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The Parasite as Portrayed  
By Plautus

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THE PARASITE AS PORTRAYED BY PLAUTUS

A STUDY OF MENAECHEMI, MILES GLORIOSUS, CAPTIVI,  
STICHUS, CURCULIO, PERSA, BACCHIDES, ASINARIA

BY

CARL ELMER ARMELING, A.B., 1904

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

IN

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IN THE

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OF THE

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THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY

Carl Elmer Arneling

ENTITLED *The Parasite as portrayed by Plautus,*

*a study of Menarchini, Miles Gloriosus, Captivi, Stichus, Utruculus, Perna, Bacchides, Asinaria,*

IS APPROVED BY ME AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF *Master of Arts*

APPROVED:

*H. J. Barton*

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In the entire scope of Latin comedy there is perhaps no character more interesting and entertaining than that of the so-called parasite. In nearly all the plays of Plautus and Terence where this part of the action of the play is not assigned to slaves, the parasite supplies not only the broadly comic element, but the wit of the dialogue, and the fertility of expedient which makes the interest of the drama. Moreover, we must not get the notion that this character is introduced merely to amuse us by his successful roguery, or by his propensity to gormandize. On the other hand, in witty repartee, and often in practical wisdom, he is represented as far superior to the patron to whom he is attached. It is by no means easy to explain satisfactorily this anomalous position between the parasite and his benefactor. To some extent it is because the Athenian citizens, from whom Plautus is supposed to have drawn, held themselves somewhat above the common practical business of life--- in short, they considered that they paid someone else to do their thinking for them in such matters. The witty parasite occupied a position in those households somewhat akin to the king's jester in later times---allowed to use a freedom which would not have been suffered from those of higher rank. In the Athens depicted by Menander and in the Rome of Plautus and Terence, when life was altogether more in public, and when men of any moderate position seldom dined alone, this character, though perhaps not in the exaggerated form which suited the purpose of the comic dramatist, appears to have been sufficiently common.

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The parasite is a free-born man, but has been ruined on account of his own or his father's debt and tortured by chronic hunger which has forced him to start on the hunt of a free table. Being still young and (except in Persa) unmarried, he has the freest disposition of his time and person so that he can with complete devotion go about his search for a meal. If he lacks steady accommodation as a constant guest or has not yet been invited out, he seeks his prey in the market place before meal-time, makes acquaintances and, by means of his agreeable conversation, obtains an invitation to dinner. If there occurs a wedding or if a pungent odor from the kitchen betrays to him that a feast is being prepared, he comes even unasked. In return for the good treatment he receives he offers his unlimited stock of witticisms and practical jokes and particularly must he be pleased at everything on the part of his host. Outwardly submissive and full of approval and admiration, he feels himself inwardly far superior to his revered lord. Along with his cleverness and shrewdness which he makes so serviceable to his patron he also fully understands how to exploit his work for the enhanced claims of his stomach. Furthermore, his humor never deserts him, and even his personal figure is in keeping with his unique character. As the principal traits of his outward appearance we notice his sly, canine movements, his grinning and greedy expression of countenance, ears flattened (as though by frequent cuffs and blows from his irritable patron), a bent nose, smooth forehead, and a lively, furtive glance. In addition, the characters, *Peniculus* of the *Menaechmi* and *Curculio* of the play



by the same name, are represented as having only one eye.

It is an interesting fact that in most cases the names of these individuals are onomatopoeic, that is, they are made to suit the characters. Peniculus says that the young men gave him the name "Sponge" because he wipes the tables clean. Saturio is a name derived from "Satur", meaning "full of food". Gelasimus is derived from the Greek γελᾶσιμος, laughable; hence its meaning of buffoon or jester. Artotrogus, from the Greek ἄρτος, bread, and τρώγω, to gnaw, gives us the meaning "bread-gnawer". A similar idea is expressed in the Latin name Curculio which means "corn-worm" or "weevil". Gnatho from γνάθων, means "full-mouth". In the name of Ergasilus from ἐργάξωμαι, to work, we have an idea quite different from that of the above-mentioned derivatives, as we have also in Phormio from φόρμιον, a door-mat. In six of the eight cases the parasite bears a name which indicates from its derivation the greedy propensities of the character. The idea "to work" suggested by the name Ergasilus is hardly in keeping with the real nature of the character unless we stretch a point and understand that "to work" means in this case "to scheme" or "to contrive plots". Likewise the name Phormio would seem to have little real significance since that character is far from being a lowly, downtrodden person as seems to be indicated in the original Greek word. Still we might understand this case to be merely an associated idea-- a reference to the frequent visits and appearances of the parasite in the door-way as an uninvited guest.

The one quality which, in the portrayal by Plautus



and Terence, most generally characterizes the parasite as a class is his ravenous, insatiable appetite. Usually on his first appearance in the play he bewails his hungry condition and moans about the gnawings of his stomach. Aulus Gellius gives us an admirable description of one of these gormandizing guests in a passage from a lost comedy-- "The Boeotian"--which he attributes to Plautus:-

"The gods confound the man who first invented  
This measuring time by hours! Confound him too,  
Who first set up a sun-dial--chopping up  
My day into these miserable slices!  
When I was young, I had no dial but appetite,  
The very best and truest of all timepieces;  
When that said "Eat", I ate--if I could get it.  
But now, even when I've the chance to eat, I must not,  
Unless the sun be willing! for the town  
Is grown so full of those same cursed dials,  
That more than half the population starve." (1)

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The Oxford Edition has been used for all passages taken from Plautus and Terence.

(1) Aulus Gellius, III, 3. Fragmenta, ll. 21-29.

Ut illum di perdant primus qui horas repperit  
quique adeo primus statuit hic solarium,  
qui mihi comminuit misero articulatum diem!  
nam me puero uenter erat solarium,  
multo omnium istorum optimum et verissimum.



Host and servants alike seemed to recognize a wide freedom in their gibes as to the greedy propensities of this class of self-invited guests. The cook in the *Menaechmi* is ordered to provide breakfast for three:-

Cook. What sort of three?

