

X. The Intriguing Slave in Greek Comedy

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Scholars have long been interested in the origins of the intriguing and deceptive slave in Plautus, especially such slaves as Chrysalus in the *Bacchides*, Tranio in the *Mostellaria*, and Pseudolus. The apparent lack of comparable figures in the older Greek fragments has led many to assume that these figures are essentially Plautine creations, and that deception and intrigue in general were much rarer in Greek Comedy.¹ Gomme goes somewhat further and is very specific: "This truly comic character, the diviser of ingenious schemes, the controller of events, the commanding officer of his young master and his friends . . . is a creation of Latin comedy, especially of Plautus. . . . Menander did not like exaggeration. . . . In no one of his plays is there a sign of the slave who holds the will and the conscience of his master, to whom the latter not only defers, but is helpless without him."²

The present writer has always assumed that Daos in the *Perikeiromenê* was just such a slave and that Moschion is as helpless a young man as there is in Roman (or any other) comedy. Be this as it may, the deceptive slave seems to fit very naturally into the picture of slave life at Athens.³ He does not fit into that at Rome. It is unthinkable that a slave of Cato should have attempted to cheat his master out of money for the son's love affair. Plautus

¹ "Our ignorance of Greek New Comedy is great, but the lack of deception in the extant fragments gives support to Gomme's conjecture that the Plautine slave, with his gaiety, cleverness, and unscrupulousness, is the creation of Roman comedy:" G. E. Duckworth, *The Nature of Roman Comedy* (Princeton 1952) 250, citing A. W. Gomme, *Essays in Greek History and Literature* (Oxford 1937) 287, and L. A. Post, *TAPA* 69 (1938) 37.

Cf. Helen E. Wieand, *Deception in Plautus*, Diss. Bryn Mawr (Boston 1920) 185, 188.

² A. W. Gomme, *op. cit.* 286-87.

³ If we accept Aristophanes, *Pax* 742 (rejected by Mazon and Coulon), the deceptive slave was found even in Old Comedy. In Aristophanes, Xanthias and Carion have that impudent familiarity which is so characteristic of the type. Xanthias is well on the way to holding "the will and the conscience of his master." Carion is certainly the devoted and unscrupulous slave (*Plutus* 27), whose former skills become useless when the god of wealth recovers his eyesight (*Plutus* 1153-58).

himself felt constrained at times to apologize to his Roman audience for the licences of his slaves and to remind them that such freedom was granted slaves at Athens (*Stich.* 446–48, *Cas.* 67–77). It seems plausible to assume that the licence of deception should here be included, and that Plautus, who came from Sarsina, did not create it out of his own observation.

The deceptive slave and the intrigue to secure money are essential and conspicuous features in the society of Athenian courtesans as it is so picturesquely set forth in extant comedy and in Athenaeus (XIII), Alciphron, and Lucian. The dominant passion of the courtesan is rapacity. There can be no substitute for money (Alciphron 4.15)! One of the courtesans of Alciphron is not beyond suggesting to her lover deception of mother and father (4.9.4), exactly the course which Calidorus considers in the *Pseudolus* (122, 290). In Lucian, too, there is a similar suggestion of cheating father or stealing from mother (*Dial. Mer.* 12.1). In another passage (*ibid.* 7.4), the mother of a courtesan complains that her daughter's lover is the one man who has not found a device against his father or set his slave upon the path of deception or used other means to secure money for her. Here is exactly the typical intrigue of comedy, and this passage alone is sufficient proof that the unscrupulous slave and his intrigue to secure money existed in Greek life and in Greek comedy. Statements of other writers confirm the point and suggest that such action was very common. Galen writes:⁴

. . . ὁμοίως τοῖς ὑπὸ τοῦ βελτίστου Μενάνδρου κατὰ τὰς κωμωδίας εἰσαγομένοις οἰκέταις, Δάοις τέ τισι καὶ Γέταις, οὐδὲν ἡγούμενοι σφίσι πεπρᾶχθαι γενναῖον, εἰ μὴ τρὶς ἐξαπατήσειαν τὸν δεσπότην.

In comedy itself there is more evidence on this point than scholars generally have realized. Perhaps the most interesting is that found in Terence's play, *Hauton Timorumenos*. In the prologue it is stated (4–6):

ex integra Graeca integram comoediam
hodie sum acturus H[e]auton Timorumenon,
duplex quae ex argumento facta est simplici.

⁴ Galen, *De Nat. Fac.* 1.17. It is interesting to note that Galen says "three times," since some scholars think that there are three deceptions in the *Bacchides* but that there were only two in the *Dis Exapatōn*.

Cf. Ovid, *Am.* 1.15.17–18 (fallax seruus . . . Menandros); Apuleius, *Flor.* 16; Pollux, *Onom.* 2.78.

