

Bringing the Gods Onstage

Anthropomorphic Deities in Plautus' *Amphitruo* and Molière's *Amphitryon*

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The theme of the anthropomorphism is manifest in the plot of Plautus' *Amphitruo* and Molière's adaptation: Jupiter takes the human form of Amphitryon to enjoy sleeping with the mortal's wife and Mercury belittles Amphitryon's servant Sosia while taking his form and preventing him from returning home to discover the affair and notify his master. However, both Plautus' *Amphitruo* and Molière's *Amphitryon* expand profoundly on the theme of anthropomorphic gods, focusing not only upon the way in which the human form of the divine facilitates the plot of the plays, but also exploring what it means to depict the gods in human form, or conversely, to see humans as god-like, in the context of a dramatic performance. Plautus and Molière humanize the gods in ways which not only situate the divine characters in a plot which takes place, in an abstract sense, on the human plane, but which furthermore provide the illusion that the gods have been placed within the social and historical contexts of the actual performances of the plays. The Plautine figures of Jupiter and Mercury become the theatre-directors and comic actors of the Roman Republic, and Molière's *Amphitryon* presents us with god figures who act like French nobles, and a Jupiter whose omnipotence mirrors that of Louis XIV. Both of these plays, then, explore the Amphitryon myth's theme of anthropomorphic gods in ways which invite the audience to think about the effects of ascribing human characteristics to the gods, and god-like characteristics to humans, in their own social and historical environments.

In Plautus, the way in which Jupiter and Mercury are humanized in the comic play is reflected upon in a meta-theatrical mode, and the world of Plautus' play provides us with two interpretations of how Jupiter and Mercury are represented as human on stage. On the one hand, they are seen as depictions of the true noble gods that one might expect to find in a tragedy, concerned with the justice and the fate of humans, who take on a human form to enter into the Amphitryon story. They are also seen as actually being humans, concerned in their role as comedians with bringing the audience a hilarious farce, who put on the dress of gods and acquire god-like capabilities in the world of their own play. Thus, the presentation of these characters as high gods onstage is accompanied by the play's meta-

theatrical gestures which draw attention to the divine characters as actually being members of a low-class theatre-troupe.¹ As Erich Segal writes, “Plautus is, in almost every sense, the most “saturnalian” comic playwright of them all; he turns *everything* topsy-turvy. In one instance even the gods are *déclassés*: almighty Jove and Mercury stoop to become mere actors (152), a group ranked so low in everyday society that they were denied even the basic right of citizenship” (101). In Plautus’ play, the disparate entities of high gods and low comedic actors become one through the art of theatre itself. In this way, Plautus invites his Roman audience to reflect upon what it means to anthropomorphize the gods and puts the gods in the immediate social context of the Roman stage.

In Plautus, several elements of Mercury’s prologue invite the audience to think of Jupiter and Mercury both as gods who take on a human form and as humans who take up the form of gods. For example, when he first introduces Jupiter, Mercury states that he has been sent by his father to plead with the audience, and that he is aware of the fact that the audience of mortals fears him justly as a god and will comply. Thus, Jupiter is introduced in his capacity as a true god who is feared by mortals. However, Mercury then quickly follows with these lines (26-31):

etenim ille, cuius huc iussu uenio, Iuppiter
 non minus quam uostrum quiuis formidat malum:
 humana matre natus, humano patre,
 mirari non est aequom sibi si praetimet;
 atque ego quoque etiam, qui Iouis sum filius,
 contagione mei patris metuo malum.

The fact of the matter is, the Jove who sent me
 Fears a flogging as much as you or yours truly.
 Small wonder he’s afraid for his hide,
 Since his father’s no god, his mother’s no goddess!

And I'm also afraid for my back side –
 Through guilt by association with dear old dad.

After we have heard Mercury talk about Jupiter's ability to inspire the fear of mortals, Mercury tells us that the person we will see in the play is actually a human actor. Speaking of this passage, Timothy J. Moore adds that, "the fact that he gives orders to 'Mercury', the actor who delivers the prologue, suggests that he is the lead actor of the company performing the play, and the trouble (*malum*) that he fears is failure of the production" (111: 1998). The definition of *malum*, often meaning "punishment" or "injury" in Plautus (Andrews, Freund), is seen in this case as referring to a beating given on account of a failed performance. This notion of beating is clearly associated with the status of the comedic performers themselves as slaves, and the act of beating slaves for an inadequate performance is also referred to in the epilogue to Plautus' *Cistellaria* (782-785). Interestingly, this passage brings Jupiter down onto the stage and draws attention to his actual status as a human in the midst of putting on a comedy, concerned with the response of the audience. However, he has been thought of in terms of his ability to do the opposite, to be a god able to inspire the fear of those mortals sitting in the audience. The world of the play sets up this doubleness in Jupiter's presence in the play, where the anthropomorphic figure of Jupiter is not only seen as a god taking a human form, but a Roman comedian taking up a god form.

Mercury continues to expand on the theme of Jupiter's representation as a god in the play. Mercury, after several interruptions, finally reveals Jupiter's request to the audience: he would like to prevent any hired clappers from manipulating the audience's perception of the show. This once again calls attention to Jupiter's presence in the play as a human interpreting a character, concerned with any unfair judgment of the actual comedic performance. Mercury, in an even more farcical mode, once again spouts out a total contradiction to this idea which confounds the audience (87-93):

ne miremini:

ipse hanc acturust Iuppiter comoediam.
 quid? ammirati estis? quasi uero nouom
 nunc proferatur louem facere histrioniam;
 etiam, histriones anno quom in proscaenio hic
 louem inuocarunt, uenit, auxilio is fuit.

Now I don't want you wondering (stop it now!)
 Why Jove has taken a sudden interest in acting:
 Yes, he'll be appearing in person in this comedy.
 You're not surprised, are you?
 As if it were unusual for Jove to act in a play!
 Why, just last year he came onstage
 When the actors called him for help.

Now that we have envisioned Jupiter once again as a human actor, concerned about the audience's perception of the show, we are given another highly comic reverse image: we are told that this concern about hired clappers is actually due to the fact that the god Jupiter is practicing with human comedians, and concerned about the art of acting. The world of the play presents the audience with a Jupiter who is born of human parents and wants to please the audience, but also states that Jupiter, the real god, will be acting in the play. Two anthropomorphic elements that relate to the presentation of Jupiter within the play are put forward: the human actor representing Jupiter and the powerful Jupiter himself are farcically conflated into one figure in the play. In this way, the very act of what it means to present gods on the Roman comic stage, and the question of whether Plautus is really attributing human attributes to the divine or divine attributes to the human actor, becomes one of the important themes of Plautus' *Amphitruo*.

