**Diphilus and Plautus’s *Rudens***

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*Rudens* is arguably Plautus’s most attractive play. Its attractiveness is more readily experienced than explained, for though Plautus’s lively language and his music, whose variety is evidenced by his metrical resourcefulness, will go some way to account for its appeal, the play exhibits an ethos and an atmosphere not widely recognised in Plautus elsewhere. Its linguistic and metrical qualities, in other words, are Plautine, its ethos and atmosphere, with the characters who lend to them, are likely to be Plautus’s inheritance from Diphilus, to whom he owed also the *Casina* and *Vidularia*, as Terence would in his time owe the *Adelphi*. No doubt an assessment of Diphilus’s qualities should rest on a study of all the extant fragments together with the dependent Roman dramas. This paper, however, restricts itself to the Diphilus of *Rudens* — the title of his own original Greek play is unknown — who ‘wished this city’s name to be Cyrene’ (32-33).

This clear statement from Arcturus in the *Prologue* transports us to a scene which is more remote by far than that of other Plautine comedies. Moreover, Cyrene itself is in the background: the immediate setting is the wild and lonely shore where Palaestra and Ampelisca have been shipwrecked (205-14). This is a setting that one associates with satyr-play (Vitr. VII 5.2), and the aura of a *genre* popular in Diphilus’s time to a large degree pervades the play. It is difficult, as already said, to argue for a ‘feeling’, but traces of influence from or reference to a satyr-play do serve to underpin that sense in *Rudens*. Most obviously, the ‘rope’ scene, which gives the play its name, has echoes of that in Aeschylus’s *Diktyoulkoi*, where a chest is, with similar difficulty, hauled ashore, amid similar speculation on its contents (A. *Dikty. I*-16).¹ Labrax is described as ‘an old man with a bald front like Silenus’ (317), and Daemones dreams of that *leno* as an ape (598-610), an animal known in one type as a ‘satyr’ (Ael. *NA* 16.15, *οἱ καλούμενοι σάτυροι*, cf. Paus. I 23.5).² One may further detect, if not with utter confidence, some *tóποι* of word and gesture which are common to *Rudens* and Euripides’s *Cyclops*. Scerpamio’s words in reply to Ampelisca (429, ‘My equipment too would show a wise man what I’m after’) recall Polyphemus’s as he gestures towards his phallos (E.Cyc. 169, ‘when this here is able to stand upright’) — though Diphilus’s

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character was presumably not phallic — and Gripus's remonstrance to Palaestra, who has 'locked [her] parents up in so confined a space' (a reference to the box of recognition tokens), recalls the Cyclops's question to Odysseus (525, 'But how can a god enjoy living in a wine-skin?).

A convention shared by satyr-drama, tragedy and comedy is that of the 'call for help' or Hilfruf. Playwrights make differing use of the convention. In Rudens, Labrax fulfils Daemones's dream by offering violence to the girls inside the temple, and Trachalio rushes out to seek assistance (615-20). His appeal to the locals for help recalls Apollo, who similarly in Sophocles's satyr-play Ichneutai (39-44) had called them to help him trace his stolen cattle. This scene brings also to mind — as does indeed the 'rope' scene — Trygaeus's efforts, by summoning assistance, to extract Peace from the cave that is her prison (Ar. Pax 296-300). In Peace, Ichneutai and (probably) Diktyoulkoi (17ff.), the Hilfruf motivates the entry of the chorus, but Philoctetes, with no human help at hand, can only appeal to his island's cliffs and wild things (S. Ph. 936-40). In Ajax, the chorus itself seeks aid from local fishermen, those 'toilers of the sea' (φιλόπονοι ἀλιάδαι, 879-80), whom Trachalio had met earlier (290-330) and expects, perhaps, to answer his call now. They do not, however, re-appear. There is no trace of a chorus in other Roman comedies, for four of which (as we saw) the playwrights drew on Diphilus: at the same time, it is hard to see why Plautus should himself have introduced a quasi-chorus here. He has used the fishermen in a two-fold rôle as singers, and, speaking through a leader's voice, as actor: in Diphilus's time they may have been a chorus proper (surviving longer than is commonly supposed) whose part has been modified and minimised by Plautus, or else (more probably) a band of entertainers, performing between the acts as in Menander (Dyskolos, 230-32).

Comparison of Diphilus's Rudens with Menander is not, however, specially instructive. There are parallels (as we see below) of language and motif — I ignore the ubiquitous motif of 'recognition' — but the question 'Which influenced the other?' is an idle one, since (a) both playwrights may have shared a common source and (b) their plays' chronology is doubtful.

