CASTRATE THE HE-GOAT! OVERPOWERING THE PATERFAMILIAS IN PLAUTUS’ MERCATOR

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Abstract. By means of a symbolic castration of the aged father, less privileged characters in Plautus’ Mercator assume powerful roles and raise their voices as they opt for the distribution of more power within the family in important matters such as divorce. In Plautus’ comic version, the change will come not only on the level of the domestic space but also in the public sphere through the modification of the legal system.

Plautus’ Mercator takes its name from Charinus, Demipho’s son, sent off by his father from Athens to Rhodes on a ship loaded with merchandise. Allegedly, Charinus’ new occupation as a merchant would help him to recover from his love affair with a meretrix. Deeming his son’s infatuation to be just a puerile rite of passage, and at the same time upset over the wickedness of the prostitute’s pimp, Demipho decides that temporary exile combined with a profitable profession is most probably the only solution for his prodigal son. Little did the old father suspect! Having spent two years abroad, Charinus comes back to Athens with a new girlfriend, whom he has met on the island of Rhodes, a very beautiful girl, as her Greek name, Pasicompsa, indicates. What will set the play into motion is the old father’s falling in love with Pasicompsa, his own son’s girlfriend, as soon as he lays eyes on her at the harbor. In this

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2 The text of Plautus Merc. is that of P. J. Enk (ed.), Plauti Mercator cum Prolegomenis, Notis Criticis, Commentario Exegetico 1-2 (Leiden 1932); of Plautus Rud. is that of F. Leo (ed.), Plauti Comoediae 2 (Berlin 1896); of Suetonius Tib. is that of M. Ihm (ed.), C. Suetoni Tranquilli Opera 1 (Leipzig 1908); of Plautus Cas. is that of F. Leo (ed.), Plauti Comoediae 1 (Berlin 1895); and of Ovid Met. is that of F. J. Miller and G. P. Goold (edd.), Ovid: Metamorphoses in Two Volumes (Cambridge, Mass. 1977-1984). All translations are mine.

3 E. Segal, Roman Laughter: The Comedy of Plautus (Cambridge, Mass. 1968) 64-69 discusses the standard role of sons ignoring monetary gain, thus opposing the basic mandate of the mos maiorum to conduct good mercantile business. In Plaut. Merc., Charinus does not meet his father’s expectations to augment his peculium, but rather spends all his money on Pasicompsa. Most recently, M. Leigh, Comedy and the Rise of Rome (Oxford 2004) 98-157 has offered an analysis of the agrarian lifestyle in the comedies and how it is juxtaposed to the more dangerous and risky mercantile seafaring, as Plautus portrays it in Merc.
study, I focus on the conflict between the older and younger generations, a prominent theme in Plautine comedy, by addressing how this topic of generational rivalry between fathers and sons is particularly exploited in Mercator to draw attention to issues, such as female power, prominent during the play. More specifically, I examine how the distinguished voice of less privileged characters, and of certain female figures in particular, suggests that a departure from the mos maiorum may be necessary for the interests of the domus and, by extension, of the urbs. The father’s unbecoming love for a younger woman represents a rupture of ancestral ideals. By means of a symbolic castration of the aged paterfamilias, the playwright points to a shift of power within the patriarchal family in important matters such as fidelity or divorce. This shift, however, is only enacted within the safe boundaries of the stage. In Plautus’ comic solution, the change will take place not only on the domestic level, but also in the public sphere through the modification of the legal system, a change that is never to be enacted.

