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LIPSIUS AS A DEFENDER OF PLAUTUS*

This paper contains a brief discussion of *Epistolicae Quaestiones* (1577), 2, 18, in which Lipsius compares Plautus and Terence, and more specifically defends Plautus against his detractors.

Lipsius was an avid and enthusiastic reader of Plautus, whom he called affectionately 'illud delictum', 'ille pullus Romanae musae'.¹ As a philologist, Lipsius was also interested in Plautus. He collated several manuscripts and published numerous critical remarks on the text of Plautus.² Several of his correspondents, notably J. J. Scaliger, encouraged him to produce an edition of Plautus, but if Lipsius ever envisaged this plan, he gave it up, for in his correspondence he only mentions it as something too difficult and too time-consuming to accomplish.³

The language and style of Plautus constitute an important reason for Lipsius's admiration. In this regard, it is significant that Lipsius consciously imitated the style of Plautus in the *Epistolicae Quaestiones* and explained his use of this style in letter 5, 25, which comprises the epilogue of the *Epistolicae Quaestiones*.⁴ In the *Epistolica Institutio* of 1591, Lipsius was likewise to mention Plautus in particular as the pre-eminent model for the epistolary style which Lipsius advocated and practised.⁵ In

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¹ *Ep. Quaest.*, 2, 4, in *Opera omnia*, 4 vols (Wesel, 1675), 1, 487.

² Especially in the *Ant. Lect.* (1575), but also in the *Ep. Quaest.* (1577) and the correspondence.

³ Lipsius and J. J. Scaliger encouraged one another to provide a Plautus edition; see ILE I, 76 11 26, 76 12 11, 77 02 12. See also *Ep. Quaest.*, 2, 12, in *Opera omnia* (1675), 1, 495.

⁴ *Opera omnia* (1675), I, 615. A few relevant sentences from this passage: 'Non excusabo in scribendo brevitatem. Nam ea, me iudice, propria est materiae huius. An in syllabis corrigendis, aut litteris commutandis, periodos adhibeam, et illum ambitum Ciceronianae orationis? [...] At in verbis fui, quam debui, antiquior. Jam enim is sermo aures meas tetigit. Et Plautum, inquit, potius sapit quam Ciceronem. Utinam verum dicerent! Nam hoc volui. Epistolas scio me sic scribere, non Orationes'. See also 3, 16, directed to C. Valerius, in *Opera omnia* (1675), 1, 532.

⁵ *Ep. Inst.*, chapter 11; ed. R. V. Young - M. Thomas Hester (Carbondale-Edwardsville, 1995), p. 38.

the epilogue of the *Epistolicae Quaestiones*, Lipsius moreover expresses the hope that the letters contained in this collection have something out of the ordinary, so that the reader never gets tired of them.⁶ The defence of Plautus in *Epistolicae Quaestiones*, 2, 18, is indeed a fine example of the typically Lipsian style of letter-writing.

Ep. Quaest., 2, 18 is addressed to Lipsius's friend Andreas Schottus (1552-1629), a well-known member of the Jesuit order. His correspondence, published at the beginning of this century, shows that Schottus was also active in Plautian philology, but unlike Lipsius he never published anything on Plautus.⁷ The letter begins with an indignant reference to the view of an unnamed friend of Schottus, who feels that Terence should be preferred to Plautus:

Omitte contumeliam. Terentius ut antistet Plauto? Ita censet, inquis, amicus meus vir doctus et gravis.

In fact, this view voices the common opinion among scholars and pedagogues in Lipsius's time. According to this opinion, Plautus's style is less elegant because it is more archaic, and moreover the jokes of Plautus are too crude and indecent. This literary and moral judgment on Plautus's comedies was argued for the first time in 1517, in the preface to one of the Aldine editions of Terence. The preface in question is signed by Francesco Asolano, but it is reported to have been written in Asolano's name by Andrea Navagero, and it is included in Navagero's complete works.⁸

This criticism of Plautus became widely accepted and eventually compromised his place in humanistic education programs.⁹ Within Italian

⁶ 'Meae vero Epistolae et facetum aliquid habeant et eruditum, et remotum a captu vulgi, et quod saepius repetitum placeat' (*Ep. Quaest.*, 5, 26; *Opera omnia* (1675), 1, 615).

