousness, employing humor sparingly.² Like Wilde, Terence highlights the

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¹ On Terence’s unsettling endings and the failure of reconciliation of the family, see J. Wright (1974: 127-51) and Anderson (1995). Plautus’ comedies end happily, but not necessarily on a moral high note. We are told that the serious aspects of the play resolve themselves, but these resolutions often occur offstage so as not to detract from the slapstick comedy of the plays.

² Terence claims in his prologue that Hecyra (probably the least funny of his plays) failed twice to capture the audiences’ attention (29-48). Whether this claim is factual or a narrative ploy, it highlights the difference in tone between Plautus and Terence.
hypocrisies of the segment of society he examines (the Roman equivalent of the middle-class\(^3\)). Both engage with the “problem play” (as noted in Chapter 2) to examine their society’s social code and claim on morality, and through that examination, each playwright demonstrates his society’s lack of morality. Terence, like Wilde, proposes no new moral code, but rejects the lip service paid to it by his protagonists and their double standard of morality. Through his comedies we see a privileged class that is careless with other people’s lives: indulging pleasures, misplacing children more through their own negligence than the vicissitudes of life, raping without remorse, and treating women like toys or pawns to be moved around. Such is Terence’s social critique.

Terence employs “types” of characters, as established by Menander and Plautus, only to subvert them. Wives behave not like Plautus’ *uxores dotatae*, but are cowed by domineering husbands. Stern *senes* treat their children harshly, despite their own far worse misdeeds. The *adulescens inamoratus*, normally a comic character, betrays a cruel or selfish streak that is innate to his character and not resolved at the end of the play. Clever slaves are introduced only to be sent away, as Terence’s societies are too complex and dark to be restored by the clever machinations of a *servus callidus*. When *meretrices* appear, they are not spirited swindlers, but damaged by the life they have been forced into, aware that they must amass wealth while they can, or earn the protection of a powerful citizen family by risking their own wellbeing. As a result, we witness a society more complexly constructed than Plautus’, and far more troubled than Menander’s.

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\(^3\) This terminology is imprecise and not without problems. When I use “middle class” here, I mean that segment of Roman society that was citizen, neither rich nor poor, and played an active part in the community (going to the forum to participate in lawsuits or politics, engaging in *patrocinium*).
Reading Wilde’s Failed Recognitions in Terence’s Flawed Recognitions

When the recognition plot is enacted by dysfunctional characters, we see a more complicated interpretation of the plot device. Menander’s characters, ultimately “good” in a sincere recognition plot, worked towards the restoration of a temporarily damaged family or society.4 “Identity” is a stumbling block for marriage and social integration, but once it is resolved, Menandrian society is restored. Plautus’ recognition plot is a springboard for comedy, in which identity is a snag that allows for ludic play. Men, when recognized, are freed from their constructed identities and allowed to develop their identities free from the stifling strictures of their false ones. Women disappear altogether after they have been identified. In Terence’s plays, the recognition plot is problematized. Some characters seek to prevent identification for their own selfish gains, or try to keep a newly established identification secret.5 Others are “restored” to families and given a family identity—but that identity is damaged. In Chapter 3 we saw that Wilde’s “successful” recognition plot uses the plot device to explore his philosophy of the self. The resolution of birth identity allowed for further development of self-expression and self-exploration, and the idea that “recognition” or “identity” establishes a static or monolithic self is rejected as trite fiction.


5 On the frustration of anagnorisis and thwarted recognition in Terence’s Hecyra and Phormio, see Anderson (2000, 2002).
But in Wilde’s plays of flawed or thwarted recognition, failure to recognize or develop the self causes the recognition to fail: if one cannot change one’s staunch moral or social values, or ideologies, the recognition of birth identity will change neither one’s perception of self nor one’s acceptance of others. Wilde rejects the superficiality of the recognition plot, asking his audience to consider whether the tidy acquisition of a birth identity can truly act as a panacea for the myriad underlying problems of a damaged society. In his failed recognition plots, he explores the damaging effects of secrets held to the detriment of others and the inevitable dysfunction of a family defined by these unhappy secrets.

When we examine Terence’s plays with Wilde’s strategies for interrogation in mind, we must consider whether the characters involved have developed and if society has altered. Looking at Terence’s plays through Wilde’s failed recognition plots adds a new dimension to the ancient material: instead of taking the recognition plot at face value, as one does with his Greek source material, we must examine whether or not Terence’s societies are actually changed or healed. Does the recognition plot lead to any resolution or restoration? Terence himself seems, like Wilde, to recognize the superficiality of the recognition plot, and he creates dramatic worlds in which dysfunction or deeply flawed family units experience the recognition plot in order to explore the tidy plotline’s inability to actually solve family problems or heal a society in reality. The secrets and hypocrisies of Terence’s characters weigh down the freedom that the Plautine recognition plot gives his characters. In most of Terence’s plays, selfish or harsh characters continue to be hard on their families, hypocrites refuse to acknowledge their hypocrisies, and resolution comes only through shifting blame or misery around. Character cannot develop in an atmosphere in which no character is willing to change his ways and opinions, or where pleasure is gained at the expense of others. These are families defined by their secrets and the pain they
inflict on one another. As a result, the superficially happy endings of Terence’s plays are troubled and unsettling.

**Terence’s Flawed Recognition Plots**

Five of Terence’s six plays involve a recognition plot (only *Adelphoe* does not—in that play, the raped citizen girl knows her rapist, and they plan to marry, but he fears to tell his father what he has done). *Hecyra* involves the recognition of the rapist, and, by consequence, the child of that rape (much like Menander’s *Epitrepontes*, but with a darker tone). In the remaining four plays (*Andria, Eunuchus, Heauton Timorumenos, Phormio*), an adult female must be identified in order to allow or cement her marriage. The ability of the woman to marry turns on the *peripeteia* of the play: the recognition of the girl as a citizen with known parents. All four are double plots, each following a pair of male friends or relatives in their pursuit of the girls with whom they are infatuated. Often the stumbling block is the citizenship or poverty of the girl. The young man in love with the sex worker or enslaved girl can resolve his situation only by purchasing the latter or rejecting the former for a legitimate marriage with a citizen girl. For the other young man, the plot is resolved when the girl he loves is discovered to be a citizen.

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6 For more information on Terence’s double plot, the *duplex comoedia*, see Goldberg (1986: 123-48), which draws on material in Duckworth (1952).

7 Double plot in Terence: *Adelphoe*, Ctesipho, the country brother, is in love with an enslaved girl, while Aeschinus, the city brother, falls for (and rapes) the legitimate citizen girl Pamphila; *Andria* features two young men (Pamphilus and Charinus) in love with citizen women who turn out to be sisters (Glycerium and Philumena); *Eunuchus* ends with Phaedria sharing *meretrix* Thais with the soldier and Chaerea marrying newly-recognized citizen girl Pamphila; in *Heauton Timorumenos*, Clitipho must give up Bacchis and agree to a legitimate marriage, while Clinia may marry newly-recognized Antiphila; in *Phormio*, Phaedria gets to keep the music girl, while Antipho may marry newly-recognized Phanium.
Despite these formally “happy”\(^8\) endings, Terence consistently highlights aspects of the dysfunctional society in which these characters live: lecherous, polygamous old men reject their family duty, stern fathers fail to properly control their household affairs and their children run wild, mothers prove better parents than their incompetent husbands but must suffer abuse, fathers nonchalantly misplace or reject daughters, and marriage is often the result of rape rather than affection.\(^9\) The recognition plot, as I argued in the previous chapter, is used to reintegrate the family unit and repair a damaged society through the proper reintroduction of a lost member, healing the fractured family and restoring order, often through marriage (uniting two families to heal society). For Plautus, the plot’s ludic atmosphere allows characters hindered by their false identity to develop upon the restoration of their birth identity. Recognition is positive for nearly all characters, excepting the buffoonish ones who seek illegitimate affairs or incestuous unions. Terence’s recognitions are deliberately artificial: they fulfill the basic criteria of the genre, but their troubled nature is symptomatic of the underlying problems of his dramatic world. Thus restored identity does little to restore society.

\textit{Andria}\(^{10}\)

In \textit{Andria} (see plot summary in Appendix B), Terence’s first play, performed in 166 BCE and based on Menander’s \textit{Woman of Andros} and \textit{Woman of Perinthos},\(^{11}\) Terence creates his most

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\(^8\) We may not find these endings emotionally satisfying for the participants, but by cultural standards, the marriage or reunion of an alienated couple satisfies the formula and is socially acceptable.

\(^9\) Gellar-Goad (2013) shows how Terence erases representations of religious ritual from his drama to underscore the dysfunction of the citizen families depicted in his plays.

\(^{10}\) For a summary, examination of the major issues, and current bibliography, see Germany (2013).
traditional and unobjectionable society, centered on a recognition plot. In this play, young Pamphilus loves Glycerium, having met her at her adoptive sister’s house. Upon her deathbed, this woman, Chrysis, entrusted Glycerium to Pamphilus in “marriage” (282-98). Pamphilus has taken her as a concubine, as Glycerium’s citizenship is not certain (146, 216), and at the beginning of the play she is about to give birth. Pamphilus’ father Simo disapproves, given that Chrysis gave up virtuous poverty to become a prostitute (74-79), and that Glycerium is poor and foreign. Moreover, he has arranged for Pamphilus to marry neighbor Chremes’ daughter with a substantial dowry (99-102). Now Chremes threatens to break the engagement, having found out about Glycerium. The conflict thus established, Terence works to complicate and then resolve the drama through the recognition of Glycerium.

Glycerium knows her heritage, though she cannot prove it. The slave Davus relates what he believes is a fabricated tale of Glycerium’s childhood (she is a citizen, lost when an Athenian merchant was shipwrecked on Andros, 220-23). Everybody learns in Act V, when Crito intervenes, that Glycerium has been telling the truth (923-37). By Act V, Simo is so desperate to be rid of Glycerium that he argues openly with Chremes, until Crito breaks in. We are surprised to

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11 The didascalia notes the Greek heritage of Terence’s plays. On Terence’s borrowing from Greek New Comedy generally, see Enk (1947), Ludwig (1968), and Brown (2013). On Terence’s Andria and Menander’s originals in particular, see L. Richardson (1997) and Lefèvre (2008). Anderson (2004) examines what he suspects is a Terentian addition, Pamphilus’ servus callidus Sosia.


13 Because Glycerium cannot prove her citizenship, she cannot legally marry a citizen. A concubine lived with her “husband” as a wife, but she did not have the legal protections of a wife.

14 His suspicion is not unreasonable, as Thraso in Menander’s Sikyonioi attempted to hire Kichesias to concoct a similar story for Philoumene (312-60; both concocted stories turn out to be true, though their inventors are unaware of that fact at the time).
learn that Chremes recognizes Crito (906-07). Crito’s tale corroborates Glycerium’s (923-31): the shipwrecked merchant’s name was Phania, from Rhamnus. When he died in Andros, Chrysisis’ father, Crito’s cousin, took the girl in. The girl with Phania was his niece (932). Chremes explains that his brother had taken his daughter in order to avoid the war in Athens, planning to meet Chremes in Asia (935-37). Glycerium’s name is the final verbal token of recognition (940-45). Chremes objects that the name was originally different, and he requires confirmation of her original name to believe fully the story. Luckily, Pamphilus had learned it from Glycerium: Pasibula (945).

Glycerium/Pasibula’s recognition occurs without her presence, and without physical tokens. Part of the irony in the play is Pamphilus’ dogged determination to avoid marrying the daughter of Chremes, not realizing that he has done so already (248-50). Pamphilus is overjoyed to possess his girl legally, with a dowry (ten talents, a very generous sum, 951). Glycerium must be pleased as well, as she loves and depends upon Pamphilus (131-36), having borne him a child (219). Charinus, Pamphilus’ friend, is pleased, as he can marry Chremes’ other daughter (965-81). All three families come together happily and the conflict of the play is resolved.

The society in *Andria* is the least disturbing of Terence’s creations, though there are underlying aspects that viewers may consider off-putting. Simo’s obsessive interest in Chremes’ wealth, his disregard for his son’s happiness, and his disapproval of Glycerium for her poverty are negative characteristics, though his characterization is in keeping with the stereotypical *durus*

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15 Chremes perhaps overcompensates for his incompetence in keeping his daughter safe by offering a large dowry for her. By comparison, Antiphila in *Heauton Timorumenos* is given two talents (835-41, 940), and Demipho offers the titular Phormio thirty *minae* (half a talent) to marry Phanium and take her away (*Phorm.* 661-7). Plautus features generally larger dowries: Selenium in *Cistellaria* is given a staggering twenty talents (561). Dorippa in *Mercator* brought ten talents to her marriage (703). In *Trinummus* Charmides offers 1000 gold Philippics (1158), and in *Truculentus*, Callicles reduces a large dowry by six talents (844) to punish the young man who raped his daughter before marriage.
pater. Chremes points out Simo’s selfishness in pursuing the match. His determination to go through with the marriage has blinded him to the suffering it would cause Chremes’ daughter. In this instance, Chremes proves a good father, refusing to endanger his daughter’s happiness on a gamble: he objects to a match that will be fraught with squabbles and unhappiness, all just so that Pamphilus will be separated from his mistress (828-32). Chremes, while protective of his daughter at home, is somewhat nonchalant about having lost his other daughter. He remarks only that he never heard any more about the matter of his missing brother and daughter (936-37). Did he spend much time looking? Perhaps his daughter’s loss has prompted him to be more protective of his remaining daughter, but one cannot view the recognition scene without noticing his lack of overt emotion. His suspicions persist even after most other characters are convinced, and his response is brief (947). Chremes’ stoicism is a far cry from Daemones’ joy in Rudens.

Heauton Timorumenos

Heauton Timorumenos (see plot summary in Appendix B) also features a double plot. Performed in 163 BCE and based on Menandrian originals, it follows the fortunes and love affairs of Clinia, son of Menedemus, and Clitipho, son of the neighbor Chremes. Clinia has gone away to serve in the army to please his father and stay away from the poor Antiphila, of whom Menedemus had disapproved. The play opens with Chremes’ nosy intervention in Menedemus’ affairs. The latter has repented of his obstinacy, which drove his son away, and is now willing to compromise and give his son anything he wishes, provided only that Clinia return. Menedemus

16 For a summary, examination of the major issues, and current bibliography, see Lefèvre (2013).


therefore originally played the *durus pater* role, and alienated his son. Chremes currently plays the *durus pater* role, and tries to give Menedemus advice and dissuade him from his new, softer position. Terence sets up the action, then, in part as a commentary on the failed child-rearing strategies of the two men. We will soon learn that Clinia’s only wrongdoing was loving a poor girl, while Clitipho pursues a calculating, expensive *meretrix* without his father’s knowledge.\footnote{A similar division of child-rearing strategies is presented in *Adelphoe*; see Fantham (1971) on the similarities and differences in the father-son relationship in these two plays. See also Traill (2013) for current bibliography and a summary of the main issues at stake in the play. In *Adelphoe* too, the lenient father’s son has turned out mostly well, whereas the stern father’s son secretly carries on a love affair with an enslaved prostitute. Menander’s original of the *Adelphoe* likely featured a stronger reunion of fathers and sons, as well as a willingness on Micio’s part to marry Sostrata. See also Grant (1975) and Lord (1977).} Menedemus’ earlier rejection of his son’s girlfriend is like that of Simo in *Andria*: at issue are the girl’s poverty and citizenship, and he refuses to allow his son to continue living with her (96-104).\footnote{Menedemus’ concerns are sound, as any children from the union would be illegitimate.} Thus Clinia’s happiness must turn on the recognition of Antiphila as a citizen.

Through this double plot Terence comments on the options left to a woman without the protection of wealth or citizenship. In *Andria*, Chrysis was forced to choose between poverty and prostitution. In *Heauton Timorumenos*, Antiphila is faced with the same decision, but because she will be discovered a long-lost citizen, Antiphila chooses the morally upright but destitute course. Clinia fears that in his absence she will have turned to prostitution. He learns from his slave Syrus that the old Corinthian woman\footnote{Clinia accuses the old Corinthian woman of being corrupt and obsessed with money (*mater mala*, 233), which is inconsistent with Sostrata’s portrayal of the woman as respectable later in the play (*haud impura*, 629).} was not in fact her mother (269-72), and that Antiphila has been spending her time weaving with a single, unkempt slave maid, living in poverty (274-91). The extravagant *meretrix* Bacchis is a foil for Antiphila: she is what Antiphila

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could have been, but for the dictates of the genre (that is, an undiscovered citizen girl cannot be a practicing prostitute, only a *meretrix*-in-training). Skilled at inflaming desire and juggling lovers (364-68), she is demanding (455-64), and she goes where the money is (723-43). But she is also given a rare opportunity to explain the differences between herself and girls who can afford to choose their fates. Bacchis claims to envy Antiphila, whose character is as pure as her looks, and who has chosen to devote herself to one man, knowing her virtue will prove her case (392-95). For girls like Bacchis, who have no hope of salvation through citizenship and a good family, the only course is prostitution before beauty fades, when they will be left alone and destitute (388-91).

But this will not be Antiphila’s fate. While staying in Bacchis’ retinue at Clitipho’s home, she gives her ring to Sostrata, Clitipho’s mother, for safekeeping. Sostrata recognizes the ring as the one she left with her baby daughter whom Chremes had ordered exposed years before (614-17, 649-52). This ring serves as Antiphila’s recognition token, though the recognition takes place offstage. Thus far the plot has been reminiscent of Plautus’ *Cistellaria*—the girl’s mother was forced to expose her daughter, but finds her safe years later in the company of a freedwoman. Whereas Selenium’s father accepted his newfound daughter, Chremes is furious with his wife for having given the baby away rather than exposing it outright. In his opinion, death would have been preferable to the chance that the girl would fall into enslavement and prostitution (639-43). In this respect he is more cold-hearted than Menander’s fathers, who receive their newfound daughters even when sexually compromised (like Krateia in *Misoumenos* or Glykera in *Perikeiromene*). After berating his wife, he finally accepts the girl, as now he is in

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22 For an examination of the characterization of Bacchis in *HT*, see Knorr (1995).
the mood to receive a daughter, (666-67). It is not irrelevant here that his chief interest in her is
the chance to use her to torment and punish his son, her brother.23

Antiphila’s recognition does not bode well for her brother. Chremes had ordered his
daughter exposed as a baby because he did not want to pay her upkeep, and now he threatens to
disinherit his son for the boy’s disobedience and womanizing.24 These are extreme actions, and
his over-the-top behavior indicates the dysfunction of the society Terence has created for this
play. Chremes does not understand his own family: he chastises his wife for her soft-heartedness
towards their infant daughter, and he rejects his son outright, rather than attempting to reform
him. His earlier platitudes are shown to be hypocritical and false. Antiphila’s recognition thus
does not heal the breach within her family, but rather tears it further apart, since Chremes uses
her as a means to punish his son: he tells Menedemus to inform his son that he is giving his
entire estate to Antiphila’s dowry (940-92).

Clitipho suffers in three ways from Chremes’ strategy. He loses his meretrix girlfriend,
he is disinherited, and he is forced to doubt his father’s love for him (and even his own paterni-
ty). When Clitipho learns about Chremes’ proposed plan from Menedemus, he is distraught
(955-57). Menedemus is shocked as well, and sympathizes with the boy, unable to understand
Chremes’ unfatherly feelings (957-59). Chremes’ plan divides him further from his wife as well,
who champions her son against his recalcitrant father, rebuking him for making their son believe

23 Contra, Konstan (1995: 127-28), who believes that Chremes acts rightly, and his cruelty is
feigned.

24 These are common crimes against fathers in ancient comedy, a point Clitipho himself makes
(957). Plays with young men in pursuit of prostitutes and sex slaves to the annoyance of fathers:
he is not their real child (1014). Clitipho begs to know who his true parents are, and Sostrata tries to calm him (1024-29), but Chremes abuses him (“you’re a useless, good-for-nothing, two-faced, profligate, debauched reprobate,” gerro, iners, fraus, helluo, ganeo’s damnosus, 1033-34). The only solution Chremes accepts is Sostrata’s promise to find Clitipho a wife, and quickly. Clitipho must accept this resolution, or depend on the goodwill of his newfound sister and her husband (965-69). The play ends with Clitipho’s bitter resignation and Chremes’ triumph, a scenario unlikely to engender fraternal feelings in Clitipho for his newfound sister.

Though Clitipho has not suffered permanent damage (his inheritance is safe, provided that he marry), he has been publicly shamed by his father. Chremes has learned nothing of sympathy or softening from Menedemus, and he redoubles his harsh behavior towards his family after suffering the embarrassment of being duped. The audience knows Clitipho has behaved badly, but he has done nothing that Plautine adulescentes have not gotten away with. Clitipho’s defeat and the failure of the family unit to come to a resolution amicably mark a departure from the Menandrian model and the Saturnalian reversal of Plautus.

_Eunuchus_26

_Eunuchus_ (see plot summary in Appendix B), performed in 161 BCE and based on a Menandrian original,27 is considered by modern audiences to be Terence’s most disturbing play.

25 Sostrata remarks that such accusations should come from one’s enemies, not one’s own family (HT, 1015).

26 For a summary, examination of the major issues, and current bibliography, see Christenson (2013).

27 Lloyd-Jones (1973), Lowe (1983), and Barsby (1993) consider Menandrian material in _Eunuchus_. Menander’s _Kolax_ inspired the introduction of the parasite and his soldier companion; see Gilmartin (1975). Further on the soldier, see Frangoulidis (1994).
Another recognition play, it boasts a double plot concerning Phaedria, who desires an exclusive relationship with the prostitute Thais, and his brother Chaerea, who lusts after Thais’ foster sister Pamphila. The conflict in the play comes from the introduction of a soldier vying for Thais’ affection (and who holds Pamphila’s ownership) and Thais’ assertion that Pamphila is a free girl. Early on, Thais explains to Phaedria that she needs several days to win over the soldier and to convince him to give her possession of Pamphila. When Thais was a girl, her Samian mother was given Pamphila, an Athenian girl kidnapped by pirates from Sunium, as a gift from a merchant (108-110). The girl knew her mother and father’s names, but had no recognition tokens or any other identifying information, so Thais’ mother raised the girl like a daughter (111-20). When her mother died, her greedy uncle sold the girl to a soldier, the same one competing with Phaedria for Thais (130-42). When the play begins Thais is trying to get the girl back in order to deliver her to her own people and gain their protection for herself (144-49).

Thus the drama begins with a straightforward recognition plot. In Plautus, there would be clever slave scenes, close calls with the girl being nearly sold away, and a young man in love trying to win and restore her. But this is Terence’s recognition “comedy,” and his society is much darker. A complication arises when Chaerea, Phaedria’s brother, skips out on his ephebic

28 As in Curculio, for instance, where Planesium is at risk of being sold to the soldier, but is rescued (and turns out to be the soldier’s sister anyway) and recognized and may marry her beloved, still a virgin. Epidicus has a similar plot, in that Telestis is nearly made the concubine of Stratippocles, but at the last minute she is discovered to be his sister. Palaestra in Rudens is sold to her beloved, then stolen away by Labrax the pimp before she is handed over to the adulescens. Her recognition saves her from a life of prostitution and she may marry her beloved, still a virgin. The girls in Poenulus are similarly rescued on the verge of becoming prostitutes. Even in Plautus’ plays where the meretrices will not be discovered to be citizens, they are saved from taking on clients other than the adulescens by the machinations of a clever slave (as in Miles Gloriosus, Persa and Pseudolus).
duties and returns to town. He sees Pamphila being led to Thais’ house, and dresses up like a eunuch to switch places with the slave his brother was giving to Thais. In this guise, he infiltrates Thais’ house and rapes Pamphila (549-606). This is not one of comedy’s nighttime, drunken, opportunistic rapes wherein a boy encounters a girl separated from her companions at a festival and takes advantage of her. This is New Comedy’s only daytime, sober, premeditated rape, and the only one described with lurid, excited detail by the perpetrator, who feels no guilt after the fact. Chaerea is callous and nonchalant about the event, and when his friend changes the subject, he has no problem turning his mind to the evening’s dinner party (607-14).

Terence increases the unsettling tone of the play by exploring Pamphila’s reactions to the violation. The maid Pythias bursts out of the house and describes Pamphila’s state: “On top of it

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29 Parmeno wonders why Chaerea has left the Piraeus, where he is supposed to be on guard duty (290). On his shirking of ephebic duty, see L. Smith (1994: 32) note 6, who also cites Wilamowitz on the problem of Chaerea’s absence.

30 Men. Epi. (Dionysia), Sam. (Adonis festival); Plaut. Aul. (vigil for Ceres); Cist. (Phanostrata was raped as a girl at the Dionysia in Sicyon; Alcesimarchus fell in love with Selenium at a Dionysia festival and made entreaties to her mother/seduced the girl); Ter. Ad. (darkness, love, wine, youthfulness, 470), Hec. (darkness, wine, a girl alone in the street [likely at a festival], 822-28).

31 Chaerea is characterized in stark opposition to Menander’s Charisios in Epitrepontes.

32 On the characterization of Chaerea and scholarly responses to him, see L. Smith (1994) and James (1998). Norwood (1923: 61) found Chaerea’s behavior morally repugnant, but Rand (1932: 58-59) found him “one of the most charming scapegraces in all comedy” and Konstan (1986: 387) calls him an “engaging scamp” and asserts that “it is easy to enjoy his ingenuous elation, despite injustice to Thais, whom we know as sympathetic, and her innocent ward.” Smith notes that D. Parker (1974: 151) calls Chaerea “sarmry,” and Goldberg (1986: 115, 121) finds him “selfish,” but Smith believes that these reactions are not strong enough, and goes on to consider how Roman audiences would have reacted to Chaerea’s rape of Pamphila. She concludes that while the play satisfies the social goal (harmony through marriage), the outcome is undermined by Terence’s portrayal of female suffering and his negative representation of the rapist (p. 31). Philippides (1995) suggests that the similarities between Roman marriage ritual and the rape scene excuse Chaerea’s behavior. Contra, James (1998: 40) note 37.
all, after he’d had his fun and games with the poor girl, the villain ripped her whole dress and tore her hair!... The girl is crying and doesn’t dare say what happened when you ask her” (*quin etiam insuper scelu, ’ postquam ludificatust virginem, / vestem onnem miserae discidit, tum ipsum capillo conscidit... virgo ipsa lacrumat neque, quom rogites, quid sit audet dicere, 645-46, 659, Thais recounts the same later, 817-21*).33

Pamphila is in shock following the rape, and her terror must have been all the greater since she had likely felt safe, finally removed from the soldier and back in her sister’s care. Pamphila’s chances of integration into citizen life are seriously damaged by Chaerea’s violence. Thais has explained earlier in the play that her sister managed to survive with her virginity intact (142-44), and she intends to protect the girl until she can deliver Pamphila to her brother, whom Thais has tracked down (203-06). Thus the devastation of Pamphila’s prospects is made more palpable by the playwright. If she had remained a virgin until delivery to her brother, she might have made a good marriage, but now there is little chance of that. To have made it to age sixteen still a virgin, in the care of a prostitute, through multiple sales, and in the hands of a lecherous soldier, only to have her status stolen from her on the eve of her restoration to her family would have been devastating. Dories, when discussing the rape with Pythias, advises her to forget everything she knows about it, as silence is the only way to preserve Pamphila’s chances (721-23). Terence’s plotting of Pamphila’s fate highlights the terrible vulnerability of citizen women in the ancient world. Valued for their chastity, which was irretrievable once lost, women were all the more vulnerable to the vicissitudes of ancient life.

Thais questions Chremes and becomes convinced he is Pamphila’s brother (517-27). She convinces him as well, but he reacts badly when he learns his sister has been left in the care of a

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33 On the importance of Pythias to the plot of *Eunuchus*, see Martin (1995).
prostitute; Thais is quick to inform him that Pamphila has been “brought up in a manner appropriate both to you and to herself” (*educta ita uti teque illaque dignumst*, 748), an exchange that recalls Kichesias’ question when his daughter was discovered in *Sikyonioi*—“Is she decently safe, or just safe?” (371)—and Dromon’s response that the girl was still a virgin. Despite Thais’ earlier assertion that no tokens were involved, she now sends Pythias for Pamphila’s tokens to show to Chremes, as well as to stave off the soldier when he comes for the girl (753, 766-68). Chremes declares Pamphila a free Athenian citizen before Thraso (805-806), and sends for Pamphila’s former nurse to identify the tokens (807-08). Thais learns about the rape and realizes what it means for her and for Pamphila, and accuses Chaerea on grounds that she knows will be meaningful to him: “Now I’ve no idea what to do about the girl. You’ve upset my calculations: I can’t hand her over to her family, which would have been the proper thing and which I’d set my heart on doing in order to gain myself some lasting benefit, Chaerea” (*neque edepol quid nunc consili capiam scio / de virgine istac: ita conturbasti mihi / rationes omnis, ut eam non possim suis / ita ut aequom fuerat atque ut studui tradere, / ut solidum parerem hoc mi beneficium, Chaerea, 867-71*). Thais echoes Pythias and Dorias’ earlier conclusions: after the rape, Pamphila is no longer in a state to return to her citizen family, and she will not make a good marriage. There remains only one course for her now, and that is to be married to her rapist, since she has been proven a citizen (by the nurse, 914-15).

Chaerea’s pleasure at the marriage is clear, and he rejoices that the object of his lust is found to be a citizen (1031-49). Pamphila’s family need not know about the rape, provided Chaerea marry her. The two families will come together, Pamphila will achieve a legitimate marriage, and Thais will gain the protection of Chaerea’s family (and likely Chremes’) for bringing about such a “happy event” (1039-40). Pamphila, however, has no choice in the match,
and will be forced to wed her violent rapist; one thinks she would have been happier to be returned to her brother Chremes while still retaining a relationship with her “sister” Thais. This outcome can no longer occur, and Pamphila’s recognition has played out disastrously: the rape must be kept secret so that Chaerea may avoid punishment from Chremes’ family; Pamphila is not returned to her natal family, but is transferred directly to her husband; Chaerea’s bad behavior is rewarded; Thais must still deal with Thraso and Phaedria (1073-94); and the play ends on an unsettling note. This is not a society restored or reintegrated, but a society still fractured by its secrets and hypocrisies, full of female suffering.

Phormio

Phormio (see plot summary in Appendix B), performed in 161 BCE and based on an original by Apollodorus of Carystus, features his most fractured, damaged society (or one perhaps tied with Hecyra’s dysfunctional society). The social corruption in this play stems from the bigamous Chremes, who has a legitimate wife in Athens, and an illegitimate wife in Lemnos. While the recognition of a daughter typically brings two houses together and heals the broken family that had lost her, this recognition plot actually ruptures a previously functioning family. Furthermore, Phormio is New Comedy’s only anti-recognition plot, wherein a parent actively

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34 On the ending of Eunuchus, see Goldberg (1986: 105-22) and Barsby (2001a: 307-11).

35 For a summary, examination of the major issues, and current bibliography, see Frangoulidis (2013).

36 On Terence and Apollodorus’ Phormio, see Kuiper (1938) and Enk (1947).
tries to suppress the recognition of a lost child.\textsuperscript{37} Terence deconstructs the plot device—and does not use the recognition of a lost child again in his two remaining plays, \textit{Hecyra} and \textit{Adelphoe}.

The identification of \textit{Phormio} as a recognition play is delayed for several acts. It begins much like \textit{Andria} or \textit{Heauton Timoroumenos}, with a father denouncing the marital choice of his son and rejecting the girl for her poverty. Early on, Phanium is declared a citizen through the indirect reporting of the slave Geta, who recounts the marriage of Phanium and Antipho. The young man had tried to take her for a mistress, but her guardian refused, telling him that “the girl was an Athenian citizen, a respectable girl from a respectable family. If he wanted to marry her, he could do so legally; otherwise, the answer was no” (\textit{neque eum aequom facere ait: illam civem esse Atticam, / bonam bonis prognatam: si uxorem velit, / lege id licere facere: sin aliter, negat}, 114-16). Fearing his father’s refusal, Antipho engages the titular parasite Phormio to take him to court asserting that Phanium is a poor \textit{epikleros}, and that Antipho, as her nearest living kin, was obliged to marry her.\textsuperscript{38} Demipho is furious that his son gave in to such trickery, and demands that the marriage be dissolved. He threatens to take Phormio back to court, and he berates his son for marrying a penniless girl against his father’s wishes.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Hecyra} also features a suppression of recognition, but the child in question has already been correctly assumed to be Pamphilus’ and Philumena’s son by other characters; he has not been lost or abandoned. Pamphilus wishes to suppress the circumstances surrounding the baby’s conception rather than its identity.

\textsuperscript{38} Phormio spelled out the law before the court: “there is a law that orphan girls shall marry their next-of-kin, and this same law compels the next-of-kin to marry them” (\textit{lex est ut orbae, qui sint genere proxumi, / is nubant, etillos ducere eadem haec lex iubet}, 125-26). Antipho’s father cites the other part of the law, that in the case of poor \textit{epikleroi}, a dowry of five \textit{minae} is all that is required by the next-of-kin if they choose not to marry the girl (407-10). On the law and the \textit{epikleros}, see Levick (2012). See also Scafuro (1994).

\textsuperscript{39} Phormio is the closest thing Terence has to the \textit{servus callidus} type in Plautus. On Terence’s construction of his only rogue character, see Arnott (1970a) and Segal & Moulton (1978).
We finally get the delayed explanation for Demipho’s disapproval of Phanium in Act IV. His brother Chremes has an illegitimate daughter with the Lemnian wife, though his current wife, Nausistrata, is still living. He is desperate to keep Nausistrata from knowing about the Lemnian family, but now that his daughter is of marriageable age, he must see her successfully wed. Demipho and Chremes plot together to marry her to Demipho’s son, because any outsider might question too closely the girl’s origins (578-84). If Nausistrata were to find out about Chremes’ perfidy, she might divorce him and take everything he has (her dowry and property) back to her natal family (585-87). In order to oust the interloper Phanium, the old men pressure Phormio to marry Phanium himself, thus removing the obstacle (645-78). Chremes has the further cheek to ask Demipho to engage Chremes’ own wife, Nausistrata, to speak to Phanium and get her to leave peaceably (718-23).

Act V finally brings the truth into the open. Chremes meets Sophrona in the street, and recognizes her as his daughter’s nurse (735-36). She calls him by the name Stilpo (740), the name Phormio had earlier given to Demipho as Phanium’s father, when the old man questioned him (389-90). He hauls Sophrona out of the street and orders her never to call him by that name, revealing to her that he gave his Lemnian family a false name to protect his Athenian family. Sophrona confesses that his daughter is in town, and that in order to keep her virtue safe while waiting for “Stilpo,” she has married the girl to a boy who lived nearby: Antipho (749-53). Chremes’ plans have fallen into place without any effort on his part (757-61). Now, however, he must strive to prevent a recognition of Phanium, so he tells Sophrona, “In the name of gods and
men, make sure that nobody discovers that she’s my daughter” (sed per d<eo>s atque homines meam esse hanc cave resciscat quisquam, 764). 40

Now the full extent of Chremes’ deceit is becoming clear: he has committed bigamy, he wants to cheat the law by foisting his questionably legitimate daughter on a relative, and he wants to do so without anyone, especially his wife, learning his schemes. In refusing to acknowledge Phanium to his Athenian family as his daughter, he denies her a legitimate place in his society and his family, as she must keep up pretenses with him for the rest of her life (or Chremes’ wife’s life). Chremes’ web of lies binds him and Demipho in perfidious activity, and creates fissures in the foundation of their kin group. The lies are detrimental to Phanium’s mental wellbeing, though they ensure that her marriage remains intact. But as destructive as a suppressed identity is for the family unit, in this play, a recognition plot destroys the peace of Chremes’ household and irrevocably damages his relationship with Nausistrata.

Chremes nearly gets away with the suppression of Phanium’s identity, but slave gossip reveals the truth to Antipho (861-76). Demipho’s ire with Phormio as well as Chremes’ greed to regain his money (which he had given to the parasite to make him marry Phanium) get the better of them. In the scuffle with Phormio, he shouts out for Nausistrata and reveals all to her (986-1007). Demipho attempts some damage control, trying to calm Nausistrata and convince her that Chremes felt nothing for the Lemnian woman, and had raped her once and never touched her again (1016-19), but the damage to Chremes’ family has already been done. Nausistrata is distraught, her trust and respect for her husband destroyed (1021-24). She refuses to forgive him

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40 Anderson (2002) calls this “privileged recognition,” that is, the recognition without reconciliation that occurs often in Terence, wherein one character actively attempts to keep the recognition confidential information, thus limiting the happy ending of the play. Anderson explores the idea of “privileged recognition” in Phormio and Hecyra, but refrains from commenting on the problematic recognitions, troubled societies, and unsettling endings of Terence’s other plays.
or make him any promises, and she rebukes him for being a bad influence on their son (1040-46). Phormio remarks that this incident will color Nausistrata’s and Chremes’ interactions for the rest their lives (1030).  

This ending is poignant, when viewed from Nausistrata’s perspective. Her recognition has allowed Phanium to marry Antipho (though no one else outside of their family may ever know), and has satisfied the aims of Demipho and Chremes, but it has destroyed Nausistrata’s marriage. Nausistra bitterly asks her brother-in-law:

\begin{quote}
  sed quid sperem? actate porro minu’ peccatum putem?
  iam tum erat senex, senectus si verecundos facit.
  an mea forma atque aestas nunc magis expetendast, Demipho?
  quid mi hic adfert quam ob rem exspectem aut sperem porro non fore?
\end{quote}

\textit{(Phorm. 1022-25)}

Should I suppose that he’ll stray any less in the future with advancing years? If old age makes men more virtuous—he was already an old man then. Am I getting any younger or more attractive now, Demipho? What reason can you suggest why I should expect or hope this won’t happen again in the future?

There is no reconciliation that could erase the painful past for Nausistrata, or help her to forget what she now knows. Phaedria, their son, is called in to arbitrate, but even if he forgives his father, the damage to Nausistrata cannot be undone. We are left to wonder how Nausistrata will behave towards Phanium, a girl she had become fond of during her interview with her (814-15). Now she will be reminded her husband’s treachery every time she sees Phanium, which must be often, given the proximity of the two families. The family is not properly reintegrated, the ending

\footnote{41 On the family dynamics in Chremes’ household in \textit{Phormio}, see Konstan (1983: 115-29). See also an explanation of father-son problems in \textit{Phormio} in financial market metaphors in J. Smith (2004).}
is bittersweet, and Terence highlights yet again the flawed reality under the morally upstanding surface of the middle-class family.  

