Of Calves and (Old) Men: A Pun at Epidicus 187 and 666 (Revised, Pre-Print)

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| **Abstract:**          | The miscellaneum argues for a heretofore unnoticed pun in Plautus' Epidicus 187 and 666, involving the pronunciation of the adjective vetulus (old) as vitulus (calf). |
Of Calves and (Old) Men: A Pun at *Epidicus* 187 and 666

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Of Calves and (Old) Men: A Pun at Epidicus 187 and 666

There is a pun in Plautus’ Epidicus that has so far gone unnoticed, involving the pronunciation of the adjective vetulus ‘(little) old’ as vitulus ‘calf.’ A brief discussion of the etymological connection between the two words and their phonological features will support the comic pronunciation of vitulus for vetulus. The pun, moreover, suits its immediate context, and the context of the play as a whole, as the concluding sections of this paper will demonstrate.

Modern etymologies point to a close relationship between vetulus and vitulus, and suggest that the initial syllable of vitulus was “in between” short i and short e. These etymologies connect vitulus to the Latin vetus ‘old’ and ultimately to PIE *wetos, ‘year’ (hence a vitulus is literally a ‘yearling calf’). The adjective vetulus in turn is, of course, the diminutive of vetus. Thus both the adjective (vetulus) and the noun (vitulus) are connected to the adjective vetus; both ultimately go back to the PIE root for year.

In the course of its development – de Vaan posits the proto-Italic *wet – elo – as a

1) My warm thanks go to Mnemosyne’s anonymous referee for criticisms and suggestions which have greatly improved this miscellaneum, and to Drs. Michael Fontaine, Claudia Grégoire, and Emily McDermott, who read and commented on earlier drafts.

2) It is not noted by four works on Plautine wordplay: Mendelsohn 1907, Brinkhoff 1935, Schmidt 1960, and Fontaine 2010. The noun vitulus does not appear in the extant works or fragments of Roman comedy, but it is three times attested in early Latin: twice in Cato, Agr. 141.4, with reference to the suovetaurilia, and once in Festus, Gloss. Lat. 461 Lindsay, where L. Aelius Stilo’s etymology of victima is quoted. The diminutive vitellus however is once attested in Plautus, as a term of endearment (Asin. 667), while the adjective derived from the noun, vitilinus, also appears once in the same author to denote calf’s meat (Aul. 375).

3) As for ancient etymologies, Varro (L. 5.96) links the word vitulus alternately to the Greek word for calf, or to the Latin adjective for frisky: vitulus, quod Graece antiquitus ἰταλός, aut quod plerique vegeti, vegetulus: ‘vitulus from the Greek of former times, ἰταλός, or from vegetius, because very many [calves] are frisky [vegeti]’ (Unless otherwise noted, translations are the author’s). Since, in Varronian etymologies, exact matches in pronunciation are not required, nothing can be inferred about the possible ways in which vitulus was pronounced in Varro’s time based on this particular etymology.

4) On the etymology of vitulus, see de Vaan 2008, 685, Walde Hofmann 1954, 777, and Ernout Meillet “1994, 742. The latter two scholars compare, alongside vitulus, the Greek ἔτος, ‘year,’ and the Aeolic ἐταλόν and Coan ἐτελόν (‘yearling’).
substrate – the initial syllable of the word for calf was raised from short e to i.⁴) Michael Weiss in particular has suggested that the origin of the raising of e to i in the environment of w and s and t is specifically dialectal, and cites the examples of vitulus and ve/ispillo, ‘undertaker.’⁵)

If this evidence does not suffice to suggest that the initial syllable of vitulus was in flux between short e and short i,⁶) the development of the Romance languages from Latin and evidence from Latin inscriptions both attest that the short i sound was close to that of short e in colloquial Latin.⁷) Latin inscriptions attest to short i written for short e in phonetic environments similar to that of the first syllable of vitulus: that is, in an open, accented syllable.⁸) Thus, the actor uttering the line in question could have, with a simple raising of the first syllable, easily pronounced vitulus instead of vetulus.⁹)