Erotium. Myself, *Menaechmus*, and his parasite.

Cook. Then that makes ten. I count the parasite as good as any eight. (1)

Again in a fragment of *Plautus* we find the amusing little pun: "'Tis not to gather strength he eats, but wishes to gather strength that he may eat the more". In many instances also the parasite himself goes to considerable length in his amusing soliloquies upon the subject of his own hunger. For instance, *Peniculus* in the *Menaechmi* says:-"The young men have given me the name "*Peniculus*" because, when I eat, I wipe the tables clean. The persons who bind captives with chains, and who put fetters on runaway slaves, act very foolishly, in my

---

ubi is te monebat, esses, nisi quom nihil erat;  
nunc etiam quod est non estur, nisi Soli lubet.  
itaque adeo iam oppletum oppidum est solaris:  
maior pars populi aridi reptant fame.

(1) *Menaechmi*; ll. 221-223.

Cy. quouismodi hic homines erunt?

Er. ego et *Menaechmus* et parasitus eius. Cy. iam isti  
sunt decem;  
nam parasitus octo hominum munus facile fungitur.



opinion at least. For if bad usage is added to a wretched man's misfortune, the greater is his inclination to run away and to do amiss. For by some means or other does he release himself from the chains; while thus fettered he either wears away a link with a file, or else with a stone he knocks out the nail; that is easy to do. He whom you wish to keep securely from running away, ought to be chained with meat and drink; bind down the mouth of a man to a full table. So long as you give him in abundance each day what he desires to eat and drink, he will never run away, even if he has committed a capital offense; easily will you secure him so long as you bind him with such chains. So very supple are these chains of food, the more you stretch them, so much more tightly do they bind." (1)

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(1) Menaechmi, ll. 77-95.

Iuventus nomen fecit Peniculo mihi,  
ideo quia mensam quando edo detergeo.  
homines captivos qui catenis vinciunt  
et qui fugitivis servis indunt compedis,  
nimi' stulte faciunt mea quidem sententia.  
nam homini misero si ad malum accedit malum,  
maior lubido est fugere et facere nequiter.  
nam se ex catenis eximunt aliquo modo.  
tum compediti ei anum lima praeterunt  
aut lapide excutiunt clavom. nugae sunt eae.  
quem tu adservare recte ne aufugiat voles  
esca atque potione vinciri decet.



Again in Persa we find some odd philosophizing by the hungry Satornio:- "I follow the venerable and ancient quest of my ancestors and cherish it with extreme care. For never any of my forefathers who were not driven by their stomachs to the business of a parasite: my father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and other ancestors, just like mice always ate the food of someone else, nor could anyone outdo them in gluttony."(1)

Perhaps in all the plays of Plautus there is no example of a character showing a wilder extravagance of imagination than in Gelasimus of the play, Stichus. This soliloquy, although very coarse in the style of its figures, no doubt appealed to

---

apud mensam plenam homini rostrum deliges;  
dum tu illi quod edit et quod potet praebeas,  
suo arbitrato ad fatim cottidie,  
numquam edepol fugiet, tam etsi capital fecerit,  
facile adservabis, dum eo vinclo vincies.  
ita istaec nimi' lenta vincla sunt escaria:  
quam magis extendas tanto astringunt artius.

(1) Persa; ll. 53-59.

Veterem atque antiquom quaestum maiorum meum  
servo atque optineo et magna cum cura colo.  
nam numquam quisquam meorum maiorum fuit  
quin parasitando paverint ventris suos:  
pater, avos, proavos, abavos, atavos, tritavos  
quasi mures semper edere alienum cibum,  
neque edacitate eos quisquam poterat vincere,



the Roman audience as extremely funny:- "I suspect that Want was the mother of me, for since I was born I've never been filled up. Neither does anyone show greater gratitude to his mother than I to mine---much against my will. For she carried me ten months in her womb, while I carry her more than ten years in mine. And she carried me when I was a very small boy, but I have undertaken a greater task, I think; for it's no little insignificant Want that I carry in my belly, but an extremely heavy one; troubles for my stomach arise daily, but I cannot satisfy my mother, nor do I know what to do. I have often heard it vulgarly stated that an elephant is pregnant for ten whole years; this hunger of mine has surely sprung from its seed for already it has hung in my womb for many years."(1)

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(1) Stichus, ll. 155-170.

Famem ego fuisse suspicor matrem mihi,  
nam postquam natus sum satur numquam fui.  
neque quisquam melius referet matri gratiam  
quam ego meae matri refero-- invitissimus.  
nam illa me in alvo menses gestavit decem,  
at ego illam in alvo gesto plus annos decem.  
atque illa puerum me gestavit parvolum,  
quo minu' laboris cepisse illam existumo:  
ego non pauxillulam in utero gesto famem,  
verum hercle multo maxumam et gravissumam;  
uteri dolores mi oboriunt cottidie,  
sed matrem parere nequeo nec quid agam scio.



In the Captivi we also have this same theme discussed from a still different point of view. Ergasilus first appears in a soliloquy, where along with his lament over the capture of his young patron in battle, he advances some novel ideas regarding the business of the parasite:- "The young men have given me the name "Scortum", because I am accustomed to receive invitations to dinner. I know that my mockers say this in jest, but I state it as a fact. For it is the courtesan who is called upon at the banquet, when the lover throws the dice.---- Just as when it becomes warm, the snails lie hidden, and live on their own vitality, if there is no rain-fall, likewise the parasites lie in wretched concealment while the feasts are postponed and live off of their own resources as long as the men are in the country whom they toady to. And when the feasting is resumed we become, like Molossian dogs, shamelessly annoying. And what's more , unless you are a parasite who can endure cuffs and blows on the top of the head, you may as well go and beg!"

(1)

-----  
auditavi saepe hoc volgo dicier  
solere elephantum gravidam perpetuos decem  
esse annos; eius ex semine haec certost fames,  
nam iam compluris annos utero haeret meo.

(1) Captivi;ll. 69-73,80-90.

