

VILLAINS, WIVES, AND SLAVES IN THE COMEDIES OF PLAUTUS

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Roman comedy offers a fruitful field for the exploration of the hierarchies of Roman society because its characters behave in ways that reverse the norms of ordinary life. The Roman comic playwright Plautus (c. 254–180 BCE) freely adapted Greek plays written about a century earlier to suit the expectations of a Roman audience of the late third and early second centuries BCE.¹ In this paper I shall be especially concerned with how social expectations inform the dramatic functions and characterizations of women and slaves. In particular, I shall examine two roles which Plautus greatly expanded with respect to his Greek models: the clever slave and the dowered wife. With the expansion of these two roles, the playwright addresses the social tensions of a period marked by the Roman conquest of the Mediterranean, the advent of large-scale slavery, and the emergence of new rules governing women's relation to property.

Plautus' expansion of the role of the clever slave with respect to his Greek models has long been acknowledged. Following the groundbreaking studies of Plautus' originality by Friedrich Leo (1912) and Eduard Fraenkel (1922), this role has received much critical attention.² However, the implications of gender in Plautus' comic inversions have not yet been fully explored.³ This study addresses the question of how free and unfree female characters were distinguished from one another in the comedies. My principal example is Plautus' *Casina*, a play whose plot hinges on an alliance between a highborn wife and a clever slave in female disguise, and which is therefore particularly revealing with respect to the intersection of gender and status in Roman comedy.

In the plays of Plautus, the discourse of the body is linked to the discourse of social status: those who cannot control their physical impulses end up having their bodies subjected to the will of others. This condition is associated on the one hand with the vulnerability of slaves to physical and sexual abuse by their masters, and on the other hand with the expected role of the sexually passive and socially submissive woman. The wealthy wife, however, occupies an

ambiguous position in Roman society because she is "high" in status but "low" in gender. In Plautus' comedies, she often appears in situations which reverse the hierarchy between husbands and wives and invite comparison to the comically inverted relationship between the master and the slave.

In the comedies, slaves and women share certain dramatic functions which derive from their social inferiority with respect to high-class men. But free, upper-class women are also sharply differentiated from unfree women. For example, the function of the trickster, male or female, is reserved for characters of the lower classes. The rogue's trickery is in fact motivated by his or her lack of social and economic power. Typically, the trickster's ruse humiliates a powerful obstacle figure and thus reverses normal social hierarchies. The principal means by which this comic humiliation is achieved are role-play and disguise. This is well illustrated in the *Casina*, where a male slave is disguised as a bride and participates in a traditional wedding ceremony of a kind that in real life was restricted to free citizens.

The prominence of slave tricksters in Roman comedy reflects the large-scale influx of foreign slaves into Rome during Plautus' lifetime. Plautus' plays were first produced in the later third and early second centuries BCE, during the early stages of Rome's conquest of the Mediterranean. At this time Rome was no longer a small, agriculture-based city-state but had become the center of a vast empire. Rome's expansion throughout the Mediterranean brought with it an increase in agricultural resources and control over important trade routes, together with the manpower of captive slaves.⁴ At the same time, Rome's expansion to the East also resulted in intensified contact with Greek culture. As is well known, highly educated Greek slaves contributed to the spread of Greek culture in Rome, often as tutors of the Roman nobility.⁵

Plautus' adaptations of Greek comedies are themselves products of the intense Hellenization of Rome during this period. It was a formal convention of this genre of comedy that all characters wore Greek costumes and had Greek names. The genre was called *fabula palliata* ("comedy in Greek dress") as opposed to the *fabula togata* ("comedy in Roman dress"), which had Italian settings and characters. *Fabula palliata* is said to have been introduced to Rome a generation before Plautus, in 240 BCE, by Livius Andronicus, a Greek from Tarentum who was brought to Rome as a captive. Plautus himself came to Rome from Umbria, and like other theater professionals of his time, he belonged to the lower rank of society.⁶ The Greek settings and costumes of these plays allowed a disguised representation of Roman weaknesses. Their clever Greek slaves reflect both the Romans' contempt for the captive foreigners and their admiration for Greek education.

Rome's expansion in the late third and early second centuries BCE also affected the status of women. The influx of foreign wealth meant that property no longer consisted primarily of land, and there was a need for new ways to transfer property among the elite. Women were central to this process, since dowries were important vehicles for such transfers, and marriage was a means of forging

the political and commercial alliances that allowed members of the elite to control and increase their wealth.⁷ The portrayal of upper-class women in Plautus' comedies reflects tensions associated with ongoing changes in the regulations concerning marriage and divorce. Anxiety about the possible economic empowerment of women runs parallel to anxiety concerning the empowerment of slaves. In these plays, wealthy wives dominate their husbands just as tricky slaves control their masters. But, as the subsequent discussion will show, the empowerment of elite women was a more real possibility than the empowerment of slaves.

Plautus' plays involve a marked difference in the dramatic functions of free and unfree women based on notions of morality as tied to rank. As William Anderson (1993, 88–92) has pointed out, the quintessential “virtue” of the trickster in the reversed value system of comedy is *malitia* (“badness”). Female tricksters in particular are referred to and proudly refer to themselves as *malae* (“bad”) in this context.⁸ It is important, however, to qualify Anderson's observation by pointing out that the trickster's *malitia* sidesteps ethical evaluation: the term is always used in reference to his or her theatrical skill at circumventing power through disguise and role-play. Unlike unfree women, upper-class women are never *malae* in this sense, even though they may be characterized as unpleasant by their husbands, who resent their economic superiority.

Unlike upper-class men in comedy, who lose their dignity by indulging in lust or greed, female characters of the same rank never behave in morally transgressive ways. They appear as moral foils to their transgressive husbands, yet, unlike slaves and prostitutes, they are generally not sympathetic characters but are presented as anti-comic agents. The high moral standards of the ideal upper-class wife restrict comedy's freedom to represent inversions in the social hierarchy. The moral qualities that defined an ideal Roman *matrona* were *puicitia* (chastity) and *fides* (loyalty), which comprised her sexual fidelity to her husband and her overall loyalty to the interests of the common household (Treggiari 1991, 229–61). In the comedies, this ideal is reflected in the wife's dramatic function as guardian of the economic and moral integrity of the household.