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⁴) de Vaan 2008, 685.
⁵) Weiss (2009, 138) limits this raising (of e to i) to the environment between w and either s or t, noting the examples vitulus and ve/ispillo ‘undertaker’, and adds, “The ‘rule’ is sporadic at best and may be of dialectal origin. Cf. Umbrian vitulīf ‘vitulōs (Ib 1)’. Cf. Walde-Hofmann 1938, 807.
⁶) Calvert Watkins 1977, 196 notes the following: “Umbrian vitulīf beside vetus, fiber beside feber, pinna beside penna, would appear to attest to a widespread, if sporadic, raising of Italic e to i after a labial.” Vispillo, pinna, and fiber each have by-forms attested: vespillo, penna, and feber (Cf. OLD s.v. vispillo, TLL s.v. fiber 641.25–27, and TLL s.v. pinna, according to which “in codd. et pi- et pe- invenitur.”). Only the initial syllable of fiber is in a phonetic environment close to that of vitulus’ initial syllable, and the parallel of vitulus with fiber suggests that vitulus may also have been pronounced vetulus.
⁷) For discussion of the short e and i vowel sounds in Latin with consideration of the evidence from Romance languages, see Allen ¹ 1978, 48–49, and Sturtevant 1940, 108–9. Wachter (1987, 487–88), drawing from his examination of Latin inscriptions up to 150 BCE, concludes that “die beiden kurzen Laute (i.e. short e and i) sehr ähnlich ausgesprochen würden.” Though the initial syllable is in flux between short e and i, it is still necessary to note, as Allen emphasizes, the “clear differences...between short i and short e” (1978, 49).
⁸) e.g. benificus for beneficus in a Republican-era election advertisement from Pompeii (CIL I² 1645a); didit for dedit in CIL I² 610, an inscription from Nemi dated to between 202-200 BCE; on the latter, cf. Palmer 1961, 351 and Wachter 1987, 287. Sturtevant (1940, 112), however, notes that “there are in inscriptions relatively few instances of the letter i for short e final or before a consonant,” and A. Gordon (2006, 270) observes that such misspelling is due in some cases to an error of the stonemason (quadratarius) or draftsperson (descriptor).
⁹) At the same time, it is worth mentioning in this context that, as is well-known, short e for short i is also attested on inscriptions, and this again, in some cases, reflects actual pronunciation. Relevant to the present discussion, with short e written for short i in an accented, open syllable are e.g. trebīlos for tribubus at CIL I² 398 (3rd C. BCE, of uncertain origin); cf. Wachter 1987, 459; and itineris for itineris at CIL I² 585, XXVI, a lex agraria dating to 111 BCE. Thus, vitulus could have been (mis)pronounced as vetulus. If
These connections between *vitulus* and *vetulus* aside, it is worth noting that Plautus generally does not seem too concerned about the plausibility, on formal (e.g. etymological or other) grounds, of a pun or wordplay. Thus, whatever the precise linguistic relationship between our two words, Plautus need not have been aware of them to pun on *vetulus*. In other contexts, he plays on words by changing a single vowel. He demonstrates considerable flexibility with puns involving a humorous pronunciation of a single word. For instance, the pun on *liēn* (‘spleen’) and *lēno* posited by J. Welsh, if correct, relies on the blurring (*synizesis*) of the two vowels in *lien*, so that we should understand at *Curculio* 244:


Ca. The spleen (*leno*) has gone to hell. Pa. Take a hike, that’s best for the spleen (*leno*).

