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Haec urbs est Thebae

Proximal Deixis in the Prologue to Plautus' Amphitruo

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Abstract

This paper analyses the use of proximal deixis in Mercury's prologue to Plautus' *Amphitruo*. The study revolves around the referential ambiguity that characterizes proximal deictics such as *here* and *this city*, arguing that it contributes significantly to the blurred distinction between reality and fiction that is typical for Plautine theatre, and for his prologues in particular. The paper shows (1) that proximal deictics play a crucial role in Mercury's creation of and transition into the fictional world; (2) that their unique referential features during audience address enable Mercury to transform the spectators' surroundings in addition to his own; and (3) that their use underlines the similarity between Rome and fictional Thebes, which is subsequently connected to the Greek setting of Plautus' plays and their performance during Roman festivals. Moreover, the paper claims that Mercury partly relies on proximal deixis for the inductive effect of his prologue.

Keywords

communicative anchoring – deixis – induction – drama – Plautus

1 Introduction

During a dramatic performance, an attentive audience perceives two distinct worlds (or *levels*) simultaneously: the external, real world of the spectators

themselves and the internal, fictional world of the characters. While naturalistic theatre upholds a strict separation of the external and the internal level, Plautine drama favours a playful blend of reality and fiction. It is notoriously difficult to distinguish between Plautus' characters and the actors that represent them, inhabitants of the fictional world constantly step into the external world to address the audience, and there is a great continuity between the fictional world presented on stage and the reality of the spectators.¹

The present paper is concerned with the blurred distinction between reality and fiction in Mercury's prologue to *Amphitruo*. In general, prologues illustrate this blurred distinction especially clearly because of their peripheral position at the start of a play. Marking the beginning of the performance, prologues exist in a grey area between the fictional world presented on stage and the external reality.² Their main function, therefore, is a performative one: similar to other opening mechanisms, a prologue "has to act as if it is doing something, causing something to happen, changing the world".³ Prologues serve to bridge the gap between the external and the internal level of the drama, to transform actors into characters, and to create a fictional space on stage.

Mercury is a unique Plautine prologue speaker who initiates the performance *and* takes part in the ensuing fictional action.⁴ In other words, apart from creating the fictional world of *Amphitruo* (Thebes), which is his duty as prologist, Mercury needs to transition into this world as well. The messenger god's presence in fictional Thebes is particularly evident at the end of the prologue, when he announces the arrival of Amphitruon's slave Sosia:

- (1) sed Amphitruonis illi[c] est seruos Sosia:
a portu illic nunc (huc) cum lanterna aduenit.
abigam iam ego illum aduenientem ab aedibus.⁵

But there is Amphitruo's slave Sosia; he's coming here from the harbor with a lantern now. This instant I'll drive him away from the house, as soon as he gets here.

1 See e.g. Moore 1998, ch. 1-3 and Marshall 2019.

2 See e.g. Sharrock 2009, ch. 2 and the contributions in Haas and Polaschegg 2012 for prologues as *beginnings*.

3 Sharrock 2009, 22; see also Wessels 2012.

4 Similar to Charinus in *Mercator* (see Dunsch 2014, 506-507).

5 Pl. *Am.* 148-150. The text and translations in this paper are by De Melo, 2011-2013 unless otherwise specified.

The impending arrival of the fictional character Sosia reveals the existence of fictional Thebes on the Roman stage. Furthermore, Mercury's intention to interact with this fictional world by chasing Sosia away from the house suggests that he has stepped into his own creation.⁶ The fact that Mercury is the prologue speaker and a participant in the fictional action makes his transition from reality into fiction exceptionally smooth.

But the creation of and subsequent existence of fictional Thebes on stage is not the only factor that causes the blend of reality and fiction, and of real and fictional space, in the prologue to *Amphitruo*. A second source of fuzziness concerns Mercury's audience address. Since the messenger god is (at least for part of the prologue) located in the fictional world, his direct communication with the spectators removes the clear boundary between the internal and the external level of the performance. Moreover, the exceedingly Roman character of Mercury, which underlines the similarity between the fictional world and the spectators' Rome, blurs the distinction between fiction and reality as well.

The present paper explores this blend of reality and fiction in the prologue to *Amphitruo* by examining Mercury's use of proximal demonstratives such as *here* and *this city*. As the interpretation of demonstratives crucially depends on the location of the speaker, their analysis is especially interesting when the speaker's location is undetermined and unstable, such as Mercury's during his transition into fictional Thebes. My central claim is that the referential ambiguity that is inherent to demonstratives such as *here* and *this city* can conveniently be used to manipulate the flexibility of space and the blurred distinction between reality and fiction in Mercury's prologue.

The analysis of proximal demonstratives that is presented in this paper centres around their use as anchoring devices. The term *anchoring* has been applied to two distinct aspects of demonstratives' communicative function. More specifically, demonstratives (1) evoke a frame of reference that is anchored to the speaker's location and (2) provide a textual anchor to which the speaker can attach new information. Both types of demonstrative anchoring are instrumental for the interpretation of Mercury's proximal demonstratives in the prologue to *Amphitruo*. They will be addressed in more detail in the following paragraphs.

6 The deictic adverb *(huc)* in 149, which is a sixteenth-century conjecture by Kammermeister that was adopted by Lindsay 1904 and De Melo 2011-2013 (but not by all modern editors; see e.g. Christenson 2000), could be an additional indication of Mercury's interaction with the fictional world, specifying the messenger god's location as the direction of Sosia's movement.

Recent linguistic and psycholinguistic studies about spatial cognition have focused on the idea that spatial expressions evoke a *frame of reference*.⁷ Frames of reference are coordinate systems in which the location of a referent (the *figure*) is specified as being at a certain angle or in a certain direction relative to a second entity (the *ground*) from the perspective of a *viewer*. The centre of the frame of reference, where the axes underlying the coordinate system meet, is called the *origin* or the *anchor*. For instance, the sentence *For John, the ball is to the left of the tree* identifies the location of a ball (the figure) as being to the left of a tree (the angle and the ground) from the perspective of John (the viewer), who additionally anchors the coordinate system to his location (Fig. 1a).

Diessel has argued that demonstratives evoke an egocentric frame of reference, in which the speaker constitutes the ground, the viewer and the anchor (in this context more commonly called the *deictic centre*) of the coordinate system.⁸ In other words, demonstratives locate a referent relative to the speaker, from the perspective of the speaker, and in his/her immediate spatial context. The choice for a specific demonstrative (e.g. proximal, distal, etc.) reflects the distance of the referent from the speaker, and the speaker's gesture indicates the direction in which the referent can be found. For example, the noun phrase *that ball* and its accompanying gesture guide the addressee's attention to a specific ball that is located in the immediate speech situation, at a relatively large distance from the speaker (Fig. 1b).

