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Translating Plautus today

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► **To cite this version:**

Clara Daniel. Translating Plautus today. Interdisciplinary Doctoral Day, Oct 2017, Marseille, France. 2017. <hal-03241870>

HAL Id: hal-03241870

<https://hal.science/hal-03241870v1>

Submitted on 29 May 2021

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Translating Plautus Today

How to Make an Ancient Comedy Funny Again?

Ph.D Thesis in Comparative Literature

In a few words

This work focuses on translating and staging an Ancient play by Plautus for a mainstream audience.

Ancient Drama is not old!

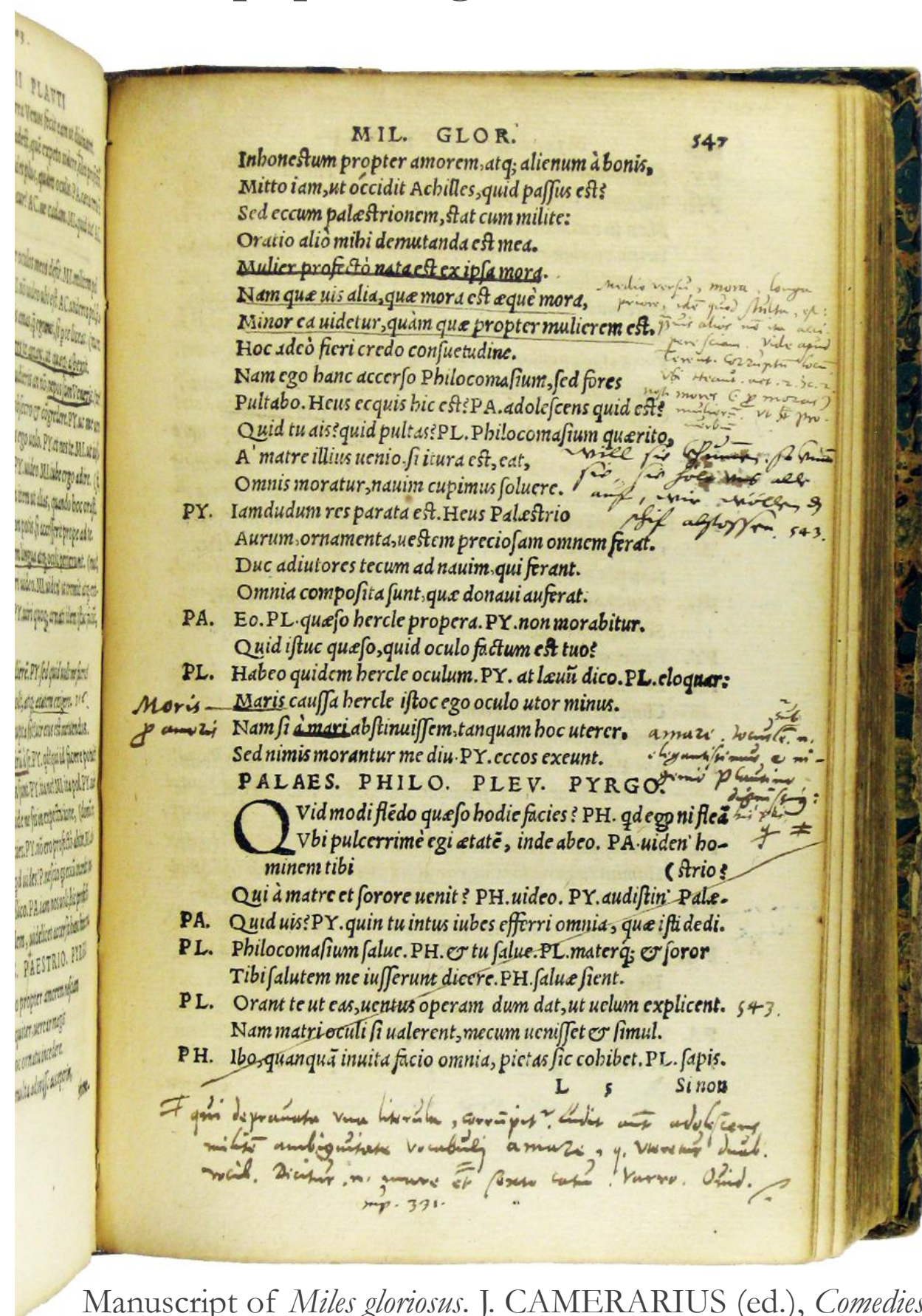
With its grotesque masks, weird choruses or obscure plots, Ancient Drama does not always seem mainstream. Apart from scholars, who still knows the Latin name Plautus? Yet, he was a very popular author of comedies in Antiquity and he has had a great posterity. His plays have inspired Molière, Shakespeare and even modern sitcoms owe him their narrative structures and dramatic motives. So if his work could still be funny and relevant today, why has he become so has-been? Because the translations of his texts are generally not accessible.