Mercury also presents contradictory images of himself as a real god, who has a superior relationship with the human audience, and as a human character in a play seeking a positive response from this audience. His opening sentence, the longest in Plautus' whole corpus (Christenson 134), presents the audience with a list of all of the things that mortals want Mercury to achieve for them, imbedded in an ongoing "ut" clause that emphasizes the mortal audience's dependence on Mercury. The tricola of "ut" clauses gives Mercury's statement emphatic length, and he tells the mortal audience that, as they wish to be provided with a prodigious list of benefits that Mercury offers, they should be quiet and listen to the play (1-16). In this sentence, he asserts a god-like dominance over the crowd and commands their attention, but his status as a god is oddly conflated with that of a human actor, since he appears on stage with the Plautine slave mask and outfit. Although first statement is a long, emphatic way of asking the audience to be quiet, given all of the things they want from the god Mercury, he follows with a humble request as a human actor pleading for the audience's attention. Mercury states, "pater huc me misit ad uos oratum meus" (20). He has been sent by Jupiter to plead with the audience, and Jupiter's request, as we have seen, is that the crowd institutes regulations against hired clappers. We have also already seen that when Mercury introduces Jupiter as actually being born of human parents and being susceptible to being beaten on account of a bad performance, he states that he in turn fears being beaten by his father (30-31).

Although Mercury clearly asserts his god-like power over other characters in many instances, his status as a slave character in comedies will be implied and referred to throughout the play. When Sosia engages in a typical comic lament about the difficulties of being a slave for a wealthy master, Mercury claims that *he* should be the one complaining, since Sosia was born a slave and Mercury was newly made into a slave by his father, in the same way that a real Roman *paterfamilias* might instantly sell someone into slavery (176-179). Sosia mentions how a slave ought to be in the same emotional state as his master (959-961), and Mercury states in a similar mode, "si quid patri uolup est, uoluptas ea mi

multo maxuma est" ("Whatever father fancies strikes my fancy too!" (994). When Jupiter is trying to sweet-talk Alcumena, Mercury tries to intervene as a *subparasitus*, interrupting Jupiter's attempts at reconciling himself with Alcumena with interjections about how much he loves her, and Jupiter threatens to whip him (515). Furthermore, Mercury states to the audience that, as he is disguised as a slave, it is up to him to act like a wickedly like a slave, and in this way takes up the role of the clever slave (*seruus callidus*) to ridicule the less clever Sosia (Faure-Ribreau 220). In these instances, we are given a hilariously conflated image of the god Mercury and a Plautine slave actor, adhering to all the stock images and behaviors of this comedic role to please the audience. These elements show that Mercury, like Jupiter, is presented within the play as having the powers of a real god, but is also seen as a low human actor playing a god and appealing to the audience as a stock comedic character. In this play's world of farce, we are presented with high gods who are also comedic actors belonging to the lowest rung of Roman society. Plautus' decision to draw attention, in a meta-theatrical mode, to the presence of low comic slaves in the play as lofty gods, is anthropomorphic not only in the sense of vaguely presenting the gods in human form, but anthropomorphizes the gods in a way that puts them in the same social world as the ancient Roman spectators, drawing attention to the way in which theatre allows the low human comedian to represent lofty deities.

This anthropomorphism, which blends together the low comic actors with the gods, is further manifested by the conflation of god-like and human motives which drive the characters of Jupiter and Mercury. Often, they are seen degrading the mortal characters with relish as if they were simply comic actors abusing the omnipotent power that the world of the play gives them, but at other times they defend their actions in the role of gods concerned with the well-being of mankind and the justness of their actions. In the prologue, Plautus establishes a connection between the gods of tragedy and their just, benevolent qualities when Mercury asks a rhetorical question to the audience, asking why he should talk about all of the great things Jupiter has done as many prologues to tragedies do (41).

Through this gesture, the traditional behavior of gods in tragedies is characterized as concerned with the just treatment of mortals. This just behavior of gods as they are typically presented on stage, in tragedies, is one feature of Jupiter and Mercury's motivation in the play, but they are also motivated by a drive to irreverently degrade the mortals and deceive them even though they have done nothing wrong, and in this way they can be identified as comedic actors taking up the costume and omnipotent power of the gods. These differing motivations prompt questions about the meaning of the play's anthropomorphism for the audience: are these just gods dragged into the world of a human comedy, or devious human comedians pretending to have the power of gods?

In his small prologue to act three, Jupiter reveals the degree to which his motivations arise both from his status as a god and as a human comedian. Jupiter claims that he is continuing to deceive Alcmena in the guise of Amphitryon because he doesn't want to give the comedy a premature ending for the audience. However, he follows with a remark that shows his concern as a god for the fate of the mortals in the play. He adds that he has also come for the sake of Alcmena; he wants to arrive in the nick of time and cause her to give birth to Amphitryon's son and Jupiter's son at one time to make it less painful. In this, and many other moments of Plautus' *Amphitruo*, the audience is confronted with the presence of characters who both want to keep the story going, in their capacity as human comedians, and want to cut the story short and deliver justice in their capacity as godly bringers of justice and equilibrium to the world.

After this mini-prologue, Jupiter tells Alcmena that he fabricated his story about having arrived home for the first time as a joke and for the sake of humor (916). Jupiter says, "si quid dictum est per iocum/non aequom est id te serio praeuertier" ("if something was said in jest/it makes no sense for you to take it seriously, (920-921)". Alcmena is offended by this, saying, "ego illum scio quam doluerit cordi meo" ("All I know is your joking broke my heart," (923). Here we see Jupiter drawing attention to his

status as a comic figure in his manipulation of Alcumena and furthermore stating that it is not proper to take his actions seriously. But Alcumena's response draws attention to the way in which this comic manipulation leads to a lack of equilibrium and justice, and betrays the degree to which Jupiter's role as a comedic actor often irreverently ignores what is beneficial to the mortal characters. If the comedic actors were to be given the chance to fully inhabit their godly omnipotence, instead of the gods inhabiting the comedic actors with their will to create equilibrium and justice, we would be presented with a play where the comedic actors do not cease to indulgently humiliate the mortal characters. Instead, Plautus's choice is to present these characters as having qualities of both noble gods and quite ignoble and low comedians. The doubled quality of these characters allows Plautus to weave much of this deliciously rampant comedic irreverence within the fabric of the play, and then to recede from it by choosing at other moments to see the gods not as embodied by base comedic actors, but to see the honorable divinities of a tragic play dragged onto the comic stage.

Florence Dupont mentions this meta-theatrical perception of the gods as comedic actors in her essay on the theme of duplication on the *Amphitruo*. She draws attention to this statement by Mercury (470-471):

erroris ambo ego illos et dementiae
 complebo atque Amphitruonis omnem familiam

I'll have the two of them and Amphitryon's entire household
 Perplexed to the point of utter insanity!

and another statement by Jupiter (980-981):

uolo delude illum dum hac usuraria
 uxore nunc mihi morigero

I want him fooled while I fool around with
My lovely wife on loan.

