

CHAPTER XXI: SPECTATORES, PLAUDITE!

DATE	circa 160 BC
TOP STORY	The Ludi Romani are being celebrated in Rome
FEATURE	Interview with a comic actor and a scene from a play by Plautus

PROLOGVS

Today's top story is the celebration of the Ludi Romani, the oldest of many annual public festivals on the Roman calendar. These *ludi* gave Romans a holiday of several days' duration and offered them a wide range of entertainments, including circus races, gladiatorial contests, and dramatic performances. This last category included tragedies and comedies, genres that the Romans inherited from the ancient Greeks. Roman audiences especially enjoyed the comic plays, and in the hands of some talented playwrights Roman comedy became a direct ancestor of modern drama.

The premier names in Roman comedy, Titus Maccius Plautus and Publius Terentius Afer, both figure in this episode of *Forum Romanum*. At the Ludi Romani of 160 BC, Terence put on his comedy *Hecyra* ("The Mother-In-Law") – indeed, our Scirtus Agitator has just seen the play, which he found extremely dull. Terence was renowned for his refined wit and his skillful use of the Latin language, but his plays were not exactly hilarious. Scirtus no doubt prefers the works of Terence's predecessor Plautus, whose plays were performed around 200-190 BC. Plautus' plays, full of slapstick humor and zippy one-liners, had immense popular appeal and continued to be performed in Rome long after the playwright's death.

In this episode Iulia Pauli interviews a comic actor who is currently starring in a revival of one of Plautus' plays, the *Amphitryon*. He is joined by a fellow actor and – after some Plautine shenanigans – the two perform a scene from the play, which dramatizes part of the Hercules myth.

Here are some questions to help you know what to look for:

1. What is today's *dictum hodiernum* and what is its significance in today's show?
2. What happens—what sort of events occur—during the festival called the *Ludi Romani*? What time of year do the *Ludi Romani* occur?
3. What elements of Plautine comedy—puns, slapstick—can you pick up in the interchanges between Iulia and Ambivius Baro and between Baro and Clunius Flaccus?
4. How does Aulus Serenus, the Weatherman, feel about the plays of Plautus? Which plays does he name?
5. How does Scirtus Agitator, the Sportscaster, describe his reaction to the play he saw?

VERSUS

Nota Bene: People, places, things explained in the Notes section (*Commentarium*) are in boldface. Terms defined in the Vocabulary section (*Glossarium*) are underlined.

SALUTATIO

FAVONIUS

Salvete, omnes! Mihi nomen est Marcus Favonius et hoc est Forum Romanum! Quid novi est hodie? Summatim praedicam: hodie de fabulis **Plauti** audiemus. Nostra Iulia Pauli loquetur cum histrione comico, qui **Amphitruonem** Plauti aget in scaena. Deinde, ut fit, Aulus Serenus de tempestate hodierna eloquetur. Tandem de his ludis scaenicis et de ludis aliis Scirtus Agitator pauca referet. Omnia haec—plus etiam—agentur hodie hac editione Fori Romani. Ante omnia, autem, ecce Dictum Hodiernum!

DICTUM HODIERNUM

LECTOR

Hoc est dictum hodiernum: **Totus mundus agit histrionem.** (“All the world’s a stage.”)

QUID NOVI?

FAVONIUS

Verba notanda. Et nunc videamus quid novi sit. Hodie, **Nonis** Septembribus, **Ludi Romani** iterum celebrantur. His diebus festis fiunt Romae munera gladiatoria et ludi circenses atque ludi scaenici. Quattuor fabulae ad scaenam componuntur: duae tragoediae et duae comoediae. De quibus rebus ut plura audiamus, eamus nunc ad Iuliam Pauli quae est in **Campo Martio**.

PERSONA NOTANDA

IULIA

Gratias, Favoni. Ita ut dicis, adsum in Campo Martio ubi brevissimo tempore fabula Plauti agetur nam ludi scaenici fiunt ad Ludos Romanos celebrandos. Itaque ut pauca de his rebus narret, mecum est Titus Ambivivus Baro, histrio comicus. Salve, Baro!

BARO

Et tu salve, Iulia Pauli. Quid agis, hodie?