This passage, of course, is disputed, but most scholars now assume that the play is a translation from the Greek without any major structural change.⁵ The external or physical action of the play as it stands devolves largely about the intrigue of Syrus to secure money from Chremes for the hetaera of his son. This intrigue is facilitated by the fact that the son's friend is seriously in love with a respectable girl. Thus, there is a double plot, very closely and very skilfully knit. Syrus, like Davos in the *Andria*, is definitely "the commanding officer of his young master and his friends." Basically, this plot is farce; but it has been elaborated into a keen study of character: the two fathers and the ironic reversal that is brought about in their positions by the slave's intrigue. In the end, however, although the hetaera gets the money, the intrigue is quite useless, since this son is forced into marriage — another delightfully ironic reversal.

If Terence is responsible for this admirable development in the *Hauton*, he must be considered a great playwright. But there is some reason to assume that he is not responsible for it. Menander's greatest achievement is found precisely in such development as this. He was a keen observer of men, and he created a high comedy of character out of the pitifully thin and farcical plots of New Comedy. That is what he did in the *Samia* and the *Misoumenos*, in the *Perikeiromenê* and the *Epilepentes*. So in the *Hauton*, a high comedy of character with delightful ironies and a delicate satirical

⁵ G. Jachmann, *RE* s.v. "Terentius" 634. Gomme (above, note 1) 275-76, 293, note 2, takes a low view of the *Hauton* and is shocked that some scholars consider it essentially a play of Menander. In general, the present writer cannot accept Gomme's views on Plautus and Terence. First of all, Gomme approaches the subject with that prejudice which has caused so much confusion in the field. For instance, he says of Menander (294, note 1): "Where he does approach (without getting very near) the manner of Plautus, he is not, I feel, very successful, as in the fooling of Laches in the scene (from the last act?) in *Fabula Incerta*, which is lively, but hurried and unconvincing. Compare too Κόλαξ, 86-8, and the leno's speech, 96 ff.; and the threats to torture Daos for his deceiving of the foolish old man (13 ff., and fr. 1) in Περικύβλη, which are in the Latin manner." Secondly, Gomme analyzes the Latin plays much more critically than he does the Greek. He objects (271, note 1) to *Ter. An.* 897-98 and *Phorm.* 693 — and rightly. In these passages, there is an undeniable dodging of the moral issue. But nothing is better authenticated for Menander: in the *Epilepentes* Charisios decides to keep Pamphila before he knows the identity of the child's father; but his "honor" is saved only by the poet's long arm of coincidence. As it stands, the plot of the *Epilepentes* is a comedy of errors, and the comedy of errors is essentially farce. To transform this plot into one of real moral significance, it would be necessary at least to have the identity of the child's father remain unknown. Menander is the best poet of New Comedy, but he is not to be mentioned in the same breath with the four great dramatists of the fifth century.

touch has been constructed on a framework of farce. Here is the deceptive slave with his intrigue to secure money and with all the cleverness and unscrupulousness of the Plautine slave.⁶ Lacking, however, is the gaiety and exuberance and elaborateness of a *Pseudolus*, features which, of course, are incompatible with the development of high comedy.

But was Menander always and from the very first above exploiting pure farce? Probably not; witness his *Dis Exapatôn*. Exactly how closely Plautus follows Menander in the *Bacchides* is and will remain — in the absence of new evidence — uncertain. But from the title of the Greek play and from the testimony of Galen cited above, two deductions seem warranted: in Menander's play there was a double — and, therefore, an elaborate — deception, and this deception was executed by a slave. It is clear from the words of Galen that Menander's deceptive slaves were regularly unscrupulous and indulged in some of the braggadocio and exaggeration that is so characteristic of the Plautine slave. Various scholars have insisted that much of the exuberant cantica of Chrysalus in the *Bacchides* is Plautine. Although the criteria used to differentiate the Roman from the Greek in these cantica have been shown to be unsound,⁷ it seems very likely that Plautus at times did elaborate Greek monologues into Latin cantica, and it is quite possible that Plautus put more picturesque and exuberant language into the mouths of these characters.⁸

As it stands, the *Bacchides* of Plautus is essentially a farce, somewhat elaborated by amusing elements of comedy of character and satire.⁹ It may be that Plautus has distorted the Menandrian relationships of these elements of farce, character, and satire; but, to the present writer, it seems likely that the farcical deceptions constituted the basic plot of Menander's *Dis Exapatôn*, and that his unscrupulous slave, when played up into a leading role, was an effective and memorable creation.

⁶ Cf. *Haut*, 470–71, 533–35. The cleverness and unscrupulousness of Syrus is shown throughout the play.

