

Greek and Roman Comedy

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Unit 1 – Greek and Roman Comedy: An Introduction

1.1 Defining comedy in the ancient world

Ancient comedy emerged from religious festivals honoring Dionysus, evolving through Greek Old, Middle, and New Comedy periods. Roman comedy followed, adapting Greek plays. These performances featured stock characters, wordplay, and social commentary, blending entertainment with cultural critique.

Comedic plays used humor to address societal issues, from politics to gender roles. Old Comedy was boldly satirical, while New Comedy focused on domestic situations. Roman comedy added slapstick and bawdy jokes, adapting Greek themes for Roman audiences.

Origins and Characteristics of Ancient Comedy

Origins of ancient comedy

- Comedy originated as part of religious festivals honoring Dionysus, the Greek god of wine and fertility
- Early forms included phallic songs and processions that celebrated the god's association with fertility and the harvest
- Over time, these performances developed into more structured plays with actors and dialogue
- Greek comedy evolved through three distinct periods
- Old Comedy (5th century BCE) represented by playwrights like Aristophanes, characterized by political satire, personal attacks on public figures, and fantastical plots
- Middle Comedy (4th century BCE) served as a transitional period between Old and New Comedy, focusing more on domestic situations and stock characters
- New Comedy (late 4th to 3rd century BCE) represented by playwrights like Menander, emphasized romantic plots, mistaken identities, and social commentary
- Roman comedy emerged in the 3rd century BCE, heavily influenced by Greek New Comedy
- Plautus and Terence were the most prominent Roman comic playwrights who adapted Greek plays to suit Roman tastes and social norms

Characteristics of comedic plays

- Comedic plays often featured stock characters such as the clever slave, boastful soldier (miles gloriosus), and miserly old man (senex)
- Plots frequently revolved around themes of love, deception, and mistaken identities that created humorous situations
- Playwrights employed puns, wordplay, and physical humor to entertain audiences and keep them engaged
- Social commentary and satire were common elements, often targeting contemporary political figures or societal norms

- Happy endings were a staple of ancient comedy, typically involving reconciliation between characters and marriage
- Masks were used to represent different characters and exaggerate facial features for comedic effect
- Music, dance, and choral performances were incorporated into the plays to enhance the theatrical experience

Subgenres and Social Commentary in Ancient Comedy

Types of ancient comedy

- Old Comedy (Greek, 5th century BCE)
- Highly political and satirical in nature, often including fantastical elements and personal attacks on public figures (Cleon)
- Loose, episodic plot structure allowed for greater flexibility in storytelling
- Example: Aristophanes' "The Clouds" satirizes the philosopher Socrates and the Sophist movement
- New Comedy (Greek, late 4th to 3rd century BCE)
- More focused on domestic situations and relationships between characters
- Employed stock characters (the young lover, the cunning slave) and romantic plotlines
- Greater emphasis on character development and realism compared to Old Comedy
- Example: Menander's "Dyskolos" (The Grouch) explores themes of love and social class
- Roman Comedy (3rd to 2nd century BCE)
- Adapted from Greek New Comedy, incorporating Roman cultural elements and references
- Often featured more slapstick humor and bawdy jokes compared to Greek counterparts
- Examples: Plautus' "Miles Gloriosus" (The Braggart Soldier) and Terence's "Adelphoe" (The Brothers)

Functions of humor in comedy

- Humor served to engage audiences and make social criticism more palatable
- Puns, wordplay, and physical comedy provided entertainment value
- Satirical elements highlighted and mocked societal flaws and political figures
- Social commentary addressed various issues
- Class distinctions and the relationship between the wealthy and the poor
- Gender roles and the status of women in society (Lysistrata)
- The influence of religion and superstition on daily life
- The shortcomings of the educational system and intellectual trends
- Satire allowed playwrights to challenge the status quo and encourage critical thinking among audiences
- Old Comedy was more direct and aggressive in its satirical approach

- New Comedy and Roman comedy employed more subtle forms of social critique through character interactions and plot developments

1.2 Historical and cultural context of Greek and Roman theater

Greek and Roman theater played a vital role in ancient society, blending religious rituals with civic education and entertainment. Comedies critiqued social norms and political issues, offering a unique window into the cultural values of the time.

The evolution of comedy reflects broader historical shifts. From the biting satire of Greek Old Comedy to the domestic focus of New Comedy and Roman adaptations, comedic plays mirrored changing social dynamics and political landscapes.

Historical and Cultural Context of Greek and Roman Theater

Religious and civic role of theater

- Theater played a crucial role in religious festivals honoring gods like Dionysus, the patron of wine and theater
- Plays were staged as competitive offerings during these festivals, serving both religious and entertainment purposes
- Theater functioned as a platform for civic education, addressing current political and social issues through satirical commentary
- Comedies often critiqued societal norms, exposing the absurdities and follies of human behavior to encourage reflection and change
- In ancient Rome, theater originated as part of religious rituals performed during ludi (religious festivals)
- Roman theater gradually evolved into a popular form of public entertainment, accessible to a broad audience across social classes

Structure of ancient theaters

- Greek theaters were typically constructed on hillsides, utilizing the natural slope for tiered seating (theatron)
- The orchestra, a circular space at the base of the theater, served as the performance area for the chorus
- A wooden structure called the skene stood behind the orchestra, functioning as a backdrop and changing room for actors
- Roman theaters were freestanding structures often built in urban centers, featuring a raised stage (pulpitum) for performances
- The scaenae frons, an elaborate architectural backdrop adorned with columns and statues, served as the background for the stage
- The cavea, a semicircular seating area, was divided into sections based on the social class of the audience members

Influences on the Development of Comedy

Social influences on comedy

- Greek Old Comedy (5th century BCE) was characterized by political satire and biting social commentary (Aristophanes)
- Playwrights freely mocked public figures, criticized political decisions, and employed crude humor to expose societal issues
- Greek New Comedy (4th century BCE) shifted focus to domestic life, exploring universal human themes and relationships (Menander)
- New Comedy featured less overt political content, favoring more refined humor and relatable stock characters
- Roman comedy, heavily influenced by Greek New Comedy, adapted Greek plays for Roman audiences (Plautus, Terence)
- Roman comedies often featured stock characters (clever slaves, young lovers) and plots involving love, deception, and mistaken identity
- Plays reflected the social hierarchies and values of Roman society, depicting the lives of the lower classes and slaves

Historical impact on comedic plays

- The Peloponnesian War (431-404 BCE) shaped the themes and tone of Greek Old Comedy, fueling political criticism and anti-war sentiment
- Athens' defeat and Sparta's rise led to a shift in comedic style, paving the way for the emergence of New Comedy
- The Hellenistic period (323-31 BCE) saw a decline in theater's political role, with New Comedy's focus on domestic themes and stock characters
- The spread of Greek culture during this period significantly influenced the development of Roman comedy
- The Roman Republic (509-27 BCE) provided a backdrop for Roman comedy, reflecting the social and political realities of the time
- Roman territorial expansion and cultural exchange with other civilizations influenced the themes and characters of comedic plays
- The Roman Empire (27 BCE-476 CE) witnessed a decline in comedy's popularity, with mime and pantomime gaining prominence
- The rise of Christianity and shifting moral attitudes impacted the content and reception of comedic plays in the later Roman period

1.3 Key elements and structures of ancient comedic plays

Ancient comedies had a unique structure and cast of characters that made them hilarious and relatable. From clever slaves to boastful soldiers, these plays used stock characters to tell stories of love, trickery, and social commentary.

Humor was the heart of these comedies, with playwrights using wordplay, slapstick, and satire to keep audiences laughing. The chorus played a big role in Greek comedies, but its importance decreased in later Roman works.

Plot and Characters in Ancient Comedy

Plot structures in ancient comedies

- Three-act structure divides the play into exposition (protasis), complication (epitasis), and resolution (catastrophe)
- Agon presents a formal debate or dispute between characters to highlight their conflicting views or goals
- Parabasis features a choral ode that directly addresses the audience, often containing political or social commentary relevant to the play's themes
- Recognition (anagnorisis) occurs when a character suddenly realizes another character's true identity, leading to a significant shift in the plot
- Reversal (peripeteia) introduces a sudden change in a character's fortune or circumstances, often from good to bad or vice versa
- Deus ex machina resolves the plot's complications through an unexpected divine intervention, such as a god appearing on stage to settle disputes

Stock characters in ancient comedy

- Clever slave (servus callidus) drives the plot and helps the young lovers overcome obstacles, using wit and cunning (Pseudolus in Plautus' "Pseudolus", Palaestrio in Plautus' "Miles Gloriosus")
- Boastful soldier (miles gloriosus) serves as a braggart and a coward, often acting as a rival to the young lover (Pyrgopolynices in Plautus' "Miles Gloriosus")
- Young lovers face obstacles to their love, such as disapproving parents or rival suitors, and rely on the clever slave for help
- Senex (old man) is often the father of the young lover or the owner of the clever slave, can be strict and miserly or more understanding and lenient
- Parasite exchanges compliments for food and favors, acting as a flatterer to gain personal benefits (Ergasilus in Plautus' "Captivi")

Chorus and Humor in Ancient Comedy

Chorus in Greek vs Roman comedies

- Greek Old Comedy (Aristophanes) features a chorus that plays a significant role, representing specific groups (wasps, birds), participating in the action, interacting with characters, performing songs and dances, and addressing the audience directly during the parabasis
- Greek New Comedy and Roman Comedy (Menander, Plautus, Terence) reduce or eliminate the chorus, which, when present, performs musical interludes between acts but does not participate in the action

Humor techniques in ancient works

- Puns and wordplay create humor based on homophones, homonyms, or double entendres (Aristophanes' "Frogs" features puns on the word "paktos" meaning both "trodden" and "struck")
- Obscenity and sexual humor involve frequent use of sexual innuendos, crude language, and references to bodily functions (Aristophanes' "Lysistrata" depicts women going on a sex strike to end the Peloponnesian War)
- Slapstick and physical humor showcase characters engaging in exaggerated physical actions, such as chases, beatings, and pratfalls (Plautus' "Pseudolus" features the titular character pretending to have a seizure to distract his master)
- Parody and satire mock contemporary figures, institutions, and literary genres to critique society (Aristophanes' "Clouds" satirizes the philosopher Socrates and the Sophist movement)

1.4 Major playwrights and their contributions

Greek and Roman comedy evolved from political satire to domestic situations. Aristophanes pioneered Old Comedy with bawdy humor and social commentary, while Menander developed New Comedy, focusing on love and family relationships.

Roman playwrights Plautus and Terence adapted Greek comedies, adding their own flair. Plautus introduced more physical humor and stock characters, while Terence emphasized refined language and realistic portrayals. Their works laid the foundation for modern comedic theater.

Ancient Greek and Roman comic playwrights

Styles and themes of major playwrights

Aristophanes (c. 446 – c. 386 BCE) - Ancient Greek playwright renowned for his contributions to Old Comedy - Wrote satirical plays filled with bawdy humor, personal attacks, and politically charged themes ("The Clouds", "The Birds", "Lysistrata") - Incorporated chorus and parabasis, a direct address to the audience, as innovative elements in his works - Focused on political and social commentary, often criticizing prominent figures and institutions of his time

Menander (c. 342 – c. 290 BCE) - Ancient Greek playwright credited with pioneering New Comedy - Wrote more refined plays with less satirical content, emphasizing domestic situations and character development ("Dyskolos" - The Grouch, "Samia" - The Woman from Samos) - Explored themes of love, family relationships, and social commentary - Influenced later Roman comic playwrights and laid the foundation for modern situation comedies

Plautus (c. 254 – 184 BCE) - Roman playwright known for adapting Greek New Comedy plays into Latin - Added more physical humor, puns, and wordplay to his adaptations ("Menaechmi", "Miles Gloriosus", "Aulularia") - Explored themes of mistaken identities, deception, and social commentary on Roman society - Introduced musical elements and stock characters like the clever slave and the boastful soldier

Terence (c. 195/185 – c. 159 BCE) - Roman playwright who adapted Greek New Comedy plays into Latin with a more faithful approach - Wrote plays with subtle, sophisticated humor and a greater emphasis on character development and refined language ("The Brothers" - Adelphoe, "The Eunuch" - Eunuchus, "The Self-Tormentor" - Heauton Timorumenos) - Explored themes of family relationships, social commentary, and moral dilemmas - Focused on creating realistic characters and situations in his adaptations

Greek vs Roman comic works

Greek playwrights (Aristophanes and Menander) - Aristophanes focused on political and social satire, while Menander emphasized domestic situations and character development - Aristophanes incorporated chorus and parabasis, elements not found in Menander's plays

Roman playwrights (Plautus and Terence) - Both adapted Greek New Comedy plays into Latin - Plautus added more physical humor and stock characters, while Terence focused on refined language and realistic characters

Greek vs. Roman playwrights - Greek playwrights established the foundations of Old and New Comedy - Roman playwrights adapted and modified these genres for Roman audiences - Greek plays were performed in religious and civic contexts, while Roman plays were primarily for entertainment

Legacy of ancient comic theatre

- New Comedy, developed by Menander and adapted by Roman playwrights, became the foundation for modern situation comedies
- Stock characters introduced by Plautus (clever slave, boastful soldier) have been used in various forms throughout theatrical history
- Works of Plautus and Terence, rediscovered during the Renaissance, influenced playwrights like Shakespeare and Molière
- Political and social satire, as seen in Aristophanes' plays, has been used by playwrights to critique contemporary issues
- Structure and themes of ancient comic plays have been adapted and reimagined in various theatrical traditions (commedia dell'arte, modern Broadway musicals)

Unit 2 – Greek Comedy: Origins and Development

2.1 Early Greek festivals and ritual origins of comedy

Greek festivals honoring Dionysus set the stage for comedy's birth. These events created a space for ritual mockery, social norm inversion, and celebration of fertility. The festive atmosphere allowed exploration of taboo subjects and critique of authority figures, laying the groundwork for Greek comedy's satirical nature.

Ritual mockery and inversion were key to comedy's origins. Festivals featured role reversals and mockery of authority figures, providing social commentary. Obscenity, sexual humor, and physical comedy in these rituals shaped Greek comedy's core elements, influencing playwrights like Aristophanes.

Early Greek Festivals and the Origins of Comedy

Greek festivals and comedy emergence

- Early Greek festivals, particularly those honoring Dionysus (City Dionysia, Lenaia), provided a platform for the development of comedy as a dramatic form
- Festivals created a space for ritual mockery, inversion of social norms, celebration of fertility and renewal
- Comic performances emerged as a way to express these themes and engage the audience in a communal experience
- The atmosphere of revelry and license during festivals allowed for the exploration of taboo subjects and the critique of authority figures
- Laid the groundwork for the satirical and subversive nature of Greek comedy (Aristophanes' plays)

Ritual mockery in comic origins

- Ritual mockery and inversion were central to the origins of comic performances in ancient Greece
- During festivals, participants engaged in role reversals with slaves acting as masters and commoners portraying aristocrats
- This temporary subversion of social hierarchies provided a release from everyday tensions and a space for social commentary
- Mockery of authority figures, such as politicians and religious leaders, was a common feature of early comic performances
- Allowed for the critique of power structures and the expression of popular discontent (Cleon in Aristophanes' *Knights*)
- The use of obscenity, sexual humor, and physical comedy in ritual mockery contributed to the development of key elements in Greek comedy

Festivals for comic competitions

- The City Dionysia, held in Athens in honor of Dionysus, was a major festival that hosted comic competitions
- The festival took place in the spring and featured a procession, sacrifices, and dramatic performances
- Comic playwrights, such as Aristophanes, premiered their works at the City Dionysia and competed for prizes (Clouds, Birds)
- The Lenaia, another Athenian festival honoring Dionysus, also included comic competitions
- This winter festival was smaller in scale compared to the City Dionysia but still provided a platform for comic performances
- The Lenaia may have focused more on local talent and experimentation in comic forms (Aristophanes' Acharnians)

Dionysus in Greek comedy development

- Dionysus, the god of wine, fertility, and theater, played a crucial role in the development of Greek comedy
- Festivals honoring Dionysus (City Dionysia, Lenaia) provided the primary venues for comic performances
- The god's association with wine, ecstasy, and the subversion of social norms aligned with the spirit of comic theater
- Dionysian themes of renewal, transformation, and the celebration of life's pleasures influenced the content and tone of Greek comedy
- Comic plays often featured characters who embodied Dionysian qualities, such as the comic hero who triumphs over adversity through wit and resourcefulness (Dikaiopolis in Acharnians)
- The presence of the phallus, a symbol of fertility associated with Dionysus, in comic costumes and props underscored the connection between the god, sexuality, and the generative power of laughter

2.2 The evolution of comic performances in Athens

Athenian comedy evolved from rural Dionysian festivals into a structured art form. It began with bawdy humor and social commentary, gradually incorporating theatrical elements like masked actors and a chorus. The 5th century BCE saw comedy flourish in Athens, fueled by democracy and a thriving arts scene.

Comedy's development was driven by playwrights, actors, and the chorus. It transformed from Old Comedy's bold satire to New Comedy's focus on everyday life. This shift reflected changing societal tastes and priorities, with comedy adapting to remain relevant and engaging for Athenian audiences.

Origins and Development of Athenian Comedy

Origins of Athenian comedy

- Ritual origins in rural Dionysian festivals honored the god of wine, fertility, and theater (Dionysus)
- Fertility rites and phallus worship celebrated the regenerative power of nature

- Ribald songs, dances, and mockery allowed participants to engage in bawdy humor and social commentary
- Gradual evolution into a more structured form introduced theatrical elements
- Introduction of masked actors and dialogue created a narrative framework for the performances
- Emergence of a chorus and its interaction with actors established a dynamic interplay between individual and collective voices
- Formalization as a dramatic genre in Athens institutionalized comedy as an art form
- Establishment of comedy competitions at the City Dionysia festival provided a platform for playwrights to showcase their works
- Official recognition and state support for comic performances elevated the status of comedy and encouraged its development

Significance of 5th century BCE

- Rise of democracy in Athens fostered an environment conducive to the growth of comedy
- Increased citizen participation in public life encouraged the expression of diverse viewpoints and ideas
- Freedom of speech and expression allowed comedians to tackle controversial topics and criticize those in power
- Flourishing of arts and culture created a supportive context for the development of comedy
- Patronage of theater by wealthy citizens provided financial support for comic productions and encouraged experimentation
- Construction of dedicated theater spaces (Theater of Dionysus) gave comedy a permanent venue and enhanced its visibility
- Social and political commentary in comedy made it a relevant and engaging art form
- Reflection of contemporary issues and concerns (Peloponnesian War, political rivalries) made comedy a mirror of Athenian society
- Satirical criticism of prominent figures and institutions (politicians, philosophers, religious practices) challenged the status quo and sparked public discourse

Key Elements and Periods of Athenian Comedy

Roles in comedy evolution

- Playwrights were the driving force behind the development of Athenian comedy
- Creators of the comedic scripts and overall structure determined the direction and style of the genre
- Notable figures (Aristophanes, Menander, Cratinus, Eupolis) left a lasting impact on the art form
- Experimentation with themes, characters, and plot devices pushed the boundaries of comedy and expanded its possibilities
- Actors brought the comedic scripts to life through their performances
- Performers of the main characters and roles showcased their talent and versatility

- Skilled in physical comedy, mimicry, and improvisation, actors added depth and nuance to the characters
- Gradual increase in the number of actors per play (1 to 3 or more) allowed for more complex storylines and character interactions
- Chorus played a crucial role in the early stages of Athenian comedy
- Group of performers representing a collective character or voice provided a counterpoint to the main characters
- Interaction with the main characters through songs, dances, and dialogue enhanced the comedic effect and provided social commentary
- Gradual reduction of the chorus' role over time reflected the changing tastes and priorities of the audience

Old vs Middle vs New Comedy

- Old Comedy (5th century BCE) was characterized by its bold, satirical, and politically charged nature
- Satirical and politically charged content targeted prominent figures and institutions
- Fantastical plots and absurd situations (talking animals, journeys to the underworld) pushed the boundaries of reality
- Personal attacks on public figures (Cleon, Socrates) were a common feature
- Prominent role of the chorus in driving the narrative and providing social commentary
- Representative playwright: Aristophanes (The Clouds, Lysistrata)
- Middle Comedy (4th century BCE) served as a transition period between Old and New Comedy
- Reduced political satire and personal attacks signaled a shift in focus
- Increased focus on social issues and character-driven humor made the plays more relatable to the audience
- Diminished role of the chorus reflected the changing tastes and priorities of the time
- Few surviving plays from this period make it difficult to fully assess its characteristics
- New Comedy (late 4th to 3rd century BCE) focused on the everyday lives and relationships of ordinary people
- Focus on domestic life and relationships made the plays more accessible and relatable
- More realistic and relatable characters (young lovers, cunning slaves, stern fathers) allowed the audience to see themselves on stage
- Emphasis on plot development and resolution created a more structured and satisfying narrative arc
- Minimal or no role of the chorus shifted the focus entirely to the characters and their interactions
- Representative playwright: Menander (Dyskolos, Samia)

2.3 Structural elements and conventions of Greek comedy

Greek comedy had a specific structure and key elements that made it unique. From the prologue to the exodos, each part played a crucial role in advancing the plot and engaging the audience. The parabasis was especially important, allowing playwrights to break the fourth wall and address current issues.