Dupont writes, “It is clear in these two passages that the exercise of divine power consists in *deludere*, ‘playing with’ mortals, in the different senses of the Latin word, ‘trick’ and ‘make fun of’, and in creating *ludi*, ‘shows’” (2001: 181). By calling attention to the way in which Jupiter and Mercury express their promises to entertain the audience by toying with the mortal characters in a future scene, Dupont reveals how Jupiter and Mercury can be seen as comedic actors in the midst of putting on a show who are also given divine agency. This facilitates what she calls “super-comedy”, where comedic actors are given a type of infinite power and license to humiliate the mortal characters. However, Dupont also writes: “All-powerful to make mortals mad, the gods are all-powerful too to make them sane again and restore their lost honor. But at that point they definitively abandon comedy, including their human disguise, and can at last address human beings in the manner of tragic deities” (2001: 181). The question of whether to attribute human qualities to the noble gods of tragedy or god-like qualities to ignoble human comedians, then, will dictate how the audience perceives the genre of the play. Thus, the anthropomorphic qualities of these Plautine gods bring them not only on an abstract human plane, but directly into the context of how their performance is perceived in ancient Rome.

What we can recover of the lost fragment in the climactic fourth act of the *Amphitruo* will show us how Plautus uses the conception of the comedic actors as gods to push this highly imaginative super-comedy to its limits, and then uses the opposite conception of gods dragged onto the comedic stage to recede from this total comic irreverence and give the play a morally satisfactory ending. Near the end of the play, Amphitryon tries to go back to his own house but is barred outside, and Mercury begins to zealously hurl insults at Amphitryon, telling the audience that he has decided to take up the role of a

drunken slave. At this point, the text on the palimpsest is indecipherable, but with fragments cited by grammarians, and through promises made by Jupiter and Mercury about the scene to come, we can reconstruct many of the most important elements of this gap. After Amphitryon is insulted by his own “slave” he is told that the real Amphitryon is busy making love with Alcumena inside, then Mercury drenches him with a bucket of water and when Jupiter makes his appearance, he drags Amphitryon around by his own neck.²

This scene is the culmination of the gods’ promises to deliver a comedy and drive the mortal characters mad in their capacity as human comedians, involving an exaggeratedly comic debasement of Amphitryon that makes us think of Jupiter and Mercury as comedic actors given unrestrained license to embarrass and ridicule. Amphitryon, the powerful master and grandiose *imperator* who expects to be heartily greeted and embraced by his Theban fellows, has water dumped on his head and is probably thoroughly beaten by someone who he believes to be his own slave. Amphitryon’s debasement by Jupiter is hilariously ironic when he is seen as a *triumphator* who has returned home after a long successful campaign, who would be traditionally decked out in an outfit to resemble Jupiter during the *ludi Romani*. Mary Beard describes the *triumphator* during the *ludi Romani* as “Dressed, more or less, in the costume of the cult image of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, his face painted red just like the statue, decked out with a series of regal and/or divine attributes, while constantly being reminded – if we believe Tertullian – that he was (only) a man” (27). We can see Jupiter as a comedic actor given the irresistible opportunity to degrade such a *triumphator* during the *ludi scaenici*, putting this type of presumptuous figure in his place while taking on the role of the actual Roman god. The divine nature of Jupiter and Mercury become a means for the human actors to create the most hilarious debasement of this grandiose war hero possible, and their omnipotence as characters is seen as an ingenious comedic invention which allows for comedy to be amplified and allows for Amphitryon, the grandiose war hero, to be the victim of this comedy.

In this scene of Amphitryon's utter embarrassment, then, we clearly see the characters of Jupiter and Mercury as human comedians who have omnipotence in the world of their own play. The audience is presented with the idea of Jupiter as truly born of human parents, a part of that Roman theatre troupe of low slaves and men who have never been granted citizenship. This theatre troupe creates an omnipotent character for the purpose of making fun of Amphitryon, making him an ugly self-aggrandizing comic figure and subjecting him to the abuse of the more powerful gods. However, in order to make the play's ending more palatable, Jupiter and Mercury will need to leave the earthy world of human comedy and put on the appearance of the real tragic gods once again. By presenting the audience with anthropomorphic characters who sometimes have earthly comic motivations and at other times have god-like, noble motives, Plautus' *Amphitruo* enables this type of shifting, where Jupiter and Mercury are both able to comically debase the human characters and then rescue them in a way that re-contextualizes the suffering they have inflicted on the humans as tragic, and thus meriting a rescue mission in the tragic style of a *deus ex machina*.

Even the *deus ex machina*, however, will be one more chance for the theatre troupe to relish a final joke, while simultaneously delivering divine justice and restoring peace to the mortal characters. After his friend Blepharo, having been asked to distinguish between Jupiter and Amphitryon, fails to judge who the real Amphitryon is, Amphitryon delivers a highly desperate speech where he laments his misfortunes and ponders if any other Thebans are as wretched as he is. Amphitryon storms into the house, resolved to slay anyone he finds there, ironically stating that even Jupiter will not be able to stop him. This is when Jupiter arrives as the *deus ex machina* of the play, and Amphitryon collapses as a thunderbolt strikes his house. This is highly comic given his recent comment and its squelching of Amphitryon's mad rage. In one action, Jupiter knocks out Amphitryon to avoid an unpleasant scene and arrives, as Amphitryon's slave Bromia later describes, to allow Alcumena to give birth to her two sons without pain and at the same time. Jupiter's thunderbolt is a comic gesture: in the same way that Mercury starts to

beat Sosia when he makes a comment about the drunkenness of a god, Jupiter hits Amphitryon with a thunderbolt when he claims that even Jupiter will be unable to stop him. Jupiter's thunderbolt reveals his role as a comic actor in the play as much as it gives him a god-like power over the tragicomedy. It is an act of farcical humor, and we can imagine that the actual Roman theatre-troupe had difficulty reconstructing the effect of a real thunderbolt. Like the effect of having a male actor play Alcumena in a fat-suit, it draws attention to the fact that a theatre-troupe has thrown together the play to be entertaining and amusing and reveals Jupiter's identity as a comic actor. It also, however, represents Jupiter's status as a powerful, serious god who is able to rearrange the tragic events of the play and create a happy ending.