\textit{Hecyra}  

Terence’s fifth play (see plot summary in Appendix B), based on a Greek original by Apollodorus (the author who also wrote the original on which \textit{Phormio} was based), features a different sort of recognition plot, that of the rapist (and therefore a recognition of the paternity of the child). The story is similar to \textit{Epitrepontes}: a young woman is raped before her marriage (383-85), but instead of her stealing a ring from her rapist and leaving it later with her exposed child, the rapist steals a ring from her (572-75). The young woman, Philumena, is then married to her neighbor Pamphilus, who refuses to consummate the marriage for two months because he is still in love with the meretrix next door, Bacchis (135-37; 392-94). When Philumena goes into labor (resulting from the rape), she withdraws to her natal home to attempt to hide the pregnancy from her husband, who has been away for several months. Pamphilus walks in on Philumena and her mother Myrrina with the baby, and he rejects his wife, though he promises to keep her secret. Myrrina promises to expose the baby (\textit{continuo exponetur}, 400), but then her husband Phidippus finds her with the child, assumes it is a premature child of Philumena and Pamphilus’  

\footnote{42} Phaedria does manage to benefit from Chremes’ discomfort. In the face of Chremes’ crimes, Nausistrata is willing to overlook Phaedra’s spending 30 minae of his father’s money (which was actually her money, 679-81) to purchase his music girl and free her (1039-42).

\footnote{43} For a summary, examination of the major issues, and current bibliography, see Knorr (2013).

\footnote{44} The play is his second in composition. Earlier staging attempts were made, but failed. Terence’s plays are generally listed chronologically by date of successful performance. On the significance of order by composition rather than date of complete performance, see Penwill (2004: 130). I will not be examining \textit{Adelphoe} in this chapter.

\footnote{45} See note 36; on the \textit{Hekyra} alone, see Sewart (1974).
marriage, and accuses her of trying to break up the marriage. Similarly, Pamphilus’ father Laches accuses his wife Sostrata of driving Philumena out of their home. Pamphilus, unlike his counterpart in *Epitrepontes*, is not at all sympathetic when he hears that his wife has been raped, even though he knows he is a rapist himself. Instead, he reasons that the loss of his beloved wife can be gotten over quickly—after all, he got over the loss of Bacchis (407-08). All he can think of is escaping the shame of raising another man’s bastard (648-49, 671).

The resolution of the recognition plot comes through the *meretrix* Bacchis, just as the *hetaira* Habrotonon had worked to resolve the plot of *Epitrepontes*. In this play, Bacchis is sent by the fathers Laches and Phidippus to speak with Myrrina and to convince her that she is no longer sexually involved with Myrrina’s son-in-law. Myrrina recognizes Bacchis’ ring as one stolen from her daughter. Bacchis swiftly deduces that Pamphilus must be Philumena’s rapist, as he had given Bacchis the ring after taking it from a girl he had raped (816-32).

This play departs from the traditional recognition plot in that the child is not actually lost or exposed, but remains with its mother and her family; it is even assumed by nearly everyone involved to be the child of the male protagonist. There is no on-stage recognition scene, and because the child was not exposed, no recognition tokens in the traditional sense. The ring stolen from the rape victim (a reversal of the traditional scenario, in which the victim takes an item from her rapist before he runs away) serves as a recognition token for the rape. There will be no public recognition or joyous reunion because the craven rapist fears being found out by his father. Myrrina and Sostrata continue to be blamed by their husbands for trying to break up the young couple, and Pamphilus never acknowledges his crime.
This is one of Terence’s most unpleasant and dysfunctional societies. Nearly all the female characters suffer for the actions and beliefs of the male characters. Society is reintegrated by a lie, namely that the women tried to break up the marriage. Pamphilus callously ignores his wife’s pain and suffering: he celebrates the restoration of his family not with his wife and new baby, but with his ex-girlfriend (855-71). Pamphilus also does not care that he is the instrument of his mother’s misfortune, as she will withdraw from her friends and society to go into the country with her hateful husband (577-612), leaving their house in town to Pamphilus and his wife, whom Sostrata (to the end) believes hates her. The resolution is discordant and uncomfortable, with Pamphilus’ guilt suppressed so that he may save face in front of his family. He tells Bacchis to keep everything to herself: “There’s no need to [tell], not even a whisper. I don’t want what happens in comedies to happen here, where everyone finds out everything. In this case those who need to know know already; those who don’t must not find out or ever know” (neque opus est / adeo muttit. placet non fieri hoc itidem ut in comoediis /omnia omnes ubi resciscunt. hic quos par fuerat resciscere / sciunt; quos non autem aequomst scire neque resciscent neque scient, 865-68). Pamphilus will not change, nor will he learn from his errors. He remains a cowardly and despicable young man, well on his way to being a misera-

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46 This play is nearly as discomfiting as _Eunuchus_ and _Phormio_. Ancient audiences found it difficult to watch, if Terence’s prologues are to be believed. It took three stagings for the play to be shown in its entirety. Terence blames tightrope-walkers in the first instance, and a gladiatorial show in the second. On the supposed failure of _Hecyra_, see Gilula (1978, 1981) and Sandbach (1982). Knorr (2013: 295-98) examines the validity of _Hecyra’s_ “failure” in both ancient and modern times.

47 See Slater (1988) on the burden the female characters must carry. Myrrina and Sostrata carry all the blame, and are hated by their husbands, who never learn how unfair they have been to their wives.

48 McGarrity (1980-1981) explores Pamphilus’ shame and the elaborate deceit that ensures his continued happiness at the expense of others.
ble old man like his father. He has been saved with no consequences for himself, while everyone else must contend with the emotional wreckage he has left in his wake.  

Conclusions

In Chapter 3 we saw that Wilde’s “successful” recognition plot used the device as a means of exploring his philosophy of the self. The resolution of one’s birth identity allowed for further development of self-expression and self-exploration. In Wilde’s plays of flawed or thwarted recognition, failure to recognize or develop the self leads to a failure of the recognition plot: if one cannot change one’s moral or social values nor one’s ideologies, the recognition of birth identity will change neither one’s perception of self or one’s acceptance of others. Looking at Terence’s plays with Wilde’s failed recognition plot in mind adds a new dimension to Terence’s recognition plots: we must examine whether or not Terence’s societies are actually changed or healed. Does the recognition plot lead to any resolution or restoration?

Terence employs troubling plots to examine the ways in which morally bankrupt authoritarian characters engage in perverted pietas and hypocritically rule over their families. They pay lip service to cultural traditions and standards of morality while missing the mark themselves. In Menander’s plays, the recognition plot facilitates the restoration of a temporarily damaged family unit or society. Plautus, as we saw, rejects the seriousness of the recognition plot to play up the slapstick humor of mistaken identity. Terence, on the other hand, uses the recognition plot to represent the greater disharmony of his dramatic societies. Misplaced children, rediscovered and identified, reveal through their recognition larger problems within the families

to which they return. Husbands abuse wives, fathers neglect or callously reject children, youthful misbehavior is darker and crueler than any Plautus could imagine, and women, in the midst of all of this familial mismanagement, must take charge and resolve conflict themselves.

Recognition plots reveal family dysfunction, and through the revelation, the family is supposed to be restored. But Terence’s hypocritical characters actively attempt to thwart recognition and derail the restoration that should result, because the problems faced by his dramatic societies are too complex for the recognition plot to solve. In the case of several of Terence’s families, the revelation of identity creates deeper fissures within the damaged society in which it plays out. Selfish or harsh characters continue to be hard on their families, hypocrites refuse to acknowledge their hypocrisies, and resolution comes only through shifting blame or misery around. Character cannot develop when nobody is willing to change behaviors or beliefs, or where pleasure is gained only at the expense of others. Both Terence and Wilde employ the recognition plot to demonstrate its artificiality: finding one’s family is only the beginning. For genuine healing of society, change must come from within rather than without.

**Wilde’s Failed Recognitions**

As I noted in Chapter 3, Wilde staged both successful and unsuccessful recognitions, adapting the Plautine and Terentian exploration of the recognition plot. For Wilde, “recognitions” are formal dramatic devices that symbolize internal issues of identity. Identity, the self, is not stable, but fluid and ever-changing, or ought to be, according to Wildean philosophy: the contemplative life is a “life that has for its aim not doing but being, and not being merely, but be-

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50 Save, perhaps, Diniarchus’ callous treatment of his fiancée in *Truculentus*, or her father Callicles’ concern for her financial value rather than emotional state.
Identity in the traditional sense—one’s place in the family or society—is an aspect of the self, but must not be an end point. Recognitions succeed when characters are not limited in their perceptions of themselves and continue to develop (or at least show the promise of it) after their natal identity is restored, as in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Flawed or failed recognitions are symptoms of failed self-understanding or a failure to break out of the conventional confines of morality or social order to which one adheres. Characters who are staunch in their socially-defined moral values and their ideas about one’s innate, unchanging self can go only so far with a recognition; it will fail altogether, as in *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, or it will change circumstances without changing self-understanding, as in *A Woman of No Importance*.

*Lady Windermere’s Fan*

*Lady Windermere’s Fan* (see plot summary in Appendix B), as we saw in Chapter 2, explores the theme of the fractured family. Husbands and wives are deceitful, society turns a blind eye, and the period’s double standards condemn women while forgiving men. Though this play has many precedents in Restoration comedy, the French “well-made play,” and nineteenth-century British theatre, it also draws upon elements of the ancient recognition comedy, aligning itself with Terentian “flawed recognition” comedies. We have a woman whose family identity has been obscured, whose marriage is endangered by her identity, and who does not know herself. There are several potential recognition tokens, and a dysfunctional society in which the recognition plot plays out. We also have a parent who actively attempts to keep the family identity of a child from coming to light. Like *Phormio*, this play postpones identification and recognition, and the drama appears in the first Act and most of the second to engage solely with

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51 Emphasis Wilde’s (“Critic as Artist II,” *Prose*, 256).
the moral issues of the “problem play” (such as the sexual double standard, an issue that
Menander, Plautus, and Terence also explore at length). When we learn in Act II that Mrs.
Erlynne is in fact Lady Windermere’s long-lost mother, we expect to see a standard recognition
plot.

Initially we learn that Lady Windermere’s mother died when she was a small child, and
that she was raised by her Puritan Aunt Julia, who allowed no moral compromise in her young
charge (I.75-80), much as Chrysis in Andria raised and guided Glycerium with every considera-
tion for the girl’s purity, even at the expense of her own. Aunt Julia’s moral obstinacy cements in
Lady Windermere an unyielding character that is given no room to develop freely. Glycerium
too is not a complex character, but a paragon. When Pamphilus meets her, his love is inspired by
her purity and her vulnerability, and he wants to protect her like a fragile thing (127-36). At the
beginning of the play Lady Windermere’s stunted development makes her no more mature than a
child, with a child’s grasp of morality and human nature (she is, in fact, coming “of age” [21
years old] the day the play takes place). Her husband paternalistically calls her “child” in most
of their conversations (I.475; IV.44, 76, 100, 387), and repeatedly seeks to shelter her purity
from the harsh truths of the world (while also wishing, somewhat paradoxically, that she were
more morally flexible).52

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52 Lady Windermere’s character at this point is the stereotype of the “angel of the house,” a
mother who is scarcely more mature or knowing than a child herself, and whose stunted
emotional development allows Lord Windermere to shelter and protect her. See Gorham (1982:
4-12).
Lady Windermere sees the world in moral absolutes—right and wrong, with no possible compromise or hope for rehabilitation in those who transgress society’s strictures.\textsuperscript{53} She is naïve, set apart from the more worldly of her companions who insist on a new morality, wherein no one is divided between good or bad, but must be either charming or tedious instead (I.112-14).\textsuperscript{54} Lady Windermere cannot countenance anyone who does not share her moral intransigence. She is an incomplete character, and Wilde sets her up for a fall. When she suspects that her husband is having an affair, she cannot hear anything else, despite her husband’s insistence that Mrs. Erlynne is to be pitied. He insists that nothing is happening between them, and Mrs. Erlynne deserves sympathy—though her problems were of her own making, she sinned when she was but a girl, and she deserves a second chance at life (I.389-406). The Lady Windermere of Act I cannot accept his arguments, and we are left wondering how her husband can justify his suspicious actions in such a way as to mollify her implacable moral indignation. Lady Windermere plots humiliation for Mrs. Erlynne at her party that evening (she will strike the woman with her fan, the birthday gift from her husband, I.480-82). Her shocked husband says she would not do such a thing; she replies that her husband does not know her (I.483-84).

The dramatic irony, observable upon review, is that Lady Windermere does not know herself; she does not yet know the lengths to which she will go to avenge herself, and the moral compromises she will make when she herself is threatened. Her unyielding nature, her Puritan-
ism, is a cardinal sin in Wildean philosophy. Her staunch morals and values, and her inability to understand herself or others, keep her from engaging truthfully with the world or exploring parts of herself that do not map onto her preexisting ideas of social categories or ways of being. Wilde said in “Critic as Artist” (*Prose* 261), “We are never more true to ourselves than when we are inconsistent.” Consistency of character only existed in the unimaginative, formulaic three-volume novels Wilde abhorred (and which he derided in “Decay of Lying” and “Critic as Artist”). Lady Windermere’s rigid consistency prevents her from developing in any way, resulting in a stunted caricature of a person, a Victorian paper doll with only one outfit.55

When Lady Windermere storms out of the room at the end of Act I, Lord Windermere hints at the deeper truth about Mrs. Erlynne, and how the woman’s identity might affect his wife: “My God! What shall I do? I dare not tell her who this woman really is. The shame would kill her” (503-05). We do not fully understand his exclamation until the end of Act II, when Mrs. Erlynne turns out to be Lady Windermere’s mother. Leading up to this admission there are hints from Mrs. Erlynne and other characters that she is more than what she seems, which become more portentous upon re-reading or viewing. Lord Augustus, the aged masher56 who wishes to marry her, marvels with consternation that she seems to have no family identity or relations, necessary commodities for getting ahead in society (II.64-68). She is a woman with a past, but no discernable history. We get another hint at Mrs. Erlynne’s identity in the conversation between Lord Darlington and Lady Windermere. When he chides Lady Windermere to leave her


56 Lord Augustus’ slang (particularly “demmed”) identifies him as a “masher” or man-about-town, rather than a dandy. See Small (1999: 32), note on Act II, line 64.
husband and run away with him, Darlington describes what life would be like if she stayed, and had to continue seeing Mrs. Erlynne: the two ladies would go driving in the Park together, Mrs. Erlynne would be her constant guest, and the two women would become dearest friends (II.312-16). He means to expose the hypocrisy of the relationship that Lord Windermere seems to want to foster, so that Windermere can have both wife and mistress, but on another level, he describes the relationship Lady Windermere might have had with her mother. Mrs. Erlynne herself drops another hint. She comments on Lady Windermere’s prettiness, remarking that she last saw the girl twenty years earlier, when she was a “fright in flannel” (II.402-04). At the act’s close, after Lady Windermere has written the fateful letter to her husband announcing her decision to leave him, we learn Mrs. Erlynne’s true identity. She intercepts the letter and cries: “A daughter must not be like the mother—that would be terrible. How can I save her? How can I save my child?” (490-92).

For the remainder of the play, we expect a recognition scene and the restoration of Lady Windermere to her true identity, as was common in both Victorian melodrama and in the ancient material from which it derives. The damage caused by Lord Windermere’s supposed affair with Mrs. Erlynne and the suppression of her identity should be undone, and Lady Windermere should experience a joyous reunion with her mother. The traditional recognition structure established by Menander and refined by Plautus calls for that type of ending, as do the conventions of the Victorian sensation play. Wilde, however, in his subversion of established literary codes operating throughout his first comedy, rejects the accepted recognition structure (much as Terence departs from the traditional recognition plot with his problematic or thwarted recognitions in Andria, Hecyra, and Phormio). Throughout Act III we see more deeply the

57 On the dramatic convention of the revelation of the fallen woman and her repentance, see Powell (1990: 14-32) “Lady Windermere’s Fan and the Unmotherly Mother.”
extent of Mrs. Erlynne’s notoriety and social isolation (see Chapter 2). The potential impact of the recognition of Lady Windermere’s true parentage on her psyche and social status becomes increasingly evident.

Act III is full of dramatic irony: the audience knows Mrs. Erlynne is Lady Windermere’s mother, but Lady Windermere does not. Lady Windermere’s insults cut deeper, and we feel for Mrs. Erlynne, fraught with emotion but unable to express its source. At the height of their verbal battle, Mrs. Erlynne tries to explain that Lady Windermere’s husband still loves her, that the cause of the relationship between herself and Lady Windermere’s husband is his love for his wife. Lady Windermere protests, “What do you mean? You are insolent! What have I to do with you?” (III.126-27). Deflated, Mrs. Erlynne can only reply, “Nothing. I know it” (III.128). Lady Windermere can never learn just how much she has to do with Mrs. Erlynne. Mrs. Erlynne begs Lady Windermere not to destroy her life, outlining the horrors of social alienation (III.142-76). Moments later she will submit to complete ruination, sacrificing her own reputation to save Lady Windermere’s, allowing the young woman to sneak out of Lord Darlington’s rooms while she stays to take the blame.

Once Mrs. Erlynne has been humiliated and exposed to the gossip of the men who find her in Lord Darlington’s rooms, any public recognition of Mrs. Erlynne as Lady Windermere’s mother becomes impossible. The revelation would certainly harm Lady Windermere socially and psychologically because of Mrs. Erlynne’s publicly known character, but—more importantly—its suppression allows Wilde to question the productivity of this type of ending. Traditional recognition comedies tidily wrap up with such endings, but Wilde problematizes the realism of the recognition plot. Here, what matters is not Lady Windermere’s birth identity, but her constructed one. What is recognized is that identity depends less upon family or social
affiliation than on the ability to understand the self and how it relates to the greater world in a more flexible way. In thus thwarting the traditional recognition, Wilde treats us to a criticism of the theatrical convention of “types,” and the tidy moral delineations of Victorian society dramas and ancient recognition comedies.

In Act IV Mrs. Erlynne forcefully refuses to reveal herself, and threatens Lord Windermere with terrible consequences should he ever reveal the truth to his wife (268-72). Now the plot is more akin to the suppressed recognition of Terence’s Phormio. Chremes’ misbehavior and rejection of appropriate social duty (by having a second family) threaten his family and his wife’s respect. He actively tried to keep his true identity a secret from his second family, and he tries to keep his daughter’s paternity from coming to light for his own selfish reasons. Likewise, Mrs. Erlynne actively prevents her daughter’s anagnorisis, as it would destroy the girl’s newfound regard for her, and would force her to accept the role of a mother, a role she has rejected. Mrs. Erlynne is also motivated by less selfish reasons, however. Full disclosure of her identity, and subsequently Lady Windermere’s, would destroy the girl’s every founding ideal, since Lady Windermere’s rigid character was built around the perfect (though false and static) memory of her dead mother (IV.300-15). Lady Windermere says her father died of a broken heart, and Mrs. Erlynne realizes the truth to her daughter’s words and the damage she has done to her former family. Though Lady Windermere sorely needs to reevaluate her ideals, a shock of that magnitude would not be conducive to her self-development.

The ending is bittersweet, as Wilde plays out the shadow of a recognition scene: Mrs. Erlynne asks for the fan that had nearly proved Lady Windermere’s undoing; the girl happily gives it to her, but remembers that it is inscribed with her name, which was her mother’s name. Mrs. Erlynne reminds her that they share a name. This is the closest they come to reunion (353-
64), and reminds the discerning reader of the power of names in the recognition scene: establishing one’s name and one’s parents’ names can stand in for physical tokens of recognition. The picture of her mother that Lady Windermere kisses every night (IV.212-14) also might have served as a recognition token, a last gift of mother to daughter before they were parted, like the tokens Phanostrata left for Selenium in Cistellaria. Lady Windermere might have recognized her mother in Mrs. Erlynne, if she had the capacity to look in such a way, but she is too blinded by her preconceived sense of self.

Originally, Wilde followed the format of ancient new comedy, in which the revelation of the child’s parentage comes late in the play.58 When preparing for performance, George Alexander, to whom Wilde had sold the play, argued for the revelation of Mrs. Erlynne’s identity to the audience earlier in the play than Act IV, but for the premiere Wilde retained his structure. Reviewers were horrified by this departure from the form of the French well-made play and Victorian melodrama; the Daily Telegraph (Feb. 22, 1892) wrote:

Neither Sheridan nor Dumas nor Sardou was ever to our knowledge guilty of the heresy known as the “stage surprise.” They never fogged their audience for three acts in order to startle them with a bombshell in Act IV. But this is exactly what Mr Wilde elects to do in the teeth of precedent, and with the full knowledge that no play has ever yet interested or wholly enthralled an audience unless the author at once gets that assembly into his confidence and allows it to act as the conscience of the drama.59

58 See earlier in this chapter, as well as Chapter 3, for a detailed examination of the structure of new comic recognition plots. The prologue reveals the truth to the audience before the first act, but the staged revelation does not occur until late in the play.

59 Menander and Plautus revealed their plots to the audience ahead of time, but Terence kept back this information, forcing the audience to bear with him, unaware of the twists in store. Wilde attempted to do just that, but the expectations of his contemporaries rankled at his dramatic strategy. The anonymous reviewer does not advocate Terence’s dramatic strategy (nor, apparently, did contemporary critics of Terence; see Dombrowski [2010]).
Wilde, probably dismayed by the reviews, relented after the first performance, agreeing that “the psychological interest of the second act would be greatly increased” if Mrs. Erlynne’s identity were known earlier.60

In Wilde’s compositional strategy, “the psychological approach” meant “finding the moment at which a reaction or change of behavior occurs, and in the attempt to produce character subtly differentiated from conventional theatrical ‘types.”61 Throughout Windermere, Wilde problematizes the character of the fallen woman and the tearful recognition scene that such a character usually undergoes. R. Cave (2006: 220) notes that to Wilde “Mrs. Erlynne is not a type but an individual with a distinct history, precision of motive, developed social acumen and a determination to succeed in re-establishing herself in society on her own terms. She refuses to play-act the contrite magdalen, since that is to fix herself permanently in a single role for which she has none of the required qualities.” Mrs. Erlynne preserves her lack of static identity: she refuses to be a mother as much as she refuses to be a depraved adventuress. Jacobs (1992: 17) says, “Though she does not regret saving her daughter, she is openly repelled by her spontaneous gesture, which (ironically) threatens to encapsulate her inside an identity.” By voiding this part of her identity, Mrs. Erlynne leaves open options for her playacting. Her character is complex, and the recognition to which Wilde wants Lady Windermere to come is not her birth identity, but some shade of Mrs. Erlynne’s protean character. Mrs. Erlynne is fully in control of herself and she has come to terms with who and what she is. Thus she can be any number of things to a number of people: an adventuress to the gossips, blackmailer to Lord Windermere, captivating

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Society lady to Augustus, a “good woman” to Lady Windermere. She is an actress through and through, capable of deftly managing all the other characters in the play, each of whom has assigned a type to her, and each of whom she surpasses in individuality and deviation from type.\textsuperscript{62}

In recognition comedies the recognition and reintegration into the family of the wayward child is usually cause for celebration, a means of healing communal rifts, restoring proper order to the society of the play, and allowing the recognized children to take his/her place in that order. For female children the social order includes a legitimate marriage and salvation from a much worse fate. The typical elements of recognition are present in Wilde’s drama (the tokens, the broken society, the threatened romantic relationship, and the emotional parent), but a standard recognition is thwarted. Lady Windermere misses the meaning of her recognition tokens, her parent withdraws, and her marriage must be healed by other means. In \textit{Phormio}, the revelation of Chremes’ and Phanium’s identities irreparably damages their family because their society is corrupt. Wilde’s society is similarly flawed, because its moral values are flawed, and his Society characters are blind to the realities of their world. Wilde pulls back from the destruction of the family unit that occurred in \textit{Phormio}, exploring instead another kind of recognition, Lady Windermere’s self-development. But even this “recognition” cannot be entirely successful, because Lady Windermere is still the product of her limited understanding, and can never achieve the self-awareness that Mrs. Erlynne possesses.\textsuperscript{63}

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\textsuperscript{62} See R. Cave (1997) for a sophisticated treatment of Mrs. Erlynne’s complexity.

\textsuperscript{63} Even if she could possess this self-awareness, her marital relationship could not withstand such self-discovery, as Lord Windermere is not well rounded enough himself to support a wife who is more than a caricature. The husbands and lovers of New Comedy too prefer not to think of their women as having identities outside of themselves.
The frustrated anticipation of the audience for the revelation of mother to daughter must be exorcized in another way. Since Lady Windermere cannot achieve self-actualization though the recognition of her “true” identity and her restoration to her parent, she must come into herself through other means. Her new “identity” is achieved through her growth as a character: the narrowly averted discovery in Lord Darlington’s rooms and Mrs. Erlynne’s acceptance of the blame through self-sacrifice teach her the falseness of her earlier moral position. She knows now that Mrs. Erlynne is not what everyone has said, and that moral situations are not always black and white. When Darlington denounces Mrs. Erlynne as the most dangerous woman he knows (IV.96-98), a sinner, and a bad woman (IV.62-67), Lady Windermere argues:

I don’t think now that people can be divided into the good and the bad, as though they were two separate races or creations. What are called good women may have terrible things in them, mad moods of recklessness, assertion, jealousy, sin. Bad women, as they are termed, may have in them sorrow, repentance, pity, sacrifice. And I don’t think Mrs. Erlynne a bad woman—I know she’s not.

(Fan IV.68-75)

But does she? Lady Windermere has moved from complete innocence to a more mature understanding of the complexities of the world, but has she really adopted a new moral paradigm? Wilde’s conventional ending of the play (noting the play’s subtitle [A Good Woman] in the line, “Ah, you’re marrying a very good woman!” [IV.420]), indicates Lady Windermere’s new understanding, as Raby (1988: 88) notes, but also highlights her continued ignorance. Lady Windermere calls Mrs. Erlynne a “good woman” but does not understand why she has acted or what she has given up; nor does she recognize Mrs. Erlynne’s actual virtue. Lady Windermere is no more correct in her assessment than Lord Windermere is in his dismissal of Mrs. Erlynne as a
Lady Windermere does not understand the “modern dress” of Mrs. Erlynne, nor the multiform machinations she must conceive and carry out in order to bring about a resolution to the play. What Lady Windermere has learned is not so much a flexibility of morality, but rather the hypocrisy of a convenient lie.

Lady Windermere may soften her rigid moral structure if it means maintaining the equilibrium of her marriage, but even this victory over her character is hard won. At the beginning of Act IV, she believes that she must tell her husband that she nearly eloped with Lord Darlington, so antithetical to her character is the idea of lying. Mrs. Erlynne must convince her that bending the rules and lying to spare the feelings of others is sometimes beneficial. As Jacobs (1992: 17) astutely observes, Lady Windermere remains a “morally immature character, kept in the dark to the last on grounds that she does not have the temperament for truth, which brings the play’s very axioms into question, since the only character to unmask an identity does so in the

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64 Lord Augustus too does not recognize the complexity of his bride, who has not explained “every demmed thing” but has instead constructed a false but attractive “truth” for Lord Augustus in accordance with Wilde’s philosophy on lying in “The Decay of Lying”, as noted in Gregor (1966: 507).

65 When Mrs. Erlynne determines not to reveal herself to Lady Windermere, she hides her feelings and flippantly remarks to Lord Windermere, “I thought I had no heart. I find I have, and a heart doesn’t suit me, Windermere. Somehow it doesn’t go with modern dress. It makes one look old” (IV.239-42). Wilde is commenting in part on the tired melodrama expected in Society plays of the period—the contrition and resignation on the part of “fallen” women—and he defies audience expectations for Mrs. Erlynne. On Lady Windermere, Mrs. Erlynne, and “modern dress,” see Bristow (1994: 59).

66 Gregor (1966: 506-507) argues, “Wilde directs his irony perfectly. Lady Windermere is now very happy, when her honor is threatened, to see goodness in a well-intentioned lie; her ‘hard and fast rules’ have been quietly waved aside. Beyond this gently satiric touch, however, the lines have a greater interest, in that they establish with delicate sureness the relationship of the dandy with the orthodox moral judges. The assessments of Mrs. Erlynne by the Windermeres are both wide of the mark. For the husband she is simply a good strategist; for his wife she is virtuous. She is in fact, up to a point, both. But the important fact is that her strategy is bound up with self-sacrifice in a way that Windermere does not recognize, while her virtue is quite other than Lady Windermere imagines it to be.”
unexamined, narrow terms of her idealistic culture.” Lady Windermere, in short, really cannot handle the truth. She becomes somewhat individuated and more self-aware through Mrs. Erlynne’s actions, but such self-understanding will be short-lived.

At the play’s close Lady Windermere resolves to go to “the Rose Garden at Selby” where “the roses are white and red” (IV.399-401). These roses call to mind the Selby roses that she was arranging at the play’s opening, before she had her mini-epiphany. She may have opened her eyes “to half of life,” and she may have avoided blinding herself walking “in a land of pit and precipice” (IV.391-93), but she will return to the idyllic, and unexamined, life she led before her moral ideals were shaken. Lady Windermere thus grows somewhat in character, but that growth has come with a host of secrets that she must keep to protect her reputation, without a full understanding of their implications. Mrs. Erlynne protects herself too through lies, as does Lord Windermere. They may all be good people, but their flawed society cannot accept characters with more than one dimension. Thus the recognition plotline fails in a fundamental way.

A Woman of No Importance

Wilde employs another recognition plot to explore the flaws of Victorian society and moral double standards in A Woman of No Importance (see plot summary in Appendix B). I have already treated at length the sexual double standard Wilde calls attention to in this play (see Chapter 2): extra-marital sexual conquest and morally reprehensible activities are approved of in men, while considered damning in women. I limit myself here to the recognition plot and those aspects of it that are adapted or actively rejected. Like Phormio, Woman initially suppresses the recognition plot. Act I sets the scene and introduces the characters, but is largely a platform for Wilde’s clever dialogue. The plot advances little until the end of the act, when Lord Illingworth
recognizes the handwriting on a letter sent by Mrs. Arbuthnot. He dismisses the sender as a “woman of no importance” and drops the matter. His dismissive remark raises the question of how Illingworth might have come to know Mrs. Arbuthnot’s handwriting, and we are encouraged to speculate on how this relationship will shape the plot.

Act II outlines the characters of Hester and Mrs. Arbuthnot, and to an extent, Gerald, while also hinting at Mrs. Arbuthnot’s dark past. Hester denounces the immoral upper-class and its clever talk with an over-the-top, biblically-tinged speech expressed in Puritan terms. Mrs. Arbuthnot has been established in Act I as a retiring widow, religious figure, moral paragon, and a loving mother. She enters the party at the end of Hester’s speech and stiffens at the girl’s pronouncements on fallen women (II.285-88); we are left to wonder why the speech prompted such a reaction, as the other women dismiss Hester’s rant. Mrs. Arbuthnot learns that her son has been offered the job of Lord Illingworth’s secretary, and Lady Hunstanton explains how Illingworth came to ascend to his title (II.358-410). Upon hearing that Illingworth is in fact a certain George Harford, Mrs. Arbuthnot becomes agitated and sends for her son immediately. At this point, viewers may begin guessing about Mrs. Arbuthnot’s past and Gerald’s identity.

Gerald insists on introducing his mother and Lord Illingworth, claiming that he wants them to meet. The irony in this statement is apparent, as clearly the two have already met; the audience is still uncertain as to the nature of that meeting (II.447-52). Wilde employs further irony when Mrs. Arbuthnot insists that Illingworth and Gerald have nothing in common (II.476-68). Only when Mrs. Arbuthnot and Illingworth speak privately do we learn the extent of their involvement: Gerald is their son (II.521). Now we realize we are dealing with a recognition plot, so we expect a reunion between father and son, and mother and father, given the traditions of the recognition plot within which Wilde is working.
But Wilde has already established the faults of his society in Act I and the first half of Act II, and the viewer now realizes the importance of the seemingly unrelated events of those acts. Although this play engages with the basic elements of the “problem play,” in which questions of morality in a domestic setting will be explored, Wilde challenges trite characterizations of “good” and “bad” that Victorian society upholds as “morality.” He employs character types conforming to the strictures of Victorian theatre, but undercuts both sides in a number of speeches and scenarios.  

First, when Hester denounces the upper classes for their hypocrisy (for rejecting fallen women while continuing to solicit the company of the men who ruin women), Lady Caroline undercuts Hester’s speech by interrupting her dismissively. Wilde shows Hester’s moralizing as risible and gauche through her over-dramatic, biblical language, but he also shows that Lady Caroline and her friends are not commendable in their values or behavior; we are not meant to side with either of these moral extremes.  

Hester shows her hypocrisy by preaching against the English snobbery about wealth and birth, but she has been sent there (in the fashion of wealthy title-hunting Americans of the time) to find a husband. Mr. Kevil preaches about the moral values of English home life, but takes every chance to be away from his wife and many children (I.346-51). The only married couple present is unhappy.

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67 R. Cave (1997) explores the ways in which Wilde plays with “type” and conventional morality.


69 See MacColl & McD. Wallace (2012) on the phenomenon of wealthy American husband-hunting among the poor but titled English nobility.

70 Lady Caroline notes with annoyance that the American girls are always carrying off the good matches, and should stay in their own country (I.206-08). See further Bristow (1994: 60).

as well: Lady Caroline constantly checks up on her husband, terrified that if she does not display her hold over him at every opportunity, she will find him secreted away with Lady Stutfield.\textsuperscript{72}

Finally, the so-called happy English home depicted and lauded by Lady Hunstanton, is in fact broken, comprised of a seduced mother and bastard son.\textsuperscript{73} Wilde demonstrates through these characters that shallow moralizing is absurd, but he only critiques; Wilde does not offer an alternative morality. He would not suggest a moral course for his audience, as this would run contrary to the program of Individualism that he had established in “The Soul of a Man Under Socialism,” that “selfishness is not living as one wishes to live, it is asking others to live as one wishes to live.”\textsuperscript{74}

Lord Illingworth and Mrs. Arbuthnot fight for control over Gerald’s future throughout the remainder of Act II (521-628). Finally he uses her inability to reveal herself publicly to manipulate her into surrender (that is, by allowing Gerald to become his secretary, II.632-64). The act ends with Illingworth praising Mrs. Arbuthnot for seeing reason, and then taking Gerald out to the terrace to discuss their future together (II.661-65). The extent of Lord Illingworth’s manipulations, and the victimization of Mrs. Arbuthnot leave the viewer to wonder how Gerald will be recognized and his family restored. Unlike ancient Greece and Rome, where a lost child could be reintegrated into the family unit provided both parents were citizens, Victorian England placed far more emphasis on the marital status of the parents at the time of the birth of the child.

\textsuperscript{72} R. Cave (2006: 217).

\textsuperscript{73} An irony Raby (1997a: 152) explores.

\textsuperscript{74} Some critics have suggested that Wilde’s failure to offer an alternative morality or make a strongly subversive point with his plays is indication of his disinterest with morality in general: Gregor (1966: 509), Bristow (1994: 67-69), and Small (2006: xxxiv-xxxv). I would argue that Wilde’s position is not disinterested, but rather a deliberate rejection of the assumption that one man should provide that alternative while calling out the hypocrisies of his society.
A child born out of wedlock was a bastard, and no late marriage of the parents could retroactively change that fact.\textsuperscript{75} Already we know this aspect of Wilde’s comedies must differ from ancient comedies, but there is still some hope that a reconciliation between the parents might be made to bring the two families together, socially if not legally. Periphanes and Philippa in \textit{Epidicus} also engage in verbal sparring when they recognize each other as the parent of their common child, but in that exchange, they reach an agreement to find and save their child together.\textsuperscript{76} Mrs. Arbuthnot, on the other hand, taken advantage of by Illingworth just as Philippa was by Periphanes,\textsuperscript{77} rejects her seducer outright, and they end their exchange only with his veiled mockery of her. They do not agree to reveal to their child his parentage, and the act ends with tension.

Act III moves into melodrama. Lord Illingworth uses the remainder of the evening to turn Gerald against his mother, subtly influencing him and twisting Mrs. Arbuthnot’s words to drive a wedge between mother and son, while bringing Gerald closer to him (III.22-40, 391-403). Seeing Illingworth’s hold over her son, Mrs. Arbuthnot tries to win Gerald back, but not even the story of Illingworth’s past misconduct can shake Gerald (429-64), and so she must admit defeat (469-70). But Illingworth brings about his own downfall when he makes good on a wager he made earlier with Mrs. Allonby to seduce Hester. He attempts to kiss Hester on the terrace, and she runs screaming into the house and into Gerald’s arms:

\textsuperscript{75} Only in 1926 through the Legitimacy Act were bastards legitimized through the subsequent marriage of their parents, provided they had not been married to others between the birth of the bastard and the marriage of its parents.

\textsuperscript{76} See Chapter 2. Philippa has come to town to engage Periphanes, the man who raped her years before, in finding their abducted daughter Telestis. When they meet in the street, they banter warily, each testing the other on their shared history before acknowledging it.

\textsuperscript{77} Though with the key difference that Philippa was raped, whereas Mrs. Arbuthnot seems to have been a willing participant.
Hester (outside): Let me go! Let me go!
[Enter Hester in terror, and rushes over to Gerald and flings herself into his arms]
Oh! save me – save me from him!
Gerald: From whom?
Hester: He has insulted me! Horribly insulted me! Save me!
Gerald: Who? Who has dared—?
[Lord Illingworth enters at back of stage. Hester breaks from Gerald’s arms and points to him]
Gerald (He is quite beside himself with rage and indignation): Lord Illingworth, you have insulted the purest thing on God’s earth, a thing as pure as my own mother. You have insulted the woman I love most in the world with my own mother. As there is a God in heaven, I will kill you!
Mrs. Arbuthnot (rushing across and catching hold of him): No! no!
Gerald (thrusting her back): Don’t hold me, mother. Don’t hold me—I’ll kill him!
Mrs. Arbuthnot: Gerald!
Gerald: Let me go, I say!
Mrs. Arbuthnot: Stop, Gerald, stop! He is your own father!
(Woman III.471-84)

Mrs. Arbuthnot sinks to the ground in shame, Hester edges out of the room, Illingworth looks annoyed, and Gerald picks his mother up and leads her from the room, ending the act (471-84).

Like many ancient recognition scenes, this one takes place onstage with plenty of emotion. Unlike Plautus’ recognition comedies, there are no tokens, but rather a verbal assertion of natal identity. Woman shares with Windermere the thwarted attempt at recognition. As in that play, a mother attempts to hide the identity of her child. In this case, however, dramatic circumstances force her to reveal Gerald’s parentage; Mrs. Erlynne’s dramatic circumstances made a recognition scene impossible.

Though their motivations are quite different, Mrs. Arbuthnot resembles Phormio’s Chremes, in that she tries to prevent the recognition of her son, to keep his identity a secret from her society at large. She does so to protect him, however, whereas Chremes sought to protect his own reputation. Nonetheless, the recognition of her child threatens to tear her family and her
world apart. Lord Illingworth also acts out his own version of *Phormio*’s Chremes: he wants to be a father to Gerald, but the exact nature of their relationship will be hushed up. He has noted to Mrs. Arbuthnot: “As for your past, no one knows anything about it except for myself and Gerald” (IV.372-73). He will leave his properties to Gerald (IV.355-61), and he promises Mrs. Arbuthnot that he will not endanger Gerald’s inheritance by marrying (IV.377-79), but if her past is to remain a secret, Gerald’s precise relationship to Illingworth will be obscured.

