

THE STOCK CHARACTER OF THE *UXOR IRATA* IN PLAUTUS

UXOR IRATA: THE STOCK CHARACTER OF THE ANGRY WIFE IN PLAUTUS'
COMEDIES

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A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfilment for the
Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts

McMaster University MASTER OF ARTS (2025) Hamilton, Ontario (Greek & Roman Studies)

TITLE: *Uxor Irata*: The Stock Character of the Angry Wife in Plautus' Comedies

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Lay Abstract

This thesis examines the figure of the angry wife found in the comedies of Plautus. Roman Republican comedy frequently used stock characters, recognizable stereotypes of real-life figures. In most texts, Plautus' married women characters are labelled as *matronae* ('matrons'). In Ancient Rome, the term *matrona* referred to a wife who would behave pleasantly and subserviently toward her husband. I argue that this categorization generalizes female characters in Plautus and inaccurately refers to wives who are typically disagreeable and confrontational. The findings of this thesis aim to illustrate the complexity of the married female character, highlighting differences in personality, behaviour, and motivation between good wives and angry ones. This project aims to contribute to ongoing discussions surrounding women in Plautus' plays by diversifying the number of character types that are available to female characters, underlining the importance of the angry wife as a stock character and as a unique comedic figure.

Abstract

My thesis aims to examine the figure of the *uxor irata* as a stock character designation for married women in Plautus. Compared to male figures, female figures in Plautus are most commonly listed in *dramatis personae* as one of five broad character designations, most scholarship following this example. Of these designations, married women are typically labelled as *matronae*. The term *matrona*, however, carries defined connotations in social history, referring to an ideal wife that behaved subserviently toward her husband. Wives in Plautus whose behaviour aligns with this historical ideal are generally good in every sense, and are *matronae bonae*. Many wives, however, fail to meet this standard, and in fact go against it. I argue that the stock character label of *matrona* is applied too broadly to the married women of Plautus. As a stock type, it fails to reflect the number of wives who act contrary to matronal ideals out of anger. Disagreeable and confrontational, the *uxor irata* is a figure that possesses motivations, personalities, and habits that directly contrast with those of the *matrona bona*. By presenting close examinations of Menaechmus' wife from the *Menaechmi*, Cleostrata from the *Casina*, and Alcumena from the *Amphitryon*, this thesis aims to illustrate the complexity of the married female character and her contributions to the plots of Plautus' surviving comedies. Furthermore, the findings of this project seek to contribute to ongoing discussions surrounding female figures in Roman comedy by diversifying the repertoire of stock characters that are available to female figures, enhancing our understanding of the complexity and nuance of personality available to the female figure on stage.

Acknowledgements

I would foremost like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Mariapia Pietropaolo, who has pushed me to dig deeper since the beginnings of my undergraduate career. Her belief in this project as well as myself has fuelled much of this work and motivated me to pursue this topic to its fullest potential. Her astute insight, gentle encouragement, and unending support was invaluable, and I am deeply grateful for every uplifting word.

I also extend my gratitude toward the other members of my supervisory committee, Dr. Kathryn Mattison and Dr. Emily Lamond. Dr. Mattison for her open door and level-headed guidance throughout my research and academic career, and Dr. Lamond for her willingness to follow me down a rabbit hole and provide endless sources to explore along the way.

I would also like to thank the professors, staff, and fellow graduate students of the department, all of whom have been exceedingly kind and good-humoured as my mentors, colleagues, and friends. In particular, I would like to thank Dr. Claude Eilers, who from the very beginning of my time at McMaster has helped me see my own potential, and who has somehow also talked me into pursuing multiple degrees in this field.

Lastly, I would like to thank my dear friends and family for their endless support and love. To my friends, thank you for every good time and serious conversation we ever held along the way. To my sisters, Brooke and Ella, who make even my worst days good, thank you. To my parents, who have never failed to accept me, who will always show up, who made all of this possible, thank you. This accomplishment would not have been possible without you all.

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Declaration of Academic Achievement

The author declares that the content of this research has been completed by Kalla Graham, with the contributions of the supervisory committee consisting of Dr. Mariapia Pietropaolo, Dr. Kathryn Mattison, and Dr. Emily Lamond during the research and writing process.

Introduction

Featuring arrays of characters representing a variety of socio-economic statuses, Roman comedy's catalogue of *dramatis personae* presents an enticing collection of figures for analysis. Although the characters are fictional and theatre is a mode which delights in artifice, as Alison Sharrock argues in *Reading Roman Comedy*, "whatever kind of fiction is at issue, some part of our process of appreciation has to involve seeing the fictive creation as in some sense 'real'".¹ As an art form, theatre relies on real experiences to provide its observer with reference for its imitations. Otherwise, the observer fails to recognize that the art of the play is found not in how closely the real thing is represented, but in the process of representing it.² Comedy, as a form of imitative art that aims ultimately to amuse, relies on frames of reference in order to be funny.³ An essential mechanism of a pleasurable comedy is humour. Psychoanalytical theories suggest that the process of humour between two parties, such as performer and audience, takes two forms. Either the spectator derives joy from the subjects who have knowingly adopted a humorous attitude, and are amused by the humorous attitude itself, or the subjects do not believe themselves to be adopting a humorous attitude, but are nevertheless viewed by the spectator in a humorous light.⁴ In order for humour to be successful in Roman comedy, the audience must be able to recognize when a character is

¹ Sharrock (2009), 3.

² See Elsner (1995); Golden (1992).

³ By Aristotelian definitions, comedy is composed of speech and actions that cause a catharsis of pleasure and laughter (Watson: 2012, 179). Plato in the *Philebus* believes the essence of the comic to be a form of malicious pleasure at the expense of the discomfort of another, an opinion based most likely in the element of satire found in Old Comedy (Duckworth: 1952, 306).

⁴ Marx & Sienkiewicz (2018), 75.

being intentionally funny by acting ‘humorous’, and when a character acts earnestly, but their actions or words are designed to be found amusing nonetheless.⁵

In order to exploit these different processes of humour, Roman comedy makes great use of stock characters. Stereotypes are different from stock characters. While stereotypes exist as “caricatures of individuals who can be categorized on the basis of their most prominent traits,” stock characters are largely based on Greek models and Italian theatrical forms, such as Atellan farce, where fixed types of mask were worn so the audience could easily recognize the character and predict their behaviour.⁶ Thus, stock characters interact with performance and identity as archetypes that are easily recognizable across different narratives due to their overly-simplified characterizations, implying a system of social roles into which people may be sorted.⁷ The stock character demonstrates defined and expected habits of behaviour that are performed to achieve identification with their re-enacted social role. Manfred Pfister argues that ‘figure’ should be used rather than ‘character’ when describing the ‘people’ of a play. ‘Figure’ carries connotations of deliberate artifice, production, and construction of something for a particular purpose, and expresses functionality rather than individual autonomy, as well

⁵ Freudian psychanalyses of comedy point to different reasons why a person may find something humorous despite the subject’s intent being serious. Although Freud is difficult to defend as scientifically sound, his theories have nevertheless provided a basis for exploring comedy as a psychological phenomenon (Marx & Sienkiewicz: 2018, 71-101).

⁶ O’Byrhim (2020), 123-4.

⁷ Robert Germany (2019) describes this replaceability of the individual by another belonging to their same stock type as a ‘radical fungibility’ that is built into this system of social roles. He argues that the existence of these rigid character archetypes suggests a world in which there is a small amount of varied human forms that can interact with each other according to a fixed economy of complementarity, and that those within a single category are mutually interchangeable with one another (82).

as dependence on environment for existence.⁸ This argument speaks to the form of the ‘stock character’ especially, as they are figures defined by and dependent on the environment (i.e. the pre-established and defined expectations of behaviour) of their stereotype. This environment, their stock-ness, allows for their existence within the play, deliberately artificial and constructed for a particular purpose and function.

Roman comedy, as primarily domestic comedy, is filled with characters whose social roles and identities are linked to the *domus*, and whose performances are based in highly domestic contexts.⁹ Within a *familia* there are a variety of hierarchies among its many members, and the inevitable tensions that arise are often subject to exploration in comedies. How each character navigates these tensions from within their stock character type, a system based in identifying and polarizing societal traits like gender, social status, and age,¹⁰ speaks to the extent to which ancient Romans understood identity as inflected by their social relationships. And while the figures of master, slave, father, son, prostitute, and pimp have seen great attention in past scholarship, the wife, predominant in a great number of Plautus’ plays and a compelling figure in the *familia*, has become an individual of interest in more recent years.

Increased scrutiny of Plautus’ female characters began to appear in earnest alongside renewed late twentieth-century interest in the playwright’s works.¹¹ However,

⁸ Pfister (2011), 161.

⁹ Fitzgerald (2019), 189.

¹⁰ Dutsch (2019), 201.

¹¹ Initially, popular interest in Plautus concerned his stagecraft, chronology of publications, verse, and translation, resulting in seminal works such as Duckworth’s *The Nature of Roman Comedy* (1952). By the mid-1960s, however, most scholars no longer agreed with founding ideas of these authors, especially regarding *contamatio*, and new works lessened (Hanson 1965). Upon the arrival of the twenty-first

when it comes to naming the stock types of the women of Plautus' comedies, many inconsistencies exist in standard editions published prior to 1940, which served as the foundation for many influential works published in the mid-twentieth century. Editions such as the Oxford Classical Texts, the Teubner, and the Budé series¹² all lacked cohesion in their labelling systems, often categorizing the same female characters across different editions as *matronae*, *uxores*, *mulieres*, *virgines*, and *sorores*.¹³ However, these contradictions are rare among male characters. Of the five female stereotypes most commonly found in Roman comedy, the *matrona* is often the role attributed to the married woman in Plautus.¹⁴ Zola Packman supposes that late twentieth-century scholarship, following the varied categorizations of the women by past editors, sought to define more consistently the adult females of Plautus' comedies according to their perceived marital status.

Designations such as *matrona* and *uxor* were thus employed rather than *mulier*, the role which Packman theorizes was more common in ancient manuscripts and that she

century, interest intensified, leading to new translations (such as de Melo's 2011 Loeb translations) and reliable Latin texts, particularly from the *Editio Plautina Sarsinatis* project, responsible for the Danese *Asinaria* (2004), Questa *Bacchides* (2008) and *Casina* (2002), Stockert *Cistellaria* (2009), Lanciotti *Curculio* (2009), and the Monda fragments (2004). Trends in scholarship in the present display a developed interest in literary theory and identity. A number of scholarly articles featuring the works of Plautus appear in recent handbooks concerning Roman comedy, including *The Cambridge Companion to Roman Comedy* Ed. Martin Dinter (2019), *Women in Roman Republican Drama* Ed. Dutsch, James, and Konstan (2015), and *Roman Comedy* by Gesine Manuwald (2020).

¹² Alfred Ernout, *Plaute*. 1 vols. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, ed. 1932-40; Georg Goetz and Friedrich Schoell, *T. Macci Plauti Comoediae*. Leipzig: Teubner, eds. 1898; W. M. Lindsay, *The Captivi of Plautus*. London: Methuen. ed. 1900; -, *T. Macci Plauti Comoediae*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1903.

¹³ Packman (1999), 246. A possible explanation of this phenomenon is that due to the varied traditions of Plautine manuscripts, editors may have lost confidence in role designations being transmitted faithfully and sought to correct or depart from them in their own lists (Bader 1970).

¹⁴ Ann Raia (1983)'s catalogue of the sixty on-stage women in Plautus' plays includes eleven *puellae*, thirteen *matronae*, nineteen *meretrices*, twelve *ancillae*, and five who fit the category of *anus*.

prefers because of the individuality it affords the female figure.¹⁵ The term *matrona*, however, carries different connotations from the *mulier*. The *matrona* in Roman comedy tends to be the focus of male frustrations with marriage and the female gender in general. She is characterized as a woman who has since shed the appeal of *puella*-hood, having become a hot-tempered, suspicious shrew in search of *imperium* over her husband. Marriage is clearly framed as the moment which changes the *puella*, a woman who exemplifies the virtues praised by Roman men like modesty and subservience, into a *mala uxor* that is taught to act poorly by other *malae uxores*.¹⁶ Whether or not the *mala uxor*'s lessons were viewed as a standard element of the Roman marriage, and if marriage itself was the corrupting factor of a woman's virtues, remains unclear.¹⁷ This negative characterization of the married woman appears strongest when she interacts with a faithless husband.¹⁸ In Plautine plays where the married woman's role is primarily to act as a sister, such as Eunomia in *Aulularia*, as a friend, like Myrrhina in *Casina*, and as daughters, like Panegyris and Pamphila in *Stichus*, these wives are not characterized negatively. In fact, Eunomia is called *optima femina* by her brother,¹⁹ Myrrhina encourages subservience to one's husband in alignment with Roman gender role ideals,²⁰ and the sisters in *Stichus* wish to remain faithful to their absent husbands, though they

¹⁵ Packman (1999), 257.

¹⁶ In the *Casina*, Chalinus, pretending to be a bride, is instructed by other women of the household that when one becomes a *matrona* they must learn to be superior in power to the husband, to let him provide, to rob him of his treasures, and to trick him often (815-824). The women offering this advice are described as "*mala malae male monstra*" [wicked women wickedly teaching wicked things] (826).

¹⁷ See Hersch (2012), for further discussion regarding the reliability of ancient texts regarding marriage, and the effects of marriage on Roman women.

¹⁸ Duckworth (1952), 255.

¹⁹ *Aul.* 135.

²⁰ *Cas.* 204-212.

will obey their father's request if he insists, acting loyally and deferentially to the male guardians in their life.²¹ In each example, the wife in Plautus, when she does not deal with her husband, does not appear to be stereotypically abusive, proud, and angry at all.

The purpose of this project is to show that the *matrona* stock character therefore is not an accurate label to apply to every married female character available in the Plautine corpus. Broad and generalizing, the *matrona* stock type fails to account for the variety of social roles and dynamics available to the married Roman woman in Plautus' comedies and the behaviours they promote. Furthermore, the title of '*matrona*', when used generally to describe wives in Roman comedy, contradicts how the word is understood to characterize women in social history. *Matronae* were free married women who, ideally, ran households reasonably, upheld a good reputation, and were modest and subservient to their husbands.²² In Plautus, women who meet these standards are generally good in every sense, morally, societally, and personally: *matronae bonae*.²³ But in Plautus' comedies, the broad term *matrona* refers to a collection of married women of which the majority are characterized as overly proud, stingy, and combative. I therefore argue that the negative wife figure of Plautus' comedies should not be classified as the stock character *matrona*, but as the *uxor irata*.

²¹ *Stich.* 39-54.

²² Assa (1960), 20.

²³ The term *bonus* is widely used in Latin writing, but when used attributively refers to the qualities, behaviour, and principles of a person which are positively valued and desired by society (*OLD*, s.v. *bonus*: 1-4, 9-17).

The *uxor irata*, just like the *matrona bona*, is a replicable, definable, and stable stock character of Plautine comedy. However, she is a unique figure that contradicts broader characterizations of the *matrona* in Roman society. Contrary to the social role of the *matrona*, who is expected to act primarily as a well-born, subservient wife, mother, and diligent household manager, the comedic *uxor irata* is expected to shirk these ideals. Plautine comedy insists that she inevitably be angered by her husband's ineptitudes so that she is driven to behave in ways that are viewed negatively for a real Roman wife, encouraging her to penny-pinch, castigate her husband, and be pridefully obstinate, all for comedic effect.²⁴ Other characters then define her by these anger-fuelled behaviours and thus make it possible for the audience to identify her as a distinct stock character that is recognizable across a number of works and predictable in the way she acts.

Characterizations of the married woman have been evaluated in scholarship before. Amy Chifci argues that the *matrona* is not a stock character at all, but that the *uxor dotata*, the dowered wife, is the true archetype.²⁵ With money under their control, they are empowered to exhibit shrewish behaviour using their dowry as leverage, whereas undowered women, disenfranchised, exist wholly under the financial power of their husbands and are portrayed more positively. While I agree that the *uxor indotata* is perhaps treated more favourably, they are still characterized on occasion like a *dotata*,

²⁴ Fantham (2015) notes that the wife is largely compelled to anger when her husband acts as a poor husband, father, or civic figure (91-2).

²⁵ Chifci (2002), 12. Elisabeth Schuhmann (1977) agrees, labelling two types of *matronae* in Plautus as the *matrona pudica* and *uxor dotata*. She, however, argues that the wife's identity in either role relies on the judgment of her husband, who decides whether his wife's virtue (*pudicitia*) or her dowry is of greater benefit to him (48).

especially when angry. Wifely anger is not treated favourably by Plautine characters regardless of her financial control. Furthermore, the Plautine corpus includes wives whose dowry status is uncertain, and therefore her financial situation can not contribute to her characterization concretely.²⁶ Packman, in her argument that the female character ought to be treated as separate from her marital status in scholarship, seeks to rectify an issue of conflicting indications of role designations for female characters.²⁷

Similarly, this thesis seeks to clarify contradicting characterizations of the wife in Plautus' comedies. However, I argue that marriage plays a significant part in the characterization of the woman in Plautus' comedies, and that to treat the married woman in Roman comedy independently from her marriage, as simply a *mulier*, is to deprive her of significant narrative effect. The playwright depends on the angry woman to act within her role as wife in scenes where he is exploiting her status for comedic and narrative effect. Furthermore, her marital relationship with her husband permits otherwise improper behaviours and social interactions with a Roman man for a woman, resulting in moments of open defiance, rude confrontation, and meddling in his private affairs. Her marriage furnishes her with a means of influence over an authoritative male figure, an avenue of social agency that is otherwise denied to non-wives of the plays.

²⁶ See Konstan (1983, 44), McCarthy (2009, 70), and Moore (1998, 159) for further exploration of dowry, the wife, and the associated power dynamics.

²⁷ Packman (1999), 248.

Menaechmus' wife from the *Menaechmi*,²⁸ Cleostrata from the *Casina*, and Alcumena from the *Amphitryon* will be used as the primary examples of my argument and will each be treated in a separate chapter. These married women provide strong examples of the *uxor irata* as they engage with main characters of the play, demonstrate complex relationship dynamics with their husbands and other members of their households, and play active roles in shaping the story's development. Additionally, in each play, the wife is recognized and treated by other characters, and the playwright, as angered. This project seeks to evaluate the relationship between the character of the *uxor* and *ira* as essential to the development of a separate stock character category. Furthermore, each of these plays is composed of a different 'stock plot'.²⁹ The predictable narratives of each play do not harm their ability to serve as a medium for exploring characterization, but rather incentivize it. With the play's outcome more or less predictable, its characters are left to make the journey interesting, rather than the destination. The characters thus become compelling in a way that supersedes our investment in the story itself.

The first character I consider in depth is Menaechmus' wife, from the *Menaechmi*. Menaechmus' wife plays a significant role in the play, although she remains un-named,

²⁸ Some scholars use 'Matrona' as a given name for Menaechmus' wife, referring to the *dramatis personae*, which provides no proper name for this character. However, due to the frequency with which the *matrona* stock character will be mentioned in this analysis, to avoid confusion she will be referred to as 'Menaechmus' wife'.

²⁹ The *fabula palliata* is a genre of Roman comedy that is set in Greece with Greek characters. The plots of *palliata* plays are largely based on Greek originals, and their plots often follow predictable formulae. The Greek elements of these plays, however, are often Romanized, especially in Plautus, where Roman customs and manners are integrated far more than in Terence (*OCD*, sv. *palliata*). *Fabulae togatae*, in contrast, were set in Rome or Italy with Roman or Italian characters.

serving as a prime example of the *uxor irata*. Perpetually irritated with her husband, she demonstrates the shrewish, abusive, bold characteristics of the negative stereotype, is perceived and described as such by those around her, and is driven largely by her anger to act and speak. She is immediately and consistently described negatively by her husband, every interaction between them laced with verbal abuse. Unlike the *matrona* figure, she is not treated as though she has a noble character, respects her husband's authority, and runs a proper household. Her husband calls her *mala*, *stulta*, and *indomita*, and she is unable to keep track of valuable household items, evidenced by her husband smuggling precious gifts from their home in order to gift them to Erotium.³⁰ Her negative characterization persists to the very end of the play, the concluding remarks resting on a joke that implies Menaechmus wishes to sell his wife off along with the rest of his property when he moves home to Syracuse.³¹ Her unlikability, both to her husband and audience, helps to justify her harsh treatment, enabling enjoyment of jokes at her expense in place of sympathy. Furthermore, there are prominent displays of the kinds of 'wifely privileges' that marriage affords Menaechmus' wife, in terms of her agency. She is able to express her anger rudely and directly to her husband, control access to their shared home, and make demands of her husband in order that he may return to her good favour. Her declaration that she has barred him from the home until she is pleased is respected as an action well within her authority. Her decision to summon her father to her defense when she believes an argument has grown unreasonable is equally as effective.

³⁰ *Men.* 130.

³¹ *Men.* 1160-1.

Menaechmus and Sosicles' acceptance of her actions speaks to the recognized authority that marriage provides to the wife: she may make such demands, reasonably expect them to be respected, and have them executed by the men in her life without experiencing negative retaliation or consequences herself as a result. Plautus is aware of the form of social immunity marriage provides an angry woman in these particular instances, and takes advantage of it in order to manipulate the narrative. A wife who is cool-tempered and accepting of her husband's faults would have welcomed him inside and forgiven him after his attempts to give away her stolen mantle.³² By ensuring Menaechmus' wife is angered instead, she takes action against him and turns him away from the home. Menaechmus is then forced to wander elsewhere so his identical twin can arrive at the house and continue causing humorous mix-ups. By making Menaechmus' wife the stereotypical *uxor irata*, the plot of *Menaechmi* becomes possible.

The next play I analyse is the *Casina*. Throughout the *Casina*, marriage is heavily emphasized. It is discussed and fought over by many of the main characters and is represented physically in moments like Chalinus' dress-up scene as a bride.³³ In addition to the heavy presence of marriage as a theme, there is a stronger family dynamic present in the *Casina* than in the *Menaechmi*, as Cleostrata acts not just as a wife in this play, but as a mother. She interferes on Euthynicus' behalf as well as on her own, motivated not only by pleasing him, but in preserving her own honour by thwarting her poorly behaved

³² Myrrhina from the *Casina* argues that a virtuous woman does not actually own anything, but treats it as her husband's (*Cas.* 199-203). By this logic, if Menaechmus' wife were virtuous, she would feel no resentment over him taking the mantle and doing with it as she pleases.