⁷ H. W. Prescott, "Criteria of Originality in Plautus," *TAPA* 63 (1932) 113–18.

⁸ But note the picturesque language of cooks in Greek comedy; e.g., Straton, *Phoenikides* (Kock 3, pp. 361–64), and more recently, the papyrus fragment in D. L. Page, *Select Papyri* III: Literary Papyri, Poetry (LCL 1950) 260–68.

⁹ The situation which sets the stage for the intrigue in the *Bacchides* develops out of certain forces of character; that is, the first part of the play seems fairly high comedy, the second part runs off into farce and satire. So in the *Trinummus*: the first part shows interesting development of character, but the final scenes degenerate into farce.

The *Thais* of Menander, as we know from a reference in Propertius (4.5.44), involved a slave and an intrigue for money. Again, in the *Hypobolimaïos* (493 K.; 427 Körte-Thierfelder) of Menander, an old man was cheated out of money. In the papyrus fragment of Menander's *Perinthia* there is a scene in which the slave Daos takes refuge from his master on an altar. This reminds one of the scene at the end of the *Mostellaria*, where Tranio takes similar refuge. This fragment is proof that Menander at times exploited very exuberant farce for its own sake (and used obscene references in the process). It is tempting to assume that the role of Daos in the earlier part of the play was an elaborate one; otherwise this scene would hardly be appropriate. We know that in the *Perinthia* a slave, presumably Daos, bragged (393 K., trans. F. G. Allinson): "A slave who is blessed with an easy-going, empty-headed master and cheats him hasn't accomplished any mighty deed in making a yet greater dolt of the one who was a dolt long since." These words, which in the papyrus fragment (lines 13–15) are in part turned upon Daos himself, clearly reveal that we here have another deceptive slave in Menander, and we know from still other lines of the papyrus that he was unscrupulous (11) and "cocky" (17).¹⁰

In the papyrus fragments of Menander's *Kolax*, a young man complains bitterly that his father has gone abroad and left him without resources; that the gods have no regard for him, whereas they have suddenly made the soldier Bias rich. His slave Daos warns him against flatterers. Finally, a slave dealer in an extended monologue, according to the text of Körte, debates with himself to which of the two rivals he should give the slave girl. All this seems to point unmistakably to farce and suggests that this play may have contained intrigue and deception. Again, in the *Hiereia*, a summary of which is preserved on papyrus (Körte³, pp. 146–49), a devoted and unscrupulous (99–100) slave was persuaded to feign "possession" in order to secure certain information.

Menander, therefore, often employed the deceptive slave and was not always above low farce.¹¹ No great writer of comedy ever has been. The slaves of Terence, such as Davos in the *Andria* and Geta in the *Phormio*, probably reflect similar slaves of Menander

¹⁰ Cf. *Perinthia*, fr. 393 K.

¹¹ In the reconstructions of Menander's plots by T. B. L. Webster (*Studies in Menander* [Manchester 1950], see Index, s.v. "Intrigue") intrigue and the deceptive slave appear frequently.

with a fair degree of accuracy. But certainly in the *Perinthia*, and probably in some other plays, Menander presented slaves with more bravado and exuberance than Terence ever allowed. It is a great mistake, although one frequently made, to assume that Menander wholly lacked that verve and catholicity of wit which characterizes Aristophanes and, to a less degree, Plautus.

Even if Menander was normally above pure farce, there is no reason to think that all his contemporaries were. In fact, we know that some were not. Among the older fragments of New Comedy, fragments preserved in large part by collectors with very special interests, there is not much reference to the deceptive slave and his intrigues for money.¹² But the newer, papyrus fragments obviously give a much fairer picture: they are not deliberately excerpted, but are chance survivals. In these, deception and intrigue are much more conspicuous, indeed are as frequent and important as in Roman comedy.

In one papyrus fragment, a certain Smikrines opposes a marriage, and Daos has designed an astonishing intrigue by which one character is made out to be dying.¹³ This is a far cry from the usual intrigue to secure money, but we can hardly deny that Daos here is an intriguing slave and that farce is rampant.

In another fragment, a slave addresses his master much as Pseudolus does Calidorus in the opening scene of the *Pseudolus*:¹⁴ "Take me as your counsellor," he says. ". . . often has a slave of good character been more prudent than his master." Obviously, it seems to the present writer, this slave is about to take over as the "commanding officer" of the situation.

Again, a slave expresses his "determination" to avoid involvement in an intrigue which seems designed to get possession of a girl.¹⁵ In still another fragment a boasting slave refers with contempt to simple intrigues as being worthy only of a novice in deception:¹⁶

¹² A few cases from the older fragments have been cited above, especially Menander 393 K., 493 K.

