

Roman Comedy: Plautus and Terence

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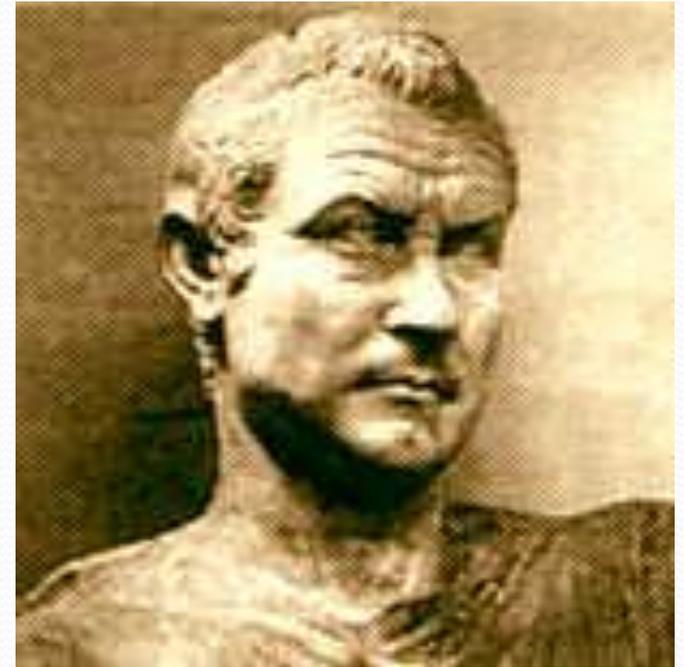
Please Silence or Mute Cell Phones

Origins of Roman Comedy

- Roman custom of farcical entertainment and music as part of religious festivals
- Greek New Comedy fused with Roman farce
- Subject Matter of Greek New Comedy (Menander) from everyday life of upper middle class at Athens
- Family conflicts, character types and love intrigues
- Son's who need money for their girl and controlling, greedy old fathers
- Clever slave who helps the son
- Long lost daughters
- Braggart soldier

Titus Maccius Plautus (254-184 B.C.E.)

- Born in N. Italy
- Name: Flatfooted Clown
- Stage Carpenter
- Failed Business ventures
- Studied Greek Comedy
- 52 plays/ 20 survive



Plautus' Style

- Melded Menander's New Comedy
- Stock characters
- Farce
- Song and dance
- Mockery of upper classes



Characteristics of Plautus

- Translations and adaptations of Greek New Comedy
 - Mistaken identity
 - Slave girls who turn out to be well-to-do ladies
 - Orphans move from poverty to affluence as they discover their lost family
 - Latin titles but set in Greek cities
 - Characters often have Greek names
- Roman characteristics:
 - Roman puns
 - Roman proverbs

Mostellaria (The Haunted House)

- Slave, Tranio, enables son of master, Philolaches, to buy a slave girl, Philematium
- When master returns home he dissembles by pretending home is haunted
- Money lender shows up and he pretends that money was borrowed to buy neighbor's home
- When master and neighbor finally talk, they figure it out
- A well to do friend of the son, Callidamates, advocates for both son and slave and gets the father to pardon them

House Slave vs Farm Slave

- Grumio: Come on out of the kitchen, will you! Dog gone you! Hiding behind your pots and pans! Getting smart with me! Come on out of the house! You'll wreck the whole place yet! By God, if I ever get you out on the farm, I'll take it out of you.
- Tranio: (opening doors—knocking Grumio back) No what in thunder are you yelling about here at the front door? Think you're still on the farm? Get out of here (slaps him!) There! That what you wanted/

Female Condition

- Scapha: I'll you what's wrong, all right. You sit around waiting for Philolaches and nobody else; you're so specially nice to him, and won't pay attention to any others. That's for married women. A girl like you hasn't any business dancing attendance on just one man...
- What you think won't happen happens a lot oftener than what you think... I was once every bit as pretty and charming as you are, and I had just as man men crazy about me as you do. Well, I was nice to just one of them and what did he do? When I'd gotten a little older and picked up a gray hair or two, he left me, walked out on me. That's what'll happen to you; you can be on that."