Stock characters like the alazon and eiron were central to Greek comedy, creating comic tension and driving the plot forward. Satire, parody, and political commentary were also essential, using humor to critique society and encourage reflection on important issues of the day.

Structure and Elements of Greek Comedy

Structure of Greek comedy

- Prologue introduces main characters and plot through monologue or dialogue between two characters
- Parados marks beginning of main action with chorus entering stage singing and dancing
- Episodes alternate with choral interludes and advance plot through character dialogue, typically three to five episodes per play
- Exodos features final scene with celebration or resolution as chorus leaves stage singing final song

Function of parabasis

- Parabasis is a break in the action where chorus directly addresses audience, often occurring in middle of play between episodes
- Allows playwright to express views on political, social, or literary issues through chorus stepping out of dramatic role
- Provides comic relief and change of pace from main plot
- Can include criticism of audience, rivals, or public figures (Cleon) or offer praise for playwright's own work and defend artistic choices

Conventions and Themes in Greek Comedy

Stock characters in Greek comedy

- Alazon is a boastful, self-important character who claims qualities or abilities they lack, often serving as antagonist or foil to main character (braggart soldier, quack doctor)
- Eiron downplays own abilities or importance as protagonist or hero, using wit, irony, and understatement to outwit the alazon (clever slave, wise old man)
- Interaction between alazon and eiron creates comic tension, drives plot, with eiron's cleverness and humility ultimately triumphing over alazon's boastfulness and deceit

Satire and commentary in comedies

- Satire uses humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize human vices or foolishness, often targeting contemporary Athenian society, politics, and public figures to challenge status quo and encourage change

- Parody imitates another work of literature, art, or genre for comic effect, frequently parodying well-known myths, tragedies, or epic poems to subvert audience expectations and create humor through incongruity
- Political commentary includes references to current events, public figures (Pericles), or policies to express views on issues (war, democracy, social reform), criticize those in power, rally support for causes, or encourage civic engagement
- Interplay of satire, parody, and political commentary creates multilayered, thought-provoking experience for audience, blending humor with serious themes to entertain while prompting reflection and debate on important issues

2.4 The role of the chorus in Greek comedy

The chorus in Greek comedy was a vital component, consisting of 24 male performers who advanced the plot and provided comic relief. They served as a bridge between actors and audience, offering commentary and representing the audience's perspective on stage.

Through songs, dances, and dialogue, the chorus explained character motivations and clarified the story. They also critiqued social norms and political figures, entertaining the audience while educating them on contemporary Athenian society.

The Chorus in Greek Comedy

Composition and function of chorus

- Typically consisted of 24 male members, all amateur performers and often citizens of Athens
- Dressed in costumes and masks relevant to the play's theme to visually represent the characters they portrayed
- Served as a representation of the audience's perspective by providing commentary on the actions and decisions of the characters
- Helped to advance the plot through their songs, dances, and dialogue, moving the story forward in engaging ways
- Offered comic relief through their antics and humorous exchanges, lightening the mood and entertaining the audience
- Acted as a moral compass, guiding the audience's reactions to the play by expressing opinions on characters' choices

Chorus as audience-actor bridge

- Acted as an intermediary between the actors and the audience by directly addressing the audience and breaking the fourth wall
- Explained and clarified the actions and motivations of the characters, providing context for the audience to better understand the story
- Expressed the thoughts and feelings of the audience, reacting to the play's events in a way that mirrored the audience's reactions
- Served as a surrogate for the audience, allowing them to engage with the play more deeply by representing their perspective on stage

Chorus techniques for plot advancement

- Performed songs and dances during the parabasis, a break in the action of the play, often containing satirical or political commentary relevant to contemporary Athenian society (government, social norms)
- Used songs and dances to transition between scenes and provide a change of pace, helping to maintain audience engagement
- Reinforced the play's themes and messages through the content of their songs and dances
- Offered humorous observations on the characters and their actions, providing a broader perspective on the play's events
- Critiqued social norms, political figures, and cultural practices through their commentary, educating and informing the audience while entertaining them

Chorus in comedy vs tragedy

- Both served as a link between the actors and the audience and provided commentary on the play's events and themes
- Used songs and dances to enhance the emotional impact of the performance, whether humorous or solemn
- Comic chorus more actively involved in the plot, often interacting directly with the characters and breaking the fourth wall to address the audience
- Tragic chorus more solemn and serious, reflecting the grave nature of the play's themes and representing the community affected by the events
- Comic chorus represented the audience itself, while the tragic chorus often represented the larger community impacted by the story's events

Unit 3 – Aristophanes and Old Comedy

3.1 Life and works of Aristophanes

Aristophanes, born around 446 BCE, was a prolific Athenian playwright who wrote about 40 comedies. His career spanned several decades, with his most successful period during the Peloponnesian War. Only 11 of his plays survive, but they offer a window into his satirical style.

Aristophanes' works reflect the cultural and political climate of 5th century BCE Athens. His comedies often addressed war anxieties, criticized political figures, and parodied intellectual trends. His influence extends beyond ancient Greece, inspiring playwrights like Shakespeare and Molière.

Life and Career of Aristophanes

Aristophanes' life and career

- Born in Athens around 446 BCE to a wealthy family
- Began his career as a playwright at a young age around 427 BCE
- First play, "The Banqueters," produced in 427 BCE under the pseudonym Callistratus to avoid legal age restrictions
- Wrote approximately 40 plays throughout his career spanning several decades
- Only 11 plays survive in their entirety, providing a glimpse into his comedic style and themes
- Most productive and successful period was during the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BCE) between Athens and Sparta
- Won several prestigious awards at the Lenaia and City Dionysia festivals, the major dramatic competitions in Athens
- First prize at the City Dionysia in 425 BCE with his play "The Acharnians," establishing his reputation as a leading comedian
- Died around 386 BCE, leaving behind a legacy as one of the greatest playwrights of ancient Greek comedy

Surviving plays of Aristophanes

- "The Acharnians" (425 BCE) - satirizes the Peloponnesian War and advocates for peace
- "The Knights" (424 BCE) - attacks the powerful Athenian politician Cleon
- "The Clouds" (423 BCE) - parodies the philosopher Socrates and the Sophist movement
- "The Wasps" (422 BCE) - criticizes the Athenian legal system and jury service
- "Peace" (421 BCE) - celebrates the Peace of Nicias and the end of the first phase of the Peloponnesian War
- "The Birds" (414 BCE) - a fantastical comedy featuring the founding of a utopian bird city in the sky
- "Lysistrata" (411 BCE) - depicts a women's sex strike to end the Peloponnesian War
- "Thesmophoriazusae" (411 BCE) - parodies Euripides and the women's festival of Thesmophoria

- "The Frogs" (405 BCE) - features a contest between the deceased playwrights Aeschylus and Euripides in the underworld
- "Ecclesiazusae" (c. 392 BCE) - envisions a women-led government and communal society
- "Plutus" (388 BCE) - explores themes of wealth, poverty, and the redistribution of money

Historical and Cultural Context

Context of Aristophanes' comedies

- Athens was at the height of its power and cultural influence during the Golden Age of Athens (5th century BCE)
- Aristophanes' plays reflect the confidence and pride of Athenians in their city-state
- The Peloponnesian War (431-404 BCE) between Athens and Sparta greatly influenced Aristophanes' works
- Many of his plays address the anxieties, hardships, and political debates surrounding the war
- Athenian democracy encouraged citizen participation in politics and decision-making
- Aristophanes frequently satirized prominent political figures (Cleon, Alcibiades) and institutions (courts, Assembly) in his comedies
- Religious festivals and dramatic competitions were central to Athenian cultural life
- Plays were performed at the Lenaia and City Dionysia festivals in honor of Dionysus
- Playwrights competed for prizes awarded by a panel of judges, with Aristophanes winning several times
- Intellectual and philosophical movements, such as the Sophists and Socratic philosophy, were popular in Athens
- Aristophanes often parodied and critiqued these intellectual trends, as seen in "The Clouds" and "The Frogs"

Reception and influence of Aristophanes

- Aristophanes enjoyed great popularity and success during his lifetime in Athens
- Won several awards at dramatic competitions, indicating the appeal of his comedies to Athenian audiences
- Influenced the development of later Greek comedy, particularly the New Comedy of playwrights like Menander
- New Comedy focused more on domestic situations and stock characters, moving away from the political satire of Aristophanes
- Rediscovered and appreciated in the Renaissance and beyond, as his works were translated into Latin and vernacular languages
- Influenced European playwrights such as Shakespeare (comic elements in his plays) and Molière (satirical social comedies)
- Modern adaptations and productions of Aristophanes' plays continue to resonate with audiences

- "Lysistrata" remains a popular anti-war play, often performed in times of conflict
- "The Birds" and its utopian themes have inspired various artistic and literary works
- Scholarly interest in Aristophanes has deepened our understanding of his language, humor, and social commentary
- Provides valuable insights into Athenian society, politics, and culture during the tumultuous 5th century BCE

3.2 Characteristics and themes of Old Comedy

Old Comedy, a staple of ancient Athenian theater, was known for its bawdy humor and satirical take on contemporary issues. These plays featured absurd plots, larger-than-life characters, and a chorus that interacted with the main characters and audience.

The genre was characterized by distinct sections, including the prologue, parodos, agon, and parabasis. Old Comedy served as a platform for political satire and social commentary, often critiquing prominent figures and institutions while indulging in fantastical scenarios for comedic effect.

Key Features and Conventions of Old Comedy

Key features of Old Comedy

- Performed at annual City Dionysia festival in Athens during 5th century BCE
- Characterized by bawdy, vulgar, satirical humor poking fun at contemporary figures and issues
- Features fantastical, absurd plots with impossible or exaggerated situations (city built in clouds, world ruled by birds)
- Frequently breaks fourth wall with characters directly addressing audience
- Showcases larger-than-life, caricatured characters often based on real Athenian politicians or public figures
- Utilizes phallic costumes and props for comedic effect and to symbolize fertility
- Typically divided into distinct sections: 1. Prologue introduces main character and their problem or goal 2. Parodos marks entrance of chorus 3. Agon features debate between main character and opponent 4. Parabasis allows chorus to directly address audience, often on political or social issues 5. Episode consists of scenes depicting main character's attempts to solve problem 6. Exodos concludes play, frequently with celebration or feast

Role of chorus in Old Comedy

- Comprises 24 male citizens who dance, sing, recite in unison
- Represents specific group (birds, clouds, frogs) and functions as character within play
- Interacts with main characters, provides commentary on actions and themes
- Directly addresses audience during parabasis, offering political and social criticism
- Participates in agon by supporting or opposing main character
- Performs elaborate song and dance numbers showcasing playwright's choreographic and musical skills

Themes and motifs of Old Comedy

- Offers pointed political satire:
 - Criticizes prominent Athenian politicians and public figures
 - Comments on current events like Peloponnesian War
 - Reflects democratic values and debates of 5th-century Athens
- Provides biting social commentary:
 - Critiques societal norms, values, institutions
 - Explores issues of education, wealth, social status
 - Subverts gender roles and expectations
- Indulges in fantasy and absurdity:
 - Presents impossible, exaggerated situations as vehicle for escapism and wish-fulfillment
 - Incorporates magic, talking animals, other fantastical elements for comedic effect

Old Comedy vs other Greek drama

- Contrasts with tragedy's serious, elevated tone focusing on mythological or heroic figures and weighty themes (fate, justice, human condition)
- Tragedies offer cathartic experience for audience
- Tragic chorus plays more solemn, reflective role
- Shares some elements with satyr plays' lighthearted, humorous tone parodying preceding tragedies
- Satyr plays feature chorus of half-man, half-goat satyrs associated with Dionysus
- Both utilize vulgar humor and sexual innuendo
- Distinguishes itself by:
 - Focusing on contemporary figures and issues rather than myths
 - Primarily aiming to entertain and provoke laughter
 - Offering direct social and political commentary
 - Featuring more dynamic, varied role for chorus

3.3 Political and social satire in Aristophanic plays

Aristophanes, the master of ancient Greek comedy, used his plays to skewer politicians and society. His witty satire targeted everyone from generals to philosophers, using exaggeration and ridicule to expose their flaws.

Aristophanes' comedies weren't just for laughs. They tackled serious issues like war, education, and gender roles. His sharp critiques of Athenian life and politics reached a wide audience, showing the power of comedy to address big problems.

Political Satire in Aristophanic Plays

Aristophanes' political satire techniques

- Targets well-known Athenian politicians and public figures in his plays
- Portrays Paphlagon as a satirical representation of the influential politician Cleon in "The Knights"
- Criticizes the Athenian general Lamachus and the Peloponnesian War in "The Acharnians"
- Mocks the Athenian legal system and Cleon's influence on the courts in "The Wasps"
- Uses exaggeration, caricature, and ridicule to highlight the flaws and shortcomings of political figures
- Employs allegory to comment on contemporary political events and policies
- Represents the Peloponnesian War allegorically and calls for peace in "Lysistrata"
- Critiques Athenian imperialism and expansionism in "The Birds"

Social commentary in Aristophanes' plays

- Addresses social issues and offers commentary on Athenian society
- Explores war and peace as recurring themes
- Criticizes the Peloponnesian War and advocates for peace in "The Acharnians" and "Lysistrata"
- Celebrates the end of the war and the benefits of a peaceful society in "Peace"
- Satirizes education and intellectual pursuits
- Mocks the sophists and their teaching methods in "The Clouds"
- Criticizes the new education system and its perceived negative influence on Athenian youth
- Examines gender roles and women's status in society
- Portrays women taking political action to end the war in "Lysistrata"
- Imagines a society where women take control of the government and implement radical reforms in "Assemblywomen"
- Challenges traditional gender roles and highlights the potential power of women in Athenian society

Effectiveness and Reception of Aristophanic Satire

Effectiveness of comedy for criticism

- Allows Aristophanes to address serious issues in a more palatable and entertaining manner
- Makes the criticism more accessible and engaging for the audience through a humorous approach
- Serves as a release valve for societal tensions and frustrations through laughter
- May be limited in effectiveness by several factors
- Depends on the audience's willingness to engage with the underlying message, not just the surface-level humor

- Risks misinterpretation or oversimplification of complex issues
- Relies on immediate cultural context due to the ephemeral nature of comedy
- Often proposes absurd or impractical solutions to the problems addressed
- Highlights the severity of the issues but may not always offer concrete or actionable ideas for change

Reception of satire in Athenian democracy

- Reaches a wide audience of Athenian citizens through performances at public festivals and competitions
- Allows for a diverse range of viewpoints and reactions to the plays due to the democratic nature of these events
- Suggests that his works resonated with at least a portion of the Athenian public, as evidenced by his success in these competitions
- Demonstrates the value placed on free speech in Athenian democracy through open critique of prominent figures and institutions
- Acknowledges limits to this freedom, as seen in the prosecution of Socrates for allegedly corrupting the youth and questioning the gods
- Provides a degree of protection against direct retaliation from those targeted in his plays through the satirical nature of his works
- Uses fictional characters and allegorical representations as a buffer between the playwright and his subjects of criticism
- Offers valuable insights into the concerns and debates of the time, although the immediate impact on Athenian politics and society is difficult to measure
- Continues to resonate with audiences and scholars alike, as suggested by the enduring popularity and study of Aristophanic comedy

3.4 The use of fantasy and absurdism in Old Comedy

Aristophanes' comedies are a wild ride of talking animals, impossible scenarios, and surreal settings. These fantastical elements aren't just for laughs - they're clever tools for satirizing Athenian society and politics, presenting absurd situations as exaggerated reflections of real-world issues.

Fantasy in Aristophanes' plays serves multiple purposes. It allows exploration of alternative realities, encourages new perspectives, and amplifies comedic effect. By subverting expectations and using exaggeration, Aristophanes creates humor while delivering sharp social commentary.

Fantasy and Absurdism in Aristophanic Comedies

Fantastical elements in Aristophanic comedies

- Talking animals feature prominently as chorus members (birds in "The Birds", frogs in "The Frogs", wasps representing jurors in "The Wasps")
- Impossible scenarios drive the plots forward (Trygaeus riding a giant dung beetle to Olympus in "Peace", creation of a city in the sky in "The Birds", women taking over the government in "Lysistrata" and "The Assemblywomen")

- Surreal settings transport the audience to otherworldly locations (underworld in "The Frogs", cloud-cuckoo-land in "The Birds", utopian society in "The Assemblywomen")

Function of fantasy in themes

- Serves as a vehicle for satirical commentary on Athenian society and politics by presenting absurd situations and characters as exaggerated reflections of real-world issues
- Allows for exploration of alternative realities and possibilities, enabling Aristophanes to present hypothetical solutions or consequences and encourage the audience to consider different perspectives
- Heightens the comedic effect through the incongruity between the fantastical elements and the real world, creating humorous situations and dialogue

Fantasy for humor and commentary

- Subverts expectations and norms, leading to humorous surprises and challenging societal conventions, thus exposing their flaws and inconsistencies
- Employs exaggeration and caricature to amplify the comedic effect and make social commentary more poignant by presenting fantastical characters and situations as exaggerated versions of real-life figures and issues
- Functions as allegorical representations of real-world concepts or problems, allowing Aristophanes to address sensitive or controversial topics indirectly while still conveying his message

Aristophanes vs other comic traditions

- Ancient Greek Satyr plays also featured fantastical elements and mythological creatures but were performed as part of a tetralogy and had a more lighthearted, less politically charged tone
- Roman comedies (Plautus and Terence) often featured stock characters and farcical situations but included fewer fantastical elements and were less politically satirical
- Modern absurdist theater (Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco) employs fantastical and surreal elements to explore existential themes and critique societal norms but often has a more serious and philosophical tone compared to the overtly comedic nature of Aristophanes' plays

Unit 4 – Aristophanes: Themes in Greek Comedy

4.1 Analysis of major Aristophanic plays (e.g., "Lysistrata," "The Clouds")

Aristophanes, the master of ancient Greek comedy, crafted plays that still resonate today. His works blend biting satire, fantastical plots, and sharp social commentary to critique Athenian society during the tumultuous Peloponnesian War era.

From the sex strike in "Lysistrata" to the sky-city in "The Birds," Aristophanes used absurd scenarios to highlight real issues. His plays tackled war, politics, education, and gender roles, poking fun at everyone from Socrates to powerful politicians.

Aristophanes and His Major Plays

Plots and themes of Aristophanes

- "Lysistrata"
 - Women of Athens and Sparta refuse sex with husbands to pressure them into ending the Peloponnesian War
 - Explores power dynamics of women in a patriarchal society (Athens)
 - Highlights absurdity and devastating impact of prolonged warfare on citizens
 - Examines intersection of sex, relationships, and political influence
- "The Clouds"
 - Strepsiades sends son to Socrates' "Thinkery" to master sophistry and evade debt repayment
 - Criticizes emerging education system and its perceived erosion of traditional morality
 - Portrays clash between conservative and progressive values in Athenian society
 - Warns against sophistic techniques and manipulative rhetoric
- "The Birds"
 - Two Athenians persuade birds to establish a utopian city in the sky, controlling divine-human communication
 - Satirizes Athenian imperialistic ambitions and political landscape
 - Expresses longing for an idealized society as escape from real-world troubles
 - Explores complex relationships and power dynamics between mortals, immortals, and the natural world
- "The Frogs"
 - God Dionysus journeys to underworld to resurrect a talented tragic poet to revitalize Athenian theater

- Laments decline of Athenian dramatic arts and cultural vitality
- Compares and evaluates literary merits of Aeschylus and Euripides
- Emphasizes crucial role of the arts, especially poetry, in shaping society's values and identity

Satire in Aristophanic comedies

- Satirizes prominent contemporaries and Athenian institutions
- Depicts Socrates and Sophists as corrupting influences in "The Clouds"
- Mocks politicians like Cleon throughout various plays
- Parodies Euripides' dramatic style and themes in "The Frogs"
- Magnifies and ridicules problematic social phenomena and trends
- Lampoons educational system and sophistic influence in "The Clouds"
- Amplifies gender roles and warfare's impact on women in "Lysistrata"
- Caricatures Athenian expansionism and imperialism in "The Birds"
- Employs fantastical, absurd scenarios to underscore real societal issues
- Imagines a sex strike to conclude a war in "Lysistrata"
- Envisions birds creating a sky-city in "The Birds"
- Sends Dionysus to the underworld on a quest in "The Frogs"
- Utilizes vulgar humor, wordplay, and ad hominem attacks for comedic impact and social commentary
- Incorporates lewd jokes and sexual innuendos throughout plays
- Ridicules characters' physical traits and quirks
- Creates puns and double entendres based on names and topical references

Context of Aristophanes' works

- Peloponnesian War (431-404 BCE)
- Protracted military conflict between rival city-states Athens and Sparta
- Strained Athenian society economically and socially
- Permeates pacifist and anti-war themes in plays like "Lysistrata"
- Ascent of sophistic education and the Sophists
- Promoted rhetoric, logical argumentation, and moral relativism
- Regarded as threatening to conventional morality and values
- Ridiculed through Socrates as a character in "The Clouds"
- Athenian political environment and democracy
- Characterized by fierce rivalries and ideological debates

- Populist leaders like Cleon rising to power
- Criticized in works such as "The Knights"
- Literary and theatrical conventions
- Aristophanes operates within Greek comedic traditions
- Satirizes and parodies famous tragedians, notably Euripides
- Meditates on theater's societal role and impact in "The Frogs"

Comparison of Aristophanic plays

- Common themes: war and peace
- "Lysistrata" has women withholding sex to end Peloponnesian War
- "The Acharnians" shows one man's quest for peace amidst war
- "Peace" personifies peace and its advantages allegorically
- Satirizing public figures and institutions
- "The Clouds" lampoons Socrates, Sophists, newfangled education
- "The Knights" satirizes the demagogue Cleon's leadership
- "The Wasps" critiques flaws and corruption in Athenian courts
- Surreal, fantastical plotlines
- "The Birds" imagines birds building a sky-city to control gods and mortals
- "The Frogs" has Dionysus descend to Hades to retrieve a poet
- "Wealth" anthropomorphizes wealth and redistributes it
- Recurring structural components
- Parabasis: Chorus directly addresses audience, often voicing playwright's opinions
- Agon: Structured debate between two characters with opposing views
- Parody and intertextuality: Alludes to other works and current events

4.2 Aristophanes' use of language and wordplay

Aristophanes was a master of wordplay, using puns, double entendres, and invented words to tickle audiences' funny bones. His linguistic creativity wasn't just for laughs—it packed a satirical punch, skewering Athenian society and politics with razor-sharp wit.