Iuventus nomen indidit 'Scorto' mihi,  
eo quia invocatus soleo esse in convivio.  
scio apsurde dictum hoc derisores dicere,  
at ego aio recte. nam scortum in convivio



This character--- the parasite--- is found in eight plays of Plautus, viz.-Menaechmi, Miles Gloriosus, Captivi, Stichus, Bacchides, Persa, Curculio, and Asinaria. In addition, the same character appears in the Eunuchus and Phormio of Terence, and these two plays will also be considered in connection with this study. The entire group of ten plays may be divided as to the importance of the individual character into three different classes, as follows:-

I. The parasite as chief agent in the action of the play.

Phormio (Phormio)

Curculio (Curculio)

II. The parasite as a minor figure in the advancement

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sibi amator, talos quom iacit, scortum invocat.

---

quasi, quom caletur, cocleae in occulto latent,

suo sibi suco vivont, ros si non cadit,

item parasiti rebus prolatis latent

in occulto miseri, victitant suco suo,

dum ruri rurant homines quos ligurriant.

prolatis rebus parasiti venatici

(canes) sumus, quando res redierunt, Molossici

odiossique et multum incommodestici.

et hic quidem hercle, nisi qui colaphos perpeti

potes parasitus frangique aulas in caput,

vel ire extra portam Trigeminam ad saccum licet.



of the plot-- a character of secondary importance in the play.

Saturio (Persa)

Ergasilus (Captivi)

Gnatho (Eunuchus)

Peniculus (Menaechmi)

Parasitus (Asinaria)

III. The parasite who has no part in advancing the plot, but rather lends to the comic element of the play.

Artotrogus (Miles Gloriosus)

Gelasimus (Stichus)

Parasitus (Bacchides)

Considering these ten characters on this basis of classification, Phormio and Curculio are distinctly the chief agents in the comedies which bear their names. In the Phormio, that parasite, by his cunning artifice, makes it possible for his young patron, Antipho, during the absence of his father, to marry a poor orphan girl from Lemnos. This conspiracy with Antipho together with the assistance which Phormio lends Phaedria in obtaining for him the music-girl with whom he has fallen in love, furnishes the basis for the complications of plot which makes the interest of the play. In short, it is Phormio who, at every point in the unfolding of the plot, stands out prominently as the principal character. He acts as counsel for Antipho in advising him how to proceed in order to secure the girl he loves, then brings the case into court and as chief witness proves that Antipho and his father are the nearest relatives of the girl. The court, in accordance with an old Athenian law,



directs Antipho to marry her, but there remains the task of reconciling the father, Demipho. At the same time Phaedria must have thirty minae to purchase the music-girl. Consequently Phormio proposes to Demipho, through the medium of Geta, that he himself will marry the girl Phanium, is thirty minae is paid to him. Demipho rages at the proposal but Chremes, his brother, offers to pay part of it, and the plan succeeds. Phaedria buys his music-girl, and Phanium is discovered to be the daughter of Chremes by a secret marriage, and is the very person whom Demipho and Chremes long before had selected as a wife for Antipho. Phormio discloses the secret to Nausistrata and thus enables Phaedria to secure a reconciliation to his marriage with the music-girl. Throughout the course of the play we are continually conscious of the influence of the shrewd schemer, Phormio---- upon him, directly or indirectly, all details of the action of the play depend. We are constantly made to feel that it is the parasite who does the thinking for all the rest. His personality overshadows and eclipses all the other characters and makes him unquestionably the most prominent figure in the entire comedy. Of the ten instances in the plays of Plautus and Terence where the parasite appears, Phormio may almost be said to stand in a class by himself as regards his prominence in the action of the play. Only in one other of the ten comedies do we find an instance of a character that may be classed with Phormio as the chief actor. Curculio is not so well known as Phormio and not quite so interesting a character, but in shrewdness of intellect and fertility of expedient his methods compare very favorably with those of the latter. The plot of



this comedy, Curculio, one not very commonly read, is in brief as follows: Curculio, the parasite of Phaedromus of Epidaurus, goes to Caria to borrow money with which the latter may buy the maiden, Planesium, from a certain slave-dealer, Cappadox. He fails to obtain the money, but falls in with Therapontigonus, a soldier, who has sent a messenger, Lyco, to Epidaurus with money to buy this same slave, Planesium. Curculio accepts an invitation to dine with the soldier, and while the latter is in a helpless state of drunkenness, he steals from him his signet-ring, returns to Epidaurus, writes letters under this seal ordering Lyco to turn over into the hands of Curculio the maiden, Planesium. Thus he obtains possession of the girl and soon afterward she recognizes the signet-ring as the seal of her father from whom she has been separated for many years. Therapontigonus now arrives on the scene in pursuit of Curculio. Soon the soldier and Planesium discover that they are brother and sister, Planesium is betrothed by her brother to Phaedromus, and Curculio sees his novel plan take a very happy ending. This play as a whole is not so remarkable for the excellent manner in which the plot is carried out and the skilful portrayal of character as is the Phormio; but at the same time we can see in Curculio certain traits of character that are scarcely inferior to those of Phormio, and in general, these persons play parts that are respectively of the same importance in the two plays. Just as Phormio was the staff upon which Antipho leaned and based all hopes in his distressing love affair, so Phaedromus trusted everything to Curculio and expected him in some way to get the maiden from the slave-dealer.



Second in this system of classification is that group in which the parasite is represented as a minor character of the play. In this class we include Saturio of the Persa, Ergasilus of the Captivi, Gnatho of the Eunuchus, Peniculus of the Menaechmi, and the parasite of the Asinaria. Three of these, Saturio, Ergasilus, and Peniculus, have been mentioned before in the quotations illustrating the ravenous appetite of the parasites. The Persa, in which Saturio appears, is a play that is not often read, and, as compared with the other works of Plautus, is of little worth. Its morals are of the very lowest and whatever of plot it may be said to have, is almost devoid of interest. Saturio lends his maiden daughter to Toxilus for the purpose of extorting money from a slave-dealer, and when the transaction is completed, rescues her again. In substance this is all there is to the plot and even in this it is Toxilus and not Saturio who is the chief actor.