Clever Slave (Tranio)

- When Theopropides knocks on the door to his home, Tranio pretends shock
- Tranio: You....you touch...touched it?
- Theopropides: Yes, I touched it, I tell you. I touchit and I pounded on the door.
- Tranio: Oh, brother!
- Theopropides: What's the matter?
- Tranio: You shouldn't have done that.
- Tranio makes up a story about a murder happening in the house when previous owner owned it; home is haunted by the murdered man.

Threat of Punishment for Slave

- Neighbor, Simo, tells Tranio: “Then you’re really going to catch it: a whipping, irons, and to top it off, the cross.”
- Although the clever slave and the foolish old master is a standard joke, it belies the reality
- Slaves had to please masters or they could be killed.
- They had no rights and could be punished or killed at will.

Obedience is Best

- Another slave, Phaniscus, discusses how a slave gets the master they deserve by their behavior
- The slave who never does anything wrong, but is always worried for fear he'll get into trouble, is the one his master loves. The one who never worries, sooner or later, always gets into trouble. And then he tries all sorts of crazy stunts to get out of it. He does exercises to to strengthen his legs, then he runs away; but he gets caught...If I obey my master, I'll have myself good and protected...A slave can have any kind of master he wants: if he he's a good slave, he'll have a good master; if he's a bad one, his master will be a bad one too."

Normalization of Slave Relations

- This normalization of slave and master relations, however, is challenged by the ending.
- A friend of the Master's son, Callidamates, advocates both for son and for slave and wins forgiveness for both.
- C: Now come one, forgive him just this once, for my sake.
- T: Why let it bother you, sir? You know perfectly well that I'll be in trouble again by tomorrow. Then you can do a really good job; you can take it out on me for both things at once!"
- Theopropides: All right, all right. I won't punish you, Tranio. No! Don't thank me! Thank Callidamates. Friends, our play is over, May we have your applause, please?

Terence: Publius Terentius Afer (195-159? BCE)

- From Carthage, N. Africa
- Brought as a slave to Rome
- Educated
- Eventually earned his freedom



Terence's Style

- More strictly Hellenic
- By Terence's time, knowledge of Greek literature and culture was common-place for Roman upper class and audience's expected literature that was decidedly Greek
- Plots, names, and allusions are more consistently Greek although Terence developed an authentic Latin style and language of his own.

The Brothers

- Two wealthy brothers, Demea and Micio—represent two different philosophies of life
- Micio adopts the elder son of Demea, Aeschinus; Demea raises younger son, Ctesipho
- Aeschinus gets a poor girl, Pamphila, pregnant
- Ctesipho buys a slave girl, Bacchis
- Demea mistakenly thinks that Aeschinus has done both deeds and blames Micio
- Old slave, Syrus, keeps him confused until...
- All is revealed and then Micio has a change of heart...or has he?
- He convinces his brother to bring Pamphila AND her mother into Micio's home and to MARRY the girl's widowed mother
- He convinces him to free the slave, Syrus, Syrus' wife, and give him a LOAN

Farm vs City

- Micio: I've been living an easy-going, pleasant life here in town, and what many people would call good luck—I've never gotten married. My brother has done exactly the opposite: he stayed on the farm. He always saved his money and worked hard. He married and had two sons, and one of them, the older—I adopted for myself...I give and forgive; I don't feel that I have to exert my full authority over him.
- Contrasts teaching a young man to do the right thing through Fear versus character—difference between a Father and Master in training a son.

Female Condition

- Sostrata (widow and mother of Pamphila): Things couldn't be worse than they are right now. First, she has no dowry; second, what was her 'second dowry', she's lost: we can't offer her in marriage as a virgin. So there's nothing else left to do. If Aeschinus denies responsibility, I've got evidence (she has a ring). Finally, I know my hands are clean: not a cent of money has passed between us or anything else unbecoming either Pamphila or me. So I'm going to take it to court."

Micio Teases Son for Not Telling Him

- He tells his son about a girl who is pregnant, and she has been abandoned by her man. So her nearest male relative, a cousin, has to marry her.
- This drives Aeschinus to tears and he finally reveals the truth to his father.
- Micio's response is human and reasonable: I know your hearts in the right place. But I'm afraid you've been very indiscreet. The girl you got in trouble was one you had no right to touch. That was the first thing you did wrong. But it was normal and human: it's been done again and again by lots of perfectly respectable young men.... Well, cheer up! You shall marry her."