⁷ L. Maes, 'Lettres inédites d'André Schott', *Le Muséon*, N. S., 7 (1906), 67-102; 325-361; 9 (1908), 368-411; 11 (1910), 239-270; especially 7 (1906), 102 and 11 (1910), 239-241. P. Burman, *Sylloges epistolarum a viris illustribus scriptarum tomi V*, 5 vols (Leiden, 1725-1727), 1, 90-105, contains eight letters exchanged between Schottus and Lipsius, but Plautus is not the subject of any of these. On Schott, see G. Tournoy, 'Schott (André)', in *Centuriae Latinae. Cent une figures humanistes de la Renaissance aux Lumières offertes à Jacques Chomarat*, ed. C. Nativel (Genève, 1997), pp. 749-753.

⁸ Terentius, *Comoediae* (Venice, 1517); see for this edition A. A. Renouard, *Annales de l'imprimerie des Alde, ou histoire des trois Manuce et de leurs éditions*, 3rd ed. (Paris, 1834), p. 80. I have consulted the preface in A. Navagero, *Opera omnia* (Padua, 1718), pp. 94-100 (*Epistulae quatuor, quae vulgo praefationes appellantur*, no. 4: Francisci Asulani nomine scripta in Publii Terentii Afri comoedias). F. Asulanus also published one of the Venetian editions of Plautus (see Renouard, *Annales*, p. 94).

⁹ See for an introduction to the history of the use of Plautus in humanistic education the general studies by O. Francke, *Terenz und die lateinische Schulcomoedie in Deutschland*

pedagogical circles in the fifteenth century and among those in the North at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the performing of Plautus's plays had not been unusual.¹⁰ Later in the sixteenth century, school masters and pedagogues, being concerned about the moral content of the ancient comedy, preferred to write and perform their own texts rather than perform the plays of Plautus or even Terence.¹¹ Likewise, the name of Plautus occurred less and less frequently on the lists of required reading at Latin schools.¹² Often, students were given an expurgated text to read or even only fragments of the plays of Plautus (and Terence),¹³ and there exist collections of elegant phrases from Plautus and Terence, so that students could memorize and imitate these, without being confused by the supposedly lascivious or ungenerous content of the plays.¹⁴

It is against this background that Lipsius formulates an eloquent and adequate defence. First, he maintains that Plautus is a better playwright

(Weimar, 1877) and P. Dittrich, *Plautus und Terenz in Pädagogik und Schulwesen der deutschen Humanisten* (Leipzig, 1915).

¹⁰ See, e. g., J. Wimpeling, *Pädagogische Schriften*, ed. J. Freundgen (Paderborn, 1892), p. 143; Wimpeling mentions in the *Isidoneus Germanicus* [1496] that Reuchlin staged student performances of the *Aulularia* and the *Stichus*. M. Dorpius staged performances of the *Aulularia* and the *Miles gloriosus* and wrote the missing fifth act of the *Aulularia*; see J. IJsewijn, 'Dorp', in *Contemporaries of Erasmus*, ed. G. Bietenholz - T. Deutscher, 3 vols (Toronto, 1985), 1, 398-404, and J. IJsewijn, 'Martinus Dorpius, *Dialogus* (ca. 1508?)', in *Charisterium H. de Vocht, 1878-1978*, ed. by J. IJsewijn - J. Roegiers, *Supplementa Humanistica Lovaniensia*, 2 (Leuven, 1979), pp. 74-75.

¹¹ A fine example is C. Schonaeus (1541-1611), who wrote a collection of biblical dramas in the style of Terence, entitled *Terentius christianus*; see H. van de Venne, 'Cornelius Schonaeus (1541-1611). A Bibliography of his Printed Works', *Humanistica Lovaniensia*, 32 (1983), 368-443; 33 (1984), 206-314; 34 (1985), 1-113; 35 (1986), 219-283.