IULIA

Tibi dico, ut plane vides.

BARO

Hilare. Tunc vis ergo ludos scaenicos aut fabulam Plauti agere?

IULIA

Nolo. Volo te narrare pauca de fabula quae ad scaenam componetur hodie.

BARO

Volo maxime. Sed prius, volo introducere comicum egregium a nostra familia histrionum. Ecce Lucius Clunius Flaccus!

IULIA

Salve, Cluni Flacce!

FLACCUS

Salva sis, Iulia Pauli! Et tu, Baro, salve! Usque vales?

BARO

Usque vides.

FLACCUS

Ita pessime, igitur?

BARO

Tace, scelerum caput!

FLACCUS

Taceo etiam. Et pergam tacere usque, nam nil nisi tacere ego possum—tacitus tamquam nox, tamquam piscis, tamquam mortuus. Re vera...

BARO

Em tibi, mastigia! [hits Flaccus] Nunc fi obsequens, obsecro.

FLACCUS

Obsequens semper ego sum—obsequens ventri et voluptatibus meis.

BARO

Tace parumper et comprime te aut tibi dabo magnum malum!

FLACCUS

Iam habeo! [pulls an apple out of his pocket]

BARO

Abi hinc in malam rem!...

IULIA

Sed tamen, amabo, ne sit mora. Nonne tu dixisti vos partes Amphitruonis Plauti acturos esse?

BARO

Ita dixi et ita agemus.

IULIA

Age ergo, fiat hoc spectaculum.

BARO

Fiat maxime. Et nunc, spectatores, apportamus vobis Plautum...

ASINIUS

... ut nobis apportetis plausum...

BARO

... et ego tibi apportabo plausum!

ASINIUS

Vae mihi!

BARO

Cur non tibi?! ... Sed tamen, spectatores, fiat fabula: Intrat **Amphitruo a portu**, bello reditus, ad uxorem **Alcmenam** salutandam. Amphitruo, autem, hoc nescit: Iuppiter, amore Alcmenae captus, mutavit sese in formam Amphitruonis et, post longam noctem, modo paulo ante a lecto Alcmenae discessit.

BARO/AMP

Amphitruo uxorem salutat laetus speratam suam ...valuistin usque? expectatum advenio? ...Et quom te gravidam et quom te pulchre plenam aspicio, gaudeo.

FLACCUS/ALC

Obsecro ecastor, quid tu me deridiculi gratia sic salutas atque appellas, quasi dudum non videris quasique nunc primum recipias te domum huc ex hostibus?

BARO/AMP

Immo equidem te nisi nunc hodie nusquam vidi gentium!

FLACCUS/ALC

Cur negas?

BARO/AMP

Quia vera didici dicere.

FLACCUS/ALC

... sed quid huc vos revortimini tam cito? ... qui non abiisti ad legiones, ita uti dudum dixeras?

BARO/AMP

Dudum? quam dudum istuc factum est?

FLACCUS/ALC

Temptas. iam dudum, modo!

BARO/AMP

Qui istuc potest fieri, quaeso, ut dicis: iam dudum, modo?..

FLACCUS/ALC

Obsecro equidem te certo heri advenientem ilico, et salutavi et valuissesne usque exquisivi simul, mi vir, et manum prehendi et osculum tetuli tibi....

BARO/AMP

Tu me heri hic vidisti?

FLACCUS/ALC

Ego, inquam, si vis decies dicere.

BARO/AMP

In somnis fortasse?

FLACCUS/ALC

Immo vigilans vigilantem.

BARO/AMP

Ei misero mihi. ...Delirat uxor!

IULIA

Laudo, laudo! Nunc ego magnopere cupio reliquam fabulam spectare. Sed, ei miseris nobis, nil temporis relictum est. Summas gratias vobis agimus, histriones optimi, et bene valete. Totum est, Favoni. Rursus ad te!

TEMPESTAS HODIERNA

FAVONIUS

Tempus est audire de tempestate hodierna. Itaque, ecce Aulus Serenus!

