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Recipe of Success

By
Meridith Sulser

Plautus' Miles Gloriosus (MG) conveys a wealth of themes to its audience; overall, however, the core of the story consists of Plautus' response to various views on people and their relationships. Texts can reveal these relationships well, such as how the playwright and actors encourage the audience to respond to their antics. While the spectators think that the play is real, they are aware that it is a performance; all performances in some way remind the audience that they are in a theatre. The ways in which the playwrights mold these relationships determines plays. Plautus' recipe for success consists of many ingredients, and they work together to make the perfect blend for an interesting story. Plautus is a very unique writer in his skepticism of moralizing, marriage, and the traditional institution of slavery. He typically addresses issues such as religion, calls attention to location, and forms a bond between the title character and audience in his plays, but surprisingly, he does not follow all of these patterns in MG. His defining characteristics are identifiable, and as a comic playwright he is funny and

successful because the audience is familiar with all of the issues at hand.

One pattern of Plautus is his refusal to use "dramatic illusion"; he is willing to sacrifice anything for a laugh. "Dramatic allusion" is a play happening without an audience. Those stories have a tendency to be more serious and extensive, such as the Iliad, the Odyssey, and the Aeneid. In addition to being serious, they also have a propensity to be tragic. A hero is most commonly involved, and he is usually the title character. However, in Plautus' MG, Pyrgopolinices is the title character, and he is certainly not a hero. He is a braggart soldier who is deceived for the benefit of the audience. He is arrogant, boastful, and full of lies. This is illustrated by Palaestrio in the prologue when he uses words such as "inpudens", "stercoreus", and "adulteri" to depict the captain. Overall, Plautus has a reputation for not creating a fourth wall; the audience is *clearly* present for everything that is happening around them.

Typically, Plautus includes allusions to settings to add metatheatrical content to his plays, but this is surprisingly not apparent in MG. A few reminders are evident, but not enough to make a defining characteristic in this play. The setting is in Greece, but the characters are speaking Latin, so it is obvious that this is a superficial farce. According to Moore in

the Theatre of Plautus, Plautus usually keeps the audience aware that the actors and characters are both Greek and Roman while the characters call attention to Greek locale. However, allusions to Italy and Rome have not been included in MG, so the spectators have not been reminded that they are not really Greek at all.

There are usually certain morals expected from theatre, because Rome has a long and honored tradition of moralizing; however, Plautus is known as being a skeptic with comedy and moralizing. He does not think that the theatre's purpose is to teach, but rather to entertain, and he thinks that it is an inadequate purveyor of moral truths. However, Plautus' scenes of deception still convey moral truths, because the characters claim they have learned from the experience. This is ironic, because the lessons are not really learned and because the people who teach them are not really moral. In the passage that begins on line 383, Philocomasium relates her fabricated dream to eventually "teach" the slave that he should not talk about things he does not have any business with or know for sure. Plautus wrote, "Ergo, si sapis, mussitabis: plus oportet scire seruum quam loqui." He said, "Now, be smart. Keep this all a secret. Slaves should know more than they tell." The idea not to speak what you are not sure of and know more than you tell is

a good lesson, but not when it is wrapped up in a play of deception. The deception demonstrates the quality and meaning of "moralizing" in MG; moralizing is *drama* in Plautus' plays, and not actual didacticism.

This deception is a common theme in MG, and it helps define Plautus because it adds most of the comedy for which he is known. Palaestrio, who is depicted as the bright, clever slave, describes one of the tricks that is taking place. Beginning at line 464, Plautus wrote,

Neque eques neque pedes
profectost quisquam tanta
audacia qui aequae faciat
confidenter quicquam
quam mulier facit. Ut
utrubique orationem docte
diuisit suam, ut sublinitur
os custodi cauto, conseruo
meo! Nimis beat quod
commeatus trastinet trans
parietem.

Palaestrio is saying, "All the king's horses and all the king's men could never act with such great daring, Never be so calm, so cool, in anything, as one small woman! Deftly she delivered up a different accent for each part! How the faithful guard, my fellow slave, was completely fooled! What a source of joy for all- this passage through the wall!" Palaestrio is addressing the audience about the deception of Sceledrus. The source of joy for the audience is when Philocomasium runs back and forth through the passage in the wall; it was

dramatic and suspenseful, which is pleasing for the audience. This can be compared to a horror movie or a drama in the present, which are popular pastimes for many people.

Plautus defines MG in the prologue; he uses it to establish general information such as where, when, and why the play is taking place, as well as who is in it. It makes the audience think of the play as a play-within-a-play and establishes Palaestrio as a playwright. At line 80, Act II begins, and Palaestrio begins to draw the audience in with honesty and jokes. "Illest miles meus erus, qui hinc ad forum abiit, gloriosus, inpudens, scercoreus, plenus periuri atque adultery." He writes, "The soldier is my master, who has just gone to the forum. What a shameless, crass bombaster! He is so full of crap and lechery, no lies are vaster." He does not hold back what he really thinks, and this is what makes him a popular character. Palaestrio can be compared to the people in the world who are honest with people, sometimes almost too honest. He can be compared with a few people who behave in a similar fashion at Denison, and people tend to find them enlightening, because they are brutally honest when telling people how they look or what they think when they meet someone for the first time. Palaestrio is the same way, and the people in the audience most likely fully appreciate

the frank and playful methods of Palaestrio's comments, because they know from the prologue that they can count on him to be honest and upfront with them.

