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## Multa multat (Pl. *Rud.* 20)

Elena Džukeska

Institute of Classical Studies  
Faculty of Philosophy  
Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, Skopje

[elena@fzf.ukim.edu.mk](mailto:elena@fzf.ukim.edu.mk), [elena.dzukeska@gmail.com](mailto:elena.dzukeska@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

The present article focuses on the 20-th verse of the prologue of Plautus' *Rudens* and in particular on the phrase *multa multat*. This obvious figura etymologica is analyzed as a more complex wordplay based on the double meaning of the word *multa*, as a form of the Latin word for "fine" and as a form of the adjective *multus*, "many, much". The semantic relations with the other words in the immediate context are also discussed, as well as the possible etymological connection between *multa*, "fine" and *multus*, "many, much". It is concluded that Plautus' play on the words *multa*, *multō* and *multus* is valuable not only as an early literary attestation of the word for "fine", but also as a possible evidence for its etymology.

*Key words: multa, multo, multus, Plautus, wordplay*

The 20-th verse of the prologue of *Rudens* reads as follows:

maiore multa multat quam litem auferunt.

"He penalizes them with a penalty bigger than the action that they win."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> All English translations of Plautus' verses in this article are quoted from the edition: Plautus, *Plautus* edited and translated by Wolfgang de Melo (in five

The prologue in *Rudens* is narrated by Arcturus, the brightest star in the northern celestial hemisphere. In Antiquity, this star was associated with tempestuous weather. In Plautus' play likewise it is responsible for a storm, the one in which the events important for the story take place. Namely, during this storm, Labrax, the pimp, loses his ship and the girls Palaestra and Ampelisca are saved<sup>2</sup>, cf. v. 67-71:

Ego quoniam video virginem asportarier,  
tetuli ei auxilium et lenoni exitium simul :  
increpui hibernum et fluctus movi maritimos.  
nam Arcturus signum sum omnium (unum) acerrimum :  
vehemens sum exoriens, quom occido vehementior.

"When I saw that the girl was being carried off, I brought help to her and at the same time destruction to the pimp. I raised a blustering storm and moved the waves of the sea. For I, Arcturus, am the fiercest constellation of all. I am violent when I rise, and when I set I am even more violent."

But, in the first thirty verses of the prologue of *Rudens*, Arcturus is portrayed in a different light. He is a deity that serves Jupiter by providing him with information about the good and bad deeds of men, so that Jupiter can reward the righteous and punish the wicked. The 20-th verse, on which this analysis will focus, concludes the part of the prologue in which Arcturus describes what happens to those who bring false cases to court or refuse to pay their debts. These people are adjudged by Jupiter again and the fine he fines them (*multa multat*) is much greater (*maiore multa*) than any compensation they might get in a lawsuit (*quam litem auferunt*).

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volumes), Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA – London, 2011– 2013. Cf. also "And the fine he fines them far exceeds their gains in courts of law" from the edition Plautus, *Plautus* with an English translation by Paul Nixon (in five volumes), William Heinemann – Harvard University Press, London – Cambridge, MA, 1916– 1938.

<sup>2</sup> On the storm as a literary device in *Rudens* and the role of Arcturus as a divinity, see Fraenkel (2007), 257-258; Manuwald (2014), 587.

Obviously, the phrase *multa multat* is figura etymologica, composed of the noun *multa*, "a penalty involving loss of property, a fine, any sort of penalty" (*OLD* s.v. *multa*) and the verb *multō*, "to punish with the loss of something, fine, mulct, to punish" (*OLD* s.v. *multō*). The use of the combination of two etymologically related words, a noun and a verb, a noun and an adjective, an adjective and an adverb, was common in Plautus. To achieve a better comic effect these words were often accompanied with other related words that sounded similarly. The use of alliteration and assonance thus transformed the etymological figures into more complex word plays.<sup>3</sup>

In the 20-th verse of *Rudens* the first three words *maiore*, *multa* and *multat* begin with *m*, two words *quam* and *litem*<sup>4</sup> end in *m*, and since *maiore* and *multa* are followed by words beginning in *m*, they were probably heard as if ending in *m*, as well. The repetition of the sound *m* produces a very effective internal rhyme within this verse.<sup>5</sup>

However, this is not done for the sound effect only. It seems that Plautus here also plays on the double meaning of the word *multa*, which is an ablative singular *multā*, of the noun *multa*, meaning "a penalty, a fine", but it can be also understood as *multa*, a form of the adjective *multus*. The nominative – accusative neuter plural or the adverb meaning "many things, much, to a great extent" is frequently found elsewhere in Plautus, cf. **multa** in pectore suo conlocare (Pl. *Per.* 8), "should place **many things** in his breast"; placide, **multa** exquirere etiam prius volo quam vapulem (Pl. *Mer.* 167), "Gently, I still want to ask you **many things** before getting a beating" or in other Latin authors, cf.