³³ *Cas.* 767-770.

husband. The treatment of Cleostrata in this play is not so overtly negative as what we see in the *Menaechmi*, nor is it as positive as Alcumena's in the *Amphitryon*. Cleostrata is presented as an *uxor irata* not due to the sheer unpleasantness of her character, but as a justified reaction to her circumstance. Cleostrata's is treated as an *uxor irata* who is not perceived wholly negatively. As a character, she demonstrates nuance in the way the stock role is understood, as well as how the playwright utilizes the angry wife to reference her realistic counterparts within the fiction of the play. Above all, Cleostrata is an example of how wifely anger can be used to cause not only outright antagonism between husband and wife, but how it is capable of simultaneously destabilizing the household while ultimately bringing about its resolution, relieving the *domus* of its discord.

The third main play of this analysis, the *Amphitryon*, is a self-proclaimed tragicomedy, and is markedly different from the rest of Plautus' corpus.³⁴ Reflecting this play's uniqueness is Alcumena, an equally novel character. A figure who swings between the behaviours of a *matrona bona* and *uxor irata*, Alcumena demonstrates how these two stock types directly contrast one another, her characterization recognizably different between scenes where she is meant to be either a good matron or an angry wife. These moments of contrast in character type demonstrate exactly how the *uxor irata* is meant to be received by other characters and audience differently compared to the *matrona bona*. Unable to be conclusively characterized as one or the other, Alcumena in particular

³⁴ *Amphi.* 1.1.59.

demonstrates the importance of theatrical conventions such as costuming, dialogue, and persona as essential elements for developing complete stock types on the Roman stage.

Combined with an otherwise positive portrayal, Alcumena offers a subtler version of the *uxor irata* that contrasts with Menaechmus' harsh and antipathetic wife and highlights the similarities that Cleostrata shares with them both. Each of these three primary plays of focus feature married women with varying performances and individual characterizations. However, as a whole, these wives demonstrate how their anger changes the way they are received in the story, and at what point their anger places them in the category of *uxor irata* rather than *matrona bona*. Although other wives from Plautus will be mentioned in support of their characterizations, these primary figures will provide a strong overview of the stability of the angry wife role, the ways in which wifely anger changes how married women are perceived and portrayed in Plautine comedy, and the degree to which the *uxor irata* is replicable and recognizable across the comedic genre as her own distinct stock type.

Chapter 1: The Wife from the *Menaechmi*

The plot of the *Menaechmi* follows twin brothers, Menaechmus and Sosicles of Syracuse, separated at birth after Menaechmus is taken on a business trip by his father to Epidamnus and kidnapped. Back in Syracuse, their grandfather changed young Sosicles' name to Menaechmus in honour of his lost brother, who went on to grow up in Epidamnus. Now a man, Sosicles (called Menaechmus) arrives in Epidamnus as part of his search for his lost identical brother. A case of mistaken identity occurs when Erotium the prostitute, Menaechmus' wife, her father, the parasite Peniculus, and the slave Messenio all individually mistake one brother's actions for the other. At the end of the play the brothers face each other and realize they have been confused for the same identity by those around them. They cheerfully reunite and decide to return to Syracuse together, thus resolving the main conflict of the play.

Menaechmus' wife plays a significant role in the story, although she remains nameless. She is first mentioned in the beginning of the play when her husband concludes a vicious argument between them, calling insults to his wife offstage. Following the fight, Menaechmus reveals he has stolen her cloak as a present for the prostitute Erotium. Clued in on his scheme by the hanger-on Peniculus, she finally appears on stage in Act IV, stopping Menaechmus from entering his home until he is able to produce the cloak he has stolen, expecting him to fail. Sosicles, instead, returns with the cloak and bracelet. Menaechmus' wife fights with him for having stolen the items in the first place and then sends a slave to fetch her father. When Sosicles claims never to have stolen anything, the wife's father accuses Sosicles of being mad on her behalf, as he believes him to be

Menaechmus. In her last appearance on stage, Menaechmus' wife is urged by her father to flee home as Sosicles grows incensed, and she takes off frightened.

The audience's first introduction to the character of Menaechmus' wife consists of a list of negative traits spoken by her husband. The first scene following the prologue sees Menaechmus criticizing her as being: *mala, [...] stulta/[...] indomita imposque animi* ("bad, stupid, indomitable, and strong-spirited," *Men.* 110).³⁵ These first moments on stage make it clear that Menaechmus is thematically positioned against his wife. Throughout the play Menaechmus continues to show that he views her as the opposite of an ideal wife, who would presumably be good, smart, restrained, and agreeable, much like the historical stereotype of the Roman *matrona*.³⁶ The audience, whose interest follows Menaechmus as the protagonist, is not meant to contradict his perspective and pity his wife for her shortcomings, but rather resent her for them. The basis of the play's plot and comedy lies in the creation of opportunities for mistaken identity. These opportunities are primarily manufactured through Menaechmus' various exploits to garner the attention of the *meretrix* Erotium, against the wishes of his wife. The audience, if they wish for the plot to progress, can not agree with Menaechmus' wife that her husband's secrecy, adultery, and theft must cease. They also can not feel distressed when Menaechmus is shown lying to her, cheating on her, and stealing her things. Instead, they must support Menaechmus' exploits regardless of their immorality, or else no opportunities for mistaken identity can occur. To ease any reluctance on the audience's

³⁵ The quotations of Plautus come from the Oxford Classical Texts and the translations are my own.

³⁶ See Hallett (1973), 103-4; Hemelrijk (1999), 13.

behalf to accept the bad, though entertaining, actions of Menaechmus, Plautus makes sure to portray Menaechmus' wife unsympathetically. Her harsh characterization ensures that the audience is not resentful about the necessary progression of the story's events when that progression is made at her expense.

Plautus does not have Menaechmus' wife make an appearance on stage until the penultimate or fourth act, where she enters the scene already enraged, complaining loudly about being treated like a fool by her cheating husband, and nearly spoiling Peniculus' carefully crafted revenge plot (*Men.* 559-62). Prior to this unflattering introduction, the audience is only provided with negative commentary on her character from her husband, the cook Cylindrus, and the hanger-on Peniculus. Plautus purposefully intends for this negative characterization of Menaechmus' wife to build over the course of three acts in order to prejudice the audience against her when she finally does appear. Figures who are portrayed positively invite audience members who are more willing to understand their motivations, to view them as complex personalities, to engage emotionally with them, and be invested in the effects of the story's outcome.³⁷ If the audience is sympathetic to Menaechmus' wife, it "disposes us to regard her as inside our network of concern, and, therefore, to assess an injustice done to her as something perpetrated against 'one of our own'".³⁸ If Menaechmus' wife were more defensible in terms of character to a Roman audience, the risk would arise that Plautus' spectators might sympathize with a character that should provoke their rejection. Should Menaechmus' wife be successful in winning

³⁷ See Aertsen (2017).

³⁸ Carroll (2008), 179.

over the audience to her argument, making them agree that her husband ought to stay home, be loyal, and avoid trouble, it would cut short the entertainment the conflict between them promises. So long as Menaechmus' wife remains an unlikable, oppositional force to the main character of the story, the audience does not need to pause their enjoyment to feel sorry for her; the fun may continue guiltlessly.

Thus, Plautus has a vested interest in not just making Menaechmus' wife her husband's antagonist, but in making her consistently unlikable to a Roman audience. Manfred Pfister's theory on the dramatic character outlines the "statically conceived figure" as one that remains constant throughout the whole of the text.³⁹ Unlike dynamic figures, who undergo a process of development over the course of the story, static figures do not change in terms of personality, traits, and overall nature, even if the perception of them may develop or expand following the transmission and accumulation of information through the course of the play. Menaechmus' wife is one such static figure: her appearance, utterances, and behaviour are determined by the paradigm of the *uxor irata* that she represents.⁴⁰ In order to cement her unsympathetic portrayal and solidify her character type, Plautus depicts Menaechmus' wife as one who continually vexes her husband, especially when she treats him coldly. Since she refuses to warm up when he speaks sweetly and attempts to comfort her, once she has learned of his theft of her *palla*

³⁹ Pfister (1988), 177.

⁴⁰ Pfister (1988), 179. The *Menaechmi* is hardly the only Plautine play that rests on figures whose personalities and behaviours are consistent, predictable, and stable, given that New Comedy's plots are built upon stock characters. In the case of Menaechmus' wife, what is most important about her static conception is that the consistent traits she portrays are not aligned with those of *the matrona bona*, but of the *uxor irata*.

and affair with Erotium, Menaechmus grows frustrated with his wife's reluctance to bend to his desires. He remarks that her negative reaction to his empty platitudes (*nugas*) are especially bothersome: *tristis admodum es. Non mi istuc satis placet* ("You're quite upset. That does not please me at all," *Men.* 622). Later on in the play, she refuses to obey not only her husband, but her father as well, challenging her father's authority when she accuses him of defending his son-in-law instead of his daughter on whose behalf he had been summoned: *non equidem mihi te advocatum, pater, adduxi, sed viro./ hinc stas, illim causam dicis* ("I brought you here not as my advocate father, but for my husband. You stand here, but you argue his case from there," *Men.* 798-9).

These un-matronly characteristics of Menaechmus' wife are viewed as incurable, since when Menaechmus decides to return to Syracuse with his brother he shows no desire to bring his wife with him, or hope she will ever change. Instead, his slave Messenio declares to the audience that Menaechmus' wife will be included in the going-away auction and that he does not think she will sell at all, even at a low price.⁴¹ Thoroughly disliked by the primary characters of the story, Menaechmus' wife is established as a contentious force for the audience as well. Plautus takes care to highlight her negative characteristics through constant demonstrations of her inability to meet the behavioural standards of the praiseworthy historical *matrona*, presenting the *uxor irata* stock configuration as something unpleasant and unsympathetic.

⁴¹ *Men.* 1160-1.

Despite failing to meet the criteria of an ideal *matrona*, however, the *Menaechmi*'s married woman continues to be labelled a *matrona* in most scholarship and in the list of *dramatis personae*. Furthermore, she is never called a *matrona* by any other characters, referred to as *uxor* thirty-eight times and *mulier* nine times.⁴² Eighteen of the uses of *uxor* come from Menaechmus, further reinforcing his view of his wife in terms of his legal relation to her, rather than to her behaviour towards him. When referring to herself, Menaechmus' wife uses *mulier* twice, both times lamenting how wretched (*misera*) she is. When she refers to herself as an *uxor*, it is to identify herself as the person from whom Menaechmus stole the mantle. Zola Packman suggests that scholars ought to revert to the earlier tradition of labelling as *mulieres* those female characters who do not fit into the stock types of *puella*, *matrona*, *meretrix*, *ancilla*, or *anus*.⁴³ However, Plautus makes an effort in his plays to communicate to his audience the social status of his married female characters, and the title of *mulier* is too neutral a term to convey a character's status as a married woman, which often is essential to her role within the play. Furthermore, a large number of Plautine stock characters are defined by their behavioural attributes, such as the *servus callidus*, the *senex amans*, and the *miles gloriosus*. While the term *matrona* carries with it extra-dramatic, societal expectations of conduct and attitude, the term

⁴² The word *uxor* is used a total of thirty-nine times in the play. Six of those instances come from Sosicles in the midst of a lie, unaware of who exactly he is referring to. One use of the word arises from Menaechmus' wife's father, who complains about the behaviour of wives in general. The word *mulier* is used a total of twenty-three times, but the majority of those instances consist of Messenio and Sosicles not knowing the identity of the woman they are speaking to, addressing both Erotium and Menaechmus' wife as *mulier*. Both men, alongside Cylindrus the cook, also use the term to refer explicitly to prostitutes on Epidamnus.

⁴³ Commonly translated as the girl, the matron, the prostitute, the servant girl, the old lady, and women. See Packman (1999) for more on the *mulier* as a role designation.

mulier offers no specificity as to the temperament of the character type. It becomes clear when studying the characterization of the many Plautine *matronae* that the treatment of the married woman varies greatly not just between different forms of ancient literature, but between the plays of Plautus themselves. Regarding characters like Menaechmus' wife, the term *matrona* therefore seems inaccurate.

Cicero's characterization of a Roman woman is helpful here. Despite the fact that Clodia Metelli was Roman, free, of high status, married, and had a child, Cicero avoided labelling her as a *matrona* in his speeches. He referred to her instead as *mulier*, presumably because Clodia lacked, in his eyes, the 'matronal respectability' we find emphasized as necessary for the title.⁴⁴ Menaechmus' wife, much like the Clodia of Cicero's invective, seems to lack essential characteristics of matronhood. She is not viewed by the other characters as *obsequens*, *morigera*, or even generally *bona*. By ancient Roman societal standards, she does not seem to fulfil the social requirements beyond being married.⁴⁵ Packman's suggestion that Plautus' wives ought to be referred to as *mulieres* seeks to categorize characters that lack matronal qualities together with those that are *matrona*-like. Following Cicero's example, Packman aims to avoid misrepresenting the character of married female figures by avoiding terminology that is

⁴⁴ See Cicero *Pro Caelio* 48-53. To succeed in indirectly labelling Clodia a *meretrix*, Cicero had to avoid directly labelling her a *matrona*. He therefore outlines how, despite meeting the social requirements to merit the title, Clodia's behaviour is incongruent with the moral standard of a Roman *matrona*, and thus employs *mulier* to describe her, a term which can easily apply to prostitute and matron alike.

⁴⁵ It is not made explicit whether or not Menaechmus and his wife have children. Presumably, however, they would have been mentioned upon Menaechmus' decision to leave Epidamnus. Furthermore, Menaechmus is referred to as an *adulescens* (youth) by Peniculus (*Men.* 100, 135) and Messenio (1066) and is often labelled as such in *dramatis personae*. Despite the fact that he is married, his youth may therefore excuse their childlessness.

associated with specific behaviours. The broadness of the term *mulier* means that contrasting characters, like Menaechmus' wife and the *Stichus* wives, can be grouped together in scholarship without presenting contradicting examples of the term's definition.

However, this approach does not correct the scholarly issue of the generalization of married female characters in Plautus. The *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (1968) offers three meanings for the word *mulier*. In general, a woman; a woman who is married or has had sexual experience; with a genitive or possessive adjective, the woman who cohabits with a man, his wife or mistress (1141). The *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* notes the word is often applied to mean the female class of humans (1571.73), generally with respect to their sex (1572.1), and more specifically to distinguish sexually experienced or married women from virgins (1574.3). Marriage is not essential to construct the meaning of each definition, given that sexual experience may qualify a woman to be a *mulier* in place of marriage, and a *mulier* may be a mistress rather than a wife. Furthermore, words related to the term *mulier*, such as *muliebris*, *muliebriter*, and *mulierosus*, emphasize the female aspect of the definition over any other. Given that *mulier* does not inherently reflect a woman's marital status in its meaning, a term that makes explicit that she is married proves far more useful in communicating vital information about the character, especially when her marriage is central to her identity. *Uxor* is defined in the Oxford Latin Dictionary simply as "a wife", used in the phrase *uxorem ducere* to indicate a woman that has been led to a man's home married (2123). Use of the term *uxor* clarifies a character's marital status, unlike the term *mulier*, which does not specify whether a woman is treated

as married or just sexually experienced. Furthermore, unlike *matrona*, the term *uxor* does not carry explicit expectations regarding the behaviour of the married woman. *Uxores* can behave badly and still be *uxores*, whereas *matronae* who behave badly are not truly *matronae*. *Uxor* is thus the most accurate term available to describe the married women of Plautus' comedies.

The audience implicitly understands that there exist two different types of Plautine *uxores*, and that their functions in each story are inherently different. Plays like the *Stichus* might benefit from respectable, subservient, and loyal *matronae*, since it is their refusal to go back on their matronly values that allow the plot to continue. For the *Menaechmi*, however, there is no need for such a figure. Rather, the plot requires a difficult, oppositional, and angry force: the *uxor irata*. Without the angry wife in the *Menaechmi*, there would be no fight to spur Menaechmus into leaving his home, no spiteful spouse to bar his re-entry, no motivation to find the stolen *palla*, no mix-ups of identity, and no testimony to ensure Menaechmus is carted off as insane in the comedic climax of the play. Although Roman comedy relies on stock characters for much of its cast, the lack of diversity and specificity in the designation of female stock types leads to oversight on the purpose and effect of different female characters in these stories. Slaves who are not cunning, for example, are not called *callidi*. Why do scholars call every married woman *matrona* if she does not embody the matron's stereotypical characteristics? The purpose of the following close reading of the wife in *Menaechmi* is therefore to demonstrate that the *uxor irata* represents a unique stock character type. We

can pursue this goal by identifying the distinctive characteristics that define the figure, paying special attention to anger as a demarcating quality.

Beyond gender, social status, and age,⁴⁶ the stock character of Roman comedy must also demonstrate that she has certain expected habits of behaviour because that is how she can be identified as the embodiment of a re-enacted social role. Shawn O'Bryhim argues that contrary to stereotypes, which function as exaggerated caricatures of an individual's most prominent trait, stock characters draw from figures with well-defined personalities.⁴⁷ Consistency in personality among different portrayals of a stock type is essential for sorting a character into one of these categories. Many old married men appear in Plautus, for example; but, should they oppose their son's choice of love interest, be displeased with their marriages, and lust after younger women, they are not just *senes*, but *senes amantes*. No one would confuse the old married man Euclio from the *Aulularia* with the lecherous Lysidamus from the *Casina*, after all. Euclio's primary concern is guarding his pot of gold. Lysidamus, meanwhile, is determined to steal his son's young love interest to keep as a mistress for himself. When the *senex* is not *amans*, instead concerned with things other than the prerequisite interests of the old lover stereotype, he fails to properly embody the stock character role. Like the *senex amans* and the *senex*, the *uxor irata* and the *matrona* are alike in that they share basic attributes with one another but vary in overall bearing and conduct. Both character types are female, generally upper-class, and of an age that is appropriate for marriage. But just as

⁴⁶ Typical criteria for determining stock characters in Roman comedy (Dutsch 2019: 189).

⁴⁷ O'Bryhim (2020), 123-4.

Euclio and Lysidamus represent drastically different character types, so too do the pleasant married women of the *Stichus* and Menaechmus' irascible wife.

The stock type of the *matrona bona* originated in the historical ideals of the Roman matron, a figure which was well established in the Republican era, but whose characteristics became more strictly defined during the early Imperial age.⁴⁸ Traditional values defined what forms of behaviour were permissible for married Roman women when dealing with men. The rules outlining the behaviour of historical *matronae* prescribed equal doses of faithfulness, submissiveness, and stability.⁴⁹ Moreover, these directives imposed chastity, modesty, and simplicity on those outside the private sphere of the *domus*.⁵⁰ Epigraphical evidence, commonly found in eulogistic contexts, further supports these traits as ideals.⁵¹ A woman who defied this cultural expectation of acquiescence to male authority subverted an acceptable condition of female nature and behaviour in the Roman mind.

In the first act of the *Menaechmi*, when Menaechmus beckons the hanger-on Peniculus to come closer for his own safety, he refers to his home as a lioness' den: *etiam*

⁴⁸ The epitaph of Claudia (CIL I, 1007 = ILS 8403) originates from second century BC Rome, and praises her for loving her husband, bearing children, holding agreeable conversation, having an accommodating demeanour, serving the *domus*, and working wool. The Augustan attitude toward women, having developed from late Republican *mores* such as those found in Claudia's epitaph, reinforced these maternal ideals. Livy's account of the insurrection against the *Lex Oppia* portray even the tribune arguing most harshly against the laws as a firm believer of womenkind's natural desire for passivity and dependence on men (see Livy 34.1-38.3, 34.7.12-13).

⁴⁹ Hallett (1973), 103-4.

⁵⁰ Hemelrijk (1999), 13.

⁵¹ Aside from the famous *Laudatio Turiae* (CIL VI.1527), the *laudatio Murdiae* (CIL VI.10230 = ILS 8394), an *inscriptio funebris* dedicated by the son of a woman named Murdia in the early Imperial period, praises Murdia for having become more pleasing as a married woman, deserving of praise from all due to her excellence in modesty, honesty, chastity, obedience, wool-working, diligence, trustworthiness, and virtue.

nunc concede audacter ab leonine cavo (“Now bravely come over even more from the lioness’ den,” *Men.* 159). One can imagine that in terms of staging, the actor playing Menaechmus would have to give the impression that he ventured far, although in perceptible reality he had to remain on stage, only a few steps away from the house. He emphasizes that Peniculus must retreat even more than he already has, and that Menaechmus himself is located *huc* (over here).⁵² Menaechmus’ swift exit from his home, his exaggerated retreat, his scathing conclusion to their argument, and his comparison of his wife to a lioness, all suggest to the audience that Menaechmus’ wife is not as placid as the ideal *matrona* is expected to be. The lioness metaphor in particular is meant as an insult, participating in the poetic tradition of using the lioness as a symbol of ferociousness, portraying his wife as angry, savage, bold, and heartless.⁵³ Although most references occur in genres outside of Roman Republican comedy, they demonstrate a cultural understanding that the symbol of the lioness often carries negative connotations. In likening his wife to a powerful animal, Menaechmus thus aims to make his fear of her seem less ridiculous. Although by calling his wife a lioness Menaechmus affirms the force of her anger, there is a simultaneous delegitimization of the threat her rage poses when Peniculus brands Menaechmus’ fear as ridiculous. The hanger-on states that Menaechmus would make a good *agitator*, a charioteer in the games of the circus, due to his theatrical display of paranoia (*Men.* 160). Peniculus’ joke implies that Menaechmus’

⁵² Gratwick (1993), 154.

⁵³ See Lucilius 7.320, Ovid *Meta.* 4.96-7, 4.102, Seneca *Aga.* 740, and Catullus 64.154 for examples of the lioness metaphor used as a means of negative description for female figures.

wife is ultimately harmless and undeserving of Menaechmus' wariness, not living up to the daunting status the metaphor assigns her in reality.

Although at first it may appear as though the behaviour of Menaechmus' wife is juxtaposed with the *matrona bona*'s, she nevertheless shares some attributes with the model of the historical Roman matron. The lioness, although stereotyped as fierce and dangerous, is also frequently mentioned in relation to her den, associated with suckling, cubs, the home, children, and nursing, all of which are typically feminine elements.⁵⁴ Menaechmus does not refer to the house as his own dwelling but rather implies to Peniculus that it is his wife's domain (*leonine cavo*) and therefore viciously guarded. In doing so, Menaechmus recognizes his wife's association with the domestic abode, marking it as her fiercely defended territory. Although the historical Roman *matrona* would not be expected to attack a trespassing husband with rage and savagery (as Menaechmus implies, this is much more the *uxor irata*'s purview), her association with the household was absolute.⁵⁵ Thus the lioness metaphor communicates not just the ferocity of her anger but also her gender and status-appropriate association with the home. Menaechmus' wife's angry temperament, although dreadful for her husband, does not exclude her from possessing otherwise appropriately matronal characteristics.