¹² See the survey in Dittrich, *Plautus und Terenz* (above, note 9), p. 34; G. Mertz, *Das Schulwesen der deutschen Reformation im 16. Jahrhundert* (Heidelberg, 1902), p. 296 ('Plautus findet sich als Lektüre in den evangelischen Schulen in der ersten Hälfte des 16. Jahrhunderts weit häufiger als in der letzten. ... Dagegen wird Terenz das ganze 16. Jahrhundert hindurch von der untersten bis zur obersten Klasse aller Schulen gelesen'). P. Bot, *Humanisme en onderwijs in Nederland* (Utrecht-Antwerp, 1955), p. 159, referring to the above quoted passage from Mertz, observes that the Dutch Latin schools of the sixteenth century generally correspond with the German evangelical schools concerning the choice, frequency and order of classical authors.

¹³ See, e. g., L. Lukács, *Monumenta Paedagogica Societatis Jesu*, 1 (1540-1556) (Rome, 1965), p. 97; 4 (1573-1580) (Rome, 1981), p. 243; 6 (*Collectanea de ratione studiorum Societatis Jesu*, 1582-1587), new ed. (Rome, 1992), pp. 365, 368.

¹⁴ E. g., *Elegantiarum ex Plauto et Terentio libri II* (Basle, 1555); a collection by Georgius Fabricius, who explains the reasons mentioned for anthologizing the ancient comedy in the dedicatory epistle (copy consulted UB Nijmegen 145 c 184^{nr.1}). Christophorus Vladeraccus also compiled an anthology of elegant phrases from Plautus (*Flores M. Accii Plauti selecti cum scholiis* (Antwerp, 1597); mentioned by A. Roersch in BN, 26, 807 [= *Biographie Nationale* (Brussels, 1866-)]).

and stylist than Terence, and then he condemns the practice of expurgating the text of Plautus; more specifically, he criticizes the edition of Joachim Camerarius (1500-1574), whose complete edition of 1552 was more or less authoritative until the beginning of the seventeenth century.¹⁵

Lipsius first discusses the general statement according to which Plautus's mind ('ingenium') is unworthy ('servile'), whereas Terence's mind is refined ('liberale'). Lipsius's discussion of this point is rather witty; one could say that it exemplifies one of the characteristics of Plautus which Lipsius sets out to praise. Playing on the literal and metaphorical meanings of 'servilis' and 'liberalis', Lipsius first ridicules the negative judgment of Plautus by pointing out that it was Terence, not Plautus, who had once been a slave. He then comes to the point, stressing that the appearance of humble characters and the treatment of trivial subjects is fully in line with the requirements of the genre, and it should therefore be a cause for praise rather than blame:

Nam comoedia cui scribitur, quam plebi? Adeo ut, quamquam in communi concessu patrum et equitum, saepius tamen summam caveam spectare actor debeat quam orchestram. Ea causa cur in Plauto pleraque ex moribus, ex verbis, ex iocis infimae plebis.

Lipsius then goes on to concede that the plays of Terence are more measured and uniform. But he turns this praise of Terence into blame by quoting a testimony of Caesar, who observes that the polished language of Terence lacks variety and comic power.¹⁶ It is precisely this quality which constitutes the uniqueness of Plautus, and which makes him more commendable than Terence, as Lipsius eloquently explains:

Haec vis et varietas in Plauto est. Nunc ille adsurgit, nunc submittit, nunc protrita, nunc grandiora dicit, proponit vitia et castigat, locos communes, τὰ ἠθικὰ καὶ πολιτικὰ admiscet, aliud quidem agens, sed quasi hoc unum agens, et haec omnia tamquam sale venustissimis iocis adspergit. Quae certe Terentius per somnium non cogitat, per iocum non tentat.

Next, Lipsius focuses on the linguistic quality of Plautus's plays. He counters the common opinion that Terence's language is more exemplary, pure and elegant, by referring to the authority of Varro. In his

¹⁵ See on the editions of Plautus the *Index editionum* in volume 3 of the Lemaire edition of Plautus, cur. J. Naudet (Paris, 1832), pp. 609-641, and especially F. Ritschl, *Kleine philologische Schriften*, 2: *zu Plautus und lateinischer Sprachkunde* (Leipzig, 1868), pp. 34-161; pp. 99-113 for Camerarius's edition.