Illingworth’s feelings about his would-be family are made clear after Mrs. Arbuthnot refuses and insults him: “Quarter to two! Must be strolling back to Hunstanton. Don’t suppose I shall see you there again. I’m sorry, I am, really. It’s been an amusing experience to have met amongst people of one’s own rank, and treated quite seriously too, one’s mistress and one’s—” (IV.481-85). All Gerald will ever really be to him is a bastard. In this respect, Chremes is actually the more sensitive of the two. While Illingworth is made out to be a thorough villain at the end of the play, Chremes looks insensitive and foolish, but not cruel.

*A Woman of No Importance* plays with elements of the recognition comedy, but as Wilde subverts types, he also subverts plot expectations. In *Epidicus*, Periphanes plans to marry Philippa, as he was free to do upon the death of his wife, and thus to recover their daughter. He had wronged Philippa, but had plans to make reparations to her and their child. Following their encounter in the street, Philippa and Periphanes work together on good terms, and it can be assumed that they will marry after Telestis’ recognition scene. In *A Woman of No Importance*, our expectations of a marriage reuniting the broken family are thwarted. Illingworth has no plans to marry Gerald’s mother, nor does she wish to marry him. Even after the recognition of Gerald, she still tries to keep Illingworth out of her life rather than invite him into it, even for the sake of their child. Unlike the rapists/seducers of New Comedy who make restitution to their victims
through marriage (as in Plautus’ *Aulularia, Cistellaria, Epidicus*, and Terence’s *Adelphoe*) because they recognize it is their duty, Illingworth begrudgingly offers marriage to Mrs. Arbuthnot only as a bribe:

I don’t admit that it is any duty of mine to marry you. I deny it entirely. But to get my son back I am ready—yes, I am ready to marry you, Rachel—and to treat you always with the deference and respect due to my wife.

... That will show you that I love my son, at least as much as you love him. For when I marry you, Rachel, there are some ambitions that I shall have to surrender. High ambitions too, if any ambition is high.

*(Woman IV.424-33)*

Illingworth offers marriage to Mrs. Arbuthnot in the most insulting terms possible. She in turn breaks from the expectations of the genre in her refusal. She refuses out of (one might say selfish) passion, as her hatred of Illingworth is stronger than her sense of duty and desire to conform to social norms. In Roman comedy, seducers are repentant, and fallen women are bound by social conventions as well as strong desire to protect their children with citizenship and family.

Thus Mrs. Arbuthnot acts in opposition to her ancient comic counterparts, mothers of the older generation who married their rapists after the rape/seduction occurred. She refuses to enact the complete recognition pattern for Gerald, who will not be reintegrated into his family and society. In fact, Gerald (with the help of Hester) comes around to Mrs. Arbuthnot’s way of thinking, and rejects his father and identity as well. Gerald tells her that she can be his mother and father both (IV.302-03), and Hester persuades them to join her in America. Since Mrs. Arbuthnot and Gerald cannot accept the terms of reintegration into his natal society, they must be removed from it in exile. Illingworth is willing to restore Gerald’s heritage only by half-measures. Although he cannot make Gerald his legitimate son, he can see Gerald provided for,
on the condition that Mrs. Arbuthnot give him up into Illingworth’s power for half the year (IV.334-79). What he suggests is further division of the family unit, not reintegration. He offers marriage only as a last resort, to placate Mrs. Arbuthnot and remove her as a barrier (425-36). When this plan also fails, he dismisses mother and son swiftly and cruelly. Gerald is not his child so much as a whim that has passed (IV.475-85).

Part of the recognition plot is the change in identity of the restored children and in the attitudes of characters involved with them. In Windermere, Lady Windermere does not learn her true parentage, but she softens her Puritanism, which facilitates the development of her character. Here, Gerald learns of his parentage, but the plot is still a failed recognition plot, as the revelation of his parentage leads not to development of his character and social reintegration, but to rejection of identity and social exile. Of all of the characters in this family drama, only Illingworth is willing to accept a new role for himself, that of father, and proceed through his life with this new information about himself and his responsibilities. He may be a villain, but he is the most flexible character involved in the recognition plot. Mrs. Arbuthnot refuses to change and accept for Gerald’s life a new direction, one outside of her influence and control.

Gerald too refuses to accept the change in himself that knowledge of his paternity brings. He has learned that lineage does not define one’s identity and character (he is certainly a nicer person than his father), but he is unwilling to explore that identity, and he actively rejects that part of himself. Hester, his wife-to-be, is a caricature. While Lady Windermere undergoes some change, Hester remains sincerely attached to her beliefs, softening her view on a single fallen woman only (Mrs. Arbuthnot), and this development occurs only after her own reputation is endangered by Lord Illingworth. Instead of revising her ideologies further, she suggests that
Gerald and his mother abandon England with her (IV.268-71). Hester is willing to free Mrs. Arbuthnot from a duty to marry Gerald’s father, but on terms Hester can dictate.

Although these characters are Wilde’s protagonists, and arguably the heroes of the play, we cannot really like them: the melodrama and religious dialogue of the last act, as well as their Puritan values, make it difficult to connect with them. They have no flexibility in their morality, they do not develop, they do not seem likely to develop in the future, and they actively suppress aspects of themselves that they are socially conditioned not to like. The recognition plot fails because these inflexible characters are devoted to one aspect of themselves at the expense of the rest. Wilde was clear in his feelings about sincerity. In “The Critic as Artist” Vivian says, “Who wants to be consistent? The dullard and the doctrinaire, the tedious people who carry out their principles to the bitter end of action, to the reductio ad absurdum. Not I.” The narrator in Dorian Gray says, “Is insincerity a terrible thing? I think not. It is merely a method by which we can multiply our personalities.” In “Phrases and Philosophies for the Young,” Wilde says, “In all important matters, style, not sincerity, is essential.” Declan Kiberd notes, “Wilde was the first major artist to discredit the romantic ideal of sincerity and replace it with the darker imperative of authenticity: he saw that in being true to a single self, a sincere man may be false to half a dozen other selves… From Wilde’s perspective, the only real fool is the conventionally ‘sincere’ man who fails to see that he, too, is wearing a mask, the mask of sincerity.” Wilde rejected English determinism, by which all people were defined by their birth. For Wilde, a person truly knew himself only if he was willing to accept all aspects of his character, and did not reject that which he did not like. Only be embracing the multiplicity of selves, could one be free. When

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examined by this standard, Mrs. Arbuthnot, Gerald, and Hester all fail to evolve, and so fail to see the traditional recognition plot to the end.

Though Gerald’s recognition plot is technically more complete than Lady Windermere’s, in that he learns his true identity, it is still a failed recognition. Like Lady Windermere, Gerald will not be restored to his natal family, and far from reintegrating his society, his revealed identity and his inability to come to terms with it have torn his society asunder. In light of Gerald’s recognized identity, Mrs. Arbuthnot may never again go into Hunstanton, or anywhere else among “good people” in England, given the veiled threat of Illingworth’s parting words (IV.482-85). Far from taking a legitimate place in their society, mother and son must retreat and create a new one removed from the world of the play. This is in part the fault of Victorian cultural *mores*, unable to accept a fallen woman and her bastard offspring in so-called polite society. But it is also the fault of the inflexibility in Mrs. Arbuthnot and Gerald. Though Mrs. Arbuthnot’s past immoral actions have been revealed, her selfishness regarding her son is made obvious, and her personal pride made evident in her refusal of Illingworth, though she clings to her vision of herself as a moral paragon. Unable to allow herself or others to acknowledge these other aspects of her character, she chooses exile. Gerald too cannot really accept what his recognition has opened up to him. Rather than negotiate the difficulties raised by the revelation of his lineage, Gerald chooses to reject his father and the threat Lord Illingworth poses to Gerald’s moral views. He may rightly recognize now that identity is not fully dependent on lineage, but he misses the mark in altogether rejecting his lineage as an aspect of himself.
Case Study: Incest in the Recognition Plot (A Woman of No Importance)

A little-noted element of the hidden identity and recognition plot is the danger of incest, or the quasi-incestuous father-son sharing of a woman. The recognition story focuses on the fragmentation of the family and its reintegration at the end of the play. The fragmented family is a symbol of greater societal turmoil: children are lost through neglect or war, or exposed after a rape. These lost children live wrongfully as slaves or concubines, and parents are denied the heirs in a culture where the younger generation cares for the elder. Social upheaval can destroy generations. The incest subtext in these comedies reveals a sign of social breakdown: the playwrights can critique their societies with such plots, incest being symbolic of the flaws that must be redeemed for the dysfunctional society to be restored. In Menander, who is most interested in the restoration of his dramatic societies, the subplot of potential incest arises from the desires of only the silliest characters (as noted in Chapter 3). Plautus hints at much darker elements in his dramatic societies (disrespectful sons, lecherous fathers, deeply embedded misogyny, the evils of the slavery) but masks them with comedy to challenge citizen viewers without affronting them. He uses the threat of incest humorously, as the taboo heightens the silliness of his characters.

The threat of incest is largely a peculiarity of comedy, and does not appear in tragedy (save Sophocles’ Oedipus Rex, in which the tragic hero flees his assumed family to avoid a prophecy, only to end up carrying it out: he marries his own mother and produces children with her). In Aristophanes’ Ekklesiazusae the indiscriminate coupling of older women with younger men in the dictates of the female council’s new laws opens the possibility of incest, which demonstrates the flaw in the women’s new political system, in which the recognition of mother-son bonds is obscured.

Only Terence avoids the potential for incest in his social critiques. The societies he creates are so dysfunctional that he can engage directly with immorality, flawed parenting strategies, cruelty, and misogyny without symbolism: Terence’s characters are bad people on a deeper level than the mere misunderstanding or selfishness we find in Menander and Plautus.
will highlight the instances of near-incest or father-son competition in the ancient plays, then return to *Woman*.

Glykera of *Perikeiromene* knows that Moschion is her brother, but he does not. We learn from Pataikos that the two children are twins, born of the same mother, so a sexual relationship between them is forbidden. The action of the play is motivated by the cutting of Glykera’s hair, the result of Polemon’s anger at her embracing Moschion. The prologue character, the goddess “Misconception,” notes that some people may find Moschion’s actions scandalous. She asks the audience to bear with her, as she herself has motivated Moschion’s actions, using a terrible social wrong to enact a reintegration of proper social structure (Glykera’s recognition and legitimate marriage to Polemon). Glykera must know the truth, because her innocent intentions must block Moschion’s lascivious ones, else the play would veer too close to moral wrong. Moschion’s mother is also horrified that Moschion is chasing after the woman she knows to be his biological sister. She shuts him out of the house to prevent further sexual contact when Glykera moves in, while still keeping him from learning the truth about his origins. Upon the recognition of both characters, the social reintegration of the biological family prevents the cultural collapse symbolized by the near-incest, and the viewers may breathe sighs of relief on several levels.

Plautus too uses the device of barely averted incest to highlight the breakdown of social order in his plays. Only through proper recognition can the characters avoid violation of taboo and near-ruin to restore social order and achieve the happy ending associated with comedy. He

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82 Brothers and sisters with the same father, but not the same mother, were permitted to marry. On this practice, see Dziaztko (1899, 1900). See note 86 for the potential brother-sister marriage in *Epidicus*, if a Greek original existed.

83 In *Georgos*, Hedaia is nearly forced to marry the man who will turn out to be her father. Because this play is very fragmentary, I will not discuss it in depth here.
hints at the same uncomfortable possibility that was threatened in Menander’s *Georgos* and *Peri-keiromene*: without a stable family unit (a mother married to a known father) children are at risk of incest. In *Rudens*, a father comments on the good looks of an enslaved *meretrix*, unaware that she is his long-lost daughter (893-94). He remarks that his wife would not want him spending too much time with the young woman, and indulges in a quick moment of fantasy. In *Poenulus*, the Carthaginian Hanno, travels around the Mediterranean seeking his lost daughters in various brothels. He spends the night with prostitutes, only afterwards asking them about their parentage (109-110). Even when he finds his daughters (being initiated into prostitution), he addresses them not as father to daughters, but as customer to prostitutes (1217-18). When Hanno embraces his daughters, the hug is more passionate than one would expect of fathers and daughters: Antamoenides believes Hanno to be a rival, so erotic seems the hug (1279). While Plautus plays Hanno’s behavior for humor (he is a foreigner, oddly-dressed, and of strange speech), the Carthaginian’s search for and reunion with his daughters have a decidedly disturbing aspect that lingers below the humor.

In *Epidicus* a young man falls in love with his half-sister, the product of a rape committed by his father while he was traveling abroad. Periphanes had hid his illegitimate daughter from his legitimate family (although not from the titular family slave), attempting to find the girl only

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84 The language makes it uncertain whether Hanno uses the prostitutes sexually or not: *ilico omnis meretrices, ubi quisque habitant, invenit; / dat aurum, ducit noctem, rogitat postibi / und’ sit, quo iatis, captane an surrupta sit, / quo genere gnata, qui parentes fuerint* (106-110). de Melo (2012) translates: “Immediately he finds out where all the prostitutes live. He pays money, hires her for a night, and then asks where she’s from and what country she comes from, whether she was captured in war or kidnapped, what family she comes from, and who her parents were.” Plautus is deliberately suggestive here, as *ducit noctem* can mean “to spend the night” or “to enjoy the night’s rent” (as *nox* in connection with prostitutes may mean “rent of a prostitute for the night,” as T. H. M. Gellar-Goad has suggested, *per litteras*).

85 On incest in *Poenulus*, see Franko (1995).
after his first wife has died and his son has grown up. The son meanwhile has purchased the girl Telestis, a war captive, intending to make her his concubine. After several scenes of shenanigans in which Epidicus swindles Periphanes out of money to purchase Telestis, he meets her for the first time in the play. Telestis and Epidicus play out a swift recognition scene when he realizes that she is the girl that his master fathered on a rape victim in Epidaurus. He states her parents’ names, then mentions tokens he gave her as birthday gifts, a small golden moon and little golden ring (634-40). At this point, her brother/would-be lover Stratippocles enters:

Stratippocles: Nunc enim tu mea es.
Telestis: Soror quidem edepol, ut tu aeque scias. salve, frater.
Str: Sanan haec est?
Epidicus: Sana, si appellat suom.
Str: Quid? ego modo <amator sum> huic frater factus, dum intro eo atque exeo?
Epi: Quod boni est id tacitus taceas tute tecum et gaudeas.
Str: Perdidisti et repperisti me, soror.
Epi: Stultu’s, tace. tibi quidem quod ames domi praestost, fidicina, opera mea; et sororem in libertatem idem opera concilio mea.

(Ép. 648-54)

Stratippocles: Now you belong to me.
Telestis: Yes, as your sister, so that you know it as well as I do. Hello my brother.
Stratippocles: Is she in her right mind?
Epidicus: She is, if she addresses one who is hers.
Stratippocles: What? How did I become her brother while I went in and out?
Epidicus: Be quietly quiet about the good you have and be happy.
Stratippocles: You’ve lost and found me, my sister.
Epidicus: You’re being silly, be quiet. You have something to love, that is the lyre girl, ready for you at home, thanks to my efforts. And I’m bringing your sister back to freedom through my efforts.

Stratippocles’ reaction is reminiscent of Moschion’s in Perikeiromene. Finally sure that he has attained his love, his hopes are immediately dashed by her discovered paternity. Stratippocles’ comment on going in a lover then out as a brother highlights the coincidence (and
absurdity) of the recognition plot, but the serious potential for violating a sexual taboo symbol-izes the danger inherent in the breakdown of the family unit. Rape, abandonment, and the vi-cissitudes of war threaten the sanctity and morality of the family. Stratippocles’ disappointment is in keeping with his inconsiderate character, but Epidicus chastens him: the satiating of lust is a simple thing (the music girl is just inside, after all), but the reintegration of the family unit transcends petty personal concerns. The restoration of Stratippocles’ sister to her father and brother is more important than the baser needs of the individual, but this knowledge does not curtail Stratippocles’ disappointment.86

Curculio has a similar recognition scene in which the girl, Planesium, realizes that her would-be lover Therapontigonus is actually her brother. In this play a young man, Phaedromus, is in love with a girl who insists she was born of a good family, but has fallen into slavery; she is currently a meretrix-in-training. Her pimp has sold her to the soldier Therapontigonus, who is coming to claim her. Through the machinations of Phaedromus’ parasite Curculio, the young man and his hanger-on acquire the soldier’s signet ring and use it to convince the banker to give them the money to buy Planesium for the soldier. When Planesium sees the ring, she recognizes it as her father’s (591-607). The soldier catches up to them and demands his ring back. Planesium asks where he got the ring, and he says that it belonged to his father (635-39): Planesium and Therapontigonus are apparently brother and sister. Planesium produces her own ring and he questions her about her parentage: she names her mother Cleobula, nurse

86 It has been argued that in the Greek original, Telestis and Stratippocles were able to marry, as brother-sister matches where the half-siblings shared a father (but never a mother) were permissible in Hellenistic Greece (see note 82). See Keyes (1940) on brother-sister marriage and Epidicus. Contra, Slater (2001). Goldberg (1978) goes further and suggests there was no Greek original at all, and renders the argument over brother-sister marriage in antiquity moot.
Archestrata, and the place where she was kidnapped (the festival of Dionysus). The ring, he realizes, is the same he sent his sister on her birthday (641-57).

Unlike Stratippocles, Therapontigonus is pleased to have found his sister. He greets her tenderly and does not seem annoyed to lose his girlfriend. He agrees easily to give her in marriage (and actually asks her if she approves [672-74]), and then turns to the business of enacting revenge on the pimp who held his sister against her will. In brotherly fashion, he protects Planesium’s virtue, threatening to murder the pimp Cappadox (693). Only Planesium’s testimony that Cappadox kept her safe and chaste (697-98), and Cappadox’s agreement to return the soldier’s money placates Therapontigonus’ wrath.\(^{87}\) The soldier acts as a proper family member in this scene, standing up for his sister before marrying her off safely. Nevertheless, the darker undertones remain. Without the ring token and Phaedromus’ intervention, Planesium would have been sold to her own brother as a sexual partner. The inherent wrongness of stolen identity and the fractured family make possible any number of evils. This theme appears yet again in Cistellaria.

In Cistellaria, a senex (Demipho’s close friend), the father of Alcesimarchus (who loves Selenium, though engaged to Demipho’s daughter), flirts with Selenium’s friend Gymnasium, thinking the girls are the same (306-72). Demipho will turn out to be Selenium’s father. The senex is goatishly lecherous over Gymnasium. Demipho himself could have easily come in his place, concerned for the marriage of his legitimate daughter. The senex flirts with his son’s girlfriend, or so he thinks, trying to reduce her threat to his household, but also won over by her beauty. Like Lysidamus in Casina and Demipho in Mercator, he forgets his son’s feelings and pursues his own lust. Had Demipho intervened instead, as older male friends often do in ancient

\(^{87}\) T. H. M. Gellar-Goad notes (per litteras) that Cappadox is unusual among Plautine pimps both in his comparatively kind treatment of the girl he has enslaved and in his religious piety.
comedy, he could have been flirting with his daughter. The senex’s seediness hints at the underlying danger of incest that lurks as a possibility when the family is fragmented.

Plautus also explores the quasi-incestuous sharing of a woman by father and son, and the upheaval of social order it causes. In *Casina*, a play discussed in Chapter 2, a lecherous old man actively pursues a girl who has been raised by his wife “like a daughter” (*quasi si esset nata*, 46), a plan disturbing in itself. *Casina* also includes an egregious sexual competition between father and son. This play causes discomfort from the incestuous aspect of an old man’s active pursuit of a young girl who had been raised in the household as a daughter, but also from the perversion of *pietas* (the ancient Roman custom of filial duty in children and respect for their parents) it stages. When Cleostrata appeals to her husband to leave the girl, Casina, alone, he

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88 In Terence’s *Phormio*, for instance, the older generation brothers Demipho and Chremes work together to rid Demipho of an inconvenient daughter-in-law. *Mercator*’s Demipho uses friend Lysimachus to facilitate his love affair, as does Lysidamus in *Casina*, who asks Alcesimus for use of his house to bed Casina. The two old men, Philoxenes and Nicobulus, work together in *Bacchides*, as do Simo and Callipho in *Pseudolus*, as well as Laches and Phidippus in *Hecyra*. Chremes believes he is allied with Menedemus in *Heauton Timorumenos*, but the latter tires of Chremes’ pompous hypocrisy.

89 Archibald (2001: 61-62) very briefly explores the topic of near-miss incest in New Comedy, but only considers *Rudens* and *Peonulus*.

90 Sedgwick (1985) explores at length the homosocial triangle of two men vying for one woman and the relationship it creates between them, as well as the insignificance of and detriment to the woman involved. While this is not incestuous, per se, the erotic triangle that involves father and son in competition for a single woman has incestuous connotations, as Sedgwick suggests. Part of her over-arching thesis is that “the continuum of male ‘homosocial desire’” was tightly bound up with “male friendship, mentorship, entitlement, rivalry, and hetero- and homosexuality.” She contends (p. 1), “To draw ‘homosocial’ back into the orbit of ‘desire,’ of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual.” Particularly relevant is her discussion of Dickens’ *Edwin Drood*, in which a mad uncle is bound in a love-hate relationship with his nephew over a woman, which Sedgwick describes as the “denied erotics of male rivalry.”

refuses. She asks him to support their son, who has an interest in the girl, as it is right for parents to help their only son (262-63). Lysidamus retorts that “even though he’s our only one, he’s no more my only son than I am his only father. It’s more appropriate for him to make a concession to my wishes than for me to make one to his” (At quamquam unicust, / nihilo magis ille unicust mihi filius quam ego illi pater: / illum mi aequiust quam me illi quae volo concedere, 263-65).

This perversion of pietas reverses the proper order of a household and society. Restoration occurs only when Casina is discovered to be the daughter of the neighbor, so that the son Euthynicus can marry her (1012-14). Lysidamus is punished with a beating and public humiliation (937-1009).

In Asinaria, Demaenetus insists on a night with his son’s girlfriend Philaenium (736). His son Argyrippus is torn apart by the sight of his father with his girlfriend, but tolerates this discomfort out of filial duty and the pact he made: if he gives his father access to her for one night, he can have her on exclusive terms for the rest of the year. Demaenetus baits his son, forcing him to watch him recline with the girl (830), and then ordering his son to cheer up, and to be respectful of his father’s rights (831-50). This is a repulsive perversion of pietas. The custom also entails proper behavior of parents towards children, and this play explores the wrongness in households that do not observe proper pietas. Demaenetus says he wants his son to love him, but he makes a rift in their relationship by demanding, then flaunting, sexual access to Argyrippus’ girlfriend.

92 On pietas in the Roman family, see Saller (1991, 1994).

93 The relationship between Cleareta and Philaenium is also one in which a faulty conception of pietas reigns. Cleareta insists her daughter work as a prostitute and stay away from the man she loves out of filial duty to her mother (505-44), who (according to Roman familial dictates) should find her daughter a legitimate marriage, not prostitute her.
In Mercator too a father, Demipho, vies for access to his son Charinus’ beautiful concubine, Pasicompsa. Demipho thinks only of his own sexual desires, while hypocritically lecturing his son for misbehavior (and he had originally sent his son away as punishment for profligacy and consorting with prostitutes). He deprives his son of a woman on principle, only to take her for himself. When Demipho is defeated and humiliated, Charinus’ friend propounds a law forbidding old men to “whore around” and to prevent young sons from being in love (1016-26). The end of Bacchides shows two sister prostitutes taking up with their lovers’ fathers as well (1120-1206). In this play proper social order is never restored, the children are not properly reconciled to their parents, and the “villains” of the play end triumphant. The dysfunctional society of Bacchides is not healed.

We may now return to A Woman of No Importance. In earlier versions of this play there was to be a reciprocal, implied attraction between Lord Illingworth and Gerald Arbuthnot. Wilde had earlier explored the relationship of an older man and his young protégé in Dorian Gray, in the style of Greek paiderastia. This is not a modern homosexual relationship, but rather an aspect of Platonic philosophy, outlined in the Symposium: Diotima says, “You should use the things of this world as rungs in a ladder. You start by loving one attractive body and step up to two; from there you move on to physical beauty in general, from there to the beauty of intellectual endeavors, and from there you ascend to that final intellectual endeavor, which is no more and no less the study of that beauty” (211c). It is both a physical and spiritual coming-together of souls, as Plato and his Victorian acolytes Walter Pater and John Addington Symonds wrote about it. Wilde attempted in his trial to downplay the physical aspects of the “Love that dare not speak

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94 On the callous transfer of Pasicompsa back and forth between the two men, see James (2010).

its name,” but physical attraction is certainly part of the practice. Male-male friendship and hints of Platonic love between men pervade Wilde’s works, particularly *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, where Wilde explores homosocial relationships and interrogates how such relationships functioned: to what extent does one individual influence another, and how does the self develop when it engages with such social structure? Wilde suggests that only by striking a balance between extremes can the self develop: “All excess, as well as all renunciation, brings its punishment.”

In *A Woman of No Importance* Wilde borrowed several passages from *Dorian Gray*. In one deleted passage, Illingworth tells Mrs. Allonby that “young Arbuthnot is not a disciple…as yet. He is simply one of the most delightful men I have ever met.” This line is borrowed entirely from *Dorian Gray*, as are many others in various drafts of the play. In two other deleted passages, the women discuss the burgeoning relationship of the two men. Gerald answered his mother about Illingworth, in another deleted passage, “I like him so much. There is no-one I would sooner be with than him.”

In *Dorian Gray* the attraction between the two men, Lord Henry Wotton and Dorian Gray, is framed in quasi-paternal terms. Wilde is very interested in the power relationships (paternal, sexual, and temporal) between wealthy, powerful, older men

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96 See Bristow (1992, 1997) on Wilde’s philosophy and homosexuality.

97 In *Dorian Gray*, the moral message is that without self-discipline and reflection, the system of *paiderastia* is exploited and perverted. Wotton encourages Dorian to experience life’s sensual and aesthetic pleasures, but only observes. By ignoring moral consequences and refusing to guide Dorian through his pleasures, Wotton fails in his role as erastes.

98 Wilde, “To the Editor of the *Daily Chronicle*” June 30, 1890.


and younger would-be social climbers (Wotton and Dorian Gray in the *Portrait of Dorian Gray*, Illingworth and Gerald in *A Woman of No Importance*, Baron Arnheim and Robert Chiltern in *An Ideal Husband*).\textsuperscript{101} In *A Woman of No Importance* these terms are problematized by the fact that Illingworth is Gerald’s father. Wilde does not put too great a stress on the fact, but the parallels between his ancient New Comic models and *Woman* provide a subtle commentary on the problem with family secrets and the fractured family: when natal identity is in question, every social norm and expectation is thrown into confusion, even the most closely held cultural taboos. Some secrets should not be kept.

Even if one rejects the argument for latent homosexual,\textsuperscript{102} incestuous subtexts in *Woman*,\textsuperscript{103} nevertheless, the conflict between father and son for sexual possession of a woman (and its inherent quasi-incestuous connotations) remains, as in *Casina, Asinaria*, and *Mercator* (all of which featured societies flawed because of the degeneration of the older generation and the perversion of filial piety expected of sons).\textsuperscript{104} Lord Illingworth’s pursuit of Hester is motivated by boredom; it is a game he plays with Mrs. Allonby:


\textsuperscript{102} I use this terminology (“homosexual”) with reservation. “Male-male desire” may be a better term, as “homosexual” can only be used anachronistically when applied to Victorian England. See Halperin (1990), Danson (1991), Sinfield (1994a), and Bristow (2003).

\textsuperscript{103} Contra Small and Jackson, see Sinfield (1994a: 34-37). Sinfield, while doubting an overt, intended “homosexual” subtext, acknowledges that early drafts did more heavily allude to *Dorian Gray* and the subtext of male-male desire in that work.

\textsuperscript{104} Wilde wrote a plot outline for *The Cardinal of Avignon* (1894) in which a Cardinal and his illegitimate son fall in love with the same young woman. The Cardinal (falsely) tells his son that the girl is actually his sister, to keep the lovers apart so that the Cardinal can keep her in his orbit and also not lose his son to the girl. The boy and girl individually commit suicide. Guy & Small (2006: 149-50) note, “This potent mix of paternal power, sexual rivalry between an older and a younger man, and the hint of incest (as both quasi-paternal and fraternal feelings are translated
Mrs. Allonby: Miss Worsley would not let you kiss her.
Lord Illingworth: Are you sure?
Mrs. Allonby: Quite.
Lord Illingworth: What do you think she’d do if I kissed her?
Mrs. Allonby: Either marry you, or strike you across the face with her glove. What would you do if she struck you across the face with her glove?
Lord Illingworth: Fall in love with her, probably?
Mrs. Allonby: Then it is lucky you are not going to kiss her!
Lord Illingworth: Is that a challenge?
Mrs. Allonby: It is an arrow shot into the air.
Lord Illingworth: Don’t you know that I always succeed in whatever I try?105

(Woman I.449-60)

Illingworth cares little for Gerald’s feelings—he thinks nothing of them at all, even after the assault and Gerald’s anger. When he makes the bet with Mrs. Allonby, he has already observed Gerald’s partiality for Hester (they have been walking together at length, and Gerald’s body language indicates interest in the girl). Though he has expressed his interest in Gerald, noting his immediate fancy for him (I.200-01) and the appeal of Gerald’s charm (I.420), Illingworth thinks nothing of playing with Hester’s person and feelings at Gerald’s expense. Like the fathers in Asinaria, Casina, and Mercator, Illingworth turns the competition for Hester into a power struggle between father and son. The contention brings father and son closer together, albeit in a dysfunctional way. Illingworth’s attempt on Hester forces Mrs. Arbuthnot to reveal Gerald’s parentage, which in turn prompts Illingworth to propose various ways in which he could have access to Gerald. He even claims that Gerald’s defense of Hester set him higher in Illingworth’s esteem, as he has behaved just as Illingworth should like his son to do (IV.348-51). He dismisses the severity of his assault on Hester, downgrading it from a horrible insult to his

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105 Ironically, it is not Hester, but Mrs. Arbuthnot who strikes him across the face. Lord Illingworth in that case does not fall in love, but betrays his crueler side.

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son and the woman to a silly whim (IV.341-43): “Last night was excessively unfortunate. That silly Puritan girl making a scene merely because I wanted to kiss her. What harm is there in a kiss?” What means everything to the son means little to the father (as in Asinaria’s final scenes). Furthermore, Gerald has recognized the assault on Hester as a re-visitation of Illingworth’s abuse of his mother, so he better understands Mrs. Arbuthnot’s dishonor and changes his opinions on fallen women (III.459-64). To the end, Lord Illingworth cannot understand Gerald’s anger. To Illingworth, Hester is of so little importance that he disdains to even name her, referring to her four times in this act only as “The Puritan” (IV.341, 373, 374; and obliquely at 352).

For Gerald, however, Hester is his life, equal to his mother (III.476-78). He tells Hester he would die to save her (IV.285) and he earlier, at the close of Act III, risked his job and his place in society to defend her honor. Like the young men of Asinaria, Casina, and Mercator, he may enjoy her exclusive company with the removal of his father as a rival, facilitated by the intervention of his mother. In Asinaria, Artemona’s assault on Demeantus allows Argyrippus exclusive access to Philaenium. In Casina, Cleostrata works with her son’s slave Chalinus to humiliate Lysidamus and allow Euthynicus to have Casina. Finally, in Mercator, Dorippa’s attack on Lysimachus reveals and puts a stop to Demipho’s designs on his son’s girlfriend, allowing Charinus exclusive access to Pasicompsa. Mrs. Arbuthnot’s rejection of Illingworth removes him from their lives, and allows Gerald and Hester to marry, an outcome that could not have taken place if Mrs. Arbuthnot had married Illingworth and Gerald had reconciled with his father.
“Seriousness of manner is the disguise of the fool, folly in its exquisite modes of triviality and indifference and lack of care is the robe of the wise man. In so vulgar an age as this we all need masks.”

(Wilde, *Letter to Philip Houghton*)

In the previous three chapters I have explored the themes of dubious morality, the sexual double standard affecting men and women, issues of identity and development, and the consequences for the individual in a damaged society. In these chapters I delineated Menander’s earnest desire for the reintegration of the family, Plautus’ comic exposure of inappropriate behavior and social flaws, and Terence’s non-comic exposure of the hypocrisies of the families in his day, alongside Wilde’s sharp critique of Victorian society. I wish now to turn to the wicked wit of Plautus and Wilde in their portrayal of the provocateur character. By “provocateur,” I mean those characters who use clever speech, outsider perspective, and calculating machination to resolve the plot, as well as promote self-development in hypocritical and stunted characters or bring about comeuppance for those who cannot change. Plautus rejected Menander’s sincere resolutions, preferring to stage the madcap antics and clever wordplay of his antiheroes, clever slaves, and saucy *meretrices*. His focus on these rogues promotes humor in his plays. He often

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1 M. Holland & Hart-Davis (2000: 586).
relegates his reunions, betrothals, and reconciliations to offstage action conferred through the prologue or epilogue, focusing instead on the witty antics that brought about these pat resolutions. Plautus experimented over his career with the role of the clever slave, from episodic comic relief to successful master of the plot. His rogues outshine the earnest adulescentes, stodgy senes, and virtuous young women whom they ostensibly help or hinder, and the happy restoration of the family and social order is an afterthought at best.²

Wilde’s plays bring together the divided aspects of ancient comedy, the serious and the frivolous, and the dual nature of his plays has disturbed viewers and readers for over a century.³ Part of what is troublesome is the odd juxtaposition of the Victorian morality plot with the “dan-

² By the time Plautus wrote Persa, one of his later plays, the love plot had become a secondary device to motivate the clever slave plot: in that play, the clever slave gains possession of his girlfriend, his ostensible goal, midway through the play. Instead of enjoying the spoils, the slave launches a new campaign to annoy the pimp, and his girlfriend (and the love plot) is forgotten.

³ Wilde deconstructed the nature of the “problem play” by setting up a melodrama and then unleashing his dandies upon it. Contemporary critics found the juxtaposition jarring. On Lady Windermere’s Fan (Sunday Times, Feb. 21, 1892): “Mr. Wilde can be brilliantly cynical, but when he handles sentiment, he seems to lack the essential of sympathy.” On A Woman of No Importance (Daily News, April 20, 1903): “Mr. Wilde’s play may be described as mainly a collection of epigrams, some of which it must be admitted are amusing, while others are decidedly lacking the most conspicuous attribute of ‘the quality of Mercy.’” On An Ideal Husband (Morning Advertiser, Jan. 4, 1895): “There is enough stale business in his latest achievement to make up a tolerably decent one act in a Surrey melodrama” but the reviewer had grown tired of the paradoxical dialogue. Only The Importance of Being Earnest avoided any serious questions of morality, but that too was criticized (much as some students and scholars of ancient comedy de-ride and dismiss Plautus today for his frivolity): “In that play…there is no trace of solemn theatrical intention. The dramatist has given himself a holiday, as it were, and rested content with putting forth, with all his characteristic volubility, a story whose extravagance is fairly matched by the tone of the dialogue which serves to tell it” (Daily Telegraph, Feb. 15, 1895). The afore-quoted reviews are collected in Tydeman (1982). George Bernard Shaw, a friend to Wilde for many years, wrote a review of Earnest in the Saturday Review (Feb. 23, 1895) denouncing the “heartlessness” of the play (all farce and clever speech, no moral responsibility). On reactions to Earnest, see Jackson (1997). Bristow (1994) criticizes Wilde’s social critique, asserting that establishing a moral problem and undermining it with clever dialogue is not revolutionary, and that Wilde’s plays are not as subversive as we would like them to be.
dy” play: Wilde’s protagonists are Puritans, victims, and upstanding citizens, but they are consistently upstaged by his provocateurs. These are the dandies and the adventuresses, the amoral commentators and mouthpieces for Wilde’s witty epigrams. In his first two plays Wilde experimented with his dandies, making them both commentators and also involved players in the morality plot. The dandy was a fashionable young man devoted to pleasure, clothing, style, wit, and indolence. The character was developed in the Regency period (though the pedigree extended further back, to the drinking, dining, gambling, and wenching of the Restoration Rake). Wilde’s dandies borrowed elements of the early British and later French dandy, but he elevated them to more deeply complex characters as informed by his theory of Aesthetics.\(^4\) His dandies become more than fashionable insoucians: they provoke, question, and persuade, saying not necessarily what one wants to hear, but what needs to be said. In *An Ideal Husband*, his third Society Play, Wilde increases the roles for his dandy and adventuress, and in his fourth Society Play, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the dandies and wits take over the plot entirely. But throughout, his dandies and adventuresses evoke in Victorian theater the provocateur characters of the Plautine *servus callidus* and *mala meretrix*.

Wilde’s polished, well-spoken, elite dandies initially seem nothing like Plautus’ earthy rogues, but similarities emerge when we examine their motivations, role in the plot, lyrical language, and status in relation to the supposed protagonists. Both types usurp the interest of the audience from the morally upstanding characters or the melodramatic characters whose interests are jeopardized. Like Wilde’s dandies, Plautus’ clever slaves trade banter, enjoy the best lines in the play, and experiment with language. Both characters stand outside their societies, but bring

\(^4\) The “dandy” as a real-life pose and character type will be explored below. For a history of the dandy, see Rodgers (2012). On Wilde’s aesthetics and the dandy, see Calloway (1997) and Danson (1997). On the dynamics of Victorian masculinity and the dandy, see J. E. Adams (1995, 2013).
the protagonists to satisfactory resolution by motivating change and development in the earnest characters of their plot. They are called upon to help the less creative or morally hindered characters, that is, those who have neither the imagination to solve their problem nor the social freedom to act on their impulses to perform unsavory actions in pursuit of their ends.

\textit{An Ideal Husband} best illustrates the range and power of Wilde’s provocateur character. Like a Plautine clever slave play, \textit{Husband} begins with the pretense of an upstanding-citizen-in-trouble play (Robert Chiltern is blackmailed by the incorrigible Mrs. Cheveley over a dark secret in his past, and his wife grapples with her husband’s immoral doings and her inability to forgive), but becomes a vehicle for the clever and amusing machinations of Lord Goring’s \textit{servus callidus} (clever slave, in Wilde the dandy) and Mrs. Cheveley’s \textit{mala meretrix} (wicked courtesan,\textsuperscript{5} Wilde’s adventuress). Unbound by strictures of clear-cut role designations in the morality play around them, Goring and Cheveley become heroes of sorts, trading wit and playing out their own plot together. Lord and Lady Chiltern often fade into the background as Goring schemes and resolves aspects of the plot. In the end his machinations move only partway to resolution, and the other characters must contribute their part to successfully enact a happy ending. The varied success of the \textit{servus callidus} is a common Plautine feature: in a number of his plays the clever slaves nearly take full charge of the plot and orchestrate success, but are hindered from fully resolving all aspects (\textit{Bacchides}, \textit{Mostellaria}, etc.).

