

Fraenkel's monumental study initiated a fundamental reassessment of Plautus as a creative artist, revealing a stylistically consistent author with identifiable *skhemata dianoias*. His findings have in large part been upheld by subsequent scholarship. The original German publication, however, predated several major Menander finds (notably, the *Sikyonioides*, *Misoumenos*, *Dyskolos*, *Aspis* and additional portions of the *Samia*). The most studied of these, at least in connection with Plautus, are the fragments of the *Dis Exapaton*, long since identified as the source for the *Bacchides* (Ritschl). These 113 lines have provided an illuminating case study to enrich our understanding of the transformations the Greek material underwent at Plautus' hands (Handley, Barigazzi, del Corno, Damen, Gaiser, Jacques, Poeschl, Questa).

Scholarly examinations of the *Dis Exapaton* fragments have tended to confirm Fraenkel's general claims and most have shared his implicit assumption that Plautus worked around the limitations of an audience with slender knowledge of Greek literature and culture, and that his central artistic purpose was to entertain an unruly and easily distracted holiday crowd. More recently, in any effort to explain Plautus' transhistorical appeal, William Batstone has considered the departures from Menandrian psychological realism as something other than a ploy to get easy laughs. He claims for Plautus a metatheatrical vision of people as constantly performing their own identities, reflected in his characters' shifting visions of "who" they are that never match any reality (because there is none). This is opposed to a tidier Menandrian model, where characters approximate – or at least try to approximate – an ideal that everyone agrees on. This reading moves beyond Fraenkel's interpretive framework but is not entirely incompatible with his conception of identifications and transformations as the product of an imagination that recognizes a fluidity of identity – the possibility of becoming something else (changing qualities means changing names and vice versa, *Elementi*, pp. 26-7).

My paper develops this notion of performing identities and becoming someone else. Focusing on examples from the *Bacchides* and drawing on the new Menander, I reexamine the mythological material identified by Fraenkel, arguing that it reflects Plautus' tendency to play with fluid identities in contrast to Menander's practice of drawing on a stable extradramatic field of reference. We now have a sufficient corpus to recognize that many of Menander's mythological allusions are mediated through tragedy (Katsouris, Hurst), often in explicitly self-conscious ways (Blänsdorf, Stockert, Gutzwiller, Marshall). Although some of Plautus' mythical allusions are probably also mediated through Roman tragedy (Leo, Ribbeck, Thierfelder, Sedgwick Finette, and Fraenkel himself identify tragic allusions), the majority are "metatheatrical" in a broader sense: they are not intended to evoke stable or consistent identities. This is a different explanation than Fraenkel himself gives for what he describes as the digressive and heterogeneous nature of Plautine mythical allusions (they simply aim at short-term effects). My paper thus combines work in the tradition of Fraenkel with a major area of Plautine scholarship that postdates *Plautinisches im Plautus* (Barchiesi, Chiarini, Slater, Moore, Williams and Sharrock, applying the concept of "metatheater," coined by Abel).