Tamen apsentes prosunt pro praesentibus
Proxied Absences and Roman Comedy

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Casina, Prologue

In the opening of Plautus' *Casina* the (interpolated)[1] prologue warns the audience:

> hinc adulescentem peregre ablegauit pater;
> sciens ei mater dat operam apsenti tamen.
> Is, ne exspectetis, hodie in hac comoedia
> in urbem non redibit: Plautus noluit,
> pontem interrupit, qui erat ei in itinere.
>
> (Pl. *Cas.* 62–6)

The father sent off his lad abroad. Even so, his mother knowingly supports him in his absence. In case you're waiting for him, he isn't returning to the city in this comedy today. Plautus didn't want him to, he demolished a bridge on his way.[2]

The *adulescens* in question is Euthynicus, the young lover of the play, who is competing with his father Lysidamus for the love of an enchanting slave-girl, the eponymous Casina.[3] As emphatically announced, Euthynicus will never become present onstage; and yet he will not be completely absent either: as the prologue also declares, his mother 'knowingly supports him in his absence' (63), by fighting against her lascivious husband Lysidamus and ultimately devising the central ruse of the play, with the help of the maid Pardalisca[4] (cf. in particular, 685–8). The mother Cleostrata is not the

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[1] On the interpolated nature of (parts of) *Casina*'s prologue, derived from a revision for a later revival, Paratore 1959: 5–12 is still useful. For a select bibliography, see Arnott 2003: 25 n. 4.

[2] All texts and translations of Plautus are from De Melo's Loeb Edition, unless otherwise specified.

[3] As suggested by line 32 (see next note), the original title of the play was *Sortientes*, while the name *Casina* was added at a later stage (cf. MacCary and Willcock 1976: 102).

[4] On Pardalisca's role in *Casina*, see Questa 2003.

only 'proxy'[5] character in *Casina*. In fact, both Lysidamus and Euthynicus have at their disposal two 'legions', prepared against each other (*sibi uterque contra legiones parat*, 50), that is, their slaves Olympio (the *uilicus*) and Chalinus (the *armiger*), who act as 'proxies' of their masters, the latter throughout the whole play. In particular, both slaves have been instructed to act as 'proxy-husbands' to secure Casina's possession; the 'proxy-marriage' will facilitate and conceal the sexual exploits of the masters.

In the passage above, the phrase *Plautus noluit* is revealing: a few lines before, the prologue-speaker has posited a clear authorial distinction between the Greek author Diphilus and the Latin Plautus.[6] In such a context, a unilateral reference to Plautus (65 *Plautus noluit*) and the deictic markers (64 *hodie in hac comoedia*) suggest that it was the Roman playwright who 'demolished the bridge', and thereby prevented the young lover from reuniting with Casina within the play's action, as presumably happened in the denouement of the Greek original.[7]

Accepting this plausible, and yet unverifiable reconstruction, in this chapter, I will speculate on the motivations that might lie behind Plautus' apparent decision to 'demolish the bridge'. More precisely, I will investigate the dramatic function of Euthynicus' (and many other characters') 'proxied absence' and argue for its central significance in Plautus and Terence's *palliata*, a Roman comic genre, performed and composed by 'proxies'. After a brief overview of Euthynicus' typology ('the proxied absentee') in Roman comedy, I will explore the potentially comic nature of 'proxy' characters, as vehicles for deception and misapprehension. I will then connect the prominence of 'proxiness' in Roman comedy with the iconic pre-eminence of slaves, 'proxies' *par excellence*, and as such sources of comic anxiety for their masters (on- and offstage), owing to the danger of their contradictory status, as instrumental and yet enterprising entities. Finally, I will relate the thematisation of 'proxiness' to comedy's treatment of theatricality more broadly, and to the plays' self-conscious status as

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[5] The English term 'proxy' ultimately derives from Latin 'pro-curare', also attested in comedy, cf. *Men.* 966–9: *spectamen bono seruo id est, qui rem erilem | procurat* (. . .) *| ut absente ero rem eri diligenter | tutetur* (for the translation, see p. 75).

[6] Pl. *Cas.* 31–4: *Clerumenoe uocatur haec comoedia | Graece, latine Sortientes. Deiphilus | hanc graece scripsit, postid rursum denuo | Latine Plautus cum latranti nomine.* 'This comedy is called *Kleroumenoi* in Greek, in Latin "Men Casting Lots". Diphilus wrote it in Greek, and after that Plautus with the barking name wrote it again in Latin.'

[7] Cf. O'Bryhim 1989, esp. 82–3, and see also Paratore 2003: 60–70, Arnott 2003: 39–44, Umbrico 2009: esp. 39. For a select bibliography on the *uexata quaestio* of the relation between Plautus' and Diphilus' plays, see Arnott 2003: 23 n. 1, to which one can add Lowe 2003, Umbrico 2009 and Konstan 2014.

'proxies' of absent or concealed figures, texts and traditions. Whether in a theatrical, social or cultural-political dimension, 'proxied absences' always have a disruptive (and thus comic) potential in Roman comedy.

The 'Proxied' Absentees in Roman Comedy

The situation in Plautus' *Casina*, with a key character remaining absent for the whole play while proxies work on his behalf,[8] is by no means eccentric in Roman comedy. Indeed, Plautus' and Terence's plays are populated by a crowd of absent characters, who participate in the comic action through the intermediation of more or less reliable 'proxies'.[9] Most Roman comedies feature at least one absentee who is 'proxied' by another character on stage, in one or several scenes, or indeed for the whole duration of the play. For instance, in *Cistellaria* Selenium asks Gymnasium to act on her behalf while she is absent (Pl. *Cist.* 104–9). Epidicus, in his eponymous comedy, plots on the orders of his absent master Stratippocles, who communicates to him by letter (cf. e.g. *Epid.* 508–9). In *Amphitruo* the absent Jupiter and Amphitruo are respectively represented on stage by the slaves Mercurius and Sosia.[10] In this comedy, and many others, the 'proxied absentees' will eventually make their appearance on stage, and the role of their proxies will not necessarily cease because of that (i.e. Sosia will continue to act on Amphitruo's behalf even when the latter is present; cf. *Amph.* 630); here, however, my focus will mainly be on the 'proxying' of absent characters, that is, on the combination of 'proxiness' and 'absence'.