Characteristically, a wife takes action to avenge not a husband's infidelity, but his violation of the property which the couple shares or which even belongs to the wife entirely.⁹ The pursuit of courtesans, both by married and by unmarried men, was not considered immoral in Roman society.¹⁰ The audience's sympathies might even be explicitly steered towards the unfaithful husband, as in the *Menaechmi*, where the husband appeals to the adulterers in the audience for sympathy (128) while the wife receives a negative characterization even from her own father (766–7). The woman's father condones his son-in-law's extramarital affairs and only comes to the rescue of his daughter when he realizes that the husband is stealing from her to finance his affairs. When husbands in comedy compete with their own sons for the same courtesan and steal from their wives to finance their affairs, their fault lies in a failure to respect the economic interests of their family. By contrast, the honor of wives and daughters

is never compromised in comedy, either by the women themselves or by others. The serious transgression of pursuing the wife or daughter of a citizen is never represented.¹¹ And the rape of a virgin, which is a frequent theme in the Greek plays adapted by Plautus, rarely figures in his plays.¹²

This correlation between female morality and status is well illustrated by the type of the *pseudomereatrix*, a character who appears in several of Plautus' plays (*Cistellaria*, *Curculio*, *Rudens*, *Poenulus*). The *pseudomereatrix* is a woman of free status who has been enslaved in a brothel by some fantastic accident of fate, such as being kidnapped by pirates. These women are always portrayed as especially virtuous, even when this characterization contrasts with their apparent role as prostitutes. The *pseudomereatrix* Adelphasium in the *Poenulus*, for instance, delivers a moralizing tirade against women's luxury (210–32) and against cheap whores (300–7; 323), and asserts her moral and social superiority throughout the play (cf. 1201f.). The exaggerated virtue of the *pseudomereatrix* anticipates the recognition of her real status – by tokens or by a reunion with the father – which enables her to marry her high-born lover. Significantly, all *pseudomereatrices* also actively reject the typical behaviors of tricksters, such as disguise and role-play.

While the sexual restraint of wives and daughters in comedy can be explained by the strict requirements of chastity for free women in Roman society, it is perhaps more surprising that upper-class female characters are also excluded from such non-sexual activities as role-play and disguise. In the *Persa* (3.1), for example, a free daughter objects to impersonating a prostitute in a ruse orchestrated by the clever slave. All she would have to do is wear a costume and make conversation, but she argues that her appearance in the clothes of a prostitute might make her neighbors believe that she actually is one. Similarly, in the *Casina*, where a wife plots a ruse against her husband, Plautus is careful to assign the actual performance of the role-play in disguise to slaves and thus to differentiate the wife from the low-class tricksters. For a wife to engage in role-play and disguise would have put her on the same low level as actors, who were marginalized in Roman society, and whose social condition was considered shameful. In Rome, unlike Greece, actors were despised. As foreigners and slaves, they were considered licentious and effeminate, thus comparable to prostitutes. Acting, like pandering and stealing, brought the stigma of *infamia*, the diminution of a person's social and legal status.¹³

At the same time, the social status that inhibited the freeborn woman's participation in role-play and disguise did give her a particular role in the comic plot. The wife's economic power often leads to an inversion of the conventional conjugal roles of dominant husband and submissive wife. In these comic situations, wives actively oppose their husbands, and assert a dominance over them that is explicitly likened to a slave's dominance over his master in comedy.¹⁴ In the words of the wife's father in the *Menaechmi* (766–7), women rely on their dowries to force their husbands into submission.¹⁵ In another play, a husband complains that he has sold his power (*imperium*) for a dowry and that the slave who manages his wife's dowry handles more money than he does (*Asinaria* 85–7).

Not only are subservient husbands compared to slaves, but their humiliation is intensified by comparison to the lowest in the social hierarchy, those who are not only unfree but also female. Thus, in the *Menaechmi* (795–7), the husband is pictured as sitting at home spinning like a maid. While the subservient husband is seen as emasculated by his position of inferiority, as a series of castration jokes makes clear (for example, *Mercator* 275), the wife is seen as defeminized by her empowerment. Accordingly, she is typically described by the husband as unattractive, domineering, and both verbally and physically abusive.¹⁶

These prominent negative portraits of powerful wives reflect the social tensions of Plautus' own cultural moment. The domineering wife is one of the features that distinguish the Roman comic world from its Greek models.¹⁷ As Eduard Fraenkel (1922/1960, 131–4) pointed out, Plautus' frequent attacks on the Roman dowry system constitute some of his most obvious innovations.¹⁸ While complaints about wealthy wives were not a Roman invention,¹⁹ Plautus exploited the potential conflict between a husband and a wealthy wife to a larger extent than the Attic playwrights of the fourth century had done. His expansion of the wife's function as an obstacle figure goes along with his interest in plots which involve married men pursuing prostitutes, a theme that is absent from the extant plays of Attic New Comedy. The Attic playwrights presented domestic conflicts between men and their concubines, but not between men and their legitimate wives (Konstan 1993); upper-class wives in Attic New Comedy never have significant speaking roles and do not actively intervene as obstacle figures.²⁰

With the character of the dowered wife, Plautus brings his adaptations of Greek plays closer to the experience of his Roman audience. Roman women of the upper classes were greatly empowered by their dowries and, unlike their Athenian counterparts, they could own and transfer property, even if they were nominally supervised by a guardian for certain transactions.²¹ Roman matrons could also make public donations and dedications from their dowries and other properties.²² And they could rally against policies that affected them, as they did in 195 BCE, when a group of matrons appeared before the senate to demand the repeal of the Oppian Law, a sumptuary law that restricted the amount of wealth that a woman could display in public.²³

The prominence in Plautine comedy of husbands who would rather put up with an unpleasant wife than give up the money she has brought into the household illustrate the real importance of the wife's dowry in the lives of upper-class men of the period. A woman's wealth enhanced the social status and prestige of her husband but also imposed responsibilities on him.²⁴ In particular, the dowry had an ambiguous legal status, since it typically became part of the husband's property but had to be returned to the wife if the marriage ended through divorce or the death of the husband.²⁵ Husbands were responsible for maintaining their wives at a standard commensurate with their dowries and with the status of the family.²⁶ They were expected to keep the dowry intact during the marriage, and the wife could demand its return if it was handled negligently.²⁷ The requirement that the dowry be returned in the event of a

divorce gave married women some protection against mistreatment by their husbands. Cato the Elder (234–149 BCE), a contemporary of Plautus, provides evidence of the real power that could be exercised by wealthy wives over their husbands. In a speech delivered in support of the Voconian Law (169 BCE),²⁸ a law intended to limit the amount that women from the wealthiest families could inherit, Cato (*Orations* 40; *Oratorum Romanorum Fragmenta* 156–60, esp. 158) cites the case of a woman who had lent a part of her property to her husband and, in a fit of anger, demanded its immediate repayment. To make matters worse, the husband had to suffer the humiliation of being harassed by his wife's servant, a slave who formed part of her dowry (cf. Plautus' *Asinaria* (85), where the slave who manages the woman's property is called *servus dotalis* "a slave who belongs to the dowry").²⁹