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Except for *Dyscolos*, few of Menander’s plays are firmly datable, and Diphilus’s ‘rope’ play is only very vaguely so by reference to Gripus’s vision of himself as another peripatetic Stratonicus (932, ‘Just for fun, I’ll build a ship and sail round cities, copying Stratonicus’). This presupposes its appearance at a time when the name of that wandering minstrel, who was born about 390 B.C., would still have meaning. Daemones is an exile in Cyrene (35), but he is an economic, not a political refugee. ‘He got in his own way while trying to help others and lost his honestly acquired wealth’ (37-38): nothing suggests his being driven out of Athens by the new restrictions imposed upon the franchise by Antipater and Demetrius of Phalerum in 322 and 317 B.C.7 Sceparnio’s boastful claim to be ‘basilicus’ (431) has no significance, except as a riposte, in terms of dicing, to an earlier reference to ‘Venus’ (430; Diphilus alludes to dicing terminology elsewhere, fr. 743)8 — by itself the word will hardly suggest the age of Alexander9 — and the discerned hint of Ampelisca’s birth in Thebes (746, ‘What difference does it make to me’, asks Labrax, ‘whether [these girls] were born in Athens or in Thebes?’), with the consequent suggestion of a date after Thebes had been rebuilt (i.e. after 316 B.C.),10 is merely a proverbial contrast between cities. The same is true of Daemones’s dream (598-99) of an ape about to attack a ‘nest of swallows’, beside Moschion’s contemptuous account in *Perikeiromene* (275-79, ‘they couldn’t destroy a nest of swallows’).11 That play’s date is, in any case, uncertain, as is that of *Leucadia*, which is also alleged — on slender grounds — to have influenced Diphilus’s *Rudens*.12 More interesting is the parallel of the eponymous arbitration scene in *Epitrepontes* (date unknown), 42-199, with that involving Daemones, Labrax and Gripus (*Rud.* 1380ff.), and the thematic links between *Halieus* (date unknown), *Dyskolos* (317-316 B.C.) and *Rudens*. In *Halieus*, fishermen may have netted (as does Gripus) a box

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6 T.B.L. Webster, ‘Chronological Notes on Middle Comedy’ *CQ* N.S. 2 (1952), p. 17. He admits, however, that ‘the evidence about Stratonicos is confusing’.

7 Webster, *SLGC*, p. 160.


9 E. Segal: *Roman Laughter: the Comedy of Plautus*, Cambridge, Mass., *HSCL* 29 (1968), p.132, ‘... an adjective ... which ... clearly carried the aura of the great Alexander who had crowned himself βασιλεύ̂ς after the death of Darius of Persia’.

10 Webster (after Höffner), *SLGC*, p. 154.

11 Webster, ibid. Menandrian plays other than *Dyskolos* (see n. 5) are cited from A. Körte, Menander *Reliquiae*, ed. suppl. A. Thierfelder (Leipzig, 1957, 1959).

containing recognition tokens, in *Dyskolos*, Cnemon, living beside a temple (as does Daemones) is pestered, like him, by sacrificers borrowing utensils (*Dysk.* 472ff., *Rud.* 133-141). However, to ask which playwright borrowed these motifs is idle — the latter motif, in particular, may well have been a stock one, like Seeparnio’s complaint of Ampelisca’s furious knocking (414, ‘Who is it that’s so brazenly damaging our door?’). The ‘door-keeper’ scene has precedents in both tragedy and comedy — in Aeschylus, Euripides, Aristophanes and Menander — but here one is reminded, in particular, of Heracles’s outburst in the *Frogs* (38, ‘Who struck the door? Whoever it was, he went at it like a Centaur’).

The reference to *Frogs* is a convenient reminder that Diphilus, whatever his links with New and Middle comedy, resembles Aristophanes in a *vis* and *virtus comica* of a more robust variety than that which Julius Caesar praised — at least by implication — in Menander. It is not immediately prominent in the Menander that we know, and Diphilus, at least on the evidence of *Rudens*, would more justly have merited Caesar’s tribute — in fact, in a later competition for old comedies, a Diphilus play did beat one by Menander. This Aristophanic link is once again a ‘feeling’, but right from the start of the play we sense a comic atmosphere that, against the background of the satyric sea-shore setting, evokes the ‘pastoral-comical’ of Polonius. There are, however, more precise Aristophanic elements: the scene of back-chat between Charmides and Labrax (485-558), although it incorporates what must be Plautine puns, is typical of Aristophanic clowns, and the audience is introduced into the action in a way that again recalls the *Frogs*. Dionysus asks Xanthias, who has walked around the lake, ‘Did you see those parricides and perjurers [Heracles] spoke of?’ Xanthias, indicating the spectators, says ‘Do you not?’ ‘By Poseidon’, says his master, ‘yes, I see them now’ (*Frogs*, 274-76). So Plesidippus asks Daemones if he has seen ‘a fellow ... a rascal, a

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13 T.B.L. Webster, *An Introduction to Menander* (Manchester, 1974), p. 144 (after Bernhardy). This work offers conjectural contexts and chronology for the Menandrian corpus (pp. 111-93).