The function of proxy characters in Roman comedy is variable: some are sent as emissaries or message-carriers (such as Sosia; cf. e.g. *Amph.* 291); others act as intermediaries, deputies, or agents, or more often a combination of these; in many cases 'proxies' perform as masterminds or pawns in the elaborate ruses which are at the core of most comic plots (as Cleostrata, Chalinus and Pardalisca in *Casina*). I could go on, as the lists of both proxy characters and their functions are extensive, and could be further expanded by non-human proxies, such as letters and tokens.[11]

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[8] On the act of 'proxying' *per se*, cf. Fitzgerald (this volume).
[9] Not all comic absentees are 'proxied' on stage, and the (prototypical) comic potential of absence extends well beyond its relation with 'proxiness'; I offer a full investigation of all types and functions of comic absenteeism in Pezzini 2019.
[10] Cf. Pl. *Amph.* 19–20, and the whole prologue, in general.
[11] Letters in particular, can be construed as involving two proxies, the message-carrier and the letter itself. Cf. e.g. Phoenicium's love letter in *Pseudolus* (Pl. *Pseud.* 51–74), Mnesicholus' letters in *Bacchides* (cf. Pl. *Bacc.* 728–48, 789–91, 995–1035), Curculio's counterfeited tables in his eponymous play (cf. Pl. *Curc.* 419–36), the several letters (fake or not) in *Persa* (196, 247–50, 497–527). Cf. also

To take a closer look, a good example of a proxy-character is the slave Harpax in Plautus' *Pseudolus*, who has been sent by the soldier Polymachaeroplagides to collect the girl Phoenicium from the pimp Ballio (cf. Pl. *Pseud.* 616–18). Harpax is introduced to the audience in a famous confrontation with the eponymous Pseudolus (595–666), who is himself a proxy, working on behalf of his master Calidorus. Harpax is the epitome of the well-intentioned proxy; he sees through his master's eyes:

> Hi loci sunt atque hae regiones quae mi ab ero sunt demonstratae,
> ut ego oculis rationem capio quam mi ita dixit erus meus miles.
>
> (Pl. *Pseud.* 594–6)

> These are the places and these the regions that I was shown by my master, that's how I draw the conclusion with my eyes from what my master told me.

and considers the master present, even when he is absent:

> Ego, ut mi imperatum est, etsi abest, hic adesse erum arbitror.
>
> (Pl. *Pseud.* 1113)

> When I'm given an order, I consider my master to be present, even if he's away.

Not all comic proxies are real or veracious, that is to say, not all of them have been rightfully appointed as such by their 'proxied' character: in *Asinaria*, for instance, the slave Leonidas postures as the trusted steward of the absent old man Demenaetus (Pl. *Asin.* 499–501); in *Pseudolus* the eponymous slave deceivingly pretends to be a proxy of the pimp Ballio (cf. Pl. *Pseud.* 607: HARPAX: *Tune es Ballio*? PSEUDOLUS: *Immo uero ego eius sum Subballio* 'HARPAX: Are you Ballio? PSEUDOLUS: No, rather I am his Under-Ballio').

The Comic Functionality of 'Proxiness': Deception and Misapprehension

Even when they are real and veracious, however, comic proxies are only rarely performing their duty in a frictionless manner; whether because of inability, ill-luck or (more often) bad intentions, 'proxiness' is never trouble-free in Roman comedy. In fact, the troubles originating from

Diabolus' contract in *Asinaria* (746–809). On the comic and meta-theatrical potential of Plautine letters, see Jenkins 2005, Barbiero 2014.

the frustration of 'proxiness' are of momentous importance both in the dramatic fabric of Roman comedy, and in its social and cultural-political framework. One of the first factors explaining the frequency of 'proxiness' in Roman comedy is indeed related to its inherent 'cognitive' dangers. 'Proxied', mediated relationships are less straightforward than direct, immediate ones: that is to say, 'proxiness' introduces a gap between the 'proxied' absent character and the intended receiver of the communication, a gap that can be intentionally exploited for deception, or (accidentally) result in misapprehension (the personified *Agnoia* of Menander's *Perikeiromene*).

Deception is accounted for in many of the examples quoted in the previous section, where 'proxiness' is capitalised on by a trickster to the detriment of the 'proxied' absentee. A good example of this is again Harpax's (and his master's) deception by Pseudolus, which involves two layers of 'proxiness', namely Harpax acting as an agent of his master Polymachaeroplagides, and Pseudolus pretending to deputise Ballio. This double 'proxiness' is exploited by the iconic Pseudolus ('the liar'), who disrupts the communication between Ballio and the soldier, i.e. the completion of the transaction of Phoenicium. The 'bug' which allows Pseudolus' 'hacking' is generated by the inherent danger of 'proxiness', of which characters are well aware.

In fact, Harpax is instructed to mistrust 'proxiness', and claims that he will give his money only to Ballio in person:

> HARPAX: Reddere hoc, non perdere erus me misit. (. . .)
> ego nisi ipsi Ballioni nummum credam nemini.
>
> (Pl. *Pseud.* 642, 644)

> My master sent me to pay this, not to lose it. (. . .)
> I won't entrust a single coin to anyone other than Ballio himself.

Despite his intentions and precautions, however, Harpax eventually falls into the cognitive trap of 'proxiness', and hands over to Pseudolus (the fake proxy) something even more important than the money; this is the soldier's letter, which Harpax has been ordered to hand over to Ballio together with the money and the seal (*symbolus*) imprinted on it, the token of the transaction:

> HARPAX: Tu epistulam hanc a me accipe atque illi dato.
> Nam istic symbolust inter erum meum et tuom de muliere.
>
> (Pl. *Pseud.* 647–8)

> You, take this letter from me and give it to him:
> the token between my master and yours about the woman is there.

Letters and tokens *per se* are common types of non-human proxies in Roman comedy, as already pointed out. The 'proxy' function of this particular letter is, however, further highlighted by the fact that the token consists in an effigy of the soldier:

> PSEUDOLUS: Scio equidem: ut qui argentum afferret atque **expressam imaginem**
> huc suam ad nos, cum eo aiebat uelle mitti mulierem.
>
> <div align="right">(Pl. Pseud. 649–50)</div>
>
> I know: he said he wanted the woman to be sent with the man who brought the money and his **stamped image** here to us.