Translating Aristophanes is a tough gig. Ancient Greek jokes don't always land in modern languages, and cultural references can fly over our heads. Translators have to balance staying true to the original while keeping the humor alive, often walking a tightrope between accuracy and laughs.

Aristophanes' Use of Language and Wordplay

Wordplay in Aristophanes' comedies

- Puns exploit multiple meanings of words to create humorous ambiguity
- Homonyms have identical pronunciation but different meanings (bear the animal, bear to carry)
- Homophones sound alike but have different meanings and spellings (pair, pear)
- Homographs are spelled the same but have different meanings (lead the metal, lead to guide)
- Double entendres are phrases with two interpretations, often one innocent and one risqué
- Sexual innuendos and allusions are frequently employed for comedic effect
- Other forms of wordplay showcase Aristophanes' linguistic creativity
- Neologisms are invented words or phrases that add novelty to the dialogue (Cloudcuckooland)
- Portmanteaus blend two or more words to create a new term (brunch from breakfast and lunch)
- Malapropisms involve the humorous misuse of words, often by characters (allegory instead of alligator)
- Spoonerisms swap initial consonants or vowels in a phrase for comedic effect (tons of soil instead of sons of toil)

Impact of linguistic creativity

- Enhances comedic effect by creating unexpected twists and surprises for the audience
- Clever manipulation of language generates laughter and keeps viewers engaged
- Reinforces satirical themes by highlighting absurdities and contradictions in Athenian society
- Exposes hypocrisy and folly of public figures and institutions through linguistic wit
- Engages the audience by encouraging active listening to catch and appreciate the wordplay
- Rewards attentive viewers who are able to follow the puns and double meanings

Challenges in translating Aristophanes

- Cultural and linguistic differences make directly translating puns and references difficult
- Ancient Greek wordplay may not have equivalent expressions in modern languages
- Some jokes rely on cultural knowledge that is unfamiliar to contemporary audiences
- Maintaining comedic effect requires translators to find comparable wordplay in the target language
- Timing and delivery of punchlines can be hard to replicate in a different linguistic context
- Balancing accuracy and readability presents trade-offs for translators
- Literal translations may preserve meaning but fail to capture the humor and tone
- Adaptive translations may convey the spirit of the original but deviate from exact wording

Language as reflection of Athenian culture

- Athenian dialect shapes Aristophanes' vocabulary and expressions
- Use of colloquialisms and slang specific to Athens grounds plays in their setting
- Incorporation of regional accents and speech patterns adds to characterization
- Social and political commentary is often conveyed through targeted language
- Wordplay serves as a means of critiquing contemporary figures and events
- Subversive puns and references allow for political dissent and satire
- Intellectual climate of Athens is reflected in the sophistication of Aristophanes' writing
- Sophistic movement's influence seen in emphasis on language and rhetoric
- Verbal dexterity and persuasion are highly valued skills in Athenian society

4.3 The role of women and gender in Aristophanic comedy

Aristophanes' comedies shake up gender roles in ancient Athens. Women take center stage, outsmarting men and seizing power. These plays flip societal norms on their head, with ladies running the show and guys looking foolish.

But don't be fooled - this gender-bending is just for laughs. Aristophanes pokes fun at male fears about powerful women while reinforcing traditional roles. It's all in good fun, not a call for real change.

Portrayal and Subversion of Gender Roles in Aristophanic Comedy

Female characters in Aristophanic plays

- Female characters often play central roles in driving the plot and action
- Lysistrata organizes a sex strike to end the Peloponnesian War in the play "Lysistrata"
- Praxagora leads a group of women to take over the Athenian government in "Assemblywomen"
- Women frequently depicted as clever, resourceful, and able to outsmart men
- In "Thesmophoriazusae," the women successfully expose Euripides' relative disguised as a woman at the festival
- Some female characters embody negative stereotypes and serve as targets of ridicule
- Old women in "Lysistrata" and "Assemblywomen" portrayed as sexually aggressive and unattractive for comedic effect

Subversion of gender roles

- Women take on traditionally masculine roles and responsibilities in the plays
- In "Lysistrata," women engage in political activism and diplomacy to end the war, stepping outside their expected domestic roles
- The women in "Assemblywomen" successfully govern the city and implement radical reforms, challenging male authority

- Men often portrayed as foolish, incompetent, or controlled by their desires
- The magistrate in "Lysistrata" easily outwitted and humiliated by the clever women
- The men in "Assemblywomen" depicted as gullible and easily manipulated by the women's schemes
- Cross-dressing and gender-swapping highlight the fluidity and performative nature of gender roles
- In "Thesmophoriazusae," Euripides' relative disguises himself as a woman to infiltrate the women-only festival, subverting gender expectations

Gender and power dynamics

- Women's power often derived from their sexuality and ability to withhold it as a bargaining tool
- The sex strike in "Lysistrata" forces men to negotiate peace to regain access to their wives, highlighting women's sexual power
- Female characters challenge male authority and disrupt the established social order
- Praxagora and the women in "Assemblywomen" overthrow the male-dominated government, temporarily inverting gender hierarchies
- The subversion of gender roles is temporary, and traditional order is often restored by the end of the play
- In "Lysistrata," the sex strike ends once peace is achieved, and women return to their expected domestic roles, reinforcing societal norms

Reflection of Athenian social norms

- Aristophanes' comedies exaggerate and satirize contemporary attitudes towards women and gender in ancient Athens
- The portrayal of women as sexually aggressive and manipulative reflects male anxieties and stereotypes prevalent in Athenian society
- The plays highlight the limited roles and opportunities available to women in Athenian society
- Women's primary responsibilities confined to the domestic sphere, as seen in "Lysistrata" and "Assemblywomen," reflecting societal expectations
- The subversion of gender roles in the plays is temporary and not intended as a serious challenge to the status quo
- The fantastical plots and outrageous situations serve as a form of escapism and comic relief rather than a call for social change
- Aristophanes' treatment of women and gender primarily designed to entertain and provoke laughter rather than promote social reform
- The plays reflect and reinforce the patriarchal values of ancient Athens while providing a temporary release through comic subversion

4.4 Theatrical devices and staging in Old Comedy

Old Comedy in ancient Greece was a wild ride of laughter and social commentary. Playwrights like Aristophanes used clever tricks to poke fun at politicians, philosophers, and everyday life. From actors wearing giant fake penises to characters talking directly to the audience, these plays were anything but subtle.

The staging of Old Comedy was a spectacle in itself. Actors wore exaggerated masks and costumes, while the chorus sang, danced, and offered witty commentary. These plays blended slapstick humor, wordplay, and biting satire to entertain and provoke thought among ancient Athenian audiences.

Theatrical Devices and Staging in Old Comedy

Theatrical devices in Old Comedy

- Parabasis
- Chorus directly addresses audience breaks from main action of play
- Offers political commentary social criticism or self-referential humor about the play itself
- Breaking the fourth wall
- Characters acknowledge presence of audience and theatrical nature of performance
- Draws attention to artificiality of stage and encourages audience engagement
- Slapstick humor and physical comedy
- Exaggerated gestures pratfalls and mock violence elicit laughter (slipping on banana peel)
- Emphasizes absurdity of situations and characters' behaviors
- Masks and costumes
- Grotesque exaggerated features on masks heighten comedic effect (large noses bulging eyes)
- Quick costume changes allow actors to portray multiple roles in same play
- Phallus props and costumes
- Oversized artificial phalluses worn by actors symbolize male virility and power
- Used for bawdy sexual humor and to mock authority figures
- Agon (debate) scenes
- Verbal contests between characters represent opposing viewpoints (rich vs poor old vs young)
- Satirize contemporary issues and public figures through exaggerated arguments

Aristophanes' comedic techniques

- Satirical portrayal of well-known figures
- Politicians philosophers and public figures depicted as caricatures (Socrates in *The Clouds*)
- Exaggerates their mannerisms beliefs and flaws for comedic effect and social commentary
- Parody of other literary works and genres

- Mocks style and content of tragedies epics and other popular forms (Euripides in *The Frogs*)
- Subverts audience expectations by blending high and low culture for humorous surprises
- Wordplay and puns
- Exploits homophones double entendres and linguistic ambiguities (Greek words for "clouds" and "testicles")
- Often used for sexual innuendo political commentary and to showcase clever wit
- Anachronisms and topical references
- Incorporates contemporary events people and issues into mythological or historical settings
- Enhances relevance and immediacy of humor for Athenian audience (Peloponnesian War references)
- Fantastical and absurd situations
- Places characters in improbable exaggerated scenarios (building a city in the sky in *The Birds*)
- Highlights ridiculousness of human behavior and societal norms through extreme examples

Chorus role in Aristophanic comedy

- Represents specific group within Athenian society
- Wasps (jurors) clouds (intellectuals) birds (Athenian citizens)
- Provides collective voice and perspective on play's themes and issues
- Engages in dialogue with main characters
- Questions challenges or supports their actions and decisions
- Offers advice warnings or commentary as plot unfolds
- Performs songs and dances
- Enhances spectacle and entertainment value of play with music and choreography
- Satirical lyrics reinforce play's message and mock targets of criticism
- Participates in agon
- Takes sides in debate between main characters (young vs old in *The Wasps*)
- Contributes to humor through exaggerated reactions and comments on arguments

Old Comedy vs other Greek genres

- Similarities with tragedy
- Performed in same theaters during religious festivals (City Dionysia)
- Uses masks costumes and chorus to convey characters and themes
- Structured around central conflict or agon as driving force of plot
- Differences from tragedy
- Lighter more irreverent tone suited to festive atmosphere of comedies

- Focuses on contemporary issues and figures rather than mythological past
- Frequent use of physical comedy sexual humor and mockery of authority
- Comparison with satyr plays
- Both incorporate elements of comedy and mythological burlesque
- Satyr plays feature chorus of satyrs while Old Comedy choruses vary
- Satyr plays performed as lighthearted conclusion to tragic trilogies while Old Comedies standalone

Unit 5 – The Transition to New Comedy

5.1 Socio-political changes influencing the evolution of comedy

Athens underwent major changes as its democracy declined and Macedonia conquered Greece. These shifts reshaped comedy, moving away from political satire towards more universal themes of love and family life. Characters became more relatable, focusing on everyday struggles.

The transition from Old to New Comedy reflected broader societal changes. Plays featured less political commentary and vulgarity, instead emphasizing wit and sophisticated dialogue. The chorus's role diminished as individual characters and their interactions took center stage in comedic performances.

Socio-Political Changes Influencing the Transition from Old to New Comedy

Socio-political changes in Athens

- Decline of Athenian democracy led to reduced political freedom and autonomy for citizens
- Rise of powerful individuals (Pericles) and oligarchies concentrated power in the hands of a few
- Macedonian conquest of Greece shifted the balance of power in the region
- Philip II's decisive victory at the Battle of Chaeronea (338 BCE) established Macedonian hegemony
- Greek city-states lost their independence and were subject to Macedonian rule
- Cultural values and priorities in Athens underwent significant changes
- Increasing emphasis on individualism and the pursuit of private interests over public affairs
- Diminishing interest in political engagement and the use of satire to critique public figures

Decline of Athenian democracy

- Reduced political criticism and satire in comedic works
- Decreased focus on lampooning prominent politicians (Cleon) and public figures
- Shift towards more general social commentary and character-based humor
- Increased emphasis on domestic life and interpersonal relationships
- Exploration of family dynamics and the struggles of everyday citizens
- Development of stock characters (the cunning slave, the young lover) and situations
- Refinement of language and style in comedic works
- Less reliance on obscenity and vulgar language to elicit laughs
- Greater emphasis on wit, wordplay (puns), and sophisticated dialogue

Impact of Macedonian conquest

- Decline and eventual disappearance of the chorus in New Comedy

- Reduced role of the chorus in advancing the plot and providing commentary
- Greater focus on individual characters and their interactions with one another
- Increased influence of foreign cultures on Greek comedy
- Incorporation of elements from Macedonian and other non-Athenian traditions
- Broadening of comedic themes and settings beyond the confines of Athenian society
- Shift in patronage and funding for dramatic productions
- Reduced state funding for dramatic festivals (City Dionysia) due to political instability
- Increased reliance on private patrons and sponsors to finance comedic works

Shift in audience preferences

- Growing preference for more relatable and realistic characters
- Audiences identified with characters facing everyday struggles and experiences
- Increased interest in the lives of ordinary citizens rather than public figures
- Desire for more universal and timeless themes in comedic works
- Exploration of love, family, and social relationships appealed to a broader audience
- Reduced emphasis on topical humor and references to specific political events
- Appreciation for more refined and sophisticated humor
- Preference for clever dialogue and intricate plot developments over crude jokes
- Decreased tolerance for obscene language and gestures in comedic performances

5.2 Middle Comedy: Characteristics and key playwrights

Middle Comedy marks a transition between Old and New Comedy, spanning 380-320 BCE. It blends elements from both eras, featuring less political satire and more developed plots and characters. This shift reflects changing societal norms and a move towards more relatable, everyday themes.

Key playwrights like Antiphanes, Alexis, and Eubulus shaped Middle Comedy's evolution. They introduced clever wordplay, plot twists, and romantic elements while reducing the chorus's role. Mythological parody remained popular, used to critique society and explore human nature through a comedic lens.

Characteristics and Key Playwrights of Middle Comedy

Characteristics of Middle Comedy

- Transitional period between Old and New Comedy spanning approximately 380-320 BCE
- Retains some elements of Old Comedy such as satirical themes and mythological parody
- Introduces features that would become prominent in New Comedy including more developed plots and characters
- Reduced political satire and personal attacks compared to Old Comedy
- Shifts focus away from mocking contemporary political figures (Cleon) and events

- Moves towards more general social commentary and critique of societal norms and values
- Increased emphasis on plot, character development, and domestic themes
- Features more realistic and relatable characters dealing with everyday situations (family dynamics, relationships)
- Explores the complexities of human nature and personal growth through comedic lens
- Diminished role and importance of the chorus in advancing plot and providing commentary
- Chorus still present but often relegated to brief appearances or musical interludes
- Reduced interaction between chorus and characters compared to Old Comedy
- Continued use of parody and mythological themes for comedic effect
- Adapts and subverts well-known myths (Odysseus, Heracles) and literary works
- Uses mythological characters and settings as vehicles for social critique and exposing human foibles

Key playwrights and works

- Antiphanes (408-334 BCE), most prolific Middle Comedy playwright with over 300 attributed plays
- Known for clever wordplay, plot twists, and witty dialogue
- Notable works include "The Fishing Woman" (Ἀλιευομένη) and "The Rustic" (Ἀγροῖκος)
- Alexis (375-275 BCE), another highly productive playwright with over 240 attributed plays
- Recognized for refined language, sophisticated humor, and romantic comedy elements
- Notable works include "The Teacher of Profligacy" (Ἀσωποδιδάσκαλος) and "The All-Night Festival" (Παννυχίς)
- Eubulus (fl. 380-330 BCE), contributed to development of romantic comedy in Middle Comedy period
- Surviving fragments suggest focus on love, relationships, and domestic life
- Notable works include "Antiope" (Ἀντιόπη) and "Nannion" (Νάννιον)

Chorus role and character development

- Chorus becomes less central to plot advancement and social commentary in Middle Comedy
- Reduced choral interludes and character interactions compared to integral role in Old Comedy
- Often serves brief, functional purpose such as musical interludes or scene transitions
- Increased focus on character development and realistic, relatable portrayals
- More psychologically complex characters with clear motivations and personal growth
- Explores everyday human experiences and emotions through comedic situations (falling in love, family conflicts)
- Shift towards domestic themes and social interactions reflecting changing norms and values
- Examines family dynamics, relationships, and individual's place in society
- Uses comedy to critique and comment on societal expectations and human behavior

Parody and mythology in plays

- Parodic adaptation and subversion of well-known mythological stories for humorous effect
- Reinterprets epic tales (Trojan War) and tragic themes through comedic lens
- Uses mythological characters (Zeus, Athena) in absurd, exaggerated situations to elicit laughter
- Satirical treatment of philosophical ideas, intellectual trends, and social conventions
- Mocks and critiques prevailing beliefs, values, and practices of the time
- Exposes human weaknesses, follies, and absurdities through comedic portrayal
- Employs mythological figures and settings as archetypal representations of human behavior
- Uses gods, heroes, and familiar myths to comment on contemporary issues and concerns
- Juxtaposes grandeur of mythology with mundane aspects of everyday life for comedic contrast

5.3 The shift from political satire to domestic themes

Greek comedy evolved from political satire to domestic themes. This shift reflected changing political landscapes and audience preferences. New Comedy focused on relatable, everyday topics like love and family dynamics, moving away from the political commentary of Old Comedy.

The emphasis on domestic life in New Comedy mirrored societal changes. Plays explored evolving attitudes towards marriage, social mobility, and personal ethics. These themes resonated with audiences, offering both entertainment and insights into human nature and relationships.

The Shift from Political Satire to Domestic Themes in Greek Comedy

Shift in New Comedy themes

- Changing political landscape in Athens led to decreased freedom of speech and political criticism due to decline of Athenian democracy and rise of Macedonian power
- Audience preferences and tastes shifted towards growing interest in relatable, everyday themes and desire for escapism and entertainment rather than political commentary
- Influence of philosophical schools emphasized individual ethics, morality, and focus on personal relationships and character development

Old vs New Comedy content

- Old Comedy themes revolved around political satire, criticism of public figures (Cleon, Socrates), fantastical and absurd plots, direct address to the audience, and breaking of the fourth wall
- New Comedy themes focused on domestic life, relationships, realistic characters and situations, love, family, and social issues
- Differences in subject matter: Old Comedy dealt with current events, politics, and public figures while New Comedy explored timeless, universal themes of human nature and relationships

The Emphasis on Domestic Life in New Comedy

Domestic focus in New Comedy

- Prominence of love stories and romantic relationships often involving young lovers facing obstacles (disapproving parents, rival suitors) with happy endings featuring marriages and reconciliations
- Depiction of family dynamics explored conflicts between parents and children, sibling rivalries and relationships
- Portrayal of everyday life and social issues such as financial problems, social status, master-slave relationships, and treatment of slaves

Societal influence on New Comedy

- Reflection of evolving attitudes towards marriage and family showed increased importance of individual choice and compatibility, shift away from arranged marriages and strict patriarchal control
- Exploration of social mobility and class distinctions included possibility of slaves gaining freedom (Toxilus in Plautus' *Persa*) and critiques of wealth and social status as determinants of worth
- Emphasis on personal ethics and moral behavior judged characters by their actions and treatment of others, promoted forgiveness, reconciliation (Menander's *Dyskolos*), and empathy

Unit 6 – Menander and New Comedy

6.1 Life and works of Menander

Menander, born in 342/341 BCE, was a prolific Athenian playwright who shaped Greek New Comedy. He wrote over 100 plays, focusing on everyday life and relationships rather than political satire. His work reflected the changing social and political climate of the early Hellenistic period.

Menander's influence on comedy was far-reaching. Roman playwrights adapted his plays, and his stock characters and plot devices became staples of Roman comedy. His style can be traced through European comic traditions, from *commedia dell'arte* to Shakespeare and Molière, even influencing modern sitcoms and romantic comedies.