Ergasilus in the Captivi is relatively of greater importance but still must be regarded as a minor character. His part in the working out of the plot is of considerable importance, but in the stronger light of the two characters, Tyndarus and Philocrates, the parasite fades into comparative insignificance. Peniculus in the Menaechmi is a character of some prominence in the action of the play---his importance being chiefly due to the manner in which he assists in complicating the situation. He is not an active force, however, and gives little evidence of such cunning and ingenuity as we find, for instance, in Phormio. He impresses us as a passive agent,



controlled by, rather than controlling, the circumstances under which he exists.

In the *Asinaria* also appears a person referred to merely as *Parasitus*, who possesses traits of character very similar to those of *Peniculus*. Both of them display as their chief characteristics a bitter and revengeful spirit, and under circumstances somewhat analogous. After *Peniculus* has been led to believe that his patron, *Menaechmus*, has stolen away from him and spent the day with the courtesan, *Erotium*, he determines to be revenged and accomplishes his purpose by telling to the wife of *Menaechmus* all that he knows of her husband's relations with *Erotium*. Likewise in the *Asinaria* when the parasite is frustrated in his attempt to win the mistress, *Philaenium*, for his youthful patron, *Diabolus*, he retaliates by informing the wife of *Demaenetus*, the old man who assists his son in buying the affections of this same maiden. To convince the matron, *Artemona*, of her husband's faithlessness, the parasite allows her to look in upon her husband as he is fondling the mistress and promising the son that he will pay the twenty minae for the girl for one year on the condition that the privilege of the first night be granted to the old man himself. The disgust of the wife and her absolute control of the situation is indicated in her wrathful and scornful reiteration of "*Surge, amator, i domum*". The parasite in this play lacks the comic element which is so marked in the character of *Peniculus*, and in every respect is a less important figure in the play than is the latter. In consideration of the moral standard of the play, moreover, the *Asinaria* may be ranked as



the lowest of the ten comedies we have mentioned. The deficient sense of morality in the play is very clearly illustrated in the concluding speech of the CATERVA. In the moral expressed there, he implies less sympathy with outraged virtue than with the disappointed delinquent. "If this old man voluntarily did indulge in any pleasure without the knowledge of his wife, he did nothing new nor remarkable nor different from what others are accustomed to do; neither is there anyone of such hard feeling or so firm a will but that he would do the same when an opportunity is offered." (1)

Gnatho of Terence's *Eunuchus* is one of the most delightfully interesting examples of the parasite in the entire ten comedies. As parasite to the braggart soldier, Thraso, he plays a part of considerable importance in the advancement of the plot, acting as the confidential agent for Thraso in his love affair with the beautiful Thais; and in the ridiculous bombardment of the house of Thais, playing the role of first lieutenant to his captain, Thraso. This scene is a delicious little burlesque, portraying the cowardice both of the assailants and the defenders of the fair heroine. Finally after a lengthy bat-

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(1) *Asinaria*, ll. 942-945.

Hic senex si quid clam uxorem suo animo fecit volup,  
neque novom neque mirum fecit nec secus quam alii solent;  
nec quisquam est tam ingenio duro nec tam firmo pectore  
quin ubi quidque occasionis sit sibi faciat bene.



tle of words Thraso acts upon the advice of Gnatho and withdraws his army; at the same time the parasite reminds his lieutenant, the cook, that for him as for all good soldiers, just as there is a time to fight, so also ---"There is a time to think of hearth and home". Sanga, the cook, fully reciprocates the sentiment in the remark---"My heart has been in the stew-pan long ago". (1) The whole body in reply to this forcible appeal cheer vociferously as they move off.

In the third class, consisting of those characters who have no part in advancing the plot, but who rather lend to the comic element of the play, Artotrogus of the *Miles Gloriosus* is by far the most important individual. As regards personal qualities, this delightful buffoon is almost an exact prototype of Gnatho in the *Eunuchus* of Terence. As to importance in the action of the play, however, Artotrogus has no part whatever. The first scene which consists entirely of a dialogue between the braggart soldier, Pyrgopolinices, and his flattering parasite, is the only appearance of Artotrogus. In this dialogue, moreover, not even a hint of the plot is given to the reader. Gelasimus in the play, Stichus, likewise takes no part in the advancement of the plot, but as regards the comic element of the play he furnishes a large portion of the material. As a matter

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(1) *Eunuchus*;ll. 814-816.

Gn. Sanga, ita ut fortis decet  
milites, domi focique fac vicissim ut memineris.  
Sa. iam dudum animus est in patinis.



of fact, the Stichus may be said to have no plot whatever, and its only claim for notice is in the picture of conjugal fidelity displayed by the pretty character, Pamphila. The husbands of Pamphila and her sister have been absent, ostensibly on a trading voyage, for more than three years. In steady resistance to the advice of their father that they should marry again, Pamphila maintains her fidelity to her absent husband and persuades her sister to follow her own example in spite of the strong probabilities of death or desertion of the husbands. In due time both men return home enriched by the profits of their journeys; and such is the whole story of this brief and inartistic drama, remarkable only for its pleasant companion pictures of the two young wives. Last of the ten comedies and least in importance, as regards a study of the parasite, is the Bacchides. In this uninteresting picture of life in the bawd-house, a character, designated by no other name than "Parasitus" appears in a brief dialogue with the slave, Pistoclerus, and represents himself as the parasite of a soldier, Cleomachus. From his conversation, consisting of less than twenty lines he seems to be in somewhat the same relation to his patron as Gnatho and Artotrogus to theirs. He is of no importance, however, in advancing the action of the play and also has little to do with the comic element.

The ten characters just reviewed include all the instances in Latin comedy in which the parasite appears. In addition to the classification on the basis of the importance of the individual in the advancement of the plot, we should again arrange the same characters on the basis of the personal



qualities of the individual. Under such a system we divide the entire number into two groups, as follows:-

I. The shrewd, scheming contriver of plots, attached to no particular patron, but usually employed by some profligate young man for the purpose of helping him out of an embarrassing situation.