Furthermore, Menaechmus' wife appropriately demonstrates distress at her mantle going missing, telling her husband: *et quid tristis [sim] et quid hic mi dixerit faxo*

⁵⁴ See Ovid, *Meta.* 13.547-8; Vergil, *Georg.* 3.245; Silius Italicus, *Pun.* 10.124-7; Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 8.45-9.

⁵⁵ Treggiari (1991), 420.

scias./palla mi est domo surrupta (“I’ll let you know why I’m so upset and what this man has told me. My *palla* has been stolen from home,” *Men.* 644-5). Although some of her upset may be due to the mantle being a lost personal possession, she seems to care especially that the *palla* was taken from the home, emphasizing within the same dialogue the place from which it was stolen again: *palla, inquam, periit domo* (“A *palla*, I say, has disappeared from home,” *Men.* 648). Since the management of the household was the duty of a *matrona*, the burden of responsibility for valuable items of the home is not lost on Menaechmus’ wife. The fact that property has gone missing points toward another shortcoming of Menaechmus’ wife. Presumably, a good *matrona* would keep good stock of all valuable items in the home, charged with the guarding of domestic resources.⁵⁶ Given the *palla*’s exceptionally high value, which Menaechmus claims was four *minas* at purchase (*Men.* 205), it is significant that she has lost track of it (despite the theft being an inside job).

Aside from losing the *palla*, however, Menaechmus’ wife does not appear to have any other difficulties managing the home. When his wife bemoans that she is wretched (“*ne ego ecaster mulier misera,*” *Men.* 614),⁵⁷ Menaechmus asks if it is because the servants have committed an offense or talked back to her (*Men.* 260). Menaechmus’ wife denies that this is an issue, insisting that she can manage the household servants well enough to avoid this kind of problem. She also manages to maintain upstanding

⁵⁶ Pearce (1974), 16-33.

⁵⁷ Often the word *mulier* is paired with another negative noun or adjective in Plautus to add to its pejorative sense regardless of the status of the woman it refers to, hence why Menaechmus’ wife does not lament being an *uxor misera*. See *Amph.* 782; *Bacch.* 41; *Merc.* 685; *Pers.* 365-368; *Rud.* 1150-1; *Most.* 176.

behaviour regarding the handling of gendered garments. This is in stark contrast to Menaechmus, who in his first appearance on stage, is quick to show Peniculus how he has stolen the female garment of the mantle by wearing it (*Men.* 146). Menaechmus' wife takes offense especially that it was her husband who lent out her *palla*, seeing as she never lends out his tunic (*pallium*). She argues that it is not proper for a man to give out a woman's clothing, nor vice versa: *equidem ecaster tuam nec chlamydem do foras nec pallium/quoiquam utendum. mulierem aequom est uestimentum muliebre/dare foras, uirum uirile* ("I certainly don't loan out your cloak or tunic to anyone. It's proper for a woman to loan out feminine garments and men masculine ones," *Men.* 658-60). She is the one acting respectfully in this regard, handling appropriate items for a woman, while her husband deviates from societal norms both in handling and wearing the feminine garment. And although Menaechmus' wife may not obey her husband as a *matrona* is expected to do, by the last act of the play she does willingly obey her father's *auctoritas* when Sosicles (whom she believes to be her husband Menaechmus) is acting mad.⁵⁸

Nonetheless, these moments of matronly behaviour hardly define Menaechmus' wife. Our first extensive description of her is given by Menaechmus himself.⁵⁹ Far from glowing, his description of her highlights her failure to achieve matronal ideals. He tells her: *ni mala, ni stulta sies, ni indomita imposque animi, quod viro esse odio videas, tute tibi odio habeas* ("If only you were not bad, nor a fool, nor wild, nor unable to control

⁵⁸ *Men.* 834, 844, 850-2. The father orders his daughter to come to his side. Having done so, she then asks him for further instructions. When he orders her to flee the scene, she agrees immediately and willingly.

⁵⁹ The prologue makes only a quick mention of Menaechmus' kidnapper giving her as a dowered wife to his adopted son (*Men.* 61).

your mind, and that which you see your husband hates, you would also hate yourself” (*Men.* 110-111a). Menaechmus also claims she is spoiled, and threatens to divorce her if this behaviour continues (*Men.* 112-7). Furthermore, he complains about her nosiness and insistence on influencing his actions outside the house: *nam quotiens foras ire volo,/me retines, revocas, rogitas,/quo ego eam, quam rem agam, quid negoti geram,/quid petam, quid feram, quid foris egerim* (“For whenever I wish to go out you hold me back, call me back, ask questions, asking me where I’m going, what I’m doing, what business I’m conducting, what I’m seeking, what I’m doing, what I’ve done outside,” *Men.* 114-116), likening her to a customs officer (*Men.* 117).

Panegyris from *Stichus*, however, states that it is indeed right for a wife to worry over her husband’s business: *quarum viri hinc apsunt,/quorumque nos negotiis apsentum, ita ut aequom est,/sollicitae noctes et dies, soror, sumus semper* (“Our husbands are absent, and thus it is appropriate that we are always worried, day and night, about their business in their absence,” *Stichus* 4-6). Her sister Pamphila agrees, saying that it is their obligation to do so, and that it does not violate the expectations of their duty: *nostrum officium nos facere aequom est neque id magis facimus quam nos monet pietas* (“It is right that we do our duty, and we aren’t doing it more than loyalty warns us to,” *Stich.* 7-8). Menaechmus clearly believes his wife’s concern with his business is a negative trait. He claims that if she were wise, she would cease observing him (*Men.* 122-122a). He protests how often she questions him, his exceptionally long list of wifely inquiries emphasizing how she is especially concerned with what he does once he leaves their house (*Men.* 114). Through his mockery, Menaechmus reveals that he views his wife’s

concern over his whereabouts and activities outside of the household as excessive and over-stepping. He affirms that her interest should remain within the household when he reminds her that she is provided with everything she needs: slave girls, food, wool, gold, clothes, and purple (*Men.* 120-121a). Her paranoia surrounding his activities outside the house is justified, because Menaechmus admits that he stole her things to give them to the prostitute Erotium in return for dinner, drink, and a good time. Nevertheless, she is framed by her husband as being overly concerned with his business, exceeding the degree of involvement appropriate for a dutiful wife, and overstepping her domestic bounds (*Men.* 124, 152, 173-5).

While Menaechmus' wife's intrusion into her husband's extra-domestic affairs can be dismissed as anxiety over his fidelity, she takes on an active role in defying matronal expectations, largely through her anger. Once he has left the threshold of his home, Menaechmus describes this argument with his wife as though it were a battle, claiming that through mutual strife he has driven her away from the doors of their home: *euax! iurgio hercle tandem uxorem abegi ab ianua* ("Hurrah! With a fight, I've driven my wife away from the doors [of our home] at last," *Men.* 127). He also celebrates taking away spoils from the enemy: *auorti praedam ab hostibus nostrum salute socium* ("I've carried off plunder from my enemies with our allies safe," *Men.* 134). This description frames his wife as an active combatant, not just some passive object of his anger. Her alluded participation in the fight informs the audience that she was likely as vicious as Menaechmus, especially since he brags about the wit it took to trick her, and asks for gifts to congratulate him for his brave fighting: *dona quid cessant mihi/conferre omnes*

congratulantes quia pugnavi fortiter? [...] Dari facete verba custodi catae (“Why don’t they all bring me gifts, congratulating me because I fought bravely? [...] A clever guard must be dealt clever words [in turn],” *Men.* 128-9, 131).

This scenario echoes Menaechmus’ description of his wife as a lioness. By describing her as a worthy adversary, Menaechmus is able to frame his arguments with his wife as something heroic and praiseworthy, rather than events which should call into question his authority within the household. When Peniculus calls out a greeting to Menaechmus after the argument, Menaechmus startles, thinking his wife has come upon him holding the stolen mantle (*Men.* 136). Menaechmus himself admits he fears someone telling her the truth about the theft: *hunc metuebam ne meae/uxori renuntiaret de palla et de prandio* (“I was afraid he might confess to my wife about the *palla* and the meal,” *Men.* 419-20). He is also accused of checking over his shoulder for her, and boasts to Erotium that stealing the *palla* from his wife was more dangerous than Hercules stealing the girdle from Hippolyta: *nimio ego hanc periculo/surripui hodie. meo quidem animo ab Hippolyta succingulum/ Hercules haud aequo magno umquam apstulit periculo* (“I stole this today in great danger. In my opinion, Hercules wasn’t under so much danger when he stole the under-girdle of Hippolyta,” *Men.* 199-201). Through these similes, Menaechmus is able to disguise his fear of his wife’s anger, painting her as a worthy adversary when enraged, and thus undermining her anger’s ability to disturb the hierarchy of their household.

Other characters are also aware of the destabilizing force of Menaechmus’ wife’s *ira*. When Peniculus believes Menaechmus has denied him a chance at a meal, he decides

the wrath of his wife will be a suitable punishment. He promises Menaechmus that all the insults he has passed onto Peniculus will be turned back onto him once he tells his wife the truth about who stole her mantle (*Men.* 518-21). When Menaechmus' wife summons her father to her defense, she complains about her husband drinking at a prostitute's house and requests her father's validation to prohibit such behaviour (*Men.* 790-792). Her father identifies her demand as shameless ("*impudentia*," *Men.* 794), saying that if requests like these are commonplace for her, then he would not be surprised if she also demanded her husband to stop accepting any dinner invitations, hosting guests, to be her slave, to sit among the *ancillae*, and spin and card the wool: *una opera prohibere ad cenam ne promittat postules/neu quemquam accipiat alienum apud se. seruirin tibi/postulas uiros? dare una opera pensum postules/inter ancillas sedere iubeas, lanam carere* (*Men.* 794-7). Her father thus confirms that his daughter, when empowered by her anger, seeks to control aspects of Menaechmus' life which are meant to exist far beyond her jurisdiction within the hierarchy of her household.

This habit is further demonstrated through instances where Menaechmus' wife successfully uses her anger as a restraining force regarding her husband's public behaviour. Cylindrus comments on how funny Menaechmus can be when his wife isn't around, implying her ire prevents him from making jokes in her presence: *quam uis ridiculus est, ubi uxor non adest* ("What a funny man he is, when his wife isn't around," *Men.* 318). When Menaechmus and his wife argue over accusations regarding the theft of

the mantle, she repeatedly accuses him of making jests (*agere nugax*, *Men.* 621-3, 625),⁶⁰ her irritation growing the longer he feigns innocence after her demands to stop. Frustrated with her husband's continued denial of the crime, she then sets conditions upon his entry into their shared home, informing him: *nam domum numquam introibis nisi feres pallam simul* ("You'll never enter this house unless you bring the mantle with you," *Men.* 662). Menaechmus accepts that he will not be welcomed home until he returns the *palla*, lamenting that if his wife is set on disliking him, he can only endure her vexation: *si tibi displiceo, patiundum* ("If I'm displeasing to you, I must suffer it," *Men.* 670). It can be assumed that in a home where the wife is properly *obsequens* she does not give orders to her husband, but rather obeys any he may give her. In *Menaechmi*, the power dynamic is flipped when the wife is angered, Menaechmus accepting inappropriate conditions from his wife to avoid unpleasant direct conflict with her.

Menaechmus' wife's wrathful treatment of her husband and authoritative demands to have the *palla* returned transgress social expectations for the *matrona*. However, these actions are only undertaken in order to reflect the disrespect done to her status as a married woman on to her husband's status as the authority figure in their household. Interestingly, both *Peniculus* and *Menaechmus* expect the wife to be angry once she discovers her husband has taken her *palla*, but Menaechmus has also stolen gold jewelry from his wife and given it to Erotium (*Men.* 530-1). Besides mentioning it in addition to the missing mantle, however, Menaechmus' wife does not seem nearly as upset over this

⁶⁰ *Nugax*, from *nugor* ("to play the fool"), is generally used to mean something is nonsensical and frivolous (OLD s.v. *nugax*). Menaechmus' wife's use of the term implies that she views his attempts at softening her anger as designs to amuse rather than prove anything substantial.

loss, and neither Peniculus nor Menaechmus mention fearing her discovery of this theft (*Men.* 739-41). The wife lists only the return of the *palla* as a condition for granting Menaechmus re-entry into their marital home. In fact, her father seems to care more that her gold has also been stolen (*Men.* 803-6). The theft of the wife's *palla*, unlike the theft of her bracelet, is the theft of a symbol of her matronal identity. The *palla* is a fictionally Greek garment that functions as a stand-in for the real Roman *stola*, a traditional dress that acted as one of the *matrona*'s most recognizable symbols. Menaechmus' gifting of the *palla* to a prostitute is hence an insult to his wife's social status. It is understandable, then, that she is enraged by this act in particular.

In contrast, the good matrons of *Stichus* never once impose restraints on their husbands' mobility or behaviour, implicitly or explicitly, as retribution for slights against their status. Panegyris in *Stichus* correctly assumes that her sister is upset that as wives they are honouring their duties whilst their husbands do not uphold theirs (*Stich.* 34-5). They even suspect that their partners have acted immorally while away (*Stich.* 43-4). When their husbands do return home, they bring girls back with them (*Stich.* 418). However, neither sister protests directly to their husbands, despite the credibility of their husbands' fidelity being threatened by the presence of these female attendants, and despite their husbands' failure to respect their roles as wives and keep them informed during their three years away (*Stich.* 34-5). Menaechmus' wife, on the other hand, feels empowered by her husband's transgressions to express anger and use it to manipulate, and make demands of, him. The unnatural behaviour of Menaechmus' wife is consistent with her character, and consistent with the humour of the play. If the *Stichus* sisters were

to exclude their husbands from their homes, argue with them, and refuse their affections when they finally returned, it would seem out of character. It would also lend little to the comedy since, by the time the brothers have returned in the *Stichus*, Plautus has shifted his attention away from the sisters. He is less focused on their attempts to outlast their father's demands and more intent on exploring the exploits of the *parasitus*, *servus callidus*, and *senex*. Angry wives at this point in the *Stichus* would not serve to further the humour, but halt it. Any demands the wives might make of their husbands would inhibit the brothers' plans for a feast, which acts as the premise for each of the remaining storylines requiring comic resolution.

Menaechmus' wife, on the other hand, is a successful source of comedy when she reverses the power dynamic between herself and her husband. Her demands are not jarringly out of character, nor do they inhibit the story of the play, but rather encourage a consistent characterization and a clear outline for the story's sequence of events. The stability in the unpleasantness of her characterization is emphasized by her own father, a character whom the audience expects to be sympathetic to her plight but is indifferent at best. When Menaechmus' wife calls her father to her defense, as Sosicles (whom she has mistaken as Menaechmus) feigns insanity, her father believes at first that his daughter must be the offender rather than her husband. He thus accuses her of not warding off disagreements between her and her husband: *Ecce autem litigium. Quotiens tandem edixi tibi/ut caveres, neuter ad me iretis cum querimonia?* ("But look! A dispute. Now, how many times did I tell you to be on guard against either of you coming to me with complaints?" *Men.* 784-5). He complains that he has had to repeatedly instruct her to

avoid certain habits to keep peace between her and Menaechmus: *quotiens monstravi tibi viro ut morem geras, / quid ille faciat ne id opserues, quo eat, quid rerum gerat* (“How many times have I taught you to obey your husband, not to watch over what he’s doing, where he’s going, nor what he’s up to!” *Men.* 788-9), and claims that, even if Menaechmus was going off to have an affair with a prostitute, it was likely his daughter’s fault for being too officious (*Men.* 791). Just like Menaechmus, the father believes that, because she is well-supplied with luxuries like jewelry, clothes, slave girls, and food, his daughter should have a more discreet attitude and be more tolerant of her husband’s vices. By contrast, the wives of *Stichus* are content only with their husbands, claiming they maintain the same mindset towards their husbands in poverty as in wealth, demonstrating the lack of influence material goods are meant to have on a *matrona bona* (*Stich.* 134). The only thing that will sway Menaechmus’ wife’s father to her side is if Menaechmus admits he has been stealing her gold and mantles from her chest at home in order to give gifts to prostitutes (*Men.* 803-4). It is only when Menaechmus is accused of a crime that is viewed as offensive to anyone, rather than something that is offensive only towards a wife, that the father’s attitude changes. While he acknowledges that there are limits as to what wives should put up with, the wife’s father still describes many more circumstances in which his daughter would be at fault for any discord in the marriage, rather than her husband (*Men.* 769-71).

It is clear that the father of Menaechmus’ wife also expects *matronae* to be *obsequentes* and *morigerae*, the *concordia*-makers of the marriage, and believes his daughter often does not meet these requirements. His hesitation to take her side implies

that her refusal to wholly obey Menaechmus' wishes is persistent and viewed negatively by the authority figures in her life. Menaechmus' wife is thus depicted as often becoming *irata*, lashing out at her husband verbally, establishing ultimatums, and walking off without submitting to her husband's attempts at appeasing her. This is contrary to the *Stichus* sisters, who, when their status is slighted by their husbands, still act as *matronae bonae*, going along with the wishes of their husbands as *morigerae* and *obsequentes* wives. Even their father, who wished for them to re-marry during their husbands' absence, can not fault them for the virtue of submission to their husbands' desires. This points to a distinct difference in characterization between these figures. The consistent contrast in behaviour between the *Stichus* sisters and Menaechmus' wife demonstrates a regularity in personality, not just in traits, between female married figures in Plautus' plays.⁶¹ Such a regularity of personality displays a fundamental difference in character stock type rather than just in stereotype, as defined by O'Bryhim.⁶²

The characters who negatively comment on the character of Menaechmus' wife, including Menaechmus, Peniculus, Cylindrus, and her father, all seem to imply that her un-matronly behaviour is habitual, if not natural. She is portrayed as being most un-matronly in response to certain aspects of her husband's behaviour. Menaechmus anticipates his wife will be upset with him when she discovers he has stolen from her, as does Peniculus when he plans to use her poor reaction to punish Menaechmus. Her father

⁶¹ Traits, in this context, are understood as a distinguishing, though singular, qualities or attributes of a person which one might use to describe them. The term personality, however, emphasizes enduring aspects of behaviour, thought, and feeling which combine in a holistic fashion to influence how a figure interacts with the world.

⁶² O'Bryhim (2020).

believes she is quick to make demands of her husband when she suspects he is having affairs with *meretrices*, and Cylindrus knows that she does not approve of her husband's sense of humour, as evidenced by her irritation at the jests he makes when she confronts him in act four. In each of these situations, Menaechmus' wife is reacting to her husband's words and deeds, rather than initiating any negative actions herself. While comedy at the expense of Menaechmus is often generated through his transgression of social norms such as wearing female garments, stealing, and perpetuating extra-marital affairs, Plautus does not use the wife in a similar fashion. Instead, much of the humour comes from the wife's reactions to her husband's shirking of moral expectations. Her exaggerated expressions of vexation and unrealistic ultimatums not only provide amusement due to their abnormality but ensure the figure of the married woman still conforms to more serious societal gender norms such as modesty and sexual loyalty.

Beyond their comedic purpose, the reactions of Menaechmus' wife also speak to her values as a character. Menaechmus' wife is portrayed as reacting especially negatively to actions which reflect poorly on her status as a married woman. The Roman matron was largely dependent on her husband for the definition of her virtues. As Anise Strong highlights, there was no standardized system for the commemoration of an unmarried adult woman's virtues. This absence is especially evident when compared to the nearly formulaic commendations found on the epitaphs of wives and mothers.⁶³ Ideal

⁶³ See Strong (2016: 19): "The seven most common adjectives used to describe women in Roman epigraphy are *dulcissima* (sweetest), *pia* (dutiful), *bene merens* (well deserving), *sua* (his), *carissima* (dearest), *optima* (best), and *sanctissima* (holiest). [These terms] emphasize the woman's relationship to her family members and her gods rather than her individual identity [demonstrating] her virtue by using her skills and her economic assets solely in subordinate support of her husband or children."

Roman wives in poetry, historical records, and public artworks were lauded especially for their loyalty to their husbands, as exemplified by the ideal of the *univira*. The Roman woman who remained faithfully married to one man her entire life was granted this valuable term of praise alongside its symbols, such as the chaste *stola* and exclusive ceremonial functions.⁶⁴ With her virtue tied so closely to her relationship to her husband, relying heavily on her loyalty being known publicly, it is understandable that the Roman wife might wish to prevent her spouse from doing anything that may reflect poorly on his reputation, and by association, on hers. Poor moral behaviour, such as excessive adultery, stealing, and lying, especially when carried out publicly, could imply similarly poor conduct within a household managed by a cheat, thief, and perjurer. Menaechmus' youth might excuse some extra-marital affairs with a neighbouring prostitute. Cicero himself argued that young men are not wrong for seeking affairs with appropriate partners but could easily become scandal-worthy should such liaisons grow infamous among the public.⁶⁵ It is reasonable, then, for Menaechmus' wife to seek to prevent such a scandal through what few means existed for her to exploit. Her husband's poor reputation could easily threaten the worth of her loyalty to him, her fidelity being one of the few avenues a married adult woman in Rome had to achieve some level of public compliment.

Far from unique, Menaechmus' wife is not the only married woman in Plautus' works to behave this way. Dorippa, the wife of Lysimachus in *Mercator*, is away for most of the play, but when she returns, she finds her husband has taken a prostitute into their

⁶⁴ Lightman & Zeisel (1977).

⁶⁵ Cic. *Cael.* 42.

house and complained about her to others while she was away. Dorippa grows angry with Lysimachus when she finds out, considering his behaviour a betrayal since she had trusted him with herself, her possessions, and her ten-talent dowry (*Merc.* 703-5). Dorippa believes that Lysimachus' infidelity brings her *contumelias* (*Merc.* 704), especially painful given her dependence upon him regarding her person and possessions, and the loyalty she had shown to him throughout their marriage. Upset, Dorippa reacts similarly to Menaechmus' wife when angered and questions her husband regarding his error, seeking a confession from him. Lysimachus complains that he is being pursued as though he were a criminal (*Merc.* 725). This protest frames his wife as an interrogating authority figure, which parallels Menaechmus' comparison of his wife to a customs officer (*Men.* 117). In both situations, it is anger that drives the wife to probe her husband, incensed in part by his initial betrayal, and again by his insistence on lying to her. The wife's desire for a profession of guilt paired with the husband's inability to skillfully deceive his wife results in a situation where the power dynamics of their marriage are comically reversed, even if it only lasts for the duration of the interrogation scene.

