

Plautus' *Menaechmi*

Dramatis Personae:

Cylindrus, cook	Cassie Sullivan
Erotium*, Menaechmus I's courtesan.	Sarah Schmidt
Matrona, Menaechmus I's wife	Jessica Glidden
Menaechmus I	Tom Lewek
Menaechmus II	Nate Miller
Messenio, Menaechmus II's slave.	Julia Hart
Peniculus*, Menaechmus I's parasite	Cassie Sullivan

* - the names of Menaechmus I's courtesan and parasite are puns: "Erotium" literally means "Darling", and "Peniculus" means "little tail or sponge, used for clearing crumbs off of the table"

Plot: The best synopsis of the plot is provided by Priscian's acrostic:

Mercator Siculus, quoi erant gemini filii,
Ei surrupto altero mors optigit.
Nomen surrepticii indit illi qui domist
Auos paternus, facit Menaechmum e Sosicle.
Et is germanum, postquam adoleuit, quaeritat
Circum omnis oras, post Epidamnum deuenit.
Hic fuerat alitus ille surrepticius.
Menaechmum omnes ciuem credunt aduenam.
Eumque appellant meretrix, uxor, et socer.
I se cognoscunt fratres postremo inuicem.

(A Sicilian merchant, who had twin sons, ended his life after one of the twins was kidnapped. Re-naming the twin who remained at home, his grandfather gave him the name of his kidnapped brother, making him Menaechmus instead of Sosicles. And he, when he grew up, looked for his twin brother on every shore, and afterwards, came to Epidamnus. To this place the kidnapped twin had been carried. Everyone thinks that the stranger, Menaechmus, is their fellow-citizen, Menaechmus. And they - courtesan, wife, and father-in-law - call him by name. There, at last, the brothers finally recognize each other.) Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* owes much to this play of Plautus.

Translation: The script is the product of the students in Latin 390. They have tried to carry over ("translate") the jokes of Plautus into modern English diction. Please forgive any detected anachronism. The play is abridged. Only selected scenes were chosen for performance.

Costumes: Plautus' comedies were *fabulae palliatae*, that is, "stories" (*fabulae*)

with a written text and plot to be followed, and performed “in Greek dress” (*palliatae*) in a Greek locale and with a Greek cast of characters. Thus, they appear less subversive, since the humor is directed ostensibly at Greeks, not at Romans. However, there are countless allusions to contemporary politics and references to Roman laws and customs, as well as Roman tragedies. As a nod to this convention, our actors perform in Greek dress, that is, each wears a tunic (*chiton*) and shawl or cloak (*himation* or *palla*). Our Matrona (respectable Roman wife), however, is the one exception. She is dressed in Roman garb, because this character is so unmistakably Roman in Plautus’ play. Her behavior, interests, and fears reflect very real changes in Roman marriage laws and consequent social tensions.

The length of the costumes is an indicator of social status - the wealthy and powerful wore longer garments, while servants and lower class characters wore shorter clothing. The colors, too, indicate character type - courtesans typically sported a yellow *palla*, and poorer characters wore red, while wealthy characters wore purple.

Mary R. McHugh constructed all of the costumes, except for the dresses of Erotium and the Matrona, which were made by the Stitch-A-Ree in New York Mills. The students added decorative trim and details to the garments. Cassie Sullivan was the make-up artist.

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