SERENUS

Gratias tibi ago, Favoni. Volo haec dicere: ludi scaenici mihi placent maxime, praesertim fabulae Plautinae—**Amphitruo, Aulularia, Mostellaria, Menaechmi, Miles Gloriosus, Pseudolus, Rudens, Captivi**, et aliae. Sed tamen, videamus quanam sit tempestas hodie. Romae dies bellissimus est, maxime idoneus ludis celebrandis. Ut manifestum est, **Apollo** ipse laetissimus erat his ludis scaenicis quod sol lucet splendide super totum Campum Martium ubi theatrum pro tempore collocatum est. Videamus quanam sit tempestas alibi circum Mare Nostrum. In Graecia et in Asia etiam sol lucet. Sed in Aegypto et Africa, unde venit (ut aiunt) **Terentius Afer** ipse, pluit paullulum. Pluit quoque in Hispania et Gallia. Auspicia autem non tam bona sunt ad tempestatem crastinam, nam **augures et astrologi** imbres praedicant—sane caelum non idoneum ludis publicis et festis diebus. At tamen, iam satis est. Aulus Serenus sum atque spero caela sint vobis valde serena!

DE LUDIS

FAVONIUS

Multas gratias, Serene. Et nunc, ut de ludis audiamus, praesto est Scirtus Agitator!

SCIRTUS

Avete omnes! Scirtus Agitator nominor, itaque eamus ad ludos! Quia Ludi Romani celebrantur, multi cives Romani in Campo Martio adsunt ad ludos spectandos. Heri erant munera gladiatoria, cras erunt ludi circenses, et, ut iam scitis, hodie sunt ludi scaenici. Re vera, ego ipse modo spectabam fabulam Terenti, **Hecyra** nomine. Me taedebat usque ad soporem! Fabula cadit et populus histriones exsibilant. Re vera, maior pars spectatorum priusquam fabula acta sit a theatro

discesserat ut alios ludos– et sane meliores ludos–aut alia certamina spectarent. At tamen, ut dicunt in ludis scaenicis, “Acta est fabula!” Itaque, spectator bone, vive valeque et otiosus esto!

VALEDICTIO

FAVONIUS

Sed tamen, ludis amotis seria quaeramus. Ut repetamus nuntios principales: Hodie Romae ludi Romani iterum celebrantur. Totum est ad hanc editionem Fori Romani. Gratias summas agimus et vobis feliciter eveniat. Nunc, spectatores, valete et **nobis clare plaudite!**



Scene from *Spectatores, Plaudite!*

COMMENTARIUM

Plautus. Titus Maccius Plautus was a comic playwright who wrote Latin comedies during the late third and early second century BC. His comedies were very popular; he is said to have written about 30 plays, many of which survive.

Amphitruo. *The Amphitryon* is one of Plautus' comedies. It's based on a Hercules myth in which Zeus disguises himself as King Amphitryon (while the real Amphitryon is away at war) and fathers a son (Hercules) by Queen Alcmena.

Totus mundus agit histrionem ("All the world's a stage"). Over the entrance to Globe Theater, made famous by William Shakespeare, appeared a crest with Hercules supporting the globe on his shoulders along with this Latin motto. In his play *As You Like It*, Shakespeare gives us the line, "All the world's a stage," which we use as the translation.

Nones. The *Nones*, along with the *Kalends* and the *Ides*, is one of the three marking points of the Roman month. Depending on the month, the Nones fall on the 5th or 7th (in September they fall on the 5th).

Ludi Romani. *Ludi* were Roman religious festivals at which games were held, such as dramatic performances (*ludi scaenici*), chariot races (*ludi circenses*), gladiatorial combats (*munera gladiatoria*), and other spectacles.

Campus Martius. The *Campus Martius* ("Field of Mars") was an open space near the Tiber in the Rome; it was a place for exercises, meetings, assemblies, and other events.

Amphitruo and Alcmena. Amphitryon and Alcmena were the parents of Hercules, though the myth has it that Zeus fathered Hercules when he disguised himself as Amphitryon while the real Amphitryon was away at war. In this scene from Plautus' play, Amphitryon returns from war to his wife, who reacts (to Amphitryon's great consternation) as if she has just seen him the night before.

a portu. "from the waterfront"; in Roman comedies, stage left usually signified the way to the port or foreign lands.