The comedy opens with the arrival of young Charinus from Rhodes. While the prologue provides the audience with the necessary background for the denouement of the story, Plautus seizes the opportunity to proclaim that his play originates with Philemon’s Emporos (Merc. 9f.). Acanthio, a slave, however, interrupts Charinus’ plan of deceiving his aged father by bringing Pasicompsa

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4 As D. Konstan, *Roman Comedy* (Ithaca 1983) 20 observes, “the competition between father and son is always the result of paternal encroachment, never of incestuous desires in the youth. By violating the connubial code himself, the father implicitly gives sanction to the son’s impulse, and thereby weakens the status boundaries that are his obligation to uphold.” D. F. Sutton, *Ancient Comedy: The War of Generations* (New York 1993) 69 points out that “by combining stories about generational conflicts within single families with the conflict of Hellenistic values versus those of Roman forefathers—for that is what mos maiorum literally means—Plautus transforms what would otherwise be abstract tales about the eternal human condition within families into creations of considerable immediacy for the time and place in which they were written.”

5 In studies of female figures in Plautus’ plays (and especially in *Cas.*), scholars have examined the transgressive role of slaves and wives in questioning the male protagonists’ actions. B. Gold, “‘Vested Interests’ in Plautus’ Casina: Cross-dressing in Roman Comedy,” *Helios* 25 (1998) 17-29 examines how Plautus uses his female characters to voice a concern of Roman social mores by questioning the naturalness of normative male sexuality. Similarly, N. E. Andrews, “Tragic Re-presentation and the Semantics of Space in Plautus’ Casina,” *Mnemosyne* 57 (2004) 445-64 has recently argued that in Cas. the slave Pardalisca uses the public space outside the house to externalize and legitimize the private concerns of women inside the house.

into the house, supposedly as Demipho’s wife’s maid. As the servus currens announces, Demipho has already seen and talked to Pasicompasa at the harbor; moreover, he has devoured the girl with his eyes (oculis . . . hiantibus, “with his eyes . . . wide open,”183) and has expressed interest in acquiring her. And yet the old man stumbles upon the major obstacle of how to conceal the newly acquired young mistress. He seeks the help of his neighbor, Lysimachus, though the next-door neighbor is reluctant to become involved. Conveniently enough, however, Lysimachus’ wife is away in the country, and therefore Pasicompasa may stay with him for the time being. When the wife comes back from the rus, Lysimachus will be in trouble. However, a solution of the plot is at hand, through the intervention of Lysimachus’ son, Eutychus, whereby Demipho has to surrender Pasicompasa to Charinus.

The comic implications from a conflict between the older and younger generations are not unique in Mercator: the figure of the senex libidinosus especially is a stock character employed in other plays (Plaut. Asin., Cas.), an element borrowed from New comedy.9 Unique in this play, however, is that the struggle between the two generations comes to an end after a process of symbolic castration of the elderly father who can be conquered only when his masculinity has been removed.

When the sixty-year-old father sees Pasicompasa, he suddenly feels rejuvenated sexually, a symptom of his coup de foudre. In his first appearance, Demipho relates how he dreamed of bringing into his house a new capra (“she-goat”), who would replace the old one, his own wife:

mercari uisus mihi sum formosam capram;

ei ne noceret quam domi ante habui capram

neu discordarent si ambae in uno essent loco,

posterius quam mercatus fueram uisu’ sum

in custodelam simiae concredere.

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9 For a good discussion of the similarities and differences between Plautus’ Mercator and Casina, see S. O’Bryhim, “The Originality of Plautus’ Casina,” AJPh 110 (1989) 81-103, esp. 85-88. Although in Cas. the father is portrayed as an impotent old man who in his ignorance, and because of his wife’s cunning, succumbs to the cross-dressed slave, I believe that in Merc. the old father is stripped of his “masculinity” through distinct imagery (such as the dream).
ea simia adeo post hau multo ad me uenit,
male mihi precatur et facit conuicium:
ait sese illius opera atque aduentu caprae
flagitium et damnum fecisse hau mediocriter;
dicit capram, quam dederam seruandam sibi,
suai uxoris dotem ambedisse oppido.

(Plaut. Merc. 229-39)

It seemed like I had bought myself a beautiful she-goat. So that she would not
be hurt by another she-goat, which I already had at home, or fight if they were
both in the same place, after I bought her, I thought I would place her in the
guardianship of a monkey. Not long afterwards this monkey came to me,
cursing and abusing me verbally: he said that thanks to my she-goat’s arrival
and effort he was greatly disgraced and incurred a significant loss. The goat,
he said, the one I entrusted to him to take care of, had completely devoured his
wife’s dowry.