A woman's wealth could put further pressure on her husband through the way in which its public display reflected on the honor and prestige of her male relatives. Polybius (*Histories* 31.26–7) illustrates the noble character of his patron Scipio Aemilianus (185–129 BCE) by recounting how he passed on the possessions he had inherited from his grandmother, Aemilia, to his mother, Papiria, who was divorced and impoverished, thus allowing her to make such a display. He comments that Papiria's means had been well below what was fitting for a woman who had been married to the great Scipio Africanus (235–183 BCE), so that she had long been forced to stay home on ceremonial occasions, when other women of her rank paraded their wealth in the streets of Rome. When Papiria finally appeared in public with her wealth visibly restored, the crowd cheered Scipio for his generosity. At the same time, however, Scipio's family owed huge sums to the husbands of his sisters for their dowries, which were supposed to be paid in installments (Polybius 31.26).³⁰ Dowries, therefore, were means to assert one's rank in society, while at the same time they could represent a significant financial burden.

Plautus' emphasis on the figure of the domineering wife coincided historically with a shift in marriage patterns that gave even greater financial power and autonomy to wives.³¹ Roman jurists clearly distinguished two forms of marriage. In early Rome, the norm among the elite was marriage *cum manu*.³² In marriage *cum manu*, the bride left her native family and came under the *potestas*, or authority, of her husband (or of his father, if he was still alive). Any property she owned or acquired in addition to her dowry became her husband's. If he died, she shared equally with her children in any inheritance, so that her legal status was comparable to that of a daughter.³³ During the late third and second centuries BCE, another form of marriage, marriage *sine manu*, became increasingly common, and by the time of Cicero in the first century BCE it had almost completely replaced marriage *cum manu*.³⁴ In marriage *sine manu* the bride remained under the *potestas* of her father, or, if he was dead, she was legally independent and could own property which by law was entirely separate from that of her husband.³⁵ In this form of marriage, the woman had no claim to her husband's estate but retained her claim to a share of her father's patrimony

as part of her inheritance.³⁶ Her dowry still became part of the husband's property for the duration of the marriage but had to be returned in the case of a divorce.³⁷

Modern scholars generally attribute the increasing predominance of marriage *sine manu* to the changes in economic conditions that came about as a result of Rome's expansion during the third and second centuries BCE.³⁸ The earlier form of marriage *cum manu* was more appropriate to a land-based economy in which a woman's marriage meant her physical departure from her father's estate and her dowry took the form of household goods or a plot of land. With the growth of fortunes based on other forms of wealth, marriage *sine manu* became more appealing because it enabled both families to prevent the dispersal of their property through marriage.

A woman's dowry gained even more importance when divorce practices began to be liberalized in the late third century BCE, partly as a response to the increased use of marriage to create political alliances.³⁹ As divorce became more common, strategies were developed to avoid dispersing a family's holdings through dowries. Down to the middle of the third century BCE, in a traditional marriage *cum manu*, Roman women could not initiate a divorce at all, and men themselves could only repudiate their wives under specific circumstances, such as adultery, "poisoning of children" (infanticide or, possibly, abortion) and negligence in guarding the family property.⁴⁰ A husband who repudiated his wife under any other circumstances forfeited his property, so that a woman was to some extent protected from capricious repudiations.⁴¹ Around 230 BCE Spurius Carvilius Ruga set a precedent that changed not only the divorce laws but also the handling of dowries.⁴² He divorced his sterile wife without penalty because he convinced the censors that his marriage was not valid under a definition of marriage as existing for the procreation of legitimate heirs.⁴³ In response to more relaxed divorce laws, the Romans established the *actio rei uxoriae*, the legal recourse by which a wife could reclaim her dowry in the case of a divorce. This kind of legal action is mentioned as a routine transaction in Plautus' *Stichus* (204), a play first performed in 200 BCE.⁴⁴

Furthermore, in a marriage *sine manu*, the form that was becoming more popular as the divorce laws were liberalized, the wife could herself initiate a divorce, as she could not in a marriage *cum manu*. At the time when Plautus wrote, both forms of marriage were practiced, and both are depicted in his works. The wives in Plautus' plays often threaten their husbands with a divorce, initiated either by them or by their fathers.⁴⁵ As we shall see, the distinction between the two types of marriage becomes important in the *Casina* (2.2), where the wife discusses the conditions of both with her neighbor and expresses frustration that her own marriage contract does not allow her to initiate a divorce.

The anxiety about women's wealth that are expressed in Plautus' comedies is also reflected in legal measures and other elite male actions of the second century. The Voconian Law, passed in 169 BCE to limit the amount that women of the

first census class could inherit, was only one in a series of laws designed to restrict women's ability to own and move property.⁴⁶ Cato the Elder, a supporter of the Voconian Law, had already proposed in 184 BCE that women's possessions in the form of clothes, jewelry, and other luxury items be catalogued at ten times their value and then taxed at three times the prevailing rate.⁴⁷ He had also objected to the repeal in 195 BCE of the Oppian Law, a sumptuary measure that restricted the amount of wealth that could be displayed in public by women during the Second Punic War (Livy 34.4.1ff.). As for his own marriage, Cato is said to have married a woman with a modest dowry because he was convinced that a financially dependent wife would be more obedient (Plutarch, *Cato the Elder* 20.2), a view echoed by the wealthy Megadorus in Plautus' *Aulularia* (534).

But economics alone did not govern the relations between husbands and wives, nor was property the only defining criterion in the self-presentation of the Roman elite. Upper-class men and women recognized each other as members of the same class not only by their property but also, ideally, by their acceptance of a common value system and of a shared code of honor. Even if marriage could be a temporary economic transaction, it was still conceived of as a partnership in which the wife shared authority over the household with her husband, while at the same time being subordinate to him by virtue of her gender.⁴⁸ Although the legal texts paint a grim picture of Roman family life under a husband's and father's *patria potestas*, his absolute power over his wife and children,⁴⁹ the relations between family members were in fact governed by a code of honor, and the law was invoked only when the traditional mechanisms of problem-solving within the family failed. As Richard Saller (1994, 102–32) has shown, a strictly legalistic approach to the Roman family fails to uncover its dynamics and organization precisely because it ignores the unwritten rules of the honor code, which were enforced by peer pressure. Saller identifies the positive force of this honor code as *pietas*, a set of mutual obligations that applied not only to the relations of inferior to superior but also of superior to inferior.⁵⁰ The violation of this ideal of shared property and mutual respect between husbands and wives and between parents and children is often the starting point for Roman comedy. Typically, the abandonment of his responsibilities by a figure of authority, a father or husband, sets in motion a series of plot mechanisms that leads to his corrective humiliation by his subordinates. With its characteristic parody of legal terms and procedures,⁵¹ Plautine comedy reinforces the notion that, in reality, domestic conflicts are not to be solved by law, but by the assertion of a commonly accepted code of honor.