This effigy, a copy of which is in the hands of Ballio, is meant to be a further precaution against the dangers of 'proxiness'. It thus serves as a seal to secure the 'proxied' communication between the pimp and the soldier, but is also an icon of it; the absent soldier connects with Ballio through a faithful effigy of himself, carried over by a (supposedly) duteous proxy. The phrasing used by Pseudolus may even include a meta-theatrical allusion to theatrical 'proxiness' (on which, see further, p. 81), since the expression *expressam imaginem* is normally used in the context of artistic representation, including indeed comic mimesis.[12] By handing over the soldier's effigy to Pseudolus, Harpax is compromising the whole enterprise, exposing the vulnerability of 'proxiness' and paving the way to the play's deception, as Pseudolus immediately acknowledges:

> PSEUDOLUS: Nam haec allata cornu copiae est, ubi inest quicquid uolo:
> hic doli, hic fallaciae omnes, hic sunt sycophantiae, (. . .)
>
> <div align="right">(Pl. Pseud. 671–2)</div>
>
> Yes, it was brought to me as a cornucopia which has everything I want inside. Here there are tricks, here there are all devices, here there are deceptions. (. . .)

Crucially, the key to dismantle the 'firewall' put up by the soldier and pimp to secure their 'proxied' communication is itself an instance of (fake) 'proxiness', that is Pseudolus' sudden decision to pretend to be Ballio's proxy, a '*Subballio*' (607). Again, Pseudolus is well aware of the momentousness of this decision:

> aurichalco contra non carum fuit
> meum mendacium, hic modo quod subito commentus fui,

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[12] Cf. Cic. *Sext. Rosc.* 47 [in comedy] *expressam (. . .) imaginem uitae cotidianae uideremus*; Quint. 10.1.69 *Menander (. . .) omnem uitae imaginem expressit.*

quia lenonis me esse dixi. Nunc ego hac epistula
tris deludam, erum et lenonem et qui hanc dedit mi epistulam.

(Pl. *Pseud.* 688–91)

It wasn't dear at its weight in mountain copper, my lie which I came up with
here so suddenly, **when I said I belong to the pimp.** With this letter I'll
now deceive three people, my master and the pimp and the man who gave
me this letter.

The deception in *Pseudolus* is a good illustration of the inherent
vulnerability and deceiving potential of 'proxiness' in Roman comedy:
despite all possible precautions and 'firewalls', proxies (human or
mimetic) do not fully 'presentify' their masters' absence – that is,
they do not provide flawless channels of frictionless communication,
as expected by their masters. For this reason, proxies can be exploited
as vehicles of deception, as cognitive interstices where the comic lie
can be implanted and develop; this can happen either passively, as in
the case of Harpax or the soldier's effigy, or actively, as with
Pseudolus' fake *Subballio*, and many other equivalents in both
Plautine and Terentian comedy.

In some cases, the deceiving potential of 'proxiness' may be stretched to
a further degree, and proxies may act as (deceitful) impersonators, taking up
(intentionally or not) the identity of the absentee who is 'proxied' by them: an
example of this is the already-mentioned Gymnasium in *Cistellaria*, who, later
in the play will be mistaken as, and pretend to be, the very woman she has been
asked to deputise for (Pl. *Cist.* 306–71), to the derision of the old man.

The misapprehension engendered by proxy characters does not always
result in humorous deception: in a more 'serious' (but no less comic)
variant, especially common in Terence and probably inherited from
Menander, the misapprehension caused by proxiness is used to introduce
a separation or alienation between characters. For instance, in Terence's
Heauton Timorumenos the young man Clitipho is estranged from his father
Chremes and is living a debauched life behind his father's back. The main
cause of this alienation is Chremes' characteristic tendency to communi-
cate indirectly, by 'proxies' (*per alium*), as Clitipho himself declares:

Mihi si umquam filius erit, ne ille facili me utetur patre.
Nam et cognoscendi et ignoscendi dabitur peccati locus.
Non ut meus, qui mihi per alium ostendit suam sententiam.

(Ter. *HT* 217–19)

If I ever have a son, he'll find me an easygoing father, believe me. There'll be
times when misdeeds are looked into and times when they're overlooked.

I won't be like my own father, who reveals what he thinks through
somebody else.[13]

In fact, later in the play, Chremes will offer a good specimen of his policy of
'proxiness', by instructing his fellow *senex* Menedemus to give money to his
son *per alium*:

> MENEDEMUS: Quid faciam? CHREMES: Quiduis potius quam quod cogitas.
> Per alium quemuis ut des, falli te sinas
> techinis per seruolum.
>
> (Ter. *HT* 468–71)

> MENEDEMUS: What shall I do? CHREMES: Anything rather than what you
> are proposing. Contrive to give it through somebody else; let yourself be
> deceived by your slave's wiles.

The result of Chremes' policy will be the protraction of the alienation
between Menedemus and his son Clinia (a key plot-catalyst in the play),
and ultimately Chremes' own deception (see p. 79).

In sum, 'proxiness' in Roman comedy is above all a channel for decep-
tion, misapprehension and alienation. Since these are all prototypical
ingredients of the comic recipe, as well known to both ancient and modern
critics,[14] one might conclude that the first reason explaining the promin-
ence of 'proxiness' in Roman comedy is its comic functionality.

Proxiness and Slavery

Yet, deception and misapprehension are not the only factors at play as far as
comic 'proxiness' is concerned. Another important element to consider is
the close connection between 'proxiness' and 'slavery', and in turn between
'slavery' and Roman comedy *per se*. Most of the proxy-characters analysed
in the previous sections are slaves acting as agents for their (absent) masters
(Sosia, Harpax, Pseudolus, Epidicus, Chalinus, etc.). This is not surprising:
the slave is by nature the 'proxy' *par excellence*, since, to quote Aristotle's
words (*Politics* 1255b), s/he is 'a part of the body of the master, alive yet
separated from it'.[15] By virtue of this 'separation' slaves can be present when
and where their masters are absent, but by virtue of their 'belonging' to

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[13] All texts and translations of Terence are from Barsby's Loeb Edition, unless otherwise specified.
[14] See e.g. Petrone 1983, Nelson 1990 (esp. 138), Duckworth 1994: 305–30, Lowe 2008: 1–17, Halliwell
2008, esp. chapters 5 and 8, and p. 398 (on Theophrastus), Sharrock 2009, esp. 2–7; see also Muecke
1986 (on disguise in Plautus).
[15] See Fitzgerald (this volume).

them the slaves' presence is supposed to be a mere proxy for that of their masters. That is to say, the main function of slaves is to obviate absence for the sake of their masters. Slaves in Roman comedy are very well aware that this is what they are expected to be. Besides the aforementioned declaration of Harpax (Pl. *Pseud.* 1113), one can refer to two monologues by the slaves Messenio in *Menaechmi* and Sagaristio in *Persa*:[16]

> Spectamen bono seruo id est, qui rem erilem
> procurat, uidet, collocat cogitatque,
> ut apsente ero tam rem eri diligenter
> tutetur quam si ipse assit aut rectius.
>
> (Pl. *Men.* 966–9)

This is the touchstone for a good servant: that one is good who secures, watches, arranges, and has in mind his master's business, so that when his master is away he guards his master's business as diligently as if he were present in person or even better.