Amphitruo, Aulularia, Mostellaria, Menaechmi, Miles Gloriosus, Pseudolus, Rudens, Captivi. These are Latin titles of Plautine surviving Plautine comedies. In order, they are *The Amphitryon*, *The Pot of Gold*, *The Haunted House*, *The Brothers Menaechmus*, *The Braggart Warrior*, *Pseudolus (the Tricky Slave)*, *The Rope*, and *The Captives*.

Apollo. Besides being god of the sun, Apollo is also patron of arts and literature.

Terentius Afer. This Roman playwright, whom we call Terence, was said to come from North Africa. Terence wrote comedies in the second century BC. His comedies are praised more for their refined wit and skillful use of the Latin language than for their hilarity (more a critic favorite than a fan favorite).

augures et astrologi. An *augur* was a type of priest who studied the flight of birds as a way to predict the future or understand the will of the gods. An *astrologus* was someone who studied heavenly bodies.

Hecyra. The *Hecyra (The Mother-in-Law)* was a comedy by Terence. This passage follows the ancient account of how interruptions or competition from other spectacles ruined the performance of this play.

nobis clare plaudite! Favonius ends the show in the spirit of a Roman stage actor ending a comedy by asking the audience for their applause.

GLOSSARIUM

Nota Bene: Since this script uses much Plautine language, many of the terms are defined in the Useful Expressions section below.

Salutatio et Dictum Hodiernum et Quid novi?

summatim – in summary form

histrio – actor

in scaena – on the stage

iterum – again (the *ludi* were celebrated several days running)

fabula – play; these type of comedies were known as *fabulae palliatae* since they were comedies acted in Greek costume (*pallium*)

Persona Notanda

Quid agis? – This greeting is translated "How are you?" but can literally mean "What are you doing?" which is why Lulia makes this attempt at humor.

familia – The term *familia*, which gives us the English word "family," can mean "household" or a group of colleagues, as it does here.

scelerum caput – an insult meaning something like, "you rogue" or "you good-for-nothing"

pergam tacere – "I'll continue to be silent"

tamquam – like; just as

mastigia – another insult, "scoundrel"

fi obsequens – be obedient!; behave yourself!

parumper – for a little while

magnum malum – This groaner is based on the two possible meanings of *malum*: "trouble" and "apple."

Iam habeo – "I already have one!"

mora - delay

plausum – The equally corny joke here is based on multiple meanings of *plausum*: "applause" and "whack (upside the head)."

mutavit sese – "transformed himself"

speratam suam – "his longed-for wife"

expectatum advenio? – "Are you happy to see me?" (lit. "Do I arrive long-awaited?")

quom = cum (when)

gravidam – expecting; pregnant

deridiculi gratia – "as the butt of a joke"

nusquam gentium – nowhere (in the world)

vera didici dicere – I've been taught to tell the truth

vos revortimini – you bring yourself back

cito = celeriter

dudum – a little while ago

quam dudum – how "a little while ago"; how recently

Temptas – "You're playing with me!"

Qui istuc potest fieri – "How can this be?"

ilico – on the spot; in that very place

valuisse ne usque exquisivi – "and I asked you if you'd been well"

osculum tetuli tibi – "I gave you a kiss"

decies – ten times

Ei! – Ah!; Woe!

Tempestas Hodierna et De Ludis et Valedictio

praesertim – especially; in particular
 idoneus – suitable (for); appropriate (to)
 manifestum – obvious
 theatrum pro tempore – "temporary theater"
 imbres praedicant – "[they] are calling for rain"
 praesto est – "Here's . . ."

modo – just; just now
 Me taedebat – "It bored me"
 Fabula cadit – "The play fell flat" ("bombed")
 Exsibilant – hissing [the actors] off stage
 seria quaeramus – "Let's turn to [more] serious subjects"

Latine Loquamur!

Useful Expressions

Here are some examples of conversational Latin used in this show. Try out some or all of these useful expressions in your own Latin conversations.