This pattern is well illustrated in the *Casina*, where a husband forfeits his authority over his household because he blatantly disregards the interests of his wife and son. There the *paterfamilias*, Lysidamus, is pursuing Casina, a servant who has come into his household as a foundling.⁵² His wife, Cleostrata, has raised Casina, in her own words, "like her own daughter" (45f.) and, being well aware of the foundling's free status, she supports her son's wish to marry the young woman. But Lysidamus has other plans for Casina: in order to retain the privilege of raping

her with impunity, he plans to keep her enslaved by arranging a “slave-marriage” between Casina and his bailiff Olympio while his son is out of town. Cleostrata tries to thwart her husband’s plans by plotting a counter-marriage between Casina and her own faithful servant Chalinus. The two slaves draw lots and Casina is assigned in marriage to Lysidamus’ candidate Olympio. But Cleostrata does not give up and devises a new strategy with the help of her servants: in the wedding ceremony, Casina is replaced by the slave Chalinus in disguise. After the ceremony, when both Olympio and Lysidamus approach the bride for sex, Chalinus beats them and threatens to rape them. Chalinus’ revenge is not staged but when Olympio reports the incident, Lysidamus becomes the laughing-stock of the entire household. Finally, he apologizes to his wife, and the play ends with the formal reinstatement of Lysidamus as the head of the household.

Lysidamus is temporarily deprived of his status because he fails to uphold the moral responsibilities associated with his position. While the law is undoubtedly on the side of his *patria potestas*, or masterly prerogative, Lysidamus blatantly violates the code of honor through his lack of *pietas*. Thus, while he insists that his son is under his absolute authority (263–5), Cleostrata points out that he is expected by moral convention (*officium*) to share important decisions about the household with her (259–61). In fact, Lysidamus is abusing his paternal power by pursuing the young man’s bride. His behavior goes beyond the stock rivalry of a father and son who pursue the same courtesan found in other plays. Lysidamus must know that Casina is really freeborn, since she is eligible for marriage, and in Rome, as in Athens, only free citizens could contract a legal marriage.⁵³ The slave wedding he is plotting is presented in the prologue as a legal incongruity (68–72).

More seriously, Lysidamus is himself attempting to commit *stuprum*, defined in the legal texts as “sex with the daughter or the wife of a citizen,” a serious transgression that is not usually dealt with in comedy.⁵⁴ Casina’s position could be considered ambiguous since, legally, freeborn foundlings remained free, but the absence of parents made their status difficult to prove.⁵⁵ Lysidamus’ insistence on keeping Casina in a servile condition and therefore exposed to sexual exploitation has a parallel in the well-known story of Verginia, reported by Livy (*History of Rome* 3.44–50). There the powerful magistrate Appius Claudius, in order to rape Verginia, the daughter of a free Roman citizen, Verginius, claims that she is not really the daughter of Verginius but a slave who was stolen in infancy from the household of one of his friends and then presented to Verginius as his own child. That story ends in tragedy: rather than see his daughter humiliated, Verginius kills her in the Roman Forum in a sacrificial act that sparks a revolt against the tyrannical Appius Claudius.

Comedy proposes more peaceful solutions to such abuses. In the *Casina* a massacre is only threatened in a tongue-in-cheek report that Casina has gone mad and intends to kill her unwanted groom(s) with two swords (3.5). The supposed slave woman is avenged through the humiliation of Lysidamus during the wedding scene, in which he is deprived of both his authority and his male

identity. The wedding scene (4.4) includes a parody of a significant moment in the traditional Roman ceremony at which the bride received advice from a respected matron, the *pronuba*.⁵⁶ In the *Casina*, this role is played by the clever servant Pardalisca, who advises the bride to dominate and financially ruin her future husband (814–24) – just what a defeminized *uxor dotata* is expected to do in comedy.

Lysidamus’ comic humiliation is represented not only as emasculation but also as enslavement. When he returns on stage after the attack by Chalinus, he compares himself to a fugitive slave and even anticipates a slave beating from his own wife (953–59; 1003). In Rome, corporal punishment was normally associated with the inherently shameful condition of slaves and represented extreme humiliation for a free citizen.⁵⁷ While allusions to slave beatings are common in Plautus,⁵⁸ the role reversal involved in a free man being subjected to physical violence by his slave was evidently beyond what the free members of the audience would have found acceptable.⁵⁹ Thus we do not see the attack on Lysidamus by Chalinus on stage but only hear about it in a displaced form in Olympio’s narrative in Act 5, scene 2. Olympio reports on his own experience at length and then concludes with a brief indication that Lysidamus has suffered a similar attack (932–3). Like the exclusion of honorable matrons from ludic agency, this avoidance of representing the corporal punishment of free citizens illustrates the limits of comic inversion.

While the humiliation of Lysidamus results from an appropriation of power by his wife, Cleostrata does not act on her own behalf but rather through the agency of two slaves: Chalinus, who disguises himself as the bride, and the maid Pardalisca, who plays the *pronuba* in the wedding scene (4.4) and delivers a fictional messenger’s speech about Casina’s murderous madness (3.5) in order to terrify Lysidamus. By using her servants as surrogates, Cleostrata preserves the hierarchical order of the household and maintains the dignity that is expected of her. As they join forces, the slave Chalinus and the matron Cleostrata present two complementary versions of the comic avenger: Cleostrata is socially high by virtue of her status but low in the hierarchy of gender, while Chalinus is low in status but high in gender.