The thunderbolt clearly also constitutes a *deus ex machina* in the classic tragic style, since a sudden divine presence gives the tragic situation a happy ending: Amphitryon is unable to kill anyone in the house, and he and Alcumena become aware that Jupiter's affair is the cause of their confusion, which is an honor since it leads to the birth of Hercules, for which the family will become famous. This striking of Jupiter's thunderbolt also mirrors the *deus ex machina* that occurs Euripides' *Alcumene*, when Jupiter brings down his thunderbolt to save Alcumena from a fire lit by Amphitryon. We know that Plautus was familiar with this play in some way, since the god Arcutus compares his own act of saving a mortal girl with a storm to this action in Euripides' *Alcumene* in the prologue to Plautus' *Rudens* (Manuwald 558). Thus, we can see this strike of lightning in Plautus' *Amphitryon*, which also interrupts Amphitryon's mad rage and potentially murderous behavior, as mirroring that of Euripides' real tragedy. Furthermore, the two-tiered staging of the play, unusual in Roman comedy, draws attention to the inclusion of the tragic *ex machina* theme, where the gods would emerge from a higher rung on the stage (Christenson 2000: 292-293). This *deus ex machina* sheds light on the tragic content of this comic play: there is a need for a device to create a happy ending because of the suffering inflicted upon Amphitryon and Alcumena by the gods, but we have also seen that the thunderbolt is a highly farcical comic gesture. We can imagine Jupiter blasting down Amphitryon with relish at his words, getting his last dose of fun as

a comic actor by interrupting his confused self-pitying lament. But we can also see that Jupiter may be acting out of benevolence towards the mortal characters, since he does facilitate the easy birth of both children, giving the family fame through his child Hercules, and he prevents Amphitryon from harming anyone in the household. In this one gesture, we can see how Plautus anthropomorphizes Jupiter in a way which not only brings him into the human disguise of Amphitryon, but draws attention to how the human comic actor of Rome inhabits his role as a god by making the play highly farcical and amusing, and how noble tragic god also inhabits the actor by undoing the wrongs of what we might call the “gods of comedy” or the comedic actors, giving the play a morally satisfying ending.

Dupont discusses the way in which the role of the gods as deliverers of comedy shifts at the end of the play as Jupiter delivers a speech in a rather tragic style as he recounts his affair with Alcumena to Amphitruo (181-182):

At the end of *Amphitruo* Jupiter thus appears in the *theologeion*, above the *frons scaenae*, perhaps wearing a tragic mask but with his body invisible. He speaks in iambic senarii, the metre common to tragedy and comedy, with a gravity suitable to the tragic role. Opposite him, down below, a poor *senex* of comedy decides not to follow him into tragedy by consulting a seer straight out of *Oedipus* or *Troades* or *Iphigenia*: he sends Tiresias away and once more becomes Amphitruo, the comic Old Man, who concludes the play by singing the trochaic septenarii expected at the end of every comedy and often performed by the *cantor*.

We see a change in Jupiter’s role; he is no longer a character thoroughly inhabited by the human qualities of a comedian, but the notion of his distance from the low human plane of comedy is conveyed and he restores peace to Amphitryon’s life as a noble and dignified god. In this way, Plautus shows us the contrast between his thoroughly anthropomorphized comedic gods and the distant gods of the tragic world, who restore the play’s sense of order and allow it to recede from its constantly irreverent, entertaining buffoonery and farce.

Plautus, then, in his saturnalian mode of smashing together unexpected, paradoxical elements, has styled the majority of the play as comic by presenting the gods as having the qualities of human comedians, but has also provided an ending which is tragic in the sense that it takes the gods' affronts to the mortal characters seriously and rescues them, presenting a more distant, less humanized version of the gods. To set up this blending of comedy and tragedy for the audience, Mercury gives the following speech in his prologue (52-59):

post argumentam huius eloquar tragoediae.
 quid? contraxistis frontem, quia tragoediam
 dixi futuram hanc? deus sum, commutauero.
 eandem hanc, si uoltis, faciam ex tragoedia
 comoedia ut sit omnibus isdem uorsibus.
 utrum fit an non? uoltis? sed ego stultior,
 quasi nesciam uos uelle, qui diuos siem.
 teneo quid animi uostri super hac re siet:
 faciam ut commixta sit; <sit> tragicomoedia.

And then I'll reveal the plot of this tragedy –
 Did I say tragedy? Are you frowning at that word tragedy?
 Okay, I'll change it, seeing as I'm a god:
 I'll make this same play comedy instead of a tragedy.
 Without changing any of the lines.
 Comedy or not? What do you want?
 Silly me! As if I didn't know what you wanted!
 I can read your minds exactly, seeing as I'm a god!
 I'll mix it up: let's call it "tragicomedy".
 It's not right to call it straight comedy

When you've got important people and gods onstage.

Through this gesture, Mercury creates an association between the identity of the actors in the play and the status of the play as comedy or tragedy. The low status of the slaves presented in the play are affiliated with the comedic genre, and the nobler, important god-figures are introduced as the reason for the play's introduction of some tragic elements. The fact that Mercury, as we have seen, often appears in his capacity as a low comic actor, invites us to take Mercury's power as a "god" to transform the play from pure tragedy to "tragicomedy" as also representing power of the comedians and comic poets to make a play amusing. However, Mercury also uses his power in manipulating the content of the play in order to restrict this decision to make the dramatic work comedic, and the inclusion of gods and important characters like Amphitryon within the play gives Jupiter and Mercury the obligation to recede from comedy in the final scene in order to escape a world where suffering is inflicted upon the mortals for no just reason. In this way, we see that the play is structured around the doubled roles of Jupiter and Mercury as bringers of comedy and as gods who take mortals seriously and care for their well-being. Given this structure, we see two primary treatments of the mortal characters by the gods in Plautus' *Amphitruo*. For the bulk of the play, the gods zealously inflict torment on the mortal characters and inscribe them in the world of comedy while the mortals attempt to take themselves seriously, including self-aggrandizing tragic rhetoric within the play. At the end of the play, they take the complaints of the mortals seriously in a tragic mode as noble gods and relieve them of the incessant comic debasement inflicted upon them by what we might call the "gods of comedy", or the comedic actors.

For example, in Sosia's speech where he practices recounting the Thebans' defeat of the Telobians to Alcumena, Plautus incorporates the use of mock-tragic rhetoric, emphasizing the desire of these characters to be taken seriously as in a tragedy. As Moore notes, "Every word of his fifty-eight line battle report would be at home in tragedy. Its subject, war, Plautus explicitly associates with tragedy

elsewhere (*Captivi* 61-62). Its patriotic and eulogistic content, its serious tone, and its numerous religious and legal formulas are all reminiscent of what one might find in the tragedies of Ennius or Naevius" (1994). Moore continues by observing that the speech is reformulated as comic for several reasons: Sosia was not there and refers to himself as a typical fibber in comedies, and Mercury states that, in an idiosyncratic way, everything Sosia said turned out to be true. Mercury knows this since he was actually there, using his omnipotence to put Sosia in his place as a laughable slave in comedies. He does this by stating that Sosia was right about the battle in his grandiose, tragic fabrication of the story since he, Mercury, was there to confirm it while Sosia was gulping unfiltered wine alone in a tent. Sosia's attempt to incorporate a tragic seriousness within the play is made comic by the presence of Mercury, whose omnipotence is used in the play as a means of making fun of Sosia, and in this regard we see Mercury as the comedic actor who has omnipotence over his own comic world. Thus, the dynamic nature of Jupiter and Mercury as characters allows for this desire for tragic seriousness on the part of the mortals to be belittled hilariously for most of the play, and the over-rendered tragic nature of their speeches becomes part of the comedy. We see deities represented here as human comedians, relishing in their ability to suspend their tragic rescue mission for the very end of the play.