Father-Son Friendship: Is it proper?

- Aeschinus: What sort of business is this? Is this what's meant by being a father, or being a son? If he were a brother or a friend, how could he be more understanding? How can I help loving him? How can I help holding him to my heart? He's been so nice to me that I'm deeply concerned for fear I might happen by mistake to do something he wouldn't like. I'd never do such a thing knowingly. But what am I waiting for? I'll go in, so I won't hold up my own wedding."

Epicureanism vs Stoicism

- Demea: But look, Micio: are you pleased with what happened?
- Micio: No, if I could change things. Now, since I can't, I'm relaxing. That's the way life is; like a game of dice. If you don't get the number you want, you make the best of the one you get.
- Demea: You and your "make the best"! Some skill you've got! It's lost you five hundred for that slave-girl, and you'll get rid of her somehow
- Micio goes on to say he will keep the slave girl and Demea is shocked that he would keep the slave girl and a respectable woman, Pamphila, in same house.

Demea Adapts

- Demea: Tomorrow morning, my son and I are heading for the farm, the minute it gets light.
- Micio: Even earlier than that! It's all right with me. Just be happy today.
- Demea: And I'm going to drag your slave girl right along with me out there.
- Micio: The battle's over! You do that and you'll have you son nailed down. Just see to it that you keep the girl.
- Demea: I'll keep her all right. She'll be all over soot and smoke and flour, because I'm going to set her to cooking and grinding grain.

Demea's Realization (51)

- I've been a stern, hard-working man all my life: and here I am, almost at the end of the line, giving up on it. And why? I've found that in actual fact nothing is more profitable to a man than good humor and kindness. Anybody can easily see this by looking at me and my brother. He has always taken things easy and had his fun; he's kind and gentle, never made anybody feel bad, had a smile for everybody, lived as he liked, spent his money as he pleased...Now me—I've been the old farmer, tough, serious-minded, penny-pinching, hot tempered, determined to get ahead...so I wore myself out trying to make money...And what do I get? My boys dislike; while my brother, without lifting a finger, gets all the benefits of a father. They love him! They can't stand me.

Demea's Revenge?

- Demea convinces Aeschinus that the wall should be torn down, separating his father's house from the home of the widow and Pamphila
- He convinces Micio that he should marry the widow and give her a rental property to her cousin
- He convinces him to free the slave and slave's wife and give him a loan
- Is this the logical outcome of Micio's philosophy? The desire to be easy-going and loved by all can ruin a man. Or can it?

Demea's lesson

- “I wanted to prove something to you. These fellows think you're such a prince: well, that's not because of any honest reason or even any proper one, Micio. It's because you let them do anything they want, let them get away with anything, and give them lots of money....
- (to Aeschinus) There are things that you young fellows don't understand, things you feel you've just got to have, regardless of cost, thing you don't really think through. Now if you'd like me to pull you up short and straighten you out and give you a hand when it's appropriate, her I am, glad to do it for you.
- Aeschinus to Demea: We put ourselves in your hands father. You really know what's best. But what about Ctesipho? What's going to happen to him?
- Demea: Leave him alone. He can keep the girl—but she's to be his last!

Observations on The Brothers

- The play contrasts an Epicurean, almost Hedonistic value system with a Stoic one
- The fact that Demea had no idea what his son was up to shows that being too strict doesn't necessarily lead to good morals
- But the way that Micio does ANYTHING to appear easy-going and to please his sons goes too far as Demea proves in the end
- Some sort of balance is needed
- Reflects a tension in value system as Rome became wealthier, acquired slaves and land. Stoic value system was tested

Conclusion

- Terence and Plautus influenced later Roman literature—the language of Terence in particular was thought to be ideal by Golden Age writers and was used in schools
- Roman comedy influenced comic writers in Renaissance
- Shakespeare borrowed plot for Comedy of Errors from Plautus' *Menaechmi*.
- Roman comedy adopted Greek plots and characters to Roman customs and values.