> Qui ero suo seruire uolt bene seruos seruitutem,
> ne illum edepol multa in pectore suo collocare oportet
> quae ero placere censeat praesenti atque apsenti suo.
>
> (Pl. *Pers.* 7–9)

A slave who wants to serve his master well should place many things in his breast which he thinks will please his master when he's present as well as when he's absent.

In the case of Messenio, words match deeds: Messenio is one of the best embodiments of the 'ideal' slave, acting as a sort of active extension of his master. Despite (or perhaps because of) his mistreatment at his hands, Messenio is always compliant to his master Sosicles, consistently acts on his behalf in his absence and eventually confirms his contested identity (and thereby fully assures his presence). Messenio's initiative in the finale confirms that he is an extension of his master, but, crucially, not a passive, lifeless one: he knows that the good slave is the slave who acts even better (*rectius*, 969) when his master is not present. That is, he knows that his master expects him to be manageable and instrumental, and yet intelligent and enterprising; to be a good proxy is to have a double, contradictory nature, both submissive and independent, and this contradiction is at the origin of the masters' anxiety, as well as of comic disruptions (see p. 80 and cf. Fitzgerald 2000: 6–8). There are many other slaves

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[16] For an analysis of these monologues, and of the 'good slave' motif in general, see McCarthy 2000: 35–76 (esp. 59–60, 71–2), 122–66 (esp. 130–3), Richlin 2017: 342–50 (esp. 347–9).

in Roman comedy who act as compliant, and yet enterprising proxies of their masters: an extreme example is the loyal Tyndarus in *Captiui*, whose proxy role will go as far as impersonating his master in the play (Pl. *Capt.* 35–9). Not surprisingly, both Messenio and Tyndarus will be rewarded with a happy ending.

That Messenio's and Tyndarus' behaviour corresponds to the masters' standard expectations is also suggested by the masters' attitude to their slaves, in *Persa* and *Captiui*, as well as in other plays. In the finale of *Rudens*, for instance, the old man Daemones has a harsh confrontation with his slave Gripus, which focuses on the re-assertion of the slave's contested 'proxiness'. Daemones is returning his trunk, lost during a shipwreck, to the pimp Labrax. In fact, it was Gripus, who found the trunk in the opening of the play, and stubbornly claimed possession of it, as a token for his freedom. Daemones has therefore no direct claim over the trunk and its finding, as his slave blatantly reminds him in protest:

> DAEMONES: Quando ergo erga te benignus ego fui atque opera mea
>   haec tibi sunt seruata. GRIPUS: Immo hercle mea, ne tu dicas tua.
> DAEMONES. Si sapies, tacebis. (. . .)
> DAEMONES: Vidulum istunc ille inuenit, illud mancupium meum est;
>   ego tibi hunc porro seruaui cum magna pecunia.
>
> (Pl. *Rud.* 1389–90, 1395–6)

> DAEMONES: Since I was kind towards you and by my attention your
>   possessions have been saved . . .
> GRIPUS: No way, by god. By my effort; don't say by your effort.
> DAEMONES: If you are wise, you will hush up. (. . .)
> DAEMONES: (*to Labrax*) That man found that trunk; he's my slave; I have
>   preserved it for you further, with a great sum of money.

And yet Gripus is silenced, and Daemones deals directly with the pimp, forcefully appropriating his slave's actions and behaving as the legitimate finder and keeper of the trunk; despite his protest, Gripus the 'trunk-finder' is thus treated by Daemones as a kind of prosthetic detector, an extension of his own authority. It does not matter that Daemones is looking after Gripus' interests, and will eventually concede to the slave the craved object of his desire, his freedom. What is important is that Gripus' active role in his *manumissio* is non-existent, since while he is a slave he and all his actions function as proxies for his master.

This kind of 'proxy' relation between master and slave is prototypical in Roman comedy, and is epitomised in the iconic scene of the slave hurrying about on behalf of his young master (*seruos currens*; cf. e.g. Ter. *HT* 37, *Eun.* 36,

Marshall 2006: 193–4), as well as its related conventional plot, featuring a cunning slave tricking out the money to fund his (young) master's revelries. Ideal proxies such as Messenio, or slapped-down rebels such as Gripo, could be construed as reflecting the anxieties of the Roman ruling class, worried about the assertion of their authority and the slaves' resistance to their expected 'proxy' nature (see McCarthy 2000, esp. 59–61, 71–6), and more generally about the inherent independence of intelligent instruments ('proxies'), an independence which is both expected and yet feared. Alternatively, following Parker 1989, comic slaves may well be interpreted as stand-ins for the Roman *adulescentes*, as alibis to vent the repressed aspirations of the Roman youth, under Saturnalian licence. Iconic in this respect is the behaviour of the free and young man Chaerea in Terence's *Eunuchus*, who impersonates a slave in order to rape the girl with whom he is infatuated.[17]

The repressions of the (comic) youth include revelry and debauchery, but also rebellion against their *patresfamilias*, and the authoritative system of Roman society, in general. In fact, Roman comedies are rich in rebellious slaves, who resist the ideals embodied in Messenio or Tyndarus, and make their expected 'proxiness' much more frictional and problematic. A good example is the already mentioned Sagaristio in *Persa*, who, after sketching the ideal of the good slave (Pl. *Pers.* 7–9, quoted on p. 75), immediately specifies that he himself does not adhere to it:

> Ego nec lubenter seruio nec satis sum ero ex sententia,
> sed quasi lippo oculo me erus meus manum apstinere hau quit tamen
> quin mi imperet, quin me suis negotiis praefulciat.
>
> (Pl. *Pers.* 10–12)

> As for me, I don't enjoy being a slave and I'm not sufficiently the way my master would want me to be, but nevertheless my master can't keep his hand away from me, as from a sore eye: so he gives me orders and uses me as support for his activities.