Then the monkey insists that unless Demipho takes his goat back right away, he
will reveal everything to the old man’s wife. Demipho’s dilemma and torturing
dream, however, comes to an end:

intera ad me haedus uisust adgredirier,
infit mihi praedicare sese ab simia
capram abduxisse et coepit irridere me;
ego enim lugere atque abductam illam aegre pati.

(Plaut. Merc. 248-51)

And next I dreamed of a kid approaching to report he had kidnapped my goat
from the monkey. And he began to laugh in my face. I woke up crying real
tears and wailing for having lost her.

Critics such as Fraenkel, Leo, and Marx have observed the similarities between
this dream and that of Daemones in Plautus, Rudens 593-614.10 Regardless of
the connection established between this scene and the episode in Rudens, and
notwithstanding the difficult issue of dating the two plays,11 the present scene is

10 E. Fraenkel, Plautinisches im Plautus (Berlin 1922) 198-206; F. Leo, Plautinische
Forschungen: Zur Kritik und Geschichte der Komödie (Berlin 1912) 162; F. Marx, “Ein
Stück unabhängiger Poesie des Plautus,” SAWW 140 (1899) 17; see also Enk [1] 7-21
(discussing Marx’s views). A. Katsouris, “Notes on Dreams and Dream-like Visions,”
Dodone 7 (1978) 43-86, and “Two Notes on Dreams: Menander, Dyscolus 412-8 and Plautus,
Rudens and Mercator,” LCM 3 (1978) 47f. sides with Marx’s view that the dream in Plaut. 
Merc. comes from the scene in Plaut. Rud.

(ca. 210 BC); T. Frank, “Two Notes on Plautus,” AJPh 53 (1932) 243-51, esp. 243-48
(189-88 BC); E. Woytek, “Sprach- und Kontextbeobachtung im Dienste der
Prioritätsbestimmung bei Plautus: Zur Datierung von Rudens, Mercator und Persa,” WS 114
carefully incorporated into *Mercator*’s plot, as we shall see. Demipho entrusts the goat to a monkey, represented by his neighbor Lysimachus, for protection. This new she-goat, however, proves powerful, and prodigally spends the dowry of the monkey’s wife. Demipho is finally saved in his dream by a *haedus*, a younger goat who takes care of the *capra* and at the same time mocks the old man’s stupidity. Demipho is quick to combine his meeting with Pasicompsa with the portent of the dream, yet he does not realize the implications set in motion by his ominous dream (*Merc. 252-71*).\(^\text{12}\)

Immediately after Demipho’s recounting of his vision, his neighbor Lysimachus comes to the stage and orders his servants to castrate the he-goat who causes trouble on the farm:

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LY. profecto ego illunc hircum castrari uolo,
ruri qui uobeis exhibet negotium.
DE. nec omen illuc mihi nec auspicium placet.
quasi hircum metuo ne uxor me castret mea,
atque illius hic nunc simiae partis ferat.
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*(Plaut. *Merc. 272-76)*

LY. As for that he-goat *I want him castrated*, the one on the farm giving you trouble.
DE. I don’t like this omen or augury at all. I am afraid my wife will castrate me as a he-goat and Lysimachus will play the role of that monkey I dreamed.

Being an out-of-context and dispensable piece of information on the surface, Lysimachus’ order to his servants invites the audience to reinterpret Demipho’s dream. In his nightmare, Demipho has already assumed the role of the *hircus* (‘he-goat’) who falls in love with a *capra*, just to surrender to a much younger

\(^{12}\) D. Averna, “La scena del sogno nel *Mercator* Plautino,” *Pan* 8 (1987) 5-17 discusses the dream from a psychoanalytical perspective, and points to its Freudian aspects.
The old man immediately apprehends the transparency of the omen: he is the he-goat who will be castrated. By “plundering” his wife’s dowry, Pasicompsa’s presence threatens to destabilize the order in Lysimachus’ house. As we shall see, the return of the wife from the country restores the disturbed *mores* of the urban house, by means of a direct threat of divorce and of immediate withdrawal of a woman’s most powerful weapon, her *dos* (“dowry”). Unless the unhinged older men change behavior, the figurative castration entailed will consist of the removal not only of their masculine power but also of a significant part of their property assets, their wives’ dowries.