Phormio

Curculio

Saturio

II. The mere flatterer or toady, usually attached to some one patron as his humble companion and entertainer.

Artotrogus

Ergasilus

Gelasimus

Gnatho

Peniculus

Parasite of Bacchides

Parasite of Asinaria

The similiary existing between Phormio and Curculio, as regards the importance of each in the action of their respective plays, has already been remarked upon. In considering the personal qualities of these two characters we group along with them also the versatile Saturio. The chief attribute of this class of parasites is what we might call their professional trickery. Neither of the three is attached to any definite patron----instead he seems to make a business of loafing about the public places of the city, waiting for some trouble to



turn up, in which the services of an expert "confidence man" is needed, whereupon the parasite becomes the important figure in the action, and upon his ability to distort the facts and carry out his "bluff" to the end depends his success in gaining for himself a permanent and standing invitation to one or more tables, beside a possibility of other remuneration. In spite of the fact that the individual of this class is woefully lacking in principles of honesty and general morals, nevertheless he compels our admiration far more than the mere toady or flatterer, whose only claim for recognition is based on his coarse methods of entertaining. The parasite of the former class performs a real service to his patron, in return for which he has a legitimate right to expect compensation. The task which he is usually called upon to do is to aid some young man in love to obtain the object of his affection. Ordinarily he must in some manner extort a sum of money from the father of the young man or from some other convenient dupe, beside acting as accomplice in bringing about a secret marriage which may perhaps be bitterly opposed by the father. Of course it is to the interest of the parasite at all times to secure a happy ending to the difficulty in order to guarantee for himself the future good will of as many as possible of the parties concerned. Thus in a way he becomes a sort of peace-maker and usually obtains results that in certain respects are very praiseworthy. At any rate, he secures the unbounded gratitude of the young man who profits especially from his wiles. It is true that he does not display a very high sense of honor, but still the parasite is no exception in



this respect to the general low standard of morals throughout the entire scope of Latin drama. It is very evident that this tendency is the result of an effort on the part of the author to appeal to the humorous sense of the masses; and we can only suppose that in this kind of fun the taste of a Roman audience preferred a strong flavor.

The second group under this classification comprises seven out of the list of ten parasites. In contrast to the former class the individual of this division is represented as the mere flattering companion and toady to some one particular patron. At the same time, however, he is not necessarily inferior to the type represented by Phormio in versatility and keenness of wit, but, on the other hand, actually excels that class in some instances. This type of the character makes the art of entertainment a profession and studies methods by which he may best amuse his hosts. It seems that sometimes he "read up" carefully for the display of the evening just as modern professors of the art of conversation have been reported to do.

"I will go in and have a look at my common-place books, and learn up some better jokes," (1) says Gelasimus, when he is afraid of being superseded by some new pretenders. A variety of this class somewhat distinct from the rest was that individual who acted as the humble foil and toady of the braggart soldier. This character of the braggadocio is one of the most

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(1) Stichus; l. 400.

ibo intro ad libros et discam de dictis melioribus;



common types both in the writings of Menander and of Plautus. He is usually a soldier of fortune who has served in Asia, has made money there and come to Athens to spend it. He has long stories to tell of his remarkable exploits abroad, which no one is very well able to contradict, and to which the parasite, who accepts his dinners, is obliged to listen with such patience as he may. His bravery consists much more in words than in deeds; he thinks that his reputation will win him great favor from the ladies, but on this point he commonly finds himself very much mistaken. It is evident that in the plays of Plautus and Terence this character was transferred bodily from the Greek original: for the Romans themselves were not likely to furnish examples of him, and no hired mercenary would have ventured to swagger in those days at Rome. To a Roman audience this could only have been one of those conventional characters, made to be laughed at, which an easy public is often very willing to accept from an author's hands. The dialogues between this braggart soldier and his parasite furnish some of the most humorous passages in Latin comedy. The most notable example of this class of entertainer is the character, Artotrogus, of *Miles Gloriosus*. The following is an extract from a conversation between Artotrogus and the soldier:

Art. Did you see those girls who stopped me yesterday?

Pyr. What did they say?

Art. Why, when you passed, they asked me--- "What, is the great Achilles here?"---I answered "No---it's his brother".

Then says the other one---"Sure, but he's handsome! What a noble man! What splendid hair! Surely they are very fortunate



who get to dine with him!"

Pyr. Now did they really say so?

Art. They did indeed, and begged me, both of them, to make you take a walk again today, that they might get another sight of you.

Pyr. 'Tis a great nuisance being so very handsome! (1)

In his attempt to please the soldier, Artotrogus tells some wildly preposterous lies about the great deeds of his patron:

Art. Why, I remember there were a hundred and fifty in Cilicia, a hundred in Scytholatronia, thirty in Sardis, sixty in Macedonia--- all that number of men, you killed in one day.

Pyr. What was the greatest number of men?

Art. Seven thousand.

Pyr. That's about right. Your calculation is correct.

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(1) Miles Gloriosus; ll. 59-68.

Ar. vel illae quae here pallio me reprehenderunt

-----Py. quid eae dixerunt tibi?

Ar. Rogitabant: 'hicine Achilles est?' inquit mihi.

' immo eius frater' inquam ' est'. ibi illarum altera

'ergo mecastor pulcher est' inquit mihi

'et liberalis . vide caesaries quam decet.

ne illae sunt fortunatae quae cum isto cubant!'

Py. itane aibant tandem? Ar. quaen me ambae opsecraverint

ut te hodie quasi pompam illa praeterducerem?

Py. nimiast miseria nimi' pulchrum esse hominem.



Art. I have not written it down though; but that's the way I remember it.

Pyr. You certainly have an excellent memory.

Art. Just little incidents call these things to my mind.

Pyr. As long as you serve me as well as you have to the present time, you will have enough to eat--- there'll always be a welcome for you at my table .

Art. And how about in Cappadocia, where, if your sword had not been so dull you would have killed five hundred men at one stroke? (1)

In the fourth act the Miles explains how his parasite has gone on an errand of business to the king Seleucus and, seeming to miss the companionship of his flatterer, he turns over to

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(1) Miles Gloriosus; ll. 42-53.