Lysimachus, like Menaechmus, also speaks poorly of his wife to others. When the cook arrives to interrupt Dorippa's interrogation scene, he misidentifies her as the *meretrix* Lysimachus has been entertaining and reveals that her husband gossips with neighbours about how much he hates her: *nempe uxor ruri est tua, quam dudum dixeras/te odisse [aeque] atque anguis*. ("Your wife is surely in the countryside, whom a while ago you had said you hated as much as snakes," *Merc.* 760-1). Menaechmus also

tells others he hates his wife, especially when compared to the eager-to-please *meretrix* Erotium, and likens his wife to a fearsome animal (*Men.* 159). Both men also fear their wives discovering their misdeeds, wary of enraged reactions from the women.

Lysimachus, much like Menaechmus, startles when he believes he is caught red-handed (*Merc.* 705). When exposing Lysimachus' hatred of his wife, the cook teases Lysimachus about how he is afraid of his wife, much like Peniculus does to Menaechmus (*Merc.* 768).

Lysimachus, unlike Menaechmus, does not deny that he is afraid and answers in the affirmative: *sapio, nam mihi unica est* ("I'm wise [to be afraid of her], for she's my one and only [wife]," *Merc.* 768). Both men also refer to their wives as enemies, Lysimachus complaining that Dorippa is the most severe of his foes once she has exited the stage into their home: *conciuit hostis domi: uxor acerruma est* ("He has provoked enemies at home: my wife is the harshest," *Merc.* 796). Menaechmus celebrates stealing treasure from his enemies when he makes away from his home and wife with the *palla* in hand: *auorti praedam ab hostibus* ("I've stolen away loot from my enemies," *Men.* 134). This places both men in opposition with their wives, framing interactions with their spouses as hostile affairs akin to war. Furthermore, both Menaechmus' wife and Dorippa view their husbands' actions as reflecting upon the quality of their marriage. Both women complain that, following their discovery of their husbands' misdeeds, they have been married badly.⁶⁶ In order to defend themselves, they both summon their fathers. Dorippa sends her

⁶⁶ Dorippa states: *nec pol ego patiar sic me nuptam tam male/measque in aedis sic scorta obductarier* ("Indeed, I won't endure being married so badly and having prostitutes brought into my home before me," *Merc.* 785-6). Menaechmus' wife tells Peniculus that she believes she has also been badly married: *viro me malo male nuptam* ("I'm badly married to a bad husband," *Men.* 602).

slave Syra to fetch her father on her behalf (*Merc.* 787-8), and Menaechmus' wife orders her servant Deceo to bring her father to chastise her husband and possibly arrange a divorce (*Men.* 734-8).

The actions of the husbands, as well as the reactions of the wives, display similar patterns in both plays as examined above. These patterns in characterization as well as plot sequencing demonstrate stability not only in the circumstances surrounding the angry wife, but in the expression of this defining characteristic of her stock type. When angered, these wives react predictably and similarly, overcome with matching emotions that drive them to make analogous choices. The regularity of their *irata* characterization is essential for the plots of both plays. The ideal Roman *matrona* does not act upon her anger, but rather restrains it, just as Pamphila urges her sister Panegyris in *Stichus* to silence her complaints and remember her duty to be subservient to her husband (*Stich.* 37-42). The *uxor irata*, however, indulges in her anger and uses it to exploit both her husband and the story's plot. Without being an *uxor*, a female character would have no justification for being angry with a particular man's infidelity or disrespect towards his marriage, as his actions would have no bearing on her status. Similarly, without her *ira*, the wife has no means by which to manipulate her husband and force him to conform to social and moral standards in their marriage. Without her wifely status, and without her anger, Menaechmus' wife has no reason to exclude him from their home, and Plautus loses the opportunity to exploit the hijinks that come from a pair of identical twins wandering in Epidamnus with the same face and name. Furthermore, any jokes made at the expense of the wife may come across as harsh without a poor character to justify her mistreatment.

The husband's relationship to his wife provides the avenue by which they may interact so informally. Arguments represent a setting in which she may display her negative traits freely. Making Menaechmus' wife unsympathetic, lionlike, and irascible is thus essential in order to get away with any jokes made at her expense.

Historical evidence shows that, although a wife could not charge her husband with adultery under Roman law, the fact that the matter was addressed in legal texts reflects not only the desire for such a procedure, but a moral expectation of marital fidelity for Roman husbands from their wives.⁶⁷ The majority of the ideal Roman wife's virtues were tied to her husband, and much of her life leading up to her wedding was spent in preparation for her marriage.⁶⁸ It is thus unsurprising that Menaechmus' wife and Dorippa, stereotypes who re-enact the social role of the Roman *matrona*, place a significant measure of their value in the behaviour of their husbands. As Elaine Fantham notes, the wife in Roman comedy can be compelled to anger when her husband acts as a poor father or civic figure,⁶⁹ but is most frequently, and easily, incensed when he is faithless.⁷⁰ As Lysimachus acknowledges to his own wife in the *Mercator*, the origin of the wife's anger typically lies not with her own behavioural shortcomings, but with her husband's: *tu irata es mihi* ("You are angry with me," *Merc.* 800). Since she had little worth outside of her marriage, the Roman wife's relation to her husband was of the utmost importance. Thus, when the husband of an *uxor irata* fails to respect his wife's

⁶⁷ McGinn (1998), 144.

⁶⁸ Hersch (2006), 301.

⁶⁹ Fantham (2015), 91-2.

⁷⁰ Duckworth (1952), 255.

socially determined role, in addition to failing to fulfil his own, she is motivated to transgress the bounds of acceptable matronal behaviour in order to motivate him to meet her, and Roman society's, social expectations. She does so through her anger, an emotional force which lends righteous authority to any insulting, defying, and antagonizing of her husband. The *uxor irata*'s role as a married woman prohibits her from seeking retribution for her husband's transgressions through the same means as his.

Although Menaechmus pursues an extramarital affair to escape the unlikable qualities of his wife, if his spouse adopted this same coping mechanism, her actions would be received with far less social and legal tolerance. However, anger, a short-term and curable expression of dissatisfaction towards her husband, is a boundary that the wife can acceptably transgress when she is justifiably upset by her spouse's actions. Unlike infidelity, expressing anger does not impact the wife's duties towards her marriage. It does not make her disloyal and it does not take her outside of the home. Although she often withdraws much-desired affection from her husband, wifely pleasantness wasn't necessary for a marriage to be considered legitimate and functioning, nor would it impact her social status as a matron. In fact, a wife's transgression of the expected pleasantness of a *matrona*, her *obsequens* and *morigera* nature, seems to be forgivable, so long as it is for the sake of influencing a husband to behave properly himself, and so long as it is remediable and brief. Furthermore, a woman's anger in a comedic setting is hardly to be taken seriously. Any strife she stirs up is easily resolved with a marriage, reunion, party,

or even a meta-theatrical request that the play not go on any longer than it already has.⁷¹

These resolutions do not contradict the transgressive dimension of the wife character in Plautus, but emphasize it using humour. By the end of the play, the importance of the angry wife's rightful outrage is diminished, her stature ultimately reduced back to its original, yielding role prior to her empowerment by her anger.

⁷¹ The ending of Plautus' *Casina* concludes with the wife Cleostrata forgiving her husband, *propter* [...] *hanc ex longa longiorem ne faciamus fabulam* ("since we ought not make this long play longer," *Cas.* 1006).

Chapter 2: Cleostrata from the *Casina*

Believed to be Plautus' latest production, *Casina* is one of the playwright's most farcical works, adapted from the comedy *Klerumenoi* ("The Lot-Casters") by Diphilus, a contemporary of Menander. The prologue that comes down through the manuscripts appears to have been written for a revival, referring to the *Casina* as an old work and referencing a time when it was 'first' staged (*Cas.* 7-17). That audiences were still fond enough of Plautine plays to wish for a revival years later, as the *prologus* claims, speaks to an element of continued appreciation and desire for the kinds of stories Plautus was capable of composing.

The *Casina* is named after a character who never appears on stage, a slave girl who was abandoned as a baby sixteen years before the events of the play begin. The slave Chalinus rescues baby Casina and brings her to his mistress Cleostrata, who agrees to raise the child *quasi si esset ex se nata, non multo secus* ("not much differently than if she were her own daughter," *Cas.* 46). However, Cleostrata's husband, the *senex* Lysidamus, as well as her son Euthynicus, begin to show sexual interest in teenaged Casina. In order to secure access to Casina for himself, Lysidamus plots behind his wife and son's backs, intending to marry Casina off to his slave Olympio so that he may enjoy easy access to the girl. The son wishes for his slave, Chalinus, to marry Casina for this same reason. In order to remove him from the competition, Lysidamus sends his son out to the countryside. Cleostrata, however, has learned about her husband's plan, and supports her son so she may prevent her husband's inappropriate love affair. Husband and wife become entangled in schemes to outwit one another. Cleostrata, aided by her neighbour

Myrrhina and slave girl Pardalisca, ultimately wins the battle when she orchestrates Lysidamus' public humiliation. Ultimately, Cleostrata forgives her grovelling husband for the sake of not drawing out what has already been a lengthy play, her anger resolved for metatheatrical reasons. Pardalisca concludes the play with a brief monologue revealing Casina was the citizen daughter of the neighbours all along and that she will be married to Euthynicus. Men in the audience who applaud are promised prostitutes with whom they may have affairs behind their wives back. Silent spectators are promised stinky goats as sexual partners instead.

By the time *Casina* was produced, some time between 186-184 BCE, Plautus' audience was likely familiar with some, if not many, of his other works.⁷² Characters such as the *senex amans*, *servus callidus*, *matrona*, and *adulescens* were common figures, developed across a number of plays. Although the *uxor irata* is not traditionally considered a stock character, I analyse Cleostrata as an atypical example of this familiar comedic figure. This analysis of Cleostrata will demonstrate how, from the very beginning of the *Casina*, Plautus clearly intends to do away with many of the conventional plot elements associated with otherwise stereotypical figures.⁷³ From the

⁷² A joke about Bacchants ("*nunc Bacchae nullae ludunt*," *Cas.* 980) is generally accepted as a reference to the 186 BCE *Senatus consultum de Bacchinalibus*, which severely limited Bacchanalia in Rome (De Melo 2011: 7). This date, alongside Plautus' death in 184 BCE, makes it highly likely *Casina* was the last, if not among the very latest, Plautine plays produced. W. B. Sedgwick (1949) argues that although *Casina* most likely belongs to the 'Late Group' of Plautine plays, its precise dating remains inconclusive, as *Mostellaria* and *Truculentus* may also qualify for Plautus' latest production date (376-383). Given the large quantity of song in the play and its highly farcical, original ending, I agree with most modern scholars that the *Casina* was likely Plautus' last production.

⁷³ Papaioannou and Demetriou (2020) present Plautus as a *doctus poeta*, arguing that his comedy is more than just an isolated, performative creation, but developmental literature that is full of "adroit exploitation of various contemporary intellectual trends, cultural vogues, ideological issues and other themes of cultural significance," including those relating to the figure of the married woman in ancient Roman society (2).

prologue, we immediately learn that the *senex amans* Lysidamus and his *adulescens* son Euthynicus are indeed in contest over a girl, but their conflict will not play out directly between them on stage, for Plautus admits to having sent away the son to a distant countryside and prohibited his return by collapsing an essential bridge (*Cas.* 64-66). Additionally, the slave girl the two men compete over is no *meretrix*, but is modelled after the *virgo*, raised by Lysidamus' wife as though she were her daughter.⁷⁴ This girl, too, never appears on stage. Two candidates for the role of *servus callidus* are presented early in the play, although neither Chalinus nor Olympio prove to be particularly clever. The main story does not involve the slaves directing plots against their masters, but rather masters who conspire against each other through their slaves. This contest by proxy is not even held between father and son, but rather between husband and wife.

To what degree Plautus altered the original Greek comedies upon which his own were based remains highly debated. Nowadays it is broadly accepted that Plautus frequently innovated elements of plot, language, theme, and character.⁷⁵ Regarding the originality of the *Casina*, Shawn O'Bryhim proposes that Plautus did not just adapt one Greek play, but spliced portions of two different ones, making major alterations as well as original additions, resulting in a "coherent, tightly constructed plot [whose] end result bears little resemblance to the prologue's description of the *Casina*'s Greek original,

⁷⁴ For the duration of the play the characters all believe Casina to be a slave because she was a foundling raised as a slave, but the conclusion reveals the truth of her citizen birth. The *virgo* stock character typically possesses the following qualifications, all which Casina does: that she is young and unmarried, chaste and pious, and citizen-born and eligible for marriage. On this see Watson (1983: 120).

⁷⁵ See Nervegna (2020); Christenson (2020); Petrides (2013).

Diphilus' *Kleroumenoi*.”⁷⁶ Although the *Casina*'s opening speech hints at the perfect premise for another *Aulularia* or *Mercator*, Plautus goes on to present a new kind of story without discarding familiar figures of the genre. In this chapter, I elaborate on prevailing patterns of the *uxor irata* stock type, including a deeper exploration of how Plautus tethers the exaggerated character to her realistic counterpart, the *uxor irata*'s motivations behind controlling her husband with anger, and her husband's role in contributing to the angry wife's destabilization of the household. Furthermore, an analysis of Cleostrata's role as internal playwright will reveal how Plautus' empowerment of the angry wife contributes to the achievement of resolution at the end of the play.

Upon her appearance, it becomes clear that the character of Cleostrata has been constructed on the model of the *uxor irata* rather than the *matrona bona*. Much like Menaechmus' wife, Cleostrata appears on stage having already learned of her husband's intent to act inappropriately and is clearly angered as a result.⁷⁷ Cleostrata's first few lines of dialogue show her refusing to prepare her husband's lunch despite his request one be made, immediately depicting her as disobedient (*Cas.* 144-6). Associations of food with sex are plentiful throughout the *Casina*.⁷⁸ Cleostrata's closing of the pantry implies she is not only cutting off his access to a meal, but to her love as well. The idea that a wife's

⁷⁶ O'Bryhim (1989), 81.

⁷⁷ Although the wife in the *Menaechmi* doesn't feature on stage until far later in the play, Menaechmus is introduced at the beginning as though mid-argument with his wife. The audience's first impression of the wife is through him, when he criticizes her for her impertinence (*Men.* 110-1), a trait Cleostrata immediately demonstrates in her introduction.

⁷⁸ Lysidamus waxes poetic about how love is a well-liked spice, essential for making well-seasoned or sweet meals (*Cas.* 221-2) and compares kissing Olympio to licking honey (*Cas.* 458). Olympio claims lovesick men do not hunger for food (*Cas.* 795) but love (*Cas.* 802). Pardalisca asks Olympio if the thing he grasped while trying to sleep with the fake *Casina*, implied to be Chalinus' penis, was a radish or cucumber (*Cas.* 911).

sexual relationship with her husband is connected to her love for him is one that persists in Greek and Roman thought and features especially in Plutarch's *Amatorius*, where it is emphasized that a wife's affection, loyalty, and honour for her husband spring from sexual relations which celebrate the virtue of her marriage and chastity toward her spouse.⁷⁹ By metaphorically cutting off Lysidamus' access to a source of marital harmony, Cleostrata demonstrates an oppositional, and therefore un-*obsequens*, attitude toward her husband that mirrors behaviour typical of other angry wives.⁸⁰

It is not lost on the figures surrounding these wives that they are dealing with *uxores iratae* rather than *matronae bonae*. Plautine characters prove they are aware of the angry wife's tendency to be disruptive rather than *morigera*, commenting on the force of the wife's anger and the fear she inspires in her husband, some even fearing her themselves.⁸¹ In the *Casina*, the neighbour Alcesimus suspects Cleostrata would not hesitate to argue with him over his involvement in Lysidamus' plan if she discovered he was involved (*Cas.* 555-67). When Lysidamus reveals to Olympio how he intends to arrange Casina's wedding so he has an opportunity to bed the young girl, the eavesdropping Chalinus is confident that Cleostrata will cause Olympio and Lysidamus trouble, and that it is in fact her obligation to grow angry and interfere with her husband's plans: *manifesto teneo in noxia inimicos meos. / sed si nunc facere uolt era officium*

⁷⁹ Plutarch, *Amatorius*, 756e-769a-e.

⁸⁰ Depriving husbands of material goods as well as emotional benefits is a common tactic of the angry wife. For example, Menaechmus' wife cuts off his access to their shared home (*Men.* 661-2), Artemona often vexes her husband by acting uncivil and troublesome (*Asin.* 62), and Dorippa threatens to have her father initiate a divorce on her behalf, which would not only end the marriage, but deprive her husband of access to her dowry (*Merc.* 784-8).

⁸¹ *Merc.* 77, 1003; *Cas.* 325-341; *Men.* 317; *Asin.* 18-22.

suom, / nostra omnis lis est (“I have caught my enemies plainly guilty in their plot, but now if my mistress is resolved to do her duty, the battle is all ours,” *Cas.* 507-9).⁸²

Cleostrata’s anger, however, is also experienced by characters other than her husband. Olympio has a brief clash with an offstage Cleostrata. Despite his status as a slave, he dismisses her threats to his freedom and refuses to obey her orders, enraging her (*Cas.* 310-316). The habitual nature of Cleostrata’s anger is emphasized when Olympio afterward complains about her attitude to Lysidamus, reminding Lysidamus of how he is regularly caught in arguments with his wife and should therefore relate to his misery (*Cas.* 317-8). Both men, when caught in quarrels with Cleostrata, are eager to get away from her. Olympio concludes his argument in the midst of fleeing it, delivering his last few lines by shouting them from the threshold, Cleostrata safely contained within the house (*Cas.* 310-316). By keeping Cleostrata indoors for this quarrel, the playwright has momentarily contained a character who will soon cross other boundaries. Lysidamus’ instinct to avoid the *uxor irata* is similar to Olympio and Menaechmus’, as he is hesitant to approach Cleostrata at all when he suspects she has overheard his plans to have Casina for himself (*Cas.* 574-5). However, Lysidamus feels he must approach once she has spotted him, planning to address her delicately to mitigate her anger (*Cas.* 227-8).

When flight is no longer an option, Lysidamus decides flattery is the next solution: *tristem astare aspicio. blande haec mi mala res appellanda est* (“I see her

⁸² The Latin word *lis* translates more literally as ‘lawsuit’ or ‘quarrel’ (*OLD* s.v. *lis*). Wolfgang De Melo (2011) in the updated Loeb edition translates the phrase as “the case is all ours,” (65). I have translated *lis* here as ‘battle’ to remain consistent in the English with the enemy metaphor Olympio presents at the start of the sentence.

standing here, unhappy. I'll need to address this unfortunate affair with charm," *Cas.* 228). He pairs his sweet talk with physical touch, which Cleostrata rejects, ordering him to go away (*Cas.* 229a-231). Lysidamus thus turns to lying. He does this on several occasions, aiming to avoid a negative reaction from his wife by concealing the truth of his intended actions, ones which he knows will anger her.⁸³ Lying, however, is rarely successful for Lysidamus. Cleostrata often already knows the truth (*Cas.* 236-243), knows the lie is impossible (*Cas.* 979-981), or suspects foul play when he fumbles his delivery and inadvertently confesses (*Cas.* 364-370). Lies frustrate Cleostrata beyond what has initially angered her, causing her to pursue the truth with rapid lines of questioning (*Cas.* 245-6), highlighting the flaws of his lies and ridiculing them at his expense (*Cas.* 368-370), and calling his bluff, inviting him to double down on his lies at the risk of further humiliation (*Cas.* 997-8). These details reveal how Plautus reminds the audience of the generic conventions and expectations that he subverts in order to make Cleostrata a more interesting character, inside and outside the mold at the same time, and to make clear how the *ira* of the *uxor irata* is inescapable.

Several other husbands of angry wives follow this pattern, with similarly unsuccessful results. When Demaenetus from the *Asinaria* is cornered by his wife at the *meretrix* Philaenium's house, he lies about how he has described his wife's breath as foul and insists that he likened it to myrrh (*As.* 928-9). In the *Mercator*, Dorippa catches sight of her husband Lysimachus with Pasicompsa and believes the girl to be her husband's

⁸³ *Cas.* 235-241, 267-8, 979-81.

affair partner (*Merc.* 705-710). Lysimachus, although Pasicompsa was bought for his friend Demipho, still lies about how he acquired the girl, her purpose, and the truth of her identity (*Merc.* 730-740). Before Menaechmus can enter Erotium's house, his wife and Peniculus stop him (*Men.* 603). She interrogates him about his affair and theft, to which he reacts by trying to stroke her arm and lie about the stolen *palla* (*Men.* 605-625). Lying, charming, and caressing as strategies for soothing wifely anger are the opposite of successful, and ultimately serve to make the problem worse. All these attempts, however, must fail if the *uxor* in question is an *uxor irata* who must become angry,

For many husbands of *uxores iratae*, physical separation from their spouses seems to be the only effective means of delaying and avoiding their wives' anger. Much like Menaechmus, Lysidamus associates safety with the containment of his wife indoors.⁸⁴ It is in this setting, the wife at home and her spouse outside, that we find Plautine husbands on their worst behaviour. Out of sight and earshot, these men plan sexual escapades, indulge in drink, and badmouth their spouses, all activities that their wives accuse them of participating in secretly but that the husbands deny doing.⁸⁵ Although physical separation may offer the husbands temporary relief from their wives' tempers, it certainly does not succeed in avoiding the wife's anger, earning them further trouble later. In plays with an *uxor irata* character, there is often another figure, either allied with the wife or simply standing to gain by working against the husband, who remains on stage when she retreats. This figure acts either as an interlocutor to whom the husband divulges his

⁸⁴ *Men.* 127-137, 158-161; *Cas.* 835-836.

⁸⁵ *Cas.* 275-8; *As.* 889-891; *Men.* 189; *Merc.* 544-549

secrets, or as an eavesdropper eager to report what they have overheard to the wife.⁸⁶ This is primarily how the angry wife learns of her husband's transgressions and becomes angry.

One possible theory for why the wife is often relegated to the indoors during eavesdropping scenes, rather than functioning as the eavesdropper herself, has to do with the number of actors typically involved in staging a play. Well into Menander's time, Greek plays were typically produced using only three actors who would double roles and part-split as needed.⁸⁷ Scholarly opinion is divided over whether Roman dramatists also staged plays with the least number of actors required,⁸⁸ maintained troupes of approximately five or six actors who divided roles among themselves,⁸⁹ or if a single actor was assigned for each character in the *dramatis personae*.⁹⁰ Assuming there was some degree of role doubling, scenes which could have featured the wife eavesdropping but instead use another character could have been written to ease the dramaturgical difficulties of working with a small troupe. However, as C. W. Marshall argues, the assumption that Roman playwrights retained the Greek 'rule of three' presents a false analogy, especially given Plautus' readiness to alter original elements of the adapted

⁸⁶ For example: Peniculus in the *Menaechmi*, Chalinus in the *Casina*, and the *parasitus* from the *Asinaria*. Occasionally, this figure is an unwitting ally, as when the cook from the *Mercator* accidentally reports that Lysimachus was seen around town with a mistress, not realizing the woman standing beside Lysimachus was, in fact, his wife, and not said mistress (*Merc.* 753-7).