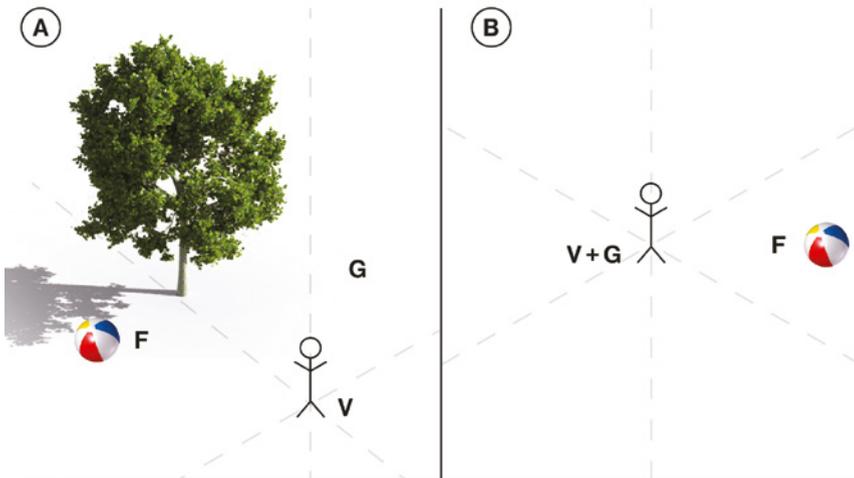


FIGURE 1 Frames of reference, whereby F = Figure, G = Ground, and V = Viewer

⁷ See Diessel 2014, 117-118 for references.

⁸ Diessel 2014.

As the egocentric frame of reference is anchored to the speaker's bodily coordinates, addressees crucially rely on their knowledge about the location and immediate physical surroundings of the speaker for the interpretation of demonstratives. This consideration is fundamental to the distinction made by Fillmore between *gestural* and *symbolic* deixis.⁹ While addressees can identify the referents of gestural deictics (such as *that ball*) by merely monitoring the utterance context, the interpretation of symbolic deictics (such as *here* and *this city*) requires more exact information about the speaker's location. Addressees cannot successfully interpret a noun phrase such as *this city* without knowing whether their interlocutor is e.g. in Amsterdam or Brussels. Further ambiguity surrounds the scope of symbolic deixis. The proximal demonstrative *here*, for example, can be paraphrased as *in this city, in this country, on this planet*, etc.¹⁰

In the case of Mercury's prologue to *Amphitruo*, the messenger god's proximal symbolic deictics are especially ambiguous due to his unstable and ill-defined location during his transition from reality into fiction. In order to interpret these deictics, the present study resorts to a second type of demonstrative anchoring, which is tightly connected to the management of common ground. It is well-known that demonstratives can refer to a variety of different entities: their referents can be located in the physical context of the speaker and his/her addressee, belong to their private and cultural shared knowledge, or constitute elements of and participants in the surrounding discourse.¹¹ This great referential flexibility allows demonstratives to refer to all types of common ground distinguished by Clark.¹²

In this context, the term *anchoring* refers to the idea that demonstratives, by indicating entities in the speech participants' common ground, serve as textual anchors to which speakers can attach new information.¹³ Thus, Kroon described the Latin demonstrative *hic*, when used as a participant tracking (or *anaphoric*) device, as an "anchor for the embedding of a new informational element in the evolving discourse representation".¹⁴ A parallel analysis applies to the spatial use of *hic*. Spatial demonstratives also provide an anchor to which speakers can attach new information, but rather than selecting an element from the previous discourse, they pick out an object from the speech participants' physical surroundings.

9 Fillmore 1997, 62-63.

10 See Diessel 2012, 3 and Section 3 of this paper.

11 Himmelmann 1996 and Diessel 1999, ch. 5. For Latin, see e.g. Pinkster 2015, 970-972, 1093-1101, 1137-1146.

12 Clark 1996, ch. 4.

13 See e.g. Rommetveit 1968, 185-188.

14 Kroon 2017, 598.

This second type of demonstrative anchoring facilitates the interpretation of the proximal symbolic deictics in Mercury's prologue to *Amphitruo*—and therefore the identification of the messenger god's location—in the following way: if a demonstrative provides a spatial or temporal anchor for events and entities belonging to the external reality, it can reasonably be assumed that the coordinate system that it evokes is anchored to this external space, and thus that Mercury is located in reality. Conversely, if Mercury's *hic et nunc* serves as a spatiotemporal anchor for fictional actions and entities, the frame of reference is anchored to fictional space, and the messenger god is located in the fictional world. Based on the type of anchored information, we can determine the anchoring point of the evoked frame of reference, and therewith Mercury's location.

Taking these two types of demonstrative anchoring as a starting point for the analysis, I aim to show that the intrinsic ambiguity of proximal symbolic deictics is extraordinarily powerful in Mercury's prologue to *Amphitruo*, a context where the distinction between real and fictional space is not (meant to be) well-defined. More specifically, I will illustrate three ways in which proximal symbolic deictics contribute to the blend of reality and fiction in Mercury's prologue. Section 2 focuses on the prologue speaker's creation of and transition into fictional Thebes. Section 3 is concerned with Mercury's direct address of the spectators. Section 4 focuses on the similarity that exists between the fictional world and Rome, and explores its connection to the performance context of Plautus' comedies during Roman festivals.

Finally, I argue throughout the paper that the referential ambiguity of proximal symbolic deixis plays a significant role in what Slater called the *inductive* goal of Plautine prologues.¹⁵ Slater argued that Plautus' prologues aim to induct the audience "into participation in the creation and functioning of the play".¹⁶ Recognizing the importance of the audience's goodwill for the reception of the play, Plautus' prologue speakers aim at getting their spectators in the right mood for a dramatic performance.¹⁷ The various interpretations offered by proximal symbolic deictics encourage the spectators to think about the nature of theatrical space, which puts them in the right frame of mind for watching a Plautine play.

15 Slater 2000.

16 *Ibid.*, 125.

17 E.g. *ibid.*, 150-151; Moore 1998, 12-17; Dunsch 2014, 499-500.

2 Proximal Deixis and the Bridge between Reality and Fiction

The first 96 lines of Mercury's extraordinarily long prologue primarily serve to get the spectators' attention and instruct them on how to behave. The messenger god begins by drawing up a contract between himself and the audience, offering the spectators financial assistance in exchange for their support during the play (1-16). After declaring himself to be an emissary from Jupiter, he embarks on a number of digressions, one of which concerns the play's genre (50-63). In lines 64-85, Mercury eventually conveys Jupiter's warning to the spectators: inspectors will search the audience for clagues and remove them from the performance space. The messenger god then reveals that Jupiter's concern for the play's reception originates in his own appearance on stage (86-95), after which he appeals to the audience for silence in order to explain the plot (95-96).