By simply raising the short e in *vetulus* to a short i so as to pronounce *vitulus*, the actor who plays the title role in *Epidicus* produces a pun that, as will now be demonstrated, works well in its immediate context, and contributes to the humor of the scene in which it occurs. The pun first occurs in a monologue spoken by Epidicus, the tricky slave who gives the play its title. As he enters the stage, intent on tricking his old master out of forty *minae*, he speaks two lines ‘behind the back’ to the *adulescens amans* inside, then turns to address the audience:

liquido *exeo* foras auspicio, avi sinistera;
acutum cultrum habeo, senis qui exenterem marsuppium.

that is the case, then no special pronunciation need have been uttered by the actor for the pun to be heard.

¹⁰ *Spencer* (1906, 10-11) lists some examples of such word play, e.g. *patitur…potitur* (*As*. 324), *pote pati* (*Trin*. 352), and *igitur…agitur* (*Mil*. 765) with alteration of the short initial syllable.

¹¹ *Welsh* 2005, 307-9
Saying ‘there he is in front of the house with Apoe
cides, just the sort of – calves that I want’ (qualis volo vitulos duo), the slave identifies the old men with calves. This identification, afforded by the pun, is in keeping with Plautus’ imagistic tendencies on evidence in other plays. In particular, the playwright elsewhere identifies the victims of tricky slaves’ roguery with animals: for example, sheep (Bac. 1121, Epid. 616), horses (Capt. 754-55), mules (Mos. 778-82), and birds (Bac. 792-93, Mos. 832-34).

Two further points can be adduced in support of the pun at line 187. First, the syntax and meter of lines 186-87 (sed eccum ipsum ante aedis conspicor <cum> Apoecide/qualis volo vetulos duo) build climactically to the key phrase vetulos duo in the emphatic, final position, and there is a natural, metrical pause at its conclusion. Second, the word vitulos fits seamlessly into its context: pronouncing vitulos for vetulos does not disturb the meter, since both words are of identical metrical shape (both scan as

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12) The Latin text used is that of Lindsay. The MSS show no variation at line 187.
13) This however does not constitute an example of the identification motif discussed by Fraenkel (2007, 28-44), in which two things are equated with a copula, with the explanation for their similarity following in asyndeton, e.g. muscast meus pater; nil potest clam illum haberi (Mer 361). For further examples of the comparison of humans with animals in Plautus, see Ramsay (1869, 263-79).
14) For the most important information in the sentence placed at its beginning, or delayed to final position, see Kühner-Stegmann 1914, 2.2.591-92 and Pinkster 1990, 178-79.
15) As Baier (2001, 21) remarks, the meter reinforces the sense of a pause at the end of line 187: “Von 181 bis 185 findet sich eine Anzahl von Gliedern, die bis zum jambischen Oktonar anwachsen. Entsprechend gibt jeder Vers eine weiter ausgreifende Erklärung. Die schwindenden Glieder in 186 und 187 bilden ein hörbaren Einschnitt: Epidicus bemerkt dass er nicht allein auf der Bühne ist.”
anapests). Nor is the syntax disturbed, since the noun *vitulos* is substituted for the substantive adjective *vetulos*, like substituted for like.  

More importantly, the language preceding the pun at 183-4 (*liquido exeo foras auspicio, avi sinistra;* / *acutum cultrum habeo, senis qui exenterem marsuppium*) suggests Roman ritual and sets the audience up to hear the pun: Epidicus has taken the auspices and identified the sacrificial victim (in this case, the purse), whose entrails he will ‘read’.  

When Epidicus punningly identifies the *vetuli* as *vituli*, he sustains the associations with haruspicy, for calves, even though they were not the most proper animal for this purpose, could be so used.  