I will begin with a survey of the most representative of Plautus’ clever slave plots and the characteristics of the \textit{servus callidus}. Next I turn to Wilde’s interaction with this plot type and

\textsuperscript{5} “Courtesan” is not an approximate translation for \textit{meretrix}, which can refer to enslaved sex workers, poor street prostitutes, or wealthy free prostitutes, but it is a commonly used translation in scholarship on the \textit{meretrix}, as well as translations of Plautus’ plays. I adopt it here only in the rendering of \textit{“mala meretrix,”} so that readers may be aware of the scholastic tradition to which I am referring. On the \textit{mala meretrix} generally, see note 13 in Chapter 2.
the characteristics of the clever slave in his plays, focusing on Wilde’s dandies, Lord Darlington, Cecil Graham, and Lord Illingworth, leading up to Lord Goring. Though the *mala meretrix*/adventuress is a fascinating character and certainly ranks among Plautus’ and Wilde’s provocateurs, she is outside the scope of my dissertation and so will not be treated in detail here.

*Plautus’ Heroic malitia*6

Plautus’ plots largely revolve around the young lover (*adulescens*) and his attempts to get a girl, either an enslaved prostitute owned by a wicked pimp, or a citizen girl from whom he is separated by some obstacle (her father, her initially unknown citizenship, etc.). The young lover is usually blocked by his stern father, who opposes his son’s profligacy and wants him to settle down with a citizen girl. Other blocking characters include moneylenders, pimps, earnest and obsessively moral slaves in service to fathers, and rivals for the girls. Such types are characterized by love of money, social order, and business, as well as rejection of the holiday atmosphere of the play and the pleasures it offers.7 In Plautus, the young lover is passive and ineffectual, unable to oppose his father, and lacking the mental acuity to hatch a plot on his own. The harsh father is morally bankrupt or an arrogant *agelast* (obsessed with money and status),8 standing in the way of his son’s happiness.

To move the plot forward, the young lover must often turn to his slave for help. The clever slave is gifted with clever speech: musical poetry and neologisms are his weapons, the

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8 Spoilsports, Puritans, non-laughers. See Segal (1968: 70).
linguistic finery with which he proves himself superior to his master(s). He plays with language, drafts a new plot, and often plays both sides, since he can do what the “upstanding” citizens cannot, that is, be bad in order to achieve the ends of his “client.” Legally and socially, these slaves stand on the fringes of society. They have no rights or power, yet they take the entire play in hand, deftly managing with casual deceit their masters, the young lover, the pimps, the girls, and the neighbors. Their clever speech also allows them to call attention to the hypocrisies of the masters who oppress them: young lovers are teased for their petty troubles and profligacy, and the senes are mocked and undercut for their arrogance. They may speak of morality, but the clever slave knows their secrets, schemes, and deceptions. Through the servus callidus, the author can draw attention to the greater hypocrisies of the middle class: moralizing in word but not deed, the limitations of the supposedly free masters, and the arrested development of the characters around them.

Anderson defines this phenomenon as “heroic malitia:” the slave (deemed “bad”) uses cleverness and trickery to deceive his master or a pimp for money or possession of a prostitute, using the “heroic” language of a military general and Roman patron, symbols of virtus (moral goodness), to create an amalgam of comic bad and good. By hijacking the language of the elite citizenry, clever slaves put their resistance to social norms in terminology their social “betters” can understand. Wilde’s dandies similarly appropriate the language of Victorian morality and norms to question the dominant view in the characters to whom they stand in opposition. Because the slave stands outside of citizen society, he displays “a striking indifference to strict ethical tenets; an adaptability to conditions; an energetic curiosity; basic cunning and enjoyment of deception; a combative, anarchic attitude towards life; and total indifference to such ordinary
things as property rights, duty, responsibility, truth, or authority.”  Despite their “wickedness” and their opposition to the citizen father (the standard symbol of Roman morality), clever slaves appeal to the pleasure principle of the audience, who want the clever slaves to succeed.

In some cases, the play’s Saturnalian atmosphere is dissolved, and the slave reverts to his “proper” subservient role at play’s end, escaping punishment but reduced to his original state. In other plays, the slave earns goodwill, freedom, and sometimes marriage for his role in resolving the action. This too is a kind of dissolution of the Saturnalian atmosphere, as the upstart slave is naturalized into the ranks of Rome’s freedmen (liberti), owing fides and obsequium to his master who is no longer undermined by the cheek of his slave nor subject to embarrassment at being disrespected by him. Some clever slaves, however, manage to effect change in the development of other characters within the play, forcing implacable senes to relax their rules or change their inappropriate behavior. Wilde’s dandies similarly encourage the Puritan, unyielding characters to relax their staunch views of right and wrong and develop their character towards flexibility and greater self-awareness.

Wilde’s Dandies

Dandies differ from clever slaves in many respects: they belong to the upper echelons of society, they do not have to work for a living, they perform few activities in the course of a play, and they are highly cultured. Nevertheless, both character types serve as provocateurs: they say the potentially wicked things that upstanding, moral characters cannot, and through their roguish

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10 On the “Saturnalian atmosphere” see Segal (1968: 42-69).
influence, they move the plot forward. They are pleased at being called “wicked,” as it puts them at odds with the expectations of the value system of the moralists who insist that the world falls into two categories of good or bad; they also quickly tire of others talking morality at them. They voice their critique of a staunch ideological system with considerable wit, metaphor, and paradox. Both dandies and clever slaves are more perceptive of the hypocrisies of the protagonists, they are amoral (which appears to the Puritan characters as immorality), both enjoy luxury, both are outsiders (the dandy eschews the productive world, the slave exists outside of legitimate society), they are the free spirits and individuals who stand outside the prescribed norms for their status (neither actually does much work), and both are threatened by non-provocateurs (Puritans and regular citizens) with punishment for their behavior or speech (dandies with mediocrity or conformity, slaves with torture or death).

As Plautus does with his *servus callidus*, Wilde becomes defter at incorporating the dandy’s role in the play over the course of his career. In *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, dandies appear primarily as episodic commentators as Wilde experiments with the role. Lord Darlington is first cast in the role of a dandified, flip seducer, but shifts in Act II into an earnest lover (or at least an opportunistic one). Earnestness strips a dandy of his status, just as moralizing kept a *servus* from being *callidus* in Plautus. In *A Woman of No Importance* the dandy is cast as the villain, and the playwright is left with the task of reconciling the voice of dramatic authority in the play, the dandy, with villainy. In *An Ideal Husband* Wilde negotiates the appropriate mix of episodic dandyism and the dandy’s role in the play: here he can be the *servus callidus*, helping his upstanding friend through dire straits. Similarly in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the dandy Algernon provokes plot development, and his clever speech prompts the audience to reflect on their own views.
In Wilde’s world, characters may be earnest dowdies, witty dandies, or shades of both.\textsuperscript{11} The Puritan protagonists are inevitably of the first type, while the provocateurs fall into the second category, just as Plautus’ slaves were generally either moralizing \textit{agelasts} or \textit{servi callidi}. The dandy was effeminate, inasmuch as he enjoyed idle or frivolous activities associated with women of the leisure class: flirting, dancing, entertaining, dressing, trivia, gossip, chit-chat, and scandal. The dandy’s public association with this culture was in direct opposition to increasingly popular middle-class values, namely that men should be overtly masculine, pure, and moral, and should have purpose and responsibility. Women could be dandies as well. Those who identified with the standards of leisured femininity coupled with wit, and who flirted with immoral speech and triviality, stood as female complements to Wilde’s male dandies in his comedies. Such women also stood in opposition to middle-class values regarding women (namely that they should be innocent homebodies). Their knowing speech and willingness to speak mark them out as much as their dress.\textsuperscript{12} Both function as provocateurs, challenging the values of the Puritan protagonists of \textit{Lady Windermere’s Fan}, \textit{A Woman of No Importance}, \textit{An Ideal Husband}, and \textit{The Importance of Being Earnest}.

Dandies speak in epigrams, paradoxes, and confusing amalgamations of both, which resist easy interpretation and encourage the recipients to parse them with self-reflection. Clever, insouciant, and contrary speech marks the dandy (considered, at least upon surface interpretation, cynical or insincere), whereas clear, epigram-free speech marks Wilde’s sincere characters.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{11} “Dowdies and dandies” is a reference to Mrs. Cheveley’s reported speech in \textit{An Ideal Husband} (I.320). See Bristow (1994) and Sinfield (1994a: 38-44).

\textsuperscript{12} Sinfield (1994a: 42); L. Hamilton (2003: 230). See below, note 64.

\textsuperscript{13} C. Hamilton (2000).
Wit grants dramatic authority: dandies may be moved by passion, but their detachment allows them to refrain from moral indignation and quick judgment, and the speech of the dandy may be considered the most truthful in the play.\textsuperscript{14} By maintaining an objective or critical stance, dandies often grant to the audience insight into the moral code of upper class Victorian society by supporting or questioning it.\textsuperscript{15} Like Plautus’ \textit{servi callidi}, dandies use their speech to mock or subvert the earnest, Puritan characters around them; they are amused rather than drawn in.

Dandies are outsiders, in both moral stance and occupation. They do not participate in any morality plot, and they strive to appear unaffected by the action unfolding around them; they merely comment on it. Though they belong to the dominant society (upper class Victorian England), they do not pursue anything but leisure and pleasure, and they care nothing for politics or the management of their estates. Their outsider status makes them more perceptive of the hypocrisies of the protagonists, whose very earnestness and participation in active life leaves them vulnerable to disappointed expectations or threats of exposure. In this way dandies expose the Puritan values of the protagonists as unrealistic and flawed.

This is not to say that the dandy is entirely objective. Dandies can be moved by the actions of other characters if they feel the participants are not approaching events rationally, and they can respond to cruelty or inconsiderate behavior in others. Their morality, however, is not dictated by social structures or strictures, nor by the policing of behavior by the elite. Their moral compass is internal, achieved through self-development and reflection, not enforced by cultural norms. The morality of the clever slaves functions in much the same way: they reject the val-

\textsuperscript{14} Raby (1988: 94).

\textsuperscript{15} See Bristow (1994: 56): “The inconsistent, contradictory, and unpredictable elements that characterize the authorial sign of “Wilde” are part and parcel of his wholesale critique of a culture that foolishly wants its meaning and its morals clearly laid out.”
ues that their elderly masters expect them to espouse (the same values that keep them servile and docile), and they react to the egregious wrongs committed by privileged citizens.

Because they are outsiders, belonging to the dominant class but refusing to be drawn into its tedium, work, or moral values, Wilde’s dandies often seem episodic additions to the play, uninvolved with the “more important” morality plot. They deliver witty *bons mots* and toss off paradoxical statements, but their role in the play is, for this reason, often overlooked. Wilde was criticized by contemporary reviewers for focusing too much on the language and verbal acrobatics of his dandies to develop his plots.\(^\text{16}\) But such assessments miss the point: the dandy is a provocateur. He motivates change and contributes to the resolution of action within the plot. He moves the protagonists outside their comfort zones, and without his contribution, the plays might not move forward at all. Thus the dandy, seemingly disconnected from it, is in fact integral to the plot.

*Servi callidi* and dandies are consummate actors. Clever slaves invoke the dramatic authority of tragedy for their metaphors, and often go so far as to stage a show themselves: Toxilus in *Persa*, the titular Pseudolus, Palaestrio in *Miles Gloriosus*, Leonida in *Asinaria*, the titular

\(^{16}\) See note 3. The *Sunday Times* (Feb. 21, 1892) noted, “*Lady Windermere’s Fan* is clever and interesting enough…though by no means a perfect or unconventional play as far as the development of character and incident goes. Mr. Wilde has the gift of writing witty and memorable dialogue.” The *Daily News* (April 20, 1893) said, “If *Lady Windermere’s Fan* deserved the complaints that were made of the paucity of action as compared with the quantity of words, what shall be said of *A Woman of No Importance*? In this play in four acts,…Mr. Oscar Wilde has introduced really only one dramatic situation…. Mr. Wilde’s play may be described as mainly a collection of epigrams.” On *Woman*, the *Sunday Times* (April 23, 1893) wrote, “If Mr. Wilde would only keep his passion for paradox, persiflage, and proverbial perversity within the legitimate limits of his dramatic theme, what a good play he might write…. .” The *Morning Post* (Jan. 4, 1895) asserted, “The strength of *An Ideal Husband* is certainly not in the narrative it lays before us…[but] the dialogue is admirable either in its truth to life or in its literary cleverness.” Of *Earnest*, the *Observer* (Feb. 17, 1895) wrote, “The plot on which Mr. Wilde here hangs his airy witticisms and his favourite contradictions of accepted axioms is as slight as the web which may serve as setting for drops of dew.” Tydeman (1982) collects these and a number of other reviews.
Curculio, and Tranio in *Mostellaria* all create elaborate “plays,” complete with costumes and settings for staging their tricks. The plays-within-plays elevate their schemes to an art form, and these pop-up dramas are used to deliver comeuppance to the arrogant, the hypocritical, or the spoilsports who cross their paths.\(^{17}\) Dandies make life an art form as well.\(^{18}\) Distilling all action into words and thoughts, the dandy plays with social codes and reduces them to absurdities, taking commonplace maxims and epigrams and transforming them into paradoxes to inspire thought or critique the dominant viewpoint.\(^{19}\) They adopt, and consistently hold, the pose with flair, dressing the part and considering always the effect and style of what they say and do.\(^{20}\) Clever slaves have trickery, which they raise to an art form, and dandies have lying, the telling of beautiful, untrue things (or at least things that require some thinking to see the “truth”). Both characters deploy thespian skill to call into question dominant beliefs and social order.\(^{21}\)

Both are free thinkers and free spirits. Dandies profess values that set them apart from their peers, whereas clever slaves act in ways contrary to their servile status. Both demand the freedom that their contrary attitudes afforded them. In subverting expectations for themselves, neither actually does any kind of work. The dandy rejects the cultivation of grounds, manage-

\(^{17}\) Moore (1998: 67-90) draws attention to the clever slave’s use of metatheatricality to denounce empty moralizing in plays.

\(^{18}\) The two dandies in *Earnest*, beyond adopting the “pose” of the dandy, actually dress up and play roles. Both pretend to be a fashionable young man named Ernest, and Jack dresses up in mourning clothes to perform a ruse in Act II.

\(^{19}\) As Danson (1997: 89) says, “Wilde transforms the dandy’s insolent languor into sublime detachment… ‘to do nothing at all’ becomes the most difficult and intellectual thing in the world.”

\(^{20}\) “The secret of Truth is entirely a matter of style,” in “The Decay of Lying” (*Prose*, 177).

\(^{21}\) On the dandy’s “pose,” as well as Wilde’s philosophies on self-development, Art, and the critic (which in many ways the dandy was), see his essays, “Decay of Lying,” “Critic as Artist,” and “The Soul of Man Under Socialism.”
ment of estate, or politics that occupy the other members of the upper class. The clever slave actively avoids the work set by his aged masters, preferring instead to lounge, eat, and drink with the young master who is more his comrade than his boss (united as they are against the older generation). Both face hostile reaction to their non-conformity: the dandy is threatened by the non-provocateur with mediocrity, marriage, and activity (the silence of his dissident voice), whereas the clever slave is threatened with actual silence—torture and/or death.

*Reading Wilde’s Dandy in Plautus, Reading Plautus’ servus callidus in Wilde*

It is often acknowledged that Plautus’ provocateurs motivate plot development for the citizen class within their plays, and Wilde’s provocateurs attempt to motivate self-reflection and development in the protagonists of their plays. Plautus’ *servi callidi* and Wilde’s dandies share the position of motivators: they stand outside the concerns of the protagonists, and comment on events, challenge the protagonists to reconsider their stances, or encourage the audience to re-think preconceived ideas. Wilde’s dandies have almost limitless freedom to observe society while standing on its fringes, purposefully withdrawing from the dominant attitudes, trite moralities, and melodramatic concerns. Plautus’ *servi callidi* ostensibly have no freedom at all, but take a liberated stance, involved in but unaffected by the problems of the protagonists or the hypocrisies of their masters. But both characters have more than one function, and their dual purpose comes into focus when we read Wilde into Plautus, and Plautus into Wilde.

When one reads the *servus callidus* with the Wildean dandy in mind, his secondary function comes more sharply into focus. His *malitia* exists not simply for Saturnalian fun and games, for resolution of the plot alone—the trickster is a social commentator, drawing attention to the
hypocrisies of his masters, questioning their values, and using his position as outside observer to mock or put in their place the characters who have become too pompous or arrogant. He forces plot development and often character development as well. The objects of his mockery are chastened, at least for the day, and may think twice before boasting again. Wicked pimps, arrogant and hypocritical fathers, and moralizing slaves—prideful men who hate above all things to be made laughingstocks—will be taken down a peg by the servus callidus, who draws attention to their character flaws.

When Wilde’s dandies are considered with Plautus’ servi callidi in mind, we see that the dandies are not episodic additions, superfluous to the main action of the play (as they may seem, given their involvement in the plot through words rather than deeds), dispensing bons mots unrelated to the main action of the play. The dandies, by standing outside of the problems of the “problem play,” can better comment, inspire thought, and encourage development. And this commentary in turn prompts action. Without their intervention, the plots might not reach resolution. In short, the servus callidus resolves the plot through his tricks, but he also calls out hypocrisy, and through mockery attempts to change pompous characters. The dandy questions thought, action, and character, but he also contributes to the resolution of the plot.

Nearly all of Plautus’ clever slave plays begin with a request from an “earnest” character to complete some task (usually swindling money or women from a blocking character), and this purpose allows the clever slave’s hijinks to take over the play. The earnest characters and the pretense become nearly insignificant in Plautus’ later career, culminating in Persa, in which a clever slave acts of his own accord, in pursuit of his own goals. Here Plautus eschews the earnest pretense altogether. In this play, Toxilus, a clever slave, seeks to purchase his own girlfriend from a pimp, rather than the girlfriend of a young master in love. The young master, being ab-
sent, is eliminated from the plot altogether. Toxilus hatches a successful plot on his own, carrying off the girl. He then forgets his original motive and hatches a revenge plot against the pimp, employing a parasite and his daughter and assigning them “roles” to play. The play is populated almost exclusively with ne’er-do-wells and seedy figures (slaves, pimps, and parasites), with only the parasite’s daughter representing morality (though she too is gifted with a crafty mind and clever speech). Wilde undertakes a similar refinement in The Importance of Being Earnest, in which he makes nearly every character a dandy and eliminates elements extraneous to the farce.

Following an examination of Plautus’ clever slave plays, I will compare and contrast the characteristics of the servus callidus with those of the dandy in Wilde’s social comedies, in order to demonstrate their similarities in both character and role in the plot. Plautus has a large number of clever slave plays: Asinaria, Aulularia, Bacchides, Captivi, Casina, Curculio, Epidicus, Miles Gloriosus, Mostellaria, Persa, Poenulus, Pseudolus, and Rudens all have some instance of the clever slave and his antics. My focus in this chapter is on the clever slaves as helper characters and social commentators, those who use malitia to resolve the plot, help their young master, or expose citizen hypocrisies, and so in the pages that follow, I will examine Asinaria, Mostellaria-

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22 And when the fantasy is extended this far, with nearly every character stretched to nearly absurd caricature, characters that may have seemed provocative in other plays are made commonplace. On elements of fantasy in Earnest, see Gregor (1966: 512-21) and Jacobs (1992).

23 Trinummus’ apparently tricky slave, Stasimus (who has schemed to get money in the past and suggests more scheming in the course of the play) never actually participates in the action to resolve the plot.

24 I omit parasites—free men whose poverty forces them to befriend and sometimes assist wealthier citizens (as in Curculio)—as well as slaves who turn out to be free men (like Tyndarus in Captivi).
Miles Gloriosus, Epidicus, Bacchides, and Pseudolus, as they most clearly illustrate the chief attributes of the servus callidus.  

**Plautus’ servi callidi**

**Asinaria**  
Plautus makes his first foray into the “clever slave” plot with *Asinaria* (see plot summary in Appendix B), based on *Onagos* by Demophilus (as he notes, lines 10-11). In this play, the senex Demaenetus engages his slave Libanus to swindle his wife, who holds the purse strings, out of money so that his son may purchase a contract with his prostitute girlfriend for a year (82-104). Libanus teams up with conservus (fellow slave) Leonida to orchestrate a caper. They decide to pretend Leonida is a slave overseer named Saurea, who belongs to Demaenetus’ wife Artemona. A merchant has come to deliver 20 *minae* to Saurea for the purchase of some donkeys.

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25 In *Aulularia*, the slave hatches a plot to steal gold from the neighbor’s house, but is motivated by greed, not a desire to use his *malitia* to help out his young master or resolve the plot. In *Cassinia*, Olympio and Chalinus scheme on behalf of their masters, but they are dependent on their masters to hatch the plot rather than thinking it out themselves. The slave Trachalio in *Rudens* is helpful, but he is not *malus*, and his help is limited. Milphio in *Poenulus* has aspirations of being a *servus callidus*, but his help is minimal in resolving the plot, as Hanno steps in to scheme with Agorastocles. The mastermind of trickery in *Persa*, Toxilus, is one of Plautus’ cleverest slaves, but he is not a helper character: his master has been long absent, and he schemes out of self-interest, to get a girl for himself.

26 On the chronology of Plautus’ plays, see Hough (1940). de Melo (2011a: 137) asserts that since the play is nearly devoid of sung passages, and on the basis of the reference to *verbivelitatio* (a play on the *velites*, which were established in 211 BCE), this play must have been one of Plautus’ earliest.

With Demaenetus vouching for their veracity, the slaves persuade the merchant, take the money, and finance the young lover’s affair.

This thin pretext allows the slaves to do what they claim is the slave’s role: swindling and cheating masters—this time in service to the master (“save your master, don’t do the same as other slaves do, who have cunning ways only in order to cheat master,” *serva erum, cave tu idem faxis alii quod servi solent, / qui ad eri fraudationem callidum ingenium gerunt*, 256-57). After Demaenetus has given him permission, Libanus immediately puts on airs and becomes insubordinate: he says he will be,

\[
\text{ubicumque libitum erit animo meo.}
\]
\[
\text{profecto nemo est quem iam dehinc metuam mihi ne quid nocere possit, cum tu mihi tua oratione omnem animum ostendisti tuom.}
\]
\[
\text{quin te quoque ipsum facio haud magni, si hoc patro.}
\]
\[
\text{pergam quo occepi atque ibi consilia exordiar. (As. 110-15)}
\]

Wherever suits me. As a matter of fact, I won’t be afraid any longer that anyone could harm me, now that you’ve shown me the depths of your soul in your speech. What’s more, I won’t even care much about you yourself if I carry this through. I will go where I had set out to go and I’ll begin my plans there.

Demaenetus says there is no worse slave than Libanus, and he will be sure to get the trick done if he has given his word to do so. With this short introduction Plautus lays out the basic aspects of the clever slave play: cheeky slaves who are the “worst of men” (insubordinate and ready to scheme at all times) and masters who will be swindled.

The next act incorporates another important tenet of the clever slave play: the witty banter. For forty lines (267-307) Libanus and Leonida exchange insults for the amusement of themselves and the audience. This section, irrelevant to the plot, allows the slaves to showcase their abilities, reassuring the audience of their competence in wickedness. Their credentials estab-
lished, Libanus abruptly interjects, “I want to cut short our word duel (verbivelitatio). What’s that business of yours?” (308-09). The “word duel” appears again and again in clever slave plays. In fact, a slave’s status as callidus is determined in part by how well he can hold his own in the verbivelitatio, and the audience expects this type of linguistic acrobatics from a Plautine play.

The slaves get down to business. They hatch their plot, determining to trick the merchant by any means, even if Libanus must tolerate blows from Leonida (though Libanus takes umbrage, 373-75). They will find their boldness and tricks (audacia usust nobis inventa et dolis, 312) by playacting, each in his own part to advance their plot. Leonida tells Libanus gleefully that there is so much good mixed with so much evil in his plot (tantum adest boni improviso, verum commixtum malo, 310) that they will deserve torture for the rest of the year. Their pride in performing acts deserving of punishment is another trait of the clever slave: the more egregious the affront, the bigger the punishment, the more accolades for the guilty slave. The whole of Act II, Scene III is taken up by their duping the merchant, and when they succeed, they discuss their victory in military terms: the legions, troops, and armies of their enemy have been put to flight by their fighting and lies, by means of their virtus (554-57). Their bravado must be fully appreciated: 20 minae is a significant sum. A slave who stole such a sum from his master could be horrifically tortured and killed (indeed, slaves could be horrifically tortured and killed

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29 On currency, see Chapter 2, note 25.
for far less\textsuperscript{30}). Their willingness to undertake such a swindle and their apparent disregard for the consequences show bravery and authority that belie their servile status.

The slaves do not immediately turn over the money. Instead, they taunt their master’s son and his girlfriend, the very people they have been engaged to help. After a short exchange with Argyrippus, Libanus and Leonida determine to make fun of him (\textit{vin erum delude?...dignust sane}, 646). They tease him into calling them patrons (\textit{patronos}, 652); they instruct him to make Philaenium beg for the money (662); they ask Philaenium to call them sweet names (\textit{meus ocellus, mea rosa, mi anime, mea voluptas}, 664; \textit{aneticulam, columbam vel catellum, hirundinem, monerulam, passerculum putilum}, 693-94); rub their knees in supplication (670) and embrace them (\textit{circumda torque bracchiis, meum collum circumplecte}, 696); and, most shocking, they ride Argyrippus like a horse (699-706). Philaenium begs Leonida to buy himself free with his kindness, and to buy Argyrippus for himself with the money (672-73; meaning that Leonida would earn a reward from Argyrippus, who does not actually have the power to free Leonida, and that Argyrippus would owe Leonida great favor in return for the good deed).\textsuperscript{31} The role reversal of master and slave is characteristic of the clever slave comedy, and here Leonida and Libanus maintain it as long as they can, even forcing a physical manifestation of role reversal by riding Argyrippus like the asses in the play’s title.

The slaves’ appearance, nevertheless, is mostly episodic, not central to the play, and once they give Argyrippus the money they disappear from the drama.\textsuperscript{32} The rest of the play is a farce

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\textsuperscript{31} Nor do the slaves desire a reward beyond the status they earn from Argyrippus. See Segal (1968: 104-109).

\textsuperscript{32} Anderson (1993: 98-99) notes the limited role of the clever slaves in this play.
in which Demaenetus torments his son with his request to spend the night with Philaenium in exchange for the money, and Artemona catches him in the act. Thus, although the slaves are successful, the plot does not require them, so they disappear when their usefulness has ended. But it is through them that we learn that Demaenetus is not the indulgent and kindly father he pretends to be. Though clever slaves most often function to resolve the plot, they also expose hypocrisy and question the behavior of the play’s other characters. When Libanus and Leonida give the money to Argyrippus, they reveal Demaenetus’ ulterior motives, telling the *adulescens* the terms of the gift: Demaenetus is not kindly, but self-serving, and will display his power by forcing his son to share his girlfriend for a night (734-38). His inappropriate invocation of *patria potestas* establishes Demaenetus’ character and guarantees his comeuppance. In many of Plautus’ clever slave plays, it is the *servi callidi* themselves who will bring the blocking character his just deserts, bringing the high and mighty low with a useful lesson on moderation or humility. Here, Leonida and Libanus set up the fall but do not enact it. That task will fall to Diabolus’ parasite and Demaenetus’ wife in Act V. Nevertheless, these clever slaves establish Demaenetus’ bad character and justify his comeuppance in Act V for violating the holiday atmosphere of the play: love and pleasure are for young men, not greybeards who should know better.

*Mostellaria*

Plautus continued to experiment with the clever slave play throughout his career, increasing the role of the *callidus servus* and his importance to the plot. In *Mostellaria*, a clever slave very nearly resolves the plot and offers a lesson in humility to his *agelast* master. This play bridges the gap between the episodic slaves of *Asinaria* and the triumphant slaves of *Miles Gloriosus*, *Epidicus*, *Bacchides*, and *Pseudolus*. 
Mostellaria\textsuperscript{33} (see plot summary in Appendix B) features a clever slave who orchestrates a complicated plot, but fails to pull it off successfully, thanks to the ill-timed visit of the neighbor’s household slaves. In this play, the *senex* Theopropides has gone off on business for three years, during which time his son has squandered vast sums of money on drink, parties, luxury food items, and a *meretrix* whom he has purchased and freed. Unfortunately, he has not planned on a course of action should his father return, and that is the very problem Tranio faces. The son, Philolaches, is a typical comic *adulescens*: not very clever, interested only in pleasure, and unable to orchestrate his own plots. He also establishes his own weak-willed nature: he knows he has behaved badly, but he cannot stop his profligate ways, and shame does not keep him from continuing to misbehave (120-56).\textsuperscript{34} Thus it falls to Tranio to sort out the problem and keep Theopropides from punishing his son, so that the young man can keep carousing, at least for a little bit longer.

*Mostellaria* has the hallmarks of a clever slave play. It begins with a verbal altercation between Tranio, the clever slave, and Grumio, the well-behaved slave. Grumio is not funny, and he moralizes to Tranio about the harm the *servus callidus* has done Philolaches with his bad influence. He condemns Tranio’s spendthrift ways (15-33) and complains of the fancy foods and luxurious ointments he enjoys:

\begin{displaymath}
\begin{align*}
\text{non omnes possunt olere unguenta exotica}, \\
\text{si tu oles, neque superiores accumbere} \\
\text{neque tam facetis quam tu vivis victibus.} \\
\text{tu tibi istos habeas turtures piscis avis,}
\end{align*}
\end{displaymath}

\textsuperscript{33} There were at least three Greek originals called *Phasma*, by Menander, Philemon, and Theognetus. Menander’s *Phasma* is fragmentary, but suggests a very different plot (see Webster [1974: 173-78] and Arnott [2000: 364-411]). de Melo (2011c: 307-308) argues that the play can be conclusively attributed neither to Philemon nor to Theognetus. On Plautine innovations in *Mostellaria*, see Lowe (1985b).

\textsuperscript{34} See Leach (1969a) on Plautine originality in Philolaches’ soliloquy.
Not everybody can smell of exotic ointments even if you do, or have the more honorable places at table, or live on such dainty dishes as you do. Have those turtledoves, fish, and birds for yourself, but leave me to my lot fed on garlic dishes. You are lucky, I am wretched.

Clever slaves in their masters’ favor get to enjoy some of the benefits of a wastrel’s life: good food, perfumes, inactivity, and women, often alongside their masters. The moralizing slaves left by fathers to look out for sons and prevent this carousing will condemn such behavior. This slave, an agelast, functions as a foil for the clever slave, but is quickly defeated with abusive language. Tranio dispatches Grumio: “Don’t be a nuisance now, go to the farm, remove yourself. You certainly won’t waste my time any more” (molestus ne sis nunciam, i rus, te amove. / ne tu [erres] hercle praeterhac mihi non facies moram, 74-75). His banter and posturing have proven superior, and Tranio retains his status as verbal master. Grumio serves as a surrogate for the absent father, voicing opinions that Theoproprides will espouse when he comes back to town. Thus Grumio foreshadows Theoproprides’ character, and his arrogance contributes to Tranio’s desire to take his master down a peg.

Tranio takes over the plot when he volunteers to trick his elder master, newly returned from Egypt (388-90). Philolaches puts himself fully under Tranio’s protection (in tuam custode-

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35 For instance, in Stichus, once the slave has performed his duties, his master allows him to go drink with his girlfriend and another slave at a small banquet. Evidence in Mostellaria indicates that Philolaches and his friend Callidamates have been partying with their slaves since Theoproprides’ departure. In Pseudolus, the titular slave appears drunk in the final scene, presumably after carousing with his master. Chrysalus in Bacchides often eats and drinks with his young master Mnesilochus (645), as do Leonida and Libanus with Argyrippus in Asinaria (270-71). Stasimus in Trinummus may have joined in his master Lesbonicus’ parties (405-15).

36 The paedogogus Lydus in Bacchides serves as the voice of paternal authority, though he takes the duty more seriously than even the boy’s own father.
lam meque et meas spes trado, Tranio, 406) and Tranio puffs himself up, saying that this is a job for a clever schemer (407-19) and that he will put on a comedy for the old man (ludos ego hodie vivo praeamenti hic seni faciam, 427-28). As noted above, the clever slave frequently puts on a play-within-a-play to show off his skills in deception. He needs to keep the old man out of the house, where Philolaches and his friends are hiding, continuing their drinking party, so he tells the old man that the house is haunted, and that any noises issuing from it should be ignored.\(^{37}\)

Playing upon the old man’s superstition, Tranio manages to get him running away from the house (454-528). In naughty slave fashion, Tranio then somewhat blasphemously invokes the gods to watch over his “bad business” (negoti mali, 530-31).

Tranio’s problems get successively worse when Theopropides comes back with news that the previous owner of the house has never heard of a haunting there (nor will he own up to the murder of a guest that Tranio asserted began the haunting). Furthermore, a moneylender shows up looking for the interest and principal on the money Philolaches borrowed to purchase his girl-friend. Money matters are typically the purview of the clever slave, who must trick the money out of a stingy father, so that is what Tranio does. He tells Theopropides that Philolaches borrowed the money to put a down payment on another house, since they cannot live in the haunted one (637-48). Unfortunately, the old man wants to see the house (674f). Quick on his feet, Tranio goes to see the neighbor Simo to convince him to let Theopropides view his house, under the pretext of wanting to model new women’s quarters after the ones at Simo’s place (754-74).\(^{38}\)

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\(^{37}\) On the anomalies in Tranio’s ghost story compared to traditional Greco-Roman ghost/haunting narratives, see Felton (1999). If Theopropides were a little cleverer, he might have seen through Tranio’s improvisation and its departure from typical elements of haunting.

\(^{38}\) On the semiotics of theatrical space in Mostellaria, see Milnor (2002).
Tranio congratulates himself on his “immortal deeds” and facetiously calls himself a *servos multitodis fidus*, a slave very reliable to his master (785).

Rather than letting Simo in on the plot, Tranio makes him the butt of the joke along with his master. Theopropides has so far shown himself to be money-minded and devoid of Saturnalian enjoyment of pleasure. He is happy only when he (incorrectly) hears that his son has taken after his father’s interest in business (638-40). He has already proven himself superstitious by believing Tranio’s story, and he establishes his lack of compassion when he refuses to “sell back” Simo’s house, saying, “In the country each farmer brings in the harvest for his own benefit. If it had been bought for too high a price, we wouldn’t be allowed to back out. One ought to keep for oneself whatever profit there is. One ought not to be sentimental” (*sibi quisque ruri metit. si male empta / forent, nobis istas redhibere haud liceret. / lucri quidquid est, id domum trahere oportet. / misericordias hominem oportet*, 799-802). Theopropides’ arrogance and hostil- ity to pleasure make him a pompous agelast, a moralizer who must be made to see another way of behaving. Tranio’s language and tricks will force Theopropides to develop his character beyond its narrow confines, at least for a short time.

Theopropides and Tranio take a real estate tour with Simo, Tranio mocking his master and the neighbor the whole time (818-40). He makes a joke about the thick doorposts (the two old men), the sleepy door joints (the men’s mental capacity), and a fresco of a crow pecking at two vultures (Tranio vs. the old men):

*Tranio:* Age specta postes eius modi, quanta firmitate facti et quanta crassitudine.

*(Most. 818-19)*

*Tranio:* Go on, look at the doorposts, what they’re like, how strong and how thick.

*Tranio:* Specta, quam arte dormiunt.
Theo: Dormiunt?
Tranio: Illud quidem, ut conivent, volui dicere.

(Most. 829-30)

Tranio: Can you see the door joints? Look how fast they’re asleep. Theopropides: Asleep?
Tranio: I meant to say, “how fast they’re shut.”

Tranio: Viden pictum, ubi ludificat cornix una volturios duos?
Theo: Non edepol video.
Tranio: At ego video. nam inter volturios duos cornix astat, ea volturios duo vicissim velicit. quaeso huc ad me specta, cornicem ut conspicere possies. iam vides?
Theo: Prefecto nullam equidem illic cornicem intuor.
Tranio: At tu isto ad vos optuere, quoniam cornicem nequis conspicari, si volturios forte possis contui.

(Most. 832-38)

Tranio: Can you see the fresco where one crow is making fun of two vultures?
Theopropides: No, I can’t.
Tranio: But I can: the crow is standing between the two vultures and is pecking at the two in turn. Please look in my direction so that you can see the crow. Do you see it now?
Theopropides: I really can’t spot any crow there.
Tranio: But since you can’t see the crow, look in your own direction, toward the two of you, to see if you can spot the vultures.

The crow, a symbol of fun and trickery in many folkloric traditions, pecks at the vultures, birds that nourish themselves on the misfortunes of other creatures. Tranio, though the old men have not realized it, has already begun breaking down their authority and power. He calls out these old men, pillars of the state and “respectable” citizen for being pompous and arrogant. They are “thick” like the doorposts, asleep to his schemes, and harassed by his tricks. Very shortly Theopropides will realize that he has been bested.

Tranio’s real estate plot is not sustainable, however, as he will eventually have to account for why Simo refuses to leave the house he “sold.” Two of friend Callidamates’ slaves put an end to the scheme when they come knocking on the “haunted” house’s door. Theopropides interro-
gates them (983-86), and they rat out the clever slave, calling him the greatest rascal. The old man goes to Simo for corroboration, then plots to torture and kill his tricky slave (1031-39). Tranio figures out what is happening and flees to the altar to escape punishment (1091), though not without witty bravado. Things look dire until Callidamates soberes up and offers to pay all the debts incurred by Philolaches (1159-61). Theopropides is happy to pardon his son in that case, but he still plans to murder Tranio, though Callidamates urges forgiveness (1169-80). Tranio works on his mollified owner, saying, “Why are you making such a fuss? As if I wouldn’t commit some other offense as early as tomorrow; then you’ll be able to punish me properly for both, this one and that one” (quid gravaris? quasi non cras iam commeream aliam noxiam: / ibi utrúmque, et hoc et illud, poteris ulcisci probe, 1178-79). Theopropides relents (1181-82).

In this scene, Theopropides is forced to alter his ways and dismount his high horse. Tranio, in clever slave fashion, has nearly resolved the plot, and Callidamates picks up the slack. But the clever slave also functions to question the morals and behavior of the agelast, encouraging him to develop into a better person (enjoy life more, indulge the whims of youth, cease his hypocrisy), or suffer for his inflexibility. Theopropides has been a harsh father, whose return was dreaded by all. He is unsympathetic, lacks compassion, and deserves his comeupance. Though Tranio has not successfully pulled off his scheme, he has made Theopropides a laughingstock before his neighbors and their slaves. Theopropides uses three versions of the verb ludificari, to make fun of, when he describes Tranio’s deceptions: deludificatus (1033), eludificatus est (1040), and ludificatus (1147). In the spirit of the ludi, the games at which the comedies were staged, Tranio has made sport of Theopropides. As Segal notes (p. 117), it is not even the money that the old master is upset about, but his comeupance by his slave, which proves

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39 On the threat of slave torture in Mostellaria, see H. Parker (1989).
Tranio’s verbal superiority (and superiority in the play) to his master, who is socially superior in status. Tranio delivers the final blow, saying, “That was done right and proper and I’m glad it was done: people of your age, who have a hoary head, ought to have more sense” (bene hercle factum, et factum gaudeo: / sapere istac aetate oportet, qui sunt capite candido, 1147-48). So focused on his own importance, Theopropides has failed to see the world around him. Tranio has helped him to see his son’s true nature, and with the help of Callidamates, has made Theopropides relax his grip.