----- Ar. memini centum in Cilicia  
et quinquaginta, centum in Schytholatronia,  
triginta Sardos, sexaginta Macedones-----  
sunt homines quos tu---- occidisti uno die.

Py. quanta istaec hominum summast? Ar. septem milia.

Py. tantum esse oportet. recte rationem tenes.

Ar. at nullos habeo scriptos: sic memini tamen.

Py. edepol memoria's optuma. Ar. offae monent.

Py. dum tale facies quale adhuc, adsiduo edes,  
communicabo semper te mensa mea.

Ar. quid in Cappadocia, ubi tu quingentos simul,  
ni hebes machaera foret, uno ictu occideras?



Palaestrio the task of taking the place of the parasite. The slave proves a worthy successor to Artotrogus and causes an immense amount of merriment for the audience---- at the expense of his new patron, however.

Another example of this variety, already mentioned as very similar to Artotrogus is Gnatho of Terence's Eunuchus. After Gnatho has delivered Thraso's present, the slave-girl, to Thais, the captain wishes to know how the fair lady has received his gift.

T. I say--- was Thais very much obliged?

G. Immensely. T. She was really pleased, you think? G. Not with the gift so much as that you gave it; 'tis that she's proud of. T. I've a happy way--- I don't know how---- but everything I do is well received. G. I've noticed it myself.

T. Yes, even the King himself, after an action, would always thank me in person. 'Twas a thing he never did to others. G. Well, with gifts like yours, a man gets double credit, while poor souls like us work hard, with nobody to thank us. T. You have it exactly. G. Ah! no doubt his Majesty had his eye on you always. T. Well---he had. I may tell you ---- I was in all his secrets----had the whole army under me, in fact. G. No--- really. T. Yes. And then, when he was tired of seeing people, or grew sick of business, and wanted to unbend him, as it were,--- you understand? G. I know --- something, you mean,

in what we call the free-and- easy line? T. Just so--- he'd ask me to a quiet dinner. G. Indeed! his Majesty showed fine discernment. T. That's just the man he is--- one in a thousand---- there are few like him. G. (aside) Very few, I



fancy, if he could stand your company. (1)

The captain proceeds to relate to his friend some of the excellent jokes which he made during the time he enjoyed this intimacy with royalty; jokes at which the parasite laughs more perhaps than the reader would. Here is a specimen:

T. Did I ever tell you how I touched up the Rhodian once at dinner? G. Never! pray tell me---(aside) for the hundredth

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(1) Eunuchus; ll. 391-410.

Th. Magnas vero agere gratias Thais mihi?

Gn. ingentis. Th. ain tu ,laetast? Gn. non tam ipso quidem dono quam abs te datum esse: id vero serio triumphat-----

-----, Th. est istuc datum

profecto, ut grata mihi sint quae facio omnia.

Gn. advorti hercle animum. Th. vel rex semper maxunas mihi agebat quidquid feceram: aliis non item.

Gn. labore alieno magno partam gloriam

verbis saepe in se transmovet qui habet salem;

quod in test. Th. habes. Gn. rex te ergo in oculis Th. scilicet

Gn. gestare. Th. vero: credere omnem exercitum,

consilia. Gn. mirum. Th. tum sicubi eum satietas

hominum aut negoti si quando odium ceperat,

requiescere ubi volebat, quasi---nostin? Gn. scio:

quasi ubi illam exspueret miseriam ex animo. Th. tenes.

tum me convivam solum abducebat sibi. Gn. hui,

regem elegantem narras. Th. immo sic homost:

perpaucorum hominumst. Gn. immo nullorum arbitror,

si tecum vivit.



time.

T. The youth was dining with us; as it chanced there was a lady there, a friend of mine; he made some joke about it;

"What" said I,--- "What, you young puppy, have you learnt to bark?" G. Ha, ha,---ho, ho! O dear! T. You seem amused.

G. Oh! good indeed! delicious! excellent! Nothing can beat it!--

Tell me now, though, really--- Was that your own? I thought it had been older. T. What?--- had you heard it? G. Often; why,

it's reckoned the best thing out. T. Well, it's mine. (1)

In several such passages from Plautus and Terence the representation of the parasite as an obsequious and flattering toady seems somewhat overdrawn, but, if the biographers of Philip and Alexander of Macedon are to be trusted, we have some historical examples of this character fully as ludicrous as any inventions of the stage. We are told that whenever King Philip

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(1) Eunuchus; ll. 419- 429.

-----Th. quid illud, Gnatho,  
quo pacto Rhodium tetigerim in convivio,

numquam tibi dixi? Gn. numquam; sed narra obsecro.

plus miliens audivi. Th. una in convivio

erat hic, quem dico, Rhodius adolescentulus.

forte habui scortum: coepit ad id adludere

et me inridere. 'quid ais' inquam homini 'inpudens?

lepus tute es, pulpamentum quaeris?' Gn. hahahahae.

Th. quid est? Gn. facete, lepide, laute, nil supra.

tuomne obsecro te, hoc dictum erat? vetus credidi.

Th. audieras? Gn. saepe, et fertur in primis. Th. meumst.



ate anything sour or acid, and made wry faces at it, his flatterer, Cleisophos, went through exactly the same grimaces; when the king hurt his leg, Cleisophos immediately put on a limp; and when the king lost his right eye at Methone, the courtier appeared next morning with the same eye bandaged up. It is also said that to wear the head a little on one side became quite the fashion in the court of Alexander, because he himself had a slight deformity of the kind.

Although the character of the parasite is a direct importation from the Greek stage, it was likely to be a very common one also in Roman society. The relation of patron and client, which meets us everywhere in the Roman city life of those days--- when the great man was surrounded with his crowds of hangers-on, all more or less dependent upon and obsequious to him, and often eating at his table--- was sure to breed in plenty that kind of human fungus.