In the second part of his prologue (lines 97-152), Mercury predominantly provides background information about the play. After identifying the fictional setting as Thebes (97), the messenger god starts discussing the plot: Amphitryon has been waging war elsewhere and Jupiter has been enjoying the company of Amphitryon's wife Alcmene (100-111). At present, Jupiter has lengthened the night for his own pleasure, while Amphitryon is returning to Thebes (112-141). The play's action revolves around Jupiter and Mercury taking on the appearance of Amphitryon and his slave Sosia. Although the gods' true identity will be hidden from the fictional characters, the audience will be able to recognize them through particular details of their costumes (142-147). The prologue ends with the announcement of Sosia's arrival and a *valedictio* to the spectators (148-152).

As the following two sections will demonstrate, Mercury travels from Rome to Thebes between the two above-mentioned parts of the messenger god's prologue. An analysis of proximal symbolic deictics reveals that the deictic centre is located in the external world in the first part (Section 2.1) and in the fictional locale during the second part (Section 2.2). In other words, Mercury transitions from reality into fiction over the course of his prologue. The intrinsic referential ambiguity of symbolic proximal deixis allows for this to happen almost indiscernibly to the spectators. Furthermore, the various possible interpretations of this type of deixis constantly remind the audience of the spatial flexibility that characterizes this particular prologue and the nature of theatre in general.

While Sections 2.1 and 2.2 are concerned with Mercury's transition into the fictional world of the play, Section 2.3 determines when and how the

messenger god creates this fictional world. I contend that the utterance *haec urbs est Thebae* (97) is a performative speech act that transforms Mercury's surroundings into fictional Thebes.¹⁸ The proximal demonstrative phrase *haec urbs* plays a critical role in this transformation, defining the scope of the operation as Mercury's immediate spatiotemporal context. The section concludes by discussing the audience's involvement in the creation of fictional Thebes. Mercury's utterance is regarded as an invitation to the spectators to accept the creation of a fictional world, and thus as part of the inductive function of his prologue.

2.1 *Proximal Deixis in Lines 1-96*

The first 96 lines of Mercury's prologue contain twenty-one instances of the proximal demonstrative *hic* and its derivatives. Seven of these are adverbial demonstratives that refer to Mercury's location, viz. *hic* in 16, 62, 91, and 94 and *huc* in 20, 26, and 50.¹⁹ The directional adverb *huc* invariably denotes the destination of Mercury's voyage as an emissary from Jupiter, providing a spatial anchor for the messenger god's journey. The co-occurrence of *huc* with *ad uos* in the excerpt below illustrates especially clearly that the frame of reference evoked by *huc* is anchored to the external world of the spectators, which implies that Mercury is situated in reality:

(2) *pater huc me misit ad uos oratum meus.*²⁰

My father has sent me *here to you* to make a plea.²¹

Likewise, all four instances of *hic* in the first 96 lines are explicitly connected to the external level of the drama. They are without exception accompanied by references to acting and performance: the spectators being fair judges of the play (16), the fact that slaves appear in *Amphitruo* (62), and Jupiter's own acting job (94). Mercury is thus located on stage in the real world. This

18 *Haec urbs est Thebae* does not, however, constitute a strict separation between fictional and non-fictional elements in this prologue, as will be discussed in more detail in Sections 2.1 and 2.2.

19 Other proximal deictics refer to textual elements (e.g. in 13 and 24) and to the play itself (see my comments later in this section). *Huc* in 38 guides the spectators' attention towards Mercury without revealing anything about his location. (*His*) in 69, which was added by Lindsay 1904 and adopted by De Melo 2011-2013 (but not by all modern editors; see e.g. Christenson 2000), combines with *histrionibus* to refer to the group of actors performing *Amphitruo*. It does not refer to Mercury's location.

20 *Pl. Am.* 20.

21 Translation by Nixon 1916. De Melo 2011-2013 takes *ad uos* with *oratum*.

is particularly evident in 91-92, where *hic* combines with the prepositional phrase *in proscaenio*:²²

- (3) etiam, histriones anno quom *in proscaenio hic*
Iouem inuocarunt, uenit, auxilio is fuit.²³

Last year, when the actors called upon Jupiter *here on stage*, he also came and brought them help.

Similar to spatial deictics, temporal deictics in the first 96 lines of *Amphitruo* provide anchors for events in the external world as well.²⁴ The adverb *anno* ('last year') in (3) above, for instance, provides a temporal reference point for Jupiter's appearance in a previous play.²⁵ A comparable example is the proximal temporal adverb *hodie* in the following excerpt, which does not denote a day in the fictional action, but the day of the play's performance:

- (4) hanc fabulam, inquam, hic Iuppiter *hodie* ipse aget
et ego una cum illo. nunc ⟨uos⟩ animum aduertite,
dum huius argumentum eloquar comoediae.²⁶

This play, then, Jupiter will act himself *here today*, and I together with him. Now pay attention while I'm telling you the plot of this comedy.

These instances of proximal symbolic deixis in lines 1-96 of Mercury's prologue are thus tied to the external level of the performance. Based on an analysis of these terms, we can therefore conclude that the messenger god is situated in the external reality, and has not yet travelled to the fictional world of the play.²⁷

22 See also Sedgwick 1960, *ad loc.*

23 Pl. *Am.* 91-92. In this example, and throughout the prologue to *Amphitruo*, Plautus plays with the idea that the real Mercury and Jupiter appear on the Roman stage as actors, playing the parts of themselves. These different layers of identity call for an analysis of person deixis in this prologue, which is unfortunately beyond the purpose of this paper.

24 See also Dunsch (2005) for a discussion of temporal deixis in Plautine (and other ancient) comedy.

25 Christenson 2000, *ad loc.*

26 Pl. *Am.* 94-96.

27 Nevertheless, several elements in the first part of Mercury's prologue are less strongly associated with the external level of the performance. Consider, for instance, Mercury's negotiations with the audience about the genre of *Amphitruo* (50-63). After expressing surprise at the audience's disapproval of tragedy as the play's genre, Mercury states

This does not, however, imply that the performance has not yet started. Prologues serve as bridges between reality and fiction, but they are unquestionably part of the performance. One type of deictic reference illustrates this especially clearly: the use of *hic* in combination with nouns such as *fabula* and *comoedia* for reference to the play itself. Apart from *hanc fabulam* and *huius comoediae* in example (4) above, examples of this construction are *huius traegodiae* (51) and *hanc comoediam* (88), as well as *huic fabulae* in the excerpt below:

- (5) ... ita *huic* facietis *fabulae* silentium
itaque aequi et iusti hic eritis omnes arbitri.²⁸

... you will keep silence during *this play* and you will all be fair and just judges.