Menander's Life and Works

Biographical details of Menander

- Born in Athens in 342/341 BCE
- Son of Diopithes, a prominent Athenian general
- Nephew of the comic playwright Alexis, exposed him to theater from a young age
- Studied philosophy under Theophrastus, a student of Aristotle, which influenced his writing style and themes
- Began writing plays around 321 BCE
- Competed in the Lenaia festival for the first time in 316 BCE
- Won first prize at the City Dionysia festival in 314 BCE, a major accomplishment for a young playwright
- Wrote over 100 plays during his lifetime, showcasing his prolific output
- Only one play, "Dyskolos" (The Grouch), survives in its entirety, providing a rare complete example of his work
- Fragments of many other plays have been discovered, allowing scholars to piece together his style and themes
- Represented the "New Comedy" style in Greek theater
- Focused on everyday life and relationships rather than political satire, making his plays more relatable to audiences
- Developed stock characters such as the young lover, the cunning slave, and the stern father, which became staples of the genre

Context of Menander's plays

- Lived during the early Hellenistic period
- Alexander the Great had recently died (323 BCE), leading to a period of political instability
- Athens was under Macedonian control, limiting political freedom and expression

- Greek society was undergoing significant changes
- Rise of individualism and private life, with a greater emphasis on personal relationships and emotions
- Decline of the city-state and traditional religion, leading to a more secular worldview
- Increasing influence of foreign cultures, exposing Greeks to new ideas and customs
- Theater was an important part of Athenian cultural life
- Plays were performed at religious festivals in honor of Dionysus (god of theater)
- Comedies were expected to entertain and educate the audience, providing both laughter and moral lessons
- New Comedy style reflected the changing social and political climate
- Less emphasis on political commentary and more on personal relationships, mirroring the shift in Greek society
- Characters represented recognizable social types rather than specific individuals, making them more relatable to a wider audience

Menander's influence on comedy

- Roman playwrights adapted Menander's plays for Latin-speaking audiences
- Plautus and Terence borrowed heavily from Menander's plots and characters, introducing his style to a new culture
- "The Brothers" by Terence is based on Menander's "Adelphoe" (The Brothers), demonstrating the direct influence of his work
- Stock characters and plot devices from Menander's plays became staples of Roman comedy
- The clever slave, the young lover, and the stern father became archetypal characters in Roman theater
- Mistaken identities, long-lost relatives, and happy endings were common plot elements derived from Menander
- Menander's influence can be seen in later European comic traditions
- "Commedia dell'arte" in Italy featured stock characters similar to those in New Comedy, showing the lasting impact of his character types
- Shakespeare's comedies, such as "The Comedy of Errors," drew inspiration from Roman adaptations of Menander, bringing his influence to English theater
- Molière's plays in 17th-century France often featured similar plot devices and character types, demonstrating the enduring appeal of Menander's style
- Menander's emphasis on the everyday lives of ordinary people set the stage for the development of modern sitcoms and romantic comedies, which often focus on relatable characters and situations

6.2 Characteristics and themes of New Comedy

New Comedy brought a fresh approach to Greek theater, focusing on everyday life and relatable characters. It moved away from political satire, instead exploring family dynamics, love stories, and social issues that resonated with audiences.

The genre introduced more structured plots, featuring chance events and recognition scenes. It balanced humor with social commentary, offering a glimpse into Athenian society while entertaining viewers with clever dialogue and satisfying resolutions.

Key Features and Themes of New Comedy

Distinguishing features of New Comedy

- Focuses on domestic situations and everyday life rather than political satire (Old Comedy) or mythological parodies (Middle Comedy)
- Explores relationships between family members, lovers (young couples), and friends
- Depicts ordinary people and their daily concerns (financial issues, personal conflicts)
- Employs more realistic and relatable characters compared to Old and Middle Comedy
- Characters are often stock types (young lover, cunning slave, stern father) but have more depth and development
- Allows audience to identify with characters and their struggles
- Uses a more structured plot with a coherent storyline
- Plots often revolve around love, misunderstandings, and reconciliations
- Endings typically feature a resolution or happy ending (marriage, family reunion)
- Incorporates elements of chance, coincidence, and recognition in the plot to create complications and drive the story forward
- Features less explicit obscenity and sexual humor compared to the bawdiness of Old Comedy
- Utilizes a chorus, but its role is diminished and less integral to the plot compared to Old Comedy

Recurring themes in New Comedy

- Love and romance are central themes
- Often involves a young man falling in love with a seemingly unattainable woman (social class differences)
- Obstacles to the couple's happiness (disapproving parents, mistaken identities, financial issues)
- Love ultimately triumphs, and the couple is united at the end (happy ending, marriage)
- Family relationships and dynamics are explored
- Conflicts between fathers and sons, particularly regarding love and marriage
- Importance of family honor and reputation in society
- Reconciliation and understanding within the family unit (forgiveness, acceptance)

- Social class and hierarchy play a significant role
- Contrasts between wealthy and poor characters (aristocrats, merchants, slaves)
- Slaves often depicted as clever and resourceful, while their masters are foolish or gullible
- Social mobility through marriage or the discovery of true identity (long-lost relatives, tokens of recognition)

Role of chance in plots

- Chance events and coincidences are used to create complications and move the plot forward
- Misunderstandings or mistaken identities that lead to confusion and conflict (look-alikes, disguises)
- Unexpected meetings or encounters that bring characters together (lost lovers, separated family members)
- Recognition scenes are a common plot device
- A character's true identity is revealed, often leading to a resolution of conflicts
- Long-lost family members or lovers are reunited (siblings, parents and children)
- Recognition can be facilitated by tokens (birthmarks, personal items, letters)
- These elements contribute to the sense of a tightly-constructed, well-crafted plot
- They help to create suspense, anticipation, and a satisfying resolution for the audience (happy endings, justice served)

Social realism in New Comedy

- Depicts the daily lives and concerns of ordinary people
- Family matters, financial issues (debt, dowries), and personal relationships
- Reflects the social realities and values of the time (gender roles, class structure)
- Presents a more grounded and relatable world compared to the fantastical settings of Old Comedy
- Characters and situations are recognizable and familiar to the audience (Athenian households, streets, marketplaces)
- Encourages the audience to identify with the characters and their struggles (empathy, understanding)
- Addresses social issues and moral dilemmas
- Explores themes such as the role of women, the treatment of slaves, and the importance of education
- Offers social commentary and criticism, albeit in a more subtle manner than Old Comedy (satire, irony)
- Incorporates elements of contemporary Athenian life
- References to real places, events, and customs (festivals, legal procedures, religious practices)
- Use of colloquial language and everyday expressions (slang, proverbs, puns)

6.3 Character types and plot structures in Menandrian plays

Menandrian plays feature stock characters like the young lover, cunning slave, and stern father. These characters drive the plot through their interactions and conflicts, creating comedic situations and misunderstandings that entertain audiences.

Menander's comedies follow a familiar structure, with exposition, rising action, climax, and resolution. The plays are known for their use of irony, role reversals, and realistic portrayals of human emotions, setting them apart from earlier Greek comedies.

Character Types in Menandrian Plays

Stock characters in Menander's plays

- Young lover (*adulescens*) serves as the protagonist driven by love and desire facing obstacles in pursuing their love interest
- Cunning slave (*servus callidus*) demonstrates loyalty to the young lover by devising schemes to help the lover achieve their goals often outwitting other characters in the process
- Stern father (*senex*) represents authority and tradition often opposing the young lover's desires with a strict and unyielding demeanor
- Courtesan (*meretrix*) acts as the love interest of the young lover and can either hinder or help the lover's goals depending on the situation
- Parasite (*parasitus*) plays the role of a flatterer and hanger-on often associated with wealthy characters providing comic relief through their gluttonous and sycophantic behavior

Plot Structures and Conventions in Menandrian Comedy

Conventions of Menandrian comedy

- Exposition introduces the main characters and their relationships establishing the central conflict or obstacle that drives the plot forward
- Rising action presents complications and misunderstandings that arise as characters devise schemes to overcome the obstacles they face
- Climax marks the peak of the central conflict where schemes and deceptions are revealed leading to a turning point in the story
- Resolution brings the conflicts to a close often through recognition or reconciliation uniting lovers and reconciling families in a satisfying conclusion
- Conventions include the use of stock characters and situations frequent use of coincidence and chance encounters and happy endings with lovers united and conflicts resolved

Irony and role reversals

- Irony takes various forms in Menandrian comedy
- Dramatic irony occurs when the audience knows more than the characters creating suspense and anticipation

- Situational irony arises when outcomes differ from expectations subverting the audience's assumptions
- Verbal irony involves characters saying the opposite of what they mean often for comedic effect
- Misunderstandings play a central role in driving the plot and creating humor
- Mistaken identities and false assumptions lead characters to act on incomplete or incorrect information
- Miscommunication between characters results in confusion and misinterpretation of intentions
- Misinterpretation of events or intentions causes characters to draw incorrect conclusions and make poor decisions
- Role reversals subvert traditional power dynamics and social hierarchies
- Slaves outsmart their masters using their wit and cunning to gain the upper hand
- Children defy parental authority asserting their independence and challenging traditional family structures
- Women assert their independence and agency defying societal expectations and gender roles

Character depth vs earlier comedy

- Realistic portrayal of human emotions and motivations sets Menandrian comedy apart from earlier Greek comedy
- Characters are driven by relatable desires such as love, ambition, and self-interest making them more accessible to audiences
- Inner conflicts and moral dilemmas are explored adding depth and complexity to the characters' experiences
- Multidimensional characters transcend the limitations of stock archetypes
- Stock characters are given more depth and nuance allowing for a wider range of emotions and behaviors
- Characters are capable of growth and change over the course of the play demonstrating a capacity for learning and adaptation
- Contrast with earlier Greek comedy highlights the innovations of Menandrian comedy
- Aristophanic comedy focused on political satire and caricature using exaggerated and absurd characters for comedic effect
- Menandrian comedy emphasizes domestic life and relationships exploring the humor and drama of everyday situations
- Shift from broad, slapstick humor to more subtle, character-driven comedy reflects a changing audience and cultural context

6.4 Analysis of Menander's "Dyskolos" (The Grouch)

Menander's "Dyskolos" is a love story set in rural Attica. It follows Sostratos, a wealthy Athenian, as he pursues Myrrhine, daughter of the misanthropic Knemon. The play explores themes of love, generational conflict, and personal transformation.

Knemon's character arc is central to the story. Initially a grouchy hermit, he softens after being rescued from a well. This change of heart leads to a happy ending with two weddings and Knemon's newfound sociability.

Plot and Characters

Plot and characters of "Dyskolos"

- Play set in rural Attica near temple of Pan and the Nymphs depicts story of love and personal transformation
- Wealthy young Athenian Sostratos falls in love with Myrrhine, poor daughter of misanthropic old farmer Knemon known as "the grouch"
- Sostratos seeks help from servant Pyrrhias and Knemon's stepson Gorgias to win Myrrhine's hand in marriage
- Gorgias, in love with Sostratos' sister, agrees to assist in exchange for Sostratos' help in his own romantic pursuit
- Knemon initially opposes the marriage due to his disdain for people and social interaction
- Series of comic events and misunderstandings lead to Knemon falling into a well and being rescued by Gorgias and Sostratos
- This act of kindness softens Knemon's heart, leading him to consent to Sostratos and Myrrhine's marriage
- Play concludes with double wedding of Sostratos to Myrrhine and Gorgias to Sostratos' sister, along with Knemon's transformation into a more sociable person

Themes and Analysis

Themes in Menander's comedy

- Love as a central theme transcends social class and brings people together, as seen in Sostratos and Gorgias' romantic pursuits despite obstacles
- Generational conflict evident in relationship between Knemon and stepson Gorgias, as well as Knemon's initial opposition to Sostratos and Myrrhine's marriage
- Older generation portrayed as more set in their ways and resistant to change
- Transformative power of human interaction demonstrated through Knemon's character arc
- Knemon's misanthropic nature challenged when rescued by Gorgias and Sostratos, leading to a change in his outlook on life
- Acts of kindness and compassion can soften even the hardest of hearts and bring about positive change

Character analysis of Knemon

- Knemon initially portrayed as a misanthropic old farmer who shuns human interaction and is quick to anger
- Described as "harsh and sour to everyone" and "hating the whole human race"

- Knemon's misanthropy challenged when he falls into a well and is rescued by Gorgias and Sostratos
- This act of kindness forces Knemon to reevaluate his view of others and his own behavior
- Throughout the play, Knemon undergoes a gradual transformation as he learns to accept the help and companionship of others
- Becomes more open to the idea of his daughter's marriage and even attends the wedding feast
- By the end of the play, Knemon sheds his "grouch" persona and embraces a more sociable and accepting attitude
- Transformation serves as a testament to the power of human connection and compassion

Social commentary in "Dyskolos"

- Play highlights differences between social classes
- Sostratos and his family represent wealthy urban elite
- Knemon and Myrrhine represent poorer rural population
- Despite differences, play suggests love and human connection can bridge the gap between social classes
- Rural life depicted as simpler and more rustic compared to sophistication of the city
- Knemon's farm described as modest and his lifestyle as frugal
- Rural setting allows for inclusion of religious elements (temple of Pan and the Nymphs)
- Religion plays significant role in the play
- Characters make offerings and prayers to the gods
- Temple of Pan and the Nymphs serves as meeting place for characters and site of religious observance
- Divine intervention (Pan's influence on Knemon's rescue) can shape human events
- Menander's portrayal of rural life, social class, and religion reflects realities and beliefs of his time while exploring universal themes of love, family, and personal growth

Unit 7 – Roman Comedy: Origins & Influences

7.1 Early Roman theatrical traditions

Early Roman theater was deeply rooted in religious festivals and public games called ludi. These events featured various forms of entertainment, including improvised comedies, satirical verses, and performances honoring gods like Jupiter and Apollo.

Etruscan and Italic influences shaped Roman theatrical traditions. Temporary wooden stages in public spaces hosted performances with masked actors, music, and dance. These early traditions laid the groundwork for the development of Roman comedy and drama.

Early Roman Theatrical Traditions

Key features of Roman theater

- Ludi (public games) played a major role in early Roman theatrical traditions
- Ludi Romani were the oldest and most important games held annually in September
- Other significant festivals included Ludi Plebeii, Ludi Apollinares, and Ludi Megalenses which featured theatrical performances
- Fabulae Atellanae (Atellan farces) were popular improvised comedic plays that originated from the Oscan town of Atella in Campania
- Featured stock characters like Maccus (the fool) and Bucco (the glutton)
- Fescennine verses were satirical and often obscene dialogues performed at festivals and private gatherings
- Saturae (medley or mixture) was a form of dramatic entertainment that combined music, dance, and improvised verses

Role of religious festivals

- Religious festivals served as the primary occasion for theatrical performances in early Roman society
- Plays were performed as part of the ludi which were held in honor of various deities
- Ludi Romani honored Jupiter
- Ludi Apollinares celebrated Apollo
- Ludi Megalenses were dedicated to the goddess Cybele
- The religious nature of these festivals allowed for the gradual acceptance and development of theater in Roman culture
- Theatrical performances were seen as a way to appease the gods and ensure the well-being of the state

Etruscan and Italic influences

- Etruscan civilization significantly impacted early Roman theater by introducing the concept of ludi (public games)
- Etruscan performers known as ludiones or histriones were skilled in dance, music, and acrobatics
- Italic traditions, particularly those from the Oscan regions of southern Italy, also influenced Roman theater
- Fabulae Atellanae originated from the Oscan town of Atella and became popular in Rome
- Roman playwrights adopted the use of stock characters and improvised dialogue from Atellan farces

Performance spaces and staging

- Early Roman theatrical performances took place in temporary wooden structures or open-air spaces
- Plays were performed on a raised stage called a pulpitum with a backdrop or scaenae frons representing the setting
- Performances were held in public spaces such as the Forum Romanum or the Circus Maximus which were used for various public events
- Actors wore masks and colorful costumes to portray different characters
- Masks amplified the actors' voices and conveyed emotions to the audience
- Music and dance were integral parts of early Roman theatrical performances
- Tibicines (flute players) provided musical accompaniment
- Dancers and acrobats entertained the audience between scenes or during interludes
- Staging practices were relatively simple compared to later periods with minimal use of props and scenery

7.2 Greek influences on Roman comedy

Roman comedy drew heavily from Greek New Comedy, adapting plots, characters, and themes. Playwrights like Plautus and Terence transformed Greek works, keeping core elements while adding Roman flair.

While maintaining similarities in themes and characters, Roman comedy introduced unique elements. These included more slapstick humor, political satire, and elaborate musical accompaniment, creating a distinct blend of Greek and Roman theatrical traditions.

Greek Influences on Roman Comedy

Influence of Greek New Comedy

- Greek New Comedy developed in the 4th and 3rd centuries BCE served as a major source of inspiration for Roman comic playwrights
- Playwrights such as Menander, Philemon, and Diphilus created works later adapted by Roman authors (Plautus, Terence)
- Roman playwrights heavily relied on Greek New Comedy for plots, characters, and themes

- Plautus adapted many of Menander's plays ("Dis Exapaton" into "Bacchides")
- Terence's plays based on Greek New Comedy ("Adelphoe", "Eunuchus")

Themes in Greek vs Roman comedy

- Similarities in themes focused on love, family relationships, and social issues
- Common themes included mistaken identities, deception, and triumph of wit over authority
- Similarities in characters with stock characters appearing in both Greek and Roman comedies (clever slave, young lover, stern father, boastful soldier)
- Differences in themes
- Roman comedy incorporated more slapstick humor and bawdy jokes
- Roman plays sometimes included political satire and commentary on current events
- Differences in characters
- Roman playwrights adapted Greek characters to suit Roman tastes and social norms
- Uniquely Roman stock characters introduced (parasite)

Roman adaptations of Greek elements

- Language and setting
- Roman playwrights translated Greek plays from Greek to Latin
- Often kept Greek setting and character names to maintain sense of exoticism and distance from everyday Roman life
- Metatheatrical elements more common in Roman comedy
- Plautus and Terence frequently broke the fourth wall, addressing audience directly and commenting on play's action
- Musical accompaniment more elaborate in Roman comedies
- Used tibia (double reed instrument)
- Chorus reduced or eliminated
- Contaminatio allowed for more complex plots and character development
- Roman playwrights sometimes combined elements from multiple Greek plays into a single Roman play

Distinctiveness of Roman comedy

- Roman comedy developed unique characteristics while heavily influenced by Greek New Comedy
- Increased use of slapstick humor, puns, and wordplay
- More explicit sexual content and bawdy jokes
- Greater emphasis on music and spectacle
- Inclusion of Roman cultural references and political satire

- Roman comedy never fully escaped shadow of Greek predecessors
- Many plays still set in Greek locales with Greek character names
- Basic plot structures and stock characters remained largely unchanged
- Roman playwrights continued to adapt and translate Greek works throughout Republican period
- Roman comedy can be seen as creative synthesis of Greek and Roman elements
- Blended best of both traditions while introducing new innovations to suit tastes of Roman audiences

7.3 The development of Roman comic conventions

Roman comedy relied on familiar stock characters and plot devices to entertain audiences. From lovesick young men to clever slaves, these archetypes created relatable scenarios filled with misunderstandings, deceptions, and surprising revelations.

Performances were dynamic, with actors improvising and interacting with the audience. Music, dance, and physical comedy added spectacle, while clever social commentary allowed playwrights to critique society through humor. These elements combined to create engaging, multi-layered entertainment.

Stock Characters and Plot Devices

Conventions of Roman comedy

- Stock characters serve as familiar archetypes audiences easily recognize and relate to (adulescens, senex, servus)
- Plot devices create comedic situations through misunderstandings, deception, and unexpected revelations (mistaken identity, disguise, trickery)
- Adulescens often portrayed as lovesick and impulsive, driven by his desire for the virgo or meretrix
- Senex frequently depicted as obstinate, miserly, or easily deceived, serving as an obstacle to the adulescens' goals
- Servus acts as the clever mastermind behind the schemes to help the adulescens, using wit and cunning to outsmart the senex
- Parasitus provides comic relief through flattery and gluttony, often aiding in the servus' plans for personal gain
- Meretrix can be either a hindrance or help to the adulescens, depending on her motivations and alliances
- Virgo typically appears as the innocent and virtuous love interest, often revealed to be of noble birth in recognition scenes
- Miles Gloriosus serves as a foil to the adulescens, boasting of military prowess but ultimately proven to be a coward
- Mistaken identity and disguise lead to humorous misunderstandings and allow characters to infiltrate households or deceive others
- Eavesdropping enables characters to gain crucial information and adds dramatic irony for the audience

- Recognition scenes (anagnorisis) resolve conflicts and mysteries, leading to happy endings with marriages and family reunions

Performance and Audience Interaction

Improvisation in Roman performances

- Actors had the freedom to improvise lines and reactions, adapting to audience responses in real-time
- Improvisation allowed for the incorporation of topical humor, satirizing current events or local figures
- Skilled actors could use improvisation to heighten comedic moments or save a scene that wasn't landing with the audience
- Audience interaction through direct address (asides) broke the fourth wall and created a sense of intimacy and complicity
- Spectators could voice their approval or disapproval, influencing the direction of the performance
- Actors might engage in ad-libbed dialogues with audience members, blurring the line between scripted and improvised content
- The dynamic nature of improvisation and audience interaction made each performance a unique experience
- Successful improvisations could be incorporated into the script for future performances, shaping the evolution of the play
- Conversely, unpopular elements could be cut or reworked based on audience feedback, ensuring the play remained entertaining and relevant

Music, Dance, and Physical Comedy

Elements of Roman comic plays

- The tibia, a double reed instrument, provided musical accompaniment throughout the performance
- Music helped to establish the emotional tone of scenes, from lighthearted to suspenseful
- Musical interludes marked transitions between scenes and allowed for set changes
- Choreographed dances by the chorus added visual spectacle and variety to the performance
- Actors might perform solo dances to express their character's emotions or as part of a comedic routine
- Cantica, lyrical passages accompanied by music and dance, showcased an actor's singing and dancing skills
- Physical comedy relied on exaggerated gestures, facial expressions, and body language to convey humor
- Slapstick humor, such as pratfalls, acrobatics, and mock fights, elicited laughter through visual gags
- Chase scenes provided opportunities for fast-paced, high-energy comedy and allowed actors to demonstrate their physical prowess
- The combination of music, dance, and physical comedy created a multi-sensory experience for the audience, enhancing the overall entertainment value of the play

Social and Political Commentary

Commentary in Roman comedies

- Stereotypical characters served as vehicles for satirizing societal roles and expectations
- The senex, often depicted as miserly or foolish, represented the older generation's resistance to change and outdated values
- The miles gloriosus satirized the military culture's emphasis on bravado and exaggerated tales of heroism
- Political commentary was often veiled in metaphor or allusion to avoid direct criticism of those in power
- Playwrights used comedy to expose corruption, hypocrisy, and abuse of authority without explicitly naming individuals
- The subversive dynamic of clever slaves outwitting their masters challenged traditional power structures and hierarchies
- Young lovers defying parental authority and arranged marriages reflected changing attitudes towards individual agency and romantic love
- Themes of class and status were explored through the interactions between characters of different social standings (nobles, citizens, slaves)
- The treatment of women and marginalized groups in the plays could either reinforce or subvert prevailing societal norms
- Tensions between traditional values (duty, honor, family) and changing norms (personal freedom, self-determination) were a common source of conflict and commentary
- By embedding social and political commentary within the conventions of comedy, playwrights could critique their society while still entertaining audiences

Unit 8 – Plautus and the Comedies of Errors

8.1 Life and works of Plautus

Plautus, a Roman playwright born around 254 BCE, left an indelible mark on comedy. Starting as a stage-hand, he became a prolific writer, penning over 130 plays. His wit and relatable characters quickly won over Roman audiences.