Mostellaria succeeds as a clever slave play, but Tranio falls short of total triumph. He hatches numerous plots (the haunting, the purchase of the house, the real estate tour), but in the end he is betrayed by the bungling of Callidamates’ slaves. It is only the intervention of Callidamates that softens the old man to consider Tranio’s argument. Thus, while Tranio is clever, a good talker, and a rogue, he does not carry off his schemes like Plautus’ later masterminds.

Miles Gloriosus

The plot of Miles Gloriosus40 (see plot summary in Appendix B) revolves around a scheme to wrest a stolen meretrix from her soldier abductor and return her to her boyfriend. The slave’s plot is successful, unlike Tranio’s, but he does not act alone. Palaestrio carries off his complex, multi-layered scheme with the help of the young man’s girlfriend, a couple of hired meretrices, the neighbor, and the adulescens. Philocomasium has been stolen from her lover Pleusicles by the braggart soldier Pyrgopolinices, who has also taken possession of Pleusicles’ kidnapped slave Palaestrio. The soldier has taken a house at Athens next door to a friend of

40 Based on a Greek original called Alazon (The Braggart, line 86). On Plautine innovation in Miles, see Williams (1956a).
Pleusicles, a man named Periplectomenus. Palaestrio conspired with Periplectomenus to bring Pleusicles to Athens to find a way to get Philocomasium back. When the play opens, Periplectomenus has conceived of an ingenious scheme to get the lovers together: they have bored a hole in the party wall of their houses so that Philocomasium can pass freely between them (144). Palaestrio has carried out the deception on his part (138-44). The rest of the deception comes mainly from Palaestrio: Periplectomenus is keen for deception, to entertain him in his old age, but is relatively new to it, and Pleusicles is too blinded by love to see the bigger picture in a plot. Nevertheless, Palaestrio is limited in his means of enacting deceptions on his own; he is enslaved to a false master, and must contend with the soldier’s loyal slaves. He constructs his plots with the help of many other characters to extricate himself and Philocomasium.\footnote{On the drama and imagery in \textit{Miles}, see Forehand (1973) and Leach (1980).}

Palaestrio informs the audience in his prologue that he has “prepared great devices” (\textit{para-avi magnas machinas}, 138) to allow the lovers to continue meeting. We will shortly see evidence of his assertion. He meets up with the neighbor to elaborate on this plot: Periplectomenus will instruct Philocomasium in all the particulars, once Palaestrio has thought up a plan. Periplectomenus jokes to the audience about the \textit{servus callidus} role—he points to Palaestrio’s stance, gestures, and facial expression and indicates his suitability to play the clever slave (200-15), but interrupts the slave’s thought process to commence his plot (215-18). As with Tranio and the slaves of \textit{Asinaria}, Palaestrio adopts the language of military conquest to get his plot going (219-30), then reviews the details with the neighbor (237-58). They will trick the soldier’s slaves into thinking there are twin girls (as in \textit{Bacchides}), as one of the soldier’s slaves has spied Philocomasium snatching kisses with Pleusicles. This ruse will buy them time to hatch another plot.
This first part of the deception goes off well. Sceledrus is tricked (272-410), and then convinced of the existence of Philocomasium’s twin sister (411-585). Palaestrio is then given space to conceive another plot inside. Pleusicles, Periplectomenus, and Palaestrio emerge from the neighbor’s house having worked out a basic deception. Palaestrio leads the pack with his new meretrix/matrona plot: Periplectomenus will hire a girl to play his wife (and distract the soldier into “adultery”), and this deception will allow them to get Philocomasium away (763-806). This strategy dovetails with their vague plot to continue the twin story, that is, to call the other twin Dicea and spin a yarn about Philocomasium’s family come looking for her (despite the fact that they came up with this plot together, the other two have difficulties remembering the details, which Palaestrio must keep supplying [808-12]).

Periplectomenus coaches the hired girls (his “wife” and her maid, 874-77), but he does so according to Palaestrio’s instructions (905). Palaestrio is particularly tricky here, as he plays a double role: the helper of a young man in love (Pleusicles)—and the helper of a young man in love (Pyrgopolinices). The soldier falls for Periplectomenus’ “wife” and engages Palaestrio to help him get her. Palaestrio takes on the clever-slave-helping-young-lover role for the second time, to help the soldier in love. He flatters facetiously in the way of servi callidi with their silly, lovesick masters, but on two levels. He mocks the soldier’s infatuation as clever slaves do (they often feel their masters are infatuated idiots, but help them anyway), while also mocking the man to whom he secretly is not loyal. Palaestrio is so convincing he manages to persuade Pyrgopolinices to agree to send Philocomasium away with all of her clothing and jewelry (951-83, 1094-1129) so that the soldier can pursue the “wife.” The soldier even puts himself in Palaestrio’s

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42 Palaestrio notes in his prologue-within-a-prologue the need to trick Sceledrus before turning to the soldier. See Frangoulidis (1996).
service like a young man in love committing himself to the slave who will facilitate his love affair (*tibi sum oboediens*, 1129).

Palaestrio acts as a stage director, right down to the costuming decisions. He plans the *meretrix’s* matron outfit (790-93), and instructs Pleusicles on the type of costume he must wear to successfully pull off “sea captain,” the role he will play to get Philocomasium away (1175-82). As the director of this comedy, Palaestrio coaxes from his actors a nearly flawless performance, though he must improvise a bit in his own role (1337-50). Through his directorial competence, he and the lovers escape. With the loss of their playwright, the remaining characters dissolve into a melodrama that is quickly found out by the soldier, but only after he is trussed up and at risk of castration (the punishment for adultery). Periplectomenus hams it up as the cuckolded husband, but when Pyrgopolinices discovers that Philocomasium has left with her lover, he figures out the author of his unhappiness: “that scoundrel of a man, Palaestrio, lured me into this deception” (*scelus viri Palaestrio, / is me in hanc inexit fraudem*, 1434-35).

Apart from staging a successful play-within-a-play to return the girl to the young lover, Palaestrio attempts to prompt some self-development in the soldier. Completely deluded, Pyrgopolinices is the epitome of the braggart-soldier character: he requires constant flattery from his parasite Artotrogus, he believes he is irresistible to women, and he is completely lecherous. Artotrogus undermines the soldier with jokes under his breath in act I, scene I, while establishing Pyrgopolinices’ character as a pompous ass. Palaestrio enters in scene II to flesh out that impression:

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illest miles meus erus,  
qui hinc ad forum abiit, gloriosus, impudens,  
stercoreus, plenus periuri atque adulteri.  
ait sése ultro omnis mulieres sectarier:  
is deridiculost, quaqua incedit, omnibus.  
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(*Mil. 88-92*)
That soldier is my master, the one who went away to the forum, a boastful creature, shameless, like dung, full of false oaths and adultery. He says that all women are running after him of their own accord; wherever he goes, he’s everyone’s laughingstock.

Pyrgopolinices could clearly benefit from self-reflection and self-improvement. Palaestrio offers him that opportunity. Sceledrus, the soldier’s other slave, must be removed from the situation instead of brought into it, as Sceledrus serves his master faithfully, despite his idiocy. Slaves loyal to pompous masters must be persecuted by the clever slave for failing to recognize their masters’ failings, and so Palaestrio does. By duping Sceledrus, he runs him around, makes him anxious, and finally terrifies him with the threat of torture and death, thereby removing him from the plot when Sceledrus exits to lie low. Having taught one misguided character a lesson, Palaestrio moves on to his next quarry, the soldier.

Palaestrio notes the novelty of having to teach a young man a lesson (“I’ve found a lovely trick by which the soldier, with his full head of hair, can be fleeced thoroughly” [nam ego inveni lepidam sycophantiam qui ammutiletur miles usque caesariatus, 767-68]). Typically in Plautus’ plays, it is the older generation who has not learned how to behave appropriately (either because they are lecherous old men who should know better than to chase girls, or because they are hypocritical old men, who have forgotten that they too behaved badly in their youth). The soldier also continues to give Palaestrio justification in tricking him. He pretends to be annoyed that Palaestrio is offering up his services to women all over the city (1056-57), he wishes that he might not be made even more beautiful, given the trouble his beauty is already causing (1086-87), and when he is pursuing Acroteleutium and Milphidippa, he takes the time to enquire into the attractiveness of both Philocomasium’s sisters and the male sea captain (1105-14). Palaestrio says, “I

43 On the plot against Pyrgopolinices, see Frangoulidis (1998).
want the soldier to be made a fool of in a lovely, amusing, and neat way” (*militem lepide et facete <et> laute ludificarier volo*, 1161), and very soon it will come to pass.

After Palaestrio has set up the action of the finale and departs, a *puer* from the soldier’s house comes out to share the effects:

Ipsus illic sese iam impedi vit in plagas;
paratae insidiae sunt: in statu stat senex,
ut adoriatur moechum, qui formast ferox
qui omnis se amare credit, quaeque aspexerit
mulier: eum oderunt qua viri qua mulieres.
nunc in tumultum ibo: intus clamorem audio.

(*Mil.* 1388-93)

He’s entangled himself in the net now. The ambush is prepared. The old man stands at his post ready to attack the adulterer, who is fierce only in his beauty and who believes that all women who see him fall in love with him. Both men and women hate him. Now I’ll enter the uproar: I can hear shouting inside.

We are reminded of the soldier’s faults, and we await his comeuppance. Palaestrio has offered an opportunity for the soldier’s self-improvement, but as the play closes, we learn that Palaestrio’s lesson has failed: the soldier stands chagrined, to be sure, but he does not understand why he has been shamed. Instead of attributing his fall to his own arrogance and pomposity, he says,

Vae misero mihi,
verba mihi data esse video. scelus viri Palaestrio
is me in hanc inlexit fraudem. iure factum iudico;
si sic aliis moechis fiat, minus hic moechorum siet,
magis metuant, minus has res student.

(*Mil.* 1433-37)

Poor, wretched me! I can see that I’ve been tricked. That scoundrel of a man, Palaestrio, lured me into this deception. I judge it serves me right. If it happened like this to other adulterers, there would be fewer of them here, they’d be more afraid and would be less keen on these things.
The soldier is not actually an adulterer, and he has learned nothing from his experience.\textsuperscript{44} Palaestrio has attempted to prompt the development of the soldier along with the resolution of the plot, but the soldier’s blindness prevents Palaestrio from achieving success there.

\textit{Epidicus}

\textit{Epidicus} (see plot summary in Appendix B) has all the hallmarks of the clever-scarve play: military/political language, schemes against old men, a young lover who is helped but worthy of mockery himself, numerous schemes, and a slave who masterminds the whole affair single-handedly, at his own risk, for love of the game.\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Epidicus} also features the typical ending for the clever-scarve play, a reward for the plotter to the chagrin of the humbled old man. While this play does not contain as many verbal battles as some of Plautus’ other clever-scarve plays, it does feature many sung passages, and it opens with a witty play between Epidicus and Thesprio, his master’s other slave.\textsuperscript{46} They trade puns and threats of slave torture, discuss the traits of the naughty slave (18). But Epidicus’ fun is short-lived, as Thesprio brings bad news: Epidicus’ earlier plot to install his young master Stratippocles’ girlfriend in his father’s home has gone awry. Stratippocles no longer loves the girl, Acropolistis, but has brought a new girl home (46-48). Epidicus is exasperated, but remarks that the best clever slaves are the ones who keep things to themselves.

\textsuperscript{44} As Moore (1998: 77) notes, Pyrgopolinices is a failed spectator of Palaestrio’s play, having missed the “moral” of the story, that pompous moralizing in plays is ridiculous and serves no didactic purpose.

\textsuperscript{45} Goldberg (1978) argues that Plautus composed an original play in \textit{Epidicus}, not based on a Greek antecedent. Contra Goldberg, see Keyes (1940). Slater (2001) argues for a Greek original, but asserts that it did not end with a brother-sister marriage as Keyes suggests. Further on \textit{Epidicus}, see Willcock (1995).

\textsuperscript{46} On the sung passages, see Moore (2012).
(59-61). Thesprio astutely guesses that Epidicus has been plotting some badness (“ita voltu tuo / videor videre commeruisse hic me apsente in te aliquid mali,” 61-62), and lets him get to it.

Like Libanus in Asinaria, Epidicus pauses to deliver a monologue about the necessity of his scheming (81-100), then resigns himself to dealing with Stratippocles. The young man is far less likable than most adulescentes in New Comedy: he is fickle in his affections, unappreciative of the efforts of his slave, and completely callous about that slave’s fate (as well as being abusive himself). Far from calling Epidicus his patron, he threatens Epidicus with the mill (certain death by terrible hard work) if the slave does not come up with the 40 minae owed for the new girl he has bought (145-47). Epidicus reminds him that Stratippocles does not have to risk his own skin in this venture, but agrees to come up with a bold and dangerous deed, since a clever slave cannot pass up an excuse for a good plot (ego istuc accedam periclum potius atque audaciam, 149). He uses military and political metaphors (159-60) and plots to swindle the old man Periphanes and his dull friend Apoecides. He manipulates the old men into accepting his plan (257-302) and convinces them that he, a good slave, works in their benefit to teach the young man a lesson about profligacy and set him on the right path. While Epidicus fears punishment (310-11), he puts it out of his mind, to better plot the current course (312-19). Focus on immediate concerns is a common trait among servi callidi, who would rather put off until tomorrow the fears of today, in favor of doing more “badness.”

Chaeribulus is as unpleasant as his friend Stratippocles. A profligate young man himself, he cannot scrape together the money Stratippocles needs, but ridicules him for putting his faith in Epidicus, and advises torturing the slave and looking elsewhere for help (323-28). Epidicus defies Chaeribulus’ expectations with a masterful plan: he will load up a hired girl with his tricks and wiles (dolis astutiisque, 375), and trick the old men out of another 50 minae in addition to
the money Periphanes paid out earlier for Acropolistis, thinking she was his daughter (a plot hatched earlier by Epidicus for Stratippocles, 363-77). Stratippocles finally behaves in the way of needy young men, accepting Epidicus as his military commander (virtute atque auspicio Epidici cum praeda in castra redeo, 381) and putting his fate in the slave’s hands.

By this point Epidicus has schemed to devise two plots: the first, to install Stratippocles’ lyre girl in Periphanes’ home, disguised as the old man’s daughter. Next, he tricks the men into “buying” a music girl under the assumption that she is Periphanes’ son’s mistress; by purchasing her they can sell her out of town before Stratippocles comes home. The girl, however, is a free girl hired for the day for a pittance (372), leaving Epidicus free to take the 50 minae to Stratippocles to pay the moneylender for his new girl. The second plot blows up too quickly. The soldier to whom Epidicus suggested they sell the newly “purchased” girl comes almost immediately, and when the hired girl is brought to him, he denies that she is the girl he has come for (Periphanes does not realize that his “daughter” Acropolistis in the back room is actually the girl the soldier seeks). The soldier tells Periphanes that he has been duped, “Old man, you’ve been tricked plainly and properly” (senex, tibi os est sublitum plane et probe, 491) and Periphanes immediately identifies Epidicus as the author of the trick, “Epidicus, you’re a decent chap, you’ve fought, you’re a man; I was a sniffling, worthless creature and you wiped my nose” (Epidice, frugi es, pugnavisti, homo es, / qui me emunxisti mucidum, minimi preti, 493-94). He calls the hired girl out to confirm the deception, and she corroborates the soldier’s assertion: she heard it was Epidicus who conceived of the swindle (507-12).

The plot continues to fall down around Epidicus’ ears. Periphanes plots revenge against his wily slave (517-25), but the biggest revelation is yet to come: Philippa, the mother of Periphanes’ lost daughter, arrives and outs Acropolistis as a fake. Epidicus has passed off a fraud for
Periphanes’ daughter, meaning that Periphanes has lost a large amount of money and his daughter is still lost and vulnerable. Acropolistis complains that Epidicus was the author of the trick (591-92), sealing the slave’s fate. Periphanes becomes murderous (605-06). Now even Epidicus becomes concerned when he sees the men preparing straps and shackles (610-14). Clever slaves can get so far on wits alone, but at some point in most clever-slave plays, they realize the very real threat of retribution by their masters. Stratippocles is still unconcerned when Epidicus looks to him for help (615-19), and he has proven himself to be the worst of the young lovers in new comedy: he cares nothing for his slave, who has undertaken many schemes on his behalf. Only at the very end of the play does Stratippocles bother to speak to his father on Epidicus’ behalf, and only then at the beseeching of his sister (721-22).

Epidicus does not scheme his way out of his troubles. In this respect he is like Tranio; both slaves were betrayed in their plots, and both must face their masters. Whereas Tranio was saved by the intervention of the wealthy neighbor Chaeribulus, Epidicus stumbles onto his salvation. When he meets Stratippocles’ paramour, he realizes that she is Periphanes’ long lost daughter (634-45). He now has leverage he can use against the old men to prevent torture and death.\(^{47}\) This turn of events also allows Epidicus to get even with Stratippocles, the ungrateful young lover who spurned the slave’s efforts and threatened him. Epidicus gleefully tells the boy he cannot have Telestis, as she is his sister (651-54). The young man’s arrogance, fickleness, and disregard for his slave’s well-being all suggest that Stratippocles needs an attitude adjustment, and Epidicus is only too happy to arrange it.

\(^{47}\) On the happy accident of Epidicus’ solution, see Anderson (1993: 101).
Epidicus’ efforts lead to the discovery of Telestis, even though his plotting is unsuccessful. Her discovery gives Epidicus the freedom he needs to show up the old man Periphanes and his friend Apoecides. Periphanes, a pompous and stingy old man, was not a good person in his youth. He raped a girl, Philippa, and fled, only occasionally sending his slave to bring her money and gifts. He may have “eased her poverty” (virgini pauperculae tuaeque matri me levare paupertatem, 555-56), but he also left her unmarried and pregnant. Philippa and Telestis remained vulnerable because Periphanes neglected them. Periphanes attempts to find Telestis, but has no idea what she looks like, since he has not bothered to see her since she was a baby (quid ego, qui illam ut primum vidi, numquam vidi postea? 660). Not only is Periphanes a neglectful father to his daughter (and deceitful to his current family, who knew nothing of the girl’s existence), he is also hypocritical: he wants his son to be upstanding and frugal, but he himself was not upstanding in his youth. His boastfulness offers Epidicus the opportunity to attempt to change his character. In this case, the clever slave seems to be successful in his softening of the old man. Periphanes, a pillar of the Senate (senati columnen, 189), is incredibly angry to be humiliated by his slave, but he is relieved and chastened when his daughter is discovered through Epidicus’ efforts. Epidicus drives this point home: while Periphanes only attempted to look, Epidicus actually succeeded (ego sum defessus reperire, vos defessi quaerere, 720), and he succeeded because he was observant and mindful—he recognizes Telestis because he has actually visited her (634-40). Periphanes is initially furious at having been bested by his slave, citing his position as the “proposer of such important decrees,” and asserting that he would rather “waste the same sum all

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48 Gellar-Goad (2011/2012) points out that Epidicus’ uniquely instrumental role in effecting the recognition of the long-lost daughter is marked by a crescendo of ritual associations during the course of the play, from sacrificial victim to sacrificer to demi-god.
over again” than to be “made a laughingstock and be cheated” by his slave (516-21). But his anger dissipates quickly when he recognizes the service Epidicus has done him, and he ends the play suitably chastened, and possibly a better person. Epidicus is offered freedom, shoes, tunic, cloak, and food for his efforts, and all his misbehavior is passed over (721-27).

The troupe closes the play saying, “this is the man who found his freedom through his slyness” (hic is homo est qui libertatem malitia invenit sua, 732). Their remark encapsulates the trajectory of the clever-slave play, and the way it will be enacted in the rest of Plautus’ clever-slave plays. A tricky slave, the title character, will plot with malitia (clever badness), and get away with it, even be rewarded for it. The plots get more complex, and the earnest love story that motivates the scheming becomes merely a pretext for giving the servus callidus authorship of crafty twists and turns. The Saturnalian atmosphere has changed as well. While Tranio escaped without punishment, his master regained authority and dignity at play’s end, while Tranio went off on probation, reduced to his subservient role. Epidicus, on the other hand, who arguably plotted worse things at Periphanes’ expense, earns freedom and the gratitude of his master, who does not reassert his power and authority at play’s close.

Pseudolus

With Pseudolus and Bacchides we see the clever-slave play in fine form. Pseudolus (see plot summary in Appendix B) is arguably Plautus’ finest play, and its large number of hatched, abandoned, and re-hatched schemes make it his longest (1335 lines).\(^{50}\) The love plot is a pretext

\(^{49}\) And Epidicus delights in making Periphanes beseech him, a slave, which the servus callidus considers a better reward than riches. See Segal (1968: 109-11).

\(^{50}\) Much Pseudolus scholarship focuses on separating Greek elements from Plautine original additions: Williams (1956b), J. Wright (1975), Lowe (1985a), and Hallett (1993).
for crafty slave machinations, the pimp is suitably wicked, the old man is properly fleeced, the young man gets the girl through Pseudolus’ efforts, the language is exciting (and the *flagitatio* fast-paced), Pseudolus uses military and political imagery to frame his swindles, and it features a dress-up scene so that Pseudolus can author a play-within-a-play. Pseudolus’ primary relationship with Calidorus is as his schemer—he is sneaky, he looks for tricks at every turn, and he wants to help his master because scheming is fun. When the play opens Pseudolus complains that he has been left out, when previously he had been involved in the scheming (*nam tu me antidhac / supremum habuisti comitem consiliis tuis*, 16-17), and offers to provide money, help, or advice (*aut re iuvabo aut opera aut consilio bono*, 19). When Calidorus finally comes out with the source of his sadness (his girlfriend being sold off by her pimp and needing money to buy her), Pseudolus promises to help through scheming or stealing (104-05).

Pseudolus quickly gets to work: after promising the money (114-120) he breaks the fourth wall (a common occurrence in this play) to instruct the audience not to trust him either (124-29). This crafty slave engages the viewers with his asides, taking them into his confidence, so they can admire his wit and dedication to tricks. Provocateurs must be likable or interesting enough to win the affection or attention of the audience despite their wickedness. The viewers know they will be seeing an amusing play with this slave organizing things, and they are quickly on his side.

Though Pseudolus seems genuinely upset that the pimp Ballio abuses his slaves, this brief glimpse of his moral character is quickly eclipsed by his taste for tricks—henceforth his “morality” acts in service only of his deception. Calidorus invites Pseudolus to help him in a *flagitatio* of the pimp, and they do verbal battle (360-68), but Ballio’s nonchalance means that Pseudolus’ verbal acrobatics have no effect. Pseudolus is momentarily stymied. A common feature of the
clever-sleave play is, as we have seen, the brief moment of self-doubt suffered by the crafty slave, which is immediately dismissed—Pseudolus pulls himself together and moves on with further plotting (394-414).

Ballio is presented as a thoroughly wicked (though amusing) villain, and the audience looks forward to his comic downfall. Ballio, from his opening lines, is cruel, petty, and supremely greedy. He beats his male slaves and threatens the sex workers with even worse punishment should they not bring him birthday gifts. Every member of the familia is required to bring Ballio something (775-78). The ugly puer (768) says that if he does not bring the pimp a present, he will have to suffer oral intercourse as a punishment (781-82)—he is willing to put up with the pain of anal intercourse if someone were willing to give him the money to avoid a beating (784-87). We look forward to seeing Ballio receive his comeuppance by the end of the play.

We expect Simo, the stern father, to be swindled, because his obstinacy prevents Calidorus from youthful fun. Simo blames Pseudolus for corrupting his son (as Theopropides did Tranio in Mostellaria), but Simo’s appearance of morality is undercut by his companion, who reminds him (and us) that when Simo was Calidorus’ age, he misbehaved in similar fashion (436-42). Simo gives Pseudolus leave to pull off his trick. The role reversal is typical of New Comedy: upstanding elder citizens will be duped by the social misfit, the non-citizen slave. The Saturnalian atmosphere of the play allows this reversal to happen without the dire consequences for the insubordinate slave that certainly would have resulted in the real world outside of the

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51 On the birthday present scene, see Arnott (1982).

play. But inside the safety of the play’s fiction, the old men defer indulgently to Pseudolus’ superiority in the plot and allow him to move against them.

We see plenty of the military and political language we have come to expect from the clever-slave plot, as outlined by Anderson: loot, troops, ambushes, comrades, enemies, putting persons to flight, etc. (579-93), aligning the clever slave’s *malitia* with traditional Roman *virtus*. Pseudolus’ verbal and mental competence grants him status superior to his legal masters, and he calls upon the vocabulary of Roman social superiority: he is a military commander, a patron, and a politician. When he rallies the ranks, Pseudolus will take over the drama by means of the play-within-a-play: he pretends to be Ballio’s slave Syrus to swindle the soldier’s emissary Harpax, and then he hires another slave to impersonate that emissary himself to swindle the pimp. After the appearance of the real Harpax, Pseudolus congratulates himself for the tricks, devices, and deceptions he will carry off with this fortuitous meeting (667-87).\(^53\) He will ultimately perform a triple deception: his master, the pimp, and the soldier’s emissary (688-91).

Pseudolus is Plautus’ most educated, well-read slave.\(^54\) Five times he responds in Greek (443, 483, 484, 488, 712), and in the final instance he employs a Greek pun on Calidorus’ friend Charinus’ name. He also speaks in the sententious manner of Greek tragedy, and at one point seems to allude to Ennius’ “*O Tite tute Tati tibi tanta, tyranne, tulisti!*” with his self-congratulation before Charinus and Calidorus: “*io te, te tyranne, te te ego, qui imperitas Pseudolo, / quaero quoi ter trina triplicia, tribus modis tria gaudia, / artibus tribus tris demeritas dem laetitias, de tribus / fraude partas per malitiam, per dolum et fallacias*” (703-06). Charinus remarks that Pseudolus out-tragedies tragedy (*paratragoedat*, 707). The clever slave is typically given clever

\(^{53}\) Pseudolus proves himself a master of quick thinking and improvisation: Barsby (1995).

\(^{54}\) On Pseudolus as a philosopher-slave, see Stehle (1984).
puns, the flagitatio, the verbivelitatio, and other instances of interesting or musical speech, but in Pseudolus (and, as we shall see, Bacchides), the clever slave outperforms all of his predecessors with his command of literary culture. Pseudolus’ ease with other genres validates his attempts to hijack the authorship of the play and the action that unfolds there.\textsuperscript{55}

Pseudolus’ play-within-a-play goes off without a hitch, and his allies carry off the girl.\textsuperscript{56} Ballio realizes he has been tricked, and Simo himself is forced to appreciate Pseudolus’ skill. Fortunately for him, the pimp has also made a bet with Simo: if Pseudolus succeeded in tricking the girl away, Ballio would give Simo 20 minae. Thus Simo has the funds necessary to pay Pseudolus for winning their own bet, so he is magnanimous: he will supply his slave with a reward instead of torture (1238-45). Pseudolus is thus amply rewarded for his tricks. He has a drinking party with Simia, Charinus, and Calidorus, and then he earns 20 minae from Simo. Magnanimous himself, he offers Simo half of the money if his master comes drinking with him (1327-31). Simo agrees, and the Saturnalian atmosphere of the play continues. We may conjecture that if the dramatic action were to continue, Pseudolus would still be a slave, and he would be doubly watched by his master since he had proven his deceitful nature, but at the close of the play the festival atmosphere is in full swing: Pseudolus remains on top.

Pseudolus resolves the plot of the play and offers the pompous characters opportunity to change their ways and become better holiday Romans. Ballio deserves his fall: he is cruel to his slaves, and he has made a business out of pleasure, a capital offense against the holiday atmos-

\textsuperscript{55} Plautus’ later clever slaves prove themselves superior in wit and word to all other characters in the plays in which they appear. This linguistic command endears them to the audience and justifies their claims to manipulate the plays.

\textsuperscript{56} On the strength of Pseudolus’ construction and Plautus’ master of the art of deception, see Sharrock (1996).
phere the play endorses. Pseudolus briefly wonders why the young men of Athens do not do something to put a stop to Ballio’s crimes against love and pleasure, but stops himself when he answers his own question: the young men are dependent on the pimp, and cannot risk angering him (202-07). It falls to the *servus callidus*, the only character not a slave to social custom or convention to foster any change. Ballio’s gloating makes his fall all the more satisfying:

> conceptis hercle verbis, satis certo scio,  
> ego periurare me mavellem miliens,  
> quam mi illum verba per deridiculum dare.  
> nunc deridebo hercle hominem, si convenero;  
> verum in pistriño credo, ut convenit, fore.  
> nunc ego Simonem mi obviam veniat velim,  
> ut mea laetitia laetus promiscam siet.

*(Pseud. 1056-62)*

I’d rather perjure myself with solemn words a thousand times over than let him make a laughingstock of me. Now I’ll make fun of him if I meet him; but I believe he’ll be in the mill, as was agreed. Now I’d like Simo to come my way so that he may be equally joyful on account of my joy.

The audience knows that Pseudolus has already made a laughingstock of Ballio—the pimp has only to realize it. Pseudolus gave him opportunity to be a better person and honest businessman. Ballio had promised Calidorus that he would not sell away Phoenicium to anyone but the *adulescens*, then perjured himself by selling her to a Macedonian soldier (351-54). Pseudolus offered to get Ballio the money for the girl within three days, but Ballio turned him down (315-19). Ballio is inflexible and unsympathetic, and therefore deserves his fate. He is so cocky that he even promises Simo 20 *minae* should Pseudolus best him. Now he must pay 15 *minae* back to the soldier for his deposit and pay 20 *minae* to Simo.

Simo too leaves himself open to comeuppance because of his arrogance. When Ballio is defeated, Simo rubs it in, reminding Ballio that he was warned, so that whatever happened was

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57 Segal (1968: 80).
his own fault (1226-27). These words become prophetic when Simo too is tricked. Earlier he had boasted, like Ballio, that Pseudolus would never trick him out of money (504-34). He enjoys teasing others (as we saw when he mocked Ballio), and he suggests making fun of Harpax (1167-68). Not only does he take pleasure in the misfortunes of others, but also he is hypocritical, trying to limit his son’s pleasures when he himself behaved the same way in his youth, as his friend Callipho reminds him (427-42). His moralizing is exactly the sermones morologi Pseudolus cites as a great annoyance to men who love life (1316). But because Simo was not the greatest impediment to Pseudolus’ tricks, he gets off easier than some of the old men swindled in New Comedy. He lost the 20 minae bet with Pseudolus, but won the bet with Ballio, so he breaks even. He even profits when Pseudolus offers him half in exchange for his forgiveness (1329-30). While Simo is annoyed that Pseudolus has prospered and he has been made fun of by his slave (1316), he will recover from the blow. He may possibly even be more lenient towards his son in the future.

Bacchides

The final clever-slave play I will consider is Bacchides 58 (see plot summary in Appendix B). Another play rich in song, this play was likely produced shortly after Pseudolus 59. A play about a young man looking for money to buy his girlfriend, Bacchides quickly leads us to look for a crafty slave to take charge of the plot. We are first introduced to Lydus, but it becomes apparent that he will not be the author of any deceptions. Lydus moralizes at length (109-69) and

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58 As with Pseudolus, significant work has been done on Plautus’ originality in Bacchides, in light of the discovery of a large fragment of Menander’s Dis Exapaton. See Damon (1992, 1995), Anderson (1993: 3-29), and W. Owens (1994). On the structure of Bacchides, see J. Clark (1976).

is finally told to shut up (168-69). When Chrysalus appears, we may safely assume this will be our clever slave (170-77). His conversation with Pistoclerus seals the impression: he tells the young man that he will take charge of things, and Pistoclerus says that he will obey (*faciam ut iubes*, 228). With this verbal cue, the clever slave plot begins in earnest.

Chrysalus plans to machinate some machinations (*machinabor machinam*, 232) to get things rolling. Compared to the plot of *Pseudolus* or *Miles Gloriosus*, this is a relatively simple swindle. Chrysalus already has the necessary funds, so he must distract the old man, Mnesilochus’ father, from taking possession of them. He does this easily, convincing the old man that they never brought back any money (which was the point of their journey, 239-348). When Nicobulus goes away annoyed, Chrysalus experiences his moment of self-doubt, but resolves casually to run away if necessary (349-37). Lydus, on the other hand, continues to be an *agelast*, going to Pistoclerus’ father to rat him out for cavorting with a prostitute. He is ashamed for the young man, his whole family, and their future standing, and he refuses to let his pupil be corrupted, despite Philoxenus’ lack of interest (368-84, 406-48). Lydus is clearly more interested in his conservative values than the details of the debauchery, and he misleads Mnesilochus (who is eavesdropping) into thinking that Pistoclerus has stolen his girl. Not only does Lydus ruin Pistoclerus’ fun, he also destroys Mnesilochus’ hopes (473-93).

Mnesilochus explodes Chrysalus’ machinations with a full confession to his father (500-25). Unlike Stratippocles in *Epidicus*, however, Mnesilochus is a good master, and argues that his father should not blame Chrysalus (521-25). The clever slave has been congratulating himself, but when he learns Mnesilochus has wasted his effort and received bad information to boot, he must concoct another plot (640-93). Chrysalus begins to envision his deceit as a new Trojan
War: he will lay siege to the city, send in his Trojan Horse, and take away the loot. He starts with less-specific military imagery (708-13), but he soon invokes high tragedy in his retelling of the war, the siege, and the tricks. Chrysalus’ erudite metaphor aptly symbolizes the role of the clever slave. He sets siege to an old city (the old men with the money) to win spoils (money for the young master) and accomplishes it through trickery (there a horse, here a letter and a plot). He makes Nicobulus believe that his son is about to be caught in flagrante with a married woman, and manages to pay off the soldier to clear the way for Mnesilochus’ love affair (850-912). He also plots a further swindle to carry out maximum loot with another letter requesting an additional 200 gold Philippics. He invokes high tragedy to congratulate himself in the longest extended metaphor in all Roman comedy, and the most consistent tragic imitation delivered by all the clever slaves (925-78). Chrysalus continues the Trojan War metaphor through the remainder of the play (987-88, 1053-58, 1067-75), and his clever speech proves his right to command the play and carry off his plot.

Philoxenus is the most lenient of the fathers we have seen so far. When Lydus moralizes about proper behavior, he says,

Heia, Lyde, leniter qui saeviunt sapiunt magis.
minus mirandumst, illaec aetas si qui illorum facit,
quam si non faciat. feci ego istaec itidem in adolescentia.

(Bacch. 408-410)

Easy, easy, Lydus! Those who restrain their anger are wiser. It’s less of a surprise if a man of that age does some of those things than if he doesn’t. I too did this in my youth.

And then,

Paulisper, Lyde, est libido homini suo animo obsequi
iam aderit tempus, cum sese etiam ipse oderit. morem geras;
dum caveatur, praeter aequom ne quid delinquat, sine.

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On Chrysalus as epic storyteller, see Jocelyn (1969).
For a short while, Lydus, a man desires to enjoy himself. Soon enough time will come when he’ll even hate himself. Humor him. So long as precautions are taken that he doesn’t go over the top, let it be.

He reiterates later that in his youth he too hired prostitutes and drank, and does not wish to take the attitude that fathers take with sons too often, but he wonders now if his son has not gone too far (1076-86). When he throws in his lot with Nicobulus, in attempting to chasten his son, he will be mocked and fleeced along with him: to change his mind so late in the play suggests hypocrisy, so he deserves the humiliation he will receive from the two prostitutes. Nicobulus has been greedy and unyielding throughout; obsessed with money, he sent his son Mnesilochus on the mission abroad to pick up the 200 gold Philippics that are his primary concern (229-38). Overconfident, Nicobulus fails to recognize the new plot before it is too late. He delivers a long speech about how he should have known better:

Quicumque ubi ubi sunt, qui fuerunt quique futuri sunt posthac stulti, stolidi, fatui, fungi, bardi, blenni, bucones, solus ego omnis longe antideo stultitia et moribus indoctis. perii, pudet: hocine me aetatis ludos bis factum esse indigne? magis quam id reputo, tam magis uror quae meus filius turbavit. perditus sum atque eradicatus sum, omnibus exemplis excrucior. omnia me mala consecutantur, omnibus exitiis interii. Chrysalus med hodie laceravit, Chrysalus me miserum spoliavit: is me scelus auro usque attondit dolis doctis indoctum, ut lubitumst. … hoc, hoc est quo <cor> peracescit; hoc est demum quod percrucior, me hoc aetatis ludificari,
[immo edepol sic ludos factum]
cano capite atque alba barba
miserum me auro esse emunctum.
peri, hoc servom meum non nauci facere esse ausum! atque ego, si alibi
plus perdiderim, minus aegre habeam minusque id mihi dam-no ducam.

(Bacch. 1087-1103)

All the weakheads, thickheads, fatheads, mushrooms, idiots, drongos, cretins, wherever they are, were, or will be hereafter, all these I alone surpass by far in idiocy and stupid habits. I’m lost and I’m ashamed: is it possible that I was made fun of twice in outrageous fashion, at my age? The more I think about it, the more I’m getting hot under the collar because of the trouble my son’s stirred up. I’ve been destroyed and annihilated, I’m being tormented in every conceivable way. Every kind of trouble’s following me, I’ve died every kind of death. Chrysalus has butchered me today, Chrysalus has robbed me, poor me. That rascal continuously fleeced me, the dim-wit, of my gold with bright tricks, as he liked.

... This, above all, is why I feel tormented, because I’m being fooled at my age, or rather, because I was fooled twice and cleaned out of my gold, wretched me, despite my grey head and my white beard. I’m done for! The idea that my slave dared to hold this cheaper than rubbish! If I’d lost more elsewhere, I’d be less upset and would consider it less of a loss.

As with Periphanes in Epidicus, it is not simply that Nicobulus was swindled, but that he was swindled by his own slave, and at an advanced age, that bothers him. He should, in fact, know better. Nicobulus has learned very little from his lesson, however, or has only learned a partial lesson. He learns to be more lenient with his son, but he decides to go after what he perceives as the source of his troubles, the Bacchides, taking Philoxenus along with him. His ultimate lesson is that pleasure is worth having, and money is not, though he does not realize that he is learning the lesson. The Bacchides are only too happy to tease the old men and take their money, making the old men fall for them as much as their sons have done (1120-1206). The
senes appear thoroughly ridiculous, lose their money, and become distracted enough to let their sons carry on their love affairs.