An alliance between audience and the "title" character is usually a defining characteristic established by Plautus, but not in the case of MG, because Pyrgopolinices is the title character. He is so unintelligent that he cannot form any bond, because he does not know how to get along with people. Consequently, the action works around him and unfolds from his stupidity. Additionally, this "title" character and the actors typically flatter the audience, or tease them. Since Pyrgopolinices barely even address the audience, it is the other actors in MG who take on his role and work to win over the audience; they are needy and desire rapport. At line 1130, Palaestrio turns to the audience and asks, "numquid videtur demutare atque ut quidem dixi esse uobis dudam hunc moechum militem?" He says, "Well, folks, did I exaggerate a while ago what I said about the concupiscent captain?" He continues to give the audience attention, which is something that every human being desires. In addition, the spectators also hear monologues, the most extensive being the Prologue from line 79 to 155 by Palaestrio, in which a relationship and bond is formed with his spectators.

In the beginning of the story, the characters make jokes to seem like likable people, often like people do in real life. When people have common ground on which to relate, then their relationship is that much stronger. Similarly, characters try to draw common ground with spectators by explaining their situation. Their monologues are aimed at persuasion. Characters call attention to themselves using words as "ecce" or "videre," often like people do in our lives by saying, "What about me?" Overall, characters strive for attention, and want appreciation and notice from the audience. In line 991, Milphidippa addresses the spectators, "Iam est ante aedis circus ubi sunt ludi faciundi mihi. Dissimulabo, how quasi non uideam neque esse hic etiamdum sciam." She says, "There is the circus where I must perform my little act right now. I'll pretend I don't even see them- I won't even know they are there." Even characters such as Milphidippa are dependent on spectators; all of the actors demonstrate their dependency in the asides.

On a similar note, Plautus' characters have a tendency to want pity and sympathy. At the beginning, Palastrio fills these shoes. In line 180, he says, "vae mihi misero quoi perundumst propter nihili bestiam!" He says, "Pity me- I'll have to die- all for a worthless animal"! It

is like a game to him and many of the characters; they want to have the most emotional appeal. Once characters have reached the point that they have evoked enough pity, they will need to balance it out. This is where teasing becomes evident. Humor has also been an effective means in the competition for attention. Most people gravitate towards easygoing, upbeat people who do not bring their mood down. The characters created by Plautus in MG are no exception; they want the audience to sympathize with them, and if they are smart characters, but they make they do not overdramatize.

Other characters try to win over the audience independently; in line 20 of MG, Artotrogus tries to gain the support of the spectators.

Nihil hercle hoc quidemst
 praeut alia dicam- quae tu
 numquam feceris.
 Periuriorem hoc hominem
 so quis viderit aut
 gloriarum pleniorum quam
 illic est, me sibi habeto, ego
 me mancupio dabo; nisi
 unum, epityrum esture
 insanum bene.

He is a jokester and the center of attention in this passage. He makes for a more enjoyable production because the audience is entertained. Also, in line 32, Artotrogus has another aside to the audience, "Venter creat omnis hasce aerumnas: auribus peraudiendas sunt, ne dentes dentiant, et adsentandumst quidquid hic mentibur."

He explains that the only reason he stomachs Pyrgopolinices is for his stomach. He is a slave, and only eats when he is fed by Pyrgopolinices, so he lives as a parasite. The fact that Pyrgopolinices is so dense that he does not understand he is the butt of the jokes is what defines Plautus' humor. The slaves are intelligent, which is unusual today, because being lower class is usually synonymous with being uneducated. However, Plautus is known for his tendency to challenge typical preconceptions on slaves.

Aside from making his characters appealing, Moore pointed out that Plautus is typically known to respond to issues of religion in his plays. However, in MG, he does not do this, although the gods and goddesses do play an important role. At line 501, Periplectomenus says, "At ita me di deaque omnes ament nisi mihi supplicum virgarum de te datur longum diuinumque." Plautus writes, "May the gods and goddesses not love me if I don't arrange a whipping for you- yes, a long and lasting one." While referring to deities, Plautus is making the point that we need discipline. Also, in line 528, Sceledrus says, "Pro di immortals," or "O ye immortal gods!" When Sceledrus finds he is in trouble, he turns to the gods for help. This is similar to what people do in present times; they turn to religion when something bad or catastrophic has

happened in their life. This is similar to how the audience in MG can connect with this situation. Next, at line 540, Sceledrus begs Periplectomenus by all of the gods and men. "Periplectomene, to obsecro per deos atques homines perque stultitiam meam."; Again, when the situation is this serious, Plautus demonstrates that it is common for people to turn to higher powers. In line 701, Palaestrio says, "di tibi propitii sunt, nam hercle si istam semel amiseris libertatem, hau facile in eundem rusum restitues locum." He says that all the gods have blessed him, for, if he lets go of his freedom for just one second, it is no easy thing to get back. Furthermore, when things have gone right in one's life, it is attributed to the gods, so Plautus is an avid believer in the need to be blessed by the gods. Overall, characters often reflect with the deities, which sends a message to the audience that the gods are a powerful being.