Plautus' works, like "Miles Gloriosus" and "Pseudolus," blend Greek New Comedy with Roman flair. He adapted Greek plots and themes, adding Roman cultural references and slapstick humor. His plays often feature clever slaves outwitting their masters and young lovers overcoming obstacles.

Plautus' Life and Works

Plautus' life and career

- Born Titus Maccius Plautus in Sarsina, Umbria around 254 BCE
- Relocated to Rome as a young man to pursue a career in theater
- Worked in the theater as a stage-hand and actor
- Acquired extensive knowledge of Greek New Comedy and stagecraft through hands-on experience
- Began writing his own comedies for the Roman stage around 205 BCE
- Quickly gained popularity with Roman audiences due to his witty dialogues and relatable characters
- Received patronage from wealthy Roman aristocrats who supported his theatrical endeavors
- Prolific playwright who wrote over 130 plays during his career, of which 20 survive today
- Passed away around 184 BCE, leaving behind a lasting legacy in Roman comedy

Major works of Plautus

- Amphitruo (c. 195-185 BCE)
 - Tragicomic play featuring mistaken identities and divine intervention (Jupiter disguises himself as Amphitryon)
- Miles Gloriosus (The Braggart Soldier) (c. 205-200 BCE)
 - Features a clever slave (Palaestrio) who outwits a boastful soldier (Pyrgopolynices) to reunite young lovers
- Pseudolus (c. 191 BCE)
 - Revolves around a cunning slave (Pseudolus) who helps his master's son win the girl he loves (Phoenicium)
- Mostellaria (The Haunted House) (c. 200-190 BCE)

- Involves a spendthrift son (Philolaches) and a clever slave (Tranio) who tries to conceal his master's debts by pretending the house is haunted
- Menaechmi (The Twin Brothers) (c. 200-190 BCE)
- Features twin brothers (Menaechmus and Sosicles) separated at birth and the comedic confusion that ensues when they reunite in Epidamnus

Historical Context and Influences

Context of Plautus' comedies

- Plautus lived during the Middle Republic period of Rome (c. 264-133 BCE)
- Rome was expanding its territory and influence through military conquests (Punic Wars, Macedonian Wars)
- Roman society was undergoing significant changes due to increased wealth and cultural exchange with Greek and Hellenistic world
- Plautus' comedies were performed at religious festivals (Ludi Megalenses, Ludi Romani) and public events
- Plays served as entertainment for the masses and a means of social commentary on contemporary issues
- Plautus' works reflect the social hierarchies and values of Roman society
- Slaves, who were often depicted as clever and resourceful (Pseudolus, Palaestrio), played a central role in his comedies
- The plays often satirized the foibles of the wealthy and powerful (Pyrgopolynices, Theopropides)

Greek influence on Plautus

- Greek New Comedy, developed in Athens during the 4th century BCE, heavily influenced Plautus
- Playwrights such as Menander, Diphilus, and Philemon served as models for Plautus' plots and characters
- Plautus adapted the plots, characters, and themes of Greek New Comedy to suit Roman tastes and sensibilities
- He often combined elements from multiple Greek plays into a single work, a technique known as *contaminatio*
- Common themes in Plautus' comedies, derived from Greek New Comedy, include: 1. Mistaken identities and disguises (Amphitruo, Menaechmi) 2. Clever slaves who outwit their masters (Pseudolus, Mostellaria) 3. Young lovers facing obstacles to their union (Miles Gloriosus, Pseudolus) 4. The triumph of wit and resourcefulness over social constraints
- Plautus infused his adaptations with Roman cultural references, wordplay (puns, alliteration), and slapstick humor
- His comedies featured musical elements, such as *cantica* (songs) and *tibiae* (double pipes), which enhanced their entertainment value for Roman audiences

8.2 Characteristics of Plautine comedy

Plautine comedies follow a formula: a young man in love, a clever slave, and hilarious obstacles. Stock characters like the boastful soldier and greedy pimp add to the fun. It's all about clever schemes, misunderstandings, and happy endings.

Plautus' humor shines through wordplay and metatheatrical tricks. Puns, double entendres, and breaking the fourth wall keep the audience laughing and engaged. It's a wild ride of clever language and theatrical shenanigans.

Characteristics of Plautine Comedy

Plot structures in Plautine comedy

- Plautine comedies follow formulaic plot structures involving a young man falling in love with an unavailable girl due to social status, financial constraints, or other obstacles
- Clever slave loyal to the young man devises a plan to help him obtain the girl through trickery, deception, or manipulation of other characters
- Complications and misunderstandings arise creating humorous situations as the plan unfolds
- Resolution occurs when obstacles are overcome often through a recognition scene or intervention by a higher authority (father, wealthy patron)

Stock characters of Plautus

- Young man (adulescens) in love but lacking financial resources to pursue his desires
- Clever slave (servus callidus) drives the plot forward through schemes and trickery demonstrating loyalty to his young master while risking punishment
- Boastful soldier (miles gloriosus) provides comic relief through exaggerated claims of bravery and sexual conquests, often portrayed as a foreigner adding to comedic outsider status
- Serves as obstacle to young man's desires competing for the same girl
- Ultimately revealed as a coward or easily duped
- Greedy pimp (leno) owns the girl the young man desires motivated by financial gain
- Parasites (parasiti) attach themselves to wealthy individuals for food and favors through flattery
- Stern father (senex) opposes young man's desires often portrayed as a miser or strict disciplinarian

Wordplay in Plautine humor

- Plautus employs various forms of verbal humor to entertain the audience
- Puns play on words with multiple meanings or similar sounds
- Double entendres are phrases with two interpretations often one being risqué or suggestive
- Alliteration repeats initial consonant sounds for humorous effect
- Malapropisms involve misuse of words often by less educated characters creating comedic misunderstandings

- Verbal humor delivered by the clever slave or other witty characters showcases Plautus' skill with Latin language appealing to audience's appreciation for clever language

Metatheatrical devices of Plautus

- Metatheatrical devices break the fourth wall acknowledging the play as a theatrical performance
- Characters directly address the audience seeking their support or opinions
- References made to the play itself, its genre, or performance aspects
- Actors' identities outside their characters are acknowledged
- Audience engagement is a key aspect drawing spectators into the comedic world
- Prologue speaker explains plot and asks for audience's attention and goodwill
- Characters may ask audience to keep secrets or aid in their schemes
- Soliloquies and asides share characters' thoughts and feelings with the audience
- Metatheatrical devices and audience engagement create a sense of complicity between characters and spectators

8.3 Adaptation of Greek New Comedy in Plautus' works

Greek and Roman comedies share themes like love, trickery, and family dynamics. But Plautus spices things up with more slapstick, bawdy humor, and Roman-specific jokes. His plays are like Greek comedies with a Roman twist.

Plautus takes Greek plays and gives them a Roman makeover. He changes names, settings, and cultural references to fit Roman tastes. He also cranks up the comedy, adding more wordplay, physical gags, and music to keep the audience laughing.

Themes in Greek vs Plautine comedy

Themes in Greek vs Plautine comedy

Similarities in themes: - Explore love and romance as central plot elements (star-crossed lovers) - Feature trickery and deception as characters scheme to achieve their goals (clever slaves) - Delve into family dynamics and relationships, often focusing on conflicts between generations (stern fathers, rebellious sons) - Highlight social class and status as key factors in character interactions and plot development (wealthy elites, poor citizens)

Differences in themes: - Plautus places greater emphasis on physical humor and slapstick comedy, incorporating more pratfalls and exaggerated gestures (characters being chased, falling down) - Incorporates more bawdy and sexual humor, often featuring innuendos and double entendres (puns about anatomy) - Often includes political and social commentary specific to Roman society, satirizing contemporary issues and institutions (corrupt politicians, legal system)

Similarities in characters: - Utilize stock characters such as the clever slave, young lovers, and stern father, each with distinct personality traits and roles in the plot (cunning slave, lovestruck youth) - Feature characters often driven by love, greed, or self-interest, leading to conflicts and comedic situations (miserly old man, ambitious courtesan)

Differences in characters: - Plautus' characters are more exaggerated and caricatured, with heightened personality traits and quirks (braggart soldier, gluttonous parasite) - Often gives his clever slave characters

more prominent roles and agency in the plot, serving as the driving force behind the action (slaves masterminding schemes) - Female characters tend to be more assertive and independent compared to their Greek counterparts, challenging traditional gender roles (outspoken matrons, resourceful courtesans)

Plautus' adaptation of Greek sources

Romanization of Greek settings and characters: - Changes Greek names to Roman names, making the characters more relatable to Roman audiences (Dionysus becomes Bacchus) - Sets plays in Roman cities or colonies, transplanting the action to a familiar context (Athens becomes Ephesus) - Incorporates Roman cultural references and allusions, such as mentioning Roman deities or customs (invoking Jupiter instead of Zeus)

Amplification of comedic elements: - Increases the use of puns, wordplay, and verbal humor, exploiting the flexibility of the Latin language (homophones, double meanings) - Exaggerates physical comedy and slapstick routines, adding more elaborate and outrageous gags (characters disguising themselves, engaging in acrobatics) - Adds more musical and sung passages to the plays, capitalizing on the Roman appreciation for music and spectacle (characters breaking into song, accompanied by instruments)

Inclusion of Roman social and political commentary: - References current events, public figures, and social issues relevant to Roman audiences, grounding the plays in contemporary reality (mentioning recent wars, political scandals) - Satirizes Roman institutions, such as the legal system or military, exposing their flaws and absurdities (corrupt judges, incompetent generals) - Comments on the relationships between social classes in Roman society, highlighting the tensions and power dynamics (wealthy patrons, impoverished clients)

Roman values in Plautine comedy

Portrayal of family dynamics: - Emphasizes the authority of the paterfamilias (male head of household), reflecting the patriarchal structure of Roman society (fathers arranging marriages, controlling finances) - Depicts tensions between fathers and sons, particularly regarding arranged marriages, mirroring generational conflicts in Roman families (sons defying fathers' wishes, seeking love matches)

Representation of social classes: - Offers satirical portrayals of the elite and their moral shortcomings, critiquing the excesses and vices of the upper class (wealthy characters' greed, hypocrisy) - Presents sympathetic depictions of clever slaves and their attempts to outwit their masters, highlighting the intelligence and resourcefulness of the lower classes (slaves devising intricate plans, outsmarting their owners) - Provides commentary on the limited social mobility in Roman society, illustrating the challenges faced by characters seeking to improve their status (poor characters dreaming of wealth, encountering obstacles)

Reflection of Roman attitudes towards gender roles: - Portrays assertive and independent female characters, challenging traditional gender norms and expectations (women taking charge, defying male authority) - Explores the power dynamics between men and women in romantic relationships, showcasing the agency and influence of female characters (women manipulating men, using their wit and charm)

Incorporation of Roman religious and cultural practices: - References Roman deities and religious rituals, integrating elements of Roman belief systems into the plots (characters invoking gods, participating in festivals) - Includes Roman festivals and holidays as plot devices, using these events as backdrops for comedic situations and character interactions (Saturnalia, Lupercalia)

Plautus' impact on Roman theater

Adaptation of Greek plays for Roman audiences: - Introduces Roman audiences to the plots, themes, and stock characters of Greek New Comedy, making these elements accessible and enjoyable (exposing Romans to Menandrian comedy) - Modifies Greek source material to make it more relatable to Roman viewers, incorporating Roman cultural references and social commentary (localizing the plays, adding Roman flavor)

Influence on later Roman comedy: - Establishes a model for adapting Greek plays into Latin, setting a precedent for future Roman playwrights (Terence following Plautus' example) - Inspires future Roman playwrights, such as Terence, to continue adapting Greek New Comedy, ensuring the genre's popularity and longevity (Terence refining Plautus' techniques)

Preservation of Greek New Comedy: - Plautus' adaptations help preserve the works of Greek playwrights, such as Menander, whose original plays have been largely lost (Plautus' plays serving as a record of lost Greek comedies) - Provides insight into the plots and themes of Greek New Comedy through his adaptations, offering a glimpse into the original source material (Plautus' plays as a window into Menandrian comedy)

Lasting impact on Western literature and theater: - Plautus' plays serve as a source of inspiration for later playwrights, such as Shakespeare and Molière, influencing the development of comedy in different eras and cultures (The Comedy of Errors, Tartuffe) - The stock characters and comedic tropes popularized by Plautus continue to influence comedy and theater to this day, shaping the conventions and expectations of the genre (mistaken identities, witty servants, happy endings)

8.4 Analysis of major Plautine plays (e.g., "The Menaechmi," "Amphitryon")

Plautus, the Roman comedy master, crafted plays full of mistaken identities and clever twists. His works, like "The Menaechmi" and "Amphitryon," explore themes of family, fate, and the blurring lines between gods and mortals.

Plautus used witty wordplay, slapstick humor, and role reversals to challenge social norms. His comedies influenced later playwrights and still resonate today, showing how laughter can reveal truths about human nature and society.

Plautine Comedy

Plots and themes of Plautine plays

- "The Menaechmi"
 - Plot revolves around twin brothers separated at birth, one residing in Epidamnus and the other in Syracuse, causing a series of comedic misunderstandings and confusion when the Syracusan twin visits Epidamnus
 - Explores themes of mistaken identity and the hilarious situations that ensue as a result, the power of chance and fate in shaping the lives of individuals, and the significance of family bonds and ultimate reconciliation
- "Amphitryon"
 - Plot centers on the god Jupiter disguising himself as the mortal Amphitryon to seduce his wife Alcmena, resulting in confusion and conflict upon the return of the real Amphitryon

- Delves into themes of the blurring of boundaries between divine and human realms, the ramifications of divine intervention in the lives of mortals, and the complexities of identity and the nature of the self

Comedic devices in Plautus

- Mistaken identity serves as a central plot device, creating humorous situations and highlighting the fragility of social roles and the malleable nature of identity
- Role reversal, such as servants outwitting their masters and women asserting dominance over men, challenges societal norms and hierarchies
- Other comedic elements include clever puns and wordplay, slapstick humor and physical comedy, and satirical commentary on contemporary Roman society

Social dynamics in Plautus' works

- Gender roles are often subverted, with women portrayed as clever and resourceful, while men are frequently depicted as foolish or easily manipulated, reflecting the limited agency of women in Roman society while providing a comedic outlet for exploring alternative gender dynamics
- Social hierarchies are examined through the lens of slaves and servants driving the plot and outsmarting their masters, highlighting the potential for social mobility and the subversion of class structures, mirroring the complex social stratification of Roman society
- Family dynamics are a central focus, exploring relationships between spouses, parents and children, and siblings, delving into themes of loyalty, betrayal, and reconciliation within the family unit, reflecting the importance of the family in Roman culture and the tensions that can arise within familial relationships

Influence of Plautine comedy

- Plautus' works serve as a model for later Roman comedic playwrights, with Terence, a younger contemporary, building upon and refining Plautine comedic conventions
- The rediscovery of Plautine plays during the Renaissance inspires a revival of classical comedy, with playwrights such as Shakespeare (*The Comedy of Errors*) and Molière (*Amphitryon*) adapting Plautine themes and devices for their own works
- Plautine elements such as mistaken identity, role reversal, and satirical social commentary remain staples of comedic theater and film, with the universal themes and timeless humor of Plautus' plays continuing to resonate with audiences across cultures and eras

Unit 9 – Plautine Comedy: Characters and Humor

9.1 Stock characters in Plautine comedy

Plautine comedy thrives on stock characters, each with distinct traits and roles. The clever slave, young lover, stern father, pimp, courtesan, and parasite form a cast of familiar faces that drive the plot and generate laughs.

These characters serve specific functions in Plautine plays. They create comedic situations through schemes, conflicts, and exaggerated behaviors. Plautus adapts Greek archetypes for Roman audiences, emphasizing humor and caricature in his portrayals.

Stock Characters in Plautine Comedy

Stock characters in Plautine comedies

- Servus callidus (clever slave)
 - Main character and driving force of the plot devises intricate plans and schemes to help their young master
 - Intelligent, resourceful, cunning character motivated by a desire for freedom or to assist the adulescens (Pseudolus, Epidicus, Tranio)
- Adulescens (young lover)
 - Driven by love and desire to be with their beloved, usually a prostitute or slave girl
 - Faces obstacles such as lack of money or parental opposition relies on servus callidus for help (Calidorus in Pseudolus, Stratippocles in Epidicus)
- Senex (stern father)
 - Opposes adulescens' desires, concerned with maintaining control over household and finances
 - Portrayed as strict, stingy, easily deceived acts as an obstacle to the young lover's goals (Simo in Pseudolus, Periphanes in Epidicus)
- Leno (pimp) or Meretrix (courtesan)
 - Leno is antagonist holding the object of adulescens' affection, motivated by financial gain and protecting business interests (Ballio in Pseudolus)
 - Meretrix can be hindrance or helper to adulescens, motivated by self-interest or genuine affection (Acroteleutium in Miles Gloriosus)
- Parasitus (parasite)
 - Flatterer who exchanges compliments for food and favors, driven by desire for material comforts
 - Assists main characters in schemes in exchange for rewards or favors (Ergasilus in Captivi, Peniculus in Menaechmi)

Traits of Plautine stock characters

- Servus callidus (clever slave)
- Intelligent, resourceful, cunning develops and executes schemes to achieve desired outcome
- Adulescens (young lover)
- Driven by love and desire, faces obstacles, relies on clever slave for help
- Senex (stern father)
- Concerned with control, reputation, wealth acts as obstacle to adulescens' goals
- Leno (pimp) or Meretrix (courtesan)
- Leno motivated by financial gain, Meretrix by self-interest or affection can be obstacles or allies
- Parasitus (parasite)
- Driven by desire for material comforts, flatters and assists others for rewards

Function of stock characters

- Clever slave's schemes
- Servus callidus devises plans leading to humorous misunderstandings, deceptions involving disguises, mistaken identities, verbal wit
- Generational conflict
- Opposition between senex and adulescens creates tension, obstacles clever slave's efforts to outwit stern father result in comedic situations
- Stereotypical traits and behaviors
- Exaggerated qualities of stock characters (leno's greed, parasitus's flattery) are sources of humor
- Predictable nature allows audience to anticipate and enjoy comedic developments
- Subversion of expectations
- Plautus subverts typical roles for comedic effect (clever slave outsmarts themselves, stern father has change of heart)

Plautine vs Greek stock characters

- Similarities
- Both feature similar stock characters (clever slave, young lover, stern father)
- Basic traits and roles largely consistent between genres
- Differences
- Plautus adapts characters for Roman tastes and culture
- Plautine characters more exaggerated, caricatured than Greek counterparts
- Servus callidus more prominent, central in Plautine comedy

- Plautus uses Latin names, Roman references Greek New Comedy uses Greek names, settings
- Emphasis on humor
- Plautus places greater emphasis on comedic elements (puns, wordplay, slapstick)
- Plautine stock characters more actively involved in creating, driving humorous situations

9.2 Plautus' use of language and wordplay

Plautus, the Roman comedy master, was a wordplay wizard. His puns, double entendres, and alliteration kept audiences in stitches. These clever linguistic tricks weren't just for laughs—they added depth to characters and got the crowd involved in the fun.

Translating Plautus' humor is tricky business. Language differences and cultural references make it a real challenge. But his witty wordplay has stood the test of time, influencing later comedy greats like Shakespeare and Molière.