⁸⁷ Marshall (2006), 95. 'Actors' refers to those who were assigned speaking roles. The chorus was granted separately to dramatists and served a distinctly different role from that of a principal actor.

⁸⁸ See Kurrelmeyer (1932).

⁸⁹ See Duckworth (1952).

⁹⁰ See Schanz and Hosius (1927).

Greek plays.⁹¹ This theory is therefore unlikely, especially when applied to the *Casina*, whose integral lot-drawing scene requires all four main characters, Lysidamus, Cleostrata, Olympio, and Chalinus, to interact with each other frequently.

The wife's recurrent retreat into the home, a stock feature of the character, may therefore be explained in relation to gender stereotypes. Although Roman wives were not so secluded as Greek wives may have been, the home was still regarded, for several reasons, the ideal domain of the woman.⁹² Livy argued that keeping women occupied within the confines of the home prevented misconduct, warding off the severe transgression of adultery.⁹³ More practically, typical division of labour between husband and wife resulted in "the frequent insistence on the wife's role as housewife and custodian and on the propriety of her keeping within doors as far as possible."⁹⁴ A combination of both moral and practical factors affirmed that for the honourable *matrona*, a primarily domestic lifestyle was valued over one that was exceedingly public. In contrast, public life was far more available and respectable for the husband. In Plautus, we see how husbands are invited to have business in the forum (*Cas.* 526), the harbour (*Merc.* 326), or the market (*As.* 108), and are even called to perform civic duties, like appearing in court (*Men.* 585-9). While Livy promotes keeping women busy with domestic tasks to prevent adultery, no such preventative measures are recommended for

⁹¹ Marshall (2006), 98-104. Marshall concedes that even if there were limits on troupe sizes, they were more likely to be financially motivated than anything, and still would not necessarily result in troupes so small that every role would need to be doubled or split.

⁹² See Lacey (1984) for Classical Greek views that influenced the common Mediterranean idea of the home as the woman's place. See Hemelrijk (2020: 15-67) for a catalogue of ancient sources which reflect Roman ideals of the woman and her domestic associations.

⁹³ Livy 1.57-9. We can see this demonstrated through the story of Lucretia.

⁹⁴ Treggiari (1991), 203.

men, who frequent a variety of spaces where they may carry out their affairs while their wives are sequestered, occupied, and unaware.⁹⁵

A Roman audience would not find it odd that the wife primarily spends her time in the marital home. For the wives in Plautus' comedies, an association with the *domus* is almost always made explicit, emphasized through moments where she is seen managing household servants (*Cas.* 144-6), safekeeping household objects (*Men.* 660-2), interrogating *ancillae* who may be guilty of theft (*As.* 888-9), and honouring altars to the gods to ask for health and well-being for the household (*Merc.* 678-680). These reminders connect the angry wife to an all-important aspect of being a married woman: the *domus*. From within the boundary of her *domus*, itself both a literal and a generic boundary, Cleostrata undermines the larger generic boundaries of her character and manipulates the plot of both the play and play-within-a-play. Since the *uxor irata* often defies other ideal traits of the *matrona*, primarily through being disobedient, Plautus makes sure not to remove her so completely from the social norms that govern her married identity. A retreat into the home is proper for the married woman, as it is her appropriate domain. Remaining in public spaces, where she has no duties to carry out nor matters to oversee, is less acceptable. Hence the need for an eavesdropper. Through this figure, the wife is able to learn of events that have transpired on stage without needing to spend the entire play outside of the home, neglecting to tend to what was primarily viewed as her rightful place. Ultimately, the *Casina* is a comedy, and its married women do not necessarily need

⁹⁵ The only *uxor irata* who has ventured away from her home is Dorippa, but only because she was sent by her husband to their country estate prior to the start of the play (*Merc.* 667-9). This location would also result in some degree of isolation and nescience regarding her husband's activities.

to reflect real *matronae* insofar as to be recognizable. In comedy there is latitude for exaggeration, distortion, and intentional misrepresentation of reality. Nevertheless, when themes of reality appear also in the play, it is worth examining how exactly elements of reality and fiction intersect so that we may understand how one might inform the other on a creative level.

Plautus surely also had dramaturgical reasons for sending the wife inside while the husband remained outdoors. It is generally accepted that the temporary wooden stages upon which Roman comedies were performed during the Republic, which Plautus calls the *proscenium* or *scaena* (*Poen.* 17, 20), stood before a characters' house. The front wall of the actors' house would typically serve as the backdrop of the scene, housing three doorways used as entry and exit points for the actors, as well as two side entrances on the wings of the house.⁹⁶ Although the wife may be visually absent from the *proscenium*, the audience is aware that she is no more than a temporary doorway away from the action, and therefore only a few steps from joining the scene herself. The longer Lysidamus remains on stage boldly plotting ways to deceive his wife, stood before those flimsy stage doors, the greater the tension must have built as the audience waited for

⁹⁶ Beare (2025), 176-7. Any set dressings, decorative or functional, beyond these architectural elements during Plautus' time are nearly impossible to identify with any certainty. While it is tempting to take references to the stage's appearance within the plays at face value, Anne Groton (2020) highlights how comments on the sounds and sights of the set might actually be sarcastic, characters praising elements which may have been absent, or at least of a lesser quality, than the script claims (54). Marshall details the importance of blocking entrances and exits in a play. While the audience's attention is drawn to the stage doors or wings, simultaneous transitions often require entering characters to avoid crossing paths with those exiting. Furthermore, the timing between when characters enter and exit must be well-timed, lest a joke regarding haste or delay fall flat (Marshall 2006: 176, 181-3). MacCary and Willcock (1976) emphasize that the "minimal scenery and no special effects [means] the plays depended entirely upon [...] a great deal of [...] stage business to hold an audience," for which the doors of the actors' house were often responsible (23).

Cleostrata to burst forth having learned everything from Chalinus' spying.⁹⁷ Additionally, the image of an out-of-place eavesdropper attempting to avoid detection without props to hide behind is farcical and can add levity to scenes which are often heavy with exposition.⁹⁸ The eavesdropper also presents an opportunity for a dramatic reveal of the truth to a hot-tempered character. As a result, the playwright now has motivation to include a scene full of emotional outbursts, entertaining jokes, and promises of future hijinks, keeping the audience engaged with promises of drama and revenge. The eavesdropper-in-place-of-wife mechanism provides an occasion for the playwright to not only expand the play's comedy, but to tether his female stock character to realistic ideals while she demonstrates exaggerated behaviour on stage. Cleostrata is a *matrona* just enough to be recognized but also exaggerated.

Through an eavesdropping scene, Plautus is also able to prolong the wife's discovery of the truth of her husband's behaviour. Assuming the play's conclusion includes some form of direct confrontation between husband and wife, Plautus is motivated to delay this meeting if there is still entertainment to be wrung from the suspense of the situation. Moreover, when the confrontation between spouses finally occurs, its scale must feel justified with the level of tension that has built in the meantime. As early as line 154, Cleostrata has vowed to have revenge on Lysidamus for

⁹⁷ Scene blockings that encourage spectators to focus on one door might delightfully trick the audience when actors enter from another instead (Marshall 2006: 164-5). This strategy not only results in the audience feeling uncertain as to when a character might enter a scene, but also from where, contributing to their anticipation.

⁹⁸ For example, when Chalinus decides to cling to the wall and imitate a scorpion so Olympio and Lysidamus do not spot him lingering (*Cas.* 443-4).

opposing her and her son. The audience has known of Lysidamus' plans since the *prologus*' speech. If Cleostrata were to conclude the play with mere insults against her husband, as she does when she and Lysidamus first meet on stage (*Cas.* 239-78), it would feel anti-climactic. On the other hand, a public humiliation on the same scale as the *Casinus* plot being used the first time she confronts her husband would come across far too strongly. With the audience being made privy to very little evidence that Lysidamus deserved such harsh treatment, the stunt would frame Cleostrata as nearly villainous. In this instance, Cleostrata would have reached so far beyond the bounds of her role as a Roman woman that not even comedy's powerful suspension of disbelief could smooth it over. As a result, the scale of Cleostrata's grand and public punishment is only justifiable after Lysidamus has spent nearly four entire acts consistently lying, hiding, and acting inappropriately. Cleostrata dominates much of the plot and is never the butt of derision. The audience is expected to be on her side. She makes the audience laugh at her husband, and therefore she and the audience laugh together, but only to a point: she herself is a character the audience is supposed to take only partially seriously. She is, after all, a character in a comedy. It is essential for the *uxor irata* that the audience has spent much of the play watching her husband willfully insist on acting against her interests. Once the husband has demonstrated his consistent disregard for her concerns, sufficient evidence against him has been mounted and the suspense of their confrontation crescendoes. Only then is the melodramatic confrontation between husband and wife comedically cathartic rather than uncomfortable.

Part of the emotional relief that comes from the revenge scene of a play is caused by “a purpose being satisfied whose satisfaction would otherwise not have taken place.”⁹⁹ Comedy allows for circumstances which permit the audience to participate in a satisfying moment of wifely vengeance against a cheating husband. As a scenario that is highly unlikely to have ever been permitted in reality, watching a play like the *Casina* might have been the only opportunity the average Roman had to indulge in the emotions such a scenario evokes. By exploring Saturnalian themes such as the wife prevailing over husband, the *Casina* “follows a sort of ritual pattern in which sexual tension within the family is temporarily resolved. [...] We have experienced a pattern of action which makes us recognize certain elements in our own lives for what they are. Having laughed at them we are free, for a while, from their influence.”¹⁰⁰

The audience has thus been given permission from the playwright to laugh at the husband’s misdeeds since they have been labelled as distasteful. Now, the angry wife must demonstrate how her motivations for acting insubordinately are not only justifiable, but persuasive. Menaechmus’ wife tells her husband directly the reason why she is upset: *et quid tristis [sim] et quid hic mi dixerit faxo scias. / palla mi est domo surrupta* (“I’ll have you know what is making me upset and what this man here has said to me. / My mantle has been stolen from home,” *Men.* 644-5). Cleostrata also criticizes Lysidamus to his face for forgetting his duty, being drunk and dishevelled, and failing to help their only son (*Cas.* 245-264), reproaching him harshly for his poor character for a man of his old

⁹⁹ Freud (1960), 143-5.

¹⁰⁰ MacCary & Willcock (1976), 38.

age: *te sene omnium se<num homi>nem neminem esse ignauiozem* (“There isn’t a more worthless old man among all old men than you,” (*Cas.* 244).¹⁰¹ In another scene, she confesses to Myrrhina that she is unhappy because Lysidamus holds her in contempt, prevents her from exercising her authority over Casina, and is in love with the young girl (*Cas.* 189-195a).¹⁰²

Although Cleostrata and other wives, including Menaechmus’ wife and the *Asinaria*’s Artemona, have also either overheard or been informed that their husbands openly express resentment towards them to others,¹⁰³ good wives, as Pamphila outlines in the *Stichus*, are ones who can walk through city streets without anyone gossiping about them (*Stich.* 113-4). Their husbands publicly badmouthing them has the potential to damage the wives’ reputations and cause citizens to whisper as they pass. Upon uncovering their husbands’ public complaints, the wives express their own disappointment in their marital matches, bemoaning that they were badly married, made miserable as women due to the character of the men to whom they were given (*Cas.* 174-5; *Men.* 614; *As.* 856). Having clearly communicated what actions taken by their

¹⁰¹ Cicero emphasizes modesty as optimal in many things, including in appearance (*Cic. De Off.* 1.128-130). Lysdamus’ poorly groomed state would be as insulting if he were overly groomed, hence Cleostrata’s complaining when he smells of perfume (*Cas.* 240).

¹⁰² Just as Cleostrata and Menaechmus’ wife narrate what their husbands have done to outrage them, when Artemona enters in the *Asinaria*, she expresses how she was led to believe her husband loved her, was sober, a good man, and moderate (*As.* 851-7).¹⁰² When the *parasitus* reveals to her that Demaenetus is actually of the opposite character, hates his wife, and has even corrupted their son alongside him, Artemona grows upset (*As.* 858-875). It is not just her husband’s poor moral character that upsets her, but how she has been deceived, disappointed by her own naïveté: *at scelestas ego praeter alios meum virum frugi rata* (“But I am a fool! I thought my husband was more honest than other men,” *As.* 856). Having outlined that she finds Demaenetus’ lies as hurtful as his vices, each subsequent fib would have only added fuel to Artemona’s fire.

¹⁰³ *Cas.* 185-6, 189; *Men.* 189; *As.* 926-8.

husbands have upset them, the *uxores iratae* have identified for both spouse and audience the issues they wish to see resolved. When husbands attempt to quell their wives' tempers through cajoling, physical touch, and deception rather than through correcting their own behaviour, they fail to remove the true source of the angry wife's ire, instead adding to it and fuelling her defense as to why she is justified in having her revenge.

With *matronae bonae*, we do not see the same pattern of anger appearing when they are disappointed by a husband's failure to meet their expectations. Panegyris from the *Stichus* tells her sister Pamphila that she is upset because their husbands are not honouring their duty while away though the sisters have been upholding theirs at home, nor have they been informing their wives of their activities (*Stich.* 31-35). These concerns are similar to those Cleostrata expresses when interrogating Lysidamus about his activities outside of the home (*Cas.* 245-6). Pamphila tells her sister to be silent and not to let her hear such a criticism again, much like how Myrrhina advises Cleostrata not to complain and to let her husband do as he wishes without opposition (*Stich.* 36-7; *Cas.* 195a-207). Panegyris is quick to agree and conform to this belief after being scolded, and insists that, unlike the *uxores iratae*, she does not regret her marriage (*Stich.* 48-54). In addition to agreeing that wives should tolerate whatever their husbands decide to do, Panegyris tells Pamphila that they should obey their father's commands as well: *pati / nos oportet quod ille faciat, quoniam potestas plus potest* ("It is proper that we endure what he orders, the man who has more authority," *Stich.* 68-69). In fitting matronal fashion, the sisters of the *Stichus* do not react to their husbands' and father's actions with anger even

if their choices upset them. Instead, they act with resolute deference to the male authority figures in their life.¹⁰⁴

When faced with demands from male figures in their family that they do not personally desire to obey, the *matrona bona* and *uxor irata* react in markedly different ways. While submitting to the desires of a male authority figure provides for the *matrona bona* an opportunity to subordinate her own desires and demonstrate her commitment to supporting her husband or father's interests, the *uxor irata* often protests and pushes back against those desires, promoting her own.¹⁰⁵ Gordon Williams, in glossing *obsequium* as a form of wifely dutifulness, presents the virtue as being more a manner of behaviour rather than a mindset.¹⁰⁶ Susan Treggiari references early epitaphs which apply the adjective to both husband and wife, arguing that the term, although often used in tandem with other virtues describing wifely obedience, in actuality refers to a vague term of approval and co-operation rather than inferiority to the authority of another.¹⁰⁷ Theoretically, anyone could be *obsequens* given that they, too, were motivated to suppress aspects of their personality which opposed the desires of another. Similarly, the origin of the term

¹⁰⁴ Eunomia, another *matrona bona* from the *Aulularia*, demonstrates this same pattern of submissiveness when dealing with her brother. When Eunomia expresses to Megadorus that she wishes for him to be married for the sake of his well-being and legacy, Megadorus harshly refuses (*Aul.* 149-157). When Eunomia offers to secure him a bride with a large dowry, Megadorus declares he is rich enough to not have to tolerate annoying habits of a wife for money (*Aul.* 164-9). Eunomia relents without any resentment that he has not obeyed her request, instead offering alternatives that might please him (*Aul.* 151-170). When Megadorus tells her that he wishes to marry the neighbour's daughter despite her poverty, Eunomia respects his command that she not lecture him about his choice and offers her support (*Aul.* 172-6).

¹⁰⁵ According to Pamphila, wise women perform their duty regardless of whether their husbands are disloyal or treat them poorly (*Stich.* 39-46). Cleostrata, however, protests that such an approach only works against the wife's own interests (*Cas.* 208-9).

¹⁰⁶ Williams (1958), 24-5.

¹⁰⁷ Treggiari (1991), 239.

morigerus suggests that the *morigera* wife is one who makes an active choice to oblige the will of her husband through the voluntary suppression of her individual character.¹⁰⁸ If *obsequentia* and *morigeratio*, then, are not mentalities, but rather singular moments where a person elects to support another person's preferences over their own, wives who choose not to act as *obsequens* or *morigera* present a fundamental difference in character from those that do.¹⁰⁹

Whenever the *uxor irata* refuses to indulge a male relative's desires, she fails to display the traits that the authority figures in her life and society wish for her to embody. When the *matrona bona* represses the negative feelings that arise from supporting a male figure's wishes that do not align with her own, she does so in order to appease a societal pressure to embody maternal ideals.¹¹⁰ Although acting *obsequens* and *morigera* appear as choices for the wives of Plautus in certain scenarios, in reality the pressure for married women to capitulate to their husbands' desires was ever-present and well-supported across all levels of society. As a result, a level of coercion often came into play given the *potestas a paterfamilias* held over his household.¹¹¹ Resisting her husband could become

¹⁰⁸ "The verb will originally have meant something like 'to regulate one's own individual behaviour (being the expression of one's character) in the interest of another'," Williams (1958: 29). See also: *OLD* s.v. *gero* (8), 762; *OLD* s.v. *morigerus*, 1134.

¹⁰⁹ This concept is supported in the *Stichus* when Antipho asks his daughters how one might easily identify a woman who has a good character and Panegyris replies: *quod male faciundi est potestas, quae ne id faciat temperat* ("[a good woman is one] who has the opportunity to act badly and manages not to do it," *Stich.* 117).

¹¹⁰ Strong (2016) observes that "the *femina bona* demonstrates her virtue by using her skills and her economic assets solely in subordinate support of her husband or children" (19). Simon Swain (2013) provides an analysis of Bryson Arabus' *Oikonomikos Logos*, a text that reflects on estate management for the Roman elite in the first century AD, where submissiveness of the wife to the will of her male relatives is a prevailing theme (283-363).

¹¹¹ For an exploration of the power the *ius vitae necisque* the *paterfamilias* held over his household, see Thompson (2006: 3-27).

intensely unpleasant for the Roman wife, if not dangerous. Iamblichus' message promoting that the wife only really won when her husband defeated her may ring true for more than just philosophical reasons.¹¹²

It is perhaps for this reason that, although *matronae bonae* might still privately disagree with an authority figure's conduct, they do not express intense feelings of disappointment, resentment, or frustration to him without layering it in charm. When Panegyris from the *Stichus* argues against her father's desire to take his daughters home so they can re-marry richer men, she calmly reasons with him as to why they ought to preserve their first marriages. Her arguments are typically phrased as suggestions, rather than demands: *at enim nos quarum res agitur aliter auctores sumus* ("but indeed we are the ones who are affected [by this decision], and we propose otherwise," *Stich.* 129). Furthermore, she frames her opinions as though they were originally her father's so she may appear as though she is agreeing with him, rather than contradicting him: *nam aut olim, nisi tibi placebant, non datas oportuit / aut nunc non aequom est abduci, pater, illisce apsentibus* ("for either we should not have been given [to our husbands] if they were not acceptable to you back then, or it is not right for you to take us away now, father, with [our spouses] absent," *Stich.* 130-1). By demonstrating such idealistic behaviour, the *matrona bona* as a stock character helps to make the *uxor irata* a more complex and intriguing figure. Good matrons help show how the characters of the *uxores iratae* are based on greater exaggeration, female figures who, though they never violate

¹¹² Iamblichus, *De vita pythagorica*, 11.54-5 (found in Guthrie 1987).

the values necessary to uphold their status as upper-class married women, nevertheless act and feel in subversive ways.

Compared to Panegyris, Cleostrata holds no reservations about escalating the tone of a conversation (*Cas.* 229-230a), claiming her opinions as her own (*Cas.* 260-6), and being harsh with her criticism of her husband's logic (*Cas.* 267-278). Furthermore, Cleostrata does not just communicate her anger through her words. It is implied through the dialogue of other characters that her anger carries a physical, visual element. When Olympio recounts his fight with Cleostrata to Lysidamus, he declares that she was surely angry given how she looked: *nunc in fermento tota est, ita turget mihi* ("now she is all puffed up [in a rage], so much she swells [in anger] at me," *Cas.* 325). Lysidamus is also able to tell his wife is angry from afar just by the look of her, but desires to avoid her or dispel her anger using gentle coaxing (*Cas.* 227-8). In some cases, the appearance of Cleostrata's anger is enough to cause physical reactions in others, like when Lysidamus goes pale after seeing her waiting for him outside the neighbour's house following his failed tryst (*Cas.* 969-982).

When Cleostrata is observed as looking upset, she is described as *tristis* (*Cas.* 228). Although the word *tristis* is often used to communicate a sense of sadness, in Plautus' comedies it is frequently employed to convey harshness and severity, as well as an ill-humour or crossness toward another person.¹¹³ Panegyris, however, is described as appearing *dolens*, which is much more strongly associated with feelings of pain, distress,

¹¹³ *OLD* s.v. *tristis* (3).

or grief, although an underlying sense of chagrin and resentment is sometimes included.¹¹⁴ This demonstrates a linguistic difference in how the playwright treats the distress of the *uxor irata* and *matrona bona*, characterizing the angry wife's as something sharp and externally directed, and the good matron's as a softer, internalized emotion. This subtly communicates to the audience differences in character behaviour and influences how those emotions are meant to be received. In a woman, bitter discontent is more likely to arouse negative and defensive reactions than forlorn turmoil, which typically evokes pity. Due to Plautus' reputation of delighting in language and word play, it is significant that he has chosen to use different vocabulary to describe distressing emotion in well-behaved wives and audacious ones.

This difference in description also carries into how the characters around the *uxor irata* react to her expressions of anger. A powerful thing not only in appearance, Cleostrata's anger carries enough influence on those around her that it leads to figures like Olympio and Lysidamus behaving in ways that contradict the stereotypical attributes associated with their roles within the Roman household.¹¹⁵ When engaged in an argument with her, Olympio does not fear his mistress' anger, brazenly arguing back and refusing her demands. He demonstrates traits one might find more typical of the *paterfamilias*, rather than the slave. Lysidamus, on the other hand, considers fleeing before even speaking with her (*Cas.* 952-962). When he is forced to interact with his angry wife,

¹¹⁴ OLD s.v. *dolor* (2).

