

The woman's mantle (*palla*) in which Menaechmus I emerges from his house at *Menaechmi* 110 has long been seen as a stage property central to the play's plot and structure (T. B. L. Webster, *Studies* [1953]: 68-69; Ketterer, *Semiotica* 60 [1986]: 51-61; Maurice, *Syllecta Classica* 16 [2005]: 37-38) as well as to its particular emphasis on pleasurable transgression, identity confusion, and self-transformation (Leach, *Arethusa* 2 [1969]: 42-43; Ketterer 51-61 again; Segal, *Roman Laughter* [1987]: 49-50). And recently Kathleen McCarthy (*Slaves, Masters* [2000]: 45-46) has called renewed attention to Menaechmus's very brief ekphrasis of paintings of Ganymede and Adonis (143-44) as a clue to the *palla*'s larger thematic significance. No study, however, has described how Plautus conjoins crossdressing and ekphrasis here to model audience response to his play itself. Menaechmus's wearing of the *palla* (a nonverbal behavior) interacts with the ekphrasis (a verbal description of other nonverbal signs) to figure in part the Roman audience's own pleasurable but risky "trying on" of the ambiguously Greek-and-Roman culture embodied by the play, again a psychological process at least partly nonverbal in its effectuation. Menaechmus performs onstage the kind of transgressive identification with an ambiguously Hellenic "other" that the sympathetic audience performs internally, and so transfers anxiety inherent in crosscultural identification to himself, so as to allow this audience to enjoy the play all the more.

An object that in being worn, exchanged, concealed, revealed, and discussed, motivates much of the *Menaechmi*'s language and action, the *palla* is "a symbol of the varying relationships and changes of character within the play" (Leach 42). Menaechmus's transvestitism, in McCarthy's view, "unmans" him, but in doing so helps set up his self-reassertion as a comic hero, an outcome anticipated in the effeminized mythical figures, both objects of divine favor. Thus while he wears it, Menaechmus, though a Sicilian Greek identifying with "unmanly" artistic images in a "translated" drama, paradoxically offers something for the Roman male spectator to identify with in turn. By the time he describes the paintings, Menaechmus has announced his plan to use the *palla* to help secure a prostitute, Erotium (130; cf. 173-75). Neither mythical youth seems a ready model for the traditional Roman manhood to which Menaechmus's ambitions as a dominant, heterosexual lover appeal. But just as the pair enjoyed divine favor, Menaechmus, after shaking off the grasping Erotium and abandoning his own henpecking wife, will be delivered by his long-lost brother, Menaechmus II, and return to his family in Syracuse. Ganymede, moreover, is a Trojan prince, his ethnicity thereby linking him to Roman foundation myth. Something of this ambiguity is intimated by the *palla*'s dramatic handling already in 1.2-3: Menaechmus wears it *under* his male cloak (*pallium*), which he must raise and lower to reveal and conceal it, then strip off and hand to his parasite Peniculus (196) before stripping off the *palla* in turn and handing it to Erotium (202) (cf. Ketterer 52).

Becoming a spectator-figure as he identifies with the imagined paintings, the crossdressed Menaechmus raises the question of how an already Romanized Greek identity might be related to its already Hellenized Roman counterpart. The paintings can stand for Plautus's play itself, a similarly ambiguous product of artistic craft subject to the engaged spectatorship of a likewise ambiguously construed audience. Through his performance, Menaechmus thus demonstrates what for the audience is an unseen, unspoken act of boundary-crossing enhancing its pleasure in the proceedings.