Plautus' Use of Language and Wordplay

Types of Plautine verbal humor

- Puns
- Play on words with similar sounds but different meanings
- Create humorous double meanings and clever twists (Miles Gloriosus, Pyrgopolynices puns on Greek words meaning "tower of many victories")
- Double entendres
- Phrases with two interpretations, one innocent and one suggestive or risqué
- Generate humor through innuendo and ambiguity (Casina, "sword" used as double entendre for male genitalia)
- Alliteration
- Repetition of initial consonant sounds in a series of words
- Produces playful, rhythmic effect that enhances comedic tone (Poenulus, "prius peperit" - she gave birth first)

Effectiveness of Plautine wordplay

- Enhances overall humor and entertainment value
- Puns, double entendres, and alliteration elicit laughter from audience
- Clever language keeps audience engaged and attentive (Pseudolus, Ballio's alliterative insults)
- Highlights wit and intelligence of characters
- Wordplay demonstrates characters' cleverness and mental agility
- Creates more dynamic interactions and adds depth to characterization (Epidicus, titular character's verbal sparring)
- Encourages audience participation and engagement

- Wordplay prompts audience to actively listen and decipher multiple meanings
- Fosters camaraderie between performers and audience as they share in jokes (Menaechmi, audience drawn into twins' confusion)

Challenges in translating Plautine humor

- Linguistic differences between Latin and target language
- Puns and double entendres may not translate directly due to differences in word meanings and sounds
- Translators must find creative solutions to convey essence of joke (Adapting puns, finding equivalent expressions)
- Navigating cultural and historical context
- Wordplay may rely on cultural references or historical events familiar to original audience
- Translators must decide how to handle references (Adapting to target culture, providing explanatory notes)
- Strategies for preserving humor
- Finding equivalent puns or wordplay in target language that convey similar comedic effect
- Using footnotes or endnotes to explain original wordplay and meaning
- Adapting joke to target culture while maintaining spirit of original humor (Modernizing references, finding cultural equivalents)

Language in Plautus' comedic style

- Distinguishing feature of Plautine comedy
- Extensive use of puns, double entendres, and alliteration sets Plautus apart
- Wordplay becomes hallmark of his comedic style and contributes to enduring popularity (Lasting appeal, influence on later playwrights)
- Reflects Plautus' skill as a playwright
- Clever and intricate language demonstrates mastery of comic craft
- Ability to manipulate words and create multiple layers of meaning highlights intelligence and wit (Trinummus, Stasimus' monologue)
- Influences later comic traditions
- Plautine comedic style, reliant on wordplay, influences later generations of comic playwrights
- Legacy seen in works of Shakespeare, Molière, and other masters who employ witty wordplay and puns (The Comedy of Errors, Tartuffe)

9.3 Physical comedy and farcical elements in Plautine plays

Plautine plays are a riot of physical comedy and farcical elements. From slapstick beatings to exaggerated gestures, these ancient Roman comedies use every trick in the book to get laughs. Characters chase each other, play pranks, and engage in elaborate schemes.

The staging of these plays is crucial for comedic impact. Actors use the whole stage, interact with the audience, and wear ridiculous costumes. Music and rhythm add to the hilarity. Compared to other ancient comedies, Plautine plays stand out for their over-the-top physical humor and farcical situations.

Physical Comedy and Farcical Elements in Plautine Plays

Physical comedy in Plautine plays

- Slapstick comedy involves characters engaging in mock fights or beatings, with slaves often threatened with or receiving physical punishment for comedic effect
- Exaggerated gestures and movements feature characters running, jumping, or falling in a comical manner, with actors using broad, over-the-top facial expressions and body language to elicit laughter
- Comedic chases and pursuits showcase characters comically pursuing or fleeing from one another on stage, adding to the physical humor
- Physical gags and pranks include characters playing practical jokes on each other and the humorous use of props (rubber chickens) and costumes (oversized shoes) to enhance the comedic elements

Farcical elements for humor

- Mistaken identities arise when characters are confused for one another due to similar appearances or when deliberate disguises and impersonations lead to comedic misunderstandings
- Elaborate schemes and deceptions involve clever slaves devising intricate plans to outwit their masters or characters engaging in deceptive plots to achieve their goals, creating humorous situations
- Farcical misunderstandings and coincidences occur when characters misinterpret events or conversations, or when unexpected and improbable coincidences contribute to the comedic plot
- Exaggerated character types and behaviors, such as the cunning slave (Pseudolus) or boastful soldier (Pyrgopolynices), engage in farcical antics, displaying exaggerated emotions, desires, or flaws for comedic effect

Staging for comedic impact

- Use of stage space and movement allows actors to utilize the entire stage to create dynamic and humorous scenes, with blocking and choreography designed to emphasize physical comedy
- Interaction with the audience involves characters breaking the fourth wall to address the audience directly and actors responding to audience reactions and incorporating improvisation to enhance engagement
- Costume and prop design features exaggerated or ridiculous costumes (outlandish wigs) to highlight character traits and generate laughs, while creative use of props enhances physical gags and slapstick moments
- Musicalsity and rhythm are incorporated through music, dance, and rhythmic dialogue delivery to heighten comedic impact, with repetition, alliteration, and wordplay creating humorous verbal exchanges

Plautine vs other ancient comedies

- Greek Old Comedy, exemplified by Aristophanes' plays, features slapstick, buffoonery, and exaggerated characters, using physical comedy to satirize political figures (Cleon) and societal norms

- Greek New Comedy, represented by Menander's plays, incorporates elements of farce, such as mistaken identities and coincidences, but places greater emphasis on character development and plot compared to Plautine comedy
- Atellan Farce, an Italic dramatic form, features stock characters (Maccus) and improvised performances, emphasizing crude humor, physical comedy, and bawdy content similar to Plautine plays
- Mime, a Roman theatrical genre, relies heavily on gestures, acrobatics, and wordless performances, using physical comedy to depict everyday life and satirize social norms

Unit 10 – Terence: Master of Comedy of Manners

10.1 Life and works of Terence

Terence, a former slave turned celebrated playwright, revolutionized Roman comedy. Born in Carthage and educated in Rome, he crafted six influential plays that blended Greek New Comedy with refined Latin style. His works explored love, family, and social issues.

Terence's comedies left a lasting impact on Western literature. Praised for their elegant language and psychological depth, his plays were studied in Roman schools and inspired later writers. From medieval scholars to Renaissance playwrights, Terence's influence spans centuries.

Life and Works of Terence

Key influences on Terence's career

- Born c. 195 BCE in Carthage (modern-day Tunisia)
- Brought to Rome as a slave captured during the Second Punic War
- Educated in the household of senator Terentius Lucanus, who recognized his intellectual potential
- Gained freedom and took the name Publius Terentius Afer, reflecting his African origin
- Became acquainted with influential figures in Roman literary circles
- Scipio Aemilianus, a prominent general who conquered Carthage in 146 BCE and patron of the arts
- Gaius Laelius, a close friend of Scipio, consul in 140 BCE, and known for his wit and eloquence
- Accused by some rivals of receiving assistance from his patrician friends in writing his plays, due to their refined style
- Traveled to Greece around 160 BCE to study Greek New Comedy firsthand
- Menander, the most celebrated playwright of the genre, served as a key influence on Terence's style and themes
- Died in 159 BCE at the age of 36 while returning from Greece, possibly in a shipwreck, cutting short a promising career

Major works of Terence

- *Andria* (The Girl from Andros), 166 BCE
- Adapted from Menander's *Andria* and *Perinthia*
- Explores themes of love, family, and mistaken identity
- *Hecyra* (The Mother-in-Law), 165 BCE
- Adapted from Apollodorus of Carystus' *Hecyra*
- Initially unsuccessful due to external disruptions, later revived in 160 BCE

- Deals with marital issues and intergenerational conflict
- *Heauton Timorumenos* (The Self-Tormentor), 163 BCE
- Adapted from Menander's play of the same name
- Focuses on the relationship between a strict father and his son
- *Eunuchus* (The Eunuch), 161 BCE
- Adapted from Menander's *Eunouchos* and *Kolax*
- Most successful of Terence's plays during his lifetime, earning him 8,000 sesterces
- Features a complex plot of disguise and deception
- *Phormio*, 161 BCE
- Adapted from Apollodorus of Carystus' *Epidikazomenos*
- Named after the clever parasite who drives the plot
- *Adelphoe* (The Brothers), 160 BCE
- Adapted from Menander's *Adelphoi* and Diphilus' *Synapothneskontes*
- Contrasts the parenting styles of two brothers raising their sons

Legacy of Terence's comedies

- Praised for his refined language, elegant style, and psychological depth of characters
- Cicero lauded Terence's "smooth and polished" Latin as an example of pure diction
- Criticized by some contemporaries, such as Luscius Lanuvinus, for lack of comic vigor compared to the more boisterous Plautus
- Plays remained popular after his death, performed at public festivals (*ludi*) and private gatherings
- Used as teaching texts for rhetoric and grammar in Roman schools, studied by scholars like Aelius Donatus
- Influenced later Roman comic playwrights, such as Afranius, who further adapted Greek New Comedy
- Manuscripts of Terence's plays survived through the Middle Ages, preserving his work for posterity
- Studied by medieval scholars like Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim and used as models for early Renaissance comedy
- Inspired adaptations and imitations in European literature from the 16th-18th centuries
- Molière's *L'École des maris* (The School for Husbands) and *Les Fourberies de Scapin* (Scapin's Deceits) drew from *Adelphoe* and *Phormio*
- Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* based on Plautus' *Menaechmi*, itself influenced by Terence's comedies
- Continues to be performed and studied as exemplars of ancient Roman comedy and its enduring influence on Western literature

10.2 Characteristics of Terentian comedy

Terentian comedy stands out for its refined language, character depth, and exploration of human emotions. Terence's plays delve into relationships, morality, and societal norms, offering a more subtle and intellectual form of humor compared to his contemporaries.

Terence's unique style was shaped by his background as a freed slave, education in Greek literature, and association with Roman intellectuals. His works reflect the growing appreciation for Greek culture in Rome while addressing contemporary social issues and tensions.

Characteristics and Context of Terentian Comedy

Features of Terentian comedy

- Emphasizes character development through exploring the psychological depth and complexity of characters, allowing them to experience personal growth and change throughout the play (Pamphilus in "The Brothers")
- Portrays human emotions and motivations in a realistic manner, making characters relatable and engaging for the audience
- Employs refined and elegant language, utilizing sophisticated vocabulary and grammatical structures to create elevated and polished dialogue (Demea's speeches in "The Brothers")
- Avoids vulgar or low-brow humor, instead focusing on more subtle and intellectual forms of comedy
- Explores relationships and family dynamics, delving into familial bonds, conflicts, romantic relationships, and their challenges (the father-son relationship in "The Self-Tormentor")
- Incorporates moral and philosophical themes, examining ethical dilemmas and societal norms while promoting virtues such as loyalty, forgiveness, and self-awareness (the concept of "humane" treatment in "The Eunuch")

Terence vs Plautus

- Both playwrights adapted Greek New Comedy plays for Roman audiences and used stock characters like the clever slave (Pseudolus in Plautus' play of the same name) and the young lover (Pamphilus in Terence's "The Girl from Andros")
- Terence's comedic style is more subtle, refined, and character-driven, while Plautus focuses more on slapstick, wordplay, and exaggeration (the pun-filled dialogue in Plautus' "The Swaggering Soldier")
- Terence employs more polished and elevated language compared to Plautus' colloquial and sometimes vulgar language (the crude jokes in Plautus' "The Pot of Gold")
- Terence's plotlines are more straightforward and realistic, while Plautus often relies on convoluted and improbable plot twists (the farcical elements in Plautus' "The Menaechmi")
- Terence's characters are more nuanced and psychologically complex, whereas Plautus' characters tend to be more one-dimensional and stereotypical (the stock character of the boastful soldier in Plautus' plays)

Context for Terence's style

- Terence's unique perspective as a freed North African slave influenced his portrayal of social hierarchies and power dynamics in his plays (the treatment of slaves in "The Eunuch")

- His education in Greek literature and philosophy shaped his literary style and the themes he explored
- Terence's association with the influential Scipionic Circle, a group of Roman intellectuals, exposed him to Hellenistic ideas and literary tastes (the influence of Stoic philosophy in "The Self-Tormentor")
- The growing appreciation for Greek art, literature, and philosophy in Rome during Terence's time allowed his plays to serve as a vehicle for introducing Greek ideas to Roman audiences
- Terence's plays reflect contemporary Roman society, depicting family life, gender roles, and social classes while exploring tensions between traditional Roman values and evolving norms (the portrayal of women in "The Mother-in-Law")
- The influence of Menander and Greek New Comedy is evident in Terence's adaptation of Greek plots, characters, and themes to the Roman context, as well as his incorporation of Hellenistic philosophical ideas (the Epicurean themes in "The Eunuch")

10.3 Terence's adaptation of Greek New Comedy

Terence, a Roman playwright, drew heavily from Greek New Comedy for his works. He adapted plays by Menander and others, focusing on domestic themes and stock characters while incorporating complex plots and moral lessons.

Terence's adaptations weren't mere translations. He combined elements from multiple Greek plays, Romanized cultural references, and adjusted the language to suit Roman audiences. This approach created unique works that blended Greek storytelling with Roman sensibilities.

Terence's Adaptation of Greek New Comedy

Greek New Comedy's influence on Terence

- Greek New Comedy, popularized by Menander, significantly influenced Terence's works
- Focused on domestic themes (family relationships, love, social issues)
- Featured stock characters (young lovers, cunning slaves, stern fathers, courtesans)
- Employed complex plot structures with misunderstandings, coincidences, and recognition scenes
- Terence drew inspiration from Menander's plays for his own comedies
- Adapted works like "The Brothers" (Adelphoe) and "The Eunuch" (Eunuchus)
- Incorporated Menandrian elements such as intricate plots, character types, and themes
- Terence's plays reflect the style and tone of Greek New Comedy
- Emphasize character development, realistic dialogue, and moral lessons
- Use prologue to address the audience and defend artistic choices

Terence's adaptation of Greek sources

- Terence employed various techniques to adapt Greek plays for Roman audiences
- Contaminatio: combined elements from multiple Greek plays into a single Latin work
- Allowed for more complex plots and diverse characters
- "The Eunuch" combines scenes from Menander's "The Eunuch" and "The Flatterer"

- Romanization: adjusted Greek cultural references and settings to suit Roman context
- Changed Greek names to Roman ones
- Adapted Greek customs and institutions to Roman equivalents
- Linguistic modifications: translated Greek dialogue into idiomatic Latin
- Captured the essence of the original while making it accessible to Roman viewers
- Employed Roman colloquialisms and wordplay
- Terence tailored his adaptations to appeal to Roman tastes and sensibilities
- Emphasized themes relevant to Roman society (family dynamics, social hierarchy)
- Incorporated Roman values and moral lessons into the plays' messages

Terence's plays vs Greek originals

- Similarities between Terence's adaptations and Greek source material:
 - Overall plot structure and narrative arcs often remained consistent
 - Stock characters and their roles in the story were largely maintained
 - Central themes (love, family, social commentary) were preserved
- Differences between Terence's adaptations and Greek originals:
 - Terence's use of *contaminatio* introduced new plot elements and characters
 - Added complexity and depth to the original storylines
 - Created more opportunities for humor and dramatic tension
 - Romanization of cultural references and settings
 - Greek gods and religious practices replaced with Roman equivalents
 - Greek place names and landmarks substituted with Roman ones
 - Expansion or reduction of certain scenes and character roles
 - Terence occasionally developed minor characters or subplots to enhance the narrative
 - Some scenes or characters from the Greek original might be omitted for brevity or relevance
 - Linguistic and stylistic differences due to the translation from Greek to Latin
 - Terence's language and wordplay were tailored to Roman audiences
 - Some nuances or puns from the Greek original might be lost or altered in translation

10.4 Analysis of major Terentian plays (e.g., "The Brothers," "The Eunuch")

Terence's plays, like "The Brothers" and "The Eunuch," tackle complex themes of family, love, and social norms. His works blend witty dialogue, clever plot twists, and relatable characters to explore the intricacies of Roman society and human relationships.

Terence's comedies offer insightful social commentary, challenging traditional values and promoting empathy. Through his dramatic techniques and nuanced portrayals of gender and class, Terence creates engaging stories that entertain while provoking thought on societal issues.

Terence's Major Plays

Plots and themes of Terence's plays

- "The Brothers" (Adelphoe)
 - Plot revolves around two brothers, Demea and Micio, who raise their sons with contrasting parenting styles
 - Demea takes a strict and traditional approach, while Micio is more lenient and permissive
 - The sons, Ctesipho and Aeschinus, encounter various challenges and misunderstandings throughout the play
 - Explores the consequences of different parenting approaches and their impact on the children
 - Features a cast of characters including Demea, Micio, Ctesipho, Aeschinus, Sostrata, and Hegio
 - Delves into themes of parenting, family relationships, the nature vs. nurture debate, and the power of forgiveness
- "The Eunuch" (Eunuchus)
 - Follows the story of Phaedria, a young man who falls in love with Thais, a courtesan
 - Phaedria's brother, Chaerea, disguises himself as a eunuch to gain access to Thais's house
 - A series of misunderstandings and deceptions lead to comedic situations and ultimately a happy resolution
 - Stars Phaedria, Thais, Chaerea, Thraso, Gnatho, and Parmeno as its main characters
 - Explores themes of love, deception, social class, gender roles, and the transformative power of disguise

Social commentary in Terence's comedies

- Offers a critique of traditional Roman values and societal norms
- Questions the rigidity of social classes and the treatment of marginalized groups within Roman society
- Challenges the strict expectations placed on women and their limited roles in society
- Promotes empathy, understanding, and forgiveness as key virtues
- Encourages open-mindedness and the acceptance of different perspectives and experiences
- Emphasizes the importance of communication and the resolution of conflicts through compassion and understanding
- Explores the complexities and nuances of human relationships
- Highlights the challenges and joys of familial bonds, friendships, and romantic love

- Demonstrates the impact of societal pressures and expectations on personal relationships and individual choices

Dramatic techniques of Terence

- Employs stock characters and character types drawn from Greek New Comedy
- Adapts and refines stereotypical characters to create relatable and engaging figures that resonate with the audience
- Utilizes familiar character archetypes (the strict father, the lenient uncle, the young lovers) to quickly establish roles and relationships
- Crafts witty dialogue and clever wordplay to engage and entertain
- Creates humorous exchanges and puns that showcase the intelligence and wit of the characters
- Uses verbal irony and double entendres to add depth and complexity to the characters and situations
- Incorporates elements of farce and physical comedy for comedic effect
- Employs mistaken identities, disguises, and slapstick humor to generate laughter and lighten the mood
- Balances the use of physical comedy with more subtle forms of humor to create a well-rounded comedic experience
- Manipulates dramatic irony and plot twists to keep the audience engaged
- Creates situations where the audience knows more than the characters, building anticipation and suspense
- Introduces unexpected plot developments to maintain interest and surprise the audience, keeping them on their toes

Gender and class in Terentian comedy

- Portrays women and their roles in Roman society with nuance and depth
- Presents strong, intelligent female characters who challenge societal norms and expectations (Thais in "The Eunuch")
- Explores the limited agency and opportunities available to women in Roman society, highlighting their struggles and resilience
- Depicts social class and the relationships between classes with insight and sensitivity
- Examines the power dynamics between the wealthy and the poor, showcasing the inequalities and injustices of Roman society
- Highlights the potential for social mobility and the blurring of class boundaries through character arcs and plot developments
- Represents family structures and relationships with complexity and realism
- Showcases the intricacies of parent-child relationships and sibling dynamics, exploring the tensions and bonds within families

- Explores the conflicts between traditional family values and individual desires, highlighting the struggle for personal autonomy
- Subverts traditional gender roles and expectations through character development
- Presents characters who defy conventional gender stereotypes, challenging the rigidity of gender norms (Thais as a complex, multi-faceted courtesan)
- Questions the limitations imposed by gender roles and the impact they have on individuals' lives and choices

Unit 11 – Terence's Comedies: Realism & Social Critique

11.1 Character development and psychology in Terentian plays

Terence's plays bring characters to life with deep psychological complexity. Unlike earlier Roman comedies, his characters grapple with inner conflicts, personal growth, and moral dilemmas, making them more relatable and multidimensional.

Through monologues and dialogues, Terence reveals characters' true motivations and emotions. This realistic portrayal allows audiences to see themselves reflected on stage, exploring universal themes of love, family, and personal growth.