¹⁶ Caesar's testimony is quoted in Suetonius's *Vita Terent.*, 5 (Roth p. 294).

study on the Latin language, so Lipsius argues, Varro quotes Plautus much more often than Terence, and in his Menippean satires, he literally states that Plautus's language is superior to that of Terence (*Men.* 399). Lipsius next refutes a counter-testimony from Cicero's *De amicitia*; Lipsius puts this important Ciceronian testimony into its proper perspective and thus skilfully neutralizes its negative force:

Quod aiunt in Laelio Ciceronis scribi Terentii se verbis libenter uti [Cic., *Amic.*, 89], certe, sed quid tum? Quasi ille ipse Cicero minus libenter utatur verba Plauti, et tamen sciant hoc non Ciceronem dicere, sed Laelium, Laelium, inquam, qui fabulas Terentii creditus est ipse composuisse, ne miremur suam supellectilem paterfamilias si libenter utatur.

Lipsius then comes to what he calls the main point ('caput et arx comparationis'), namely the fact that Plautus's characters and their jokes are considered to be obscene. As is clear from the context, Lipsius here responds to one scholar in particular, namely Joachim Camerarius, the editor of the 1552 complete comedies of Plautus.¹⁷ Camerarius fulminates against the *Casina* in particular,¹⁸ and he erases from his edition of the play several lines in which kissing and making love are mentioned or suggested.¹⁹ Lipsius condemns both Camerarius's view and the practice of erasing verses and passages from the text of Plautus with a three-fold argument: the complaint about Plautus's indelicacy is (1) anachronistic, (2) unfair, and (3) all too prudish. First, it is anachronistic, because the Roman theatre audience, consisting of people of all ranks and classes, demanded comedies that were *risqué*. The difference between Plautus and Terence in this regard reveals precisely Plautus's superiority as a comic author. Secondly, the complaint about Plautus's indelicacy is unfair; Aristophanes is a much more offensive and vulgar comedian, but

¹⁷ Plautus, *Comoediae XX, diligenti cura et singulari studio Joachimi Camerarii Papeberg. emendatius nunc, quam ante unquam ab ullo, editae* (Basle, 1552); the copy in UB Leiden, 682 D 18, was consulted.

¹⁸ 'Huius fabulae (i.e. Casinae) argumentum, ut est festivum atque bellum, ita admodum etiam turpe et obscenum. Atque existimo illa quae in nostro libro veteri ommissa plurima animadverti, relictis spaciolis passim quibusdam, quod non ferrent aures piae, ideo exarata non fuisse. Nam veteres comici studio quodam singulari obscenis iocis indulerunt, faciente has delicias satana in mundo, inter haec impuritas vitae minus ut vitaretur, et immundicia cordis, ut a Dei conspectu averteret homines. nam Christus ita dicit: Beati mundi corde, quia Deum videbunt. Ab illa igitur spurcicia avertamus oculos et mentes nostras, et utilia atque bona quasi margaritas de stercore legamus, et talibus scriptis: quae satius erat nunquam inspicere, quam instrui his levitatem et libidinem animorum. Sed de his nunc satis' (ed. 1552, p. 307).

¹⁹ E.g. lines 881-890, 902-914, 921-928, 943-950, 965-972.

no literary critic or pedagogue ever blames him. The discussion of the third and final point is even more direct and pointed, for Lipsius suggests that Camerarius and those who feel like him are using their puritanism as a shield for their sensualism:

Quod moribus nostris foeda haec, illicita, intestabilia aiunt, scimus ista. Sed tu, audi me, praetervehere ista quasi Sirenum scopulos et aspice, non lege. Livia viros nudos castae feminae nihil differre a statutis aiebat, tu tam molli libidine es, quem nudi aliquot ioci abripiant?

Lipsius continues by firmly stating in a rather eloquent sentence that the shocking verses and passages should not be erased from the text, since young people do not understand the innuendo they contain, whereas mature men cannot be misguided by them:

Si igitur qui haec capiunt, constantiori iam aetate sunt quam ut decipi possint, et qui decipi possunt, omnino non capiunt, cur scalpellum adhibeatur et unius omnium Latinissimi scriptoris membra violentur?