While addressing the gods, Plautus also undermines conservative views on marriage, which opens the door for satire and social comedy. Periplectomenus' life as a single man reinforces this stereotype of wives by Plautus; in line 705, he states that he lives happily and well as a single man. "Quando habeo multos cognates, quid opus est mihi liberis? Nunc bene uiuo et fortunate atque ut uolo atque animo ut lubet." Next, in line 672,

Periplectomentus delivers a discourse on the evil of wives. "Morus es. Nam in mala uxore atque inimico quaestus est quod sumitur: et quod in diuinis rebus sumitur sapienti lucrost". This is translated, "You moron! What you spend for enemies or for a nasty wife is expense, what you lay you for a guest, a real true friend, it a profit"! Again, this is one of Plautus' common themes, also present in the Casina. Basically, wives do not fare well in Plautus. A few common stereotypes are that wives with large dowries bring trouble, matronae do not bond with the audience, and wives are always bothersome to husbands.

Plautus' example of this theme in MG is Periplectomentus, a fifty-ish bachelor, who I have already established as being satisfied with his life as a single man. He does not hold back when explaining why to Palaestrio and Pleusicles either; his wife would be nagging him for money and gifts for her mother, and only be a burden for him. This passage begins at line 685,

Nam bona uxor sua ue
ductust, si sit usquam
gentium ubi ea possit
inueniri; uerum egone eam
ductam domum quae mihi
numquam hoc dicat "eme,
mi vir, lanam, und tibi
pallium malacum et
calidum conficiatur
tunicaeque hibernae bonae,
ne algeas hac hieme" (hoc
numquam verbum ex uxore

audias), uerum prius quam
galli canent quae me e
somno suscitet, dicat "da,
mi vir, calendis meam qui
matrem munerem, da qui
faciam condimenta, da
quod dem quinquatrubus
praecantrici, coniectrici,
hariolae atque haruspicae

He is straightforward and honest about his picture of women in this passage: he does not like them. Overall, the playwright, actors, and audience join to make married women the object of their laughter. This is partly possible because playwrights and actors are all men, so they have this common link with which to bond. Furthermore, this defining characteristic of Plautus was successful at that time because there were no women there to disagree with it.

Plautus challenges preconceptions of slaves by constantly striving to contrast the notion that slaves are inherently inferior. This is seen in the play Captivi as well as MG. One point Plautus focuses on is the fact that there are no physical differences in the slaves and the rich. In line 111, Palaestrio, a slave, talks about what he did for his master, "nam is illius filiam conicit in nauem miles clam matrem suam, eamque huc inuitam mulierem in Ephesum aduehit." He said, "As fast as possible, I get this ship of mine. I head for Naupatuc to tell him the fact." The fact that he can sail proves that he is skilled,

and the fact that he has such a good relation with his master proves he is trustworthy.

Concerning slaves, Plautus also sets out to teach that true moral worth is the domain of the free. Palaestrio's devotion to his old master is a clear indicator of Palaestrio's character; he arranges the visitations between the lovers so that his master can be happy again. Plautus adds the notion that slaves are more intelligent and clever than their masters, as seen with Palaestrio and Pyrgopolinices. In line 235, Palaestrio begins, "erus meus elephanti corio circumtentust, non suo, neque habet plus sapientitai quam lapis." He said, "Master hasn't normal skin- it's thicker than an elephant's. He's about as clever as a stone." Slaves were a part of everyday life in that time, so it was common to portray them in plays. His thoughts on them are distinguishable from other playwrights though, and these opinions are validated when the audience sees how much power a slave can really have.

Palaestrio is portrayed as clever and cunning in the deception of Pyrgopolinices. He explains the plan in line 232, "tace, dum in regionem astutiarum mearum te induce, ut scias iuxta mecum mea consilia." Palaestrio continues that there are a million excuses as to where Philocomasium may be when

Sceledrus or anyone is looking for her twin. She may be walking, sleeping, dressing, washing, dining, drinking, busy, or just indisposed. Palaestrio's craftiness is apparent in this plan. He challenges the accepted value of slaves with his intelligent jokes about Pyrgopolinices as well as in his flattery. Palaestrio is depicted but a human being. In the end, Palaestrio is also morally superior to Pyrgopolinices. Overall, Plautus challenges assumptions about inferiority successfully.

Plautus has many defining characteristics, most of which are present in the MG, but some of which are not; the uniqueness of these components is what makes Plautus a successful comic playwright. His characteristics are also suitable for the times he published his plays. Overall, the metatheatrical content of Plautus' plays is truly the defining characteristic. It wins the goodwill of the audience, adds humor, and challenges the spectator's preconceptions. Metatheatre reminds the audience that this *is*, in fact, a play. It also engages and entices the audience; the humor is intertwined in the jokes to the audience. In the end, Plautus has concocted a recipe that is more delectable than any other.