Character Development in Terentian Plays

Depth of Terentian characters

- Terence's characters exhibit greater psychological depth and complexity than those in earlier Roman comedy
- Characters have more fully developed personalities and motivations like inner conflicts, personal growth arcs, and nuanced decision-making processes (Demea in *Adelphoe*)
- They experience inner conflicts and personal growth throughout the plays, grappling with moral dilemmas, evolving relationships, and self-discovery (Pamphilus in *Andria*)
- Earlier Roman comedy characters were often stock types with little individual characterization
- Characters were defined by their archetypal roles with predictable traits and behaviors (the clever slave, the young lover, the strict father)
- They lacked the nuance, depth, and psychological realism found in Terentian characters, serving more as plot devices than fully realized individuals (Plautus' *Pseudolus*)
- Terence's characters are more multidimensional and relatable to the audience
- They face real-life challenges and make decisions based on their individual circumstances, backgrounds, and emotional states (Chremes in *Heauton Timorumenos*)
- Their actions and reactions are driven by their unique personalities and experiences, reflecting the complexities of human nature and relationships (Thais in *Eunuchus*)

Inner lives in Terence's plays

- Terence explores the inner thoughts, feelings, and motivations of his characters
- Characters engage in self-reflection and introspection, revealing their hopes, fears, and internal struggles through monologues and asides (Pamphila in *Eunuchus*)
- They grapple with moral dilemmas and personal conflicts, weighing their desires against societal expectations and personal values (Ctesipho in *Adelphoe*)
- Characters' actions are driven by their psychological states and emotional needs

- Their decisions are influenced by factors such as love, loyalty, ambition, and self-preservation, often leading to internal turmoil and external conflicts (Phaedria in *Eunuchus*)
- They are motivated by complex emotional states like guilt, jealousy, and self-doubt, adding depth to their characterization and driving the plot forward (Clitipho in *Heauton Timorumenos*)
- Terence portrays characters as complex individuals with unique perspectives and experiences
- Each character has a distinct personality and backstory that shapes their behavior, attitudes, and relationships with others (Micio and Demea in *Adelphoe*)
- Their motivations are not always clear-cut or easily understood by others, reflecting the ambiguity and subjectivity of human experience (Bacchis in *Heauton Timorumenos*)

Monologues for character revelation

- Monologues allow characters to express their inner thoughts and feelings directly to the audience
- Characters reveal their true motivations, doubts, and desires through soliloquies, providing unfiltered access to their psychological states (Chaerea's monologue in *Eunuchus*)
- Monologues offer insight into characters' decision-making processes and internal struggles, illuminating the complexities of their minds and hearts (Pamphilus' monologue in *Andria*)
- Dialogues between characters reveal their interpersonal dynamics and psychological states
- Characters' words and actions in conversation reflect their underlying emotions, intentions, and power dynamics within relationships (Thais and Phaedria in *Eunuchus*)
- Dialogues highlight the characters' conflicts, alliances, and emotional bonds, showcasing the intricacies of human interaction (Micio and Demea's dialogues in *Adelphoe*)
- Terence uses monologues and dialogues to gradually reveal characters' psychological depth and complexity
- Characters' true nature and motivations are unveiled through their interactions and self-expressions, allowing the audience to piece together a comprehensive understanding of each individual (Clinia and Clitipho in *Heauton Timorumenos*)
- The audience gains a deeper appreciation for the characters' inner lives and personal journeys as the play progresses, fostering empathy and emotional investment (Pamphilus' development in *Andria*)

Realism of Terentian characters

- Terence's characters are more realistic and relatable than those in earlier Roman comedy
- They face challenges and make decisions that resemble real-life situations, such as navigating familial expectations, romantic pursuits, and personal ambitions (Aeschinus in *Adelphoe*)
- Their emotions, flaws, and personal growth are recognizable and resonant to the audience, reflecting the universal human experience (Chrysis in *Andria*)
- Characters' psychological depth and complexity make them more believable and engaging
- The audience can empathize with the characters' struggles and relate to their experiences, seeing aspects of themselves and their own lives reflected on stage (Sostrata in *Heauton Timorumenos*)

- The characters' inner lives and motivations are portrayed in a way that feels authentic and genuine, transcending the limitations of stock characterization (Parmeno in *Eunuchus*)
- Terence's portrayal of realistic characters allows the audience to see themselves reflected on stage
- The plays explore universal themes and experiences that resonate with the audience, such as love, family, identity, and personal growth (the brothers' relationship in *Adelphoe*)
- The characters' journeys and personal transformations can inspire self-reflection and introspection in the audience, encouraging them to examine their own lives and relationships (Pamphilus' growth in *Andria*)

11.2 Social themes and commentary in Terence's works

Terence's plays offer a sharp critique of Roman society, exploring class distinctions, family dynamics, and gender roles. Through clever humor and irony, he exposes hypocrisy in social norms and challenges traditional expectations, giving voice to marginalized groups.

His works advocate for education and intellectual pursuits while questioning rigid hierarchies. By portraying intelligent slaves and flawed elites, Terence suggests that wit and humanity can transcend social class, encouraging audiences to reflect on their own societal values.

Social Commentary in Terence's Works

Themes in Terence's plays

- Class distinctions and social hierarchies explored through conflicts between upper and lower classes (patricians and plebeians) and the challenges of social mobility for those of lower status
- Family dynamics and relationships examined, including father-son relationships marked by generational conflicts, the dominant role of the *paterfamilias* (male head of household) in Roman society, and marital relationships with strict expectations placed on wives
- Gender roles and expectations critiqued, highlighting the limited agency of women in Roman society, their objectification and treatment as commodities, and the double standards applied to male and female behavior (sexual activity)
- Education and intellectual pursuits valued, with slaves often depicted as educated and serving as confidants to their masters, emphasizing the importance of knowledge and rhetoric
- The influence of Greek culture on Roman society explored through Terence's adaptation of Greek plays (Menander) for Roman audiences and the tension between traditional Roman values (*gravitas*) and Greek cultural influences (*luxuria*)

Terence's critique of Roman society

- Exposes the hypocrisy and contradictions within Roman social norms by depicting characters who behave in ways that contradict their professed values (politicians) and highlighting discrepancies between public persona and private actions
- Challenges the rigid social hierarchy and class distinctions by portraying the intelligence and humanity of lower-class characters (slaves) and demonstrating the flaws and weaknesses of upper-class characters (senators)
- Questions traditional gender roles and expectations by featuring strong, intelligent female characters who defy societal norms (Antiphila in *The Girl from Andros*) and criticizing the objectification and

mistreatment of women

- Advocates for the value of education and intellectual pursuits, emphasizing the importance of wit, cleverness, and rhetorical skill (Davus in *The Eunuch*) and suggesting that intelligence and education can transcend social class

Gender and family in Terentian comedy

- Women often depicted as objects of desire or commodities to be traded (Pamphila in *The Brothers*), with female characters who assert their agency met with resistance or punishment
- Male characters expected to prioritize their public reputation and social standing over personal desires or relationships
- Fathers portrayed as authoritarian figures who prioritize social expectations over their children's happiness (Demea in *The Brothers*), with sons expected to obey their fathers and uphold family honor
- Marital relationships often depicted as transactional or politically motivated rather than based on love or companionship (Nausistrata and Chremes in *Phormio*)
- Slaves portrayed as more intelligent and cunning than their masters (Syrus in *The Self-Tormentor*), with lower-class characters shown to have more integrity and humanity than upper-class characters
- Social mobility depicted as possible but challenging, requiring wit and resourcefulness to navigate societal constraints (*Phormio*)

Humor for social commentary

- Humor exposes the absurdity and hypocrisy of social norms and expectations, with characters who strictly adhere to social conventions often portrayed as ridiculous or foolish (Thraso in *The Eunuch*)
- The clever schemes of lower-class characters (Davus in *The Andria*) often outwit the rigid expectations of upper-class characters, highlighting their intelligence and adaptability
- Irony highlights contradictions and double standards within Roman society, with characters often saying one thing but doing another (Demipho in *Phormio*), exposing their true nature
- The outcomes of the plays often subvert traditional expectations (recognition scenes), challenging societal norms and suggesting the possibility of change and progress
- Stock characters (*adulescens*, *servus callidus*) and situations allow Terence to critique social issues without directly confronting them, encouraging the audience to recognize parallels to their own lives
- The resolution of the plays often suggests the possibility of social change and progress, with love and understanding triumphing over strict adherence to societal expectations (*The Brothers*)

11.3 Terence's influence on later European drama

Terence's plays sparked a Renaissance revival of classical literature, inspiring playwrights across Europe. His themes of love, family dynamics, and social class resonated with audiences, while his complex plots and witty dialogue became hallmarks of comic theater.

Terence's influence extended beyond the Renaissance. His realistic characters and refined plot structures shaped the development of comedy for centuries. From *commedia dell'arte* to Restoration comedies, Terence's legacy lives on in Western theater.

Terence's Influence on European Drama

Impact of Terentian plays

- Renaissance revival of Terentian plays sparked renewed interest in classical literature and drama
- Rediscovery and translation of Terence's works in the 15th and 16th centuries reignited passion for ancient texts
- Renewed fascination with classical themes, characters, and dramatic techniques inspired new generations of playwrights
- Inspiration for Renaissance playwrights across Europe
- Italian playwrights drew heavily from Terentian plays (Ludovico Ariosto, Niccolò Machiavelli)
- English playwrights adapted Terentian elements into their own works (William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson)
- Influenced the development of commedia dell'arte, a popular form of improvisational theater
- Stock characters (clever servant, young lover) and plot structures derived from Terentian plays became staples
- Terentian archetypes provided a foundation for the exaggerated, masked characters of commedia dell'arte
- Adaptation of Terentian plays continued into the Restoration period in England
- English playwrights reworked Terentian themes and structures for contemporary audiences (William Wycherley, William Congreve)
- Restoration comedies often featured Terentian elements of wit, intrigue, and social commentary

Terentian themes vs later playwrights

- Terentian themes resonated with later playwrights and audiences
- Love and relationships explored the complexities of romance and marriage (The Brothers, The Eunuch)
- Family dynamics and generational conflicts highlighted tensions between parents and children (The Mother-in-Law, The Self-Tormentor)
- Social class and status examined the impact of wealth and position on characters' lives (The Eunuch, Phormio)
- Terentian techniques adopted and adapted by later playwrights
- Complex plot structures with multiple storylines created engaging, layered narratives
- Witty dialogue and repartee showcased characters' intelligence and humor
- Realistic characterization and psychological depth made characters relatable and believable
- Differences in style and tone emerged as playwrights adapted Terentian elements
- Contemporary social and cultural contexts shaped the presentation of themes and characters

- Local customs, language, and humor were integrated to appeal to specific audiences (Commedia dell'arte, Restoration comedy)

Reception of Terence's works

- Medieval period saw Terence's plays used as models for Latin language instruction
- Terentian works were studied for their linguistic and rhetorical qualities
- Christian scholars applied allegorical interpretations to Terentian plays, finding moral lessons and religious symbolism
- Renaissance humanism celebrated Terence as a model of classical style and eloquence
- Scholars produced detailed commentaries and editions of Terentian plays (Donatus, Servius)
- Terence's works were upheld as exemplars of Latin grammar, style, and wit
- Enlightenment and Neoclassical period viewed Terence as an exemplar of rational and moral comedy
- Terentian plays were praised for their balanced structure, clear moral messages, and refined humor
- Playwrights adapted Terentian plays to address contemporary social and political issues (Molière, Richard Steele)

Terence's contributions to playwriting

- Influenced the development of realistic characterization in drama
- Psychological depth and complexity of characters set Terence apart from his predecessors
- Portrayal of relatable human emotions and motivations made characters accessible to audiences
- Refined plot structure and dramatic techniques that became standard in comedy
- Balanced multiple storylines and subplots to create engaging, dynamic narratives
- Employed dramatic irony and suspense to keep audiences invested in the action
- Established stock characters and situations that became staples of comic theater
- The clever slave (servus callidus) who outwits his master and drives the plot (Pseudolus, Chrysalus)
- The young lover who faces obstacles in pursuit of his beloved (Pamphilus, Chaerea)
- The stern father figure who opposes the young lover's desires (Demea, Simo)
- Left an enduring legacy in the Western theatrical tradition
- Continued adaptation and reinterpretation of Terentian plays across centuries and cultures
- Enduring influence on the development of comedy and drama, from the Renaissance to the modern era

Unit 12 – Greek vs. Roman Comedy: A Comparison

12.1 Similarities and differences between Greek and Roman comic traditions

Greek and Roman comedies share common elements like stock characters and plot devices. The clever slave, young lover, and blocking character create hilarious situations through mistaken identities and trickery. These plays often end happily with lovers united.

Despite similarities, Greek and Roman comedies have distinct features. Greek comedy evolved from political Old Comedy to domestic New Comedy. Roman playwrights adapted Greek New Comedy, adding their own flair with wordplay and social commentary on Roman life.

Common Elements and Distinct Features

Elements of Greek and Roman comedy

- Stock characters appear in both Greek and Roman comedies
- The clever slave (*servus callidus*) aids the young lover in outwitting the blocking character (*Pseudolus* in Plautus' play of the same name, *Palaestrio in Miles Gloriosus*)
- The young lover (*adulescens amans*) is often in love with a courtesan or slave girl and relies on the clever slave to help him achieve his goals
- The blocking character (*senex iratus*) opposes the young lover's desires and is often the father of the young lover or the owner of the desired woman
- The courtesan (*meretrix*) serves as the love interest of the young lover and can be either a hindrance or an aid to the lover's goals
- Plot devices create comedic situations in both Greek and Roman plays
- Mistaken identities and disguises create confusion and comedic situations (*Menaechmi* in Plautus' play of the same name, *Casina* in the eponymous play)
- Trickery and deception are often employed by the clever slave to help the young lover (*Phormio* in Terence's play of the same name, *Tranio* in Plautus' *Mostellaria*)
- Happy endings resolve conflicts and unite lovers, often involving a recognition scene (*anagnorisis*) where true identities are revealed

Distinctions in Greek vs Roman comedies

- Greek comedy evolved from Old Comedy (5th century BCE) to New Comedy (4th century BCE)
- Old Comedy was more political and satirical in nature, with the chorus playing a significant role (Aristophanes' plays like *Lysistrata*, *The Clouds*)
- New Comedy focused on domestic situations and stock characters, with a reduced role of the chorus (Menander's plays like *Dyskolos*, *Samia*)

- Roman comedy (3rd-2nd century BCE) adapted from Greek New Comedy
- Plautus known for his wordplay, puns, and slapstick humor
- Terence known for his refined language and character development
- Roman comedies addressed social and cultural issues specific to Roman society
- Reflections on the Roman family structure
- Commentary on the role of slaves in Roman society

Humor, Satire, and Influence

Humor and satire in classical comedies

- Humor varies between Greek Old Comedy, Greek New Comedy, and Roman Comedy
- Greek Old Comedy features crude, sexual, and scatological humor
- Greek New Comedy and Roman Comedy employ more refined, situational humor based on stock characters and plot devices
- Satire and social commentary differ in their presentation
- Greek Old Comedy includes overt political satire and criticism of public figures and institutions (Aristophanes' criticism of the Athenian legal system in *The Wasps*)
- Greek New Comedy and Roman Comedy offer more subtle social commentary on domestic life and relationships (Terence's exploration of family dynamics in *Adelphoe*)
- Metatheatrical devices break the fourth wall and comment on the play's structure and conventions
- Characters address the audience directly and comment on their roles (Pseudolus in Plautus' play of the same name, commenting on his role as the clever slave)

Greek influence on Roman comedy

- Roman comedies heavily inspired by Greek New Comedy, with Plautus and Terence adapting plots, characters, and themes from Greek plays
- Plautus' *Aulularia* based on a lost play by Menander
- Terence's *Adelphoe* adapted from Menander's *Adelphoi*
- Roman playwrights added distinctly Roman elements to their adaptations
- References to Roman culture, society, and politics
- Inclusion of Roman customs and religious practices (Plautus' incorporation of Roman legal terminology in *Aulularia*)
- Greek comedy's influence extends to later comic traditions
- Stock characters and plot devices became staples of comic theater
- Influence on Renaissance and modern comedy (Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* inspired by Plautus' *Menaechmi*)

12.2 Evolution of comic themes from Old Comedy to Roman Comedy

Comic themes evolved dramatically from Greek to Roman times. Old Greek comedies mocked politicians and society, while New Greek comedy focused on everyday life. Roman comedy adapted Greek plots but added local flavor, emphasizing relatable characters and domestic issues.

Protagonists changed too. Old Greek comedies had larger-than-life heroes, while New Greek and Roman comedies featured everyday people. The chorus's role diminished over time, reflecting changing audience tastes and societal shifts away from political satire towards universal themes.

Evolution of Comic Themes from Greek to Roman Comedy

Themes in Greek vs Roman comedy

- Greek Old Comedy (5th century BCE) satirized political figures and social institutions through plays like Aristophanes' "The Knights" which mocked prominent Athenian politician Cleon and "The Clouds" which criticized the philosopher Socrates and intellectual trends of the time
- Greek New Comedy (4th century BCE) shifted focus to domestic themes, everyday life situations, and character relationships as seen in Menander's plays "The Grouch" about a misanthropic old man and his family dynamics and "The Arbitration" which explored a conflict between a father and son
- Roman Comedy (3rd-2nd century BCE) adapted plots and characters from Greek New Comedy but emphasized Roman cultural elements, names, and references in plays like Plautus' "The Pot of Gold" about a miser who finds a pot of money and Terence's "The Mother-in-Law" which dealt with family conflicts and marriage issues

Protagonists in classical comedies

- Greek Old Comedy protagonists embodied larger-than-life, heroic figures who represented political or intellectual ideals such as Dionysus, the god of wine and theater, in Aristophanes' "The Frogs" and Strepsiades, a rustic farmer, in "The Clouds"
- Greek New Comedy protagonists were more relatable, everyday characters focused on personal relationships and domestic issues like Knemon, a misanthropic old man, in Menander's "The Grouch" and Charisios, a young husband, in "The Arbitration"
- Roman Comedy protagonists, adapted from Greek New Comedy models, emphasized relatable characters facing common challenges such as Euclio, a poor old man who finds a pot of gold, in Plautus' "The Pot of Gold" and Pamphilus, a young man caught between his wife and mistress, in Terence's "The Mother-in-Law"

Evolution of chorus role

- Greek Old Comedy featured a chorus that played a significant role in the play's action and commentary, often representing the voice of the community or specific groups and engaging in direct dialogue with characters and the audience
- Greek New Comedy diminished the chorus' role, using it primarily for musical interludes between acts and to provide background information rather than as an integral part of the plot and themes
- Roman Comedy virtually eliminated the chorus, replacing it with musical interludes, and focused more on dialogue and character interactions to reflect changing audience tastes and expectations

Societal influence on comic conventions

- Political and social shifts like the decline of Athenian democracy and rise of Macedonian and Roman power influenced the move away from political satire to domestic themes and everyday stories that reflected changing social norms and values
- Audience preferences gravitated towards relatable characters, escapist entertainment, and universal themes with emotional resonance rather than political critique and satire
- Theatrical conventions adapted Greek plays to suit Roman tastes by incorporating Roman cultural elements and emphasizing fast-paced action, witty dialogue, and physical humor

12.3 Comparative study of theatrical conventions and staging

Ancient Greek and Roman comedy used different staging techniques to bring laughter to audiences. Greek plays were performed in outdoor theaters with circular orchestras, while Roman comedies took place in dedicated buildings with raised stages and elaborate backdrops.

Costumes and masks played crucial roles in both traditions. Greek actors wore exaggerated masks and padded costumes, often sporting comical phalluses. Roman productions used more naturalistic masks and everyday clothing to indicate character types and social status.

Physical Layout and Staging

Greek vs Roman comic staging

- Greek comic performances held in outdoor theaters called "theatrons"
- Semicircular seating area (koilon) built into a hillside provided tiered seating for the audience
- Circular orchestra (orchēstra) served as the main performance space for the chorus and actors
- Raised stage (proskenion) located behind the orchestra used for entrances, exits, and scene changes
- Simple stage buildings (skene) provided a backdrop and space for costume changes
- Performances took place during religious festivals dedicated to Dionysus (City Dionysia, Lenaia)
- Roman comic performances held in dedicated theater buildings, often attached to temples
- Semicircular seating area (cavea) divided into sections by aisles allowed for social stratification
- Semicircular orchestra area used for seating important spectators (senators, VIPs)
- Raised stage (pulpitum) deeper than Greek stages accommodated more elaborate sets and action
- Elaborate stage buildings (scaenae frons) featured multiple levels and decorative elements (columns, statues)
- Performances held during religious festivals (Ludi Megalenses, Ludi Romani) and public events

Costumes, Masks, and Props

Masks and props in ancient comedy

- Greek comic productions relied on distinctive masks to portray stock characters

- Exaggerated facial features and expressions conveyed emotions and character types (old man, young lover)
- Masks allowed actors to play multiple roles and switch genders within a single play
- Costumes indicated character types and social status through padding and exaggeration
- Padded costumes created comedic effect and exaggerated body types (fat belly, large buttocks)
- Phallus often worn by male characters added bawdy humor and sexual innuendo
- Simple props enhanced comedic situations and physical humor (slapsticks, food items)
- Roman comic productions used less exaggerated, more naturalistic masks compared to Greek masks
- Masks conveyed age, social status, and character traits without extreme distortion
- Gender switching less common in Roman comedy, but masks still allowed actors to play multiple roles
- Costumes resembled everyday Roman clothing, indicating character types and status
- Wealthy characters wore colorful, elaborately decorated costumes (embroidery, jewelry)
- Poor or slave characters donned drab, simple costumes reflecting their lower status
- Props drove the plot forward and created comedic effects (letters, disguises)

Acting Styles and Delivery

Acting styles in Greek and Roman comedy

- Greek comic acting featured highly stylized and exaggerated movements, gestures, and vocal delivery
- Emphasized physical comedy and slapstick humor to engage the audience
- Acrobatic feats and dancing showcased actors' skills and agility
- Choral passages delivered in unison, with synchronized movements and gestures
- Actors frequently broke the fourth wall by directly addressing the audience
- Roman comic acting more naturalistic and restrained compared to Greek acting
- Focused on witty dialogue, puns, and verbal humor over physical comedy
- Physical comedy still present but less acrobatic and exaggerated than in Greek plays
- Actors delivered lines in a conversational style, with fewer asides to the audience
- Soliloquies and asides revealed characters' thoughts and motivations to the audience

Music, Dance, and Spectacle

Music and spectacle in comic performances

- Greek comic performances incorporated music provided by a small ensemble of wind and string instruments
- Music accompanied choral passages, songs, and dances to set the tone and highlight emotions
- Dance was an integral part of the performance, with the chorus performing synchronized movements

- Actors incorporated dance into their physical comedy and character portrayals
- Spectacle created through the use of masks, costumes, and stage machinery
- Ekkyklema used to reveal interior scenes or tableaux for comedic effect
- Mechane used for divine appearances or supernatural effects in the play
- Roman comic performances featured less prominent music compared to Greek performances
- Music accompanied songs and dances but with fewer choral passages
- Used to set the mood and highlight important moments in the play
- Dance incorporated into the action but less central to the performance than in Greek comedy
- Specialized dancers (mimi) performed during interludes or after the play
- Spectacle created through elaborate stage sets, costumes, and special effects
- Painted backdrops and movable scenery used to create different locations
- Trap doors, pulleys, and other stage machinery used for comedic effects and surprises

Influence on Play Structure and Pacing

Theatrical conventions in ancient plays

- Greek comic plays typically divided into distinct sections 1. Prologue: Introduced the characters and plot to the audience 2. Parodos: Entrance song of the chorus, setting the tone for the play 3. Episodes: Alternated between dialogue scenes and choral passages 4. Stasimon: Choral odes commenting on the action and providing reflection 5. Exodos: Concluding scene and exit of the chorus, wrapping up the story
- Pacing influenced by the alternation between dialogue and choral passages
- Choral passages provided breaks in the action and opportunities for reflection
- Rapid-fire dialogue and physical comedy maintained a fast-paced, energetic tone
- Roman comic plays adapted the Greek structure but with some modifications
- Prologue: Introduced the characters and plot, often with direct audience address
- Dialogue scenes: Focused on character interactions and plot development
- Cantica: Solo songs or musical passages performed by actors to showcase talent
- Chorus: Reduced role compared to Greek plays, often absent altogether
- Pacing more continuous and fast-paced compared to Greek plays
- Fewer breaks in the action due to reduced choral presence
- Emphasis on witty dialogue and verbal humor maintained a lively tempo
- Short, punchy scenes and frequent entrances and exits kept the action moving

Unit 13 – Classical Comedy's Impact on Europe

13.1 Influence of Greek and Roman comedy on Renaissance theater

Greek and Roman comedy left a lasting mark on Renaissance theater. Plautus and Terence's works, with their stock characters and farcical situations, inspired the *commedia dell'arte* in 16th-century Italy. This improvisational form spread across Europe, influencing future comedic styles.