Ita ut dicis – Just as you say . . .
 Quid agis, hodie? – How are you today?
 ut plane vides – as you plainly see
 Hilare – Very funny!
 Volo maxime – I'd like that very much
 Salva sis – (variant of *Salve!*) Greetings!
 Usque vales? – You doing all right?
 Ita pessime, igitur? – That poorly, huh?
 Tace, scelerum caput! – Hush, you good-for-nothing!
 tacitus tamquam piscis – silent as a fish
 Re vera – in point of fact; really; indeed
 Em tibi! – Take that!
 mastigia! – You scoundrel!
 Fi obsequens – Behave yourself!
 obsecro – I beg of you
 comprime te – Stifle yourself! (Hush up!)
 tibi dabo magnum malum! – I'll give you what-for!
 Abi hinc in malam rem! – Go to "Heck"!

amabo (te) – please
 ne sit mora – don't delay
 Age ergo – Come on, already
 Vae mihi! – Poor me! (Woe is me!)
 In somnis – In your dreams; While you were asleep
 Ei misero mihi – Oh, poor me!
 Laudo! – Hooray! Well done!
 ut aiunt – as they say
 iam satis est – enough already!
 Avete omnes! – Greetings, all!
 Eamus ad . . . – Let's go to . . .
 ut iam scitis – as all of you already know
 At tamen – but anyhow
 Vive valeque – Live and be well!
 Otiosus esto! – Take it easy!
 Ludis amotis, seria quaeramus – Enough games; let's get serious!
 Vobis feliciter eveniat – Good luck to all of you!

GRAMMATICA

As a grammarian, you should know a grammatical form when you see it. But as a translator, always use context as your guide and remember that a true translation sounds good in English.

1. Telling people to do things: Imperative mood and vocative case

The imperative mood is used to express a command—not "John is walking the dog" but "John, *walk* the dog!" The vocative case is the noun form of the person or persons you are telling to do something. In Latin, a singular imperative verb form looks like the verb's stem (*Tace, Marce!*), while the plural form (telling two or more people to do something) looks like the singular with *-te* added (*Tacete, omnes!*). The vocative case (the form of the noun being addressed) looks just like the nominative with some exceptions: nouns ending in *-us* change the *-us* to *e* (*Salve, Marce!*); nouns ending in *-ius* change the *-ius* to *-i* (*Salve, Favoni!*).

Example in Context

1. Salvete, omnes!
2. Gratias, Favoni!
3. Salve, Baro!
4. Et tu salve, Iulia Pauli!
5. Salve, Cluni Flacci!
6. Tace, scelerum caput!
7. Fi obsequens!
8. et salutavi simul, mi vir
9. Multas gratias, Serene.
10. Avete omnes!
11. Itaque, spectator bone, vive valeque!
12. Nobis clare plaudite!

Translation

1. Greetings (Be well), everyone!
2. Thanks, Favonius!
3. Hello, Blockhead!
4. Hello to you too, Julia Pauli!
5. Hello, Clunius Flaccus!
6. Be quiet, you good-for-nothing!
7. Become obedient! (Behave yourself!)
8. and I greeted you at the same, my husband
9. Thanks a lot, Serenus.
10. Hail, everyone!
11. And so, kind viewer, live and be well!
12. Applaud loudly for us!

2. *Ut* clauses: translating the conjunction based on the verb's mood

The conjunction *ut* has lots of uses in Latin. Sometimes it introduces a clause whose verb is in the indicative mood, and sometimes a clause whose verb is in the subjunctive. When the verb is in the indicative, *ut* is often translated "how" or "as"; when the verb is in the subjunctive mood, *ut* is often translated as "that" or "so that" or even "to."

Example in Context

1. ut fit
2. Ita ut dicis
3. ut pauca de his rebus narret
4. Ut plane vides.
5. ut nobis apportetis plausum
6. ut aiunt
7. ut iam scitis
8. Maior pars spectantium
discesserat ut alios ludos
spectarent
9. ut dicunt in ludis scaenicis . . .

Translation

1. as happens
2. Just as you say
3. As you plainly see.
4. to say a few words about these things
5. so that you will give us your applause
6. as they say
7. as you already know
8. The majority of the spectators had left to
see other games.
9. as they say on the stage . . .