Cleostrata’s reliance on Chalinus and Pardalisca to achieve her ends constitutes an interesting variation on the more typical avenging wife plots represented by Plautus’ *Asinaria* and *Mercator*. In those plays, wives use their dowries to oppose their husbands, but Cleostrata does not have this option and is therefore obliged to team up with her servants. The playwright motivates her alliance with these powerless and marginalized figures by demonstrating early in the play (2.2) that she cannot rely on her property as leverage because she is married *cum manu* and thus cannot threaten to initiate a divorce.⁶⁰

Plautus makes an elaborate business out of the revelation of Cleostrata’s marital status, first playing with the audience’s expectations to suggest that it is something different. Cleostrata first appears in Act 2, scene 1, when she is locking her husband out of the house. This action identifies her as a typical

angry wife (144–61) engaged in gender reversal as she locks her husband out of the house. In particular, it puts her in a position that recalls the behavior of a man repudiating his wife according to the ancient legal formula codified in the Twelve Tables, the most ancient legal text of the Romans. In that situation, the husband would tell the wife to gather her belongings, then take away her keys and send her away.⁶¹ Furthermore, careless handling of the household's keys was cited in the Twelve Tables as one of the three causes that justified a wife's repudiation.⁶² The next scene (2.2), however, reveals Cleostrata's true situation as she admits that she has no legal recourse against her husband (189–90). In her legalistic arguing about property, Cleostrata here conforms to the figure of the powerful comic wife as she appears in the *Asinaria*, *Menaechmi*, and *Mercator*. But it turns out that, unlike the angry wives in those plays,⁶³ she cannot rely on a dowry as leverage against her husband. She complains that Lysidamus is stealing from her by trying to impose his will on a slave who, she claims, was brought up with her money and is therefore part of her property (194).⁶⁴ Cleostrata's neighbor, Myrrhina, refutes her claim with a legal argument of her own. She states that during her marriage a wife was not allowed to own property independently, including a slave, since whatever she acquired became the property of her husband (198–202), making it clear that Cleostrata's is a marriage *cum manu*. Cleostrata's situation, Myrrhina continues (204–7), not only precludes her from initiating divorce, but on the contrary makes her vulnerable to her husband's repudiation (210–12). Thus Cleostrata is shown to be hampered by a lack of legal avenues that justifies her recourse to a slave's ruse.

Because Chalinus masquerades as the bride in a supposed slave marriage, Lysidamus is, in effect, reduced to sexual and social submission by the figure most associated with those conditions, the powerless slave woman. The double vulnerability of the female slave is underscored in the alliance between the slave Olympio and his master Lysidamus. In their scheme, the female slave would be exploited by a fellow slave on account of her gender and by her master on account of her unfree status. Thus Cleostrata's use of both substitution and disguise in her plot results in the most thorough possible reversal of the violence and domination reflected in Lysidamus' abusive behavior against both his wife and his slaves. Yet it is notable that, like the matron Cleostrata, Casina can only gain revenge through the male Chalinus, who acts as a surrogate for both of them.

As female agency is ruled out and displaced onto the male slave, the revenge on Lysidamus becomes a transaction between men, free and servile. By making Chalinus the one who imposes a moment of fictive enslavement and emasculation on Lysidamus, the play emphasizes a weak point in the Roman slave system, namely the lack of a clear natural distinction between male master and male slave. In the course of the play, both of Lysidamus' male slaves – his accomplice Olympio as well as his punisher Chalinus – challenge his domination. Both have experienced that domination in the form of unwanted sexual advances by their master (451ff.; 515ff., 811). As a consequence, Olympio, although he is his

master's accomplice in the planned rape of Casina, is not as willing a participant as Lysidamus had hoped for. In exchange for his cooperation, he demands to be treated like a free man who has the right to reject Lysidamus' sexual exploitation (723–47).⁶⁵

Olympio's rejection of the submissive role expected from slaves is paralleled by Chalinus' attack on Lysidamus, in which what has appeared to be a docile bride turns out to be a valiant soldier instead. Chalinus is not, in fact, a simple household servant, but the military attendant (*armiger*) of the absent son (257, 277, 769).⁶⁶ This association with weapons promotes the recurring use of phallic props to express Lysidamus' humiliation. Chalinus' sword is stressed in Olympio's report in Act 5, scene 2,⁶⁷ where it becomes the object of much obscene word-play. In the inserted narrative through which Pardalisca attempts to confuse Lysidamus in Act 3, scene 5, "Casina" is raging inside the house brandishing *two* swords with which she intends to kill her groom(s). This emphasizes Chalinus as an avenger who possesses the phallus and thus the feature that distinguishes him from Casina, but not from Lysidamus.

Correspondingly, Lysidamus' humiliation is underscored by the loss of his staff and his cloak, the symbols of his social and gender status. Both of these props carry multiple meanings. The hooked stick is the identifying feature of the old man in comedy,⁶⁸ and Lysidamus has in fact given up his conventional role of *senex* to behave more like the typical *adulescens amans*, the irresponsible young man in love. At the same time, his loss of his staff expresses that temporary loss of social power to Chalinus that is also expressed in Chalinus' brandishing of a sword. The wrinkled state of Lysidamus' cloak is an indication of his debauchery from the very beginning of the play (246). After the struggle with Chalinus, Lysidamus returns on stage without it, wearing a slave's short *chiton*.⁶⁹ Appearing without his cloak, Lysidamus is like an adulterous matron who, as a result of her shame, would lose the right to wear her distinctive cloak, the *palla*.⁷⁰ Furthermore, the "unclanking" of Lysidamus also plays with the dramatic conventions of the *fabula palliata*, a comic genre that disguised universal human weakness behind the mask of despised "Greeklings." When Lysidamus realizes that he has lost his cloak, he exclaims that he has been *expalliat* (945), "un-clanked," and thus exposed to the audience as one of them, a flawed human rather than a Greek caricature.⁷¹

Lysidamus has a ready excuse for the disappearance of the cloak, blaming it on a sudden attack by raging Bacchantes. This excuse is dismissed by Myrrhina, who counters that there are no Bacchic rites at the time in Rome (978–81). In fact, Dionysiac rites were banned in the city in 186 BCE by a famous decree of the senate following a scandal involving the participants in these mystery cults, among whom were distinguished matrons.⁷² Lysidamus' reference to Bacchantes works against him, however, because it evokes mythical gender reversals. In Euripides' *Bacchae*, Pentheus is torn apart by Bacchantes when he tries to overstep gender boundaries by watching an all-female ritual. This myth must have been well known in Rome at the time, since Plautus uses it again in

another play.⁷³ Further, the reference to the Bacchantes incongruously elevates the gender reversal of Chalinus' attack to mythological heights, one of Plautus' favorite comic techniques.⁷⁴ Cleostrata, however, is not about to turn into a murderous Bacchant. Unlike the avenging wives in the *Asinaria* and the *Mercator*, she cheerfully accepts Lysidamus' apologies (1004) and the two reconcile.