Mercury here uses a proximal demonstrative to refer to the play in which he himself is performing. Similar instances of reflexive deictic reference are *this section* and *in this book*.²⁹ The performance context of theatre plays makes this type of reference particularly powerful in drama: by referring to the play with a proximal deictic, Mercury indicates that it is already going on. To be sure, the very mention of *fabula* and *comoedia* reveals the messenger god's awareness of the play as a play, thus positioning him in the external world, but the reflexive deictic *hic* emphasizes the existence of an ongoing performance.

2.2 Proximal Deixis in Lines 97-152

While the proximal deictics in the prologue's first part are linked to the external world, most of the proximal deictics in lines 97-152 are connected to fictional Thebes. There are sixteen instances of proximal deixis in these lines, ten of which denote Mercury's location: *haec urbs* (97) and the spatial adverbs *hinc* (102, 125), *hīc* (112, 128, 151, 152), and *huc* (117, 140, 149).³⁰ *Haec urbs* will be considered in Section 2.3. Although *huc* (117) and *hīc* (151, 152)—being accompanied by references to acting and to the performance—are tied to the external

deus sum, commutauero. It is the messenger god's divine power that allows him to transform the genre of *Amphitruo*, something which he could not do as a human actor (see Gonçalves 2015, 61).

28 Pl. *Am.* 15-16.

29 See also Himmelmann 1996, 221.

30 The other six proximal deictics refer to objects on stage (e.g. in 116), to discourse segments (e.g. in 105), and to the night of the performance, cf. example (9). For *huc* in 149, see n. 6 above.

world, the remaining six instances of proximal symbolic deixis in lines 97-152 evoke reference frames that are anchored to the fiction. *Hinc* and *hinc* in the excerpt presented below, for instance, provide spatial anchoring points for events that are taking place or have taken place in the fictional world, which suggests that Mercury has stepped into fictional Thebes:

- (6) ego serui sumpsit Sosiae mi imaginem,
 qui cum Amphitruone abiit *hinc* in exercitum,
 ut praeseruire amanti meo possem patri
 atque ut ne qui essem familiares quaerent,
 uorsari crebro *hic* quom uiderent me domi.³¹

I've taken on the slave Sosia's image, who went away [*from here*; M.B.] to the army with Amphitruo, so that I can be in attendance on my father during his love affair and so that the family servants won't ask who I am when they see me spend a great deal of time *here* in the house.

Similar to *hinc* and *hinc* in the excerpt above, *hinc* (102), *hinc* (112) and *huc* (140, 149) are explicitly connected to the fictional world: *hinc* (102) provides a spatial reference point for Amphitruon's departure from Thebes, *hinc* (112) specifies the setting of Jupiter's adventures with Alcmena, *huc* (140) indicates the location of Amphitruon's impending arrival (cf. example [7]), and *huc* (149) describes the direction of Sosia's movement.

Likewise, while temporal deictics in the first part of Mercury's prologue provided temporal anchors for actions happening in the external world, those in lines 97-152 are connected to the fiction. For instance, whereas *hodie* in example (4) above referred to the day of the performance, *hodie* in the excerpt below provides an anchor in the fictional world, framing actions that will happen in Thebes:

- (7) nunc *hodie* Amphitruo ueniet huc ab exercitu
 et seruos, quouis ego hanc fero imaginem.³²

Now *today* Amphitruo will come here from the army, and also his slave, whose likeness I bear.

³¹ Pl. *Am.* 124-128.

³² *Ibid.* 140-141.

Similar observations can be made about the temporal adverb *nunc*. Christenson observed that instances of *nunc* in lines 1-96 of the prologue to *Amphitruo* typically have a discourse structuring function, marking the transition to a new discourse segment, e.g. in 17, 38, 50, 64.³³ Although several occurrences of *nunc* in the remainder of the prologue serve the same purpose, e.g. in 116 and 140, the adverb frequently refers to the current state of affairs in the fictional setting, e.g. in 112 (cf. example [9]), 120, 131, 135, and 149. *Nunc* in the excerpt below, for instance, provides a temporal anchor for Amphitryon's absence from Thebes, and the present tense forms of *esse* refer to a state of affairs in the fictional world as well:

- (8) is *nunc* Amphitruo praefectust legionibus,
nam cum Telobois bellum est Thebano poplo.³⁴

This Amphitruo is *now* in command of the legions because the Theban people is at war with the Teloboians.

Mercury's transition from the external to the internal world becomes complete at the end of his prologue, when he announces the arrival of Amphitryon's slave Sosia (148-150, cf. example [1]). The abundance of spatiotemporal deictics, as well as repeated references to the physical world of the play, make these lines exceptionally dynamic. The fictional setting of *Amphitruo* has come to life.

2.3 *The Creation of Fictional Thebes*

The previous sections discussed Mercury's transition from reality into fiction. Seeing that the messenger god cannot physically move from Rome to Thebes, but constantly remains on stage, his change in location must be the result of a transformation of his surroundings. The present section is concerned with the moment of this transformation.

According to Sharrock, the spectators become aware of the existence of a fictional world during the expository part of Mercury's prologue to *Amphitruo*, during which he outlines the plot.³⁵ After explaining Amphitryon's absence from Thebes and Alcmene's double pregnancy (once by Amphitryon and once by Jupiter), the messenger god turns to the present situation in lines 112-114: Jupiter is enjoying an exceptionally long night in bed with Alcmene. About

33 Christenson 2000, 139.

34 Pl. *Am.* 100-101.

35 Sharrock 2009, 34.

these lines, which are presented in (9), Sharrock observed that “Mercury makes us ‘believe’ there is more going on behind the scenes, both physically and temporally”.³⁶

- (9) et meus pater *nunc* intus *hic* cum illa cubat,
et *haec* ob eam rem *nox* est facta longior,
dum (cum) illa quacum uolt uoluptatem capit.³⁷

And my father’s *now* lying with her [*here*; M.B.] inside the house, and for that very reason *this night’s* been made longer, while he’s enjoying himself with the one he wants.

The numerous proximal deictics (*nunc*, *hic*, *haec nox*) in these lines, which provide anchors in the fictional world (as is evident from e.g. *intus*) and emphasize that the story is taking place in the here and now, support Sharrock’s observation.

Nevertheless, the proximal deictics leading up to lines 112–114 are connected to the fictional world as well. For instance, *nunc* (100, cf. example [8]) and *hinc* (102) provide spatiotemporal anchors for states of affairs and events belonging to the internal level of the performance, which hints at Mercury’s presence in fictional Thebes. The messenger god’s creation of the fictional world must therefore precede lines 112–114. In particular, I would argue that Mercury creates fictional Thebes by proclaiming *haec urbs est Thebae* in line 97:³⁸

- (10) *haec urbs est Thebae*. in illisce habitat aedibus
Amphitruo, natus Argis ex Argo patre,
quicum Alcumena est nupta, Electri filia.³⁹

This city is Thebes. In that house there lives Amphitruo, born in Argos of an Argive father. His wife is Alcumena, daughter of Electrus.