¹¹⁵ Lysidamus and Olympio participate in transgressive role reversals throughout the *Casina*. Moore (2012) demonstrates how Plautus tends to use ionic meter in scenes where *senex* states he has become *servus* and *servus* now free (113). Richlin (2017) explores the role reversal scene of lines 720-758 of the *Casina* in further detail (211).

instead of asserting his will over hers, Lysidamus cowers, bargains, attempts to flee, and even begs to get out of trouble with her (*Cas.* 969-1009), actions usually associated with the *servus*.¹¹⁶

Cleostrata's anger is capable of destabilizing the traditional power structures within the Roman household. This power to subvert the roles of *senex* and *servus* stems from Lysidamus' failure to act as an ideal head of his household, as well as the fact that the comedic genre permits his wife to act domineeringly in his stead. On the conditions of a husband's rule over his wife, Livy states that since women are forever under the control of men, it is up to those men to make their rule tolerable.¹¹⁷ Plutarch suggests something similar, stating that husbands should not indulge in the trivial pleasure of having sex with other women at the expense of their wife's pain.¹¹⁸

While Lysidamus is certainly no strict authoritarian, he hardly fulfils the ideal of an abstinent, respectable, and loving father and husband. Ultimately, Lysidamus' status as the head of his household is tenuous due to his failure to embody the moral duties of his position as *paterfamilias*. Although lawfully Lysidamus holds all the power in his household, Cleostrata asserts that he lacks *pietas*: *mirum ecastor te senecta aetate*

¹¹⁶ For how Plautus depicts the runaway slave trope, see Richlin (2017: 451-7).

¹¹⁷ Livy 34.5-7.

¹¹⁸ Plutarch, *Coniugalia Praecepta*, 44. More generally, Cassius Dio promotes good behaviour on behalf of both wife and husband, since then they may be able to enjoy a child who benefits from inheriting good qualities from both parents (56.3.3-4). Early Greek theories of marriage that later came to influence Roman ideals promote a moderate relationship between the household head and his subjects. Treggiari (1991) notes that Callicratidas classifies the husband's rule as political, and in order for it to be effective, the husband "should inspire respect and love; it is a mixture of pleasure and righteousness. The former comes from loving, the latter from abstention from unworthy action" (402).

officium tuum / non meminisse (“it is a wonder how in your old age you have forgotten your duty,” *Cas.* 259-260). As Annalisa Rei observes:

“typically, the abandonment of his responsibilities by a figure of authority, a father or husband, sets in motion a series of plot mechanisms that leads to his corrective humiliation by his subordinates. [...] With its characteristic parody of legal terms and procedures, Plautine comedy reinforces the notion that, in reality, domestic conflicts are not to be solved by law, but by the assertion of a commonly accepted code of honor.”¹¹⁹

By disregarding this code of honour, Lysidamus violates the ideal of mutual respect between spouses, and through pursuing a girl his son is also interested in, between father and son.

If Lysidamus were fully secure in his role as the head of the household and truly embodied its ideals, not as a character in a comedy, he would have rightfully earned the respect and submission of his wife through acting virtuously. In the absence of him upholding this responsibility, however, Cleostrata is compelled to reinforce the moral ideals that ought to govern the relationships between husband and wife, as well as father and son. While Lysidamus’ adultery is not exactly moral, it is generally regarded as an acceptable activity for the married Roman man.¹²⁰ However, by pursuing Casina specifically, Lysidamus is also disqualifying a citizen *virgo* from her own rightful marriage, depriving his son of a rightful marriage to the object of his affections, overriding his wife’s efforts to raise a chaste ward, and coercing Olympio into a marriage which he plans to violate by sleeping with the bride first, not to mention engaging in what

¹¹⁹ Rei (1998), 99.

¹²⁰ See Rei (1995: 218), who notes that even if men’s affairs were generally tolerated in Roman society, it “doesn’t mean that the ideal of mutual conjugal fidelity (or that wives were indifferent to husbands’ infidelity) wasn’t violated.” See also Saller (1987) and Griffin (1985: 1-31).

some may view as pseudo-incest.¹²¹ Lysidamus' failure to secure honour for himself, his family, and all other parties involved has destabilized the natural order within his household. By inhabiting the role of lecherous *senex* rather than honourable *paterfamilias*, Lysidamus has caused an echoing transformation in Cleostrata: "[when] the *senex* changes from being the obstacle to his son to become *amator* himself, a powerful new obstacle needs to be introduced, a function that is assigned to the wife."¹²²

As Elaine Fantham argues, in Terence's plays women are "[imbued] with the natural authority of their integrity" as a means of control over their husbands.¹²³ This is also true in Plautus' *Casina*, as Cleostrata is never depicted as engaging in the same lechery as Lysidamus. However, she largely maintains control over her husband as a result of his compromising sexual appetite rather than her own upright behaviour. Her proper conduct is at times questionable, considering how often she is warned by other characters that she is overstepping her bounds.¹²⁴ Sharon James demonstrates how Cleostrata's speech reflects the emotional power she holds over Lysidamus when they are at odds with one another, employing sarcastic modifiers, intensifiers, and a lack of deference, all of which are typically unacceptable for women speaking to their social superiors.¹²⁵ Positioned as an authority in conversations with Lysidamus while he is morally compromised, it is not until Cleostrata has decided that her husband is forgiven

¹²¹ Fantham (2015), 103.

¹²² Rei (1995), 214.

¹²³ Fantham (2015), 104.

¹²⁴ Myrrhina, for example, instructs Cleostrata on how she ought to be obedient and indulgent to her husband's whims (*Cas.* 204-7). Lysidamus himself must warn Cleostrata that she has forgotten that he is the one meant to hold authority in their conversations (*Cas.* 249-53).

¹²⁵ James (2015), 110-1.

that his symbols of authority and respect, his cloak and staff, are returned to him, marking visually the end of his disgrace and her reign of moral superiority within their relationship (*Cas.* 1007-9). Cleostrata's impulse to protect the honour of her household through controlling her husband is hardly surprising. Yet the means by which she goes about it are far more shocking: staging revenge and plotting for a long time rather than giving way to spur of the moment reactions. She is generically expected to get revenge, but on another level, and quite a delightful one at that, she goes about it in such a deliberate, elaborate, drawn out and entertaining way.

For the married woman, the household was central to her identity. Not only were *fides* to her husband and *pudicitia* in public life prioritized as responsibilities for the *matrona*, an ideal every Roman wife was expected to strive for, but her commitment to the best interests of the common household as well.¹²⁶ Lysidamus does not act in the best interests of the household when he pursues the girl Cleostrata has raised like a daughter. While Cleostrata is right to fret over how this affair may reflect on the reputation of their household,¹²⁷ she is further justified in worrying over how the affair might impact her relationship to her son. By arguing in favour of her son's right to marry Casina, Cleostrata

¹²⁶ The honour of the *domus* was often explicitly tied to the honour of its *mater familias*. Cicero, for example, alleged that Clodia Metelli lived in an immoral *domus* because its *mater familias* lived in the style of a prostitute, explicitly connecting the respectability of the entire household to whether or not the married woman overseeing it demonstrated the idealized values of the Roman *matrona* (*Pro Cael.* 32, 57).

¹²⁷ Married Roman women were far more involved in their husbands' social lives than they would have been as unmarried daughters. As Hemelrijk (1999) points out, they were expected to entertain his guests and accompany their husbands on social visits (8). As such, it was prudent for a wife to be worried over how peers might judge her husband's reputation, as she would be heavily associated with him in those circles. Lysidamus was extremely willing to enlist the help of Alcesimus in his scheme, which sets a precedent for the old man to reveal his misdeeds to any other member of the public he might deem to be a friend.

aims to protect the potential renown he might bring her. Respect from a son to his mother “appears to have been strengthened by the general social esteem in which a Roman matron was held [by propping up] her association as partner rather than obvious subordinate in parental activities.”¹²⁸ If Cleostrata wants to benefit from the boost in reputation her son might grant her through future recognition of her contributions to his success, she must ensure he has motivation to do so. Lysidamus ought to share this same desire, rejoicing in the happiness he is capable of bringing his son through acting virtuously, but forgoes this so he might indulge in short-term pleasures instead.¹²⁹

It is therefore unsurprising that Cleostrata has decided drastic measures must be taken to preserve the good standing of her family and household. What is perhaps most exciting about Cleostrata’s decision to confront Lysidamus, however, is how she goes about accomplishing her goal. Unlike other *uxores iratae*, when Lysidamus’ misconduct is revealed to her, Cleostrata does not choose to immediately shame her husband in a spur of the moment, emotionally driven confrontation.¹³⁰ Cleostrata takes her time to properly orchestrate her revenge. Although she learns early in the story about her husband’s affair, she does not immediately engage him in a quarrel. Instead, she goes first to her neighbour

¹²⁸ Dixon (1988), 176.

¹²⁹ The home, wife, and child as sources of true happiness for the Roman man was a popular *topos* in Roman literature (Lucr. 3.895-6; Cic. *Att.* 1.18.1), and so something comedy can readily make use and fun of.

¹³⁰ Menaechmus’ wife, Dorippa, and Artemona all introduce an element beyond argument to punish their husbands for misbehaving soon after discovering what their spouse has done. When Menaechmus’ wife overhears him admitting his affair and theft, she immediately rushes out to confront him (*Men.* 598a-605). To conclude the argument, she announces that she will punish Menaechmus by excluding him from their home until her mantle is returned (*Men.* 661-3). Dorippa acts similarly when she learns her husband is keeping a girl in their home, hurrying to confront him and finishing her tirade with an order that her father be summoned on her behalf (*Merc.* 700-788). Artemona only lasts a handful of lines after catching sight of her husband’s infidelity before storming in and dragging him home (*As.* 880-909).

Myrrhina to complain (*Cas.* 149-162). Later on, when she is squabbling with Lysidamus over how Casina's spouse will be selected, Lysidamus accidentally admits that he wants Casina for himself and not Olympio. Cleostrata does comment sarcastically on the slip up, but ultimately allows the lot drawing to proceed (*Cas.* 363-378). When she learns about Alcesimus and Lysidamus' plans to prepare the house for her husband's plot, she does not follow her husband to the forum and embarrass him there, but stays behind to manipulate Alcesimus instead (*Cas.* 531-8). On any of these occasions, it would not be unexpected for the angry wife to immediately confront her husband. Cleostrata, however, prioritizes her long-term plan for revenge over a short-term showdown.

Ultimately, Cleostrata does not even do the humiliating herself. Unlike the other wives, who personally harass their husbands, Cleostrata arranges for Chalinus to do the beating and demeaning (*Cas.* 963-975). She emerges only once the shaming has been completed to take credit and gloat, similar to how a playwright might step out on stage after a performance to receive applause and credit for their work.¹³¹ Due to the genre of the *Casina*, the audience expects Cleostrata's revenge to be uproariously entertaining regardless of its scale. Certainly, once her plan has come to fruition and Olympio and Lysidamus have been publicly, and hilariously, humiliated, the audience has been thoroughly amused. However, the novelty, complexity, and originality of the scheme that humiliated the men was an amusement in and of itself. What is especially delightful about Cleostrata's plot is its deliberateness. Leading the audience through each elaborate step,

¹³¹ Myrrhina in fact compares those involved in executing the ruse to playwrights: *nec fallaciam astutorem ullus fecit / poeta atque ut haec est fabre facta ab nobis* ("No playwright has ever produced a trick more cunning than this genius one we have created," *Cas.* 860-1).

Cleostrata has drawn out the construction of her revenge over the course of several acts. Excitement builds the closer we get to the final staging of her play-within-a-play as the audience experiences actors getting into character (*Cas.* 815-824), costumes (*Cas.* 769-770), and places (*Cas.* 892, 965).

Lysidamus' comeuppance is entertaining to watch unfold, especially given the fact that, in addition to his failure to prioritize honour, reputation, his family's respect, and virtuous happiness, he is also guilty of violating social norms for a man of his status and age.¹³² Certainly, in the world of Plautine comedy, a married *senex* is often also *amator*. Although infidelity may be treated lightly in Plautus' works, the frequency and tone of the concluding remarks of several of his plays demonstrates that by the end of a love affair narrative, Plautus' characters still recognize adultery as a negative thing, particularly when associated with older men. Although the delivery is playful, a genuine sentiment breaks through in the concluding scenes of several plays where Plautus must remind the audience that his plays are not entirely fantastical, and that they are connected to reality, regardless of how earnest that connection may be. Repeated themes of the cheating husband and angry wife link a number of Plautine plays, creating, in a way, a theatrical universe in which these characters and their plot lines might occur. These epilogues that address the morality of infidelity serve as moments of validation for the angry wife, echoing the argument she has spent most of her time on stage defending.¹³³

¹³² In ancient Greece and Rome, older men, generally age forty-five and above, were supposed to be married and responsible, having matured out of the habit of pursuing, as Witzke (2020) notes, "frivolous or excessive sexual desire" (333).

¹³³ In the epilogues of the *Asinaria*, *Bacchides*, *Mercator*, *Miles Gloriosus*, and *Captivi*, moral statements are made decrying the character, upbringing, and intelligence of old men who have affairs behind their

While the audience might have laughed at the *uxor irata* for her anger, portrayed in fantastical exaggeration through comedic dialogue and action, the reason she has been angered is ultimately recognized as a persistent and legitimate issue in society. Although Plautus sympathizes with the “human weaknesses of the old men, [he] also gives the audience room to mock that weakness: the transgression of sociocultural norms is fair game for comedy.”¹³⁴

For angry wives there is “this impulse toward self-protection applied *a fortiori* to members of [their] own household, whose exposure to *pudor* implicated [them] in still more intimate ways.”¹³⁵ While Myrrhina might have scolded Cleostrata for her behaviour when she perceived it as contradicting the sociocultural norms (*Cas.* 196-212), Cleostrata believes she is acting in her best interest (*Cas.* 208-9).¹³⁶ If the head of her household will not act morally through his own willpower, thereby affecting the honour of his entire *domus*, then he must have these morals enforced through means of humiliation and anger. Cleostrata is willing to refute societal pressure to conform to the behavioural ideals of the *matrona* to achieve this. From this perspective, Cleostrata’s values are not so unaligned with greater society’s. The moment a woman married, her role changed from *virgo* to *mulier*, and she was positioned as a figure who was held as greatly responsible for the

wives’ backs (*As.* 942-5, *Bacch.* 1207-1211, *Merc.* 1016-1020, *Miles.* 1433-7, *Capt.* 1029-1030). However, all of these plays also confess that such affairs are not uncommon, with plenty of precedent in reality to make fun of in comedy.

¹³⁴ Witzke (2020), 334.

¹³⁵ Kaster (1997), 16.

¹³⁶ Christenson (2019) proposes that Cleostrata’s objection may even indicate an emotional interest in her husband’s marital fidelity, given there is evidence to suggest that even in arranged marriages Roman spouses might seek “emotional companionship, mutual respect and intimacy, including sexually, from their marriages” (83).

wellbeing of her household.¹³⁷ While prioritizing being *obsequens* to her husband would earn her praise for her behaviour, Cleostrata has instead chosen to prioritize her responsibility towards the overall reputation and prosperity of her household, therefore demonstrating a greater commitment to her role of *materfamilias diligens* than *matrona bona*. However, just as for the *senex amans*, the *uxor irata* represents a transgression of sociocultural norms. No matter how virtuous she may view her own actions to be, Cleostrata is therefore just as open to ridicule as Lysidamus, a fact which Plautus fully exploits.

Plautus, through the *uxor irata*, gives a female character the ability to make people laugh at someone else. In the concluding action of the *Casina*, once the Casinus plot has come to fruition, Lysidamus begs Cleostrata to forgive him, entreating Myrrhina to help him persuade her (*Cas.* 1000). After promising his wife that she can hang him up and beat him if he ever lays with Casina, a vow which earns him Myrrhina's sympathy, Cleostrata finally agrees to pardon him. Not because she believes him, but in order to spare the audience from being bored by a drawn out denouement: *propter eam rem hanc tibi nunc ueniam minus grauante prospero, / hanc ex longa longiorem ne faciamus fabulam* ("I'm granting you this [pardon] less unwillingly for the simple reason that we ought not make this long play any longer," *Cas.* 1005-6).

When Cleostrata promises Lysidamus that *non sum irata* ("I am not angry," *Cas.* 1007), it is for the sake of preserving the play's goal to entertain. In acknowledging the

¹³⁷ Treggiari (1991), 416-424.

length of the play, Cleostrata has effectively broken the fourth wall, referring “to the presence of the audience, in so doing drawing attention to the artifice of the situation.”¹³⁸ Acting as playwright once again, Cleostrata has transformed from angry wife to satisfied director. While at the beginning of the play the audience might have expected a storyline more consistent with the typical *uxor irata* and *senex amans* pairing, any expectations regarding Cleostrata’s character, the plot of the play, and the genre’s conventions have all been subverted by the end. Generally, New Comedy is interested in resolution.¹³⁹ In the *Casina*, a return to *concordia* is dependent not on a successful citizen marriage, the triumph of a clever slave, or the celebration of a successful lover, but on Cleostrata relinquishing her anger. In this unique case, resolution is achieved through change rather than stability. Cleostrata is marked as an especially striking character not only for her brazen stock type, but for her role in shaping the intrigue of the entire play. Plautus has used the *uxor irata* of the *Casina* to construct a novel way of executing a story that, in New Comedy, had otherwise been done dozens of times before.

¹³⁸ Braund (2017), 163.

¹³⁹ See O’Byrhim (2001); Frye (1948: 58-73); Nelson (1990: 19-40, 179-86).

Chapter 3: Alcumena from the *Amphitryon*

Set in the mythical past, *Amphitryon* is unique among Plautus' surviving works in that it features a mythological subject as the basis of its plot. Re-telling the story of Alcumena and Amphytruo,¹⁴⁰ Plautus' *Amphitryon* opens with a prologue delivered by Mercury. As the god of commerce and trickery explains, he is in Thebes at Jupiter's behest, disguised as the slave Sosia in order to abet his father in a duplicitous affair. Also disguised is Jupiter, who has gained access to Alcumena by pretending to be her husband returning early from his success abroad. Already pregnant by Amphytruo before his departure, Alcumena has also become pregnant by Jupiter. Chaos naturally ensues as the real Amphytruo arrives in Thebes. Conflict arises between husband and wife as they attempt to puzzle through how it is possible Alcumena has already spent the night with her husband when he has only just returned. Convinced his wife has been unchaste, Amphytruo accuses her of insanity and infidelity. Alcumena is naturally upset. Divorce looms as a threat from both sides as they attempt to untangle the truth. Alcumena is eventually approached again by Jupiter-as-Amphytruo, who successfully regains her favour. Locked out of his home while Jupiter enjoys his wife, Amphytruo is mocked by Mercury-as-Sosia.

It is here that a portion of the text is missing. Textual scholars offer some lines to fill the gaps, and most editors agree that the plot must ensue as such: Mercury and Amphytruo argue, Alcumena exits the home, Amphytruo accuses her some more,

¹⁴⁰ While there is no standard spelling convention for the title and names of the main characters of this play, for ease of reading Amphytruo will refer to the character and *Amphitryon* the play. Cited works may also include alternate spellings of Alcumena such as Alcmene, Alcmena, and Alkmene.

Alcumena grows angry, the real Sosia arrives and is berated by Amphitruo, Jupiter appears on stage, and he and Amphitruo attempt to detain each other.¹⁴¹ Continuing from here, the manuscripts outline how Jupiter goes inside as Alcumena is about to give birth, enraging Amphitruo, who can do nothing as he is suddenly struck by lightning. Bromia the *ancilla* exits the home, marvelling at the day's strangeness, before announcing to Amphitruo that Alcumena has given birth to twin sons. One is the son of Amphitruo, and the other of Jupiter. Jupiter himself then appears and reveals what has truly happened, insisting that Amphitruo regard his wife as innocent, given the god's might forced her into an unwitting affair. Amphitruo concludes the play by vowing to do as Jupiter tells him, calling on the crowd to applaud not for the play, but for the king of the gods.

While the myth of Zeus' impregnation of Alcumena, begetting the great hero Heracles, was well-known in antiquity, the play upon which the *Amphitryon* was based is unknown. There exists a wide range of possible inspirations for Plautus' version. It is typically believed that, like the rest of Plautus' plays, *Amphitryon* was based on a Greek New Comedy for which we likely have no surviving knowledge. Some scholars, however, suggest that a tragic inspiration should not be dismissed as a possibility.¹⁴² H. D. Jocelyn proposes that a reference in *Amphitryon* to Jupiter having appeared recently on the Roman stage, perhaps in Euripedes' *Alkmene*, reminds the audience of a recent

¹⁴¹ De Melo (2011), 5-6.

¹⁴² For further elaboration on possible sources of inspiration for Plautus' *Amphitryon*, see Christenson (2000: 47-55).

point of reference to the myth, providing Plautus with the ideal time to debut his own version of this story.¹⁴³ The exact dating of the play, however, remains uncertain.¹⁴⁴

The *Amphitryon* shares several themes with the previously examined *Casina* and *Menaechmi*. Both Cleostrata and Alcumena are involved with a ‘Jupiter’ who is attempting to carry out a successful extramarital affair, fulfilling the role of ‘Juno’, the loyal, though at times spiteful, wife. *Menaechmi* is another ‘doubles’ play, where identical appearances cause trouble for those involved. However, how the *Amphitryon* wields these themes is unique. The affair, for example, involves a party who is willing only because she does not realize it is an affair. There is no character aiming to stop any infidelity either, since the cuckolded partner, once he has been convinced an affair has happened at all, believes it to have been concluded, and must now instead deal with the consequences. Furthermore, it is not the husband indulging in the affections of a *meretrix* or taking advantage of a beautiful slave girl, but the wife who is guilty of adultery, enthusiastic about taking to bed someone she does not realize is not her husband.

This chapter aims to examine not only how the *Amphitryon* subverts conventions of the comedic genre such as costume and stock characters through Alcumena, but how she, as a central figure, illustrates the codification of the *uxor irata* in Plautine works as a stock figure designed to directly contrast the *matrona bona*. Embodying the angry wife

¹⁴³ Jocelyn (1967), 6-7.

¹⁴⁴ A reference to Bacchants, similar to that found in the *Casina*, may suggest a date close to the *senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus* of 186 BCE (MacCary & Willcock 1976: 1). Approaches that examine metre and style place it closer *Rudens*, around 190 BCE (Sedgwick 1949: 379). Thus, a dating of somewhere between 185 BCE and 190 BCE is reasonable to support.

and the good matron at different times throughout the play, Alcumena can be conclusively categorized as neither, demonstrating Plautus' capacity to evolve established practices of Roman comedy through the exploitation of otherwise formulaic character stock types.