Sagaristio does not consider his 'proxy' role as being fully relieved (he still supports his master's activities), but as being imperfect (*nec satis ... ero ex sententia*, 10) and frictional, and this generates a 'sore' for his master: this 'sore' is archetypically comic and is often thematised in Roman comedy, which abounds in slaves showing disobedience, rebellion, disrespect against their (old) masters.[18] A good example is the slave Tranio, who fails to fulfil the primary role of the good proxy, i.e. to perform his master's orders in his absence, as his fellow-slave Grumio accuses him in the opening of *Mostellaria*:

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[17] I owe this point to Victoria Rimell.   [18] On this, see Richlin 2017, esp. 203–51.

Haecin mandauit tibi, quom peregre hinc it, senex?
Hocin modo hic rem curatam offendet suam?
Hoccin boni esse officium serui existumas
ut eri sui corrumpat et rem et filium?

(Pl. *Most.* 25–8)

Is this what the old man told you to do when he went abroad? Is this how he'll find his business looked? Is this what you consider the duty of a good servant, to ruin his master's wealth and son?

And at the end of the play, in a meta-theatrical exchange with the master Theopropides himself, Tranio will explicitly describe his misbehaviour as the subject matter of the play, and of the comic activity as such (*ludificare*):[19]

Si amicus Diphilo aut Philemoni es,
dicito is quo pacto tuos te seruos ludificauerit:
optumas frustrationes dederis in comoedias.[20]

(Pl. *Most.* 1149–51)

If you're a friend of Diphilus or Philemon, tell them how your slave made fun of you: you'll give them first-rate stories of imposture for their comedies.

In *Mostellaria*, as in many other trickster plays, the slave's subverted 'proxiness' is complemented by his loyalty to the *adulescens,* and often by the loyal 'proxiness' of another fellow slave (e.g. Grumio). In *Captiui*, for instance, the quintessentially bad slave Stalagmus, whose betrayal is at the origin of the play's complications, is contrasted with the embodiment of the good slave, the proxy-impersonator Tyndarus. At the end of the play Stalagmus is punished and Tyndarus is revealed as a free citizen; this kind of retributive framework could be (and has been) used to argue that Roman comedy mainly reflects the masters' point of view, but the situation is more nuanced than it may appear.

There are some plays in which loyal slaves do not feature at all. In *Persa*, for instance, a comedy where masters are never on stage, the only servile duty felt by the subversive Sagaristio is towards his fellow slave Toxilus. A problematic set of cases in particular, is that of the 'imperious proxies', i.e. slaves who, in their dutifulness towards their masters, transcend their servile status, and become authoritative and independent.[21] This is the case

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[19] See Chiarini 1983: 215, Petrone 1983: 202–9.
[20] I here accept Kassel's (1991: 376) emendation of the manuscripts' *comoediis*.
[21] Cf. also Pl. *Cist.* 233–5 (Alcesimarchus insulted by his slave), *Curc.* 9 (Phaedromus teased for doing a slave's job), 298–9 (Phaedromus commenting on the freedom and overbearingness of (comic) slaves, with ref. to the iconic scene of the *seruos currens*). On this prototypical situation, see Richlin 2017, esp. 203–51 with bibliography.

of Pseudolus, who formally acts on behalf of his young master Calidorus, but does not hesitate to disrespect and command him (cf. Pl. *Pseud.* 1327: *fac quod te iubeo*). In Terence's *Heauton Timorumenos* the slave Syrus takes full control over his master Clitipho: he overzealously brings home his master's prostitute Bacchis, to his displeasure (cf. Ter. *HT* 311–3: *o hominis inpudentem audaciam*), blackmails him to secure his own mastery (338–52), and later sends him away from the comic action (585–9). Most authoritative slaves are purportedly acting on their master's behalf, and yet this does not necessarily result in the master's success, as Clitipho's eventual downfall in *HT* exemplifies.

An extreme example of an authoritative slave comes from Plautus' *Asinaria*, which features a particularly commanding proxy, Libanus. Together with his fellow Leonida, Libanus continuously crosses over his status, as epitomised in a famous scene in which he rides his master Argyrippus (Pl. *Asin.* 698–710). And yet, despite his subversive behaviour, Libanus is working throughout the play on behalf of Argyrippus himself, hunting for the money to fund the youth's revelries; moreover, in a key passage in the opening of the play, we find out that Libanus' tricks have been masochistically ordered by the *senex* Demaenetus himself (*me defraudato*, *Asin.* 91). This contradictory situation, featuring slaves ordered to act 'freely' against their masters, is paralleled in several plays. In *Heauton Timorumenos*, the slave Syrus is ordered by his master Chremes, albeit unconsciously, to perform a ruse against himself (543–58). There is one stock scene in particular, which epitomises this situation, which is that of the master handing over his authority to the slave and asking (and at times begging) him to act on his behalf.[22] An embodiment of this stock scene of inversion is also found in *Casina*, and features the old man Lysidamus and his proxy-husband Olympio:

> LYSIDAMUS: Seruos sum tuos. OLYMPIO: Optume est. LYSIDAMUS:
>   Opsecro te,
> Olympisce mi, mi pater, mi patrone. OLYMPIO: Em,
>   sapis sane. LYSIDAMUS: Tuos sum equidem.
>
> (Pl. *Cas.* 738–40)

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[22] Cf. also Pl. *Capt.* 442–5: *haec per dexteram tuam te dextera retinens manu / opsecro, infidelior mi ne fuas quam ego sum tibi. / tu hoc age. tu mihi erus nunc es, tu patronus, tu pater, / tibi commendo spes opesque meas*, 'I entreat you by your right hand, holding you back with my right hand: don't be less faithful to me than I am towards you. Pay attention. Now *you* are my master, *you* are my patron, *you* are my father. I commend my hopes and my fortunes to you.' (Tyndarus/Philocrates to his slave Philocrates/Tyndarus); *Epid.* 381 (Stratippocles praising his slave Epidicus as his military leader); *Merc.* 171.

LYSIDAMUS: I'm your slave.
OLYMPIO: That's perfect.
LYSIDAMUS: I entreat you, my dear little Olympio, my father, my patron.
OLYMPIO: There you go, you really show sense.
LYSIDAMUS: I'm yours.

Social inversion, however one interprets it, is certainly an important feature of the Roman comic world: such inversion involving a master handing over his authority to his 'proxy' could be interpreted within a Saturnalian framework, as analogical to the withdrawal of the elite from the comic world and their temporary handing over of power (or at least prominence) in favour of the underclass.[23] And yet, as pointed out above, Olympio does remain a 'proxy' at the service of Lysidamus, and his independence is partial and restricted to the duration of the play.