The interpretation of *haec* in the example above, as well as in a number of settings in other Plautine plays (cf. example [16]), is ambiguous. On the one hand, *haec* can be analysed as a gestural deictic, accompanied by a pointing gesture and referring to the physical buildings that make up the stage setting. In this

36 *Ibid.*

37 *Pl. Am.* 112–114.

38 As does Gonçalves 2015, 66.

39 *Pl. Am.* 97–99.

view, Mercury uses *haec urbs est Thebae* as a descriptive phrase, intended to inform the audience about the play's setting.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, I am inclined to analyse *haec urbs est Thebae* not merely as a description of the stage setting, but as a performative speech act: Mercury uses the power of language to create a fictional space.⁴¹ Accordingly, I follow Zanchi's interpretation of *haec urbs* as a symbolic deictic.⁴² *Haec urbs* does not refer to a well-delineated referent that is present on stage, but to Mercury's more extensive, undefined surroundings. The demonstrative allows the messenger god to pick out his spatial context and indicate that it is Thebes, thereby transforming reality into fiction.⁴³ A symbolic interpretation of *haec urbs* also allows for a more fluent transition towards the use of *nunc* (100) and *hinc* (102) discussed above.

Sentences such as *haec urbs est Thebae* are used to "create imaginative space", and are therefore part of the inductive process in Plautine prologues.⁴⁴ Section 1 showed that the chief aim of Plautus' prologue speakers is to urge their audience to participate in the functioning of the play. The creation of a fictional world is of pivotal importance to the performance, and the spectators' cooperation is essential in carrying it out.⁴⁵ *Haec urbs est Thebae* must therefore be seen as an invitation to the spectators to accept a transformation of Mercury's surroundings, rather than the messenger god's individual action.

3 Audience Address and the Collapse of Double Deixis

The previous sections were concerned with Mercury's creation of and subsequent transition into fictional Thebes in the prologue to *Amphitruo*. Although the audience was briefly discussed in the context of induction, the chief aim of the analysis was to establish Mercury's location based on his use of proximal symbolic deictics. The present section shifts the focus from the prologue speaker to his audience. It is argued that Mercury's spectators do not get left behind as the messenger god steps into fictional Thebes. Instead, they are invited to accept a transformation of their own surroundings in addition to

40 See n. 79 below for the type of gesture that possibly accompanies this utterance.

41 See Gonçalves 2015, ch. 3 for performatives and the creative ability of language in *Amphitruo*.

42 Cf. Zanchi (forthcoming). This also appears to be the interpretation by Christenson 2000, *ad loc.*: "Mercury extends his hands to define the theatrical space around him".

43 See also Wessels 2012, 62-64.

44 Slater 2000, 125.

45 See also Marshall 2019, 89-90.

those of Mercury. Again, the ambiguity that is inherent to proximal symbolic deictics, in particular with reference to their scope, in combination with the unique properties of deixis during audience address, is of crucial importance for this transformation, as it allows the fictional world to encroach on the real one.

The scopal ambiguity of proximal symbolic deixis was previously described by Diessel.⁴⁶ Observing that the deictic adverb *here* can be accompanied by a variety of different constituents, including *where I am*, *in Jena*, and *on this planet*, Diessel stated that “the area included in the deictic centre (denoted by *here*) varies with the construal of the speech situation”. In other words, when its scope is not specified by e.g. a prepositional phrase, *here* can be interpreted as referring merely to the speaker’s direct surroundings, but also to larger areas, such as the entire planet. In many instances, the addressee is included in the area denoted by such a use of *here*.

More explicit proximal symbolic deictics, such as *this city* and *this country*, also typically indicate an extended space that encompasses the addressee’s as well as the speaker’s own location. To be sure, in situations where the speech participants are not in each other’s vicinity, but are communicating e.g. over the phone or via correspondence, the symbolic use of proximal deixis can refer to the location of the speaker alone. This is the case in the excerpt from Cicero’s letter to Manius Curius cited below. As Curius is in Greece, *huius urbis* refers exclusively to Cicero’s own spatial context (Rome).

- (11) Memini cum mihi desipere uidebare quod cum istis potius uiueres quam nobiscum: erat enim multo domicilium *huius urbis*, cum quidem haec urbs, aptius humanitati et suauitati tuae quam tota Peloponnesus, nedum Patrae.⁴⁷

I remember the time when I thought you were out of your mind to prefer life with your friends over there to life with us. When Rome [*this city*; M.B.] was Rome, it would have been a much more suitable residence for a person of your culture and social gifts than the whole Peloponnesus, let alone Patrae.

By contrast, when the spatial surroundings are common to both speech participants, the usage of *this city*, *this country*, etc. always implies the inclusion of the addressee in the deictic centre. Consider, for instance, the following

46 Diessel 2012, 3-4.

47 Cic. *Fam.* 7.28.1. Text and translation by Shackleton Bailey 2001.

excerpt from a dialogue between Charinus and Eutyclus in Plautus' *Mercator*. After Charinus announces that he will leave town, Eutyclus asks him:

(12) cedo, si *hac urbe* abis, amorem te hic relicturum putas?⁴⁸

Speak, if you leave *this city*, do you think you'll leave your love behind here?

Seeing that Eutyclus and Charinus share their physical context, Charinus is by default included in the area denoted by Eutyclus' *hac urbe*.

This dialogue from *Mercator*, however, is crucially different from Mercury's prologue to *Amphitruo* when it comes to the speech situation: while Charinus and Eutyclus are two fictional characters involved in a conversation without noticing the audience, Mercury directly addresses the spectators. This difference in the communicative situation of these characters has a drastic impact on the interpretation of their proximal symbolic deictics. In particular, by failing to acknowledge the audience's presence during their dialogue, Charinus and Eutyclus maintain a strict separation between the internal and the external level of the performance. This type of communicative situation is characterized by a lack of common ground between the characters and the spectators: the *hic et nunc* of the audience pertains to the external world, while the *hic et nunc* of the characters is restricted to the internal world. A dialogue such as the one between Charinus and Eutyclus thus involves two deictic frames of reference, or a "double deixis".⁴⁹

However, when a character addresses the spectators from within the fictional world, the strict distinction between the external and the internal world becomes blurred. By (partly) stepping out of the fictional world and communicating with the audience, characters open up an entirely new dimension of common ground, viz. that between themselves and their spectators. Suddenly, characters and spectators share their *hic et nunc*. Audience address can therefore be described in terms of a 'collapse of double deixis', which makes deictic reference especially interesting in this type of communicative situation.