The assimilation of the old male to an animal whose manliness will be lost is constant in *Mercator*, as castration is accompanied by the augmented role of female power and the final submission of older generations to the demands of a new status quo. More specifically, after Demipho confesses to Lysimachus his passion for Pasicompsa, the latter disparages, throughout the play, his neighbor’s madness. Among Lysimachus’ censorious apostrophes to his old friend, two stand out. First, Lysimachus addresses Demipho as a *ueruex* (“castrated ram”) and then as a *senex hircosus* (“old goat”):


DE. What should I consider? Lord, man! I certainly think that what I should do is go inside there!

LY. *Do you really, old wether? You shall go inside? . . . On an empty stomach, foul-breathed pervert, dirty old goat, you will kiss a woman! Why? To make her throw up, as soon as you approach her?*

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13 What is noticeable in Demipho’s dream of animals is that the language echoes similar phraseology from Attelan farce: . . . *donec ea [sc. Mallonia] relicto iudicio domum se abripuit ferroque transegit, obscaenitate[ri] oris hirsuto atque olido seni clare exprobrata. unde mora in Atellancio exhodio proximis ludis adsensu maximo excepta percrebruit, “hircum uetulum capreis naturam ligurire” (“. . . until Mallonia left the court and returned home in a haste, where she stabbed herself, publicly condemning the hairy and stinking old man for his obscenities. Hence a line from the end of an Atellan play was taken up with great enthusiasm in the next games and was repeated: ‘The old goat is licking the she-goat’s behinds,’” Suet. *Tib.* 45.1.6-11). Suetonius here relates how the death of a certain Mallonia results in the mockery of Tiberius during the following games, by means of allusion to a farce. On Atellan farce, see P. Frassinetti, *Atellanae Fabulae* (Rome 1967).

14 In Plautus’ *Casina*, a play preoccupied with similar issues, the *senex* is also called *hircus* (*hirquus*, 550) and *vervex* (535).
In the eyes of his “upright” neighbor, Demipho has not only been assimilated to an animal, but also to one whose masculinity has been impaired. After all, Demipho is portrayed with many physical defects. For instance, when Eutychus describes to Charinus the unidentified old man who has already bought Pasicompsa, the picture is painted in the least attractive colors:

\[
\begin{align*}
EV. & \text{ feci. CH. qua forma esse aiebant, } <\text{Eutycche}>? \text{ EV. ego dicam tibi: canum, uarum, uentriosum},^{15} \text{ bucculentum, breuiulum, subnigris oculis, oblongis malis, pansam aliquantulum.} \\
& \text{(Plaut. } \text{Merc. 638-40)}
\end{align*}
\]

EU. I did.
CH. How do they say he looked like, Eutychus?
EU. I will tell you: grey-haired, knock-kneed, pot-bellied, big-mouthed, stubby fellow, with blackish eyes, lantern jaws, and feet a bit splayed.