In Alcumena's lament upon the departure of Jupiter, who has just slept with her in the guise of Amphitryon, and in the scene where the real Amphitryon comes to meet her, the machinations of the gods allow for another expression of over-rendered tragic sentiments on the part of the mortal characters. Alcumena is in the process of creating her own personal tragic story, and she seems to relish in painting a self-portrait of a noble, grief-stricken wife. She states, "plus aegri ex abitu uiri, quam ex aduentu uoluptatis cepi" ("Greater was my sorrow at his leaving than the pleasure I took from his coming," (641), emphasizing the victory of her suffering over pleasure. She attributes her ability to endure this suffering to the nobility of her cause, which makes her happy (641-647):

sed hoc me beat
 saltem, quom perduellis uicit et domum laudis compos reuenit:
 id solacio est.
 absit, dum modo laude parta
 domum recipiat se; feram et perferam usque
 abitum eius animo forti atque offirmato, id modo si mercedis
 datur mi, ut meus uictor uir belli clueat.

One thing only brings me joy:
 He's beaten the enemy host and come home in full glory!
 This is my solace.
 If he must leave me, let him always return home
 A hero. I'll endure, yes, I'll endure
 His departure with a heart of steel, if it's my only reward
 To hear my husband hailed a champion!

Alcumena poses herself as a virtuous wife, stoic and able to suppress her grief until her husband's arrival. She relishes in this grandiose, exaggerated tragic image of herself, but the arrival of Amphitryon interrupts this process; she is not allowed the dignity of a tragic and heroic wife who is able to endure her husband's absence. In the same way, Amphitryon has a tragic, dignified image of himself: that of the war hero who has returned home and awaits his wife's thankful greeting. Amphitryon states, "Amphitruo uxorem salutat laetus speratam suam/quam omnium Thebis uir unam esse optumam diiudicat/quamque adeo ciues Thebani uero rumiferant probam" ("Amphitryon greets his lovely wife with joy/Whom he considers the single finest woman of all/Whose virtue all my fellow Thebans praise," 676-678). This is Amphitryon's grandiose entrance as a returning war hero, highly dramatized by his use of the third person and the exaggerated praise he gives to his wife. When Alcumena is taken aback by

the return of Amphitryon, she ruins his heroic self-portrait as a returning war hero because of the way she was deceived by Jupiter: she has just greeted and been in bed with Jupiter in the form of Amphitryon the previous day. An exasperated argument between the two ensues, in which Amphitryon, enraged, threatens to divorce a confused and upset Alcumena, who is degraded as unchaste. In an instant, Amphitryon and Alcumena are stripped of their heroic and noble qualities: Amphitryon is unrecognized for his war efforts and cuckolded to boot, and Amphitryon's suspicion that Alcumena is unchaste undermines her exaggerated lament about being the ideal wife, waiting patiently for her war hero to return. However, in reality, they are both more in line with their virtuous tragic depicted selves than these low, degraded characters which they become in each other's eyes, however hilariously overwrought their expressions of mock-tragic seriousness may be. Alcumena is actually a virtuous wife and Amphitryon is a returning war hero. Thus, when Alcumena asks the following to Amphitryon (694-695):

quid enim censes? te ut deludam contra lusorem meum,
qui nunc primum te advenisse dicas, modo qui hinc abieris.

What do you think? I'm the one mocking you,
After you pretend you're coming home just now?

she betrays the desire of both these lovers to avoid being ridiculed, in a comic mode, for the roles that they know they do not actually play. In this way the play presents us with a world where the deception of the "gods of comedy" makes a sober, tragic world into a comic one which degrades and ridicules human beings. The comedic actors as gods always suspend the final decision to take the mortal characters seriously despite their self-pitying laments, and it will be left to the distant gods of tragedy to relieve the mortal characters of Plautus' dreamy world of super-comedy, driven by the god-like omnipotence of comic actors over the world of the play.

In this way, Plautus' *Amphitruo* brings the very effort of the playwright and the theatre-troupe to render the gods in a human style right before the audience's eyes. This effort is reflected upon in the context of the Roman stage, where the low status of the comic actors and the baseness of their motives inhabit the omnipotence of the gods, an omnipotence which is seen as an allegory for the power of the Roman comedian over the world of his play. This comic inhabitation of the gods is seen in contrast to the idea of humans representing the true unmasked Roman gods onstage, whose more noble motives recover a sense of equilibrium at the end of the play. The theme of anthropomorphism reflected by the notion of the gods in human disguises is expanded upon in a way which allows Plautus to refer to the real act of representation taking place onstage, and the way in which the divine characters are represented humanizes them in a way which brings them directly into the context of Roman theatre in Plautus' day.

The way in which the gods are humanized, adhering to their Plautine meta-theatrical representation as the playful, low theatre-troupe of Roman comedy, is further reinforced by the play's status as a farce with a surreal, drunken character. As the characters in the play endure an identity crisis, they constantly accuse each other of being drunk, dreaming, or insane, and the unreality of the play is further emphasized by elements like the use of the expletive *hercle*, despite the fact that Hercules is clearly not born yet for the majority of the play. The festive, drunken atmosphere of Plautine performances at the *ludi scaenici* becomes a part of the dramatic spectacle, contributing the notion that the spectator is looking upon a comic world constructed by the fertile, rampant imaginations of Roman comedians, who want to construct drunken, irreverent world instead of being restricted by the unremarkable everyday world of wakefulness and soberness.

This type of meta-theatre, which allows for the characters to break the fourth wall and engage with the audience's current enjoyment of the *ludi scaenici*, is a typically Plautine element which we see

in the humanized gods of the *Amphitruo*, who conspire to create an unreal, drunken world of deception and steer away from the everyday. In Plautus' *Pseudolus*, for example, we encounter a celebration of Pseudolus' triumph at the end of the play in which Simo invites the audience to a celebratory banquet (1333-1335). Speaking of this open invitation to the audience, Laura Banducci notes that although many people in the audience may not have been able to engage in the feasting, "drinking and celebration were part of the atmosphere." Pseudolus expresses an excitement for this type of festival atmosphere earlier on in the play (1252-1254):

Quid hoc? sicine hoc fit, pedes? statin an non?
 an id voltis, ut me hinc iacentem aliquis tollat?
 nam hercle si cecidero, vestrum erit flagitium.
 pergitin pergere? ah, serviendum mihi
 hodie est; magnum hoc vitium vino est:
 pedes captat primum, luctator dolosust.
 profecto edepol ego nunc probe habeo madulsam:
 ita victu excurato, ita magnis munditiis et dis dignis,
 itaque in loco festivo sumus festive accepti.

Hey feet, what ya' doing? Care to stand up – or not?
 Is that what you want – for me to fall and be dragged offstage?
 Damn! It's all your fault if I fall! Still stumbling?
 Time for me to get tough with you now!
 The worst thing about wine? Easy:
 It trips the ol' feet like some tricky wrestler!
 Damn straight! I've got absolutely the best buzz going on!
 And inside, dishes done so deliciously, every kind of elegance, a perfectly

Festive setting and reception, fit for the gods!

