

The point of my presentation is to illustrate in general how Plautus uses **catachresis** (misuse of a word, like “disinterested” for “uninterested”) and **made-up words** (like *virgidemia* or *Crucisalus*) to create ingenious puns, and to show specifically how and why these two concepts are used early in *Stichus* to make the catchword *arcessitus* “having been summoned” temporarily mean “buffoon”.

The pun refers to the parasite Gelasimus, and its intentionality can be demonstrated beyond a reasonable doubt through careful consideration of phonemes, stage action, and modes of expression adduced from other Plautine plays.

Briefly, the argument is this: (1) *arcessitus* can be humorously regarded as a compound word formed from *ar-a* “altar” and *cess-are* “to loiter, lurk;” this because (2) the stage presumably features the altar (Greek *agyieüs bōmós*, Latin *ara*) that typically stands before a Greek house; and (3) as the Greek Gelasimus delivers his long monologue in front of a house, he presumably stands beside it; this supplies a visual indication that Gelasimus *lurks* beside the *altar*. (4) Considered together, these cues suggest to our mind the Greek word *bōmolóchus* “buffoon,” which etymologically is really a compound word meaning “altar-lurker”. A pictogram shows the process of condensation:

ARA	~	βωμός	(BŌMós)
<u>CESSARE</u>	~	<u>λοχῶν</u>	(<u>LOCH</u> ñn)
AR<u>CESS</u>itus	~	βω<u>μολό</u>χος	(BŌ <u>μ</u> o <u>LÓCH</u> us)

The *bōmolóchus* “buffoon” figure is most familiar from Aristophanic comedy, but allusions to it appear in Roman Comedy, too (*Rudens* 94-5, *Mostellaria* 1094-7, *Eunuchus* 489-91, bibliography to be provided), and Gelasimus has already quite rightly been called by past scholars the Plautine *bōmolóchus par excellence* anyway (e.g. Petersmann 1973:122). Plautus must want the *cognoscenti* in his audience to note this crosslingual pun since it is initially made by Crocotium who, I argue, serves as the poet’s ironic mouthpiece in the play.

I finish by arguing, with new examples, that puns like the above are more widespread in Plautus than is usually supposed. I then speculate briefly on the Roman audience’s knowledge of Greek and suggest further avenues of research along similar lines.