If one combines this metaphorical impotence ascribed to Demipho with the presence of female cunning in the play, we can see how the overpowering of the male \textit{paterfamilias} foreshadows the changes proclaimed at the end of the comedy. Lysimachus serves as the go-between, the person who arranges for Pasicompsa to stay at his house. When he brings the girl to the stage, he promises to give Pasicompsa to a female sheep as a wife, which she may easily fleece, thus alluding to Demipho’s wealth but also to his senile dullness and sexual impotence:

\[
\begin{align*}
. . . & \text{LY. ém istaec hercle res est. ouem tibi eccillam dabo, natam annos sexaginta, peculiarem. PA. } \text{mi senex, tam uetulam? LY. generis graecist; eam sei curabis, perbonast, tondetur nimium scite.} \\
& \text{(Plaut. } \text{Merc. 523-26)}
\end{align*}
\]

LY. Lord! Look, this is how things are. I will give you an ewe, look that one, sixty years old, for your very own!
PA. Dear old man, so old?
LY. \textit{It is a Greek one! If you take care of it, it will be a very good one! You will shear it to perfection!}

Special emphasis is placed on the feminine gender of the sheep (\textit{ouem eccillum, 524}).\textsuperscript{16} Demipho is pliable and can be readily manipulated. Indeed, the reader

\textsuperscript{15} In Plaut. \textit{Mil.}, when Pyrgopolynices faces an immediate threat of castration, the word \textit{abdomen} (see P. G. W. Glare \textit{[ed.], Oxford Latin Dictionary} [Oxford 1982] 4 s.v. “abdomen”) is used instead of \textit{inguen} (“groin,” “sexual organs”) or \textit{testis} (“testicle,” 1394-417); a reference to an older man’s big belly would comically emphasize his obesity rather than his sexuality.

\textsuperscript{16} The noun \textit{ouis} (“sheep”) would otherwise be distinguished from \textit{aries} (“ram”) if attention were being drawn to its masculine gender (cf. Ov. \textit{Met.} 9.732).
may be tempted to make a metatheatrical interpretation of Lysimachus’ words, whereby Plautus alludes to the mining of Philemon’s Greek original and its utter transformation into *Mercator*: just as Demipho will be shorn by Pasicompsa, so does Plautus quarry Philemon’s *Emporos*, for the sole purpose of clipping or even “castrating” it by means of a thoroughly Roman production. Most important, however, the passage bears upon our understanding of how the transition to a new status of things will be accomplished, namely the reduction of power for the *paterfamilias*.

How does the overpowering of the elderly male figure assist the objectives of the play? How does it relate to the end, and to the message that the playwright passes through laughter? An answer to these questions lies in the role of female figures in the play. As we have seen, the inappropriateness of elderly *amor* results in several humorous situations, but most importantly gives Lysimachus’ wife, Dorippa, and her slave, Syra, the chance to express their opinions about divorce with respect to women’s rights. Upon discovering what she thinks to be her husband’s amorous escapade, Dorippa sends her slave Syra off to her father:

*DO.* non miror sei quid damni facis aut flagiti. 
nec pol ego patiar seic me nuptam tam male 
measque in aedis seic scorta obductarier. 
Syra, i,rogato meum patrem uerbeis meeis 
ut ueniat ad me iam simul tecum.—*SY.* eo.—

(Plaut. *Merc.* 784-88)

DO. I am not surprised if you are disgraced or incur a loss! Good heavens! I will not endure such a dreadful married life and have prostitutes led to my house in such a fashion! Syra, go, ask my father on my behalf to come here with you now. 
SY. On my way.

The summoning of the father-in-law alludes to the threat of an impending divorce, since Lysimachus’ wife is an *uxor dotata* (“dowried wife”).¹⁷ In the scene of the dream, the young *capra* has been portrayed as spending the monkey’s wife’s dowry. Now the wife’s power lies in her right to use her *dos* as a means to threaten her rowdy husband, who can legitimately use the assets while married but has the obligation to return it in case of divorce.¹⁸ Moreover,


¹⁸ On marriage *manu* in Plautus’ time, see Treggiari [17] 443f.
when Syra comes back, the playwright seizes the chance to have her proclaim women’s rights; as an ideal of *emancipatio*, wives should be allowed, by law, to divorce faithless spouses:\(^{19}\)

SY. Ecastor lege dura uiuont mulieres
multoque iniquiore miserae quam uiri.