The monologue under discussion, in which the tricky slave humorously identifies the pair of old men as *vituli*, serves an important function within the play as a whole. Using language that hints at rituals – augury and haruspicy – rituals that preceded important undertakings in Roman political life, Epidicus ‘inaugurates’ his scheme in the grandiose terms typical of the tricky slave. The success of this scheme is indicated later in the play by allusions to the sacrificial language first used by Epidicus in this ‘sacrifice’ monologue. For instance, the old man Periphanes will later exclaim on two separate occasions that the slave has indeed ‘disemboweled’

16) Wolfgang de Melo’s translation of the sentence brings out the substantive use of *vetulos*: ‘But look, I can see my master himself and Apoecides, two old men of the sort I want.’ *Vitulus* is by origin a substantive adjective, like *catulus*; cf. Ernout 1961, 103.

17) Cf. Thulin 1912, 2457 on the Etruscan origin of the demarcation of the sky into regions, left and right and Varro L. 7.97 on the left side as the favorable one in taking auspices, A. Ernout (1972, 3.130) and N. Slater (2001, 196), note the allusions to haruspicy in this passage. Slater (ibid.) further observes that “while the phrases *liquido [...] auspicio* and *avi sinistra* find parallels elsewhere in Plautus [e.g. Ps. 762, Per. 607], the reading of entrails does not.” Hanson (1959, 98n.67) commenting on the religious imagery, speaks of the ritualistic underpinnings of “Epidicus’ colorful promise to ‘disembowel’ his master’s purse on behalf of his love-stricken son” adding that “further weight is in fact given to the religious area of the metaphor by the immediately preceding mention of ‘liquido auspicio, avi sinistra.’”

18) Thulin 1912, 2450.

19) For auspice-taking prior to significant political and military undertakings, see Livy 1.36.6 and 6.41.4; cf. Wissowa 1896, 2582; 2584. For reading of entrails before leading the army out, cf. Livy 8.9.1, Livy 27.16.15.
(exenteravit) him of his money (511, 672). As Thomas Baier observes, the perfect
exenteravit indicates the fulfillment of the tricky slave’s confident prediction made
earlier in the monologue announcing the deceitful undertaking (185: acutum cultrum
habeo, senis qui exenterem marsuppium).20) Similarly, Epidicus’ adjective vetulus occurs in
the last scene of Epidicus, as Periphanes vents his anger at having been twice duped:
satine illic homo ludibrio nos vetulos decrepitos duos/ habet? (666-7), ‘Has that person
mocked us two old decrepit men quite enough?’ The old man, cheated out of a huge
sum of money – eighty minae (466-67; 703) – here ‘accepts’ Epidicus’ earlier
identification of himself as ‘vetulus’, or – better – as ‘vitulus’.

Understood both here (666) and in the earlier line (187), the pun develops a
sacrifice motif that is recurrent in the play.21) The hiring of a lyre-player to accompany
a thanksgiving sacrifice is mentioned repeatedly (316, 418, 500-1); Epidicus refers to
himself as a piacularis, an expiatory sacrifice (139-40); and the old man Periphanes gives
thanks-offerings to Orcus (175-77). There is reference to the sacrifice of Iphigenia:
Epidicus’ substitution of a lyre player for his young master’s most recent beloved elicits
an allusion to the story in which a deer was substituted in Iphigenia’s place (490: haec
cerva supposita est tibi). There is also, of course, the word exenterare, ‘disembowel’, itself
four-times repeated in the play and occurring nowhere else in Plautus.22) Finally,
beyond the two punning references to him as a vitulus, Periphanes is perhaps affiliated

20) 511: planissume/ meum exenteravit Epidicus marsuppium: 672: ut illic autem exenteravit mihi opes argentarias.
Baier (2001, 32n.5) comments in particular on line 511 (spoken by Periphanes) as echoing Epidicus’ line
185 (acutum cultrum habeo, senis qui exenterem marsuppium), but 672 also refers back to 185. Baier puts well
the effect resulting from the echo: “exenteravit klingt wie ein Echo und eine Beglaubigung der stolzen
Ankündigung des Epidicus in 185.”
21) For this sacrificial imagery in Epidicus see the particularly detailed treatment of Jocelyn (2001, 261-96,
esp. 278-80, 287-90); also see Slater 2001, 196, and most recently Gellar-Goad 2011, 149-164.
22) Exenterare appears a total of four times in Plautus, but nowhere else (in addition to Epid. 186, also at vv.
320, 511, 672). Hall (1926, 22) observes that the repetition of this verb in Epidicus is an instance of one of
Plautus’ ‘obsessions’ within the play.
to a sacrificial victim at lines 488-89: em istic homo [sc. Epidicus] te articulatim concidit senex, tuos servos, 'Look at that! That man – your own slave – has slaughtered you limb from limb, old man.'