The collapse of double deixis in Mercury's prologue to *Amphitruo* lends a new interpretation to *haec urbs est Thebae*. The lack of a clear demarcation of the fictional and the real *hic et nunc*, in combination with the fact that noun phrases such as *this city* typically include the addressee in their deictic centre, immediately suggests that *haec urbs* refers to an area that extends beyond

48 Pl. *Mer.* 654.

49 For a discussion of "double deixis", see Pfister 1988, 247-249.

Mercury's direct context and includes the spectators' surroundings as well.⁵⁰ *Haec urbs est Thebae* thus invites the audience to accept a temporary transformation of their own surroundings as well as those of Mercury. It is the referential ambiguity of proximal symbolic deixis that allows for this interpretation.

This transformation of the audience's surroundings results in the spectators becoming part of the fictional world of *Amphitruo*. The inclusion of the audience in the fiction can frequently be observed in other Plautine plays as well. Plautus' characters often assume that their spectators are able to take part in the fictional action. A famous example comes from *Aulularia* 716-720, where the miserly Euclio accuses members of the audience of stealing his pot of gold.⁵¹ Similar, in *Mostellaria* 354-355, the slave Tranio, expecting punishment for disobeying his master, asks the spectators to be tortured in his stead:

- (13) *ecquis homo est qui facere argenti cupiat aliquantum lucri,
qui hodie sese excruciaci meam uicem possit pati?*⁵²

Is there anyone who'd like to earn some money, who could bear to be tortured instead of me today?

The notion that spectators can participate in the fictional world is also present in *Amphitruo*. Consider the following lines of Sosia's soliloquy, which immediately follows the prologue, and Mercury's subsequent comment aside:

- (14) *SOS. ubi sunt isti scortatores qui soli inuiti cubant?
haec nox scita est exercendo scorto conducto male.
MER. meus pater nunc pro huius uerbis recte et sapienter facit,
qui complexus cum Alcumena cubat amans, animo opsequens.*⁵³

SOS. Where are *those lechers* who are lying alone against their will? This night is perfect for exhausting a prostitute hired for a lot of money.

MER. (*aside*) According to this chap's words, my father's now doing the right and clever thing; he's lying with Alcumena in his arms, full of passion and enjoying himself.

50 See also Marshall 2019 for the extension of the fictional world.

51 For a discussion of this passage, see Christenson 2014.

52 Pl. *Mos.* 354-355. See also *Cas.* 951.

53 Pl. *Am.* 287-290.

The use of the addressee-oriented demonstrative *iste* in this example is intriguing. The demonstrative does not primarily indicate an entity that is physically present in the speech situation or an element of or participant in the preceding discourse. Instead, *iste* here presents the *scortatores* as a common, well-known group in the larger community. Himmelmann calls this type of demonstrative reference, whereby the referent belongs to the speech participants' shared knowledge, the "recognitional use" of demonstratives.⁵⁴

In Latin, as in most other languages, the recognitional usage type of demonstratives is typically associated with the distal term *ille*.⁵⁵ A recognitional instance of *ille* is presented in (15), where the noun phrase *illunc hircum* refers to a goat that is not present on stage, but that is known to both speech participants and is further identified by the relative clause *ruri qui uobis exhibet negotium*.

- (15) profecto ego *illunc hircum* castrari uolo,
ruri qui uobis exhibet negotium.⁵⁶

That he-goat causing trouble on the farm—I want him castrated.

Although recognitional demonstratives are generally of the distal type, a considerable amount of recognitional reference in Plautus is made with the medial, addressee-oriented demonstrative *iste*, as was the case in (14). More specifically, of the 197 instances of recognitional reference that I counted in Plautus' plays, 44 (22%) include a form of *iste* rather than *ille*.⁵⁷ I have observed that the referents of recognitional *iste* tend to be more strongly associated with the addressee than those of recognitional *ille*. As Sosia is addressing the spectators in (14), it is tempting to analyse *isti scortatores* as referring to (certain) members of the audience.⁵⁸ The use of recognitional *iste* presents these spectators as a well-known sight in fictional Thebes, which implies that they are part of the fictional world. Moreover, Sosia indicates that the present night is perfect for *scortatores*' behaviour, suggesting that the relevant spectators can participate in the fictional action. The framing of Alcmene as a *scortum* and the inclusion of Jupiter in the group of *scortatores*, as Mercury's subsequent

54 Himmelmann 1996.

55 E.g. Dupraz, 2012 and Pinkster 2015, 1099-1101. See Himmelmann 1996, 206 for the use of distal terms for recognitional reference.

56 Pl. *Mer.* 272-273.

57 Breunesse 2020.

58 See also Christenson 2000, *ad loc.*

comment aside suggests, blurs the distinction between fiction and reality as well.⁵⁹

Finally, similar to spatial deictics, temporal deictics involve the speaker as a reference point. However, even more clearly than spatial proximal deictics do, temporal proximal deictics include the addressee in their deictic centre: the temporal *hic et nunc* of two speech participants is necessarily, due to the nature of time, the same. In this light, *hodie* in example (7) must be analysed as referring to the ‘today’ of both Mercury and his spectators. A parallel interpretation pertains to *haec nox* in example (9): even though the performance takes place by day, the spectators are encouraged to imagine a fictional world at night and they are invited to accept this as their own temporal context.

4 Deixis and Realism

Prologues and other situations in which a fictional character communicates directly with the spectators, which Pfister calls “epic communication structures”, are widely considered as resulting in a “break in the illusion” of the performance.⁶⁰ While illusory passages encourage the audience to believe in the reality of the fictional world, epic structures remind the spectators of the fact that they are watching a play. As a result, these communicative structures are said to have an alienating effect:

... these epic elements have an anti-illusionist function which is intended to counter any identification or empathy on the part of the audience with the figures and situations within the internal communication system, thereby encouraging a posture of critical distance.⁶¹

Rather than being totally immersed in the fictional action, the spectators’ “posture of critical distance” allows them to reflect on the play that they are

59 See also *ibid.*, *ad loc.*

60 Pfister 1988, 71. The term ‘epic’ is closely associated with the type of drama advocated by the German playwright Bertolt Brecht. Pfister 1988, however, uses the term for a type of communication structure whereby the internal level of the drama becomes mediated by a figure addressing the audience. He argues that “if we understand the epic tendencies in drama to be those that encourage the development of a mediating communication system, then they were a recurrent feature of dramatic texts long before Brecht ever thought of them” (71). In the remainder of this paper, I use the term ‘epic’ in Pfister’s sense. For epic communication structures and their effect of breaking the illusion, see e.g. Pfister 1988, 70-84.

61 Pfister 1988, 71.

watching. By using epic communication structures, playwrights can thus guide the audience's interpretation of the performance and control their reception of the play.