Almost immediately, the theme of doubling is revealed to extend beyond the conventional plotline involving a single lookalike. Not only is Mercury meant to look exactly like Sosia, Jupiter is made identical to Amphytruo. From this, several layers of duality reveal themselves. The audience has been told explicitly that gods are dressing up as mortals, and characters will be acting as other characters. However, spectators would also understand that the figures on stage were actors taking up *personae*. In his prologue speech, "Mercury alternates different *personae* with breakneck speed: he is simultaneously the god Mercury with all his powers, the actor speaking for his troupe, and a character of the play."¹⁴⁵ He is a figure who is capable of moving fluidly between roles, both staged and real. Alcumena does not move so obviously between actor and character. However, part of the humour of her portrayal relies on the knowledge that the figure on the stage is composed of a male body layered in female signals. While stereotypical costuming for a high-status female character might include jewelry, robes, and perhaps even a mask, it is the image of a protruding belly that holds the most comic potential.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Dutsch (2015), 18.

¹⁴⁶ See Pieczonka (2023); Marshall (2006: 126-158).

There exist other characters who may have been padded for comedic effect.¹⁴⁷ These figures adopt the imagery of pregnancy in order to make a joke regarding their own physical appearance, whether that was represented with similar padding in costume or in the imaginations of the audience. Truly pregnant characters are not portrayed on the Plautine stage apart from Alcumena. Typically, young women involved in love affairs or rapes perpetuated by *adulescentes amantes* have given birth before the story begins.¹⁴⁸ That Alcumena is an exception is significant. Motherhood was a virtue that was celebrated, and at times viewed as necessary, for the title of Roman *matrona*.¹⁴⁹ As a figure in the process of achieving motherhood, Alcumena occupies a liminal space, transitioning from the status of mere wife to that of venerable matron. In that same way, Alcumena lies between the typical configurations of the *uxor irata* and *matrona bona*. Angela Hug reasons that a wife's "*fecunditas* demonstrated her fulfilment of the purpose of [her] marriage, the birth of legitimate children."¹⁵⁰ Prior to reaching motherhood, the highest demonstration of a woman's fecundity, Alcumena lacks security in her title as *matrona*. Until she has her children, her behaviour may reflect matronal ideals, but she has yet to fulfill what was commonly viewed as the ultimate purpose of marriage,¹⁵¹ and as such slips frequently into the mode of the un-matronly *uxor irata*.

¹⁴⁷ The *leno* Cappadox from the *Curculio* explains that a symptom of his ill-health is a protruding gut that makes it seem as though he is pregnant with twins (*Curc.* 221-2). The *parasitus* Gelasimus claims that he is carrying a great hunger to term within his stomach (*Stich.* 163-4), a statement made ironic should he be padded to look fat from over-eating.

¹⁴⁸ For example, Philippa from *Epidicus*, and the daughter of Diniarchus in *Truculentus*.

¹⁴⁹ According to Aulus Gellius, the word *matrona* originates from *mater*, motherhood being the natural state that all matrons should aim to someday reach (*Noc. Att.* 18.6).

¹⁵⁰ Hug (2023), 87.

¹⁵¹ Treggiari (1991), 11.

Jokes that rely on the largeness of Alcumena's pregnancy gain an additional layer of ridiculousness when the audience recalls who, exactly, is wearing the costume. While Plautus rarely makes obvious jokes about the custom of men playing female roles, "we should not conclude that Roman audiences were blind to the actors' identity as males of (mostly) low status in everyday life."¹⁵² For the exaggerated appearance of Alcumena's pregnant body to be funny, there must exist a consciousness of not just who the character is, but who is portraying her. Knowing there is a male body under the padded costume allows the audience to find amusement in a gender enacted and, in a way, parodied. As Christenson notes, "it seems very likely that Plautus' audience would take especial delight in the rare spectacle of a male actor usurping female fecundity itself,"¹⁵³ a phenomenon reserved purely for women now ironically displayed on the body of a man for the amusement of a crowd. Where before jokes regarding Alcumena's insatiable sexual appetite might have strayed too close to inappropriateness given her married status, Plautus has, through the display of her swollen belly, provided for the audience a safer avenue through which to find humour. Rather than attempting to rouse a laugh with an uncomfortable acknowledgement of a married woman's desire for sex from a man other than her husband, audiences are permitted instead to laugh at the image of a figure metaphorically 'full' that still desires more, Alcumena managing to outpace even Jupiter's sexual appetite.¹⁵⁴ While earlier scholars preferred to view Alcumena as a purely tragic

¹⁵² Christenson (2001), 245. Amy Richlin (2017) examines several scenarios in Plautus where the dimensions of class, gender, and costume intersect to generate delight for the audience (281-303).

¹⁵³ Christenson (2001), 246-7.

¹⁵⁴ Christenson (2001) addresses the motif of satiety and Alcumena's sexuality, in particular how it contrasts the "reserved and dignified public persona of the idealized Roman matron" (247-8).

figure, serious and matronly, Jane Phillips argues that “in the mere appearance of Alcumena, thus swaybacked and protruding, we have a first answer to the question of whether anything was funny about Alcumena herself.”¹⁵⁵

Plautus’ awareness of the conventional artifice of the theatre bleeds through in other moments of the *Amphitryon*. Although plays like the *Casina* are often praised for their metatheatricality, characters in the *Amphitryon* consistently reveal self-reflexive insight of the play’s narrative and performative aspects. In the prologue, as is typical, Mercury outlines for the audience how the story will unfold, revealing all except for how it concludes (*Amph.* 96-141). Later in the play, Jupiter addresses the audience to explain how he intends to wrap up the action and bring resolution to those involved (*Amph.* 873-9), even announcing that he has come back out on stage to prolong things so the audience is not disappointed by the play ending prematurely (*Amph.* 869-72). Even though Alcumena is not as self-aware as the gods of the play, she does deliver a monologue which outlines how enjoyment in life is brief, while suffering and trouble are long, as is the gods’ will (*Amph.* 633-653). Unknowingly, she has described the shape of her and Amphitruo’s journey within the play. Jupiter and Mercury, the gods, have orchestrated a situation where pleasure for Alcumena is short-lived and the trouble that follows long, a night of love with Jupiter-as-Amphitruo unfolding into accusations of infidelity and threats of divorce from her real husband.

¹⁵⁵ Phillips (1984), 121-3.

Mercury, however, promises that no one will find Alcumena guilty at the end of the play (*Amph.* 492). Although it may seem like Mercury is referring to the opinions of just the characters of the *Amphitryon*, Plautus is also addressing the audience. This statement encourages the play's spectators to agree with Mercury and forgive Alcumena for her unknowing transgression, by extension finding no fault with the playwright for exploring such a troubling theme. When Alcumena complains that Amphitruo has not yet summoned Naucrates for the investigation pertaining to her sexual fidelity, Jupiter-as-Amphitruo claims that the threat of a divorce was a joke: *si quid dictum est per iocum, / non aequom est id te serio praeuortier* ("If something is said as a joke, / it isn't reasonable that you take it in earnest," *Amph.* 920-1). Plautus once again asks the audience through his characters not to take too seriously anything that is meant to generate entertainment on stage. Susanna Braund proposes that the *fabula palliata* as a genre "had difficulties accommodating the theme of divorce," a subject which typically dealt with "material normally eschewed as too uncomfortable."¹⁵⁶ The *Amphitryon*, however, is able to assure its audience that in a play so conversant with its own metatheatricality, there will be very little room for any form of biological, social, and psychological realism. This provides the playwright with enough plausible deniability to safely make fun of the much-valued ideals of marriage and procreation. When Jupiter ultimately commands that Alcumena should be found innocent of any fault (*Amph.* 1141-3), it is not just Amphitruo's lenience that he orders, but the audience's as well.

¹⁵⁶ Braund (2005), 63; 42.

Beyond the play's awareness of its own plot, particular attention is also paid to the construction of the theatrical character. As actors, Jupiter and Mercury remark often on the roles they fulfil throughout the course of the play. According to Mercury, in comedy, slaves are more empowered to move crowds than a god, who in reality would instead hold this privilege over the slave.¹⁵⁷ Mercury also remarks on the variety of personae he fulfills while in the service of his father, the *filius bonus*, *parasitus*, and advisor (*Amph.* 992-3). Just as he flits between identities in the prologue, Mercury continues throughout the *Amphitryon* to move fluidly between different stock roles of New Comedy, counter-balanced with his ultimate designation of Olympic god, a figure most commonly found in tragedy.¹⁵⁸ Mercury's flexibility of character designation is complimented by the power of costume in theatre, both he and Jupiter acknowledging its necessity in successful depictions of particular characters.¹⁵⁹ Just how the padded belly of Alcumena communicates essential comedic elements for the reception of her character, a correctly chosen *ornamentum*, according to the gods of the *Amphitryon*, can enhance particular traits that the actor wishes to portray.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ *nam mihi quidem hercle qui minus liceat deo minitarier / populo, ni decedat mihi, quam seruolo in comoediis? / ill' nauem saluam nuntiat aut irati aduentum senis: / ego sum Ioui dicto audiens* ("For why is it less permissible for me, a god for goodness' sake, to threaten people if they don't go away, than it is for some meager slave in comedies? [The slave] announces when a ship arrives or when the angry old man is coming: I obey the command of Jupiter," (*Amph.* 986-8).

¹⁵⁸ Hermes, Mercury's Greek counterpart, is featured in popular tragedies such as Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* and Euripides' *Ion*.

¹⁵⁹ Jupiter claims that though he is Jupiter in the heavens, when he appears on stage he becomes Amphitruo and changes his clothes (*Amph.* 866), while Mercury, having adopted Sosia's form, states he should adopt his traits and habits as well (*Amph.* 265-7). When Mercury-as-Sosia wishes to act drunk, he decides a garland and costume change is required to successfully sell the act (*Amph.* 999-1007).

¹⁶⁰ Concerning the construction of a recognizable stock character, Marion Faure-Ribreau (2009) argues that a character is defined "d'une part par des caractéristiques conventionnelles, (masque, costume, type social et comique), et de l'autre part par la façon dont il est joué" (4).

Mercury and Jupiter, however, purposefully undertake changes in costuming in order to perform successful imitations of other character types. Alcumena is unaware of the effect her own costume has on the audience. Alcumena's padded stomach is not just a throwaway joke based on visual humour, but a feature that lends emphasis to her role as a married woman. Given the emphasis on wifely chastity and sexual integrity for married women in Ancient Rome, the visual reminder of a double pregnancy, a child fathered by Jupiter and Amphitruo each, would keep the affair at the forefront of the audience's mind. This single detail in costume transforms Alcumena's visual portrayal from that of the typical *matrona*, draped in the *stola* and accessorized appropriately, to a new, more ambiguous category. Alcumena's pregnant appearance summons concerns surrounding her *pudicitia* due to "the emphasis on *fecunditas* as a female responsibility [which] led to it becoming a recognised female virtue, closely associated with *pudicitia*."¹⁶¹ Jupiter's affair complicates the relationship between these virtues at a foundational level for the Roman audience. Although she upholds her *pudicitia*, a term which "connotes [...] the conscience which keeps a person from shameful actions," of the firm belief that she has only ever slept with her husband, Alcumena has instead lost, by definition, her *castitas*: her "sexual integrity and scrupulousness."¹⁶² Alcumena's pregnancy is thus essential for the argument that Plautus has achieved a novel characterization of a married female character. Alcumena is a figure that, somehow, has simultaneously maintained her *pudicitia* but lost her *castitas* through conceiving a child from both husband and affair

¹⁶¹ Hug (2023), 83.

¹⁶² Treggiari (1991), 232.

partner. This concept is most frequently accessed through her appearance on stage, which, like with Mercury and Jupiter, serves to enhance her behaviour. Costume therefore acts for Alcumena as a mechanism through which her character can be refashioned, adding new meaning to the portrayal of her stock type and altering a role that is otherwise rigidly defined.

Change, clearly, is a persistent theme of the *Amphitryon*. The play's most outlandish change appears in the prologue. The *prologus* promises the audience that he can keep all the original verses of the *Amphitryon*, at first a tragedy, and mix it with comedy, creating something new: a *tragicomoedia* (*Amph.* 50-59). Before the story has properly begun, the playwright has declared that even genres are flexible categories which can be influenced and changed without any variance in text. Since there are gods and kings on stage, the *prologus* argues that it would not be appropriate to make the play entirely a comedy. However: *quoniam hic seruos quoque partis habet, / faciam sit, proinde ut dixi, tragico[co]moedia* "Since slaves also have parts [in this play], I'll make it, as I said before, a tragicomedy," *Amph.* 62-3). If gods and kings can make plays tragedies, and slaves can turn them into comedies, then Plautus has determined that theatrical genre is driven in some capacity by the type of characters taking part in the play.¹⁶³ Alcumena's own characterization, fluctuating between the stock types of *uxor irata* and *matrona bona*, drives the play's movement between genres as much as the presence of gods and slaves.

¹⁶³ Faure-Ribreau (2009), 4.

Markedly unique in origin as a mythological figure, in appearance as a pregnant woman, and stock type, only a play so flexible in genre as the *Amphitryon* could accommodate a character so mercurial as Alcumena. Serving as the underpinning tonal element of several scenes, Alcumena's temperament is capable of dictating the progression of a scene's plot alongside its sources of humour. In scenes where Alcumena calmly and obligingly answers Amphitruo's questions, the comedy largely comes from Sosia's unwanted interjections (*Amph.* 696-707). When she becomes angry, Alcumena supplies wisecracks at others' expense (*Amph.* 755-8; 792-4). Alcumena's sweet and indulging temperament toward her husband is what allowed Jupiter-as-Amphitruo to be so warmly welcomed in the first place (*Amph.* 508-513), their enjoyable night together the premise of the play's entire plot and eventual conflict. On the other hand, her biting temper is what effectively drives Amphitruo to seek out mediation for their quarrel so that Jupiter may return and soothe her (*Amph.* 848-853, 891-6), eventually resulting in a second quarrel between real husband and wife, requiring Jupiter's *deus ex machina* that resolves the story. Several of these scenes occur back-to-back and are more or less shaped according to whether Alcumena is acting as *uxor irata* or *matrona bona*.

While one can not claim that the determination of a drama's genre relies entirely on its characters, for surely tone, plot, and setting play significant roles as well, the inclusion of specific character types considered 'stock' for that genre does influence how the play is deemed to fit within a conventional generic role. So, in a play that has already demonstrated a playful disloyalty to fixated categories of genre, character, and appearance, where does that leave Alcumena? Displaying characteristics of both the

matrona bona and the *uxor irata*, much like Mercury, Alcumena proves to be an example of a Plautine character capable of slipping between stock types where most convenient for the playwright. What specifically causes an audience, as well as characters within the play, to receive a married female figure as either a *matrona* or an *uxor irata* remains consistent with the criteria established in previous chapters of this study.

At the beginning of the *Amphitryon*, Alcumena does not immediately strike the audience as an angry wife. Unlike Cleostrata and Menaechmus' wife, her initial entrance is rather tame. She is found exiting the home alongside Jupiter disguised as her husband, not in a rage over his misbehaviour, but content after concluding an exceptionally long night of lovemaking (*Amph.* 497-8). Although she inquires as to where her husband plans to go once he has left her sight, it is not due to any suspicion about infidelity or immoral behaviour. Rather, Alcumena wishes that he would stay so that they might spend more time together, hinting at a desire to continue last night's sexual activities (*Amph.* 501-512). Although she attempts to persuade him to stay, she is nevertheless understanding of her husband's desires and does not try to assert her will over his through means of argument, manipulation, or trickery. Rather, she acquiesces, requesting only that Jupiter-as-Amphitruo continue to love her when he is gone and return soon (*Amph.* 533-545). The audience's first impression of Alcumena is that of a pleasant, doting, amenable wife. This is a far cry from the introductions of Cleostrata and Menaechmus' wife, who burst onto the stage complaining of their husbands' behaviour and planning how they might get revenge (*Cas.* 144-164; *Men.* 559-561).

Also significant is how those around Alcumena react to her behaviour. Jupiter-as-Amphitruo hardly acts like the husband of an *uxor irata*. Jupiter, seeing Alcumena is upset, reassures her that he is not leaving because he is fed up with her or their home, but that he has a responsibility to oversee the army (*Amph.* 503-5). While he is resolved to leave, Jupiter is not so eager to avoid the presence of his pseudo-wife as Lysidamus and Menaechmus often are (*Cas.* 227-8; *Men.* 127). Jupiter's attitude toward Alcumena is echoed by the real Amphitruo when he arrives. Amphitruo is glad to see his wife and eager to hear that his joy is reciprocated:

*Amphitruo uxorem salutat laetus speratam suam,
quam omnium Thebis uir unam esse optumam diiudicat,
quamque adeo ciues Thebani uero rumiferant probam.
ualuistin usque? exspectatun aduenio?*

“Amphitruo is delighted to greet his yearned-for wife,
Whom her husband decrees to be by far the greatest in all of Thebes,
and whom the Theban citizens truly salute as virtuous.
Have you remained well? Do I arrive awaited for?” (*Amph.* 676-9)

It seems that the desire for each other's company is reciprocated within Alcumena and Amphitruo's marriage. While Alcumena does request that Jupiter-as-Amphitruo return soon, she does not do so out of anxiety that he will misbehave if not kept under her supervision, but so that she might enjoy his presence some more (*Amph.* 542-545). Husbands of *uxores iratae* do not typically rejoice at seeing their wives, but dread approaching them at all, expecting that they will be poorly received (*Men.* 158-161; *Cas.* 574-7). Amphitruo, however, anticipates a warm welcome, and is frustrated when he does not receive one, resolving to scold Alcumena for not greeting him according to the

custom of a modest wife (*Amph.* 705-7; 711-3). Amphytruo believes that it is reasonable to expect this custom from Alcmena, referring to it as a *mos*, connoting a sense of habituality and deliberate practice.¹⁶⁴ Connecting this custom to the value of *pudor* also implies modesty to be a value Alcmena typically takes care to observe. Jupiter's plot, however, has now undermined her execution of this particular duty.

Alcmena's dedication to upholding matronal values, regardless of her situation, appears throughout the *Amphytrion*, echoing sentiments heard expressed by other *bonae matronae*. After Jupiter-as-Amphytruo has left and while the real Amphytruo approaches home, Alcmena stands before the house doors to deliver a monologue. In it, she describes feeling alone since her husband has left, more distressed by his departure than his arrival (*Amph.* 640-641a).¹⁶⁵ For Alcmena, her husband's military success while away is a comfort to her: *feram et perferam usque / abitum eius animo / forti atque offirmato, id modo si mercedis / datur mi, ut meus uictor uir belli clueat* ("I'll bear and continue bearing / his absence with a spirit / that is strong and steadfast, if only the reward / given to me is that my husband is called a victor in war," *Amph.* 645-7).¹⁶⁶ Here Alcmena exhibits traits of the *matrona bona*. *Matronae bonae* are able to find comfort in the success of their husbands. They become willing to endure long absences so long as

¹⁶⁴ OLD, s.v. *mos* (1).

¹⁶⁵ We can recall that Panegyris, the *matrona bona* of the *Stichus*, expresses feeling similar emotional pains due to the long absence of her husband (*Stich.* 1-6).

¹⁶⁶ Panegyris is comforted by the fact that her father will not force her to remarry because doing so would result in his losing the mountains of Persian gold with which her husband promised to return (*Stich.* 23-6).

their household stands to gain something positive from these extended periods of spousal absence from the home.

This steadfastness in character is promoted also in the *Stichus*. When asked what kind of woman seems wisest, Panegyris' opinion is that she must be self-reflective and unwavering: *quom res secundae sunt, se poterit noscere, / et illa quae aequo animo patietur sibi esse peius quam fuit* ("when times are good [the wisest woman] can still recognize herself, and, when she's in a worse time than she once was, can bear it with an easy spirit," *Stich.* 124-5). Alcumena attempts to uphold this ideal as well. When Amphitruo hears that Alcumena has already greeted her husband despite he and Sosia only just arriving, he begins to interrogate her. Alcumena suspects she is being tested, but nevertheless holds strong, indulging his questions and supporting his interest to decipher the truth (*Amph.* 682-700). Although she has begun to grow frustrated with the accusations thrown her way, Amphitruo denying the reality of her experience and Sosia interrupting to suggest sleepwalking, false dreams, and Bacchic frenzies (*Amph.* 696-705), Alcumena makes an effort to remain even-keeled, obliging her husband's desire to continue interrogating her (*Amph.* 708). When he then accuses her of surrendering to either stupidity or pride, she reacts with hurt rather than anger: *qui istuc in mentem est tibi ex me, mi uir, percontarier?* ("How could it come into your mind to ask me such a thing, my husband?" *Amph.* 710). When Artemona hears her husband insult her, she reproaches and mocks him (*As.* 899-941), as does Cleostrata (*Cas.* 233-240). Alcumena's wounded reaction, in place of an angry retaliation, marks her as a character with a distinctly

different temperament from the typical angry wife. That is, until she is accused of madness.

In contrast to how the good woman, as outlined in the *Stichus*, is meant to remember herself and keep a peaceful spirit in difficult times, Alcumena does not quite maintain these standards and allows her frustration to grow. As she begins to show irritability at not being believed, it becomes clear that Alcumena's anger in the *Amphitryon* is treated as a loss of control over her sanity. Infidelity is seen as a behaviour so out of character for Alcumena, famously matronal in conduct, that those around her suspect something must be fundamentally wrong with her mind in order for her to have slept with a man other than her husband. Rather than concluding that she has chosen to act against traditional matronal values, Amphitruo and Sosia turn to possible external factors, considering black bile (*Amph.* 727-9), prodigal dreams (*Amph.* 738-40), evil spirits (*Amph.* 775-6), bacchic frenzy (*Amph.* 702-7), and even Thessalian witches (*Amph.* 1084-1127) as feasible sources of madness.

The change in Alcumena's character begins rather abruptly when Sosia suggests to Amphitruo that she is not pregnant with a son, but with insanity (*Amph.* 718-9).¹⁶⁷ Alcumena refutes Sosia's claims and asks the gods to ensure she does truly bear a son (*Amph.* 720). To Sosia, whom she believes she previously defended from Amphitruo's temper, though in reality saved Mercury from Jupiter's, she now threatens a thrashing: *uerum tu malum magnum habebis si hic suom officium facit* ("Indeed, you will suffer a

¹⁶⁷ Assuming Alcumena is indeed exceedingly padded at the belly, that is a lot of insanity with which to be pregnant.

terrible beating if [my husband] does his duty,” *Amph.* 721). Given that Amphitruo left her earlier to attend to his responsibilities despite desiring to stay, it is significant that Alcumena invokes her husband’s sense of duty as a means of revenge against Sosia for his accusation. She believes Amphitruo to be a responsible man, and must therefore expect him to carry out his duties as she has outlined them: Alcumena must earnestly wish for Sosia to be punished. This vengeful attitude is far more in line with the behaviour of the angry wife than the *obsequens matrona*.