With the theme of the sacrifice established early in the play, then, the repetitions of the pun harmonize with, and may be seen as further instances of that larger theme. In their immediate contexts, too, the puns are in keeping with Plautus' tendencies to assimilate hapless senes to animals, at the same time as they enhance the humor of the scenes in which they occur.

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23) Fraenkel (2007, 60) argues against F. Leo’s idea that this is a reference to Medea’s chopping of King Pelias limb from limb, claiming instead that “it would be wiser to see in te articulatim concidit...only a spontaneous intensifying of concidere (‘to chop up, cheat’) which is quite common in this sense in everyday speech.” This does not preclude a literal reading of the line, viz. Epidicus has (metaphorically) slaughtered the old man, a reading encouraged not only by the adverb articulatim, but also by the recurrent references to sacrifice in the play.


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substrate – the initial syllable of the word for calf was raised from short e to i.\(^4\) Michael Weiss in particular has suggested that the origin of the raising of e to i in the environment of w and s and t is specifically dialectal, and cites the examples of *vitulus* and ve/ispillo, ‘undertaker.’\(^5\)

If this evidence does not suffice to suggest that the initial syllable of *vitulus* was in flux between short e and short i,\(^6\) the development of the Romance languages from Latin and evidence from Latin inscriptions both attest that the short i sound was close to that of short e in colloquial Latin.\(^7\) Latin inscriptions attest to short i written for short e in phonetic environments similar to that of the first syllable of *vitulus*: that is, in an open, accented syllable.\(^8\) Thus, the actor uttering the line in question could have, with a simple raising of the first syllable, easily pronounced *vitulus* instead of *vetulus*.\(^9\)

\(^4\) de Vaan 2008, 685.

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\(^6\) Calvert Watkins 1977, 196 notes the following: “Umbrian *vitluf* beside *vetus*, fiber beside feber, pinna beside penna, would appear to attest to a widespread, if sporadic, raising of Italic e to i after a labial.” Vispillo, pinna, and fiber each have by-forms attested: vespillo, penna, and feber (Cf. OLD s.v. vispillo, TLL s.v. fiber 641.25-27, and TLL s.v. pinna, according to which “in codd. et pi- et pe- invenitur.”). Only the initial syllable of fiber is in a phonetic environment close to that of *vitulus*’s initial syllable, and the parallel of *vitulus* with fiber suggests that *vitulus* may also have been pronounced *vetulus*.

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\(^8\) E.g. *benificus* for *beneficus* in a Republican-era election advertisement from Pompeii (CIL I² 1645a); *didit* for *dedit* in CIL I² 610, an inscription from Nemi dated to between 202-200 BCE; on the latter, cf. Palmer 1961, 351 and Wachter 1987, 287. Sturtevant (1940, 112), however, notes that “there are in inscriptions relatively few instances of the letter i for short e final or before a consonant,” and A. Gordon (2006, 270) observes that such misspelling is due in some cases to an error of the stonemason (quadraturarius) or draftsperson (descriptor).

