

Plautus, *Curculio*, 193 BC.

Act II, 466f. Phaedromus is in love with the slave girl Planesium. He sends Curculio, the stock figure of a parasite, to borrow money in order to buy her for him, giving Curculio a costume to disguise himself. Curculio thus fraudulently borrows from a banker.

In Act II a Choregus, or theatre chorus-producer, who has lent Phaedromus the costume used by Curculio, appears, explaining that he has come to keep an eye on the costume. While waiting outside the house of Phaedromus, he amuses the audience by describing characters of the Roman Forum and the locations where they may be found.

THE CHOREGUS

By my faith, Phædromus has cleverly met with this clever rogue [Curculio]; but whether a salt-water rogue² [an informer against illegal exporters of salt] or a dry-land one, I really don't know. The costume that I've lent I fear I shan't get back. Although I have nothing whatever to do with him [Curculio] (I trusted Phædromus himself), still I'll keep an eye upon him. But until he comes out of doors, I'll point out in what place you may easily meet with each person, so that he mayn't lose his labour through too much trouble, if any one wishes to meet either a rascal or one without rascality, or an honest man or a dishonest one. He who desires to meet with a perjured fellow, let him go into the courts of law³ [the Comitum, where trials are held near the Curia. In this vicinity were to be found persons for hire to give false testimony]; he who wants a liar and a braggart, near the rites of Cloacina⁴. [Venus is supposed to have been called by this name, from her statue having been once found in the "Cloacæ," or sewer of Rome.] The rich and erring husbands seek you at the magisterial halls of the Basilica. There, too, will be the worn-out harlots, and those who are wont to haggle for them. Contributors to picnic dinners⁵ you'll find in the fishmarket. In the lower part of the Forum good men⁶ [i.e. wealthy] and opulent do walk; in the middle, near the canal⁷ [?], there are the mere puffers-off. Beyond the lake⁸ of Curtius [now dried up, where the markets presently are] are impudent, talkative, and malevolent fellows, who boldly, without reason, utter calumnies about another, and who, themselves, have sufficient that might with truth be said against them. There, at the old shops⁹, [in the Forum, which were the property of the state, and were let out to the bankers and money-lenders] are these who lend and those who borrow at interest. Behind the Temple of Castor there are those to whom unguardedly you may be lending to your cost. There, in the Etrurian street, [the north south street running through Forum] are those men who hold themselves¹⁰ on sale. In the Velabrum¹¹ [area south of the Forum, with cattle market by the river] you'll find either baker, or butcher, or soothsayer; either those who sell retail themselves, or supply to others things to be sold by retail. Rich sinning husbands you'll find at the house of Oppian Leucadia¹² [a woman named Leueadia, a freedwoman of the Oppian family, whose house was a rendezvous for riotous and debauched husbands]. But, meantime, the door makes a noise; I must curb my tongue. (*Exit.*)

Notes:

² Salt-water rogue: "Halophantam." The "halophantæ" were those who informed against the exporters of salt contrary to law, as the "sycophantæ" did against the exporters of figs.

The Choregus is using a choice of names for the same thing, as he means to say, "call him by what name you will, Curculio is a clever rogue." It is not possible to translate the passage literally and preserve the spirit of it at the same time.

3 Into the courts of law: The "Comitium" was a place in the Roman Forum, near the "Curia," where trials were carried on before the Prætor. It was near the "Puteal Libonis," or "Scribonianum." where witnesses were sworn, and perjured people were to be found, ready to give false testimony.

4 Rites of Cloacina: Venus is supposed to have been called by this name, from her statue having been once found in the "Cloacæ," or sewer of Rome. He alludes to the neighbourhood of her Temple, in which Plautus himself is said to have dwelt.

5 Picnic dinners: The "symbolæ," or "pic-nic entertainments," have been referred to in the Notes to the Stichus. They were probably got up on a cheap scale.

6 Good men: "Boni" is here used in the sense of "opulent," "men of substance."

7 Near the canal: The banks of this canal were much resorted to by walkers. It is not accurately known in what part of Rome it was situate.

8 Beyond the lake: He probably alludes to the former site of the Curtian Lake, which, in his time, was dried up. Ovid says, in the Fasti, B. vi., l. 401, "This place, where now are the markets, formerly fenny marshes covered; a ditch was here swimming with water from the overflowing of the river. That spot formed the Curtian Lake, which now supports the altars on dry ground: 'tis now dry ground, but once it was a lake." It is not a little amusing, that though the Scene is in Epidaurus, Plautus is here discussing Roman scenes and manners.

9 The old shops: He probably alludes to the old shops in the Forum, which were the property of the state, and were let out to the bankers and money-lenders.

10 Who hold themselves: Horace alludes to the "turba impia," the "impious throng," of the Etrurian street.

11 Velabrum: See the Captivi, l. 494 (Act III., Sc. 1).

12 Oppian Leucadia: The best solution of the meaning of this passage seems to be, that he is alluding to a woman named Leueadia, a freed. woman of the Oppian family, whose house was a rendezvous for riotous and debauched husbands.