The family conflict of the *Casina* is not resolved by law, as initially proposed by the angry Cleostrata in Act 2, scene 2, nor by a perversion of the law, as Lysidamus attempts in the "slave marriage," but by an entertaining *ludus* that brings the head of the household back to his senses and restores order. Like the author himself, Cleostrata manipulates events behind the scenes. Her cleverly contrived reinstatement of Lysidamus as the head of the household also reaffirms her status as ideal *matrona* – respectful of her husband's authority and at the same time in control of the servants. As Cleostrata forgives Lysidamus, she both reasserts her own virtue and rescues her husband from the threatening implications of his humiliation. Husband and wife are reunited in order to affirm domestic stability and, at the same time, to re-establish solidarity among the free, both men and women. Within the now properly functioning household the distinctions between free and unfree are again clear. The questions raised in the course of the action about the upper-class male's control over his subordinates have been resolved in his favor.

As the ending of the *Casina* demonstrates, Plautine comedy ultimately validates existing social arrangements. Comedy reinforces an ideal in which economic and social superiority is legitimized by adherence to a shared moral code. At the end of the play, everyone knows his or her place once again. Social stability is restored after chaos and reversals, and the spectators are sent home with the satisfying notion that, at least in the world of happy endings, stability among the orders and within the family is not only desirable but also feasible.

Notes

- 1 Recent studies have shown that Plautus was working within an established tradition of Roman playwrights adapting Greek plays, a tradition that had already generated its own aesthetic and dramatic conventions (Wright 1974, 15–32).
- 2 On Plautus' slaves see also Spranger 1984; Slater 1985; Segal 1987 [1968], 99–170.
- 3 On women and the family in Plautus, cf. Schuhmann 1977; Konstan 1977, 1978, 1983, 47–56; Wiles 1989; Stärk 1990.
- 4 The enslavement of the vanquished enemy was one of the principal sources of slave-supply during the central period of Roman history. For a brief introduction to the Roman slave system, see Bradley 1994a, with sources and bibliography.
- 5 See, for example, Bonner 1977.
- 6 Our information about Plautus' life is sparse and unreliable. Aulus Gellius (*Attic Nights* 3.3.14), who quotes Varro (116–27 BCE), the most important ancient editor of Plautus, states that Plautus earned his living in theatrical work. He is said to have made a fortune and to have lost it in a trade venture, so that he was forced to hire out his services in a mill for some time. See Leo 1912, 63–86; Duckworth 1952, 49–51; Gratwick 1982, 181–2.
- 7 See Corbier 1991; 1992.

- 8 Cf. *Truculentus* 448–79; *Miles Gloriosus* 188–94; 355f., 879–95, *Casina* 826. Unless indicated otherwise, the plays are all cited from W. M. Lindsay's edition in Oxford Classical Texts (1904–5). Passages from the *Casina* are cited from MacCary and Willcock (1976). Translations are mine where no author is indicated.
- 9 See, for example, *Mercator* 700–4.
- 10 Cf. Cicero *In Defense of Coelius* 42; Plautus *Curculio* 37–8; Griffin 1985, 1–31; Saller 1987, 78–9; Treggiari 1991, 299–309. On the double standard in marriage, see *Mercator* 817–29, where a female servant imagines a topsy-turvy world in which married men are held accountable for marital infidelity in the same way as women are.
- 11 Fantham 1991; Paul, *Sententiae* 2.26.16 (*Fontes Iuris Romani Antelustiniani (FIRA)* 2.352).
- 12 Plautus differs here from Terence, whose adaptations remain closer to the Greek originals. On rape plots see Fantham 1975.
- 13 Cicero, *Philippics* 2.8.26; *In Defense of Plancio* 30; *On Divination* 2.66; *The Republic* 4.10; Cornelius Nepos, *On Famous Men*, preface 5; Livy 7.2; Valerius Maximus 2.4.4; Ulpian, *Digest* 3.2.1 [6 *ad edictum*]. See Baltrusch 1988, 128–9; Leppin 1992, 71; Edwards 1993, 98–172.
- 14 *Asinaria* (5.2), *Amphitruo* (2.2, 3.2), *Casina* (2.3), *Mercator* (4.3–4), and *Menaechmi* (4.1). Cf. Konstan 1978; 1983, 47–56. Even Alcumena, the wife who is seduced by Jupiter disguised as her husband in Plautus' mythological travesty, *Amphitruo*, behaves like a conventional virtuous wife.
- 15 *Ita esse solent quae uiros supseruire/sibi postulant, dote fretae feroces.* – "That's the way they are, those women: just because they have a fat dowry they are mean and expect their husbands to be subservient to them." Similarly, see *Aulularia* 158–69, 474–535. Outside of comedy, too, the wife's dowry is regarded as an element that reverses the roles of men and women in the household. For instance, Tacitus (*Germania* 18.2; relates that in Germany the groom brings a dowry to the bride; cf. Horace, *Odes* 3.24.19–20 on the Scythians. Columella (12.3.5) regards separate property in the household as a source of imbalance in marriage, as he describes the dowered wife's constant demands with the same *topoi* found in comedy. The gender reversal in Plautus' comedies is paralleled by Martial (8.12.1–2), who plays with the gendered terms for marriage in Latin when he has a man say that he does not want to be the "wife" of a wealthy woman (*uxorem quare locupletem ducere nolim / quaeritis? uxori nubere nolo meae.* "You ask why I don't want to marry a rich woman? Because I'd rather not be the bride of my wife.").
- 16 Cf. *Asinaria* 4, 743, 894–5, 937, 942, 946. The nagging wife is repeatedly compared to a yapping dog, as in *Miles Gloriosus* 681, *Menaechmi* 716–18, 837; *Casina* 319–20. Husbands always pursue their affairs with *meretrices* in fear of retaliation by their wives and in anticipation of corporal punishment, as in *Asinaria* 897–8; 946; *Casina* 451, 1003; *Mercator* 275, 545, 798, 819, 827, 1002; *Menaechmi* 161, 1138.
- 17 The Romans themselves were aware of the differences in the social conditions of Greek and Roman women. Cornelius Nepos (*On Famous Men*, preface 6) observes that while Roman women accompanied their husbands to social occasions such as the banquet, Greek women lived segregated in a separate part of the house and did not attend the symposium.
- 18 Attacks on the dowered wife are scattered throughout Plautine comedy but are most prominent in the tirades delivered in the *Aulularia* (475–535), *Epidicus* (221–35), and *Miles Gloriosus* (672–700).
- 19 Cf. Alexis frag. 146 K; Anaxandrides frag. 52 K; Antiphanes frag. 320 K; Menander, frags 333, 334 K–T; Menander, *Plokion* (Sandbach 1990, 311–12); Plato, *Laws* 774c; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 8.1161a.
- 20 In the comedies of Menander, for example, married women hardly ever speak and, when they do, they are reserved, kind, and submissive. In the *Epitrepontes*, for instance,