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<sup>3</sup> On the alliteration, assonance and the etymological figure and its development into a word play in Plautus, see Duckworth (1994), 342-344; Karakasis (2014), 568.

<sup>4</sup> Although, *litem* was probably heard as *lit'*. It is followed by *auferunt*, which is a word beginning with a diphthong and therefore elimination of the final syllable *-em* of *litem* is expected. See Weiss (2009), 132 ff.; Meiser (2006), 94.

<sup>5</sup> In the previous verse (19) the sound *i(j)* is repeated to produce a similar sound effect, cf. iterum ille eam rem iudicatam iudicat, "he judges the judged matter again".

**multa** petentibus desunt **multa** (Hor. *Carm.* 3.16.42-43), "To those who seek for **much**, **much** is ever lacking".<sup>6</sup>

The ambiguity of *multa* is related to the ambiguity of the verb *auferō*, which has a double meaning as well, "to carry or fetch away, to take away, remove" and "to emerge from a transaction as the possessor of, to obtain, win" (*OLD* s.v. *auferō*). In Plautus *auferō* is used in its second meaning, to denote the opposite of *petō*, "to direct one's course to, to reach out for, to seek to obtain", cf. dum **auferam** abs te id quod peto (Pl. *Cur.* 428), "so long as **I take away** from you what I seek" and Vidi petere miluom, etiam quom nihil **auferret** tamen. (Pl. *Rud.* 1124), "I've seen a kite pounce, without **carrying off** anything after all".<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the verb form *auferunt* in the 20-th verse of *Rudens* is used to denote the opposite of the verb form *petunt* in the 15-th verse, cf. qui falsas litis falsis testimoniis petunt ... (Pl. *Rud.* 14-15), "Of those who bring fraudulent cases to court, supported by fraudulent evidence, ..." The segment of the prologue (v. 14-20) in which Arcturus describes what happens to men who act immorally is clearly enclosed by *petunt* and *auferunt*, "what they seek to exact" in the beginning and "what they obtain" at the end.

On the other hand, *auferō* in its first meaning "to carry or fetch away, to take away, remove" often takes *multa*, the nominative – accusative neuter plural of the adjective *multus*, meaning "many things, much" as a direct object, cf. multa palam domum suam **auferebat** (Cic. *S.Rosc.* 8 fin.), "He openly **carried much away** to his own house".<sup>8</sup> The presence of *multa* in the first half of the verse implies that the meaning of the verb form *auferunt* might as well be "they carry, take away" and vice versa, while the presence of *auferunt* in the second half of the verse implies that the meaning of *multa* might as well be "many things, much".

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<sup>6</sup> The Latin original and the English translation are quoted from the edition Horace, *The odes and epodes* with an English translation by C.E. Bennett, Harvard University Press – William Heinemann, Cambridge, MA – London, 1946.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. also Paul Nixon's translation "I've seen a kite after something, and still **get** nothing, though."

<sup>8</sup> The Latin original and the English translation are quoted from the edition Cicero, *The Speeches* with an English translation by John Henry Freese, William Heinemann – Harvard University Press, London – Cambridge, MA, 1961.

The interpretation of *multa* becomes even more ambiguous because of the use of the comparative *maior* and of *quam* in the immediate context. The phrase *maior multo quam*, "much greater, larger than" was common in Latin, cf. equidem dotem ad te adtuli **maiolem multo quam** tibi erat pecunia (Pl. *Aul.* 498-499), "I brought a dowry to you which is **far greater than** the money you had".

Furthermore, it is possible to understand *quam* literally as an accusative singular feminine form of the relative pronoun *qui*,<sup>9</sup> referring to the noun *multa*, "a penalty, a fine" and used as a direct object of the verb form *auferunt*. And the entire verse acquires a completely different meaning if we take into account that *maiore multa* could have easily been interpreted by the audience as a phrase in accusative, *maiolem multam* because of the repetition of the letter *m*.