¹³ Cf. A. Körte, *Menandri quae supersunt* 1³ (Leipzig 1938) 138-42.

¹⁴ Cf. Page (above, note 8) 318-20.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 316-18 (= *POxy.* 1.10). The "determination" of the slave to avoid trouble should deceive no one: similar is the resolve of Onesimos never to meddle again (*Men. Epit.* 397-400 K.³), the misgivings of Davos in *Ter. An.* 206-27, of Geta in *Phorm.* 187-90, Sceledrus in *Plaut. Miles* 576-85, etc.

¹⁶ Page (above, note 8) 284 (= *POxy.* 1.11). Cf. *Ter. Eun.* 39, 386; *Haut.* 470-71, 533-35.

αὐλ]ητριδίου γὰρ συμπο[τικοῦ τε κατακρατεῖν
 κ]αὶ βουκολῆσαι δεσπό[την ἀπράγμονα
 ἔστιν νεωνήτου· μεμ[άθηκα τοῦτό που
 ἅπαξ ποτ' ἢ δῖς.

This fragment alone is sufficient proof that the clever and unscrupulous slave of deception was a stock figure in Greek Comedy — just as much so as his necessary counterpart, the easy-going master.

Here in this last fragment, the slave is bragging that he plans a much greater and cleverer deception than that of a neophyte. Similar are the lines of Daos in Menander's *Perinthia* (393 K.) which have been quoted above. In both these passages there is shown the same spirit of bravado and braggadocio that lends so much color to the figures of Chrysalus, Tranio, and Pseudolus. Such braggadocio would be ridiculously out of place if these slaves and their intrigues did not have conspicuous roles in their plays.

A new piece of evidence on this point has recently appeared. This fragment is one of the earliest of all Greek papyri; indeed, its editor, Bruno Snell, thinks that it may perhaps be contemporary with Menander himself.¹⁷ Snell suggests that it may be a fragment of Menander's *Kekryphalos*. An hetaera, Dorkion, is apparently in great need of ten minae. The slave Parmeno has secured it, as if from Heaven (12–13):

ἀπὸ μη]χανῆς τις τῶν θεῶν σοι Παρμένων
 μνᾶς δ]έκα δέδωκεν ὥσπερ ἐν τραγωιδίαι.

At the end of the first column of this fragment, Parmeno is left alone on stage. The second column is preserved only for a few letters at the beginning of each line. Snell in his commentary (on 22) thinks that Parmeno here reviews his situation in a monologue. The slave seems to refer to money (24), to fathers (33), and, despairingly (38), to running away (40). Again we have a certain case of an unscrupulous slave who has indulged in deception in order to secure money for his young master's hetaera.

When all the evidence, especially that of the papyrus fragments, is marshalled and reviewed, therefore, we see that the deceptive

¹⁷ *Griechische Papyri der Hamburger Staats- und Universitäts-Bibliothek . . .* eingeleitet von Bruno Snell, 2 (Hamburg 1954) 20–27. This fragment is discussed at length also by A. Thierfelder in Körte-Thierfelder, *Menandri quae supersunt* 2 (Leipzig 1953) 272–78; especially noteworthy are Thierfelder's apt comparisons with various passages in Plautus, esp. *Bacch.* 358–63.

slave is thoroughly and undeniably at home in Greek New Comedy, indeed as much so as the comic cook and the other stock characters. There is no reason whatever to think that intrigue was rarer than it is in Roman Comedy.

In general, the assumption that the deceptive slave is mainly a Roman creation originated before the discovery of the papyrus fragments. It was rash even then, for the testimony of Athenaeus, Lucian, and Galen indicated otherwise. This assumption arose in the same school as the elaborate theories of contamination, and should have disappeared with them. It was never plausible. For instance, the deceptive slave Tranio is the *Mostellaria*. Grumio means little except as a foil for Tranio, and Tranio has little justified existence except as the perpetrator of a very elaborate intrigue. The appeal of Tranio and Grumio to Shakespeare perhaps testifies to the fact that they are among the most picturesque characters of Latin comedy. What did the Greek original consist of if not the machinations of such a slave? The whole plot is farce. And if the Greek original did have an intriguing slave, what a dull play it must have been if this slave entirely lacked the gaiety and exuberance which he has in the Plautine version!

It is the same with the *Pseudolus*. If Plautus is really the creator of Tranio and Pseudolus, he is really the author of their plays. It seems very likely that Plautus at times elaborated monologues into cantica. He may have added some verbal exaggeration and exuberance — there is still not enough evidence for a definitive comparison of the style of Plautus with that of Greek writers of comedy other than Menander. But we have seen from the evidence cited that the main characteristics of bravado, boastfulness, unscrupulousness, and cleverness certainly occur — and frequently — in Attic Comedy.