SY. Good Lord! Women live under harsh conditions, so much more unfair, poor us, than men. For if a husband brings a “girl” home behind his wife’s back, and the wife finds out, he gets free without a penalty. If the wife goes out behind his back, it is an excuse for him to get a divorce. Would that there be the same law for both husbands and wives; for a good wife is happy with one man: why should a husband be less happy with one wife? Mercy me, I warrant, if any husband cheat on his wife with a mistress, should these men be punished just as their wives are divorced if they make the same mistake, there would be more lone men than there now are women.

Syra’s proclamation of women’s legal rights with regard to divorce comes at a moment in the play when the male protagonist has been conveniently overpowered and subdued.

If we look closer at the new, ideal type of relationship that the play announces, we find substantial differences from what the corrupt elderly fathers of *Mercator*, and of Plautine comedy in general, come to represent. Being a prostitute, Pasicompsa herself would not comply with the conventional *mos maiorum*: she confesses ignorance of how to take care of a household or raise children (*Merc. 508f.*), and therefore she is unwilling to enter a conventional marriage, as one would otherwise expect. Rather, the new generation, to which Pasicompsa and Charinus ascribe, advocates equal roles in a loyal relationship as becomes clear from Pasicompsa’s own words:

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\(^{19}\) T. J. Moore, *The Theater of Plautus: Playing to the Audience* (Austin 1998) 164 observes how unusual and ironic this scene is, given that slaves would normally follow their masters immediately after their exit from the stage.
LY. quid ais tu? iam biennium quom tecum rém habet? PA. certo; 
et intér nos coniurauimus, ego cum illo et ille mecum: 
ego cum uiro et ill’ cum muliere, nisi cum illo aut ille mecum, neuter stupri caussa caput limaret. LY. di immortales! 
etiam cum uxore non cubet? PA. amabo, ân maritus?
neque est neque érit. LY. nolim quidém. homo hercle peierauit.

(Plaut. Merc. 535-39)

LY. What do you say? He has had a relationship with you for two years now?
PA. Sure; and we have promised each other with an oath, I to him and he to
me: I would not have a sexual affair with another man or he with a woman,
except for our own two selves.
LY. Immortal gods! He couldn’t even sleep with his wife?
PA. Say again, he is married? He is not and will never be.
LY. I would certainly wish. By Hercules, the guy has committed perjury.

Charinus and Pasicompsa seem to espouse a new ideal of a bond where
faithlessness has no place. Their secret vows of loyalty play off against
Lysimachus’ and Dorippa’s fight that ends in a reconciliation, but nevertheless
displays all the traits of a dysfunctional home: the alternative to reconciliation is
divorce. While the wife is away in the country, a place of ancient purity and
idealism, the elders of the city go wild:

LY. quid nunc ego faciam nisi uti ádeam atque adloquar?
iubet saluere suo’ uir uxorem suam.
urbani fiunt rustici? DO. pudicius
faciunt quam illi qui non fiunt rustici.
LY. num quid delinquont rustici? DO. ecastor minus
quam urbani, et multo minu’ mali quaerunt sibi.
LY. quid autem urbani deliquerunt? dic mihi,
cupio hercle scire.

(Plaut. Merc. 712-19)

LY. What should I now do but go and talk to her? Greetings from the husband
to his wife. Have our rustics become city people?
DO. They act with more decency than those who do not become rustics.
LY. The rustics haven’t done something wrong, have they?
DO. Mercy me, less than city people as they ask for much less trouble.
LY. But what have city people done wrong?

The old men’s rebellion, however, needs to be suppressed for the sake of the res
publica. Any love affair at their advanced age could be destructive for the
commonwealth:

DE. fator, deliqui prefecto. EV. étiam loquer, larua?
itidem ut tempus anni, aetate alia aliudfactum conuenit;
nam si istuc ius est, senecta aetate scortari senes,  
ubi locist res summa nostra puplica?

(Plaut. Merc. 983-86)

DE. I admit, for sure, I did something wrong.  
EU. Do you still speak, scarecrow? Just like seasons, it is appropriate for men to do different things at different ages. For if it is a proper thing that old men sleep around in old age, what will become of our affairs of the state?