It can be argued, however, that epic communication structures in Plautus' plays cannot be adequately described in terms of a break in the illusion because his drama is essentially non-illusory.⁶² Plautine theatre does have a mimetic component, but the creation of a convincing fictional world is arguably not its only—or central—objective. In fact, epic communication structures are so pervasive that they can be considered the default state in Plautus' plays.⁶³ Moreover, abundant metatheatrical references—both inside and outside epic communication structures—and conventions, such as the play-within-a-play, as well as the non-illusory nature of space and time, which will be discussed in greater detail later, constantly remind the audience that they are attending a dramatic performance.

Rather than creating a convincing fiction, the main objective of Plautine drama is to discuss the nature of theatre. Plautus' plays are metatheatrical: they do not imitate life, but drama itself.⁶⁴ The prologues of his plays do guide the spectators' interpretation of the drama, but rather than encouraging the audience to reflect on the content of the fiction, Plautine prologue speakers primarily focus the spectators' attention on the dramatic nature of the performance that they initiate. These metatheatrical comments do not serve to alienate the spectators from the fictional world, but are part of a process of induction: they are aimed at getting the audience in the right mood for a dramatic performance.⁶⁵

One of the aspects of non-illusory drama that is frequently exploited and highlighted in Plautine theatre is the elasticity of theatrical space and the arbitrariness of its setting.⁶⁶ Space and setting in non-illusory drama are not rigid and they are not intended to reflect reality. Plautus' prologue speakers are remarkably aware of this fact. The prologue speaker to *Menaechmi*, for example, takes advantage of the flexibility of theatrical space by skipping from Epidamnus to Athens and back again in the blink of an eye. Mindful of the arbitrariness of the settings of plays, he comments:⁶⁷

62 See also Dunsch 2014, 504 n. 9. For Plautine drama as non-illusory theatre, see e.g. Slater 2000, 6-7.

63 For instance, Moore 1998, 8 claims that almost a sixth of Plautus' corpus consists of monologues, a large part of which are directed to the audience.

64 Slater 2000, 118.

65 Slater 2000, 124-125.

66 See e.g. Germany 2016; Hollmann 2016; McCarthy 2016; Marshall 2019.

67 For a discussion of these lines, see McCarthy 2016, 205-206.

- (16) *haec urbs Epidamnus est dum haec agitur fabula:
quando alia agetur aliud fiet oppidum.*⁶⁸

This city is Epidamnus as long as this play is being staged. When another is staged it'll become another town.

By playing with and commenting on the flexibility of space and setting in drama, prologue speakers such as the prologist to *Menaechmi* encourage their spectators to think about the conventions of the theatre and dramatic space, thereby guiding their interpretation of the performance.

In Mercury's prologue to *Amphitruo*, there are no references to fictional space as explicit as the comment by the prologue speaker to *Menaechmi*. Nevertheless, Mercury exploits the flexibility of theatrical space and encourages the spectators to reflect on it in a more subtle way through his use of proximal deixis. The great ambiguity that characterizes proximal symbolic deictics, which was illustrated in the previous sections, contributes to the spectators' awareness of the non-illusory nature of theatrical space. By offering various possible interpretations, these deictics stimulate the spectators to consider the flexibility of space and setting in drama.

The occurrence of *haec urbs est Thebae* immediately after the very metatheatrical opening part of Mercury's prologue has a similar effect. Before Mercury transforms reality into fiction, he repeatedly calls attention to the play as a play: he emphasizes the role of Jupiter as an actor and explicitly refers to the performance with *hanc fabulam* and *huius comoediae* (cf. example [5]). The abruptness of Mercury's transformation gives the whole utterance a make-believe character and emphasizes the arbitrariness of the setting, thereby undercutting any pretence of realism. *Haec urbs est Thebae* thus urges the audience to think about the nature of theatrical space and invites them to participate in the creation of the performance.

Apart from unrealistically fast journeys between different locations, such as that illustrated by the prologue speaker to *Menaechmi*, the flexibility of space and setting in non-illusory theatre provides a number of other liberties to the playwright and his characters. One of these has been illustrated for Elizabethan drama by Styan.⁶⁹ Styan observed that the characters of Ben Jonson's early comedies, which take place in Italy, behave like regular Londoners. The inhabitants of various Italian cities thus do not behave as the setting suggests, but closely resemble the population of the external world. This continuity between

68 Pl. *Men.* 72-73.

69 Styan 1975, 185-186.

reality and fiction gives the fictional world an air of realism: "... Jonson and Shakespeare take outrageous advantage of the unreality of their stage to have the real impinge upon the unreal".

Similar to Elizabethan theatre, Plautine drama is also characterized by a continuity between the real and the fictional setting. All Plautus' plays are set in Greece, but scholars have repeatedly emphasized the resemblance between the fictional world and the Rome of the spectators.⁷⁰ Not only is the fictional space simultaneously Greek and Roman, the inhabitants of the fictional world are remarkably aware of contemporary Roman customs and values, resembling the inhabitants of the real world. To use the words of Marshall, "the plays create a continuum between the stage world and the world of the audience that is almost seamless, somehow both Roman and Greek, both contemporary and set a century before in a fictional world created by one of the Greek playwrights of New Comedy".⁷¹

This realistic nature of the fictional world is further emphasized by the appearance that it extends beyond the spatial and temporal boundaries of the performance.⁷² The epilogue of *Asinaria*, for example, shows the company of actors asking for the spectators' applause in exchange for the old man of the story escaping a beating. Plautus here plays "with the idea that a character has slipped off stage and out the back door and now lives his own life somewhere outside the theatre".⁷³ Similar, the prologue speaker of *Captivi* emphasizes that the war he has mentioned previously takes place outside the performance space:

(17) ne uereamini
 quia bellum Aetolis esse dixi cum Aleis:
 foris illic extra scaenam fient proelia.⁷⁴

Don't be afraid because I said that the Aetolians are at war with the Eleans: the battles will take place out there, off-stage.

Mercury's prologue also contains elements that emphasize the continuity between the external and the internal world. The most conspicuous element is Mercury's Roman character. Although he is supposed to be in Greece, the

70 See e.g. Moore 1998, ch. 3; Marshall 2019, 90-95.

71 Marshall 2019, 90. See also Beacham 1991: 40-41.

72 See also Sharrock 2019, 34-39, 55, who discusses the creation of "the greater world of the imagination".

73 Slater 2000, 127.

74 Pl. *Capt.* 58-60.

messenger god identifies himself and Jupiter with their Roman names (e.g. in 19, 26, 152), and he showcases his striking knowledge about the Roman spectators by repeatedly referring to their cultural common ground. For example, he parodies Roman contractual language (1-16),⁷⁵ mimics Roman legalistic style (64-85),⁷⁶ and mentions previous dramatic performances in Rome (91-92). Moreover, Mercury explicitly evokes his audience's knowledge concerning genre conventions to coin the term *tragicomoedia* for the genre of *Amphitruo* (62-63).