In a less subversive variant of this situation, slaves are (temporarily) allowed by their masters a suspension of their proxy role, and this becomes the precondition and subject matter of the comedy. I am here thinking in particular about *Stichus*, a famously plot-less comedy, which is essentially an eponymous celebration of Stichus' 'holiday' from his servile duties, yet explicitly requested from and granted by his master Epignomus.

EPIGNOMUS: Age abduce hasce intro quas mecum adduxi, Stiche.
STICHUS: Ere, si ego taceam seu loquar, scio scire te
quam multas tecum miserias mulcauerim.
Nunc hunc diem unum ex illis multis miseriis
uolo me eleutheria capere aduenientem domum.
EPIGNOMUS: Et ius et aequom postulas: sumas, Stiche.
In hunc diem te nil moror; abi quo lubet.
Cadum tibi ueteris uini propino.

(Pl. *Stich.* 418–25)

EPIGNOMUS: Go on, take these girls inside whom I brought along with me, Stichus.
STICHUS: Master, whether I'm silent or whether I speak, I know that you know how many hardships I've given a hard time to with you. Now for this one day in recompense for those many afflictions I want to celebrate the Festival of Liberty on my arrival home.
EPIGNOMUS: What you say is just and fair; have it, Stichus. For this day I dismiss you: go where you like. I contribute a jar of old wine as a toast to you.

The paradox of 'proxies' ordered, begged, or allowed to cross over their 'proxiness' (with its comic implications) seems to be at the core of Roman

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[23] See the classic Segal 1987; also Moore 1998: 181–96.

comedy, and is probably related to the general contradictory nature of slaves in Roman society, wavering between their double nature as tools and human beings, between their expected 'proxiness' and independence (on this, see Fitzgerald 2000: 6–8, McCarthy 2000). It also opens up the *uexata quaestio* about whether Roman comedy conveyed the slave's point of view (Richlin 2017), that of the citizen slave-owner (Parker 1989, McCarthy 2000) or a combination of both (Stewart 2012). This is a complex issue, which cannot be fully addressed here: I will only point out that the variety of approaches to 'proxiness', as outlined above, does not seem to allow for any unilateral interpretation.

In any case, the 'proxy' relation between slave and master, and the comic problems associated with that (self-inflicted or not), are iconic of the Roman *palliata*: internal evidence suggests that Roman comedies were performed by slaves (see Marshall 2006: 83–125) and that already in Plautus' time they were characterised by the prominent role slaves play in them (see e.g. Pl. *Most.* 1149–51, p. 78). If we add the fact that ancient traditions report that Roman playwrights were or had been slaves (Livius Andronicus, Plautus, Caecilius Statius, Terence),[24] and in at least one case (Terence) that they (allegedly) were mere proxy pennames for the Roman elite (see below pp. 85–6), we can conclude that the link between 'proxiness' and Roman comedy is very tight indeed. This also explains the (meta-)theatrical potential of 'proxiness', which we will explore in more detail in the next section.

Theatrical 'Proxiness'

There is indeed something inherently theatrical (and literary) about 'proxied absence': actors, playwrights and the plays themselves can all be considered as 'proxies' for someone else, and this is at times openly acknowledged in Roman comedy.

To focus on an illustrative example only, in the prologue of *Heauton Timorumenos* an unnamed veteran actor and troupe-leader (later identified with the 'star' Ambivius Turpio), enters on stage and introduces himself as the spokesman (*orator*) of the absent playwright, whose name he ostentatiously withholds:

> Nunc qui scripserit
> et quoia Graeca sit, ni partem maxumam
> existumarem scire uostrum, id dicerem.
> Nunc quam ob rem has partis didicerim paucis dabo.

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[24] Cf. Richlin 2014: 211–12.

> Oratorem esse uoluit me, non prologum.
> Vostrum iudicium fecit, me actorem dedit.

<div align="right">(Ter. HT 7–12)</div>

> I would tell you who wrote it and the author of the Greek original, but I judge that most of you know this already. Now I will explain briefly why I have taken on this role. The playwright wanted me as an advocate, not as a prologue speaker. He has turned this into a court, with me to act on his behalf.

Ambivius is an *orator* and *actor* in both senses of the words (spokesman/advocate, actor/pleader): he has been sent by Terence, with the same authorial assertiveness (*uoluit*, 11) shown by Plautus in a similar context (*noluit*, *Cas.* 65), to deliver a memorised speech on his behalf, in a metaphorical trial in front of the audience/jury, in which the poet has been accused of having 'contaminated' Greek plays (*multas contaminasse Graecas*, 17) and of being a mere stand-in for powerful friends (*amicum ingenio fretum*, 24).

There are parallels in Roman comedies where actors present themselves as the performers of someone else's will (normally the leader of the company), and especially in prologues: cf. e.g. Pl. *Poen.* 4: *audire iubet uos imperator histricus* and especially *Amph.* 19–20: *Iovis iussu uenio ... pater huc me misit ad uos oratum meus*, a passage that has several similarities with the prologue of *HT*. However, in *HT* there is an important hierarchical shift, from a secondary actor carrying the will of the leading actor in *Amph.* (cf. Oniga 1992: n. 26), to the leading actor carrying that of the poet in *HT*. Ambivius in *HT* presents himself as a mere 'proxy' for the absent poet, and this is further highlighted by his anxiety about the ability to perform his proxy role accurately:

> Sed hic actor tantum poterit a facundia
> quantum ille potuit cogitare commode
> qui orationem hanc scripsit quam dicturus sum?

<div align="right">(Ter. HT 13–15)</div>

> I only hope that the eloquence of the actor can do justice to the aptness of the arguments which the writer of this speech has contrived to put together.

As we have seen in the previous sections, 'proxiness' always carries with itself the anxiety about its unfulfillment, on the part of the master and/or the slave. Since Ambivius is not just an actor, but the leader of the troupe performing Terence's play, his anxiety encompasses the whole performance of the play, by the whole comic troupe. A similar concern, from a different perspective, is found in

Plautus' *Bacchides*, in a famous passage complaining about the bad performance of *Epidicus*:

> CHRYSALUS: Non res sed actor mihi cor odio sauciat.
> etiam Epidicum, quam ego fabulam aeque ac me ipsum amo,
> numquam aeque inuitus specto si agit Pellio.
>
> (Pl. *Bacc.* 213–15)

> It's not the success, but the actor that's wounding my heart with tedium. Even the Epidicus, a play I love as much as myself – well, there's no play I enjoy watching less if Pellio is acting in it.