Finally, if it is possible to take *multa* as a form of *multus*, meaning "many, things, much", it is also possible for the verb form *multat* to acquire the improper meaning "multiplies", because it is coupled with *multa* in figura etymologica.<sup>10</sup>

As a result of all these ambiguities, the 20-th verse of *Rudens* is open for other interpretations, different from the obvious interpretation, the first that arises from the context and which underlies Nixon's translation, "And the fine he fines them far exceeds their gains in courts of law" or De Melo's translation "He penalizes them with a penalty bigger than the action that they win." The audience could have easily got the impression that it was not so clear after all whether Jupiter fines bad people with much greater fine or he fines (punishes) the fine itself, whether it is a compensation that bad people gain in a lawsuit, or a fine, and whether Jupiter fines them with a greater fine or gives them even more (multiplies their quantity) than the compensation they might gain in the lawsuit. The use of the figura etymologica *multa multat* and the play on the double meanings of all the words in the verse thus creates a comic effect and intrigues the audience at the same time. Plautus' *Rudens* is usually quoted as a comedy, which opens with a divine prologue, in

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<sup>9</sup> OLD s.v. *quam*, EDL 507-508; Leumann (1977), 484.

<sup>10</sup> Misusing words and giving them new, unusual and improper meanings was just as usual for Plautus as making up new words was. See Fontaine (2010) 5 ff. and also Duckworth (1994), 345 ff.

which it is clearly stressed, in a serious religious tone, that being wicked brings nothing good and that good people in the end will be compensated for all the bad that happened to them.<sup>11</sup> The wordplay on *multa multat* in the 20-th verse implies that, at this point in the prologue, the audience, in addition to being amused, was invited to reconsider whether this is true and to prepare to see the expected and unexpected turns in the play from this perspective.<sup>12</sup>

This would have easily been possible if the audience felt that there was a semantic relation between the words *multa*, *multō* and *multus*. And it seems that Varro provides evidence of this relation, cf. **Multa** <e>a pecunia quae a magistratu dicta, ut exigi posset ob peccatum; quod singulae dicuntur, appellatae eae **multae**, <et> quod olim v<i>num dicebant **multam** : itaque cum <in> dolium aut culleum vinum addunt rustici, prima urna addita dicunt etiam nunc. (Var. *De Ling.Lat.* V.177), "A **multa** 'fine' is that money named by a magistrate, that might be exacted on account of a transgression; because the **fin**es are named one at a time, they are called **multae** as though 'many', and because of old they called wine **multa** : thus when the countrymen put wine into a large jar or wine-skin, they even now call it a **multa** after the first pitcherful has been put in."<sup>13</sup>

But is there an etymological relation between these words?

The verb *multō* is derived from the noun *multa*, and on the archaic inscriptions, the noun and the verb occur as *molta* and *moltāre*, cf. *molta*, gen. sg. (CIL I.2/366, Spolegium, ca. 241 BC); *moltāre*, inf. (CIL I.2/401,

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<sup>11</sup> On the religious tone, the seriousness of the prologue (ascribed to the original play by Diphilus) and the Greek and Pre-Greek roots of the idea about the universal ruler being informed daily about the deeds of the pious and impious, see Duckworth (1994), 299-300; Fraenkel (2007), 285-286, 322 n. 25, 426 n. 285. See also Gruen (2014), 606 ff.

<sup>12</sup> Other comic aspects of the prologue of *Rudens* have also been analysed. On its interpretation as a parody of Ennius' *Alcumena* see Sharock (2009), 206ff. On another joke, at the very beginning of this prologue, v. 1-2, see Fontaine (2010), 102.

<sup>13</sup> The Latin original and English translation are quoted from the edition Varro, *On the Latin Language* with an English translation by Roland G. Kent, in two volumes, 2nd ed., William Heinemann – Harvard University Press, London – Cambridge, MA, 1951; cf. also Maltby (1991), 395.