The resemblance between Mercury's fictional world and the spectators' reality immediately suggests that *haec urbs* does not simply refer to the audience's undefined surroundings, but to the city of Rome in particular. As such, *haec urbs est Thebae* is more than merely an invitation to the spectators to accept a transformation of their immediate surroundings into Thebes: it invites them to accept a transformation of Rome itself.⁷⁷ Roman theatres were temporary structures that were located in front of temples or at the Forum, which enabled spectators at a dramatic performance to see Rome.⁷⁸ It is imaginable that this visible continuity between fiction and reality made Mercury's invitation particularly easy to accept.⁷⁹

Finally, let us consider the transformation of Rome into Thebes in light of the performance context of Plautus' plays. Roman comedies were performed during festivals that provided Roman citizens, who were typically governed by strict laws and a strong sense of morality, with the opportunity to live an

75 Slater 2000, 185; Sharrock 2009, 60-61.

76 Christenson 2000, *ad loc.*

77 Cf. Moore 1998, 82.

78 This is especially obvious in *Cur.* 462-486, which is discussed by Groton 2020.

79 It is tempting at this point to speculate about the type of gesture that accompanies *haec urbs est Thebae*. According to Olga Capirci (personal communication), three parameters are relevant here: (i) the movement of Mercury's hand, viz. static or sweeping, (ii) the shape of his hand, viz. with the index finger stretched out or with an open hand, and (iii) the orientation of his open hand, viz. with the palm facing upwards or downwards. Pointing at the stage building would require Mercury to make a static gesture with his index finger stretched out, seeing that the referent is a well-delineated entity located away from the speech participants (for a discussion of this type of deictic gesture in Roman comedy, see Dutsch 2007, 48-49, 69). However, for reference to a larger space that includes Mercury's own as well as the spectators' surroundings, a sweeping motion with an open hand would be more suitable. Moreover, the performative nature of *haec urbs est Thebae* arguably calls for a gesture with the hand palm facing upwards, which, according to Capirci, has an additional presentational value as opposed to the merely indicating function of a palm facing downwards. By producing such a gesture, Mercury would effectively re-define the extended space around himself and his spectators, presenting them with fictional Thebes.

un-Roman day. It is only fitting that comedies should be performed during these festivals and similar celebrations in other societies, because “the holiday occasion and the comedy are parallel manifestations of the same pattern of culture”.⁸⁰ Citizens that take part in the holidays and characters in comedies are both granted a temporary license to break the rules of society.

Accordingly, the inhabitants of the fictional worlds of Plautine theatre constantly misbehave, most conspicuously by rejecting morality and displaying an indifference towards hierarchy. Plautine sons disregard their parents and slaves their masters. Segal argued that it was the Greek setting of Plautus’ plays that allowed this type of behaviour.⁸¹ In agreement with this, Moore showed that the breaching of society’s laws in Plautine drama is consistently accompanied by references to the Greekness of the plays’ characters and settings.⁸² For instance, “Plautus frequently includes one or more emphatic references to the Greek setting at the climax of a slave’s deception”.⁸³ On the other hand, characters who refuse to join the comedies’ merrymaking, the so-called ‘agelasts’, who embody the anti-comic spirit, are “a caricature of actual Roman attitudes”.⁸⁴ The heroes of Roman comedy are thus explicitly Greek, while the villains are distinctly Roman.

The transformation of Rome into Thebes that is performed in the prologue to *Amphitruo* neatly connects to the festive context of its performance: for the time being, Rome turns into Thebes, and Roman morals are substituted for Greek frivolity. As was described in the previous sections, the audience’s acceptance of this transformation is essential for the success of the performance. Should the spectators embrace it, they show themselves willing co-creators of *Amphitruo* and friends of comedy, while also revealing their eagerness to engage in a festival spirit. Conversely, spectators’ rejection of the proposed transformation equals a rejection of participating in the performance and the holiday atmosphere, which defines them as agelasts, as enemies of comedy.⁸⁵ *Haec urbs est Thebae* therefore does not simply invite the audience to participate in the co-creation of the fictional world and the dramatic performance of *Amphitruo*, but also to take part in the holiday spirit of the Roman festivals.

80 Barber 2012, 4; see also Bakhtin 1984.

81 Segal 1987.

82 Moore 1998, ch. 3.

83 Moore 1998, 60.

84 Segal 1987, 71.

85 See also Dunsch 2014, 500.

5 Conclusion

The central claim of this paper was that the inherent ambiguity of the symbolic use of proximal deixis makes a significant contribution to the blurred distinction between the external reality and the internal fiction that is so characteristic of Plautine theatre, and especially of its prologues. By analysing Mercury's prologue to *Amphitruo*, I have illustrated three ways in which proximal symbolic deictics such as *haec urbs* and *hic* can be interpreted. These various interpretations were not mutually exclusive, and they were argued to encourage the audience to contemplate the nature of dramatic performances. As such, they were considered part of the induction process of Plautine prologues, which gets the audience in the right mood and invites them to participate in the creation of the play.

Section 2 focused on the blend of reality and fiction that results from a prologue's unique position at the beginning of a play. As opening mechanisms, prologues have the performative function of changing the world and creating an imaginative space, thereby bridging the gap between reality and fiction. I argued in Section 2 that Mercury's performative speech act *haec urbs est Thebae* crucially relies on the proximal demonstrative *haec* to transform the messenger god's surroundings and create a fictional world. The vague referential value of proximal symbolic deixis allows for Mercury's transition into fictional Thebes to be particularly smooth and almost imperceptible to the spectators.

Section 3 explored the effect of Mercury's direct communication with the spectators on the distinction between reality and fiction in his prologue to *Amphitruo*. I showed that the collapse of double deixis that results from Mercury's audience address leads to a shared *hic et nunc* for the messenger god and his spectators. I argued that the scopal ambiguity of proximal symbolic deictics allows the messenger god to refer to his audience's surroundings as well as his own. This results in a blend of reality and fiction, and the audience is invited to accept a transformation of its own surroundings in addition to those of Mercury.

Section 4 elaborated on this analysis by considering the continuity between the fictional world and the reality of the spectators' Rome. I argued that *haec urbs* and other proximal symbolic deictics do not simply refer to the spectators' undefined spatial context, but more specifically to the city of Rome itself. The spectators are thus invited to accept a transformation of Rome into Thebes. I then connected this transformation to the performance context of *Amphitruo*: a transformation of Rome into Thebes reflects the festival spirit of the Roman holidays. The audience's acceptance of this transformation

indicates a willingness to participate in the festive atmosphere, while a refusal defines the spectators as ‘agelasts’. I concluded that *haec urbs est Thebae* does not simply invite the audience to co-create fictional Thebes and participate in the performance, but also encourages the spectators to enjoy the holiday atmosphere in Rome.

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