Since, as argued by Brown (2002), it is likely that Pellio is also the leading actor of the comic *grex*,[25] Chrysalus' words voice the author's disappointment (real or fictional)[26] about the general performance of the play by a troupe of unreliable 'proxies', a disappointment which is similar in many respects to that of the master frustrated by the behaviour of his unsatisfactory or rebellious slave.

The 'demotion' of the actor to a mere proxy of the poet implies a confirmation of Terence's authorial authority, which is constantly highlighted in the prologue of *HT*.[27] The unnamed poet has assigned to the actor his part (*poeta dederit*, 2, *me actorem dedit*, 12), and crucially he has written (*scripserit*, 7, *scripsit*, 15) the script. The repeated use of the verb *scribere* is noteworthy, and is useful to introduce another important dimension of (meta)theatrical proxiness, which is related to the controversial relation between the Roman playwrights and their Greek models. The idea that Roman comedies are just an imperfect reflection of the splendour of their Greek originals does not belong only to German Romanticism: there is internal evidence in Roman comedy for the notion that Roman playwrights were supposed to be mere 'proxies' for their Greek models. The charge of *contaminatio* in particular, which Ambivius is refuting in the prologue of *HT*, implies a call for a strict adherence to the 'purity' of the originals. This is indeed what Terence explicitly attributes in disparaging terms to his detractor (cf. *obscuram diligentiam*, Ter. *An.* 21; *bene uortendo et easdem scribendo male*, *Eun.* 7), although he himself apparently claims

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[25] On Pellio, see further Garton 1972: 172–4, Marshall 2006: 89–90, Fraenkel 2007: 417, speculating that Pellio may actually have been playing the part of Chrysalus.

[26] Mattingly (1960), followed by Zwierlein (1990–2: 4.202–12), considers these lines as a later addition; this is of course unverifiable, but even if the passage were interpolated, it would still introduce a (fictional) authorial concern about the reliability of the play's performers.

[27] On Terence's prologues, see in particular, Gilula 1989.

to have pursued literal or at least close translation in one scene (cf. Ter. *Ad.* 11: *uerbum de uerbo expressum extulit*).[28]

In the prologue of *HT*, however, Terence clearly claims a degree of freedom in the adaptation of his Greek originals, following the *neglegentia* of his real models, Naevius, Plautus and Ennius, who accordingly would have been exposed to the same charge of *contaminatio* (cf. *An.* 18–21: *Naeuium Plautum Ennium | accusant quos hic noster auctores habet | quorum aemulari exoptat neglegentiam | potius quam istorum obscuram diligentiam*).[29] This apparent 'rebellion' of the Roman playwrights against a reduction of their literary activity as a 'proxying' translation is also suggested by the insistence on the act of writing (*scribere*): the reference to the play and its composition as the 'writing' of the Latin poet is a characteristic trait of Terence.[30] By contrast, in Plautus (and other earlier dramatists) the verb *scribere* is hardly ever associated with the composition of a theatrical piece. In the few Plautine cases in which the verb *scribere* does refer to the composition of a play, the subject is a Greek author (cf. *Demophilus scripsit*, *As.* 11, *Philemo scripsit*, *Trin.* 19, *antiquom poëtam* [i.e. Euripides?] *audiui scripsisse in tragoedia*, *Cur.* 591), whereas the act of the Latin poet is *uertere* 'translate' (cf. *Maccus uortit barbare*, *As.* 11, *Plautus uortit barbare*, *Trin.* 19). A possible exception is found in the prologue of *Casina* (*Diphilus | hanc graece scripsit, postid rursum denuo | latine Plautus cum latranti nomine*, 32–4),[31] where, however, the Greek poet is still in a position of prominence. Conversely, in Terence the only occurrence of the verb *uertere* is found in a derogatory context (*qui bene uortendo et easdem scribendo male*, *Eun.* 7), probably with a negative connotation (cf. Don. *Eun.* 7: *uertendo, corrumpendo*), in which it is distinguished from *scribere* and associated with Terence's literary enemy. That is, if Plautus and above all Terence's enemy seem to consider themselves as (more or less complying) proxies subbing in for their Greek masters, Terence's emphasis on *scribere* betrays an urge for literary *manumissio*, although not yet complete independence (Menander, although unnamed, is still a looming shadow in the prologue of *HT*, cf. 7–9).

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[28] See, however, Bettini 2012: 71–2 for a different interpretation of the passage.
[29] '(. . .) they are actually criticising Naevius, Plautus, and Ennius, whom he takes as his models, preferring to imitate their carelessness in this respect rather than the critics' own dreary pedantry'.
[30] Cf. *Poeta quom primum animum ad scribendum adpulit*, *An.* 1; *ne cum poeta scriptura euanesceret*, *Hec.* 13; *Postquam poeta sensit scripturam suam*, *Ad.* 1; *poetae ad scribendum augeat industriam*, *Ad.* 25.
[31] 'Diphilus wrote it in Greek, and after that Plautus with the barking name wrote it again in Latin.'

The authority of the Greek models is not the only factor of anxiety for the Roman playwrights. The second charge addressed by the *actor* in the prologue of *HT* concerns another intricate dimension of 'proxiness', involving the relation between the playwright and the 'powerful friends' who patronise him:

> Tum quod maleuolus uetus poeta dictitat
> repente ad studium hunc se adplicasse musicum,
> amicum ingenio fretum, haud natura sua,
> arbitrium uostrum, uostra existumatio
> ualebit.

<div align="right">(Ter. HT 22–6)</div>

> The malicious old playwright further asserts that our author has taken up the dramatic art rather suddenly, relying on the talent of his friends and not on his natural ability. This is a matter for your judgement; you shall decide the issue. (Trans. Barsby, with adjustments).

The accusation against Terence of being a mere 'proxy' of powerful friends becomes more explicit in the prologue of *Adelphoe*:

> Nam quod isti dicunt maleuoli, homines nobilis
> hunc adiutare **assidueque una scribere,**
> quod illi maledictum uehemens esse existumant,
> eam laudem hic ducit maxumam quom illis placet
> qui uobis uniuorsis et populo placent,
> quorum opera in bello, in otio, in negotio
> suo quisque tempore usust sine superbia.

<div align="right">(Ter. Ad. 15–21)</div>

> As for the malicious accusation that members of the nobility assist our author and **collaborate with him in his writing all the time**, which his enemies consider a serious reproach, he regards it as a great compliment, if he finds favour with men who find favour with all of you and the people at large, men whose services have been freely available to everyone in time of need in war, in peace, and in their daily affairs.