**Conclusion**

In sum, the features of a clever slave are witty speech and verbal battles, a lack of moralizing, a devotion to pleasure and self-expression (through their trickery and play), and a love of malitia. The clever slave is by far the most interesting character in these plays, outshining the earnest characters who engage his help, and his acumen for plotting schemes propels the play forward. He is amoral, or at least morally ambiguous, and from the fringe of society (where as a slave he resides) he may undertake schemes that upstanding citizens cannot. His verbal acuity wins the servus callidus a position superior to his useless masters. The aid he offers reverses the social order of the play, making him the patron, politician, and military commander, while his master becomes client, layperson, and lowly soldier. Finally, the slave may capitalize on his successes in the plot to gain freedom, marriage, or money, though reward is not his aim. In addition to resolving the plots to satisfy their young masters, servi callidi also serve as catalysts for change in the stodgy, business-minded characters who attempt to prevent the fun and games out of moral or monetary motivation. These characters frequently demonstrate their hypocritical natures, and invite their own comeuppance through inappropriate behavior. By the end of the play, they have either learned a lesson or lost their money (or both).

Plautus’ clever slaves evolved from episodic roles to become the main characters and authors of primary action. Plautus distills the role to its supreme iteration in Persa, which eliminates all elements extraneous to the clever slave plot. Wilde will incorporate the characteristics of the clever slave for his dandy characters, and his plays follow the same trajectory: the dandy
becomes more and more integrated into the action until he takes over the play entirely, as in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. We now turn to Wilde’s earlier Society Plays, in which he employs the dandy character much as Plautus did his *servus callidus*, from modest beginnings in *Lady Windermere’s Fan* to a more interventionist role in *An Ideal Husband*.

**Wilde’s Dandies**

*The pre-Wildean Dandy*

The dandy, prior to Wilde, was a fashionable urban man who enjoyed refined language, drinking, gambling, and smoking, and worshipped the Cult of the Self (after Baudelaire’s *Cult de soi-même*). The early model was Beau Brummell (1778-1840), an Oxonian and friend to the Prince Regent. Always perfectly dressed, coiffed, and laundered, he enjoyed a luxurious lifestyle, squandering his inheritance of £30,000. The French dandy picked up the sartorial trend, dressing in aristocratic style for status. Baudelaire wrote at length of the dandy, and asserted that he should have “no profession other than elegance.” British aesthetes of the mid-late 19th century adopted the style of the French dandy, but imbued him with a new aesthetic philosophy.

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61 The origin of the word is uncertain. It appears in the late 18th century and may originally come from the phrase “jack-a-dandy.”


64 Though the dandy developed in some ways out of the “rake” of the Restoration period, his sexual politics were different. While dandies were associated with a lifestyle of pleasure, they were not necessarily associated with debauchery and seduction (though Moers [1960: 304] suggests the dandy was a heterosexual philanderer). It is a common misconception (frequently deriving from Wilde’s personal life) that the dandy was an effeminate homosexual. L. Hamilton (2003: 230) uses evidence from Wilde, contemporary events, and New Woman literature to ar-
Wilde’s Aestheticism and the Dandy

Wilde, influenced by the aesthetic treatises of Walter Pater and Matthew Arnold, as well as Hegelian philosophy, developed a theory of aesthetics derived from these thinkers, and coupled it with his readings of Plato and Aristotle. While an in-depth examination of Wilde’s aesthetic theory is outside my purview here, I will discuss elements of Wilde’s philosophy as they relate to his re-envisioning of the dandy. “L’art pour l’art” became the catchphrase for fin de siècle aestheticism, and the influence of its proponents Théophile Gautier and Charles-Pierre Baudelaire shaped Wilde’s philosophy on Life and Art. For Wilde, as he proposed in “Critic as Artist,” Life was Art, and the true artist made his own life his finest work. To base one’s life on Nature rather than Art was to be old-fashioned, derivative, and simple. Fashioning Life on culture, on Art, refined the self and constantly reinvented it, he notes in “The Decay of Lying.”

Wilde’s philosophy was not limited to dress and style. Rather, it reflected a cultivation of the self, of personality, of development. Wilde’s philosophy of the Self and Individual, as outline that “outside the homosexual subculture of the fin de siècle, however, effeminacy is ambiguously represented as a problematic form of heterosexuality,” and that it is necessary to “unravel the automatic association of effeminacy and homosexuality” (232).

Sinfield (1994a) explains the expectations of the aristocracy and the pose of the dandy: “Dandy effeminacy signaled class, far more than sexuality. The new dominant middle class justified itself by claiming manly purity, purpose, and responsibility, and identified the leisure class, correspondingly, with effeminate idleness and immorality (p. 38)….The dandy is good at entertaining and being entertained by women. He enjoys activities that were encoded as ‘feminine’—trivia, chit-chat, flirting, gossip, scandal” (p. 42).


66 Wilde frequently capitalized concepts such as “Life,” “Art,” “Nature,” and “Truth” in his essays on aestheticism. On the definitions of and differentiations between the aestheticist, decadent, and symbolist movements, see Hanson (2013).
lined in “The Soul of Man Under Socialism,” advocated freedom from popular morality: the new maxim was not “Know Thyself” but “Be Thyself” (*Prose*, 135) for in being one developed the personality and learned about the complexities of the multiplicity of selves.\(^6^7\) Man was not static, nor of one identity, but of inconsistent, ever-shifting identities. Adherence to popular thought, or moralistic cant, limited man’s ability to develop freely and to exercise the intellect: the selfish man was not he who lived as he wished, without regard for the opinions of others, but rather the man who asked others to believe what he believed and live as he lived (“Soul of Man Under Socialism,” *Prose*, 156). In “Critic as Artist,” Danson notes,

> Wilde drew on the musings of the ancient Chinese philosopher Chuang-tzu, who preached “the great creed of Inaction, and … the uselessness of all useful things.” With the help of this otherwise improbable source, Wilde transforms the dandy’s insolent languor— itself a derivative pose, adopted from French writers who had previously adopted it from the English example—into sublime detachment. Wilde’s dandyism, in his life and work, had always been a rebuke to the Victorian ideal of manly productivity. Now, in “Critic as Artist,” “to do nothing at all” becomes the most difficult and intellectual thing in the world, and the non-productive dandy becomes the critic who is dedicated to self-culture and loves truth for its own sake.\(^6^8\)

Where *servi callidi* manipulated the plot and prompted character change or development through trickery of action, dandies manipulate the plot and question social codes of thought and behavior through trickery of speech. Like Plautus’ *servi callidi*, Wilde’s dandies appreciated the potential of a good lie. The tricks of the *servus callidus* revealed the hypocrisy of the dominant social class; lying (the telling of beautiful, untrue things), taken to its fullest extent in the speech

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\(^{67}\) Many have noted the correspondences in Wilde’s philosophy on the Self to Nietzsche, though Wilde has left no record that he engaged directly with the German philosopher. On their similarities, see Allen (2006).

\(^{68}\) Danson (1997: 89). See also Calloway (1997).
of the dandies, revealed the hypocrisy of Victorian upper-class social code; it was better to be entertaining than earnest, and he who could best master affect rather than truth had the most authority to expose that lie and unveil underlying truths. The dandy made an art of life, and the dedication to self-culture, to the contemplative life of not doing but being (“Critic as Artist”), transformed him into the perfect social commentator. The constant development and refinement of pose and affect by the dandies in *Lady Windermere’s Fan* made them better able than any other character to expose the ludicrousness of the social code by reducing it to absurdity.69

*Lady Windermere’s Fan*

There are several dandies in *Lady Windermere’s Fan*: Lord Darlington, Cecil Graham, and Mr. Dumby. Lord Augustus associates with them, but he is what is called a “masher” in Victorian slang.70 He flirts with Mrs. Erlynne too earnestly, and defends her character too fiercely, to be a dandy himself. Lord Augustus resembles the old man in love, the *senex amator*, in Plautus’ comedy, but without that character’s selfishness and cruelty. His earnestness recalls the *adulescens* of new comedy (Argyrippus, Calidorus, Philolaches and the rest), bumbling and ineffectual but blindly in love. Mrs. Erlynne speaks in the language of the dandy, but her role in the play casts her as an adventuress. Adventuresses and dandies keep company, sharing similar values and a fondness for expressing themselves through wit and paradox, but the other characters’ reactions to them vary—a dandy is always acceptable, but even the dandies may be turned off by an adventuress. To succeed fully, a dandy must be detached from the main action of the plot, so


Mrs. Erlynne succeeds only partially: she is an observer of the action around her, but as a protagonist must necessarily participate in it.

In Act I, Lord Darlington comes to call on Lady Windermere. She asserts that she is a Puritan, which gives him more pleasure in flirting with and shocking her. Darlington, like Plautus’ clever slaves, revels in his reputation for badness, because the pose allows him to say things forbidden to the “moral” majority. Lady Windermere claims to see through his artifice, asserting that he is really not bad (“You are better than most other men, and I sometimes think you pretend to be worse,” 47-48), but she misses the point. To be “bad” in Society allows one to discard Society’s “truths” (culturally reinforced values) and instead pursue Truth. Darlington retorts,

> Oh, nowadays so many conceited people go about Society pretending to be good, that I think it shows rather a sweet and modest disposition to pretend to be bad. Besides, there is this to be said. If you pretend to be good, the world takes you very seriously. If you pretend to be bad, it doesn’t. Such is the astounding stupidity of optimism.”

(Fan I.51-56)

Darlington is flippant, but also speaks the truth. In his society, so many people adopt the pose of goodness, so that they might uphold the great lie of Society’s morality—the pose is social participation and reinforcement. It is not a pose that allows for self-reflection, self-improvement, or free-thinking. By pretending to be “bad,” Darlington can critique the pose and opinions of the philistines around him. He sees potential in Lady Windermere, and attempts to encourage her to develop beyond her Puritan values, but at this point, she is inflexible.

When the Duchess of Berwick arrives, she teases Darlington, saying she will not introduce her daughter to such a wicked man (146-47). He teases back, laying claim to his “badness” with disappointment that some people try to say he is actually very good (148-51). When Lady

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71 Cecil picks up this thread in Act III when he cites the attraction of “bad” men to women:
Windermere claims that she would not allow anyone in her house about whom there is any scandal, Darlington retorts, “Oh, don’t say that, Lady Windermere. I should never be admitted!” (170-73). He is also pleased when the Duchess calls him “depraved” (186). When Lady Windermere asks him why he talks so trivially about life, he responds, “Because I think that life is far too important a thing ever to talk seriously about it” (190-91). The Wildean dandy enjoys life and experiences the joy in it, the beauty of it. Attempting to find serious meaning, to culturally enforce purpose and value in life on the individual, runs contrary to Wilde’s beliefs. Lady Windermere instead tries to reform Darlington, not realizing that she is the one who must develop.

Darlington makes a good beginning as a dandy, but his interest in Lady Windermere threatens his aloofness and his ability to see through social melodrama and hypocrisy, so he is reduced to the role of “honest lover” in Act II and III.72 He hinted to Lady Windermere about her husband’s infidelity in Act I, and tries earnestly and self-interestedly to win her away from Lord Windermere in Act II. When his role changes, Darlington can no longer inhabit the role of a dandy, so his language accordingly shifts away from paradox and wit.73 As a lover trying for selfish reasons to persuade his beloved to do something thoroughly damaging to her own life, Darlington can no longer speak Truth. Cecil Graham takes up the mantle of the provocateur in

Now my dear Tuppy, don’t be led astray into the paths of virtue. Reformed, you would be perfectly tedious. That is the worst of women. They always want one to be good. And if we are good, when they meet us, they don’t love us at all. They like to find us quite irretrievably bad, and to leave us quite unattractively good.

(Fan III.290-95)

72 As Small (1999: xxix) notes, “As soon as he [Darlington] actually break Society’s moral code (in declaring his adulterous love for Lady Windermere), he abandons the pose of the dandy, and to all intents and purposes, ceases to have any significant critical function.”

73 A phenomenon noted by Gregor (1966: 504).
Act III, along with his friend Mr. Dumby. Though his role is smaller than those of Wilde’s later dandies, Cecil contributes to plot development and encourages thought and development in other characters. Though he has little engagement with the action of the plot, he nevertheless espouses many of the values of the dandy and the clever slave, and his speech propels the narrative forward.

Cecil embodies the characteristics of the dandy and *servus callidus*. Like Pseudolus and Tranio, he is disgusted with the moralizing talk of his family (*familia* for the *servus callidus*) and shuns his relatives because they spend too much time moralizing (II.102-04). He teases his Society fellows, particularly Lord Augustus (Tuppy) for his earnest pursuit of love and marriage.

The focus in Act II moves from group to group in a scene perfectly suited to social critique: Lady Windermere’s “small and early” party, attended by the best of Society. Here Cecil and Dumby establish themselves as the new critical voices of the play. Dumby expresses Wilde’s interest in self-reflection and development: “I am [a mystery]—to myself. I am the only person in the world I should like to know thoroughly; but I don’t see any chance of it at present” (II.239-41).

For Wilde, the self was a great mystery, and knowing oneself thoroughly was impossible. One could continue to develop over one’s entire life, expressing many selves, rather than being limited to the hypocrisy of a single identity.\(^\text{74}\) Cecil and Dumby become the voices of dissent, reducing social customs and attitudes to absurdity in opposition to the hypocrites around them, who said one thing and did another without realizing the contradictions they presented.

In Act III, after the extended, melodramatic dialogue between Mrs. Erlynne and Lady Windermere (who has decided to run away with the now-earnest Darlington), the men return to

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\(^{74}\) This theme recurs in Wilde’s essays: “We are never more true to ourselves than when we are inconsistent” (“Critic as Artist,” *Prose*, 261), and “Know Thyself was written over the portal of the antique world. Over the portal of the new world Be Thyself shall be written…You have a wonderful personality, develop it. Be yourself” (“Soul of Man Under Socialism,” *Prose*, 135).
Darlington’s rooms to chat and drink. The women (Lady Windermere, who has come there to confess her plans, and Mrs. Erlynne, who wants to dissuade her) hide, and the audience is treated to a long back-and-forth between the dandies, Cecil Graham and Dumby, and the serious lovers, Darlington, Augustus, and Lord Windermere. Cecil teases the lovesick Augustus, as Pseudolus plays with Calidorus in *Pseudolus*. When asked what business of his it is, Cecil retorts, “None! That is why it interests me. My own business always bores me to death. I prefer other people’s” (III.205-07). Like Pseudolus, he wants to be in on the schemes (“Master, if while you’re silent I could get the information out of you as to what misery is vexing you so miserably, I’d have been happy to spare two people from trouble, me from asking you and you from answering me” *Pseud.* 4-6). Refusing to be put off, Cecil tries harder to get in the thick of Augustus’ heartache, offering more laughs for the audience at Tuppy’s expense. Just as the clever slave rejects earnest lovesickness, Cecil and Dumby dismiss Tuppy’s appeals to sincerity:

*Augustus:* Ah! You may laugh, my boy, but it is a great thing to come across a woman who thoroughly understands one.

*Dumby:* It is an awfully dangerous thing. They always end by marrying one.

( *Fan* III.225-29)

*Augustus:* You want to make her [Mrs. Erlynne] out a wicked woman. She is not!

*Cecil:* Oh! Wicked women bother one. Good women bore one. That is the only difference between them.

( *Fan* III.242-44)

Cecil also employs the clever slave’s signature reversal, defying audience expectations of a response with the opposite:

*Augustus:* My dear boy, if I wasn’t the most good-natured man in London—

*Cecil:* We’d treat you with more respect, wouldn’t we, Tuppy?

( *Fan* III.255-57)
Cecil continues the theme on which he entered the play in Act II, denigrating the pose of morality and noting the hypocrisy of Victorian society for dwelling so consistently upon it:

Oh! Gossip is charming! History is merely gossip. But scandal is gossip made tedious by morality. Now, I never moralize. A man who moralizes is usually a hypocrite, and a woman who moralizes is invariably plain.

(Fan III.270-73)

The dandy loves gossip, but cares little for the posture of morality that makes it titillating and turns it into scandal. Cecil and Dumby fail somewhat in their supposed insouciance as they mock Augustus for his love. They are amused not only by Tuppy’s having fallen in love, but also by but the object of his love, the notorious Mrs. Erlynne. Though they claim disengagement with the morality of the issue, their mockery is clearly colored by Mrs. Erlynne’s reputation; they tease Darlington less for his unidentified beloved. Nevertheless, they continue the contest between earnestness and triviality with Darlington, once they tire of pursuing Augustus:

_Lord Darlington:_ This woman has purity and innocence. She has everything we men have lost.  
_Cecil:_ My dear fellow, what on earth should we men do going about with purity and innocence? A carefully thought-out button-hole is much more effective.

(Fan III.317-21)

Dumby responds paradoxically to Darlington’s sad denial that his love is requited: “I congratulate you, my dear fellow. In this world there are only two tragedies. One is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it. The last is much the worst, the last is a real tragedy!” (324-27). To achieve all that one desires has a stifling effect. Having no goal, one is rendered complacent, so self-development stagnates. Hence the clever slave reminds his master that he will have more opportunities to punish him, as he will certainly commit more acts against him in

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75 “It is grossly selfish to require of one’s neighbor that he should think in the same way and hold the same opinions. Why should he? If he can think, he will probably think differently” (“Soul of Man Under Socialism,” Prose, 156).
the future (cf. Tranio in *Mostellaria*, “Why are you making such a fuss? As if I wouldn’t commit some other offense as early as tomorrow; then you’ll be able to punish me properly for both, this one and that one,” 1178-79).

Both Cecil and Dumby reject the tedium of a love affair. While clever slaves are at risk of torture and death in punishment for their subversive behavior, dandies are threatened by any challenge to their lifestyle. When Dumby asks “How long could you love a woman who didn’t love you, Cecil?” he responds, “A woman who didn’t love me? Oh, all my life!” Dumby answers, “So could I. But it’s so difficult to meet one” (III.328-31). Thwarted love inspires self-improvement and at the same time frees the individual from the tedium of conventionality. Dumby continues, “I have been wildly, madly adored. I am sorry I have. It has been an immense nuisance” (III.334-35). It certainly is for the dandy’s existence. Married, he becomes domesticated, and must descend into mediocrity or become the object of fun in turn. Love and married life put an end to their fun (as evidenced by Darlington’s change of character), fixing their character to a single way of being and limiting their ability to develop, the quintessential goal of the dandy.

Augustus opens himself up to mockery because he loves earnestly without self-awareness. Calidorus in *Pseudolus* has the complicity of his slave without significant mockery because he is aware that he is playing a role. Pseudolus deflates his melodrama (for example, when asked by Calidorus for a drachma to buy a rope and hang himself, Pseudolus undercuts him by asking how he can get a drachma back from a dead man, 85-93). When Pseudolus tells Calidorus to stop thinking with his feelings and start thinking with his head, he responds, “That’s nonsense: there’s no fun in it unless a lover behaves stupidly” (238). It is Pseudolus’ job to scheme, Calidorus’ to be a silly lover. Augustus’ fault is that he does not understand his role.
Throughout this act Cecil and Dumby serve a similar narrative function as Libanus and Leonida in *Asinaria*, mocking and teasing Argyrippus and Philaenium for their earnest protestations of love and abject sadness at being parted. His earnest love puts Augustus at a disadvantage to Cecil and Dumby, the former being single, and the latter (perhaps) involved in an affair with Lady Plymdale, but it is his lack of self-awareness that prompts their mockery. Early in their game, Augustus snaps at Cecil, “You’re getting annoying, dear boy; you’re getting demmed annoying,” and Cecil responds, “You’ve lost your figure and you’ve lost your character. Don’t lose your temper; you have only got one.” At this point Augustus resembles Argyrippus, who became annoyed with Libanus, telling him, “Not one more word, you rascal” (*verbum cave faxis, verbero*, 625). Leonida and Libanus then conspire to mock their master, “Do you want the master to be made fun of? —He really deserves it” (*vin erum deludi? dignust sane*, 646). As the clever slaves jump on Argyrippus physically, riding him like a donkey in a role reversal of master and slave, Cecil and Dumby tease their elder Augustus, having no respect for his grey hair.

When Cecil thinks he has discovered that Darlington is a hypocrite like the rest of their society (having invited a woman into his rooms while professing great love for a woman he can’t have), he abandons his mockery of Augustus, and gleefully reveals what he believes is Darlington’s hypocrisy, calling first Lord Augustus, then Lord Windermere: “Darlington has been moralizing and talking about the purity of his love, and that sort of thing, and he has got some woman in his rooms all the time” (III.369-73). The tone of “and that sort of thing” dismisses moralizing and the purity of love very effectively, and he obviously enjoys being able to tease the man.

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76 As Small (1999) notes on Act II, line 216.

77 When Lord Augustus protests against their treatment of him, Dumby responds, “The youth of the present day are quite monstrous. They have absolutely no respect for dyed hair” (that is, the grey hair of their elders, now dyed to make them appear more youthful, though they are fooling no one, III.257-58).
for abandoning the dandified triviality that Cecil still espouses. Darlington’s apparent hypocrisy opens him up to criticism just as Stratippocles’ fickleness in love earned Epidicus’ disapproval. Though willing to help his master (under threat of torture), Epidicus is delighted to remove Stratippocles’ object of desire from him, happily announcing that Telestis is Stratippocles’ sister, and that the young man must make do with the other girl (652-54).

When Windermere jumps to the conclusion that Darlington is carrying on an affair with his wife, the other men are surprised at the turn, and when the woman is revealed (apparently) to be Mrs. Erlynne, who comes out of the bedroom, Cecil and Dumby share a smile, while “Lord Windermere looks at her in contempt, Lord Darlington in mingled astonishment and anger,” and “Lord Augustus turns away.” Their shared amusement at the scandalous revelation in Darlington’s rooms is our last impression of them. The delight of Cecil and Dumby comes in part from their belief that they have prompted a revelation that humbles both Darlington and Augustus, who have been so earnest and pompous. Though they are mistaken, their commentary and revelation do prompt more circumspection in Augustus. He is less gullible in Act IV, when he runs into Mrs. Erlynne at the Windermeres’ house, as he tries to recover his wounded dignity.\footnote{Though he does allow himself to be convinced by her once more, he at least makes her work for it.}

The dandies in \textit{Windermere} do not fully resolve the plot, but they move events along through their clever talk. Darlington plants the seeds of doubt in Lady Windermere in Act I, prompting her subsequent self-development and soul-searching. Thanks to his intervention, she does become more flexible in her values. Cecil and Dumby may seem unconnected to the plot, but they question the pompous earnestness of Darlington and Augustus in Act III, and through their actions, they allow Lady Windermere to escape. Their clever talk benefits both their inter-
nal audience (Darlington, Windermere, and Augustus) and the viewers, who might question their own hypocrisy thanks to Cecil and Dumby’s absurdist depiction of their society.

*A Woman of No Importance*

*A Woman of No Importance* presents a number of society characters who, to various degrees, align themselves with the two provocateurs, Lord Illingworth and Mrs. Allonby (though they often do not understand the dandified speech and frequently do not realize that they themselves are of the object of much mockery). The earnest protagonists, Mrs. Arbuthnot, Gerald, and Hester, stand in contrast to the shifting moral values and hypocrisies of the dominant class of Hunstanton. In this play Wilde grapples with the problem of integrating the dandy further into the plot, but instead of casting him as the lover, Wilde makes him the villain: Lord Illingworth had seduced and abandoned Mrs. Arbuthnot as a young woman. Gregor (1966: 507) remarks, “It would seem that Wilde had not yet grasped the fatal significance of making his dandy into a character, equipped, in however simple a way, with complexity of motive and a capacity for involvement in emotional affairs.” Wilde’s dandy Illingworth does seem divided, uncomfortably attempting the insouciance of the dandy and the immoral behavior of a villain, here akin to the Restoration comedy “rake.” Tension is created between the dramatic authority of dandiacal

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79 It could be argued that Mrs. Allonby is an adventuress, but her exploits are rumored rather than reality. She is respectably married and accepted in “good” Society where she titillates with her dandified opinions, but does not transgress social bounds.

80 Wilde was very sensitive about the portrayal of Darlington in *Lady Windermere’s Fan*. The character was supposed to believe that he was genuinely in love and offering Lady Windermere an alternative to the wrong being done her. After seeing Maurice Barrymore play the role in New York, Wilde complained, “Darlington is not a villain, but a man who really believes that Windermere is treating his wife badly, and wishes to save her. His appeal is not to the weakness, but to the strength of her character (Act II): in Act III his words show he really loves her” (Ellmann [1988: 363-64] and M. Holland & Hart-Davis [2000: 549]).
speech and Illingworth’s unlikable role as a debauch. The dandy inherits some characteristics of the rake, such as fashion, style, wit, and class, but Wilde’s philosophies on aesthetics and self-help elevate the dandy beyond the Restoration rake and imbue him with more complexity as a character. Illingworth speaks like a dandy, but behaves like a rake.

Despite the troublesome characterization of Illingworth, Wilde incorporates his provocateurs here more deftly than in Lady Windermere’s Fan. The tension between the earnest Puritan protagonists and their middle-class values stands in direct opposition to the pettiness, amorality, and triviality of the upper class. Mrs. Allonby and Lord Illingworth serve to highlight these contradictions. Once fully enmeshed in the villain role with the revelation at the close of Act III, Illingworth fails to speak in paradoxes or epigrams, and the dandified speech comes solely from Mrs. Allonby; by giving in to the melodrama of the plot and the stark wickedness of his role, Illingworth surrenders his dandy status.

Wilde called the first act of Woman a perfect act because it contained “absolutely no action at all.” We see the scene set for a clever-slave play, a play in which the dandies might run the show. We learn that Gerald and Hester are fond of one another, and that the dandy Lord Illingworth has offered Gerald a job of fashion and status. We also learn, circuitously, that Hester is wealthy (214-18), and Gerald is significantly beneath her in status. So, like the clever slaves of New Comedy, Illingworth may be the salvation of Gerald’s love affair by giving him

81 On the rake and the dandy, see Cecil (1959: 242-44), Hume (1977), and Weber (1986).


83 Lady Caroline questions her hostess’ wisdom in “taking him out of his position,” as she is affronted at the idea of mixing with “anyone in society who worked for their living” as it was “not considered the thing” (I.39-43).
the means to win his girl. Mrs. Allonby and Illingworth are established straightaway as “wicked,” as suits servi callidi. But like servi callidi and their female counterparts, the malae meretric-es, Illingworth and Allonby are evaluated differently by the other characters. Illingworth is male, and therefore can get away with more questionable behavior, while Mrs. Allonby is subject to more scrutiny. She is considered “unsuitable” by Lady Caroline (I.26-27, though she defends Mrs. Allonby when Hester expresses dislike as well, I.29-31). Lady Stutfield notes with pleasure that Illingworth is “very, very wicked” (I.186, 189), and he is happy to take the compliment (I.190-92). The two mutually agree that they are pleasantly wicked:

    Mrs. Allonby: What a thoroughly bad man you must be!
    Lord Illingworth: What do you call a bad man?
    Mrs. Allonby: The sort of man who admires innocence.
    Lord Illingworth: And a bad woman?
    Mrs. Allonby: Oh! the sort of woman a man never gets tired of.
    Lord Illingworth: You are severe—on yourself.

(Woman I.433-38)

As we saw with Lord Darlington, a pose of wickedness gives the dandy freedom to speak Truth by standing outside social convention and its subjective “truth.”

When Mrs. Allonby dares Illingworth to kiss Hester, the Puritan (I.449-92), she instigates a Restoration comedy type plot. When Illingworth takes up the challenge, he begins to slip from the detached aesthetic pose of the dandy into the role of villain. In this play we see the servus callidus character both helping and hindering the young man in love: Lord Illingworth proposes to elevate Gerald socially and financially enough to marry Hester (just as the clever slave promises the adulescens the gold he needs to pay for his girl in Asinaria, Bacchides, Epidicus,

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84 R. Cave (1997) wonders if Mrs Allonby’s bold speech is an “artful pose” or “shameless” daring. In other words, does she put on a good show, or does she actually have a wicked past that she covers up with outspokenness (so that people would think that she must be innocent of real wickedness, because surely a wicked person would not be so open about it). His question highlights the complexity of Wilde’s characterizations that goes beyond the “types” he employs in his plays.
*Pseudolus*, and others), but he also undermines Gerald by trying to seduce his girl (a thing the clever slave never does, though the lecherous father might; cf. *Asinaria, Casina, Mercator*).

Act II has an extended sequence of clever talk among the fashionable ladies of the Hunstanton party, with Mrs. Allonby leading the pack with her contradictory talk on love, relationships, and marriage. After 212 lines of extended dandy-speak, Lady Hunstanton breaks in with “Oh, my dear! I had completely forgotten that the American young lady has been in the room all the time. I am afraid some of this clever talk may have shocked her a little” (II.213-17). In response to their amorality/immorality, Hester preaches with two biblically-tinged speeches on appropriate behavior, propriety, and punishment for sinners:

> We are trying to build up life, Lady Hunstanton, on a better, truer, purer basis than life rests on here. This sounds strange to you all, no doubt. How could it sound other than strange? You rich people in England, you don’t know how you are living. How could you know? You shut out from your society the gentle and the good. You laugh at the simple and the pure. Living, as you all do, on others and by them, you sneer at self-sacrifice, and if you throw bread to the poor, it is merely to keep them quiet for a season. With all your pomp and wealth and art you don’t know how to live—you don’t even know that. You love the beauty that you can see and touch and handle, the beauty that you can destroy, and do destroy, but of the unseen beauty of life, of the unseen beauty of a higher life, you know nothing. You have lost life’s secret. Oh, your English society seems to me shallow, selfish, foolish. It has blinded its eyes, and stopped its ears. It lies like a leper in purple. It sits like a dead thing smeared with gold. It is all wrong, all wrong.

>(*Woman* II.257-74)

It is right that they should be punished, but don’t let them be the only ones to suffer. If a man and woman have sinned, let them both go forth into the desert to love or loathe each other there. Let them both be branded. Set a mark, if you wish, on each, but don’t punish the one and let the other go free. Don’t have one law for men and another for women. You are unjust to women in England. And till you count what is a shame in a woman to be an infamy in a man, you will always be unjust, and Right, that pillar of fire, and Wrong, that pillar of cloud, will be made dim to your eyes, or be not seen at all, or if seen, not regarded.
Lady Caroline undercuts the power of her tirade with a dismissive request that Hester pass her a shawl: “Might I, dear Miss Worsley, as you are standing up, ask you for my cotton that is just behind you? Thank you” (301-02). The dandified Mrs. Allonby and the Society women have little patience for Hester’s gauche morality. Lady Caroline cuts Hester down much as Tranio deflates the insufferable Grumio in *Mostellaria*. Grumio moralizes at length, on points similar to Hester’s (the decadence and immorality of the wealthy):

\[\text{Tu urbanus vero scurra, deliciae popli,}
\text{rus mihi tu obiectas? sane hoc, credo, Tranio,}
\text{quod te in pistrinum scis actutum tradier.}
\text{cis hercle paucas tempestates, Tranio,}
\text{augebis ruri numerum, genus ferratile.}
\text{nunc, dum tibi lubet licetque, pota, perde rem,}
\text{corrumpre erilem adolescentem optumum;}
\text{dies noctesque bibite, pergraecamini,}
\text{amicas emite liberate, pascite}
\text{parasitos, obsonate pollucibiliter.}
\text{haecine mandavit tibi, quam peregre hinc it, senex?}
\text{hocine modo hic rem curatam offendet suam?}
\text{hocine boni esse officium servi existumas,}
\text{ut eri sui corrumpat et rem et filium?}
\text{nam ego illum corruptum duco, quom his factis studet;}
\text{quo nemo adaeque iuventute ex omni Attica}
\text{antehac est habitus parcus nec magis continens,}
\text{is nunc in aliam partem palmam possidet.}
\text{virtute id factum tua et magisterio tuo.}

(Most. 15-33)

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\[85\] Wilde may be making a comment on morality and moralizing here. Hester comes off as an inappropriate guest and a bit of a bumpkin for her Puritan values, but this scene can be interpreted two ways. Hester is undercut by the request for the shawl, and this may be funny because she is being rude preaching to the party, and the women have put her in her place. On the other hand, if one identifies solely with the society women here, s/he is complicit in the snobbish, hypocritical values they are revealed to hold. The women admit that Hester is right, and Henry Weston is a cad, but they also allow him to be so because he has a good cook. They value a good dinner party over morality, and care little for the women Weston ruins, so long as he shows the society matrons a good time. It is hard to overlook the hypocrisy here. See R. Cave (2006: 216-17).
You city loafer, you darling of the streets, you are throwing [the fact that I serve] the farm in my face? I do believe, Tranio, that you know you’ll be thrown into the mill soon. Before long, Tranio, you’ll increase the farm population, the folks that work in iron fetters. Now, while you wish and are able to do so, drink, squander our wealth, continue to corrupt the master’s fine young son. Do drink day and night, live in Greek style, buy girlfriends and free them; feed hangers-on; buy sumptuous amounts of food. Is this what the old man told you to do when he went abroad? Is this how he’ll find his business looked after? Is this what you consider the duty of a good servant, to ruin his master’s wealth and son? Yes, I do consider him ruined now that he goes in for this sort of thing. Before, no one among all the youth in Attica was deemed equally thrifty or more retrained; now he bears the palm for the very opposite. This happened thanks to you and your teaching.

non omnes possunt olere unguenta exotica,  
si tu oles, neque superiores accumbere  
neque tam facetis quam tu vivis victibus.  
tu tibi istos habeas turtures piscis avis,  
sine me aliato fungi fortunas meas.  
tu fortunatu’s, ego miser: patiunda sunt.  
meum bonum me, te tuom maneat malum.  

(Most. 41-50)

Not everybody can smell of exotic ointments even if you do, or have the more honorable places at table, or live on such dainty dishes as you do. Have those turtledoves, fish, and birds for yourself; but leave me to my lot fed on garlic dishes. You are lucky, I am wretched; I have to bear it. So long as my good fortune awaits me and your bad fortune awaits you.

When Tranio finally tires of listening to Grumio’s moralizing, he dismisses him and undercuts the power of Grumio’s tirade: “Don’t be a nuisance now, go to the farm, remove yourself. You certainly won’t waste my time any more” (molestus ne sis nunciam, i rus, te amove. / ne tu erres) hercle praeterhac mihi non facies moram, 74-75).

Hester, the staunch Puritan, knows no flexibility in character or values, despite being a hypocrite herself (disdainful of Society’s marriage-making and snobbery, but in England to find a husband), and her inability and lack of desire to understand life’s complexities leave her cha-
racter in need of development. Similarly, Grumio does not understand the holiday lifestyle of the young man and his slave, acceptable in the Saturnalian world of the play. Too obsessed with the values of his pompous, unyielding master, Grumio becomes a mouthpiece for his trite morality, without reflecting on the hypocrisy of those values in the mouth of an enslaved man. Hester will have to develop beyond her rigid values in order for her to accept and be accepted by Gerald’s family and move the plot towards resolution. The actions of Lord Illingworth and Mrs. Al-lonby will prompt this development and resolution.

Because the men are away for most of Act II, there is little dandified speech or banter between the two provocateurs, save a bit of flirtation (431-57). When they join the party, Gerald tells his mother how pleased he is that Lord Illingworth is opening up a good opportunity for him—through the help of his new mentor, Gerald has a chance of attaining his love Hester (458-62, 473-76). Like the impecunious young men of ancient comedy, Gerald is discontented that his lack of funds stands in the way of his desire for nice things and the girl he loves. Illingworth makes him an offer to help him get the things Gerald wants (590-92). At this point Woman vaguely resembles the clever-slave play in which a young man goes to the more worldly (and amoral) servus callidus for help finding money, luxury, and the girl he wants, because his parent stands in the way of his desires (i.e., Mrs. Arbuthnot does not want Gerald to advance and leave her, especially not with Illingworth). Once Illingworth has talked Mrs. Arbuthnot into a corner, he sets about informing Gerald of the wonderful things open to him if he goes along with Illingworth:

Lord Illingworth: Ah! she [Mrs. Arbuthnot] is not modern, and to be modern is the only thing worth being nowadays. You want to be modern, don’t you, Gerald? You want to know life as it really is.

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86 It is noted several times by Lady Caroline, Illingworth, and Gerald himself that the young man is in a dead-end, underpaid job in a provincial town (e.g., II.583-86).
Not to be put off with any old-fashioned theories about life. Well, what you have to do at present is simply to fit yourself for the best society. A man who can dominate a London dinner-table can dominate the world. The future belongs to the dandy. It is the exquisites who are going to rule.

Gerald: I should like to wear nice things awfully, but I have always been told that a man should not think too much about his clothes.

Lord Illingworth: People nowadays are so absolutely superficial that they don’t understand the philosophy of the superficial. By the way, Gerald, you should learn how to tie your tie better. Sentiment is all very well for the button-hole. But the essential thing for a necktie is style. A well-tied tie is the first serious step in life.

Gerald: [Laughing.] I might be able to learn how to tie a tie, Lord Illingworth, but I should never be able to talk as you do. I don’t know how to talk.

Lord Illingworth: Oh! talk to every woman as if you loved her, and to every man as if he bored you, and at the end of your first season you will have the reputation of possessing the most perfect social tact.

Gerald: But it is very difficult to get into society isn’t it?

Lord Illingworth: To get into the best society, nowadays, one has either to feed people, amuse people, or shock people—that is all!

Gerald: I suppose society is wonderfully delightful!

(Woman III.50-77)

Illingworth seduces Gerald with visions of wealth, luxury, and leisure. He even trains Gerald in the art of becoming a dandy, giving him advice about speech and clothing. Pseudolus similarly raised Callidorus’ hopes in Pseudolus, saying, “I won’t desert you, lover that you are, stop being afraid. I expect to find financial help for you somewhere today (verum ego te amantem, ne pave, non deseram. spero alicunde hodie me bona opera aut hac mea tibi inventurum esse auxilium argentarium, 103-05)….Is it enough if I bring it about that this woman is yours today, or if I give you twenty minas?” (satin est si hanc hodie mulierem efficio tibi ut sit aut si tibi do viginti minas? 112-13). The titular Epidicus promises the same, as does Chrysalus in Bacchides. Following their discussion, Gerald is convinced that Illingworth can move him ahead in the world, and that he can have the girl he wants, so he argues with his mother:
You don’t suppose that men like Lord Illingworth are to be found everyday, do you, mother? It is very strange that when I have had such a wonderful piece of good luck, the one person to put difficulties in my way should be my own mother. Besides, you know, mother, I love Hester Worsley. Who could help loving her? I love her more than I have ever told you, far more. And if I had a position, if I had prospects, I could—I could ask her to—Don’t you understand now, mother, what it means to me to be Lord Illingworth’s secretary? To start like that is to find a career ready for one—before one—waiting for one. If I were Lord Illingworth’s secretary I could ask Hester to be my wife. As a wretched bank clerk with a hundred a year it would be an impertinence.

(Woman III.376-89)

Gerald wants to be Lord Illingworth, so seduced is the boy by his clever talk and promises (III.400-403). Like the youths in Plautine comedy he wants to enjoy money, power, and the things they can bring him, but he is held back by his parent. We might imagine that Illingworth, like the servus callidus, will deliver on his promises. But Act III explodes the impression of the provocateurs as helper characters in this play. Illingworth proves himself a terrible mentor and servus callidus, however, as his own interests outweigh those of the young man he pledged to help, like the lecherous senex of ancient comedy. He indeed proves to be wicked, but not in the useful way of New Comedy’s clever slaves. Instead, he tries to seduce the girl Gerald himself wants (471-79), much more like Demaenetus in Asinaria than an Epidicus or Pseudolus.