15 Suetonius, *Vita Terenti* 8, 116-20, ‘... o dimidiate Menander ... /Lenibus atque utinam scriptis adiuncta foret vis /comica ut aequato virtus polleret honore /cum Graecis ...’ (Suetonius, *De Poetis et Biografi Minoris*, ed. A. Rostagni, Torino, 1944, pp. 43-44). It is possible (and common) to punctuate after *comica*.


17 Plautus’s reliance on Diphilus does not, of course, prohibit him from employing jokes which depend on Latin language. See (in particular) *Rud.* 1269-79.
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perjurer, a con-man'. Daemones, pointing towards the audience, answers 'Lots of them. For it's because of people like this that I am poor' (125-27). The play, moreover, has its sexual innuendoes: Sceparnio, in his approach to Ampelisca, is a typical Aristophanic amorist. He is capable of suggestive puns and gestures, as we saw, and also of ambiguous politeness: 'I'll receive you kindly', he says to Ampelisca (who is soon obliged to protest at certain freedoms he is taking, 419-20, 424), 'if you'll come later, in the evening. I have nothing to offer a woman in the morning' (417-18). Gripus too can produce a (homo)sexual joke. Trachalio asks Daemones to 'put [Gripus] down' (1073, 'comprime hunc sis'), i.e. to check his constant interruptions. That (counts Gripus) is not Daemones's way, whatever is true of Trachalio's own master (1074-75). Such homosexual jokes, by no means rare in Plautus, are usually taken to be Plautine: they can hardly, though, be seen as out of character for Diphilus, whose fragments (fr. 49 ad fin.) contain a homosexual allusion, whose work underlies Casina with its homosexual humour (449-70, 809-13) and who wrote a now lost comedy The Paederasts (fr. 57). Sceparnio and Gripus, of course, belong to the 'lower' of the play's two clearly differentiated groups, but Trachalio too can indulge in double-entendre (704, 'They say that you [Venus] were born from a shell — see that you don't despise the shells of these girls', where concha, 'shell' or pudenda muliebria exactly represents the nuances of Greek κόγχη),18 and Daemones requires his wife's vigilance to check his Aristophanic old man's roving eye (892-96). His genuine concern for the two girls and for Venus, at the same time, allows him to relish confrontation with the leno and participate in knockabout Aristophanic farce (780-820). The Diphilean provenance of the humour is confirmed by the similar scene in Terence's Adelphi (155-75).

A feature of Old Comedy that survived into the New — although it is very much less common there — is parody and burlesque of tragic language and convention, or of elevated style and epic diction. Diphilus's Rudens offers these examples. The priestess Ptolemocratia, when the shipwrecked girls approach her, adopts at first a slightly haughty attitude. This comes out in her exaggerated diction, which (even though Plautus expresses it in cretics) must surely represent the Greek original. 'Presumably', the priestess says, 'you have been carried on a wooden horse over the dark-blue roads?' (268-69, 'nempe equo ligneo per vias caerulas/estis vectae?'). The girls' plight, however, and her own good nature, soon bring more ordinary and sympathetic words (280-81, 'Give me your hands, get up off your knees, both:

18 Leach comments on the resemblance between a scapha (on which Palaestra escapes shipwreck, Rud. 75, 163, 173) and a concha: 'Palaestra will not only escape prostitution but be genuinely reborn from a shell' (TSLL, p. 192).
no woman has more sympathy than I have’). Our sight of the sea-drenched girls is shortly followed by sight of the sea-drenched leno and his friend. When Labrax emerges dripping from the sea he praises, in regular paratragic language, the enviable fortune of a bull-rush:

‘o scirpe, scirpe, laudo fortunas tuas,  
qui semper servas aritudinis’.  

(523-24)

There is no doubt that Plautus’s senarii endeavour here to reproduce the trimeters of Diphilus: their tragic strictness is pointed for the audience by contrast with those from the teeth-chattering Charmides:

‘equidem me ad velitationem exerceo,  
nam omnia corusca gloriar tremore fabulor’.  

(525-26)

The contrast is still more pointed some lines later, when Labrax expresses similar envy of the blacksmiths:

‘ut fortunati sunt fabri ferrarii  
qui apud carbones adsident! semper calent’,  

(531-32)

and Charmides’s chattering teeth reduce him to replying, in imitation of the ducks that he is envying,

‘utinam fortuna nunc anetina  
ut quam exissim ex aqu- aqu- aqua ar-arerem tamen’.  