Shakespeare and Molière drew heavily from classical comedy. They adapted stock characters and plot devices, blending them with their own innovations. This fusion of ancient and contemporary elements created a new comedic style that both entertained and provided social commentary.

Influence of Greek and Roman Comedy on Renaissance Theater

Plautus and Terence's influence on *commedia dell'arte*

- Plautus and Terence adapted Greek New Comedy featuring stock characters (clever servant, young lovers), mistaken identities, and farcical situations
- *Commedia dell'arte* emerged in 16th-century Italy as improvisational theater performed by professional actors on temporary outdoor stages based on sketches or scenarios
- Adopted elements from Plautine and Terentian comedy including stock characters, masks exaggerating facial features to convey character types, physical comedy, acrobatics, and improvisation
- Plots revolved around themes similar to Roman comedy such as conflicts between generations, social classes, genders and trickery, deception, disguise to achieve goals
- Traveling *commedia dell'arte* troupes spread the influence of Roman comedy throughout Europe

Renaissance adaptations of classical comedy

- Shakespeare and Molière heavily influenced by works of Plautus and Terence
- Shakespeare's early comedies drew from Plautine models
- The Comedy of Errors based on Plautus' *Menaechmi* and *Amphitruo* featuring mistaken identities and farcical situations
- The Taming of the Shrew incorporates elements of Plautus' *Casina* with plot centered around "taming" a shrewish woman
- Molière's plays adapted stock characters and situations of Roman comedy to satirize 17th-century French society
- *Tartuffe* features religious hypocrite attempting to deceive gullible old man echoing themes from Plautus and Terence
- The Miser draws inspiration from Plautus' *Aulularia* centering on miserly old man and his buried treasure
- Blended farcical elements of Roman comedy with more sophisticated characterization and social commentary showcasing their own unique innovations

Classical elements in Renaissance plays

- Incorporated stock characters from Greek and Roman comedy
- Clever servant (servus callidus) who helps young lover (Tranio in *The Taming of the Shrew*)
- Braggart soldier (miles gloriosus) adapted as Parolles in *All's Well That Ends Well*
- Foolish old man (senex amator) easily deceived (Orgon in *Tartuffe*)
- Adapted common plot devices from classical comedy
- Mistaken identity and disguise (*Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It*)
- "Blocking figure" opposing young lovers, often parent or guardian (*The School for Wives*)
- Recognition scene (anagnorisis) where true identities revealed (final act of *The Comedy of Errors*)
- Explored similar themes as Greek and Roman plays
- Triumph of wit and cleverness over authority and social hierarchy
- Power of love to overcome obstacles and bring happy resolution
- Exposure of hypocrisy, greed, human foibles through satirical portrayal

Humanism's role in comedy revival

- Humanism emphasized study of classical texts and ideas to revive cultural and literary achievements of ancient Greece and Rome for moral guidance and inspiration
- Rediscovery of Plautus' and Terence's plays by humanist scholars sparked renewed interest in classical comedy
- Edited, translated, published works of Roman playwrights making them more accessible
- Praised wit, elegance, moral insights of classical comedy as model for contemporary writers
- Humanist education exposed Renaissance playwrights to classical comedic works through study of Latin and Greek
- Shakespeare and Molière likely encountered plays of Plautus and Terence as part of schooling informing their own comedic writing and adaptation of ancient conventions
- Humanist emphasis on value of classical learning created receptive environment for revival of Roman comedic traditions
- Renaissance audiences, particularly those with humanist educations, appreciated references to classical works and themes
- Adaptation of classical comedy allowed playwrights to showcase own erudition while entertaining and edifying audiences

13.2 Adaptations and reinterpretations in later European drama

Classical comedy has left an indelible mark on playwrights throughout history. From Carlo Goldoni's reform of Italian comedy to Pierre Beaumarchais' witty servants in 18th-century France, these writers drew inspiration from ancient traditions.

Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw adapted classical elements for Victorian audiences, while Bertolt Brecht and Luigi Pirandello subverted conventions. The enduring appeal of universal themes, adaptable characters, and satirical commentary ensures classical comedy's ongoing influence on theater.

Influence of classical comedy on playwrights

Influence of classical comedy on playwrights

- Carlo Goldoni, Venetian playwright reformed Italian comedy by moving away from improvisational *commedia dell'arte* style and incorporating elements of classical comedy like stock characters (clever servant, young lovers) and situational humor in plays like "The Servant of Two Masters" and "The Mistress of the Inn" showcasing his blend of classical and contemporary comedic elements
- Pierre Beaumarchais, French playwright best known for Figaro trilogy, adapted the witty servant stock character from classical comedy to fit the social context of 18th-century France in plays like "The Barber of Seville" and "The Marriage of Figaro" featuring clever servants and satirical social commentary reminiscent of classical comedies

Classical elements in Wilde and Shaw

- Oscar Wilde, Irish playwright known for witty, satirical comedies, used classical comedic elements like mistaken identities, wordplay, and social satire in plays like "The Importance of Being Earnest" and "Lady Windermere's Fan" while updating stock characters (dandy, ingénue) for Victorian society
- George Bernard Shaw, Irish playwright and social critic, adapted classical comedic device of role reversal in plays like "Pygmalion" and "Arms and the Man" to highlight social inequalities, challenge conventions, and critique social norms and expectations through humor

Subversion of comedic conventions

- Bertolt Brecht, German playwright and theorist, subverted classical comedic conventions in epic theater plays like "The Threepenny Opera" and "The Good Person of Szechwan" by breaking the fourth wall and incorporating social and political commentary to alienate the audience and encourage critical thinking
- Luigi Pirandello, Italian playwright and novelist, reinterpreted classical comedic device of mistaken identity in plays like "Six Characters in Search of an Author" and "Henry IV" to explore themes of personal identity and the nature of reality while blurring lines between reality and illusion and challenging traditional theatrical conventions

Enduring appeal of classical comedy

- Universal themes in classical comedies like love, power, and social hierarchies remain relevant across time periods and cultures allowing for successful adaptations
- Adaptable stock characters (clever servant, young lovers, braggart soldier) can be updated to reflect contemporary issues and concerns while maintaining essential comedic functions
- Satirical social commentary using humor to critique social norms and institutions remains effective in different cultural contexts as playwrights adapt specific targets of satire to address relevant issues in their own societies
- Flexibility of comedic devices like mistaken identity, role reversal, and wordplay can be adapted to suit different styles and genres of theater, allowing playwrights to incorporate these devices while experimenting with new forms and techniques ensuring continued evolution and relevance of classical

13.3 The impact of classical comedy on modern theatrical forms

Classical comedy's influence on modern theater is profound and far-reaching. From musical theater to sitcoms, ancient Greek and Roman comedic elements continue to shape contemporary entertainment, influencing character archetypes, plot structures, and comedic techniques.

The legacy of classical comedy extends to contemporary playwrights and performers. Stock characters, satirical themes, and physical humor from ancient works persist in modern comedy, demonstrating the enduring appeal and relevance of these timeless comedic traditions.

The Impact of Classical Comedy on Modern Theater

Classical comedy in musical theater

- Classical comedy's use of song and dance influenced the development of musical theater
- Greek comedies often included choral odes and musical interludes (Aristophanes' "The Frogs")
- Roman comedies featured cantica, songs sung by the actors (Plautus' "Pseudolus")
- Stock characters from classical comedy appear in musical theater
- The clever servant or witty slave character evolved into the wise-cracking sidekick (Pseudolus in "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum")
- The braggart soldier archetype can be seen in bombastic, self-important characters (Miles Gloriosus in "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum")
- The use of mistaken identities and disguises in classical comedy is a common trope in musical theater plots ("The Boys from Syracuse" based on Plautus' "Menaechmi")
- The happy endings and resolution of conflicts in classical comedies are mirrored in the typically upbeat conclusions of musical theater productions

Classical techniques in modern comedy

- The use of stereotypical characters in classical comedy is reflected in sitcom character archetypes
- The domineering wife and henpecked husband dynamic has roots in Greek and Roman comedy ("The Honeymooners", "Married... with Children")
- The foolish old man outwitted by younger, cleverer characters is a recurring sitcom trope ("Everybody Loves Raymond", "Modern Family")
- The fast-paced, witty dialogue of classical comedy is a hallmark of many contemporary sitcoms ("Frasier", "The Golden Girls")
- The use of physical humor and slapstick in classical comedy is often employed in sketch comedy ("Saturday Night Live", "Monty Python's Flying Circus")
- The direct address to the audience, common in classical comedy, is used in sitcoms to break the fourth wall ("Fleabag", "Modern Family")

Classical influences on contemporary playwrights

- Tom Stoppard's plays often draw on classical themes and techniques
- "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead" is based on minor characters from Shakespeare's "Hamlet," a play influenced by Roman comedy
- Stoppard's use of wordplay, puns, and intellectual humor echoes the wit of classical comedy
- Christopher Durang's works frequently parody and subvert classical comedic conventions
- "The Marriage of Bette and Boo" employs exaggerated, stereotypical characters reminiscent of stock figures in classical comedy
- Durang's absurdist humor and satirical tone have roots in the irreverent spirit of Greek and Roman comedy ("Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike")

Legacy of Greek and Roman comedy

- The basic structure of comedic plots, involving conflict, resolution, and happy endings, has endured since classical times
- Stock characters established in classical comedy continue to be used and adapted in various forms of modern comic entertainment
- The clever servant (Jeeves in P.G. Wodehouse's novels), braggart soldier (Zapp Brannigan in "Futurama"), and young lovers are archetypal figures still prevalent in comedy
- The use of satire and social commentary in classical comedy has influenced generations of comedic writers and performers
- Greek Old Comedy, exemplified by Aristophanes, often critiqued contemporary politics and society ("Lysistrata")
- Roman comedy, such as the works of Plautus and Terence, satirized social norms and class distinctions ("The Brothers")
- The tradition of physical humor and slapstick in classical comedy has had a lasting impact on comic performance styles
- The use of masks, exaggerated gestures, and pratfalls in Greek and Roman comedy has influenced physical comedy from commedia dell'arte to modern clowning (Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton)

Unit 14 – Ancient Comedy: Modern Relevance & Interpretations

14.1 Modern productions and adaptations of Greek and Roman comedies

Classical comedies are getting a modern makeover. Directors are updating ancient plays with contemporary settings, characters, and language to make them more relatable to today's audiences. These adaptations aim to preserve the core themes while adding fresh twists.

Modernizing classical comedies is a delicate balance. While updating elements like costumes and humor, adaptations must retain the essence of the original work. The success of these productions depends on how well they engage contemporary viewers while honoring the timeless themes.

Modern Adaptations of Classical Comedies

Adaptation of classical comedies

- Update setting and context to modern era or location to make the story more relatable to contemporary audiences
- Adapt characters and their roles to align with current social structures and norms
- Modify plot elements to resonate with present-day cultural issues and sensibilities
- Modernize language by translating ancient Greek or Latin into contemporary vernacular, incorporating slang, idioms, and references familiar to modern audiences
- Adjust humor and wordplay to suit current comedic tastes and styles
- Enhance visual and auditory elements through the use of modern stagecraft, lighting, sound design, multimedia, or digital effects
- Adapt costumes and props to reflect contemporary aesthetics and fashion

Elements of classical comedy

- Retain core themes and motifs that explore universal human experiences such as love, conflict, and social commentary to preserve the essence of the original play's message or moral
- Modify character archetypes by updating stock characters to align with modern stereotypes or social roles, adjusting relationships and dynamics, and developing backstories or motivations to enhance relatability
- Adapt plot structure and narrative devices by streamlining or condensing the original plot, rearranging scenes or altering the sequence of events for dramatic effect, and introducing new subplots or eliminating extraneous elements to focus on central themes

Effectiveness of modern productions

- Assess the balance between faithfulness to the original work and innovative modernization to evaluate how well the adaptation captures the essence and intended message of the classical play

- Consider the impact of updated elements in engaging contemporary audiences and conveying the spirit and themes of the original work
- Examine audience reception and critical response by gauging emotional impact, reviewing professional critiques and feedback, and comparing the reception of the modern production to that of the original play, if known

Comparative Analysis of Modern Adaptations

Comparison of modern interpretations

- Compare and contrast directorial vision and artistic choices in different adaptations of the same ancient comedy, analyzing how directors approach the source material, emphasize various aspects, and employ distinct styles or conceptual frameworks
- Examine how different adaptations reflect and address the social, political, or cultural climate of their time, incorporating contemporary issues and perspectives that influence the interpretation of the original work
- Evaluate the target audiences, intended impact, critical reviews, and audience reactions of various adaptations to assess their effectiveness in engaging viewers and leaving a lasting legacy on the perception of the classical play

14.2 Relevance of ancient comic themes to contemporary society

Ancient Greek and Roman comedies tackle timeless themes like love, social hierarchy, and human flaws. These plays expose greed, mock authority figures, and celebrate wit over brute force. Their universal appeal stems from relatable characters and situations that still resonate today.

Modern adaptations of classical comedies address contemporary issues like political corruption, gender inequality, and economic disparities. By updating ancient themes and characters, these works continue to provide social commentary and critique, proving the enduring relevance of comedic storytelling across millennia.

Universal Themes and Contemporary Relevance

Universal themes in ancient comedies

- Love and relationships
- Depict romantic pursuits and the obstacles lovers face (misunderstandings, deception)
- Explore familial relationships and the conflicts that arise within them (parent-child, sibling rivalries)
- Social and class hierarchy
- Highlight struggles between the wealthy and the poor (income inequality, access to resources)
- Critique societal norms and expectations (marriage customs, gender roles)
- Satirize the ruling class and authority figures (politicians, religious leaders)
- Human flaws and foibles
- Expose greed, vanity, and self-interest as common human weaknesses (miserly characters, narcissistic behavior)

- Reveal hypocrisy and moral failings (characters who preach virtue but act unethically)
- Celebrate the triumph of wit and cleverness over brute force (cunning servants outsmarting their masters)

Classical comedy in modern context

- Political corruption and abuse of power
- Satirize politicians and government officials who prioritize personal gain over public good
- Expose the influence of money in politics and how it undermines democratic processes
- Highlight the gap between the ruling class and the governed (elitism, lack of representation)
- Gender inequality and roles
- Challenge traditional gender norms and expectations (women in positions of power, men as caregivers)
- Portray strong, intelligent female characters who defy societal constraints
- Examine double standards applied to men and women (sexual behavior, professional opportunities)
- Economic disparities and social mobility
- Depict the struggles of the working class (low wages, poor working conditions)
- Criticize the excesses and extravagances of the wealthy (lavish lifestyles, conspicuous consumption)
- Explore the limitations and obstacles to upward mobility (lack of education, systemic barriers)

Characterization and Representation

Social dynamics in ancient vs modern comedy

- Gender roles and stereotypes
- Subvert traditional masculine and feminine ideals (assertive women, sensitive men)
- Present empowered female characters who challenge societal norms
- Examine the consequences of rigid gender expectations (repression, unhappiness)
- Class distinctions and social hierarchy
- Highlight disparities between upper and lower classes (access to resources, political influence)
- Satirize the pretensions and affectations of the wealthy (snobbery, superficiality)
- Portray the resourcefulness and resilience of the working class
- Power dynamics and relationships
- Explore the abuse of power by those in authority (tyrannical rulers, corrupt officials)
- Depict the struggles of the powerless against the powerful (slaves vs masters, citizens vs government)
- Examine the complexities of master-servant relationships (loyalty, resentment)

Enduring appeal of comic archetypes

- The clever servant or slave
- Provide wit, humor and commentary on social issues
- Act as a foil to the wealthy and powerful
- Embody the triumph of intelligence over status
- The young lovers
- Represent the universality of romantic pursuits and desires
- Overcome obstacles and societal expectations to be together
- Serve as a vehicle for exploring relationship dynamics
- The braggart soldier
- Satirize military culture and the glorification of war
- Expose the hollowness of bravado and machismo
- Provide comic relief through exaggerated boasts and cowardice
- The miserly old man
- Critique the hoarding of wealth and resources
- Explore themes of generational conflict and the transience of material possessions
- Serve as a foil to the younger generation's values and priorities

14.3 Critical approaches to studying and interpreting classical comedy

Ancient comedies offer a window into Greek and Roman societies, reflecting cultural norms and challenging them through humor. Feminist, Marxist, and psychoanalytic approaches provide new insights, revealing subversive elements and deeper meanings in these timeless works.

Interpreting classical comedies requires understanding their cultural, historical, and social contexts. Close reading and critical analysis allow us to develop nuanced interpretations, uncovering patterns and themes that shed light on ancient societies and their enduring relevance.

Critical Approaches to Classical Comedy

Critical lenses for ancient comedies

- Feminist criticism
 - Examines representation of gender roles and power dynamics in ancient comedies
 - Analyzes portrayal and treatment of female characters within patriarchal society (*Lysistrata*)
 - Considers subversive potential of comedic genres in challenging gender norms
- Marxist criticism
 - Focuses on representation of class struggles and economic disparities in classical comedies (*Plutus*)

- Examines how comedic genre reflects and critiques social hierarchies of ancient societies
- Explores subversive potential of comedy in exposing and challenging dominant ideology
- Psychoanalytic criticism
- Applies Freudian and other psychoanalytic theories to interpret unconscious desires and conflicts of characters
- Analyzes role of humor and laughter in releasing repressed emotions and desires (The Clouds)
- Examines how comedic genre reflects and shapes psychological experiences of audience

Strengths vs limitations of approaches

- Strengths
- Provide new perspectives and insights into meaning and significance of ancient comedies
- Allow for deeper understanding of social, cultural, and psychological contexts in which comedies were produced and received
- Help uncover subversive and transformative potential of comedic genre
- Limitations
- Can impose modern values and assumptions onto ancient texts, leading to anachronistic interpretations
- May overlook specific historical and cultural contexts in which comedies were created and performed (5th century BCE Athens)
- Overreliance on single critical lens can lead to reductive or one-dimensional interpretations of comedic works

Contextual Influences on Interpretation

Contexts in comedy interpretation

- Cultural context
- Consider religious, mythological, and philosophical beliefs of ancient Greek and Roman societies (Dionysian festivals)
- Examine how cultural values and norms shape themes, characters, and humor of classical comedies
- Historical context
- Investigate political, economic, and social conditions of time period in which comedies were written and performed (Peloponnesian War)
- Analyze how historical events and figures are referenced or satirized within comedic works
- Social context
- Explore social hierarchies, gender roles, and power dynamics of ancient Greek and Roman societies
- Examine how comedic genre reflects and subverts social norms and expectations of the time (role of slaves in comedies)

Arguments from close reading

- Close reading
 - Engage in detailed and attentive reading of comedic texts, paying attention to language, structure, and rhetorical devices
 - Identify patterns, themes, and motifs that emerge through careful analysis of text (recurring character types)
- Critical analysis
 - Synthesize insights from various critical approaches to develop nuanced and multifaceted interpretation of comedies
 - Support arguments with textual evidence and logical reasoning, while acknowledging alternative perspectives and interpretations
- Original arguments
 - Develop unique and innovative interpretations that contribute to ongoing scholarly discourse on classical comedy
 - Engage with existing scholarship while offering fresh insights and perspectives based on own critical analysis and close reading of texts (new readings of Aristophanes' plays)