Luceria).<sup>14</sup> Related forms can be found in other Italic speeches, cf. Osc. *molto*, nom. sg., *moltam*, acc. sg., *moltaum*, inf.; Umb. *muta*, nom. sg., *muta*, acc. sg. (Untermann 2000, 483-484), which point to a Proto-Italic stem *\*molto-*. The ancient grammarians Gellius and Festus note that Varro was aware of the relation between the Latin and Sabellian evidence, cf. *vocabulum autem ipsum multae idem M. Varro in uno vicessimo rerum humanarum non Latinum, sed Sabinum esse dicit, idque ad suam memoriam mansisse ait in lingua Samnitium, qui sunt a Sabinis orti.* (Gell. 11.1.5), "Furthermore, Marcus Varro, in the twenty-first book of his *Human Antiquities*, also says that the word for **fine** (**multa**) is itself not Latin, but Sabine, and he remarks that it endured even to within his own memory in the speech of the Samnites, who are sprung from the Sabines."<sup>15</sup> **multam** Osce dici putant poenam quidam; M. Varro ait poenam esse sed pecuniariam (Fest. 142.34-36, see Maltby 1991, 395).

The adjective *multus*, on the other hand, can be compared and possibly related to other I.E. words meaning "good, big", such as Gr. *μάλα*, "very, quite", *μᾶλλον*, "more, rather", *μάλιστα*, "mostly, quite especially"; Latv. *milns*, "very many" and Lat. comp. *melior* (EDL 394; EDG.II 895-896; Leumann 1977, 617). According to EDL, "The appurtenance of *multa* here is not certain, but can be justified: a fine is a 'quantity' one has to pay."<sup>16</sup> Alternatively, the noun *multa* has been related to the verb *mulcō*, "to beat" and explained as a development from PIE *\*m<sub>1</sub>lktā*.<sup>17</sup> This etymological explanation can also be semantically justified. A penalty is a punishment in general, including a 'physical punishment'.

The testimony of the Ancient grammarians and the Old Latin inscriptions confirm the relation between the fine and the quantity. In

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<sup>14</sup> On the change of the vowel *o* into *u*, see, Meiser (2009), 84; Weiss (2009), 140, n. 19.

<sup>15</sup> The Latin original and English translation are quoted from the edition Gellius, *The Attic Nights* with an English translation by John C. Rolfe, in three volumes, William Heinemann – Harvard University Press, London – Cambridge, MA, 1927; cf. also Maltby 1991, 395.

<sup>16</sup> EDL 394, cf. also IEW, 720; Untermann (2000), 484.

<sup>17</sup> LEW 501; Leumann (1977), 217, cf. also Untermann (2000), 484.

the beginning the imposed fine had to be paid in livestock, cf. pecore diceretur **multa** (Var. *De Ling.Lat.* V.95); minima autem **multa** est ovis unius (Gell. 11.1.3) and latter in money. Plautus' evidence about the meaning of the noun *multa* and the verb *multō* is more versatile. In addition to the phrase *multa multat* in the 20-th verse of the prologue of *Rudens* there are several other examples in his plays. Some of them clearly show that the imposed fine was monetary penalty, whereas some other suggest a penalty of another kind, but it is always something 'funny', cf. ... haec **multa** ei esto, vino viginti dies ut careat. (Pl. *As.* 800-802), "... then this shall be her **punishment: she shall not have wine for twenty days.**"; is diem dicam, irrogabo **multam**, ut mihi cenas decem meo arbitrato dent (Pl. *Capt.* 494-495), "and as **penalty** I'll inflict on them that they have to give me ten dinners at my own discretion"; agedum. Stiche, uter démutassit, poculo multabitur. (Pl. *St.* 725), "Come on, Stichus, whichever of us makes a slip **will forfeit a cup.**"; At me viginti modicis multavit minis. (Pl. *Ps.* 1228) "But me he's **penalized** with the nice little sum of twenty minas."

As to the phrase *multa multat* in the 20-th verse of *Rudens*, although, the fine itself is not precisely described, the context (v. 14-20) implies that it must be a certain amount of money, cf. the 14-th verse: ... quique in iure abiurant pecuniam. "and of those who deny the receipt of money before a magistrate on oath". But, far more suggestive is the play on the double meaning of the word *multa* and the possibility to interpret it as an object of the verb form *auferunt*. This particular wordplay therefore is important as an early literary attestation of the noun *multa* and the verb *multō* and as a possible evidence about how the meaning of *multa*, "much (quantity, good)" might have developed into "fine (forfeited quantity, goods)". The amount (quantity, goods) one gains in a lawsuit becomes a fine, an amount (quantity, goods) of the property that had been taken away, carried off from someone else.

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