- Pamphile refuses to leave her husband despite the rift between them and the pressure of her father (134–5; 1065–7). In the *Heros* Myrrhina is treated with respect by her husband (65ff.) when she tells him that she was raped in her youth. See Stärk 1990, 70.
- 21 Evans 1991, 51, with sources. On women and property in Athens see Schaps 1979.
- 22 According to Livy (5.23.8–11; 5.25.4–10; 5.50.7), in 395 BCE Roman women deposited sufficient gold in the state treasury to redeem Camillus' vow of a one-tenth part of the Veientine spoils to Apollo. These matrons earned the right to be eulogized in funeral orations (Plutarch, *Camillus* 8). Similarly, in 207 BCE, the temple of Juno on the Aventine was rebuilt with money donated by matrons from their dowries (Livy 27.27.1–15).
- 23 Livy 34.4.1 ff.; cf. Johnston 1980; Culham 1982; Hemelrijk 1987.
- 24 Evans 1991, 53ff. with sources and extensive bibliography on the subject of the Roman dowry.
- 25 Cicero, *Topics* 66; Tryphonius, *Digest* 23.3.75 [6 *Disputationes*]; Ulpian, *Titles* 6.3–5; cf. Treggiari 1991, 323–5; Watson 1965; Dixon 1992, 51.
- 26 Corbett 1930, 147, 152–4; Dixon 1992, 50; Saller 1994, 210–11; Treggiari 1991, 332. Until the marriage legislation of Augustus, a dowry was not legally required as a condition for marriage but it was socially expected. The jurists recognize the importance of dowries to enable women to marry and preserve the institution of marriage, cf. Paul, *Digest* 23.3.2 [60 *ad edictum*]; Pomponius, *Digest* 24.3.1 [15 *ad Sabinum*].
- 27 Dixon 1992, 50; Gardner 1986, 108–9; Ulpian, *Titles* 6.8; Ulpian, *Digest* 24.3.24 pr. [33 *ad edictum*].
- 28 An excerpt of this speech is quoted by the antiquarian Aulus Gellius (17.6.1).
- 29 Cf. Festus 356 (Lindsay); Nonius 54 M.
- 30 Dixon 1985b; Evans 1991, 64; Fantham *et al.* 1994, 262.
- 31 See Schulmann 1977, 65.
- 32 Watson 1971, 17; Treggiari 1991, 324–6; Cantarella 1996, 56–67.
- 33 Gaius, *Institutes* 1.111.
- 34 We are much better informed about marriage and divorce in the late Republican period than we are about the period of Plautus; cf., for example, Bradley 1991, 156–204; Corbier 1991, 47–78.
- 35 Gaius, *Institutes* 1.136; Cf. Corbett 1930, 90–4.
- 36 Hallett 1984, 90–1.
- 37 Watson 1967, 66–76; Gardner 1986, 105–6.
- 38 Saller 1994, 207; Dixon 1992, 41; Frank 1933, 109–214.
- 39 Pomeroy 1976, 222; Gratwick 1984, 46–9; Corbier 1991; 1992.
- 40 *Digest* 24.2.1; Corbett 1930, 222, 242; Yaron 1962.
- 41 Plutarch, *Romulus* 22; Cicero, *Philippics* 2.28.69; cf. Dixon 1992, 68.
- 42 Gellius 4.3.1–2; 17.21.44. Gellius took the story from the late republican jurist Servius Sulpicius, who had noted it for the regular *actio* for recovery of dowry by widows or divorced women and their fathers. Gellius terms it “the first divorce in Rome” to illustrate a deterioration of the moral climate. Cf. Evans 1991, 54; Saller 1994, 208; Treggiari 1991, 492; Dixon 1992, 68.
- 43 The censors regularly asked men if they had married for the purpose of begetting children. See Cicero, *Laus* 3.7; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 2.25.7; Watson 1965; Treggiari 1991, 325, 439ff.
- 44 This is one of the few plays of Plautus that we can date with some certainty because the didascalía indicate the consuls for the year.
- 45 *Amphitruo* 928, *Menaechmi* 719ff., *Mercator* 784ff., *Miles Gloriosus* 1164–7; 1276–8, *Casina* 2.2.
- 46 Gellius 17.6; Cicero, *Republic* 3.10.7; Evans 1991, 50–71.
- 47 Livy 39.44.2–3; Plutarch, *Cato the Elder* 18.
- 48 Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 2.25.5; Plutarch, *Roman Questions* 20, 271 E; Treggiari 1991, 183–262; Dixon 1992, 83–9.
- 49 Gaius, *Institutes* 1.48–55; 108–18; 136–7a; Justinian, *Institutes* 1.9.
- 50 Segal (1987, 43) discusses the transgression against *pietas* in the comedies but he considers *pietas* to be an obligation of respect by the sons towards their elders only.
- 51 Fraenkel 1960, 153–4; Zagagi 1980.
- 52 The freeborn foundling is a dramatic *topos* of Greek and Roman comedy but it also reflects the disturbing reality of child exposure in antiquity. Sometimes these infants were rescued from certain death by strangers who reared them in their households to become servants. Gomme and Sandbach 1973, 34–5; Boswell 1988, 53–157; Harris 1982; Bradley 1994a, 35–9.
- 53 Ulpian, *Titles* 5.5 (*FIRA* 2.268); Paul, *Sententiae* 19.6 (*FIRA* 2.345). Although slaves in Rome did form partnerships (*contubernia*) and families, these unions had no legal validity and could be arranged and disrupted at will by a slave owner. Slave families were often in the slave owner's interest since slaves born on the estate would automatically come into the master's property. The unions of land overseers (*vilici*), like Olympio in the *Casina*, were especially encouraged as a means to promote stability. See Cato (*On Agriculture* 143); Columella 1.8.5. On slave-families Scaevola, *Digest* 40.4.59 [23 *Digest*]; Varro, *On the Latin Language* 9.59; Flory 1978; Treggiari 1991; Bradley 1994a, 50–1.
- 54 Relations with prostitutes and slaves did not fall under the definition of *stuprum*, not even under the otherwise strict Augustan legislation on sexual morality, the Julian Law. See Paul, *Sententiae* 2.26.16 (*FIRA* 2.352); Fantham 1991.
- 55 There was enough ambiguity to warrant debate about the status of foundlings. In a rhetorical school exercise (Seneca, *Controversiae* 10.4.13) one speaker argues that all exposed children were automatically slaves. A similar dispute is also presented in Quintilian, *Minor Declamations* 278. However, the problems surrounding the status of foundlings who claimed to have been born free were not only the stuff of rhetorical exercises. When Pliny was governor of Bithynia he wrote to the emperor Trajan to ask how he should handle cases in which a person claimed to have been born free but was enslaved (Pliny, *Letters* 65 and 66).
- 56 Williams 1958.
- 57 Saller 1994, 133–54.
- 58 Saller 1994, 137 with examples; Parker 1989.
- 59 The Romans' anxiety about possible violence from their slaves is evident in the harshness of the punishment contemplated by the law for the murder of a master by his slave: according to Tacitus (*Annals* 14.42–5), ancient laws required that all household slaves should be killed in retaliation (cf. Finley 1980, 173 n.41; Saller 1987, 65). As for drama, the grammarian Donatus (fourth century CE) observes that in drama slaves were allowed to deceive and dominate their masters only in the genre of Roman comedy known as the *fabula palliata*, “the comedy in Greek dress,” where the characters and settings were “Greek,” but not in the *fabula togata*, where the characters were Roman (ad Ter. Eun. 57). It is conceivable that behind the Greek mask Romans could imagine the threatening idea of rebellious slaves as a distant fantasy.
- 60 Treggiari 1991, 465ff.; Watson 1967, 29–31.
- 61 Cicero *Philippics* 2.69; Gaius [*ad edictum pro.*] *Digest* 24.2.1–2. Cf. McDonnell 1983, 54–80; Schuhmann 1976, 46–65; Treggiari 1991, 435–82.
- 62 Plutarch, *Romulus* 22.3; cf. Watson 1975, 31–4.
- 63 Cf. *Asinaria* 856ff.; *Mercator* 700–4, 784–6; *Menaechmi* (766–7).
- 64 See Pearce 1974; Treggiari 1991, 185–7, 220–1, 229–61. The female staff especially was the responsibility of the mistress of the household. In Tibullus' fantasy about country life (1.5.19–35) Delia is cast in the role of the mistress of the house over-

