

READING

The major Latin literary works from prior to 100 BCE are comedies by two Roman dramatists, Titus Maccius Plautus (ca. 254–184 BCE) and Publius Terentius Afer (called Terence in English), who died in 159 BCE. Plautus is said to have written approximately 130 plays. Only twenty-one, however, still survive. He modeled these plays on Greek comedies written in the fourth and third centuries BCE by various Athenian writers.

Still, Plautus writes for a contemporary Roman audience of all social backgrounds, ranging from slaves to the political elite. His comedies allude to current Roman events, and are noteworthy for their inventive and playful use of the Latin language. Here is an excerpt from his *Menaechmī*.

A merchant from Syracuse (a city on the island of Sicily) has two identical twin sons. When they reach the age of seven, he takes one of them, named Menaechmus, on a business trip. The boy gets lost in a crowd and is adopted by local residents. The remaining twin, Sosicles, is re-named Menaechmus in memory of his lost brother. After this Menaechmus-Sosicles grows up, he travels without knowing it to the town where his twin brother resides. A long series of misunderstandings occur. Menaechmus's friends and family think Menaechmus-Sosicles is Menaechmus, while Messenio, the slave of Menaechmus-Sosicles assumes that Menaechmus is his master. Because the two men are identical twins, the misunderstandings are not surprising, but because neither twin knows of the other's existence they involve numerous complications. Confusion comes to a head when the two Menaechmi finally meet, each still unaware that the other exists. The slave Messenio is present at this meeting, realizes that the two young men are identical in appearance, and gives voice to his surprise.

DĒ MENAECMĪS

- 1 Messeniō: Prō Iuppiter! Quid videō?
Menaechmus Sōsiclēs: Quid vidēs?
Messeniō: (*pointing at Menaechmus*) Hic fōrmam tuam habet.
Menaechmus Sōsiclēs: Quam fābulam mihi nārrās?
- 5 Messeniō: Fābulās nōn nārrō. Tū vidēre dēbēs.
Menaechmus Sōsiclēs: Papae! (*addressing Menaechmus*) Quōmodo tē vocant?
Menaechmus: Menaechmum mē vocant.
Menaechmus Sōsiclēs: Fābulās nārrās! Mē quoque Menaechmum vocant.
- 10 Messeniō: Sunt sicut duae guttae aquae!
Menaechmus Sōsiclēs: Quam patriam habēs?

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Menaechmus: Sum Syrācūsānus.

Menaechmus Sōsiclēs: Ego quoque ibi habitō. Itaque tū es frāter meus.

Salvē, mī frāter! Diū tē exspectō.

Menaechmus: Salvē, mī frāter! Dēbēmus nunc cum patre habitāre.

READING VOCABULARY

cum patre – with father

***dēbēmus** – we ought, must

dēbēs – ought, must

dē Menaechmīs – about the Menaechmi <brothers>

***diū** – for a long time

es – are

duae guttae aquae – two drops of water

***ego** – I

***exspectō** – I am waiting for

***fābula, fābulae, f.** – story

***fōrma, fōrmae, f.** – form, appearance

frāter meus – my brother

gutta, guttae, f. – drop

habēs – do you have

***habet** – has

habitāre – to live

***habitō** – live, dwell

hic – this (man)

ibi – there

mē – me

Menaechmī – plural of Menaechmus

Menaechmum – Menaechmus

mī frāter – my brother

mihī – to me

nārrās – are you telling, you are telling

***nārrō** – I do tell

***nōn** – not

***nunc** – now

papae! – wow!

***patria, patriae, f.** – fatherland

prō Iuppiter! – by Jove!

quam – what?

quid – what?

quōmodo – how?

quoque – also

salvē! – hello!

sicut – as

***sum** – I am

sunt – they are

Syrācūsānus – from Syracuse

tē – you

***tū** – you

tuam – your

***videō** – do I see

vidēre – to see

vidēs – do you see

***vocant** – do they call, they call

*Words marked with an asterisk will need to be memorized.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What happens between the two Menaechmi?
2. Who is the first to notice the similarity between the two Menaechmi?
3. What serves as a confirmation that the two Menaechmi are brothers?
4. What is the Menaechmi brothers' intention for the future?