A study of the various personal qualities of the parasite that seem most particularly to make him a desirable figure for the use of the dramatist reveals to us the chief reason for the universal popularity of the writings of Plautus. In all Latin literature there is no type of character that possesses so many of the essentials of dramatic action as this unique person. He is the embodiment of all those attributes that combine to give flavor, animation, and invention to the plot. Among the most conspicuous traits of his character we notice the quick play of his wit, the riotous exaggeration of his fancy, his unusually vivid observation of immediate conditions and circumstances, the inexhaustible resources of his



faculty for genial vituperation and execration, and even the novelty and peculiar attraction of his personal appearance. While he charms and entertains us with his delightful humor, he is very often at the same time busy with his plots and intrigues that furnish the basis for the action of the play. By reason of these qualities of his character, the parasite furnishes a very useful avenue for that which is Plautus' largest endowment and the truest note of his creativeness--- his power of expression by means of action, rhythm, and language. Horace refers by the expressive phrase "properare" to the extreme vivacity and rapidity of gesture, dialogue, declamation and recitative, by which his scenes are characterized. On account of their liveliness and mobility of temperament, the Romans were admirable mimics, and naturally a plot which afforded such abundant opportunity for action appealed especially to them. This fact doubtless explains in part the favor which these comedies continued to enjoy with companies of players. How far the actor was expected to bring out the meaning of the poet may be gathered from the following lively description of a bit of silent acting by the scheming Palaestrio:

" Look there, if you please, how he has taken up his post, with serious brow pondering, meditating; now he taps his breast with his fingers. I fancy he is going to summon his heart outside: look, he turns away; now his left hand is leaning on his left thigh; with his right hand he is making a calculation on his fingers: he is at a loss; he often changes his position: look, there he nods his head: he does not like this new idea. Whatever it is, he will not bring it out until it is ready; he'll serve it



up well done. Look again, he is busy building: he props his chin up with a pillar. Away with it! I don't like that kind of building: for I have heard that a foreign poet has his face thus pillared, beside whom two sentinels are every hour on watch. Bravo! truly he is now in a fine attitude, like a slave or a man in a play. (1)

We cannot emphasize too strongly the importance of those qualities of Plautus' comedies that are represented in the character of the parasite. The same points of excellence which made his plays so dear to the Roman people have also caused them to become a considerable influence in modern literature. During that formative period of the English drama, where we can

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Miles Gloriosus; ll. 200-213.

-----illuc sis vide,  
quem ad modum astitit, severo fronte curans, cogitans.  
pectus digitis pultat, cor credo evocaturus foras;  
ecce avortit: nixus laevo in femine habet laevam manum,  
dextera digitis rationem computat, feriens femur  
dexterum. ita vehementer icit: quod agat aegre suppetit.  
concrepuit digitis: laborat; crebro commutat status.  
eccere autem capite nutat: non placet quod repperit.  
quidquid est, incoctum non expromet, bene coctum dabit.  
ecce autem aedificat: columnam mento suffigit suo.  
apage, non placet profecto mihi illaec aedificatio;  
nam os columnatum poetae esse indauidivi barbaro,  
quoi bini custodes semper totis horis occubant.  
eugae! euscheme hercle astitit et dulice et comoedice;



first see the beginnings of real comedy, there is no other agency so apparent in the molding of its form as the influence of the classic types. Nicholas Udall, the most noteworthy writer of that pre-Shakespearean period admirably illustrates in his play, *Roister Doister*, how serviceable was the example furnished by the persons of Plautus, and particularly the parasite, in the development of English Comedy. In his adaptations from the classic models, Udall shows himself a genuine disciple of the Renaissance; he "imitates" in that true way in which "imitation" has always ultimately proved originality: he shows that he had absorbed the spirit of the Roman comedy and understood the easy movement, the sparkling and refined dialogue, the succinct but full delineation of character, and the clear development of a plot. His experience as teacher of the classics and the humanism which he observed in the plays of Plautus must have pointed out to him the way in which the "Enterlude" might be outgrown, the way that would lead to a new category of plays: the "comedy". It is due to his faithful imitation of the great classic models more than to any other influence that Nicholas Udall has obtained first claim to the title of the "Father of English Comedy". His persons show that he studied Plautus and Terence as a clear and sharp observer, and that he had learned from them where the originals for a comedy were to be found---in life, in the actual world surrounding the poet.

The play, *Roister Doister*, written about the middle of the sixteenth century, marks the point where English dramatic literature takes a sharp turn from the influence of the morality plays and that later category of interludes termed



" Bastards of the Moralities " (which seem to have no other purpose than to introduce dogmatical moralizations, seasoned perhaps with a tavern scene or with some other farcical coarseness, and at best ending with an "unmotived" conversion of the sinner or sinners) and launches out into what may be called the beginning of the regular drama. In fact, Roister Doister is often mentioned as the first English comedy and surely it seems to have an indisputable claim to that distinction. Ward, in his Dictionary of National Biography, states that in the witty plays of Heywood, a contemporary of Udall, the " personified abstractions" of the moralities have been entirely superseded by "personal types"; but we might add that these personal types have not yet matured into individual persons, into men of flesh and blood, as they have in Udall's play.

This comedy, Roister Doister, is evidently an adaptation from the Miles Gloriosus of Plautus; and the characters, Ralph Roister Doister, and Mattheve Merygreeke, are as nearly as possible the counterparts of the braggart soldier, Pyrgopolinices and his parasite, Artotrogus, respectively. The plot is very simple; Ralph Roister Doister woos for the hand of Dame Christian Custance and after various entanglements is ultimately unsuccessful, rather on account of the enormity of his own folly than because Dame Custance has been engaged to another man before Roister makes his first advances. The figure of an avowed fool in love together with the additional motive of vainglory, which is so evident a trait of Roister's character, furnishes the basis for complications of character and situation necessary for a comedy. Moreover, in the



introduction of a personage who seasons the play by his wit and produces the necessary entanglements, the author seems to have made complete the analogy of this plot to that of the Miles Gloriosus. Matthewe Merygreeke embodies most of the characteristics that we find in the facetious Artotrogus, and is altogether a splendid imitation of that interesting buffoon. From a somewhat minor figure at first he grows gradually under the poet's hands until he occupies the most prominent place in the play, at least as far as our interest in the different characters is concerned.