seeing the servants. Female staff were also likely to belong to the wife and to have come into the household with her (cf. Treggiari 1973; 1991, 374). The involvement of the wife with the care of her female servants is also illustrated by a case described in the *Digest* (40.4.59, Scaevola [23 *Digest*]) where a female slave owner specified in her will that some of her personal attendants (*pedisequae*) should be freed. But before she died she arranged a "marriage" of one of her servants with the bailiff. The legal question that interests the jurist here is whether the slave woman in question should still be freed, which is decided positively.

- 65 See Seneca, *Controversiae* 4, praef. 10.; Richlin 1993. A similar reversal of the roles of master and slave in a sexualized context occurs in the *Asinaria* (697ff.) where the two slaves demand to be addressed as *patroni* by the young man who needs their help and at the same time subject him and his girlfriend to sexual taunts.
- 66 Anderson 1983.
- 67 Despite the fragmentary state of the text in parts of this passage (especially 923–9), the phallic references are still evident in Olympio's comparisons which involve swords (909) and vegetables (911–14).
- 68 Pollux, *Onomastikon* 4.118; Neiiendam 1992, 81.
- 69 Cf. Webster 1960, 185; Neiiendam 1992, 81.
- 70 Adulterous matrons were forced to wear only the *toga*, like prostitutes. See Juvenal 2.68–70; Martial 2.39, 10.52; Cicero, *Philippics* 2.44; Horace, *Satires* 1.2.63; cf. Sebesta 1994.
- 71 The term *expalliatu*s is a Plautine *ad hoc* creation. The term *palliatu*s appears in the *Curculio* (288–9) in a mocking reference to Greeks in the Roman Forum.
- 72 The ban is documented in the *Senatusconsultum de Bacchanalibus* (The Senatorial Decree Concerning the Bacchic Rites) on *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* I² 581; Livy 39.8–18; cf. Gruen 1990, 34–78. If the line in the *Casina* is indeed alluding to these events, the play had to have been written during or after 186 BCE. If 184 BCE is correct as the date of Plautus' death, the *Casina* would be one of the last, if not the last, of Plautus' plays; cf. Buck 1940, 54–61.
- 73 *Mercator* 469–70.
- 74 Fraenkel 1960 (1922), 55–94.

8

WOMEN, SLAVES, AND THE HIERARCHIES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The family of St Augustine¹

Patricia Clark

In Roman society the ideal of domestic *concordia* (harmony) included two pivotal concepts: first, the family was hierarchically structured in terms of power and status and second, this structure was maintained through reciprocal ties of affection and favor.² At the head of the family was the *paterfamilias*; other family members were ranked vertically according to the degree of dignity (*dignitas*) commanded or compliance (*obsequium*) expected. More than a simple hierarchy of authority and obedience was involved, however, for at the core of the ideal family was the conjugal pair, bound by mutual ties of marital affection (Treggiari 1991, 54–7 and chapter 8). In an affective configuration, children, dependents, freedmen and freedwomen, and assorted household slaves were envisaged as ranging outward from this centre in concentric spheres (Cicero, *On the Supreme Good and Evil* 5.65). Domestic harmony, then, included the mutually agreeable functioning of these spheres and the absence of friction between them. In sum, authority and obedience on the one hand, and familial affection and loyalty on the other, were the foundations for the orderly, stable, and harmonious ideal of the Roman household.

In reality, of course, domestic harmony was not always easily maintained. In Roman political life, it has been observed, the term *concordia* came most often to the fore when it was either threatened or absent, and this very likely held true too for the domestic realm (Bradley 1991, 6–8). Evidence of discord within Roman families is easy to find, and with it the potential for violence. Force or the threat of force always underlies hierarchies of power, the classic example being slavery, which was founded on the violent act of enslavement and maintained by the constant threat of force (Bradley 1987; MacMullen 1986, 512–19; Shaw 1987, 11–12). Within the Roman family, violence as a method of control is most clearly apparent between master and slave; it is less immediately discernible and more ambiguously presented among members of the nuclear