Plautus draws attention here to the presence of the actor onstage and the danger of him slipping off on account of his drunkenness, and the character's drunkenness and enthusiasm for feasting is placed *in loco festivo*. The festival atmosphere is thus depicted as a place of drunken revelry and feasting, and Plautus' breaking of the fourth wall is intensified by the shared drunkenness of the character and the drunken atmosphere of the *ludi scaenici*. We see another example of this in the fourth act of Plautus' *Amphitruo*, where Sosia dons a *corona* which is associated both with drunkenness and with festive occasions (Christenson 2000: 292). In this way we see that comedic actors, who are meta-theatrically represented as entertainers, are associated with the creation of the festive atmosphere and are seen in Plautus as a part of the audience's experience of the *ludi scaenici*.

Plautus' anthropomorphism is a fascinating phenomenon which links divine power to the limitless power of the comedian and playwright over his own productions, giving rise to a form of special humor which delights in distorting reality, wholly reversing the power dynamic between the master and his slave, and rupturing the drab daily life of Romans with a fresh, cleverly constructed, paradoxical play that celebrates its own limitless comic potential. The theme of anthropomorphism, which facilitates the plot by allowing Jupiter and Mercury to take on the human forms of Amphitryon and Sosia, is also a device that allows the human comedian to take on the stature of the gods, producing a world deception that subverts normative thinking and offers up an infinitely alluring, dreamy world of farce.

Having examined the way in which the gods are humanized in the Plautine context, where the idea of their omnipotence is attributed meta-theatrically to the Roman actors and their power over the world of a play, we will now move to Molière's world of 17th century France, where the idea of god-like omnipotence, or near-omnipotence, can be instantly associated with a set of historical individuals. In particular, Jupiter's omnipotence and unrestrained power over the other characters in the play serves as

a symbol for Louis XIV and his rule. Molière worked with an already formed symbolic association between Louis XIV and Jupiter, drawing on their shared status as all-powerful and noble. Before examining the way in which Molière's *Amphitryon* humanizes Jupiter by depicting him with attributes of the Sun King, we will examine the rich symbolic association between Louis XIV and Jupiter in the world of Versailles in order to show how the audience would have readily perceived this connection between Jupiter and the Sun King.

As early as 1655, the young Louis XIV was depicted with the attributes of Jupiter in a painting by Charles Poerson. He is depicted as the unmistakable victor of the Fronde, a civil war in which the French resistance to the monarchy was crushed, solidifying Louis XIV's absolute power over France (Moote 1972). The inscription at the bottom of the painting reads: "novum mundus sensit adesse lovem" ("the world senses that a new Jove is at hand" Costelloe 91). Thus, the painting celebrates the emergence of Louis XIV's absolutist power by referring to him as this "new Jupiter", posing the kingly pagan god as a symbol for his awe-inspiring supremacy. Mazarin was known to encourage the use of Jupiter as a symbol for Louis XIV's absolutist rule, along with depictions of him as Apollo or Alexander the Great, in order to propagate this positive image of Louis XIV as an absolutist monarch (Costelloe 91).

In a 1661 poem dedicated to Mme. Foquet, the wife of one of Louis XIV's finance ministers, Jean de la Fontaine celebrates the birth of one of her children at Fontainebleau, citing it as the home of Jupiter and stating directly that Jupiter and Louis XIV are the same person (Fontaine: 534). In the same year, Louis XIV appeared as Jupiter in Lully's *Ballet royal de l'Impatience*, disguised in order to seduce a mortal and delivering these lines:

Devant une beauté je cache finement
 Cette pompe divine où mon être se fonde;
 Et l'on me prendrait seulement

Pour le premier homme du monde.

Before a beauty I carefully hide

This divine splendor which forms my true being;

And then people would think of me only

As the foremost of men on earth.

In these verses, as in many moments in Plautus' *Amphitruo*, the relationship between the actual performer of the comedy and the character depicted is explored. In this case, however, instead of noticing the disparity between the social status of the low Roman actors of farce and the notion of a divine Jupiter, we see a remarkable similarity; as Fontaine said in the aforementioned poem, "Jupiter et Louis, c'est le même." Louis XIV is depicted as the embodiment of Jupiter, who is "mistaken" for the greatest and most powerful man on earth because he must hide away his divinity, lest the powerful radiance of his true form destroy the mortal he is courting.

In some depictions which come after Molière's *Amphitryon*, the association between Louis XIV and Jupiter changes from a positive, propagandistic example of symbolism to a critique of his rule. *La naissance de Venus* (1696), an opera by Pascal Collasse and Abbé Pic, depicts an overly-militant, power-hungry Jupiter. In her discussion of this opera, Georgia Cowart writes, "In the plot, a general happiness attending the birth of Venus is spoiled by Jupiter and his jealous wife Juno, who cruelly quell the 'revolution' it creates. The *livret* [libretto] transforms Jupiter into a tyrannical villain and the goddess of love into a victim of royal aggression. At the climax of the opera, Jupiter's lightning bolts fill the stage in a spectacular display of destructive power" (164-165). Thus, we see that the association of Louis XIV and Jupiter can also be used as a form of critiquing absolutist power, especially later on in his reign.

Based on these various references to Jupiter and Louis XIV in visual art and theatre of the court of Versailles, which occur over a wide span of time during the reign of the Sun King, we can presume that Jupiter could be easily interpreted as a symbol of Louis XIV to the French audience at the courts of Versailles. Much critical debate has centered around whether Molière's play is a comment on Louis XVI's affair with Mme de Montespan, who served as the *maîtresse en titre*, or official court mistress, for the Sun King. The Montespan affair proved controversial given the fact that the Sun King already had a well-established mistress and that Mme de Montespan's husband had a violent outburst at court upon hearing the news (Phelps 443). The 1668 première of Molière's *Amphitryon*, according to P.L. Roederer, followed this affair by only two months (Phelps 443), and given the play's theme of adultery and cuckoldry by the king of the gods, it is possible to read Molière's Jupiter as a metaphorical rendering of this historical event. The degree to which the play is rendered as a response to Louis XVI's affair with Mme de Montespan remains an intriguingly open question which we will not examine further in this essay, for, as Ruth Shepard Phelps writes, this reading is not "capable of proof", but there is certainly sufficient evidence that a 17th century French audience would have come to the play with a strong association between Louis XVI and Jupiter. Thus, in Molière's *Amphitryon*, whether or not we choose, like Roederer, to read this historical event into the play, we will see that the theme of humanizing the gods and bringing them onto the comedic stage is expanded upon by the symbolic association between Louis XVI and Jupiter.

Mercury's exchange with the goddess Night in Molière's prologue reveals the degree to which the classical gods are rendered as having qualities of French nobles from the Sun King's court. When Mercury tells Night that he is exhausted from traveling so far to send messages, she asks if it is not improper for a god to say such things. Mercury asks, "Les Dieux sont-ils de fer?" ("Are we made of iron?"), and Night responds (13-18):

Non; mais il faut sans cesse
 Garder le decorum de la divinité
 Il est de certains mots dont l'usage rabaisse
 Cette sublime qualité,
 Et que, pour leur indignité,
 Il est bon qu'aux hommes on laisse.