The rumour that Terence was a mere proxy-name for the literary ambitions of the Roman elite is also confirmed by a passage of Suetonius' *Vita Terentii* 3; it opens up the crucial issue of the role of the Roman aristocracy in the integration of Greek culture in the Rome of the Middle Republic, and their (not always frictionless) patronage of the first 'culture brokers'[32] of Latin literature.

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[32] See Feeney 2016: 67, and *passim* for the general issue (esp. 65–91); the classic Gruen 1990 and 1992 are still useful.

As already noted by Suetonius, in both *HT* and *Adelphoe* Terence fails to refute the charge of being assisted by *homines nobiles*. Claiming a degree of independence from his Greek literary masters is one thing (and fits in with the widespread nationalistic discourse of the Rome of the time), quite another is to deny the patronage of powerful aristocrats. In particular, Terence's riposte in *HT* is apparently a mere appeal to the verdict (*arbitrium*, 25) and judgement (*existumatio*, 25) of the audience/jury, who are called to assess Terence's poetic talent and thereby the merit of his (forthcoming) play. These have been pre-emptively challenged by the charge of his detractor, who accused Terence of undeserved favouritism in his quick career; the refutation of this charge will require the examination of the whole play, and, in fact, the passage above is followed by a traditional request for an impartial hearing (*aequi sitis*, 28) of the forthcoming play. Terence's riposte to the charge of 'proxiness' marks therefore a key step of the prologue speech, by which Terence extends the forensic metaphor and reshapes it into a more traditional format, recasting its scope (the duration of the prologue > the duration of the whole play) and some of its structural elements, including the *orator* (Ambivius as an *actor* in the prologue > Ambivius as *actor* in the *Heauton Timorumenos*) and the *oratio* (the prologue speech > the play as a whole). This metaphorical extension also paves the way for the traditional request for fairness and attention (28–30, 35–6), and eventually the display of the evidence, i.e. the beginning of the play.

The prologue of *HT* thus introduces a final, important layer of literary 'proxiness': the *oratio* that the 'proxy' actor has been assigned to deliver is not just the prologue speech, but is extended to the whole comedy. A few lines later, this will be defined as a 'static' comedy (*stataria*), in which there will be only speech (*in hac est pura oratio*, 46):[33] against the accusation of having been undeservedly favoured in his career by the protection of powerful friends, Terence, through his 'proxy actor', cites his forthcoming comedy as a sort of 'evidence', proving the author's poetic talent. This situation can thus be construed as an embodiment of that prototypical

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[33] Despite a popular and long-standing interpretation, *pura oratio* does not refer to Terence's pure language and/or style. *Oratio* is what is said, not the way it is said or written (which would rather be '*stilus*' or '*scriptura*'; cf. Ter. *An.* 12: *dissimili oratione sunt factae ac stilo*; *Ph.* 5: *tenui esse oratione et scriptura leui*). In a theatrical context the term refers to the content of the play in so far as it contributes to the entertainment of the audience, e.g. by means of verbal jokes, plot developments, characterisation, etc. (see *TLL* 9.2.884.65–77). Moreover, in early Latin *pura* does not mean 'elegant' or 'refined' but rather 'free from extraneous materials, physically undefiled', i.e., in this context, uninterrupted by stage activity. The inaccurate linguistic or stylistic interpretation is biased by Caesar's praise of Terence as a *puri sermonis amator* (*Carm.* fr. 1 Klotz), where, however, the word used is *sermo* and not *oratio*.

model of 'proxied absentee' which I have discussed in this chapter, with the performative comic text acting as a proxy for the author/playwright.

There are several remarks in Roman comedy presenting the comic plays as 'proxy' artefacts for the absent author, anticipating more elaborate variants on the theme in later Latin literature.[34] For reasons of space, I will only touch upon the most explicit of all, which describes the inherent (meta)theatricality of proxiness, and is again found in *Casina*'s prologue. In a passage that closely echoes the reference to Cleostrata's proxy role in the play (*sciens ei mater dat operam* **apsenti tamen**, 63), the prologue states that Plautus, by now a forever-absent character, can still be beneficial after his death, indeed by means of his plays:

> Ea tempestate flos poetarum fuit,
> qui nunc abierunt hinc in communem locum.
> Sed **tamen apsentes** prosunt pro praesentibus.
>
> (Pl. *Cas.* 18–20)

> In that era the cream of poets lived, who've now gone away to the place to which all men go. But **even so** they benefit us **in their absence** as if they were present.

In conclusion, the prologues of *HT* and *Casina* reveal what is perhaps the most important dimension of absence and 'proxiness' in Roman comedy: the absent character *par excellence* is the author-playwright, who is 'proxied' by the actors and by the comedy they perform, and who is himself a 'proxy' for both the 'absent' Greek originals and the powerful Roman elite patronising Roman comedy. Just as all the other types of 'proxiness' discussed in this chapter, which pave the way for comic deception and misapprehension, or mirror the problematic relation between slaves and masters, this kind of literary 'proxiness' is never frictionless; rather, the complications related to the proxy-relations between Greek models, comic texts, Latin playwrights, the cultured elite and the social realities of the Middle Republic have engendered the most vexed problems that have tormented scholars and readers of Roman comedy for centuries: these include the relation with the absent Greek originals;[35] the identification of later interpolations and the unreliability of the canonical transmitted texts;[36] the authorial personality of the Roman playwrights

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[34] Cf. e.g. Hor. *Epod.* 1.20, where the proxy-book is compared to a slave-boy leaving his master in search of pleasures in the city.

[35] Besides the classic Fraenkel 2007, see, for an overview, Halporn 1993 (esp. 191–3) and Petrides 2014.

[36] See e.g. the work of Zwierlein 1990–2, Goldberg 2005: 62–75, and for an overview Gratwick 1993: 3–4, Tarrant 1986: 302–3.

and the proportion of improvisation and script-adherence;[37] the supposed 'realism' of Roman comedy (are comedies reliable 'proxies' of contemporary social realities?[38]); and the interaction with the political background of the Middle Republic and its cultural discourses.[39] 'Proxiness' is a complex and elusive presence in Plautus and Terence, and yet pervasive and consistent: in one sense, it is at the origin of Roman comedy as we know it.

[37] See e.g. Lefèvre, Stärk and Vogt-Spira 1991, Benz, Stärk and Vogt-Spira 1995, and Stärk and Vogt-Spira 2000, Marshall 2006.
[38] See Pezzini 2021 with bibliography.
[39] See e.g. Gruen 1990: 124–57, Umbrico 2010, Feeney 2016, esp. 122–51.