\(^9\) At the same time, it is worth mentioning in this context that, as is well-known, short e for short i is also attested on inscriptions, and this again, in some cases, reflects actual pronunciation. Relevant to the present discussion, with short e written for short i in an accented, open syllable are e.g. *trebibos* for *tribubus* at CIL I² 398 (3rd C. BCE, of uncertain origin); cf. Wachter 1987, 459; and *itineris* for *itinere* at CIL I² 585, XXVI, a *lex agraria* dating to 111 BCE. Thus, *vitulus* could have been (mis)pronounced as *vetulus*. If
These connections between *vitulus* and *vetulus* aside, it is worth noting that Plautus generally does not seem too concerned about the plausibility, on formal (e.g. etymological or other) grounds, of a pun or wordplay. Thus, whatever the precise linguistic relationship between our two words, Plautus need not have been aware of them to pun on *vetulus*. In other contexts, he plays on words by changing a single vowel.\(^{10}\) He demonstrates considerable flexibility with puns involving a humorous pronunciation of a single word. For instance, the pun on *līēn* (‘spleen’) and *lēno* posited by J. Welsh, if correct, relies on the blurring (*synizesis*) of the two vowels in *liēn*, so that we should understand at *Curculio* 244:

\[ Cā. liēn dierectust. Pā. ambula, id liēni optumumst:\(^{11}\) \]

\[ Cā. The spleen (*leno*) has gone to hell. Pā. Take a hike, that’s best for the spleen (*leno*). \]

By simply raising the short e in *vetulus* to a short i so as to pronounce *vitulus*, the actor who plays the title role in *Epidicus* produces a pun that, as will now be demonstrated, works well in its immediate context, and contributes to the humor of the scene in which it occurs. The pun first occurs in a monologue spoken by Epidicus, the tricky slave who gives the play its title. As he enters the stage, intent on tricking his old master out of forty *mina*ē, he speaks two lines ‘behind the back’ to the *adulescens amans* inside, then turns to address the audience:

\[ liquido exeo foras auspicio, avi sinistera; \]
\[ acutum cultrum habeo, senis qui exenterem marsuppium. \]
\[ sed ecce ipsum ante aedis consipcor <cum> Apoecide \]

that is the case, then no special pronunciation need have been uttered by the actor for the pun to be heard.

\(^{10}\) Spencer (1906, 10-11) lists some examples of such word play, e.g. *patitur...potitur* (*As*. 324), *pote pati* (*Trin*. 352), and *igitur...agitur* (*Mil*. 765) with alteration of the short initial syllable.

\(^{11}\) Welsh 2005, 307-9
qualis volo vetulos duo.\textsuperscript{12)

183-213 deest A. 185 conspicra poecidee EV conspicor apoecide J, apeciden B et Apoeciden Acidalius cum Apoecide Leo, Lindsay

I am coming out with clear auspices, a bird on the left; I have a sharp knife, with which I’ll disembowel the old man’s purse. But look! There he is himself in front of the house with Apoecides Just the sort of old men I want.

Saying ‘there he is in front of the house with Apoecides, just the sort of – calves that I want’ (\textit{qualis volo vitulos duo}), the slave identifies the old men with calves. This identification, afforded by the pun, is in keeping with Plautus’ imagistic tendencies on evidence in other plays. In particular, the playwright elsewhere identifies the victims of tricky slaves’ roguery with animals: for example, sheep (\textit{Bac.} 1121, \textit{Epid.} 616), horses (\textit{Capt.} 754-55), mules (\textit{Mos.} 778-82), and birds (\textit{Bac.} 792-93, \textit{Mos.} 832-34).\textsuperscript{13)

Two further points can be adduced in support of the pun at line 187. First, the syntax and meter of lines 186-87 (\textit{sed eccum ipsum ante aedis conspicor \textlangle cum\textrangle Apoecides/qualis volo vetulos duo}) build climactically to the key phrase \textit{vetulos duo} in the emphatic, final position,\textsuperscript{14) and there is a natural, metrical pause at its conclusion.\textsuperscript{15) Second, the word \textit{vitulos} fits seamlessly into its context: pronouncing \textit{vitulos} for \textit{vetulos} does not disturb the meter, since both words are of identical metrical shape (both scan as

