

Scholars of fragmentary Roman drama are often confronted by the fact that the sources that preserve those fragments work against their interests. Grammarians and lexicographers quoted republican dramatists not to preserve information about a play, but to illustrate bits of Latinity that were odd or unfamiliar to the speech of their own day. Despite this opposition, fragments are usually treated as an unproblematic guide to the structure of the original script. This paper tests that assumption more critically than has been done for Roman drama. The best guide now available for the reliability of fragments is to see what the 'fragments' of an extant work suggest about its plot, and to compare that idea to the surviving text. This paper presents the results of such a thought experiment. Similar experiments on Greek drama (Dover 2000, Mastronarde 2009) have yielded encouraging results, but since each corpus of fragments is preserved for different reasons by individuals of varied habits and interests, it is impossible to generalize across genres and cultures.

This paper assembles the thirty ancient quotations of Plautus' *Captivi* and attempts a reconstruction of its plot, proceeding as though the entire Plautine corpus had been lost. It begins with some methodological remarks about assembling and 'de-editing' the quotations and about the reasons for selecting this play. The *Captivi*, only moderately well represented in the grammarians and lexicographers, provides a corpus that is roughly comparable to well-represented fragmentary plays in other genres of Roman drama. Individually, the quotations reveal the names of two characters, Tyndarus and Hegio; they also indicate that the play dealt in some way with former prisoners-of-war and that a parasite was involved in the plot. Closer consideration of the connections between these fragments indicates that the parasite had a central role in the return and recognition of a prisoner of war which took place during the action of the play; that a deception scheme was somehow essential to that return; and that in one scene a former prisoner confronted his captor on stage. Various arrangements would be possible.

Comparing those traces of the plot with the whole script reveals a few inevitable missteps in interpretation, both where the fragments lead us slightly astray and where a conservative or 'safe' interpretation in fact falls far short of the truth. It also reveals certain elements that the fragments do not, most notably the role of Aristophontes, the precise number of captives in the play, and why Hegio's situation and the character of Philocrates have been thought to make the play 'moral' and 'high-minded.' While a good idea of the plot emerges, much of its texture—including many features that set the *Captivi* apart from the rest of the Plautine corpus—would remain out of view.

As a coda, this paper examines how our understanding of the fragmentary *Captivi* would change if we compared the quotations to the rest of the Plautine corpus. From this kind of comparison the fragmentary *Captivi* would have seemed most similar to the *Menaechmi* or the *Stichus*, an impression that we know to be misguided, and which has far-reaching implications for the habit of using the scripts of Plautus and Terence as a guide when reconstructing fragmentary plays of more disparate dramatic genres.