From page to stage

Due to its grammatical and literary value, Plautus' work is now reserved to linguistic studies in academic circles. Outside of university, he is scarcely ever staged. Translated by A. Ernout, the standard French version of his plays is hardly stageable: obscure references, outdated language, unfunny jokes for who is not a specialist of Ancient comedy. Plautus needs to be modernized to become popular again.

Based upon one play, entitled *Miles gloriosus*, this project focuses on adapting the original Latin text through a new translation for a modern stage. With a new title, *Le militaire Kislapet* (from the phonetic transcription of the slang phrase "se la péter"), this French adaptation focuses on three elements:

Orality: colloquial register
Cultural References: modern equivalents
Humour: adaptation of jokes



Manuscript of *Miles gloriosus*, J. CAMERARIUS (ed.), *Comedies*, Basel: Johannes Hervagen, Octavo 1552, USTC 674254.



Plautus onstage nowadays: *Menachmi*, directed by G. Paquette at Thorneloe University, 2011, photo by C. RODYA.

Antiquity VS Modernity: an impossible relationship?

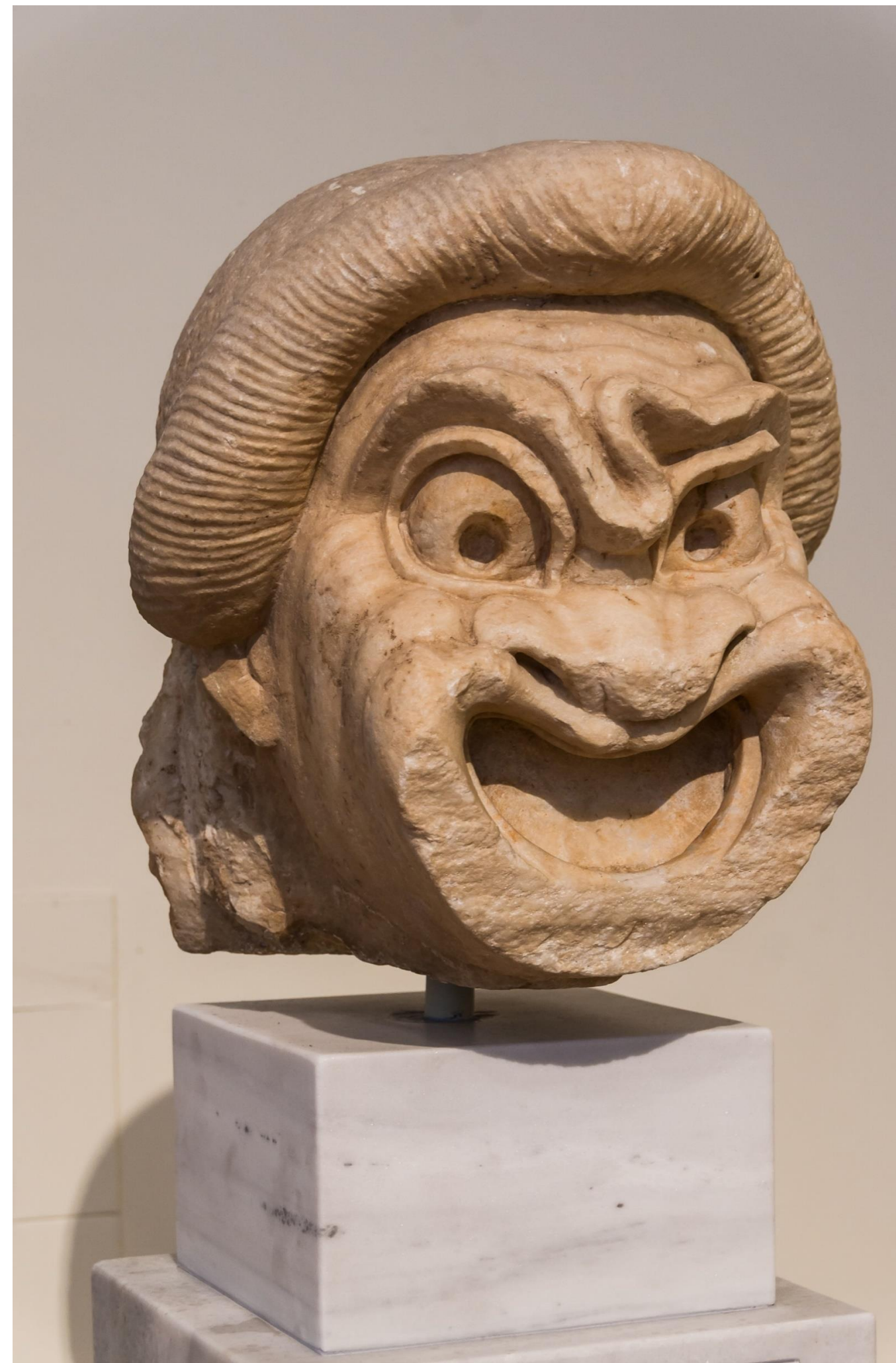
This project arises from the encounter of two opposite views: the Latinist and the Translator. How to offer a rigorous and scholarly approach while creating an entertaining and popular play is the main challenge of this two-part work :