In a manner that echoes Cleostrata’s interrogation of her husband’s whereabouts, in which Lysidamus refutes every accusation she makes (*Cas.* 239-247), Alcumena eventually turns to questioning her husband about his. When Amphitruo asks if Alcumena believes he was really home a day early, instead of answering patiently, such as she might have done earlier in the conversation, she turns the question back around on him, demanding: *tun te abiisse hodie hinc negas?* (“Do you deny that you left here today?” *Amph.* 758). When Amphitruo does indeed deny it, Alcumena grows dismissive and sarcastic, asking if he will also deny gifting her a golden *patera* which she has already sent inside their home (*Amph.* 760-1). As they examine the evidence of the *patera*, Alcumena successfully producing it, she begins to order her husband around, taking satisfaction in what will be a public embarrassment for him: *age aspice huc sis nunciam / tu qui quae facta infitiare; quem ego iam hic conuincam palam* (“Go ahead, look here, won’t you, you who denies what’s happened; now I’ll expose all this publicly,” *Amph.* 778-9). Her tone having grown sharper and her replies now far less entreating, Alcumena

has changed into the role of an *uxor irata*, treating her husband not as a man she seeks to please with her responses, but an opponent from whom she wishes to wring out the truth.

Like other *uxores iratae*, Alcumena desires to preserve her honour. Rather than guarding her reputation against the damage her husband might cause her through his affairs, however, she is put into a position where she must defend against accusations of her own infidelity. When Amphitruo hears that his wife has gone to bed with another man, he accuses Alcumena of shamelessness (*Amph.* 818). Alcumena does not just defend herself, but her lineage as well: *istuc facinus quod tu insimulas nostro generi non decet* (“This outrage that you accuse [me of] does not befit our family,” *Amph.* 820). Despite swearing oaths to the gods and promising witnesses who can corroborate her story (*Amph.* 824, 831-4), Amphitruo does not believe her, stating that women are wont to swear boldly (*Amph.* 836).¹⁶⁸ With no other options, Amphitruo finally resorts to threatening divorce. Rather than the wife seeking out a family member to act on her behalf, as Menaechmus’ wife and Dorippa do (*Men.* 734-8; *Merc.* 787-8), Plautus subverts this convention by having Amphitruo suggest Alcumena’s relative be brought to mediate their quarrel (*Amph.* 848-54). If Alcumena’s relative, Naucrates, finds that Alcumena has indeed done anything wrong, then she will not object to Amphitruo divorcing her (*Amph.* 853). Plautus, in assigning the role of divorce-seeker to the husband, rather than the angry wife, has subverted a trope that is otherwise typical of a couple with this confrontational dynamic.

¹⁶⁸ See Porter (2008) on how the comic tradition of faithless wives exploiting oaths may inform Plautus’ approach to the reception of Alcumena’s pledge.

After the agreement to an investigation has been made, Alcumena withdraws into the home and Amphitruo goes to find Naucrates. Jupiter then returns disguised as Amphitruo and announces to the audience how he will cast the couple into even greater confusion before ultimately revealing the truth. When he is finished explaining this, however, Alcumena enters for the second time. Unlike her initial introduction on the stage, this one greatly resembles the entrances typical of the *uxor irata*. Ranting, Alcumena protests her husband's behaviour towards her and vows not to treat his accusations as though they were of no consequence (*Amph.* 882-6). Promising she will not tolerate being indecently accused, she outlines her plans for how to get back at her husband. Either she will leave him, or he will need to apologize to her, swearing that he wishes he had never accused an innocent woman of such indecent charges (*Amph.* 887-890). Before she can continue, Jupiter-as-Amphitruo appears. Alcumena remarks: *sed eccum uideo qui <modo> me miseram arguit / stupri, dedecoris* ("Oh, but look, I can see the man who declared his poor wife was guilty of adultery and dishonour," *Amph.* 897-8). The use of *misera* to describe her current state echoes similar usage by other angry wives in the midst of a disagreement with their husbands,¹⁶⁹ and by positioning him as her enemy, she cements that she perceives herself to be in direct opposition to her husband (*Amph.* 900).

In response to this harsh treatment, Jupiter-as-Amphitruo chastises her for her irascibility: *nimis iracunda es* ("You're too hot-tempered," *Amph.* 903). Tensions between

¹⁶⁹ E.g. Menaechmus's wife (*Men.* 852).

spouses appear to have reached their peak in this moment where Alcumena is explicitly identified as angry. Alcumena, in return, orders him not to touch her and implies he must be an idiot: *stultior stultissimo* (“More stupid than the stupidest man,” *Amph.* 907). We can recall that in the *Casina*, when Cleostrata insults Lysidamus directly to his face, she is accused of stepping beyond the bounds of how much anger is appropriate for a wife to express towards her husband (*Cas.* 244-251). Rather than chastising Alcumena, however, Jupiter-as-Amphitruo goes on to explain that he has returned to apologize, since her anger upsets him more than her words do (*Amph.* 908-17).

By Jupiter’s definition, his only chance at absolution of his guilt will be if Alcumena resolves to let go of her anger towards him: *per dexteram tuam te, Alcumena, oro, opsecro, / da mihi hanc ueniam, ignosce, irata ne sies* (“By your right hand, Alcumena, I ask, I entreat you, / give me this pardon, forgive me, don’t be angry,” *Amph.* 923-4). Forgiveness is explicitly associated with the relinquishment of anger in this scene. When an *uxor irata* lets go of her anger toward her husband, it is implied that this action exonerates him, and she no longer finds him guilty of offending her. When Alcumena initially refuses to pardon him, Jupiter-as-Amphitruo questions if she is sane (*Amph.* 929), the accusation which caused her temper to boil over in the first place. This results in Alcumena turning away, but Jupiter-as-Amphitruo calls her back, swearing an oath that he believes his wife (who is technically Juno, though he does not explain this to Alcumena) to be chaste (*Amph.* 931-2).¹⁷⁰ Once he gives this oath, Jupiter asks if

¹⁷⁰ Juno is at times characterized as a form of *uxor irata* herself, married to an unfaithful partner, prone to crafting clever means of vindictive revenge, and irascible. She forms a sort of divine parallel to the angry wives of Plautus, a mythological tradition which reflects contemporary attitudes.

Alcumena is still angry: *iam nunc irata non es?* (“Now you’re not angry anymore, right?” *Amph.* 937). While he has not apologized for Amphitruo’s treatment of her during their argument, in particular the accusations of madness that appear to have pushed her quickly to anger, he has addressed a core issue of Alcumena’s anger: she has grown defensive over her *pudicitia* after being accused of losing it. Believing that her husband has just sworn that his earlier claims were not made in earnest, therefore implying that he does in fact regard her as chaste and loyal, Alcumena confirms she is no longer angry with him: *non sum* (“I’m not,” *Amph.* 937).

The construction of this scene is nearly identical to that of the *Casina*. Lysidamus asks that a pardon be given to him by his wife: *uxor, da uiro hanc ueniam* (“Wife, give your husband this pardon,” *Cas.* 1000). Then when Cleostrata agrees, he verifies that she means it: *non irata es?* (“You’re not angry?” *Cas.* 1007). Cleostrata confirms: *non sum irata* (“I’m not angry,” *Cas.* 1007). In order to reach this reconciliatory place in the *Casina*, Cleostrata has orchestrated a complex public humiliation of her husband who, now embarrassed, seeks to save some face with his wife and return to their previous status quo. Jupiter-as-Amphitruo has not been shamed in a grand display by Alcumena. His desire to return their relationship to a more pleasant state is fuelled by his eagerness to regain sexual access to her, a strategy which is ultimately successful.¹⁷¹ While stating that her husband should not have made such accusations in the first place, Alcumena nevertheless becomes obliging once more: *uerum eadem si idem purgas mi, patiunda sunt*

¹⁷¹ As examined in the previous chapter, restricting sexual access is also strategy which Cleostrata employs when angry at Lysidamus. Lysidamus’ attempts at cajoling his wife, however, are far less successful.

(“At the same time, if indeed you apologize to me for it, I’ll have to endure it,” *Amph.* 944-5). *Obsequens* once again, when Jupiter-as-Amphitruo requests that Alcumena have clean vessels be prepared for him to make offerings, she obeys immediately (*Amph.* 946-9).

In scenes of apology where the husband seeks absolution from his wife, her anger has empowered her to control the narrative. Unless the *uxor irata* forgives her husband, the story arc cannot conclude. When Sosia returns to the stage, for example, he asks Jupiter-as-Amphitruo if there is peace between him and Alcumena now. Jupiter answers in the affirmative: *habui expurigationem; facta pax est* (“I’ve been forgiven: peace has been made,” *Amph.* 956-62). The onus for concordance within the marriage has once again been placed on the wife. However, unlike the *matrona bona*, who begets *concordia* through submissiveness to her husband’s will, the *uxor irata* achieves it through surrendering her anger toward her husband. The husband is, as Jupiter says, expurgated, and as a result, peace is made not by him, but by the desire of his wife to pardon him for his transgressions. Without Alcumena’s forgiveness, there is no chance for plot progression beyond repeated scenes of the wife reproaching the husband. Although Alcumena is being manipulated by Jupiter when she shows him lenience, the responsibility of permitting the story to evolve beyond the dynamic of angry wife and contrite husband is ultimately left up to her. Soon after the forgiveness scene in the *Casina*, the play concludes, resolution achieved at last. The role of the *uxor irata* concludes alongside the play itself. The *Amphitryon*, however, still has a ways to go. Jupiter has promised the audience, after all, that this story will end with Alcumena

painlessly giving birth, her reputation restored just in time for reconciliation with her true husband (*Amph.* 876-9). Because he has instead chosen to take advantage of his doubled identity to do again what caused Alcumena so much trouble in the first place, Jupiter has not yet allowed to story to overcome the ultimate obstacle to Alcumena and Amphytruo's true happiness. While T. G. A. Nelson states that "harmony and reconciliation rather than wit or hilarity" are the essence of comedy in the Middle Ages, this statement applies at times to the plots of Plautus, and in particular to this scene.¹⁷² Aside from Jupiter's false oath, there is not much about this moment that is particularly witty or hilarious. Rather, it extends another opportunity for conflict, so that the playwright might later demonstrate even greater obstacles being overcome and greater peace ultimately restored.

With Alcumena's anger resolved, the audience watches as she returns to her previous archetype of the *matrona bona* (*Amph.* 973). Just as the *Amphytrion* is a tragicomedy, a play that claims to seamlessly implement distinct conventions from two different genres, so Alcumena is both an *uxor irata* and *matrona bona*. While New Comedy is not known for flexibility in the roles its characters play, figures typically categorized as a particular stock type who then act accordingly for the duration of the play, the *Amphytrion* subverts audience predictions regarding the identities of its main characters. Although Alcumena is first introduced as a *matrona bona*, those around her also perceiving her as such, it is easy for her to slip into the role of *uxor irata* once provoked. It is just as easy for her to slip

¹⁷² Nelson (1990), 1.

back into her role as *matrona bona* once subdued. Alcumena demonstrates an ease of transformation on par with that of Mercury in the prologue.

It would be difficult to claim, therefore, that Alcumena is either fully an angry wife or entirely a good matron. When she is insulting her husband, withholding affection, and complaining about his behaviour, she does not resemble a *matrona bona*. Likewise, when she acquiesces to her husband, laments his absence, and eagerly seeks out his company in bed, one can not imagine other *uxores iratae* acting in such a way. Instead, Alcumena exists as evidence of the difference between the two figures, and most importantly, the ‘stock’ element of the contrasting character types. Having become codified in Plautus’ works, the *uxor irata* and *matrona bona* have been developed enough that they appear as two distinct identities. They are identifiable by audience, playwright, and even dramatic figures within the plays as having contradicting behaviours, motivations, and temperaments. Although Marion Faure-Ribreau identifies the *uxor irata* as a “variation assez fréquente sur le code des personae comiques,”¹⁷³ it is more right to consider the angry wife as her own comic persona, rather than a variation of the typical *matrona* figure, given the antithetical nature of their behaviours and temperaments. The *Amphitryon* is therefore a unique example of the power of change for the playwright. By manipulating the convention of stock characters in New Comedy to achieve new narratological effects, Plautus has created a comedy that is hybridic not just in its genre, but in the very nature of the figures that form the basis of the story itself.

¹⁷³ Faure-Ribreau (2009), 10.

Conclusion

This thesis presents an examination of three characters who represent the stock type of the *uxor irata*. As a figure central to a variety of plots found in New Comedy, the *uxor irata* is a recognizable archetype that embodies distinct behaviours, motivations, and personalities from those typical of the *matrona bona*. Although both figures draw on shared cultural knowledge concerning the married Roman woman, Plautus is fond of using the *uxor irata* to subvert expectations. Inherently transgressive, the angry wife goes against the mainstream conventions of contemporary Rome to provide entertainment, the ultimate goal of Plautus' comedies. She is an avenue through which he commonly enhances fundamental components of the narrative, such as conflict, suspense, and resolution, to create a more interesting story.

Although the term *matrona* is generally used to refer to the married women in Plautus, I argue that the term is not suitable to describe wives whose behaviour and traits do not align with the ideals prescribed to the *matrona* in ancient Roman society. While *matronae* in reality were expected to manage households properly, be deferential to their husbands, and have a good reputation, several wives in Plautus often fall short of these expectations, at times outright defying them. Instead, they prioritize controlling the behaviour of their husbands through means of manipulation, humiliation, and influence over the household, sex, and material goods, motivated to do so by their anger. The *uxor irata* possesses inherent motivations that the audience, already familiar with the stock type, understands upon encountering them in the play. Her distinction from the *matrona bona* is therefore exceedingly important from the playwright's perspective. If the

audience is easily able to recognize that a character is an *uxor irata*, and not a *matrona bona*, then the playwright does not need to spend time developing that character's identity throughout the play. Instead, he may rely on the stock type to provide information for the audience on that figure's typical motivations, behaviour, and personality.

Plautus' use of language in the *Menaechmi* highlights the problem confronting scholars concerned with identifying the stock types to which his female characters belong. Menaechmus' wife is never referred to as a *matrona* in the play itself. Rather, she is overwhelmingly addressed as *uxor*. Following the naming conventions of male stock characters, who are defined by behavioural attributes as well as their social statuses, the title of *uxor irata* is more accurate than the term *matrona* when describing figures such as Menaechmus' wife. Especially when compared to the wives of the *Stichus*, Menaechmus' wife does not share enough similarities with historical understandings of the term *matrona* nor does she serve a particularly matronal function in the story. While the wives from the *Stichus* aim to ease the fulfillment of their husband's desires and act accordingly, Menaechmus' wife desires and does the opposite. Ultimately, Menaechmus' wife demonstrates that although she does not completely juxtapose the figure of the *matrona*, since both stock types reference the same social category in reality, she nevertheless portrays a markedly different stock character configuration from the *matronae bonae* of other plays.

The wife from the *Menaechmi* thus serves as a key example of the *uxor irata*. She is framed as an opponent to Menaechmus, her anger essential not just for her

characterization but for the story itself. With a plot that relies heavily on moments of mistaken identity, Menaechmus' wife serves as an opportunity to create situations where these mistakes can happen. By blocking him from entering the home until her anger is appeased with the return of her stolen *palla*, Menaechmus' wife creates situations where both Sosicles and Menaechmus are left to roam Epidamnus and create trouble for each other. Emboldened by her anger, Menaechmus' wife makes demands of his oblivious twin, criticizes Menaechmus for actions that were not his own, and confuses one's behaviour with the other, ultimately resulting in the accusations of madness that form the play's exuberant conclusion. Furthermore, the negative characterization of Menaechmus' wife is essential for justifying the mistreatment she suffers from her husband. Plautus has determined that in the plot of the *Menaechmi*, it is more important for the audience to be entertained than it is to sympathize with the wife figure. Thus, she is framed as an irascible, unreasonable shrew. Unlike the figure of the *matrona*, who in Ancient Rome was revered for her tolerant temperament, the *uxor irata* is framed as an adversarial, antipathetic stock type, ideal for use in situations where the playwright requires a strong, oppositional force to create opportunities for entertainment and conflict at the expense of the protagonist.

In the *Casina* Cleostrata represents a nuanced version of the *uxor irata*. Not as unsympathetic as Menaechmus' wife, she nevertheless acts largely in opposition to her husband and utilizes similar techniques of manipulation, embarrassment, and withholding to influence his behaviour, albeit in a far more complex manner. In orchestrating a plan to humiliate her husband for his refusal to behave in accordance with her ideals, Cleostrata

acts as an internal playwright, her anger not only emboldening her, but empowering her to take action against her husband's poor behaviour. Every step taken towards the execution of her 'Casinus' plot is deliberate, and though motivated by her anger at her husband's failure to preserve the good standing of the household, she acts with a clear mind and level head. Cleostrata is different from other *uxores iratae*, such as Dorippa from the *Mercator* and Artemona from the *Asinaria*, who impulsively confront their husbands to chastise them into compliance. Her calculated plan for retribution is also in contrast with the behaviour of *matronae bonae*, who do not choose to act similarly when threatened with the same poor behaviour from their husbands, highlighting the unique intentionality in how Cleostrata acts upon her anger.

Additionally, Cleostrata elucidates compelling motivations for wifely anger, driven by her desire to preserve the good standing of herself, her household, and her family. Her husband's failure to prioritize this same goal, going so far as to actively undermine it, serves as the fundamental source of her frustration with him. Cleostrata's connection to Lysidamus through marriage is an essential feature of the mechanisms of her character type, her status as an *uxor* implying that she has stakes in the impact Lysidamus' affair might have on their household. Furthermore, by having Cleostrata label Lysidamus' actions so frankly as distasteful, the playwright has justified Cleostrata's revenge against him. In portraying the angry wife as occupying a morally superior position over her husband, Plautus has given the audience permission to laugh at the husband's misdeeds. While previously the audience might have laughed at Menaechmus' wife for her outlandish behaviour and failure to prevent her husband's infidelity, in the

Casina they laugh with Cleostrata, an *uxor irata* successful in preventing her husband's affair in an outrageous fashion. Plautus has therefore exploited the possible uses of the stock character of the *uxor irata* to generate a new source of comedy.

Finally, Alcumena in the *Amphitryon* presents a unique synthesis of the *uxor irata* and *matrona bona*. Making use of the contrasting traits between both stock types, Plautus has Alcumena slip between the behaviours of the angry wife and the good matron in order to cater to the goals of different scenes. When doting *obsequentia* towards Jupiter enables the plot to move forward and resolve previous obstacles, she is *bona*. When conflict is necessary to increase tension and create new issues to contend with, she is *irata*. Her temperament ultimately determines the outcome of the scene of which she is the centre. As a tragicomedy, the *Amphitryon* also claims to exist as both a tragedy and comedy, in part due to the characters involved in the story. Although gods and kings are considered tragic figures, the presence of an *uxor irata* contributes to the comedic classification of the play, the angry wife stock character directly tied to the genre of New Comedy. Similarly, in Plautus' comedies, resolution is practically required in order to conclude a story properly. The *Amphitryon* demonstrates how the rectification of the *uxor irata*'s anger is a necessary condition to achieving resolution in the conflict of the plot. In plays with an *uxor irata*, the burden of *concordia* within a marriage, and within the play itself, is placed on the wife. The *uxor irata* realizes this ideal not by being subservient, as a *matrona bona* might be, but in withholding forgiveness until her anger is appeased, her role as the *uxor irata* ultimately concluding with the play itself.

Alcumena also presents the unique case of an *uxor irata* who is not angry because her husband is faithless, but because her husband perceives her as such. Although the *uxor irata* may take drastic measures in order to control her husband, she never violates the core ideals that sustain her status as a married, upper-class woman. When Amphitruo believes that Alcumena has failed to be chaste in their marriage, unlike Menaechnus' wife and Cleostrata, Alcumena does not occupy the moral high ground in her husband's eyes. Without her husband's belief in her integrity lending her authority, Alcumena is representative of Plautus' endeavour to evolve traditional elements of Roman Republican comedy, such as the stock character, by subverting the typical situations associated with specific character types. Furthermore, the play's self-consciousness of its own artificiality permits Plautus to play with taboo themes of wifely infidelity and questionable paternity of an unborn child without crossing the boundary into impropriety. Exploiting the layers of persona, costume, and actor through Alcumena's pregnant appearance as a source for jokes sets a precedent of playful artifice regarding the play's connection to reality. By acknowledging and exaggerating its metatheatricality, Plautus makes clear that the *Amphitryon* is not designed to be taken seriously enough for its subject matter to seem unreasonably offensive. In other words, he explicitly requests comedic license from the audience so that he might entertain them using subjects contemporary society might regard as otherwise inviolable.

Across all three plays, recurring themes point to consistency in the stock character of the *uxor irata*. The figure of the angry wife is unwaveringly defensive over signals of her identity as a married woman of high status, protective of her *palla* (modelled after the

stola), her household's reputation, and her chastity. Her *ira*, typically triggered by threats to these elements, is a destabilizing force in the dynamics of authority within her household. The typical perpetrator of offence against her image, honour, and reputation is her husband, who is consequently the target of her reactive anger. Motivated by this anger, the *uxor irata*'s actions are aimed at controlling her husband's behaviour so that he will no longer threaten to unsettle the elements over which she is most protective. While a *morigera* wife, like the *matrona bona*, might prioritize submissiveness to her husband over holding him accountable, the angry wife is instead drawn to act vindictively. The *uxor irata*'s actions, such as locking out the husband from the home, humiliating him publicly, and making demands, reflect a personality rooted in different values than those represented by the *matrona bona*. The *uxor irata*'s expression of her anger is often a source of amusement for the audience, one founded not only in farce and exaggeration, but in the playwright's ability to subvert societal ideals for the married woman without transgressing the extremes of serious gender norms. At their core, *uxores iratae* value their status as married women and are willing to prioritize the good standing of this status over behavioural ideals. The angry wife's *ira*, from the angry wife's perspective, is justifiable as a means to an end. More often than not, it is the anger of the Plautine wife that brings about the resolution of the play otherwise mired with trouble. The *uxor irata* is, at her core, an essential stock character of Plautus' comedies, one whose role in his plays deserves recognition and close study. I present this thesis as such a study.

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