Lipsius then amplifies this view by boldly and categorically dismissing Horace's authoritative statement against Plautus's jokes (*Ars poetica*, 270-274):

Superest Horatii iudicium, quod, obsecro, Horatii causa omittatur. Utinam eadem tolli possit ex libris!²⁰

Lipsius then comes to his conclusion, in which he formulates with both elegance and brevity his preference for Plautus and states that both Roman comedians should be read in the Latin schools:

Concludam. Terentium ipsum amo, admiror, sed Plautum magis, uterque adolescentibus in sinu, in manu, in oculis sit, conferantur etiam, si placet, inter se, tantum alter ille ne praeferatur. Magistellos istos, qui vulgo aliter sentiunt, plorare iubeo, te, amicissime Schotte, valere.

All in all, Lipsius's comparison of Plautus and Terence is alone of its kind. It is not a detailed or exhaustive essay. One notes with surprise that Lipsius does not mention Cicero's remark concerning the elegance and urbanity of Plautus's jokes (*De officiis*, I, 104), nor the numerous ancient testimonies concerning the excellence of Plautus's language (e. g., Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, 1, 10, 99; Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 1, 7, 17; 19, 8, 6; Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, 2, 1, 10). Nor does Lipsius discuss

²⁰ The last sentence from this quotation has been removed in the second and following editions of the text.

Plautus's talent as a dramatist in as much detail as Francesco Florido Sabino (1511-1548) had done long before him,²¹ and Lipsius is completely silent about problems such as the deficient transmission of the text and the difficulty of old Latin. A brief examination of the Camerarius edition to which Lipsius refers reveals that such problems account for at least some of the *lacunae* in the text,²² and they had been discussed by Henri Estienne (1528-1598) in an essay of 1576.²³ On the other hand, Lipsius's letter contains the eloquent and stylistically appropriate expression of an original and daring judgment concerning the essence of the reception of Plautus in the Renaissance, namely his importance as a school author and a stylistic model. Just how original and daring Lipsius's view was, we may appreciate when we realize that until well into the seventeenth century, famous and respected scholars like D. Heinsius (1580-1655), R. Maresius (1594-1653) and D. Morhof (1639-1691) were to criticize Lipsius's preference for Plautus, and his view that Plautus should be read without expurgation in Latin schools.²⁴

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²¹ Franciscus Floridus Sabinus, *In M. Actii Plauti aliorumque calumniatores Apologia* (...) (Basle, 1540); the copy of Leiden UB, 352 A 3², was consulted. See on this text R. Sabbadini, 'Vita e opere di Francesco Florido Sabino', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 8 (1866), 351-363 (pp. 351-352 on Plautus).

²² Camerarius used two manuscripts as the basis for his edition (Ritschl, *Kleine philologische Schriften*, vol. 2 [above, note 15], p. 100). A number of the verses which are lacking in his edition contain explicit or implicit sexual remarks (see above, note 19), while others are left out partly or entirely for some other reason, for instance because the text of Camerarius's manuscripts contains a *lacuna* or remains incomprehensible (e. g., *Casina*, 455, 982-990, *Cistellaria*, 757-758, *Epidicus*, 144-145, 525, 617, 710, *Miles gloriosus*, 169, 465, 894-895, 924, *Mostellaria*, 100, 1129, *Poenulus*, 770, 977, 1033, the final scene of the *Poenulus*, *Pseudolus*, 712, *Rudens*, 648, 650, 724, 1065, 1132).

²³ H. Stephanus, *De latinitate falso suspecta ... De Plauti latinitate dissertatio et ad lectionem illius Progymnasma* ... (s. l., 1576; reprint Geneva, 1972).

²⁴ D. Heinsius's Notes to Horace, *Ars poetica* 270-271 (1610), consulted in the Lemaire edition of Terence (Paris, 1827) 1, XCIV-CXX. See for this text J. H. Meter, *The Literary Theories of Daniel Heinsius* (Assen, 1984), pp. 108-118, especially pp. 112-113. R. Maresius, *Epistolarum philologicarum libri II* (...) (1655), letter 2, 6; consulted in the edition Leipzig and Frankfurt, 1687 (UB Leiden 425 g 31), pp. 258-267. D. Morhof, *Polyhistor literarius* (Lübeck, 1747; reprint Aalen, 1972), book 4, chapter 11, p. 842; see also book 2, chapter 9, p. 443.