Translation
Modern French adaptation of the full play *Miles gloriosus* written by Plautus

Dissertation
Literary comparison between the Latin text, this adaptation and previous translations

Funding

This project benefits from a full funding granted by Aix-Marseille University, thanks to a recent program (2008) established to support interdisciplinary theses (**contrat doctoral inter-ED**).



Ancient Theatre mask found near the Dipylon Gate in Athens. This could be the "ruler slave" or "first slave": a character of the New Comedy who inspired Plautus (2nd-century BCE).

PLAUTUS

c. 254 -184 B.C.

Very popular Latin playwright. He wrote and staged about 100 comedies, adapted from Greek models. He left us 20 whole and well preserved scripts, an incredible achievement for such an old author.

About the play

The *Miles gloriosus* (« braggart soldier ») takes place in Ephesus, Greece. A pompous soldier abducted a young Athenian girl who now lives secluded in his house. Her lover arrives from Athens to free her. With the help of a clever slave and a generous neighbour who invent some funny tricks, the soldier ends up humiliated onstage and the young couple is finally reunited.

With 1437 lines, it is Plautus' longest play.

Example of Modern Adaptation

PERIPLECOMENES

[...] « Da mihi, uir ; [...] quod dem quinquatribus praecantrici, coniectrici, hariolae atque haruspicae; flagitium'st, si nihil mittetur quo supercilio specit ! »
Plautus, *Miles gloriosus*, l.691-694

PERIPLECOMENE

« Mon cher mari, donne-moi [...] ; de quoi donner le jour des Quinquatries à la conjureuse de sorts, à l'interprète des songes, à la devineresse, à l'haruspice. Ce sera un scandale si l'on n'envoie rien à la voyante qui lit dans les sourcils. »
Translated by A. Ernout, *Le soldat fanfaron* (1956)

ROULEPATIN

« Mec, file-moi [...] de quoi donner pour Noël à la voyante, la psy, la coach et la prof de yoga. C'est la honte si je paye pas l'esthéticienne qui m'a fait les sourcils ! »
Modern adaptation, *Le militaire Kislapet* (2017)

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I am a Ph. D student of Aix-Marseille University and I work on an interdisciplinary subject (**Comparative Literature / Classics**). Under a co-supervision shared between **Sabine Luciani** (Latin Language and Literature) and **Francesca Manzari** (Translation Studies), I have the opportunity to work in association with two research teams: Centre interdisciplinaire d'étude des littératures d'Aix-Marseille, AMU, and Centre Paul Albert-Février, Textes et documents de la Méditerranée antique et médiévale, AMU, CNRS, UMR 7297.