\textsuperscript{12) The Latin text used is that of Lindsay. The MSS show no variation at line 187.\textsuperscript{13) This however does not constitute an example of the identification motif discussed by Fraenkel (2007, 28-44), in which two things are equated with a copula, with the explanation for their similarity following in asyndeton, e.g. \textit{muscast meus pater: nil potest clam illum haberi} (\textit{Mer} 361). For further examples of the comparison of humans with animals in Plautus, see Ramsay (1869, 263-79).\textsuperscript{14) For the most important information in the sentence placed at its beginning, or delayed to final position, see Kühner-Stegmann \textsuperscript{1914, 2.2.591-92 and Pinkster 1990, 178-79.}\textsuperscript{15) As Baier (2001, 21) remarks, the meter reinforces the sense of a pause at the end of line 187: “Von 181 bis 185 findet sich eine Anzahl von Gliedern, die bis zum jambischen Oktobar anwachsen. Entsprechend gibt jeder Vers eine weiter ausgreifende Erklärung. Die schwindenden Glieder in 186 und 187 bilden ein hörbaren Einschnitt: Epidicus bemerkt dass er nicht allein auf der Bühne ist.”}
anapests). Nor is the syntax disturbed, since the noun *vitulos* is substituted for the substantive adjective *vetulos*, like substituted for like.¹⁶

More importantly, the language preceding the pun at 183-4 (*liquido exeo foras auspicio, avi sinistra; acutum cultrum habeo, senis qui exenterem marsuppium*) suggests Roman ritual and sets the audience up to hear the pun: Epidicus has taken the auspices and identified the sacrificial victim (in this case, the purse), whose entrails he will ‘read’.¹⁷ When Epidicus punningly identifies the *vetuli* as *vituli*, he sustains the associations with haruspicy, for calves, even though they were not the most proper animal for this purpose, could be so used.¹⁸

The monologue under discussion, in which the tricky slave humorously identifies the pair of old men as *vituli*, serves an important function within the play as a whole. Using language that hints at rituals – augury and haruspicy – rituals that preceded important undertakings in Roman political life, Epidicus ‘inaugurates’ his scheme in the grandiose terms typical of the tricky slave.¹⁹ The success of this scheme is indicated later in the play by allusions to the sacrificial language first used by Epidicus in this ‘sacrifice’ monologue. For instance, the old man Periphanes will later exclaim on two separate occasions that the slave has indeed ‘disemboweled’

¹⁶ Wolfgang de Melo’s translation of the sentence brings out the substantive use of *vetulos*: ‘But look, I can see my master himself and Apoeides, two old men of the sort I want.’ *Vitulus* is by origin a substantive adjective, like *catulus*: cf. Ernout 1961, 103.

¹⁷ Cf. Thulin 1912, 2457 on the Etruscan origin of the demarcation of the sky into regions, left and right and Varro *L. 7.97* on the left side as the favorable one in taking auspices. A. Ernout (1972, 3.130) and N. Slater (2001, 196), note the allusions to haruspicy in this passage. Slater (ibid.) further observes that “while the phrases *liquido [...] auspicio* and *avi sinistra* find parallels elsewhere in Plautus [e.g. Ps. 762, Per. 607], the reading of entrails does not.” Hanson (1959, 98n.67) commenting on the religious imagery, speaks of the ritualistic underpinnings of ‘Epidicus’ colorful promise to ‘disembowel’ his master’s purse on behalf of his love-stricken son” adding that “further weight is in fact given to the religious area of the metaphor by the immediately preceding mention of ‘liquido auspicio, avi sinistra.’”

¹⁸ Thulin 1912, 2450.