Once Illingworth is shown to be a villain, he ceases to be a disaffected dandy. The individuality and aesthetic self-expression of the dandy are subsumed by “type” (the Restoration rake), and type is the antithesis of the dandy’s existence. Like the servi callidi of ancient comedy, the dandies of Wilde’s drama cease to play their roles if they are forced to operate in the mundanity of the earnest plot. Mrs. Allonby remains the sole provocateur. She recalls the dandy Illingworth several times, quoting him on influence: “Lord Illingworth says that all influence is bad, but that a good influence is the worst in the world” (IV.20-21). Though Illingworth has
dropped out of the dandy’s role, Mrs. Allonby voices the criticism of the dandy, that “moral-minded” persons should attempt to educate others or reform them in their own image (recall Lord Darlington in *Windermere*, I.200-201, “Ah! you are beginning to reform me. It is a dangerous thing to reform anyone, Lady Windermere”). Mrs. Arbuthnot, like Lady Windermere, is hypocritical in laying claim to the morals and values of society while having gone astray of them herself. It takes the intercession of Illingworth and Mrs. Allonby to shake up her world (thus resolving the play), but she cannot allow herself to grow as a character. Only Hester achieves any kind of development, and it is limited (see Chapter 4).

Mrs. Allonby makes some scandalous remarks about men, and then Lady Hunstanton silences her with an ironic comment on “wicked society”: “Mrs. Arbuthnot doesn’t know anything about the wicked society in which we all live. She won’t go into it. She is far too good” (IV.54-56). Mrs. Allonby teases her, then drops out of the conversation. The women soon leave, and the morality play takes over for the rest of the act. While the provocateurs have brought about a resolution to the play that has allowed Gerald and Hester to be together, they have failed to prompt much development in the Puritan and earnest characters.

In *Woman*, the provocateurs and their followers occupy considerable space, and their witty repartee is far more entertaining than the melodramatic conflict in which Hester, Gerald, Mrs. Arbuthnot are involved. The dandies are more directly involved in the plot than they were in *Windermere*, but remain at odds with it thanks to the old-fashioned turn of Illingworth’s character and his reduction into a “type.” Wilde develops the dandy’s role in the play further, as

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87 Lady Hunstanton sets a divide between the “wicked” world of society and the “good” world of the happy English home, not realizing, as the audience does, that Mrs. Arbuthnot has firsthand knowledge of the wickedness that exists in the world of society, and that it is not merely a teasing pose the society women put on. She knows far more about “wickedness” than Mrs. Allonby and Lady Hunstanton themselves do.
both the voice of Truth in a corrupt society and as resolver of plot in *An Ideal Husband* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

The dandy appears again in *The Importance of Being Earnest* in the character of Algernon, but in this play, the speech of the dandy shifts among the four principal characters. Because every character of the younger generation speaks the language, there is no single character who stands out as the provocateur. Their verbal acrobatics challenge the moral cant of the “problem play” and offer alternative ways of being for the audience. Gregor (1966: 514) notes:

> “In the earlier plays, where the dandy was a figure involved with others who were not dandies, his idiom belonged to him in a very personal way: we were driven to reflect on his criticism, his self-delight. But when all the characters can speak with the author’s voice they are completely insulated against each other; the criticism is then cut free to apply to a world beyond the characters, to the world of the audience.”

Every character, as R. Cave (1997) remarks, has a secret life, and “the play is undeniably the funniest Wilde created, but what in truth we are laughing at are the struggles of a particular social group to avoid being exposed for what they really are: they yearn of the grace and social ease of characters in high comedy, but the complexities of their makeup constantly pitch them into farce.” Algernon chides Jack for carrying on hypocritically by not revealing the Ernest/John dichotomy. Gwendolen refuses to be defined by her current state or her marriage prospect and intends to “develop in many directions.” Jack calls out Algernon for inventing a Bunbury instead of confronting his problems. And Cecily harbors a romantic nature that she exercises in trying to get Prism and Chasuble together, though their prim characters refuse to admit the mutual attraction. The dandy speech traded amongst the characters reveals social hypocrisy, calls out moral cant, questions conventions, and facilitates development of character. As Jacobs (1992: 23) suggests, “[t]he play’s artificiality and its exaggeration of style and structure, joined to its
psychological improbabilities, produce a ludic, fantasy world in which undefined personality may be mutable and, therefore, freely creative.”

In the end, a happy coincidence resolves the plot when the clash of personalities (Algernon, Jack, Gwendolen, Cecily, Lady Bracknell, Dr. Chasuble, and Miss Prism) produces a stalemate. The characters reduce popular pose to absurdity, and the entire play becomes an expression of style over substance. When Jack asks Algernon if his witticism is considered clever, he responds, “It is perfectly phrased! and quite as true as any observation in civilized life should be” (I.628-29). As Gwendolen remarks in Act III (28-29), “In matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity is the vital thing.” Like Plautus’ Persa, it is a play full of provocateurs. I examined Earnest at length in Chapter 3, so I will not treat it further here.

Case Study: An Ideal Husband and the Clever-Slave Play

An Ideal Husband (for plot summary, see Appendix B) follows the trajectory of Plautus’ clever-slave play. Lord Goring launches schemes and succeeds both in bringing part of the plot to resolution and in adjusting the moral values of previously unyielding characters. He also helps his friend out of a mixture of affection and interest in displaying his wit. Husband has in common with the clever-slave play the genuine desire to help a young-man-in-love-and-duress character, successful scheming, a love of perceived “badness,” commentary on the foolishness of the earnest protagonists, clever speech, and a reward for the help of the servus callidus.
Goring as Provocateur

Though *An Ideal Husband* is ostensibly Lord and Lady Chiltern’s play, Goring emerges almost immediately as the play’s character of interest, and the notes that accompany the text of the dialogue reveal the essence of dandified perfection that has much in common with the *servus callidus* character:

A well-bred, expressionless face. He is clever, but would not like to be thought so. A flawless dandy, he would be annoyed if he were considered romantic. He plays with life, and is on perfectly good terms with the world. He is fond of being misunderstood. It gives him a post of vantage.

(*Husband*, Act I, play notes between lines 198 and 199)

Goring is portrayed as clever and perceptive, but from a pose that causes people to dismiss or overlook him. Being underestimated and standing outside of the action, he is the perfect observer, able to see truths that other characters do not perceive. If the world thought him clever, he would be pressed to become involved in the tedious action and moral poses of Society. Wilde’s dandy instead seeks to be set apart, doing nothing, now an (in)action elevated to sublimity. In “Critic as Artist Part I (With Some Remarks on the Importance of Doing Nothing)” (*Prose*, 231), Wilde’s interlocutor asserted that one should not speak of action for “it is a blind thing dependent on external influences, and moved by an impulse of whose nature it is unconscious. It is a thing incomplete in its essence, because limited by accident, and ignorance of its direction, being always at variance with its aim. Its basis is the lack of imagination. It is the last resource to those who know not how to dream.” The dandy eschews unthinking action in favor of inward reflection and play. Wilde insisted “intellect at its best was play.” On the fringes of Society, his intellect misunderstood or discounted, the dandy is well-positioned to be a philosopher and schem-

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er. Not mired in details, he may observe, process, and understand the bigger picture in the drama around him. Unburdened by the demands of a political career or investment in trappings of the commercial world, he is not influenced by them, nor are his reasonings biased.  

Before Goring even appears we learn from his father that he leads an idle life (I.26), the idleness being requisite for both dandies and servi callidi. Idleness in profession allows for acuity of mind, physical and mental liberty, and the freedom to engage in play (triviality being the only thing one should be serious about). A profession leads to obsession with money and power (in the case of Robert Chiltern), which can lead to corruption, a loss of the self, and the impediment of Individualism. Chiltern is so caught up in his reputation and his political rise that he has sacrificed self-knowledge, self-development, and personal integrity. Such behavior is antithetical to the dandy, who wears his debt as a badge of honor, for he is unwilling to com-

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89 “Lord Goring stands at the apex of the hierarchy of wit. He represents the dandiacal point of view; he functions as Wildean commentator and observer, but in addition as philosopher and judge… Apart from his ability to manipulate events, his superiority is expressed by his decision to distance himself from the world of affairs,” Raby (1988: 98).

90 “Soul of Man Under Socialism” (Prose, 132): “The recognition of private property has really harmed Individualism, and obscured it, by confusing a man with what he possesses. It has led Individualism entirely astray. It has made gain not growth its aim. So that man thought that the important thing was to have, and did not know that the important thing is to be. The true perfection of man lies, not in what man has, but in what man is.”

91 Lord Darlington in Lady Windermere remarks, “Ah, nowadays we are all of us so hard up, that the only pleasant things to pay are compliments. They’re the only things we can pay (I.35-37). Lord Alfred in A Woman of No Importance enjoys gold-tipped cigarettes, and boasts, “They are awfully expensive. I can only afford them when I’m in debt.” Lady Stutfield responds, “It must be terribly, terribly distressing to be in debt.” He rejoins, “one must have some occupation nowadays. If I hadn’t my debts I shouldn’t have anything to think about. All the chaps I know are in debt” (I.355-60). Algernon in Earnest, we may assume, is in debt himself. When Lady Bracknell rings, he proclaims, “Ah, that must be Aunt Augusta. Only relatives, or creditors, ever ring in that Wagnerian manner” (I.280-82). In Act II.527-58, he remarks, “Half of the chaps who get into the Bankruptcy Court are called Algernon” (a comment on the aristocratic nature of the name, and the reputation for young aristocrats to be hard up for cash). Lady Bracknell confirms
promise his artistic integrity to pursue something so base as money.\textsuperscript{92} The dandy instead occupies himself with pose: dress, dining, and riding (I.28-32). Goring, as the “idlest man in London” (I.200), is in position to be a great observer and social commentator.

When his father objects to his dissipation and inability to speak of anything of substance (I.257-60), Goring responds, “I love talking about nothing, father. It is the only thing I know anything about” (I.265-67). This statement is characteristic of the dandy, but is also misleading. Goring may talk about nothing and live entirely for pleasure (I.267-69), and he may be dismissed as a lost cause by the play’s earnest characters, but he will prove the only character capable of rational thought and responsible planning. Lord Caversham’s constant reprisals and urging that Goring should get into politics (IV.62-65) and be more like Robert Chiltern (III.89-100) are ironic. By remaining outside of the “upstanding” world of Caversham and Chiltern, Goring actually retains his integrity and innocence.

Like Plautus’ servi callidi, Goring delights in his “wickedness,” or at least being perceived as wicked by other characters, who (like Mabel) also enjoy his reputation, inasmuch as they enjoy the titillation it brings (I.223-31). The ladies at Hunstanton similarly had admired rakish Lord Illingsworth and the dissolute Lord Henry Weston, and the Duchess of Berwick enjoyed teasing Darlington about his naughty reputation. Like the servus callidus, Goring is “bad” in the sense that he deviates from the expectations of his rank and status. It will be revealed that the moral and upstanding characters have, in fact, genuinely behaved badly. Thus Goring must re-

\textsuperscript{92} Though the dandy certainly enjoyed the things money could buy, as did Wilde himself, but he recognized the danger of living for acquisition.
solve the action of the plot and use his superior intellectual position to foster the development of
the hypocritical Chil terns.

Goring spends much of Act I engaged in clever speech with Lady Basildon, Mrs. March-
mont, and Mabel Chiltern, proving himself a superior conversationalist in full command of the
dandy’s wit (I.271-340), much as the servus callidus engages in verbivelitatio to ensure his supe-
rior linguistic position, winning authority through words rather than social status. But a servus
callidus needs a mission, and Goring soon finds his in the tedious, melodramatic morality of the
Chil terns. Both are helpless against adversity, so only the counsel of a capable outside party can
resolve their conflict. Goring must put his intellect to work, as the Chil terns are too caught up in
their ideologies to compromise or help themselves (I.679-803).

Goring as Helper

Once Wilde has established Goring’s status as an idle rogue, as well as Chil tern’s seem-
ingly insuperable problem (the blackmail), the play can move on to the second stage of the clev-
er-slave plot, the engagement of the servus callidus as a helper character to the young man with a
dilemma. When we next meet Goring, he is at Chil tern’s house, where the latter is explaining
Mrs. Cheveley’s blackmail scheme. He must also reveal the extent of the moral lapse that got
him into this mess in the first place. Here we learn the full extent of Lord Chil tern’s hypocrisy,
and we see how superior in character Goring actually is. In the majority of clever-slave plays,
the young man in distress is inferior in character to the clever slave whose help he needs. The
young man owes pietas (respect) to his father, but is profligate instead, drinking and chasing
girls (e.g., Mnesilochus, Callidorus, Stratippocles, Pistoclerus, and Philolaches). The clever
slave is the far more interesting character, employing playful *malitia* in the service of the *adulescens’* actual misdeeds.

Goring, once engaged in the problem, is sympathetic, surprised, and logical. The role of an advisor suits Goring, and suits the role of the dandy well. Goring’s genuine affection for Chil- tern recalls Palaestrio of *Miles Gloriosus* and Trachalio of *Rudens*, both of whom had a genuine affection for and loyalty to their masters rather than a desire to swindle for deception’s own sake. Goring’s initial solution is by far the simplest, or would be, if Lady Chiltern were not an inflexi- ble Puritan. She, like Lady Windermere and Hester Worsley before her, is unyielding, inflexible, and religiously fervent. Such inflexibility is unacceptable in Wildean philosophy: consistency of character means the denial of all other aspects of one’s character (“We are never more true to ourselves than when we are inconsistent,” “Critic as Artist”). Goring first suggests that he try to change Lady Chiltern’s opinions, since her obsessive morality and her idealized view of her hus- band stands in the way of Chiltern’s acquiescing to Mrs. Cheveley’s scheme (II.19-25). At this juncture, however, Lady Chiltern cannot be moved. Her melodramatic rejection of her husband at the end of Act II is proof of her unyielding character. Like Lady Windermere and Hester, she is not yet able to see beyond her unthinking morality, but Goring, as the dandy/*servus callidus* who encourages development and thought in others, will have another chance to work on her.

But Goring, despite his affection for Chiltern, should not be confused with an earnest pro- tagonist. He retains his dandy-speak even in serious conversation with Chiltern, because under- cutting his own capability allows him to retain his liminal vantage point: “I prefer a gentlemanly fool any day. There is more to be said for stupidity than people imagine. Personally I have a great admiration for stupidity. It is a sort of fellow-feeling, I suppose” (II.87-90). He also depre- cates himself: “Never mind what I say, Robert. I am always saying what I shouldn’t say. In
fact, I usually say what I really think. A great mistake nowadays. It makes one so liable to be misunderstood” (170-73). Their society is such that honest speech is susceptible to suspicion, and no one says what he truly thinks. The dandy’s appeal to paradox to comment on his class becomes the voice of honesty and authority, confusing though it is; everyone else hides their sins behind the mask of civility. Robert remarks that he has been caught doing something that all other men do, “men who, each one of them, have worse secrets in their own lives” (II.37-39). Though his appeal to the principle of “everyone else is doing it, so why can’t we” is weak, he justifies Goring’s decision to eschew public life and the public pose of morality: Goring alone is not hypocritical. Goring avoids making a moral call on Robert’s actions, since the dandy stands outside the trite moral world of the protagonists, but tries to lead him to understand his own hypocrisy, and the petty, hypocritical nature of the English public. He explains:

Well, the English can’t stand a man who is always saying he is in the right, but they are very fond of a man who admits he has been in the wrong. It is one of the best things in them. However, in your case, Robert, a confession would not do. The money, if you will allow me to say so, is…awkward. Besides, if you did make a clean breast of the whole affair, you would never be able to talk morality again. And in England a man who can’t talk morality twice a week to a large, popular, immoral audience is quite over as a serious politician.

(Husband II.175-85)

One of the favored activities of the agelast is the attempt to dictate the lives of others. I have already noted Wilde’s re-definition of selfishness in “Soul of Man Under Socialism.” The active, professional majority against which the dandy stands is forever attempting to reform, change, fix, or lecture the “bad” among its ranks. Tranio in Mostellaria voiced the dandy’s opposition to such dictation when he told the moralizing Grumio (34-37):

Quid tibi, malum, me aut quid ego agam curatiost? an ruri quaeso non sunt, quos cures, bovis? lubet potare, amare, scorta ducere.
Chiltern has been hypocritical in his political career, based as it was on false gain. He has stood by joking about Goring’s lack of profession or ambition alongside Goring’s father, but he has done so hypocritically. Goring may be idle and trivial, but he is sincere about it, and he does not pretend to be what he is not.

Goring also highlights the hypocrisy of the ambitious class at odds with the dandy’s ideology: “I had no idea that you, of all men in the world, could have been so weak, Robert, as to yield to such a temptation as Baron Arnheim held out to you” (II.128-30). Such a statement seems like a far cry from “I can resist everything except temptation” (Darlington, *Fan* I.139-40), but the dandy’s creed is aestheticism and pleasure, not base action for financial compensation (here, the £110,000 from Baron Arnheim, II.143); Robert’s yielding is the exact opposite of the dandy’s “weakness” in the face of temptation. Like the Plautine clever slave, Goring remains aloof from the pursuits of those he helps, and is thus uncorrupted by them. He demonstrates in this conversation the dandy’s perception of the faults in the earnest, “moral” class that its members fail to see. Robert refuses to see the wrong that he has done. He says it was something that he would “suppose most men would call shameful and dishonorable” (II.33-34), but defends his actions, saying that these men have all done wrong too (II.37-39). Goring tries again to make

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93 Wilde remarked in “Critic as Artist” (*Prose*, 257), “Each of the professions means a prejudice. The necessity for a career forces every one to take sides.” The dandy, by remaining unemployed, is aloof. In Plautus too, while the clever slave might drink and carouse with his young master, he is not embroiled in money-lending, chasing expensive women (save Toxilus in *Persa*, a unique character in an odd play), or the hypocritical moralizing of the master-class.

(mei tergi facio haec, non tui fiducia. 

*(Most. 34-37)*

Damn it, what do you care about me or what I do? Aren’t there any cattle for you to care about on the farm, please? I wish to drink, to love, to keep company with prostitutes. I do so relying on my own back, not on yours.
Chiltern see that what he did was wrong by the standards of morality that he and his colleagues profess to uphold, finally equating Robert’s crime with prostitution of his morality (II.77-79).

Still Robert defends himself and the man who convinced him to sell the secrets:

Lord Goring: But tell me, Robert, did you never suffer any regret for what you had done?
Robert Chiltern: No. I felt that I had fought the century with its own weapons and won.
Lord Goring: You thought you had won?
Robert Chiltern: I thought so. Arthur, do you despise me for what I have told you?
Lord Goring: I am very sorry for you, Robert, very sorry indeed.
Robert Chiltern: I don’t say that I suffered any remorse. I didn’t. Not remorse in the ordinary, rather silly sense of the word.

(Husband II.154-63)

In the end, despite his moral pose, Chiltern does not regret his actions: he regrets only that he got caught and will suffer. While Goring does not presume to judge his friend overtly, he does highlight for Robert (and the audience) the hypocrisy of Chiltern’s reputation, and the ludicrousness of Lady Chiltern’s stark sense of right and wrong, much as clever slaves highlight the ridiculousness of their masters who call clever slaves “wicked” while they themselves go on having affairs, wasting money, or punishing their sons for sins they had committed as well. Robert will prove himself a hypocrite again at the close of the play, when he presumes to make moral judgments about Goring and nearly refuses to allow the man to marry his sister.

Like Epidicus, Pseudolus, Palaestrio, and the rest, Goring is a confidante: everyone goes to him with their problems and suggested solutions (both Chilterns, Mrs. Cheveley). Though he cannot make Chiltern see his own hypocrisy at this juncture, he nevertheless offers his services to solve his friend’s problem. Despite not knowing how exactly to help, Goring says: “As regards this dreadful business, I will help you in whatever way I can. Of course you know that” (II.173-74). Epidicus similarly devoted himself to his master’s problem, saying “Something will
be found, I’ll rescue you with some resource, I’ll get you out of it in some way” (*aliaquae res reperibitur, aliqua ope exsolvam, extricabor aliqua*, 152-53). Pseudolus too proclaimed, “I won’t desert you… I expect to find financial help for you from somewhere today…and I don’t know where I should say it’ll come from, except that it will come” (*non deseram. spero alicun-de hodie tibi inventurum esse auxilium argentarium. atque id futurum undeunde dicam nescio, nisi quia futurum est*, 103-07). Robert waffles, like the distraught young men of New Comedy, but finally rallies: “The only thing for me to do now is to fight the thing out” (II.189-90), to which Goring responds, “I was waiting for you to say that, Robert. It is the only thing to do now” (II.191-92). Goring is established as the counselor, and must begin the next stage of the clever-slave role, the schemer.

**Goring as Schemer**

After having been invited to help, Goring can begin to scheme. In Act I, Mrs. Cheveley had revealed that she was going to blackmail Chiltern for support of a canal scheme in exchange for the damming letter in which Chiltern sold state secrets, now in her possession (I.459-521). We have also already learned that Goring and Cheveley have a past together (I.201-03), and in Act II we learn that they were once engaged (II.198-205). This may provide Goring with material for his scheming. Like Libanus in *Asinaria*, Goring doesn’t quite know how he will accomplish a happy resolution for Chiltern, but he is prepared to figure it out:

*Lord Goring:* Robert, you must fight her. You must fight her.
*RRobert Chiltern:* But how?
*Lord Goring:* I can’t tell you how, at present. I have not the smallest idea. But everyone has some weak point. There is some flaw in each one of us.

(*Husband* II.216-20)
Like the distraught *adulescentes*, Robert rejoices at his counselor’s aid, places his hope in the
man’s cunning, and thanks him as if the deed were as good as done. Goring replies:

> I don’t know that I have been able to do much for you, Robert, as yet. In fact, I have not been able to do anything for you, as far as I can see. I am thoroughly disappointed with myself.

*(Husband II.298-301)*

But Goring has already begun to work on husband and wife, attempting to make Robert see the
fault in his action, and Lady Chiltern see the hardness of her values. He tries to make her under-
stand that anyone is susceptible to wrongdoing, given the right circumstances: “Nobody is inca-
pable of doing a foolish thing. Nobody is incapable of doing a wrong thing” (II.373-74). When
Lady Chiltern chides him for his seemingly un-dandylike speech (“What will the other dandies say?”), we see Goring the philosopher-dandy coming to the fore:

*Lord Goring*: All I do know is that life cannot be understood without much charity, cannot be lived without much charity. It is love, and not German philosophy, that is the true explanation of this world, whatever may be the explanation of the next.

*Lady Chiltern*: Lord Goring, you are talking quite seriously. I don’t think I have ever heard you talk seriously before.

*Lord Goring*: You must excuse me, Lady Chiltern. It won’t occur again.

*(Husband II.378-90)*

Goring stands apart from the typical British dandy, as Wilde imbues his dramatic dandies with aesthetic philosophy that goes beyond an interest in dress, food, drink, and insouciance.

From his vantage point as an intellectual and as one who sees more than the obvious, he can phi-
losophize, empathize, and offer gentle criticism to encourage development in the Puritan charac-
ters. Plautus imbued his clever slaves with similar intellectual capacity and philosophic bent to
give them authority that exceeded their legal status. Not mere schemers and rogues, Plautus’
clever slaves have a superior understanding of the world around them. Equating Wilde’s philos-
opher-dandy with the *servus callidus* encourages us to return to Plautine comedy and consider
the intellectual prowess of the clever slave (as I have tried to do in the passages preceding).

Pseudolus, Plautus’ most erudite servus callidus, is a philosopher like Goring. He muses:

\[
\text{centum doctum hominum consilia sola haec devincit dea,} \\
\text{Fortuna. atque hoc verum est: proinde ut quisque Fortuna utitur,} \\
\text{ita praecellet atque exinde sapere eum omnes dicimus.} \\
\text{bene ubi quoi scimus consilium accidisse, hominem catum} \\
\text{eum esse declaramus, stultum autem illum quoi vortit male.} \\
\text{stulti hau scimus, frusta ut simus, quom quid cupienter dari} \\
\text{petimus nobis, quasi quid in rem sit possimus noscere.} \\
\text{certa mittimus, dum incerta petimus; atque hoc evenit} \\
\text{in labore atque in dolore, ut mors obrepat interim.} \\
\text{sed iam satis est philosophatum. nimi diu et longum loquor.} \\
(Pseud. 678-87)
\]

This goddess alone, Fortune, conquers the plans of a hundred clever men. Yes indeed, that’s true: in proportion as each one has Fortune, he excels and we all say that he’s wise. When we know that someone’s plan was successful, we declare him a smart man, but stupid the one whose plan was unsuccessful. In our stupidity we don’t know how we deceive ourselves when we keenly demand to get something, as if we could know what was going to be to our advantage. We let go of certainties while chasing after uncertainties; and in the midst of toil and pain it so happens that death creeps up on us in the meantime. But that’s enough philosophizing now. I’ve been talking at great length.

Like Goring, he pulls himself back after his philosophizing to reassume the mask of the rogue. Bacchides’ Chrysalus too opined on the world and the duty of man, praising intelligence:

\[
\text{nequius nil est quam egens consili servos, nisi} \\
\text{habet multipotens pectus:} \\
\text{ubicumque usus siet, pectore expromat suo.} \\
\text{nullus frugi esse potest homo,} \\
\text{nisi qui et bene et male facere tenet.} \\
\text{improbis cum improbus sit, harpaget furibus,} \\
\text{furetur quod queat,} \\
\text{vorsipellem frugi convenit esse hominem,} \\
\text{pectus quoi sapit: bonus sit bonis, malus sit malis;} \\
\text{uctumque res sit, ita animum habeat.} \\
(Bacch. 651-61)
\]

Nothing is more worthless than a slave who lacks intelligence, if he doesn’t have a versatile mind; whenever necessary, he should
draw a plan from his own mind. Nobody can be any good unless he knows how to do both good and bad. Let him be a rascal with rascals, let him grab and steal with thieves as much as he can; a man who has cleverness in his heart should be able to change his spots. Let him be good to the good, let him be bad to the bad. Whatever the situation is like, he should adapt to it.

Rogues must be smart, perceptive, and adaptable. The servus callidus is quick on his feet and always ready with a new plan.

By Act III, however, Goring is still working out his plan. As with many of the clever slaves in ancient comedy, the resolution to his problem will come to him by happy accident, so long as he can recognize its potential and talk his way successfully through it. Lady Chiltern has written to take him up on his offer of help. He determines to force her to understand Chiltern’s position (III.52-56), but before he can set his plot in motion, his father shows up, like so many interfering fathers in ancient comedy (e.g., Periphanes in Epidicus, Simo in Pseudolus) who interrupt the servus callidus’ planning. Lord Caversham begins again with his criticisms of Goring, getting in the way of his plotting and highlighting his comic “badness” (III.59-138). Like Pseudolus, Goring attempts to get out of the situation with clever speech. Accused of not taking anything seriously, he responds, “The fact is, father, this is not my day for talking seriously. I am very sorry, but it is not my day” (III.77-78). Before he can shake off his father, Mrs. Cheveley arrives to complicate matters. Goring abandons his plan to work on Lady Chiltern and turns to manipulating Mrs. Cheveley instead (III.323-71). The servus callidus is quick on his feet and recognizes an opportunity when he sees one. Pseudolus, Chrysalus, Tranio, Libanus and the rest often start and then abandon plots when other opportunities literally walk in, as Mrs. Cheveley has done. Goring quickly recalibrates and works on Cheveley, as Pseudolus used Harpax, and Libanus and Leonida tricked the merchant in Asinaria.
Cheveley has come to tell Goring she has become tired of living abroad and wants to return to England. She will give Goring the incriminating letter if he agrees to marry her (III.439-48). His sense of fairness and his dislike of Cheveley (she had earlier been unfaithful when they were first engaged, III.414-16) are in revolt, and he attempts to come up with an alternative plot. For Goring, Cheveley’s resolution is about as welcome as a trip to the mill for the clever slave (the punishment for failure). The easy way out is never the best approach, and the servus callidus will explore all options before falling into despair. Usually a scheme will present itself through the unknowing suggestion of another player, or by the advantageous arrival of a new character. The clever slave must simply be sharp enough to see the potential.

In Husband, it is Cheveley herself who gives Goring the scheme he needs. She unwittingly discloses her reason for being at the Chil terns’ house earlier in the day: she was looking for her brooch, which she describes to Goring (III.526-35). By happy coincidence, Goring had already found the brooch and knows its history. He slaps it on her wrist like a bracelet, trapping her (III.545-47). Unable to remove it, Cheveley cannot distance herself from the crime: she stole it ten years earlier from Goring’s cousin Lady Berkshire, to whom he had given it (III.552-60). In exchange for the letter, Goring will release Cheveley. She agrees, and Goring burns the letter, saving Chil tern’s career (III.575-92). Plautus’ rogues frequently use the device of a pur loined letter, piece of jewelry, or costume to carry off their tricks: Pseudolus acquired Polymachaeo-plagides’ seal from Harpax, Curculio snatched Therapontigonus’ ring, and Leonida dressed up as Saurea. With the diamond and ruby brooch, Goring tidily tricks Cheveley.94

Mrs. Cheveley has been thwarted once, but she throws Goring another complication. She steals Lady Chil tern’s letter to Goring, which she will use to make Chil tern believe his wife is

94 On the symbolic and biblical associations of the diamond snake with a large ruby, and its power to trap the feminine Cheveley, see Bristow (1994: 63-66) and Dellamora (1994: 128-31).
having an affair, forcing Goring once more into the business of others (III.600-615). Cheveley takes the letter and sends it to Lord Chiltern. Lady Chiltern’s letter does seem incriminating: “I want you. I trust you. I am coming to you. Gertrude” (III.45). In Act IV Goring goes to Lady Chiltern to reveal that one letter has been destroyed, but that she is now in danger for another letter (IV.201-17). He proposes that Lady Chiltern simply reveal all to Robert (IV.237-38). When she refuses, he hatches a new plan for her to steal Robert’s mail, but this does not come to pass either (like many of the servus callidus’ botched plots), as Robert has already fetched the mail (IV.253-66). By another happy accident, Cheveley has forgotten to provide context: Robert believes Lady Chiltern’s unaddressed letter is for him (IV.274-89).

As schemers go, Goring is perceptive, intelligent, and witty, and mostly effective. Like Tranio, Epidicus, and Pseudolus, he fails to save his friend solely through his own plotting, but the servus callidus is always open to regrouping and taking advantage of coincidence. Goring has destroyed the blackmail letter by means of happy accident, but Robert determined to refuse Mrs. Cheveley anyway and indeed acted before learning of Goring’s success. With Robert acting independently to do the right thing, Goring saves his friend only from the consequences (IV.46-55). Nevertheless Goring is instrumental in resolving the plot, as his intervention saves Robert from scandal. And like the servus callidus, the dandy does even more. To fully effect an ending, he will have to work on the development of his misguided and inflexible friends.

Goring and Character Development

Though Goring has not been able to make Lord Chiltern see his error in having taken the bribe in the first place, he does persuade Lady Chiltern to forgive her husband and not force him out of a political career. She has been unyielding. She idealizes her husband in Act I; in Act II
she still refuses to believe that he could be imperfect, even if other men have erred. By the end of Act II, she had learned of her husband’s sordid past and declared that she could never compromise herself to understand what he did. Only when she finds herself in danger of losing him in Act IV, thanks to the purloined letter, does she finally feel any sense of compromise. But she has still not understood why she must compromise. Though their marriage has been saved, and no public retribution is in store, Lady Chiltern wishes her husband to retire from public life. Her idealism is still too inflexible to allow that Robert could be morally compromised, learn from it, and still serve. Goring tries again to make her see that by refusing to learn, yield, and develop, she is doing Cheveley’s work for her (IV.393-99). Once more, Goring the philosopher-dandy reasserts himself:

Pulling himself together for a great effort, and showing the philosopher that underlies the dandy. Lady Chiltern, allow me. You wrote me a letter last night in which you said you trusted me and wanted my help. Now is the moment when you really want my help, now is the time when you have got to trust me, to trust in my counsel and judgment. You love Robert. Do you want to kill his love for you? What sort of existence will he have if you rob him of the fruits of his ambition, if you take him from the splendour of a great political career, if you close the doors of public life against him, if you condemn him to sterile failure, he who was made for triumph and success? Women are not meant to judge us, but to forgive us when we need forgiveness. Pardon, not punishment, is their mission. Why should you scourge him with rods for a sin done in his youth, before he knew you, before he knew himself? A man’s life is of more value than a woman’s. It has larger issues, wider scope, greater ambitions. A woman’s life revolves in curves of emotions. It is upon lines of intellect that a man’s life progresses. Don’t make any terrible mistake, Lady Chiltern. A woman who can keep a man’s love, and love him in return, has done all the world wants of women, or should want of them.

(Husband IV.401-20)

Goring has realized that Lady Chiltern will not develop on her own as a result of her experiences, so he cleverly changes tactics. The Puritan Lady Chiltern may be convinced to soften
her inflexible moral stance if Goring uses moral cant against her in turn. She is convinced by his speech, and she yields because she sees in Goring’s words a philosophy that appeals to her sensibilities.95 Chiltern is persuaded not to retire, and the couple is reunited. Goring has cleverly helped the Chilterns move beyond their rigid poses, but their development has made only small progress, just as Lady Windermere and Hester learned to compromise incrementally. Nevertheless, Goring’s intervention has allowed them to progress to the point of compromise. Lady Chiltern will see her husband more realistically, and he will approach his political career with more awareness.

**Goring’s Reward**

Finally, there is the matter of Goring’s reward. Regardless of how he did so (mostly by coincidence, but partly by his own activity), Goring receives credit for the resolution of the plot. Thus, he will be rewarded, but he must weather one more complication. His father wants him to marry, so he has finally given in and proposed to Mabel. Robert, however, refuses to consent to the marriage: he thinks Goring had Cheveley secreted in his rooms because he was having relations with her, and Chiltern will not give his innocent sister in marriage to such a man (IV.480-90). Lady Chiltern must now save Goring; she must reveal that that he was expecting her, not Cheveley (IV.492-517). This late-stage intervention is akin to Callidamates’ protection of Tranio.

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95 Bristow (1994: 65-66) notes the troublesome content of Goring’s speech and Lady Chiltern’s parroting of it back at Robert, and suggests that Wilde may not be as progressive as we want him to be. Gregor (1966: 511) asserts that Goring’s success should not be attributed to his dandy characteristics at all, since it was based on coincidence and a speech Goring himself cannot possibly believe in. But Wilde may in fact be very clever in his construction of this speech: Goring knows Lady Chiltern does not share his value system, and so cannot be convinced by clever argument. He uses instead conservative, trite terms that Lady Chiltern will understand and value. He uses her hackneyed values against her to save Robert’s career and succeeds. I prefer to believe Wilde was knowingly calculating in assigning this speech to Goring.
in *Mostellaria*. In that play Tranio could stave off punishment only by sitting on the altar; he could not avoid it altogether through his own machinations. Here Goring must accept defeat, as he is unwilling to reveal the truth and harm Lady Chiltern’s relationship with Robert. But with her intervention, Goring is freed from condemnation, and is rewarded for his service (IV.520-end).

This reward is somewhat troublesome. For the clever slaves, the reward of freedom and/or marriage is a happy prospect, but at the same time, it is a dissolution of the Saturnalian atmosphere. The clever slave is freed from servitude, but alienated from his clever-slave persona. He becomes a freedman, with no need to swindle his master for fun or profit. His master is no longer disrespected by an upstart, insubordinate slave. The dandy too benefits only partially from such a reward. While Mabel is a clever dandified character herself, marriage still means domesticity. Goring will no longer keep his schedule, frivolity, or reputation for idleness if his life is normalized through marriage. However, as Gregor (1966: 509) notes, “if Lord Goring is to be in love, it will be with a minor character in the play, and his ‘love’ will simply be there to testify his status as hero.” Perhaps Goring has found his ideal match, a girl who will allow the philosopher-dandy to continue to be what he is, and develop her character along with his.
CONCLUSION

“I mean that intellectual curiosity of the nineteenth century which is always looking for the secret of life that still lingers round old and bygone forms of culture. It takes from each what is serviceable for the modern spirit.”

(Wilde, The English Renaissance of Art lecture)

My goal for this dissertation has been to demonstrate that Oscar Wilde, an Oxford-trained classicist, drew on the available materials of Greek and Roman New Comedy, disdaining the political commentary and vulgarity of Aristophanes, inferring as much as possible from extant Menander, and reinventing the material of the Roman playwrights. He did so both in his education at Trinity and Oxford, where he had to study these plays and fragments for his exams, and in his later career as a dramatist. His other influences and sources of inspiration are numerous, of course, most prominently contemporary Victorian Society plays and melodrama (Pinero, as well as Shaw, with whom he corresponded), French theater (in particular, the so-called well-made play popularized by Scribe, Sardou, and Dumas fils), the dramatic works of Sheridan, and Restoration comedy, not to mention Renaissance British and European comedies inspired by Terence and Plautus. The ancient comedies had been staged and restaged, interpreted and reinterpreted in Wilde’s time, but they were typically not reinterpreted by philologists. Wilde read the plays not only as someone interested in drama and aesthetics but also as a philologist. In adapting the an-
cient material, he reconsidered character development, the roles of women, the superficiality of designated plot type, and the ways in which morality was staged.

I hope to have demonstrated here Wilde’s systematic program of drawing on aspects of the ancient plays in creating his Society Plays—particularly the refined language and tightly constructed plots of Menander and Terence, but also the vibrant humor of Plautus—that were of less interest to the more boisterous productions of other Anglo-European playwrights, who were not Oxford-trained classicists with a particular dedication to the aesthetics of New ism. Wilde, ultimately interested in the individual and his place in society, explores through aspects of New Comedy how the individual can develop while mired in the hypocrisies of those around him. Conventional morality often comes under fire in his dramas, as he demonstrates the lip service paid to morality by its proponents or the hypocritical way in which morality is applied. His social satire includes implicit critique but does not amount to outright condemnation or call for social reform, but rather offers an acknowledgment of hypocrisy (particularly through his provocateurs), and a call for the individual to evolve beyond blanket strictures for the self.

Reception, however, is a two-way street: we may read New Comedy into Wilde and identify the elements that influenced him and how he appropriated the material, but we must also read Wilde back into New Comedy—doing so offers a new way of reading the ancient material. Wilde interrogates the ancient New Comedies: these plays were considered not only funny, but mimetic of reality in their day, and viewers found value in the messages they conveyed. Wilde identifies what is amusing in these plays, but also sees what is serious or thought-provoking—elements that must have been obvious to ancient viewers, but went underappreciated in Wilde’s time, and indeed in our own. Wilde questions the value systems in place and draws attention to the psychology underpinning these plays by restaging them in his time.
The double standard of sexuality, and the ancient playwrights’ sympathy for the supposedly agelast wife are brought into focus through *Lady Windermere’s Fan* and *A Woman of No Importance*. By identifying the various stages of grief experienced by the wronged wife in *Fan*, we may recognize the heart of the Plautine or Terentian wronged wife’s troubles, namely that her husband has humiliated her (not simply that he has wasted her money, as is commonly note). Her feelings must be taken into account. The struggle of the individual out of place in society in *Menaechmi* (a play often dismissed for its frivolity) comes into focus through *The Importance of Being Earnest*. The superficiality of the recognition plot and social dysfunction of Terence’s theatre is evinced when considered against *Lady Windermere’s Fan* and *A Woman of No Importance*. A reading of Plautus’ clever slave plays against *An Ideal Husband* suggests that servi callidi were necessary both for the resolution of plot and as agents of comeuppance, while dandies both facilitated character development and resolved plot.

