

## Spinning an Old Tale: Myth and Originality in Terence's *Eunuchus*

The issue of originality in Terence has been brought to the foreground in recent scholarship, and it is no longer indisputable that Terence simply translated and adapted Greek originals. One strand of scholarship centers on intertextual analyses of Terentian additions and alterations; particular interest has been paid to the visually striking impact they produce (Ludwig 1968) and their comedic effect (Goldberg 1986). More recent scholarship centers on cultural analyses of the additions and alterations: Barsby (1999) claims that their function is to produce a distinctively Italian production, while Fontaine (2014) argues that the additions establish an intertextual dynamism present throughout the corpus of Terence's plays. It is clear that some characters were added to the *Eunuchus* that were not derived from Menander's original: Barsby (1999) points to Thraso, Gnatho, and Antipho. However, the motives behind and process by which derivative and added characters were integrated has yet to be fully addressed.

This paper proposes a detailed analysis of three specific mythological references in the *Eunuchus* that can clarify how and to what purpose Terence distinguished between stock characters, which were borrowed indiscriminately from Greek originals, and the new characters he purposefully developed for his audience at Rome. I propose that the mythological figures referenced in the play serve as parallels to the characters that evoke them. Moreover, this paper argues that the mythic figure/dramatic character correspondences suggest that those character-types, although fundamentally unoriginal, are transformed into stock "New Comedy" characters.

The first mythological reference is to Jupiter and Danaë, the woman whom Jupiter, disguised as a golden shower, impregnated although she had been securely locked away. The reference is made by Chaerea, who recalls Jupiter's actions in order to justify his own rape of Pamphilla, the very girl to whom he, disguised as a eunuch, had been assigned to guard

(*Eunuchus* 584-5). The relationship and characters of Jupiter and Danaë parallel those of Chaerea and Pamphilla; Jupiter/Chaerea, in disguise, enters the home of Danaë/Pamphilla and rapes her while she is bathing. The next mythological reference is to Hercules and Omphale, the foreign queen to whom Hercules was made a slave. Thraso, the *miles gloriosus* character, justifies his desire to serve the *meretrix* Thais through the precedent set by Hercules (*Eunuchus* 1024-5). These characters reverse socially established gender roles when Omphale/Thais is portrayed as a dominant figure, reigning over Hercules/Thraso as a prostitute *regina* (*Eunuchus* 168). The third mythological reference is to Sisyphus, the deceitful, hubristic mortal who tricks the gods and the laws of nature to satisfy his own ends. Gnatho, the *parasitus colax* character, compares himself to the mythological figure, telling Chaerea: “I keep rolling that stone—sufficiently—for a long time now” (*Eunuchus* 1085). Flattering insolence through sophisticated rhetoric is Sisyphus/Gnatho’s *raison d’être*.

My analysis demonstrates that Terence renovates paradigmatic stock characters in the *Eunuchus* by providing them with a mythological parallel. The character of Chaerea, the lustful youth, is as ancient as Zeus; Thraso, the arrogant-turned-subservient soldier, is preceded by Hercules; Gnatho, the tricky charmer, has Sisyphus as a prototype. Therefore, by examining how these characters were reframed by mythic figures and prepared for a Roman audience they may be analyzed for Terentian originality. Furthermore, the implications of this study will allow the play’s other major and minor characters to be seen in a new light. This argument provides the basis for further research which will more finely distinguish the motives behind and process by which derivative and innovative characters were integrated into Terence’s *Eunuchus*.

## Bibliography

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