RĒCITATIO

Practice reading aloud—with your teacher or in pairs—these excerpts from the show. After you practice reading aloud, sum up in a few words what the excerpt is about. At this point, don't translate, just give a summary.

A. An Ancient Abbott and Costello?

Baro: Salve, Cluni Flacce!

Flaccus: Et tu, Baro, salve! Usque vales?

Baro: Usque vides.

Flaccus: Ita pessime, igitur?

Baro: Tace, scelerum caput!

Flaccus: Taceo etiam. Et pergam tacere usque, nam nil nisi tacere ego possum—tacitus tamquam nox, tamquam piscis, tamquam mortuus. Re vera...

Baro: Em tibi, mastigia! [hits Flaccus] Nunc fī obsequens, obsecro.

Flaccus: Obsequens semper ego sum—obsequens ventri et voluptatibus meis.

Baro: Tace parumper et comprime te aut tibi dabo magnum malum!

Flaccus: Iam habeo! [pulls an apple out of his pocket]

Baro: Abi hinc in malam rem!...

B. Amphitryon, Alcmena, and a strange homecoming

Amphitryon: Amphitruo uxorem salutat laetus speratam suam ...valuistin usque? exspectatum advenio? ...Et quom te gravidam et quom te pulchre plenam aspicio, gaudeo.

Alcmena: Obsecro ecastor, quid tu me deridiculi gratia sic salutas atque appellas, quasi dudum non videris quasque nunc primum recipias te domum huc ex hostibus?

Amphitryon: Immo equidem te nisi nunc hodie nusquam vidi gentium!

Alcmena: Cur negas?

Amphitryon: Quia vera didici dicere.

Alcmena: ... sed quid huc vos revortimini tam cito? ... qui non abiisti ad legiones, ita uti dudum dixeras?

Amphitryon: Dudum? quam dudum istuc factum est?

Alcmena: Temptas. iam dudum, modo!

Amphitryon: Qui istuc potest fieri, quaeso, ut dicis: iam dudum, modo?..

Alcmena: Obsecro equidem te certo heri advenientem ilico, et salutavi et valuissesne usque exquisivi simul, mi vir, et manum prehendi et osculum tetuli tibi....

Amphitryon: Tu me heri hic vidisti?

Alcmena: Ego, inquam, si vis decies dicere.

Amphitryon: In somnis fortasse?

Alcmena: Immo vigilans vigilantem.

Amphitryon: Ei misero mihi. ...Delirat uxor!

EXERCITATIO

I. PARI RESPONDERE (MATCHING)

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 1. chariot races _____ | A. Herculis pater |
| 2. gladiatorial combats _____ | B. qui divinat aves spectando |
| 3. theatrical productions _____ | C. fabula a Terentio scripta |
| 4. Campus Martius _____ | D. dies festi |
| 5. Plautus _____ | E. Amphitruonis uxor |
| 6. baro _____ | F. versus ad finem fabulae auditi |
| 7. histrio _____ | G. nomen deridiculi gratia "stultus" significans |
| 8. malum _____ | H. qui partem agit in ludis scaenicis |
| 9. Iuppiter _____ | I. unde venit Terentius Afer |
| 10. Alcmena _____ | J. ludi circenses |
| 11. Africa _____ | K. scriptor fabularum in quibus sunt <i>Amphitruo</i> |
| 12. augur _____ | L. munera gladiatoria |
| 13. <i>Hercyra</i> _____ | M. ludi scaenici |
| 14. "Acta est fabula!" _____ | N. periculum an pomum |
| 15. Ludi Romani _____ | O. locus communis Romae prope Tiberim ubi
theatra pro tempore collocata sunt |

II. VERSUM COMPLERE (SENTENCE COMPLETION)

Fill in the blank by choosing a word from the pool of Latin words below. Each word is used only once.