(533-34)

Labrax and Charmides here illustrate a further point — burlesque in the Aristophanic manner of encomia like those which we hear of on bumble-bees and salt (Isocr. X 12, Pl. Symp. 177b) and which Xanthias sends up in his praise of tortoises (Ar. Vesp. 1292-95) and Praxagora in her eulogy of the lamp (Ec. 1-16). Their incongruous lauding of the common duck and bull-rush accentuates their incongruous tragic speech.

Labrax’s tragic lines are hardly a quotation, and Diphilus here aims to mock tragic style in general, or that of a particular tragic playwright. If the latter, a likely candidate would be Euripides, who was, of course, in ways that need not be detailed here, the chief tragic influence on New Comedy. Familiarity with and affection for his work permitted Diphilus, like Aristophanes before him, to quote or misquote and burlesque the ‘gilded’ poet (κατάχρυσος is Diphilus’s own description, fr. 60.1). One wonders, in passing, if Diphilus here remembered, but misunderstood or chose to do so, the Aristophanic passage in which a man recalls that ‘everybody was straightaway for gilding’ (κατεχρύσος a poristes named Euripides Ar. Ec. 826). Whatever of that, the fragment (from The Parasite) contains two travestied Euripidean lines, as a fragment of Synoris contains lines from the Antiope and Iphigenia.

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19 There is little doubt that this text (Seyffert’s) of 534 should be adopted. See n. 17 and W.G. Arnott, Menander, Plautus, Terence, G & R New Surveys in the Classics. 9 (Oxford, 1975), p. 33.
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in *Tauris* (fr. 74.7-9). The speaker here uses dicing terminology to introduce his quotations from Euripides, a name shared by the poet and a member of the Forty — thus a throw of forty at dice was a ‘Euripides’. Sceparnio likewise (we remember) uses dicing terms, and he too is incongruously acquainted with Euripides: the great storm which shatters Daemones’s roof reminds him of that tragedian’s *Alcmene* (86).

It is easy enough to find Euripidean precedents for atmosphere and action in the *Rudens*. For atmosphere, the *Iphigenia in Tauris* comes to mind (‘the wild and almost fabulous coast of the Crimea’), for action that and the other plays (in particular, *Ion* with its recognition tokens) which introduce an *anagnorisis*. One may detect thematic echoes too from tragic sources other than Euripides — most obviously, Labrax’s attempted seizure of Palaestra and Ampelisca from the altar recalls Creon’s of Antigone and (reported) of Ismene (*Rud.* 570, 641-653, S. OC 818-847). Probably not all such echoes are direct ones, and many tragic dramaturgical conventions reached Diphilus through earlier comic writers. Yet in all the talk of influence one should not perhaps forget — what the new Menander, indeed, will not allow us to do — that poets of New Comedy could shape their own techniques. It is of interest, in closing, to isolate some features which strike the student coming fresh to *Rudens*.

Two of these features have, indeed, emerged already. They are basic, however, to understanding Diphilus and may thus, without apology, be restated. *Rudens* is enacted between two clashing worlds, the pastoral/romantic world of its setting and its story and a knockabout rumbustious world of farce. These two worlds are peopled by appropriate inhabitants, whose interaction is (of course) the play. The result may be not unfairly styled a ‘melodrama’ and the denizens of the clashing worlds referred to, in melodramatic terms, as ‘good’ and ‘bad’. Their entrances and scenes of interaction are carefully paralleled and balanced: the emergence of Palaestra and Ampelisca from the sea (185ff.) is later recalled by that of Labrax and his friend (485 ff.), and the dialogue between Ampelisca and Trachalio (331 ff.) is followed by one between her and Sceparnio (414 ff.). We can thus contrast the reactions to similar misfortunes of ‘good’ characters (Palaestra) and ‘bad’ ones (Labrax and his friend): we may also note how Ampelisca (a ‘good’ character) is brought into conversation with ‘good’ and ‘bad’ characters successively. She is given the chance to demonstrate two sides of her own character, a chance which is utilised delightfully: for in labelling them ‘melodramatic’, ‘good’ or ‘bad’, one does not imply that Diphilus’s characters are cardboard. In fact,

even his minor ‘walk-on’ rôles have some vitality — Daemones’s ‘heavy men’ Turbalio and Sparax, although they constitute a motionless tableau (‘two statues with clubs’ as Labrax calls them, 823), are also more than willing to participate in the world of knockabout and violence (826-36). However, there is room for but the slightest mention here of individuals within their groups. Centre of their respective worlds are Daemones and Labrax — the ‘good old man’ (35) whose goodness is rewarded by the restoration of his long-lost daughter, the leno (reviled throughout) whose wickedness is punished by shipwreck and the loss of his two girls. Yet the melodrama has an unexpected twist, for Labrax, with Gripus (who belongs to the same world) is invited at the end by Daemones to dine with him (1417-23). By a gesture unique in extant comedy the two worlds are finally united.

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