When Demipho finally comes to his senses, Eutychus, Lysimachus’ son, concludes the play with a stipulation for the introduction of a new law, whereby older men must never fall in love again with younger women:

DE. eamus intro. EV. immo dicamus senibus legem censeo, priu’ quam abeamus, qua se lege teneant contentique sint.  
annos gnatus sexaginta qui erit, si quem scibimus si maritum siue hercle adeo caelibem scortarier,  
cúm eo nos hic lege agemus: inscitum arbitrabimur,  
et per nos quidem hercle egebit qui suom prodegerit.  
neu quisquam posthac prohibeto ádulescentem filium quin amet et scortum ducat, quod bono fiat modo.

(Plaut. Merc. 1015-022)

DE. Let us go inside.  
EU. No! I move that we make a law before we leave, by which old men be restrained and kept. If we know of someone, whoever is sixty years or older, either married or, by Hercules, celibate, who wenchers, with such man we shall deal in accordance to this law: we shall deem him a dotard, and as far as we are concerned, he who wastes his substance, we swear, shall come to want. Nor shall anyone hereafter prevent his young son from falling in love and marrying his mistress, provided it happens in good measure.

The law, whose solemnity is sealed by the use of future indicatives and imperatives, will aid the restoration of the order, not only in the private but also, and most important, in the public domain. But as any ritual preceding restoration, this one is possible by the restraining and symbolic castration of the out-of-control senex. Demipho has been disparaged publicly, an allusion to the ancient custom of flagitatio and then, as the audience applauds, he is taken within the safe boundaries of the house, to be kept from further mischievous acts:

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20 E. S. Gruen, Studies in Greek Culture and Roman Policy (Berkeley 1990) 142f. observes that this is a classic instance of unenforceable legislation.

21 On the custom of flagitatio, see A. C. Scafuro, The Forensic Stage: Settling Disputes in Graeco-Roman New Comedy (Cambridge 1997) 185-87. In Plaut. Cas., the cast also goes inside to make sure that the play stays short (1005f.).
DE. nihil opust resciscat. EV. quid istic? non resciscet, ne time. 
eamus intro, non utibilest hic locus, factis tuis, 
dum memoramus, arbitri ut sint qui praetereant per uias. 
DE. hercle qui tu recte dicis: eadem breuiror fibula 
erit. eamus. 

(Plaut. Merc. 1004-008)

DE. There is no need she should know. 
EU. Is that so? Don’t be scared, she shall not know. Let us go inside; this 
place is not appropriate, while we discuss your deeds. Passers-by may make 
fun of you. 
DE. God, you are absolutely right. This play will be shorter. Let’s go.

As Moore has suggested, attention is paid to the conflict between generations, 
and not to husbands and wives, at the end of the play.22 The legislation that 
comes at the end, therefore, can be practiced only within the illusory, safely 
escapist, boundaries of the stage and only to the effect of producing laughter. 
After all, only old men are to be punished under the provisions of the “new” 
law, whereas young ones can enjoy the benefits of the double standard 
proposed, provided of course it be practiced quod bono fiat modo (1022).23 The 
audience does not leave unsatisfied, having laughed at the comic situations, but 
at the same time having been reassured that these events should and will remain 
a fiction of the stage.

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22 Moore [19] 165 maintains that “this is a comedy, and the concerns of wives do not require resolution. The dismissal of the wife through metatheatrical means opens the way for an epilogue that omits her.”

23 Scafuro [21] 235-38 discusses the proposed legislation in terms of Greek and Roman mores. According to Scafuro, the double standard castigated in Syra’s monologue is redefined later in Eutychus’ proposal. As Sutton [4] 63 points out, “sympathy is always placed on the side of the son rebelling against his father, or of youth rebelling against old age. Sons and their hedonistic enterprises are portrayed in a tolerant or favorable light; fathers and their authoritarian values are not.”