The cases studies concluding each chapter have attempted to bring into focus a particular representative analysis of an ancient play against one of Wilde’s dramas. In this study I have not claimed that the ancient playwrights Menander, Plautus, and Terence were a primary source of inspiration for Wilde: as I noted above, he had countless other sources to draw on. Nevertheless, Wilde’s debt to New Comedy, and his direct engagement with its themes, must be acknowledged. There are a number of topics I was not able to study in this dissertation, which I hope to develop further in the future. This dissertation unfortunately could not include a consideration of staging or production, but focused on the texts themselves, of which there are so many that not all receive adequate attention. A more detailed treatment of Wilde’s engagement with Plato and Aristotle’s philosophies is necessary in analyzing Wilde’s approach to theatre and in foregrounding the study of his engagement with New Comedy. I was only able to examine Wilde’s philos-
ophies briefly in this dissertation, but I hope to expand this area in a more focused study. The sheer amount of material available for study in the New Comedy of Menander, Plautus, and Terence provides fertile ground for engaging in deep textual analysis. I offered one such analysis in chapter 3, showing how a close reading of Plautus’ *Menaechmi* and Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest* can reveal deep textual and philosophical connections between the two plays. Similar studies of other plays would no doubt prove just as fruitful. Another area ripe for analysis is the heritage of Plautine *meretrices* in Wilde’s adventuresses: the Bacchides, Erotium, Phronesium, and others can be seen in Wilde’s Mrs. Erlynne, Mrs. Allonby, and Mrs. Cheveley.

It has been my aim here (1) to draw out the way Wilde integrated the ancient materials, in which he was uniquely trained, into his theater and into his aesthetics, and (2) to re-read the ancient New Comedies through the nuances highlighted in Wilde. Doing so brings new elements of the ancient New Comedies into focus and facilitates a greater appreciation of ancient comedy in readers previously unaware of or resistant to its merits. I hope that my work here will provide a useful source for others who are interested in Wilde, Victorian theater, and the reception of New Comedy.
APPENDIX A: CORRESPONDENCES (MENANDER, PLAUTUS, TERENCE, WILDE)

The material in the following chart demonstrates the correspondences between ancient New Comedy and Oscar Wilde’s Society Plays. Though the majority of the discoveries of Menander were made after Wilde wrote his Society Plays (see Chapter 1), I have included Menander’s plays for the benefit of comparison with Plautus and Terence (who had access to these plays and many more). Because this dissertation is limited to standard page size, to be legible the following chart must be viewed digitally with the PDF zoom feature. If problems are encountered when using the included PDF chart, please email serena.witzke@gmail.com for an Excel version.
Marriage Related

young lovers / kept woman

obstacles to deliberately accidentally playacting courtesan / dressing up babies lost seduction arranging marriage attempted / wealthy parent & idealistic meretrix romantic pseudo-­‐shirking identity anxious women plot baby child help

✔

Oscar Wilde

IH

Geor.

Kolax

Amph.

As.

Cist.

Curc.

Merc.

Mil.

Stich.

Haut.

Hec.

Phorm.
APPENDIX B: PLOT SUMMARIES

I. Menander

Epitrepontes

The play opens with Charisios drowning his sorrows in the company of a hired hetaira named Habrotonon, after learning that his new wife Pamphile has given birth to a baby just five months after their wedding and his long absence. He has left and installed himself at his friend Chairestratos’ house, while his wife Pamphile remains at their home. She is under pressure to leave Charisios from her father Smikrines, who is unaware of her rape before the marriage and the resultant pregnancy and is scandalized by the presence of the hetaira. Meanwhile, the baby Pamphile gave birth to and exposed is found by the shepherd Daos, who in turn gives it to Chairestratos’ slave Syros and his wife. They have a loud argument publicly about the ownership of the tokens found with the baby. They ask Pamphile’s father Smikrines to arbitrate (hence the name of the play, The Arbitration), and he unwittingly decides the fate of his owngrandchild. He allows the child to keep the trinkets and departs. Then Charisios’ slave arrives, recognizes the ring left with the baby, and claims it belongs to Charisios—the baby thus must be his. Habrotonon bemoans her lot: she had thought Charisios fancied her and would save her from sex slavery, but he has hired her and then ignored her. She determines to find a way to win him over. When she learns about the baby and that Charisios committed rape, she remembers a rape at the Tauropolia nine months earlier; she thinks she would recognize the raped girl if she saw her again. She suggests to her fellow slaves that she pass off the girl’s story as her own, and to manipulate Charisios into admitting what he did. Habrotonon will look for the girl too, since she knew the girl’s companions. When Pamphile goes into Chairestratos’ house, she sees Habroto-
non with the baby and Habrotonon recognizes her as the attacked girl from the Tauropolia. Habrotonon convinces Charisios that he is the father, Pamphile the mother, and all turns out well.

*Misoumenos*

Krateia has been captured in war by the soldier Thrasonides, a blustering blowhard who has fallen in love with the girl and made her his concubine. He has given Krateia slaves, jewelry, clothes, and has been treating her like a wife. Though the play is very fragmentary throughout the first three acts, it seems that Krateia has seen her brother’s sword in Thrasonides’ possession, and it is likely the soldier bragged about killing the sword’s owner. She has refused Thrasonides her bed and her love, and it is driving the soldier to suicide. Fearing for his master’s safety, the slave Getas has removed the swords to neighbor Kleinias’ house, the very place Demeas, Krateia’s father, has gone to start his search for his missing daughter. Finding his son’s sword in the pile, he goes next door to seek the sword’s new owner. Krateia, however, is the one who opens the door. Father and daughter joyfully reunite, but the slave Getas insists on proof rather than a convenient story. Demeas instructs him to question Krateia’s nurse, who will vouch for the truth. Krateia tells Demeas that her brother is dead, and Demeas is distraught. They return to Kleinias’ house. Thrasonides learns that Krateia has been identified by her father, and he wishes to marry her now that her status is established. Demeas and Krateia refuse, thinking Thrasonides is responsible for Krateia’s brother’s death. Thrasonides is heartbroken. In the next act, however, the presumed dead brother returns, very much alive, and Krateia no longer has a reason to hate Thrasonides. Her father betroths her to the soldier.
Perikeiromene

In this fragmentary play, Glykera has been punished by her master Polemon for embracing what seemed to him a strange man. In retribution, he cut her hair off. In the divine prologue we learn that Glykera was not embracing a lover, but rather her brother Moschion. The children were abandoned by their father Pataikos after their mother died, the boy being adopted by a local couple and raised as a citizen son, the girl being taken in by an old woman, who passed her on in concubinage to a soldier, Polemon. Before she died, the old woman disclosed the truth of Glykera’s birth in case the soldier turned out to be a poor provider. Glykera, knowing the truth, did not wish to ruin her brother’s prospects, so she kept his origins a secret. The brother Moschion, however, turned out to be very wild, fond of drinking and carousing. He lusts for Glykera, not knowing she is his sister. Though Glykera knows he is her brother and harmless, no other character does. This misunderstanding will motivate most of the plot. After being mistreated by Polemon, Glykera runs to Moschion’s foster mother Myrrhine, who allows Glykera to stay in their house but urges her to keep Moschion’s identity secret to protect him. Their father, Pataikos, completely unaware of his children’s whereabouts, happens to fall in with Polemon’s gang, and agrees to be the soldier’s emissary to Glykera. During their argument Glykera fetches her recognition tokens to show them to Pataikos (presumably to prove that she is a citizen girl of a good family). Pataikos is shocked to find his wife’s embroidery. Glykera is his daughter. Meanwhile, Moschion’s adoptive mother Myrrhine has told him of his parentage, and he is devastated to learn he is Glykera’s brother. Father and children reunite, and Glykera is given in marriage to the soldier.
Sikyonioi

Two children were separated from their families. Stratophanes was given away by his parents for unknown reasons, while Philoumene was kidnapped by pirates as a small girl and sold as a slave to a wealthy Sikyonian officer (who happens to be the adoptive father of the boy). Now both children are grown up, and the Sikyonian officer and his wife are dead. Stratophanes wants to marry Philoumene, but her slave status is a barrier to his marrying her, and his foreign status is a barrier to her marrying him, should she be found an Athenian citizen. Complicating matters is the neighbor boy Moschion, an Athenian citizen hoping to make Philoumene his mistress. Fleeing the two men who seek sexual possession of her, Philoumene takes her slave to the sanctuary of Persephone and Demeter at Eleusis, where she begs the citizens to protect her until she can locate her father and prove her citizen status. Stratophanes, meanwhile, has learned that he is not Sikyonian, but rather an Athenian citizen. His adoptive mother had written a letter and included his recognition tokens so that Stratophanes might avoid inheriting his adoptive father’s terrible debt. With his own citizenship in place, Stratophanes seeks to prove Philoumene’s, even going so far as to hire a man to pretend to be Philoumene’s adoptive father. Miraculously, this man, Kichesias, actually turns out to be Philoumene’s father. Stratophanes finds his birth family, and learns that he and Moschion are brothers. Kichesias gives Philoumene in marriage to Stratophanes, and Moschion is left with no girl and an inheritance he will now have to share.
II. Plautus

Asinaria

Argyrippus, the son of Damaenetus, is violently in love with Philaenium, a prostitute under the management of her mother, Cleareta, a lena. Cleareta has made an agreement with a soldier, Diabolus, to put Philaenium under exclusive contract to him for a year for twenty minae, but tells Argyrippus that if he finds the money first, he shall have her instead. Argyrippus, having exhausted all his own resources, despairs. Damaenetus, his lecherous father, wants to buy his son’s affection by providing the money. Damaenetus is married to Artemona, a wife with a large dowry who controls the purse-strings. Damaenetus orders his slave, Libanus, to scheme and cheat his wife out of the money. Just then an ass-dealer arrives, to pay Artemona’s steward Saurea twenty minae, the price of some asses which he purchased previously from Artemona. Libanus then arranges with his fellow-slave, Leonida, that the latter shall personate Saurea, and so receive the money from the ass-dealer. This is done, and the money is paid to Leonida, in the presence of Damaenetus, who assures the dealer that Leonida really is the person to whom the money is owed. This sum is then given to Argyrippus, but with the disgraceful stipulation that his father shall enjoy the company of Philaenium for one night. Argyrippus submits, and the three sit down to a banquet. The soldier discovers Cleareta’s betrayal, and sends his parasite to inform Artemona of her husband’s conduct. She accompanies the parasite, and discovers her husband embracing Philaenium. She berates and drags him home, leaving Argyrippus to enjoy Philaenium exclusively.
There are two sisters named Bacchis. Pistoclerus loves one, the Athenian Bacchis, while Mnesilochus (Pistoclerus’ childhood friend) loves the other, Samian Bacchis. Mnesilochus sends Pistoclerus a letter asking to commission him to find Samian Bacchis. She has been hired by a soldier for a whole year for 200 gold Philippics. Samian Bacchis and the soldier come to Athens, where she ditches him and moves in with her sister. Athenian Bacchis encourages Pistoclerus to get Samian Bacchis out of her contract, and he agrees to help. Upon Mnesilochus’ return to town, his slave Chrysalus concocts a scheme to swindle Mnesilochus’ father Nicobulus out of the needed money. But Mnesilochus, unaware that there are two women named Bacchis, mistakenly thinks that Pistoclerus has taken up with Samian Bacchis. He swears to give up his lying girlfriend, and confesses all to his father. Now he has no money. When he finds out that there are two women named Bacchis and Samian Bacchis still loves him, he once again turns to Chrysalus, who concocts another wild scheme to fleece Nicobulus. He tells Nicobulus that the soldier is looking for his wife, Samian Bacchis, and that Mnesilochus has been caught in adultery with her. If Nicobulus does not give the soldier 200 gold Philippics, the soldier will kill the adulterer. He also claims that the wife needs a further 200 to keep Mnesilochus’ reputation intact. Nicobulus pays up. At the end of the play Nicobulus and Pistoclerus’ father Philoxenus discover their sons’ misdeeds and go to the two Bacchides’ home to chastize the women and drag their sons home. But the prostitutes sweet-talk the fathers, who fall for them. Philoxenus and Mnesilochus will share Samian Bacchis, while Nicobulus and Pistoclerus will share Athenian Bacchis.
Captivi

Hegio had two sons. The younger was kidnapped as a child by a runaway slave, Stalagmus. The older has grown up and been captured by the Eleans. Hegio has gotten hold of an Elean prisoner of war, Philocrates, and his slave Tyndarus in the hope of ransoming the former for his son. Unbeknownst to Hegio, Philocrates and Tyndarus have switched clothes, and the slave plays the master. Tyndarus (dressed as Philocrates) convinces Hegio to release his “slave” Philocrates to send a message home. When another prisoner unwittingly betrays the ruse, Hegio is distraught that he has released his only hope of regaining his son. He sentences Tyndarus to hard labor in the mines for tricking him. Philocrates is honorable, however, and returns with Hegio’s son Philopolemus and Stalagmus. Through questioning Stalagmus, Hegio learns that his other son was sold to Philocrates’ family: his long-lost son is Tyndarus, and he has unwittingly sentenced his son to die in the mines. He retrieves Tyndarus, and all three family members are restored to each other. Stalagmus is punished.

Casina

The beautiful young girl, Casina, was abandoned as a baby and was taken in by Cleostrata’s family. She has been raised in the household as a daughter. Having reached sexual maturity she is now an object of desire for the men in the house, both citizens and slaves. Both Cleostrata’s husband Lysidamus and her son Euthynicus want the girl. Both devise a scheme to get their respective male slaves “married” to her (since she cannot marry a citizen, being a slave herself), so that they themselves can enjoy her too. Cleostrata learns of the plot, and decides to favor her son, though she does not like the idea of him having a slave concubine (especially one raised as his sister). Nevertheless, she prefers her son’s having the girl to her husband’s getting her. Cle-
ostrata and Lysidamus have several agonistic encounters, and finally decide to cast lots to see whose slave gets the girl. Lysidamus and his slave Olympio win, but Cleostrata, her son’s slave Chalinus, and the women of the house hatch a plot. Chalinus will dress as Casina for the “marriage” and take her place. He assaults Lysidamus and Olympio when they come in to take their marriage rights, terrifying and embarrassing both men. In the end Casina will turn out to be the long-lost daughter of the neighbor Alcesimus, and Cleostrata’s son Euthynicus will then be allowed to marry her.

*Cistellaria*

Selenium, a *meretrix*-in-training, loves Alcesimarchus. Her adoptive mother Melaenis has allowed her to live exclusively with him, until she learns Alcesimarchus is betrothed to another. She parts the couple, but Alcesimarchus, distraught, abducts Selenium. Meanwhile, Selenium’s birth mother, Phanostrata, has been looking for the girl. Phanostrata was raped, and she exposed the baby, but left a little chest and recognition tokens with the child in case she was ever in a position to find the girl again. After his wife died, the rapist (Demipho) came back to town and married Phanostrata. Able to legitimize her daughter now, Phanostrata sends out her slave to find the girl. The tokens prove Selenium’s identity, and Melaenis gives up her claim on her adopted daughter. Alcesimarchus may wed her instead of his intended bride, Demipho’s other daughter.

*Epidicus*

Stratippocles loves the music girl Acropolistis. While away at war he writes to his father’s slave Epidicus, telling him to find the money to buy her. Epidicus does this by telling Stratippocles’
father Periphanes that his secret daughter, Telestis (by Philippa, a woman he raped in Epidaurus) has been abducted and sold, and that Acropolistis is in fact the lost Telestis. Epidicus buys Acropolistis and sets her up in Periphanes’ house as Telestis. In the meantime, Stratippocles has coincidentally found and bought Telestis with the desire to make her his concubine, forgetting all about the music girl he used to love. He needs money to buy this girl too, so he asks Epidicus to get it. He does by tricking Periphanes again (he hires a free music girl to pretend she is Stratippocles’ beloved, then “buys” her to “send her away,” taking the money instead to pay the money-lender for Telestis). When Philippa comes looking for Periphanes for help in finding her daughter, Periphanes learns that he does not have Telestis, but rather Acropolistis, his son’s lover. Epidicus is in deep trouble, but he saves himself with a new discovery: he recognizes Telestis, and reveals that Stratippocles has purchased his own half-sister. Epidicus is saved when he hands over the real Telestis, and Stratippocles must make do with the music girl Acropolistis.

Menaechmi
A humorous story of twins and mistaken identity. One twin, Menaechmus, was stolen from his father in the confusion at a festival in Tarentum and taken to Epidamnus where he was made the heir of his kidnapper. His true father died of grief, and his grandfather named the remaining twin after the brother that was lost. This boy, originally called Sosicles, is now grown up and wandering the Mediterranean in search of his lost brother. He comes to Epidamnus and a series of misadventures and episodes of mistaken identity begin. Menaechmus has made a good life for himself in Epidamnus. His adoptive father bequeathed him much money and gave him a wealthy wife. He has a city house and country estates, and he is a civic man who participates in public life. Unfortunately, he does not get along with his wife, in main part because he steals from her
regularly to give presents to the *meretrix* residing next door. Menaechmus sets up a variety of events that Sosicles then blunders into, not understanding why everyone seems to know him and his name. He enjoys the *meretrix*, eats the lunch Menaechmus planned for himself and his parasite, steals Menaechmus’ gifts back from the *meretrix*, gets into an altercation with Menaechmus’ wife, fights with her father, falls out with the parasite—all the while not understanding why all of these people seem to know him intimately. Only after Menaechmus and Sosicles come face to face and Sosicles’ slave Messenio points out the similarities between the two do they understand that they are in fact twins. Menaechmus rejects his life in Epidamnus, auctions off his property, and leaves his wife to travel with his twin brother.

*Mercator*

Charinus was a profligate son, so his father Demipho sent him away on business. He comes back two years later with the beautiful enslaved *meretrix*, Pasicompsa, that he bought for himself, but he does not want his father to know, lest he sell off the girlfriend. So, when his father finds the girl, Charinus says he bought her as a maid for his mother. Demipho, his father, falls for the girl and tells Charinus that they should find another maid and sell this one. He insists he knows just the buyer (a stand-in for Demipho to ensure the old man gets the girl all for himself). Charinus sets one up too, for the same reasons. Demipho’s buyer, his friend Lysimachus, gets there first. Eutychus, Lysimachus’ son, who was supposed to buy Pasicompsa for Charinus’ use, gets there too late and cannot find out who bought the girl. Demipho has Lysimachus install the girl at Lysimachus’ house, but Lysimachus’ wife Dorippa finds out and is outraged. She thinks the girl is her husband’s new mistress. Her clamor brings Eutychus running, and he quickly learns who really bought the girl. He tells Charinus and then goes to Demipho to explain that the
girl was supposed to be for his son and that old men should not pretend they are young and able to have love affairs. Lysimachus agrees with his son because he is terrified of his wife’s anger. Demipho is forced to give up Pasicompsa, and Charinus gets to keep his girl.

*Miles Gloriosus*

Pyrgopolinices and Periplectomenus are neighbors. Pyrgopolinices, a soldier, used to live in Athens near Pleusicles, but while Pleusicles was away on business, Pyrgopolinices stole his girlfriend, Philocomasium, and fled town. Palaestrio, Pleusicles’ faithful slave, set out to find them, but was kidnapped by pirates and later sold to Pyrgopolinices, the very man he had been looking for. Pyrgopolinices is the biggest, most obnoxious braggart to have ever lived. Palaestrio puts up with him, while secretly getting word back to Pleusicles that he has found Philocomasium. Pleusicles hastens to Ephesus to devise a scheme to get his girlfriend back with the help of his friend Periplectomenus and former slave Palaestrio. Palaestrio plots to convince the soldier to free Philocomasium. Periplectomenus will hire a *meretrix*, Acroteleutium, to pretend to be his wealthy wife. This “wife” will pretend to be hot for the soldier with plans to divorce her husband and marry him instead. The soldier is thrilled, but now needs to get Philocomasium out of the house. Palaestrio suggests that Pyrgopolinices let her go—her mother and twin sister are in town, he says, and they would gladly take her back if the soldier were to give her freely with all of her clothes and jewels. He agrees. Pleusicles dresses up as a ship’s captain and takes Philocomasium way to meet her “mother and sister.” The soldier, finally unencumbered of Philocomasium, goes to the neighbor house. There he is “caught” by Acroteleutium’s “husband” Periplectomenus. He orders his slaves to beat the soldier and threaten to castrate him. Pyrgopolinices realizes he has been tricked by Palaestrio.
Mostellaria

Theopropides has been away in Egypt. While he is away, his son Philolaches spends exorbitant amounts of money on wine, parties, and girls. He even buys an enslaved meretrix and manumits her. He has borrowed money from a moneylender. Tranio, his slave, has helped in all this. Theopropides arrives while Philolaches and friend Callidamates are having a party. Tranio dissuades Theopropides from going in the house by spinning a story about hauntings: the familia abandoned the house when they stirred up a nasty ghost. Theopropides and Tranio go to the forum instead, because Tranio has concocted a scheme and tells his master that Philaches has borrowed money to buy the house next door, given that their own house in uninhabitable by the living.

Theopropides insists on seeing the new house. Tranio manipulates the owner, Simo, into playing along. Theopropides is impressed at his son’s apparent business acumen. Unfortunately, Callidamates’ slaves come knocking on the door of the “haunted” house, and Theopropides questions them. The slaves betray Tranio and reveal that the house is still in good use, and that Philolaches has been throwing lavish parties the whole time Theopropides has been away. Theopropides wants to beat and crucify his deceitful slave, but Callidamates offers to pay off all of the debt Philolaches has incurred; he even speaks for Tranio. Tranio promises to misbehave again so Theopropides can punish him another day. The old man relents, and Tranio escapes punishment, at least temporarily.

Pseudolus

Calidorus is in love with an enslaved meretrix (Phoenicium) belonging to the pimp Ballio, but he has run out of funds to pay for her services. Ballio has sold the girl to a Macedonian soldier for a down payment of 15 minae. The soldier is sending a slave with the balance of five minae and a
token of proof of identity to retrieve the girl. Calidorus is crushed, but Pseudolus, Calidorus’
trusty slave, has a plan. Pseudolus bets Calidorus’ father Simo that he will get the girl by the end
of the day, swindling everyone involved. Simo says that if he can do it, he will give Pseudolus
20 minae. Callipho, Simo’s neighbor, stands as witness. Simo goes to warn the pimp and Pse-
dolus puts his plan in motion. When the soldier’s slave Harpax arrives, Pseudolus claims to be
Ballio’s slave Surus. Harpax gives the pseudo-Surus the token (a letter with the soldier’s seal)
and leaves—he will come back to pay the five minae and retrieve the girl later. Calidorus’ friend
Charinus offers up his slave Simia to finish the plot. Simia takes the sealed letter and masquer-
ades as Harpax. He uses five minae borrowed from Charinus to complete the transaction with
Ballio and take Phoenicium away. Calidorus gets his girl back. Meanwhile Simo has been han-
ging out with Ballio. The real Harpax shows up. Ballio is sure that Harpax is an imposter hired
by Pseudolus, having been warned by Simo. He bets Simo 20 minae that Pseudolus will not get
the girl from Ballio. When it becomes clear that Simia was the imposter who got the girl, and
this is the real Harpax, Ballio realizes he has been tricked out of the girl, the 15 minae he has to
refund the soldier, and the 20 minae he bet Simo. Simo is annoyed at Pseudolus (he owes Pse-
dolus 20 minae for his successful scheme) but he has the 20 minae from the pimp now. He is
embarrassed to be tricked by his slave, but he is no poorer. Pseudolus offers him half the money
if Simo will come drink with him. Simo agrees.

Rudens

A pirate kidnaps a young girl, Palaestra, from her family and sells her to a pimp. Now grown,
she has been sold again to her beloved Plesidippus. Unfortunately, the pimp is the swindling
sort, and he skips out on the final sale, absconding with the girl and the deposit. Plesidippus is
searching for the girl when a terrible storm wrecks the pimp’s ship and deposits him and his cargo near Cyrene. Palaestra and her companion, Ampelisca take shelter at the temple of Venus while they try to find Plesidippus. The pimp, learning the girls’ location, storms the temple and tries to take the girls by force. Daemones, whose house neighbors the temple, comes to the rescue with his slaves. Palaestra wants to prove she is free, but her tokens of recognition were lost in the shipwreck. Luckily, one of Daemones’ slaves (Gripus) fishes out the trunk, but he tries to claim the contents for his own. Plesidippus’ slave Trachalio, having located the girls and the trunk, prevents Gripus from taking the loot away. Palaestra is able to name all of the contents within the trunk, proving her ownership. But her recitation of the recognition tokens inside the trunk jogs Daemones’ memory, and he realizes that Palaestra is his long lost daughter. He betroths Palaestra to his countryman Plesidippus, and swindles the pimp out of a talent of gold, with which he buys Ampelisca’s freedom and grants freedom to his slave who found the trunk. Trachalio is granted his freedom and marries Ampelisca.

**III. Terence**

*Adelphoe*

Demea has two sons (Aeschinus and Ctesipho), decides he cannot afford them both, and gives the elder to his brother Micio to adopt. Micio is an indulgent, urban father, while Demea is a harsh, country father. Aeschinus knows Demea would not allow his brother to consort with enslaved *meretrices*, and so offers to abduct Ctesipho’s girlfriend, the music girl Bacchis, and take the blame so that Ctesipho can enjoy her without risking his father’s wrath. Meanwhile Aeschinus has raped Pamphila, the daughter of his neighbor Sostrata, a widowed old woman, and has promised to marry her. When Sostrata’s family learns Aeschinus has abducted a girl, they des-
pair, for now Pamphila is unmarriageable with no prospects. Sostrata’s friend Hegio (an old comrade of Micio and Demea) demands aid of Micio in bringing his son to his senses, and Micio learns of Aeschinus’ true intentions for Bacchis. He indulgently allows all. Demea, on the other hand, when he learns of the real arrangement, is appalled. At the end of the play he undergoes an apparent change of heart—he advocates excessive leniency, if Micio is going to pay for it, while he gets the credit for suggesting it. Micio is to marry Sostrata, the wall between the houses will be knocked down, Syrus (the trusty, tricky slave) and his wife are to be freed (with funds), and Ctesipho is to get his music girl, paid for by Micio (but allowed to live at the farm by the grace of Demea).

Andria

Glycerium is a freeborn girl who was raised by the family of Chrysis, an Andrian, who later became a prostitute in Athens. Glycerium accompanied her and everyone assumed she was a foreigner and a prostitute as well. Simo has a perfectly-behaved son, Pamphilus, but he is a very suspicious father. The son, afraid to cross his father, agrees to marry Philumena, the neighbor girl Simo has chosen, even while already living in “marriage” with Glycerium, whom he seduced and impregnated after the death of her “sister” Chyrsis. Simo has learned of this liaison and wants to trick his son into betraying his disobedience, or convince him to reject the foreign girl and marry Philumena. Her father, Chremes, has found out about the clandestine “marriage” and has withdrawn his consent for Pamphilus to marry his daughter. But Simo insists the pretense of the wedding continue, so that he might trick his son into confession. Eventually Simo manages to convince Chremes that the lovers have broken up. Chremes consents to the marriage, and Pamphilus despairs. His clever slave plots some schemes, and the baby is discovered, ruining
Simo’s plans. Then Crito, Chrysis’ cousin and friend to Chremes, arrives in town and reveals that Glycerium was brought to Andros by a man named Phania—Chremes’ own brother. Phania was taking his young niece away from the war at Athens and was shipwrecked off the coast of Andros. Chrysis’ family, who had given succor to the shipwrecked man, took the girl in. Chrysis brought her back to Athens, and with her citizenship established, Glycerium can legally marry Pamphilus.

_Eunuchus_

Phaedria is in love with Thais, but she has instructed him to stay away for several days so she can entertain a soldier. He is very upset, but she explains to him that she has an adopted sister, Pamphila, kidnapped from a good family and sold to Thais’ family. When their mother died, Thais’ brother sold Pamphila. Fortunately, Thraso, the soldier, bought the girl as a present for Thais. But, he will only give her back if Thais proves to him that they have an exclusive relationship. Thais wants to restore Pamphila to her family and win patronage for herself. Phaedria agrees to stay away until Pamphila’s real brother Chremes can come to verify her identity and take the girl into his keeping. Phaedria then gives Thais tokens of his love, an Ethiopian maid and a eunuch. Chaerea, Phaedria’s brother, comes to town. He sees a girl walking across the forum and instantly became infatuated with her. He learns from Parmeno, his brother’s slave, that the girl is Pamphila, the sister of the _meretrix_ Thais who has come to live with her. To gain access to her, he dresses up in the eunuch’s clothes and takes the slave’s place in Thais’ house. Once inside and alone, he rapes Pamphila. He then leaves to attend a dinner party. Meanwhile Chremes comes to Thais. Thraso, believing him a rival, becomes enraged. Thraso storms Thais’ gates, demanding Pamphila back. Chremes leaves to get Sophrona, the nurse who will confirm
Pamphila’s citizen status. Meanwhile, Chaerea is caught by Thais and her maids as the rapist of Pamphila. Chaerea’s father is very angry that his son shamefully dressed up as a eunuch and raped a citizen girl. He consents to Chaerea’s marrying her, and will take Thais into his patronage for helping bring the thing about.

*Heauton Timorumenos*

Clinia has left home after an argument with his father Menedemus over his beloved Antiphila, a poor girl suspected of being foreign and a prostitute. Menedemus has since had a change of heart and goes from being a stern father to a lenient one. The son returns and still loves Antiphila. Clinia and his friend Clitipho contrive an elaborate hoax to get Antiphila close to Clinia and bring Clitipho’s *meretrix* mistress Bacchis into his home as well. Bacchis has demanded a lot of money from Clitipho and will leave if he cannot pay. They decide to pretend that Bacchis is Clinia’s mistress, not Clitipho’s. Clitipho’s busy-body father Chremes rejoices that his son is well-behaved while Menedemus’ is still a profligate. Menedemus is ready to pay the money to get his son to come home. In the middle of the play it is revealed that Antiphila is Chremes’ daughter, whom he had ordered abandoned at birth. He decides to recognize her now and provide her with a dowry, as Clinia has revealed that he loves Antiphila, not Bacchis. Chremes is livid that his son is the one in love with Bacchis, and he threatens to disinherit Clitipho rather than let his estate be ruined by Bacchis’ expensive tastes. Clitipho chooses to give her up and marry a citizen girl instead. Clinia marries Antiphila.
Hecyra

Pamphilus is married to Philumena. He initially objected to the marriage, because he was in love with the meretrix Bacchis, but he grows to love his wife and has sex with her after two months of marriage. Shortly after, he leaves town on business. Some months later, Philumena withdraws from the house and refuses to see her mother-in-law, Sostrata. Philumena was raped coming home from a festival before her marriage and is bearing a bastard child. Pamphilus returns, finds out about the rape and pregnancy, and refuses to take his wife back, though he agrees not to tell either of their fathers the truth about their break up. Laches, Pamphilus’ father, blames Philumena’s withdrawal on Sostrata. He also blames Pamphilus’ rejection on Bacchis, believing Pamphilus is still in love with her. The fathers learn about the baby and believe it is Pamphilus’, not knowing that he did not consummate the marriage immediately. Laches and Phidippus (Philumena’s father) tell Bacchis to speak to Philumena’s mother Myrrina and to insist that she is not trying to break up the marriage. Myrrina sees Bacchis wearing a ring belonging to Philumena, which her rapist had stolen during the attack. Since the ring had been a gift to Bacchis from Pamphilus, Bacchis concludes that Pamphilus was the rapist. Pamphilus is relieved to be the father of Philumena’s baby, but insists the women keep the rape a secret—he does not want his shame revealed to his father or Laches.

Phormio

Chremes is a bigamist. He has a wife in Athens, but took another on the side in Lemnos. He had a daughter, Phanium, by his second wife and went to Lemnos often to visit them, sneaking away from his first wife Nausistrata on false pretenses. Demipho, his brother, often travels as well. While Demipho is away, Antipho, his son, falls in love with a bereaved girl he meets on the
street, who happens to be Phanium. All Antipho knows is that she is a freeborn citizen, so with the help of the adventurer Phormio, he contrives to marry her. The law states that kin are obliged to marry orphaned kin, so Phormio claims in court that the girl, Phanium, is kin to Antipho, and they are married. Demipho returns very angry. He intends for his son to marry the daughter of Chremes’ secret marriage, not an unknown, impoverished girl. He will contest the marriage and effect a divorce. Meanwhile, Antipho’s cousin Phaedria (Chremes’ son by his legitimate wife Nausistrata) needs money to purchase a flute girl. Phormio will cheat the old men out of the necessary funds by agreeing to marry Phanium if Demipho provides a substantial dowry. Chremes has returned and he is anxious for Antipho to marry his daughter, whom he now knows is somewhere in Athens. He must marry his daughter to a relative, one who will not question the details of Phanium’s birth, as he does not want his wife to learn of his second family. So Chremes urges Demipho to take Phormio’s offer to free up Antipho. They make a deal and Phormio gets the money. He turns it immediately over to Phaedria who buys and frees his flute-girl. Chremes then sees his daughter’s nurse Sophrona leave Demipho’s house and quickly learns that not only has Antipho found his daughter, but he has also married her, just as Chremes had wished. The old men try to get the money back from Phormio, who retaliates by calling Chremes’ wife Nausistrata outside. He reveals Chremes’ secret and befriends Nausistrata. She forgives him the money, makes him a dinner companion and becomes angry with Chremes, offering him up to his son for punishment.
IV. Wilde

Lady Windermere’s Fan

This is the story of a young, idealistic society matron, Lady Windermere, a new mother happily in love with her husband and satisfied with her place in society. Her safe, comfortable world is thrown into chaos when she learns from interfering friends that her husband has taken up with a fast woman, Mrs. Erlynne, and is keeping a house for her. Lady Windermere bemoans her stupidity in trusting men, berates her husband for destroying their love, and runs off to be with another man, Lord Darlington, whose advances she had earlier spurned. The scandal would have destroyed her family and the life of her young son, had not Mrs. Erlynne stepped in and kept Lady Windermere’s flight a secret, helping her back home without her husband knowing. We learn that Mrs. Erlynne is Lady Windermere’s long-lost mother, who had destroyed her own life in the same way twenty years earlier, and that Lord Windermere had not been unfaithful, but had been bribing her to stay away from Lady Windermere. Lord and Lady Windermere keep their secrets at the close of the play, reunited, but changed.

A Woman of No Importance

This play focuses on a mother, Mrs. Arbuthnot, who was seduced as a young girl, abandoned by the father of her child, retired from society to raise him, and then meets her seducer again years later. It is also the story of her son Gerald, who is in love with an American Puritan girl Hester, whom he thinks he cannot have because he is poor with few prospects outside of the provincial town in which he lives. When he meets Lord Illingworth at a country house full of witty London society people, he is entranced by the man and his power. Lord Illingworth offers Gerald a job as his secretary and plans to take the boy to India with him. Mrs. Arbuthnot, called to the house
to meet Lord Illingworth, comes face to face with her seducer. Desperate to keep Gerald away from Lord Illingworth, she struggles to convince her son that Lord Illingworth is a bad man. It is only when Lord Illingworth sexually assaults young Hester on a dare from another guest that Gerald sees his true colors. He wants to kill the man, but only Mrs. Arbuthnot’s impassioned confession that Lord Illingworth is Gerald’s father prevents violence. The play ends with Gerald attempting to convince his mother to do her duty and marry Lord Illingworth while Mrs. Arbuthnot refuses. It is finally Hester, having come to understand the plight of wronged women, who convinces Gerald to give up the match and come to America with her and Mrs. Arbuthnot.

*An Ideal Husband*

Robert Chiltern, a highly successful Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, is blackmailed by an adventuress, Mrs. Cheveley, to speak in support of a swindle that she and her friends have invested in. At one time he sold state secrets to a wealthy aristocrat, and made his fortune and political career on that immoral act. If he does not support Mrs. Cheveley’s interests, she will ruin him politically by revealing his past. Matters are complicated by Chiltern’s wife, who has put her husband on a pedestal and would never forgive him if she learned about his sordid past. Chiltern appeals to his friend, the dandy Lord Goring to help him against Mrs. Cheveley. Lady Chiltern also asks Lord Goring for help with the trouble. Goring must scheme to defeat Cheveley and protect Chiltern’s reputation. After various machinations of varying degrees of success, Chiltern’s career is saved, he and his wife reconcile, and Goring marries Chiltern’s sister, Mabel.
In this play, a foundling, Jack Worthing, pretends to be a degenerate young man named Ernest, his fictional brother, so that he may spend more time in London wooing wealthy socialite Gwendolen and gadding around with his friend Algernon. The two men find decadent entertainment all over the city, dining out, leaving unpaid bills, and seeing shows. When the bachelor dandy Algernon discovers that his friend Ernest is actually a dull country landowner named Jack with a beautiful young ward named Cecily, Algernon decides to dress up as Ernest to gain entrance to Jack’s country home and woo Cecily. Upon seeing Cecily, he immediately falls in love and vows to have her. Meanwhile, Jack is thwarted in love when Gwendolen’s mother, the wealthy Lady Bracknell (Algernon’s aunt), will not allow a foundling to marry her daughter. When Gwendolen sneaks away from her mother to run off to the country to see Jack, Lady Bracknell storms after her to thwart the union. In retaliation for Lady Bracknell’s intervention, Jack refuses to allow Algernon to marry Cecily. After many humorous antics, Cecily’s governess recognizes the handbag in which Jack was found (a recognition token) and Jack’s parentage is revealed—he is, in fact, Algernon’s brother. A deal is struck with Lady Bracknell, and both men may marry their beloveds.
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Abbreviations

AJP  American Journal of Philology
CA  Classical Antiquity
CJ  Classical Journal
CM  Classica et Mediaevalia
CQ  Classical Quarterly (n.s. = new series)
CP  Classical Philology
CW  Classical World
EMC  Echoes du monde classique (n.s. = new series)
G&R  Greece and Rome (n.s. = new series)
HSCP  Harvard Studies in Classical Philology
IJCT  International Journal of the Classical Tradition
JRS  Journal of Roman Studies
PLLS  Papers of the Leeds Latin Seminar
RFIC  Rivista di filologia e di istruzione classica
RM  Rheinisches Museum für Philologie
RSC  Rivista di studi classici
TAPA  Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association
TLS  Times Literary Supplement
ZPE  Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik


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