

Typecastaways: Stock-type shifting in Plautus' *Persa*

In Plautus' *Persa*—a play without any citizens of respectable standing—practically every character attempts to appropriate the language, characteristics, or authority of another stock type, usually one with higher status or greater theatrical agency. The *seruus callidus* protagonist Toxilus adopts the role of *adulescens inamoratus*; the parasite Saturio tries to act like a *senex durus*; the *seruus currens* Paegnium challenges Toxilus for the position of *seruus callidus*; and the *ancilla* Sophoclidisca strives to become a *lena*.

Such “stock-type shifting,” as I term this phenomenon, has been observed for some characters—Toxilus (Slater, McCarthy, Moore), Saturio (Bettini, Damon), and Saturio's unnamed daughter (Lowe, Marshall, Manuwald, Hardy)—but not for others, especially Paegnium and Sophoclidisca. Furthermore, a synoptic analysis, inclusive of all characters who appropriate additional stock roles, has not been undertaken, so the attempts of these other characters to change stock type have gone without comment. By considering the cast as a whole throughout the play, with particular emphasis on Saturio, his daughter, and the two subordinate slaves with minor roles (Paegnium and Sophoclidisca), I will show that Plautus uses stock-type shifting programmatically, to advance the humor, the plot, and an underlying theme of *Persa*.

While Saturio can be seen as an über-parasite (*Persa* 57–58), he nevertheless appeals to his *maiores* (53, 55, 61) and to *patria potestas* (340) as if he were a *senex*. His daughter, a speaking citizen *uirgo*, is essentially unprecedented in New Comedy, and her role in *Persa*—clever but morally upstanding—is unlike any female comic stock types (cf. James). Paegnium functions as *seruus currens*, but backtalks to his superiors aggressively, like a *callidus*. Comparison of Sophoclidisca with other Plautine slave women reveals that she is indeed an *ancilla* and would-be *lena*.

Plautus uses stock-type shifting to augment the farce he stages in *Persa* and, consequently, to extend the play's Saturnalian spirit (cf. Segal). With characters in stereotypical costumes exhibiting the behaviors of other stereotypical personae, Plautus cheats expectations about the characters and plot his audience might have held. Additionally, the alteration and blending of stock roles in *Persa* mirrors and reinforces the doubling of the plot itself: with two goals—trick the pimp, get the girl—and only one protagonist (Toxilus), Plautus successfully blends the two plotlines together by making Toxilus both *callidus* and *inamoratus*.

Finally, the play's stock-type shifting, compounded with its lack of authority-wielding citizens, thematically disrupts the moral framework of more regular New Comedy. Plautus uses a focus on slave characters who adopt non-slave roles to show slaves experiencing human emotions (like love) that merit the audience's attention. Furthermore, when a pimp (Dordalus) is the only free and independent member of the community and a slave (Toxilus) the only defender of public morality (cf. McCarthy), when a citizen allows his own daughter to be sold onstage by a slave on another slave's behalf, the play's social fabric is ripped. The conclusion of *Persa* in a slave-run festal banquet (with masters still glaringly absent) does not effect the usual Saturnalian

resolution and return to the *status quo*, but rather widens the holes in the play's social fabric (as the pimp tries to isolate himself from the community and as Plautus prevents a return to the balance of power within the *familia*), holes that give no signs of mending in the future. Stock characters are twisted into different roles, and in the process Roman *mores* are displaced onto the pimp, the pimp's criminality is rebuffed by not a citizen but a slave, and a citizen girl disguised as a foreigner delivers moral commentary—and the Roman audience is encouraged to consider its beliefs and behaviors, as well as the emotions of its slaves, from an outsider's perspective.

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