No; but we must maintain
 A tone befitting of our divinity.
 Some words, if uttered by the gods, profane
 Our lofty rank and high degree,
 And such base language ought to be
 Restricted to the human plane.

The idea that the gods would resist any form of expression which betrays their indignity and human-like qualities is highly amusing and farcical because it conflates these classical figures with 17th century French nobles looking to keep up a sense of decorum and high status, a process which would of course be unnecessary for the gods in their classical context. The gods need to keep up their appearances, avoiding embarrassing words that manifest their indignity, and make a good impression on mortals with the same type of concern as 17th century French aristocrats whose success depended on their ability, in a heavily class-based society based on decorum and politeness, to keep up a good relationship with the Sun King and his associates, who created a social climate where the most superficial rumors could be detrimental to one's career. This theme is further reinforced as Night expresses her worry about the indignity of her role, enabling Jupiter's base desires for a low human. Mercury assures her that "dans un haut rang on a l'heur de paraître/Tout ce qu'on fait est toujours bel et bon" ("When one is blessed with high estate and standing/All that one does is good as gold," 128-129). The "haut rang" of Jupiter alludes

to his status as a powerful god and to the high noble status of Louis XIV, which makes the actions of the Jupiter character unquestionable and Night's actions justifiable. This theme of justifying such love affairs because of one's noble status is seen at other points in Molière, like in his ballet with music by Lully called *La Princesse d'Elide*, where a tutor named Arbate speaks of a prince's love affair as fully justified because of his kingly status (Prest 2014). Furthermore, Mercury continues with a quip about Night's reputation and her ability to mask other affairs, and states, "Vous avez dans le monde un bruit/De n'être pas si renchérie./On vous fait confidente, en cent climats divers/De beaucoup de bonnes affaires" ("Your reputation everywhere/Is not for being prim and queasy/In every clime, you've played a shady part/In many a tryst and rendezvous," 138-141). Night responds defensively (144-147):

Laissons ces contrariétés,
 Et demeurons ce que nous sommes:
 N'apprêtons point à rire aux hommes
 En nous disant nos vérités.

Enough. Let's cease to bicker thus;
 Let us maintain our dignities,
 And let's not prompt mankind to laugh at us
 By too much frankness, if you please.

This exchange presents us with a world where classical gods are colored with the human qualities of 17th century French nobles, preoccupied with keeping up their noble appearances, engaging in the process of trying to expose the other's vices, and attempting to maintain a good reputation among the human characters, who they will toy with shamelessly by means of their "divine" power. These attitudes, and the gods' discussion of Jupiter's unquestionably just motives and absolute power, make the gods of classical myth also resemble 17th century French nobles.

Several other moments of the play color the classical gods with the desires and foibles of French nobles and of Louis XIV. One of them consists in the ability of the characters in both their god-like and noble capacities to perpetrate vices and get away with them, presenting these vices as virtuous and cultivated. Before examining how the vices of Jupiter and Mercury become excused on account of their “nobility” at the end of the play, it is important to examine how Molière adapts the play in order to present the actions of the gods as morally unsound. Where in Plautus, we see a combination of base and just motives for the actions of the gods, based on the switching between the characters of Jupiter and Mercury from the human “gods of comedy” to the unmasked gods of tragedy, Molière emphasizes the ugly spitefulness and abusiveness of the gods and renders the final scene in a way that makes the gods seem presumptuous when they tell the mortals that they have in fact been honored by the gods because of their actions. Molière sets the action of the play to an earlier time, when Amphytrion and Alcmena are newly married and she is not yet noticeably pregnant, and so Jupiter’s act which allows both children to be born painlessly is removed. The meta-theatrical role of Jupiter as a theatre director is also removed, taking away his motivation to give the audience a pleasing comedy. Thus, all the actions that Jupiter and Mercury refer to in Plautus as a means of asserting the justness of their enterprise are removed from the play, except for the birth of Hercules.

Furthermore, Mercury’s tormenting of Sosia is intensified. Sosia’s wife Cleanthis is added as a character in the play, and Mercury acts cold to Cleanthis in the guise of Sosia, telling her that he is fine with being cuckolded and doesn’t care much for Cleanthis’s virtuous behavior, which leads to Sosia being scolded by and confused with his wife. This encounter interestingly doubles the crisis of deception: one crisis is an aristocratic one of Jupiter deceiving Amphytrion where Jupiter discusses lofty concepts of love and marriage in his relationship with Alcmena, and the other represents love in terms of lower class relations, where Mercury deceives Sosia and pretends not to care about faithfulness in love (Davis : 132). It also has the effect of torturing Sosia in an even more thoroughly than in Plautus, so

that when Mercury manifests his identity and then disappears into the sky, Sosia quickly chimes in with these words (1886-1889):

Le Ciel de m'approcher t'ôte à jamais l'envie!
 Ta fureur s'est par trop acharnée après moi
 Et je ne vis de ma vie
 Un Dieu plus diable que toi.

May heaven keep you away from me forever!
 Your malice is implacable and evil.
 Truly, in all my life I've never
 Met any god so like a devil.

Thus, the evidence for the gods as corrupt manipulators of the mortal characters vastly overwhelms the “justness” of their actions. In addition to the misdeeds of Mercury’s wreaking of havoc on Sosia, Jupiter is presented as having a more negative impact on Alcumena. In the scene where Jupiter tries to restore “his” relationship with Alcumena, we see him deviously trying to blame the “husband” instead of the “lover” for his false actions. He tries, in fact, to make a division between Amphitryon and Jupiter in Alcumena’s mind and claim that Jupiter is the true lover, an act that is of course impossible while he is disguised as Amphitryon. When Alcumena, as a faithful wife, refuses to accept this distinction between husband and lover, Jupiter, as a last resort, threatens to commit suicide, giving Alcumena the choice between forgiving him and condemning him to death. Alcumena’s response is continued resistance and outrage: “Faut-il encore pour vous conserver des bontés/Et vous voir m’outrager par tant d’indignités?” (“Am I to show you kindness, if you please/After such insults and indignities?” 1393-1394). However, given this choice she is forced to acquiesce and forgive Jupiter. The suicide threat is wholly insincere and manipulative, since Alcumena thinks she is talking to her husband, and manifests

the degree to which the outrageous immorality of Jupiter's actions is emphasized in Molière's adaptation of the Amphitryon story. As Roger Ikor writes, "Mercure profite de sa force pour batter Sosie, Jupiter profite de ses pouvoirs pour abuser Alcmène. C'est à nos yeux, pour peu que nous y réfléchissions, pure lâcheté de la part du supérieur (39)."