¹⁹ For auspice-taking prior to significant political and military undertakings, see Livy 1.36.6 and 6.41.4; cf. Wissowa 1896, 2582; 2584. For reading of entrails before leading the army out, cf. Livy 8.9.1, Livy 27.16.15.
(exenteravit) him of his money (511, 672). As Thomas Baier observes, the perfect
exenteravit indicates the fulfillment of the tricky slave’s confident prediction made
earlier in the monologue announcing the deceitful undertaking (185: acutum cultrum
habeo, senis qui exenterem marsuppium).20) Similarly, Epidicus’ adjective vetulus occurs in
the last scene of Epidicus, as Periphanes vents his anger at having been twice duped:
satine illic homo ludibrio nos vetulos decrepitos duos/ habet? (666-7), ‘Has that person
mocked us two old decrepit men quite enough?’ The old man, cheated out of a huge
sum of money – eighty minae (466-67; 703) – here ‘accepts’ Epidicus’ earlier
identification of himself as ‘vetulus’, or – better – as ‘vitulus’.

Understood both here (666) and in the earlier line (187), the pun develops a
sacrifice motif that is recurrent in the play.21) The hiring of a lyre-player to accompany
a thanksgiving sacrifice is mentioned repeatedly (316, 418, 500-1); Epidicus refers to
himself as a piacularis, an expiatory sacrifice (139-40); and the old man Periphanes gives
thanks-offerings to Orcus (175-77). There is reference to the sacrifice of Iphigenia:
Epidicus’ substitution of a lyre player for his young master’s most recent beloved elicits
an allusion to the story in which a deer was substituted in Iphigenia’s place (490: haec
cerva supposita est tibi). There is also, of course, the word exenterare, ‘disembowel’, itself
four-times repeated in the play and occurring nowhere else in Plautus.22) Finally,
beyond the two punning references to him as a vitulus, Periphanes is perhaps affiliated

20) 511: planissume/ meum exenteravit Epidicus marsuppium; 672: ut illic autem exenteravit mihi opes argentarias.
Baier (2001, 32n.5) comments in particular on line 511 (spoken by Periphanes) as echoing Epidicus’ line
185 (acutum cultrum habeo, senis qui exenterem marsuppium), but 672 also refers back to 185. Baier puts well
the effect resulting from the echo: “exenteravit klingt wie ein Echo und eine Beglaubigung der stolzen
Ankündigung des Epidicus in 185.”

21) For this sacrificial imagery in Epidicus see the particularly detailed treatment of Jocelyn (2001, 261-96,
esp. 278-80, 287-90); also see Slater 2001, 196, and most recently Gellar-Goad 2011, 149-164.
22) Exentero appears a total of four times in Plautus, but nowhere else (in addition to Epid. 186, also at vv.
320, 511, 672). Hall (1926, 22) observes that the repetition of this verb in Epidicus is an instance of one of
Plautus’ ‘obsessions’ within the play.
to a sacrificial victim at lines 488-89: *em istic homo* [sc. *Epidicus*] *te articulatim concidit senex, tuos servos,* ‘Look at that! That man – your own slave – has slaughtered you limb from limb, old man.’

With the theme of the sacrifice established early in the play, then, the repetitions of the pun harmonize with, and may be seen as further instances of that larger theme. In their immediate contexts, too, the puns are in keeping with Plautus’ tendencies to assimilate hapless *senes* to animals, at the same time as they enhance the humor of the scenes in which they occur.

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Fraenkel (2007, 60) argues against F. Leo’s idea that this is a reference to Medea’s chopping of King Pelias limb from limb, claiming instead that “it would be wiser to see in *te articulatim concidit*...only a spontaneous intensifying of *concidere* (‘to chop up, cheat’) which is quite common in this sense in everyday speech.” This does not preclude a literal reading of the line, *viz.* *Epidicus* has (metaphorically) slaughtered the old man, a reading encouraged not only by the adverb *articulatim*, but also by the recurrent references to sacrifice in the play.
   Translation of *Plautinisches im Plautus* (Berlin, 1922) and *Elementi Plautini in Plauto* (Florence, 1960)


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