- Salvete, omnes! Mihi _____ est Marcus Favonius et hoc est Forum Romanum!
- Totus _____ agit histrionem.
- Verba _____.
- Quid _____, hodie?
- Taceo etiam. Et pergam _____ usque.
- Tace parumper et comprime te aut tibi dabo magnum _____!
- Amphitruo _____ salutat laetus.
- Vae _____!
- Sed, ei miseris nobis, nil _____ relictum est.
- Totum est, Favoni. _____ ad te!
- Tempus est _____ de tempestate hodierna.
- Gratias _____ ago.
- Ludi scaenici mihi _____ maxime.
- _____ quatenus sit tempestas alibi circum Mare Nostrum.
- Et nunc, ut de _____ audiamus, praesto est Scirtus Agitator!
- Multi cives Romani in Campo Martio adsunt ad ludos _____.
- Ego ipse modo spectabam fabulam Terenti, Hecyra nomine. Me _____ usque ad soporem!
- At tamen, ut dicunt in ludis scaenicis, "Acta est _____!"
- Vive valeque et _____ esto!
- Ut _____ nuntios principales: Hodie Romae ludi Romani iterum celebrantur.

agis	malum	notanda	Rursus	temporis
audire	mihi	otiosus	spectandos	tibi
fabula	mundus	placent	tacere	uxorem
ludis	nomen	repetamus	taedebat	Videamus

DELIBERANDA

1. If a child were carrying on about something, his mother might say, "Spare me the histrionics!" Explain the origin of this English word *histrionics*.
2. Roman comedic actors might use stage names rather than their real names. Why does the name *Ambivius Baro* fit a comedic actor.
3. It seems the Roman public preferred chariot races, gladiatorial combats, and the raucous comedies of Plautus to theatrical plays like tragedies or the more sophisticated comedies of Terence. How would you compare modern popular tastes in public entertainment to those of the Romans?



Roman amphitheater with modern matador statue in front

NOTA BENE

For a great follow-up to this chapter of forum Romanum, see "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum" a modern movie (and play) based on the works of Plautus.

STVDIA AMPLIVS: Write Your Own Screenplay

In his *Amphitruo*, Plautus takes a piece of a popular myth—the birth of Hercules—and uses it as the subject for a comedy. Plautus saw the comic potential in a husband returning home after a long absence only to find his wife insisting that she had just seen him the night before.

Writers like Plautus start with an idea—their own or, more often, a new take on an old story. Before developing a full story, or to help pitch the full story to someone, they create a synopsis or quick sketch of the plot or story around which the full book, television show, movie, or play will revolve. For the *Amphitruo*, the storyline might look something like this:

A king is away from home and has been for a long time. While he is gone Jupiter disguises himself as the king so he could spend the night with the king's wife, Alcmena. The queen welcomes Jupiter, now disguised as King Amphitryon, as her husband, and the two spend the night together (resulting in the conception of Hercules). Jupiter departs early the next morning and later that very day the real King Amphitryon returns to his wife, whom he has not seen for many months. The welcome he receives from his wife, however, is a far cry from what he expected. The king is stunned to find his wife insisting that she just saw him the previous night! As the two argue, the king begins to think his wife is losing her mind; the wife thinks her husband has lost his. What's worse for the king: If his wife is not crazy then who was the man with whom she spent the previous night?

Classical mythology is full of tales, characters, and personalities that could make for a very funny story. Let's say you are a screenwriter and you have been asked to develop the storyline for a television comedy. Look over the ideas below and either pick one to develop or use them to spark your own idea. Outline a television comedy, including a description of some of the funny scenes or exchanges. You may have to do a little research on the characters to help you think the humorous circumstances in which the characters find themselves.

- A. "Hero High": Two friends enroll in an unusual high school where Orpheus teaches music (he is frustrated at the lack of musical talent among his pupils), Hercules teaches gym (he has trouble avoiding student injury, because of his own great strength and the "sports" he makes students play, like Dodge Hydra Ball and Lion Wrestling), Medea teaches Home Economics (including quick and easy killer potions), and Cassandra (who is blessed with the gift of prophecy but cursed in that no one ever believes her) is the guidance counselor.
- B. "The Dating Game": One female contestant asks questions of three men, one of whom she will choose to go out on the date. The catch is that the female contestant cannot see the three men at all. She must ask her questions and make her choice from behind a wall. The three men are Narcissus, Charon (ferryman of the River Styx), and Polyphemus, the Cyclops.
- C. "Real Mythological Life": Midas, Echo, Pan, Medusa, and Helen of Troy must live together in a small house for three months.