Having noted the artistic choices implemented by Molière to make the gods appear more wicked and devious, we will now discuss the degree to which the godliness and "high rank" of the gods allow these vices to be reformulated as virtuous actions worth celebrating, and how the classical gods are humanized by their similarity to the real French nobility because of their shared capacity to make their idiosyncratic foibles and vices into unquestionable virtues. The final scene begins with Mercury introducing his true self (1874-1879):

Et quant à moi, je suis Mercure,
 Qui, ne sachant que faire, ai rossé tant soit peu
 Celui dont j'ai pris la figure:
 Mais de s'en consoler il a maintenant lieu;
 Et les coups de bâton d'un Dieu
 Font honneur à qui les endure.

And as for me, I'm Mercury.
 Who gave this rogue, for pastime, many a whack,
 And borrowed his identity;
 But he need not think his fate so black
 For it's an honor to have one's back
 Lambasted by a deity.

This notion that it is an honor to be whipped by a god hilariously betrays Mercury's abuse of his godly status. We have already seen him assert in his discussion with Night that if a person is of high enough status, "Tout ce qu'on fait est toujours bel et bon". His godliness, in its resemblance to nobility, gives his actions an unquestionable sense of justice, and his presumption that his beating of Sosia must have constituted an honor for him is highly farcical and amusing. Jupiter's speech has a similar effect, and he states, "Mon nom, qu'incessamment toute la terre adore/Étouffe ici les bruits qui pouvaient éclater" ("My name, which the world adores at every minute/Will stifle any scandal that might occur," 1896-1897). Here, Jupiter's fame and high reputation make his act an honor for Amphitryon, and the single concept of renown which is shared by Jupiter and the Sun King is used as a means of excusing the character's actions in the play.

When Jupiter announces that the birth of Hercules will bring Amphitryon fame, Naucrates, who has been brought over to help Amphitryon beat up his imposter, begins to exclaim how grateful he is about this turn of events. But Sosia interrupts with a speech which ends the play (1928-1943):

Messieurs, voulez-vous bien suivre mon sentiment?
 Ne vous embarque nullement
 Dans ces doucerus congratulantes:
 C'est un mauvais embarquement,
 Et d'une et d'autre part, pour un tel compliment,
 Les phrases sont embarrassantes.
 Le grand Dieu Jupiter nous fait beaucoup d'honneur,
 Et sa bonté sans doute est pour nous sans seconde;
 D'une fortune en mille biens féconde,
 Et chez nous il doit naître un fils d'un très grand coeur:
 Tout cela va le mieux du monde:
 Mais enfin coupons aux discours,

Et que chacun chez soi doucement se retire.

Sur telles affaires, toujours

Le meilleur est de ne rien dire.

Will you allow me, sirs, a small request?

Do not embark with too much zest

On speeches of congratulation:

Such compliments, let me suggest,

Would seem, to all, embarrassing at best

In so complex a situation.

We have been honored by the gods' great king,

Who offers us unparalleled largesse;

Our future is replete with each good thing,

And we shall have, to crown our happiness,

A son with whose renown the world shall ring;

And all that's very fine, I guess;

But let us cut our speeches short,

And quietly retire now, if you will.

Regarding matters of this sort,

It's wisest always to be still.

Sosia's speech, in various ways, draws attention to the need to keep vices quiet and make the gods appear seemly in their motivations. Sosia presents us with the idea that it is not good to embark on this type of praising of Jupiter's actions since it might be "embarrassing" or call attention to the true nature and motivation behind Jupiter's romantic escapade. He delivers this speech having given his famous comic interjection, "Le seigneur Jupiter sait dorer la pilule" ("Lord Jove knows how to sugarcoat the pill," 1913), which draws attention to the fact that Jupiter is trying his best to make his bitter actions

justifiable. Furthermore, this speech by Sosia draws attention to the fact that there is a crowd of people watching the play and able to judge its content, and makes the claim that perhaps the best course of action is to let everyone go back home so that the play will be finished before Jupiter (read: Louis XIV) is seen in a negative light. Instead of any of this critique, Sosia remarks that Jupiter has done everyone a great service and it is best to leave the nature of that service unexamined. This is interesting given the fact that Sosia is known to have been played by Molière himself (Brander 238), whose comedies and productions were of course commissioned by Louis XIV. We can think, then, not only of Sosia as motivated to create such a speech, but read Molière's desire to please the king into this speech which urges everyone to think of Jupiter's actions as a great service and go home, since the play is over and it is best to keep silent about such complicated affairs. Molière presents us with a blurring of worlds that brings the gods down onto the human plane: the characters, which are presented as belonging to a fantasy world of classical myth, are also presented as behaving like the noblemen, kings, and playwrights of 17th century France. The power dynamic between the divine Jupiter and the human valet Sosia are given real human correlates, Louis XIV and Molière, who are situated in the context of the play's performance. As Jacques Scherer writes, "Les dieux y sont peints comme des sortes des super-nobles et l'on peut presque partout y lire Louis XIV entre les lignes" (195).

In Molière's depiction of the gods as French aristocrats and his Jupiter styled as Louis XIV, and in Plautus' depiction of the gods as a Roman theatre-troupe, we encounter a thematic extension of the idea of anthropomorphism already implicit in the plot of the plays which makes the gods thoroughly human, not only in an abstract sense, but in a sense which renders them particularly human to the audiences of these plays in their social and historical contexts. The success of the humor of these works is largely contingent on the ability of Plautus and Molière to thoroughly humanize of these gods in a way which roots them in the same type of human world as the audience. As Henri Bergson writes in his essay *Laughter*, "the comic does not exist outside the pale of what is strictly *human*. A landscape may be

beautiful, charming and sublime, or insignificant and ugly; it will never be laughable. You may laugh at an animal, but only because you have detected in it some human attitude or expression. You may laugh at a hat, but what you are making fun of, in this case, is not the piece of felt or straw, but the shape that men have given it" (3). The exaggerated humanization of the gods, which allows the audience to see the embodiment of familiar, profoundly human presences in Jupiter and Mercury, allows for the god-like qualities of these characters to serve primarily as attributes which mirror human behavior metaphorically. Humor emerges from the way that Plautus and Molière manipulate these profoundly human roles in surprising ways or playfully critique the human-like qualities of Jupiter and Mercury. The world of Plautus' play enables the metaphor of humans as the gods of theatre to invert the normative power dynamics of everyday life, giving these gods, who we see as members of a socially disadvantaged theatre-troupe, the chance to ridicule characters like the presumptuous *triumphator* and slave-owner, Amphitryon. Molière presents godliness as a metaphor for high status and kingliness, presenting these qualities in a comic mode as pompous and ridiculously presumptuous. These plays, then, show us the veracity of Bergson's statement about the human-centered nature of comedy through their special genius, which recovers a metaphorical human quality, situated in the social context inhabited by the audience, in the presence of the divine onstage, using the sense of the gods as humans to stun the audience with shocking reversals of normal human behavior and presenting the audience with the exaggeratedly risible foibles and vices of human beings.

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Endnotes

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Other translations are by the author.

- 1 For a discussion of the low status of Roman actors and their degradation of by censors during the Roman Republic, see Green.
- 2 For a reconstruction of this scene, see Fantham.