This portrayal of the parasite by Udall gives us a type that is very charming and entertaining, especially when viewed in comparison with the dull characters of the moralities before him. In imitation of their Latin prototypes, all his characters are men and women of flesh and blood, interesting and amusing living beings, not the wax figures of "Sapience" or "Folly", "Virtuous Living" or "Counterfet Countenance". They are vastly superior to those wooden "dialoguers", whom one feels to be acting merely for a school-bred morality, and they leave the coarse-grained but witty figures even of Heywood's farces far behind.

Although Merygreeke is usually regarded as a sort of modern parasite, transferred bodily from the works of Plautus and Terence, there are many qualities in his character that make him in certain respects a new creation. The chief distinction between Merygreeke and his Latin prototype, Artotrogus, is in the fact that he takes this part in the action of the play more for the pure enjoyment of it than for the material profit which he may derive for his services. He first comes to Roister



"for his stomach's sake" and wants a new coat, but later when he sees Roister in love and realizes what a source of fun the love of such a vain fool might become, he determines to bring about such complications of plot as will yield the greatest quantity of amusement. Merygreeke may at times seem to act treacherously with Roister but his flattery is so exaggerated, his lies are so improbable, so enormous, so amusing to all sane people and Roister so fully deserves such treatment that we fully and freely forgive him. After all he does not betray Roister, but rather helps him to what he really desires. And what Roister most desires in this world is, not the possession of the fair widow, but the satisfaction of his vanity. He straightway forgets his love in the delusion fostered by Merygreeke, that Goodluck and Custance desire to live in peace with him because they fear him.

From the point of view of the moral principles depicted in his character, this modern parasite has met with very general approval. In fact, some English critics have argued that he is superior to the type which we find in Plautus.

Dr. Ewald Flügel in his essay upon the play, Roister Doister, notes ----"first, that the classical parasite lacks the element of modern humor, of witty but, after all, good -natured enjoyment of the mischief which he stirs up; secondly, that Merygreeke is free from the endless and ---to us---tedious allusions to the stomach; and , thirdly, from the vulgar, and almost uninteresting selfishness, revealed in such words as those of Gnathio:<sup>(1)</sup>

Principio ego vos credere ambos hoc mi vehementer volo-----

(1)

Now, to start with, I want both of you to distinctly understand that whatever I do in this matter, I do chiefly for my own profit.



Ne huius quicquid faciam id facere maxime causa mea.

I may be mistaken but I cannot find that the classical parasite has any fine touch of the humor that is inseparable from 'humanity', from good nature. The classical parasite is, on account of this deficiency, distinctly inferior to this modern creation".

As to the first point made by Dr. Flügel, it is true, as was remarked earlier in this paper, that Merygreeke differs from Artotrogus in that he takes this part in the play more for the pure enjoyment of it than for any material profit. Still this fact, together with the second and third points of this criticism---- the gluttony and selfishness of the classical parasite, cannot justify the conclusion that Merygreeke is a superior invention. Although this adaptation by Udall coincides more accurately with our ideas of integrity and unselfishness--- gives us a person more in keeping with the modern conception of morals---nevertheless this same character is just as distinctly inferior to the parasite of Plautus and Terence in keen sagacity, brilliancy of wit and shrewd contriving of plots-- the very qualities that make them suitable characters for dramatic action. As to the lack of morals in the classic comedy it is perhaps necessary to be on one's guard against judging this tendency too severely from a merely modern point of view. These plays were addressed to the people in their holiday mood, and a certain amount of license was claimed for such a mood, which perhaps was not intended to have more relation to the ordinary life of work and serious business than the lies and tricks of slaves in comedy to their ordinary relations with



their masters. Furthermore, Plautus shows much greater familiarity with the life of the lower and middle classes than with that of those above them in station. He takes a good-natured, ironical delight in his slaves, courtesans, parasites, and sycophants. He is not shocked by anything they can do or say. He feels the enjoyment of a man of strong animal spirits in laughing at and with them. In short we may say that it is rather in the absence of any virtuous ideal, than in positive incitements to vice, that the Plautine comedy might be called immoral. Plautus shows scarcely any of the Roman feeling of dignity or seriousness, or any regard for patriotism or public duty. There is everywhere abundance of good humor and good sense, but, except in the *Captivi* and *Rudens*, we find scarcely any pathos or elevated feeling. The ideal of character which satisfies most of his personages might almost be expressed in the words of Stalagmus in the *Captivi*:- "I was a fine gentlemen, a nice fellow--- a good or respectable man I never was nor will be".(1)

Plautus is not surpassed by any of the other poets in the exuberant vigor and spontaneous flow of his diction. No Roman poet shows more rapidity of conception, or greater variety of illustration: and words and phrases are never wanting to body forth and convey with immediate force and freshness the intuitive discernment of his common sense. His resources of language are never wanting for any call which he may make upon them. In a few descriptive passages he shows a command of the

(1) *Captivi*; ll. 956-7.

Fui ego bellus , lepidus,---bonus vir numquam,neque frugi bonae,  
neque ero unquam.



language of forcible poetic imagination. But he does not often betray a sense of beauty in action, character or Nature: and thus if his style altogether wants the peculiar charm of the later poets, and the tenderness and urbanity of Terence, the explanation of this defect is perhaps to be sought rather in the limited play which he allowed to his finer sensibilities than in any inability to avail himself of the full capabilities of his native language.

Whether the deficiency in the sense of beauty should deny to him the name of a great poet, is to be answered only when agreement has been attained as to the definition of a poet. Plautus has been spoken of as a writer of "prodigal invention and a popular and national fibre". No description could be more fitting. Certainly he is thoroughly representative of his race---- not of the gravity and dignity superinduced on the natural Italian temperament by the strict discipline of Roman life, and by the sense of superiority which arises among the governing men of an imperial state--- but the strong and healthy vitality which enabled the Italian to play his part in history, and of the quick observation and steady resource, the lively emotional and social temperament, the keen enjoyment of life, which are the accompaniment of that original endowment.





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