

A Soldier and his Parasite: Roman Reliance on *socii milites* in Terence's *Eunuchus*

New Comedy at Rome was produced during a series of Punic Wars (264-146 BCE) that saw the expansion of Rome unlike any other era before it. As a result, the qualifications for service in Rome's military changed dramatically during this time. No longer did the Roman army consist exclusively of the wealthiest Roman citizens, but now it consisted of *socii milites*, the non-citizen 'allied' troops from recently subjugated territories. Around the time of Terence's literary output (166-161 BCE), the Roman army was heavily reliant on the use of *socii*. In fact, the total number of *socii* serving with the Roman army likely outnumbered the citizen-soldiers three to one (Kendall 2013). Nevertheless, many scholars such as Hunter (1985) and Gruen (2014) contend that Terence offers little or no reflection of the contemporary social and political scene at Rome.

This paper argues that key dramatic relationships in Terence's *Eunuchus* (produced for the Megalesian Games in 161 BCE) suggest a parallel to the historical relationship between Rome and her subjugated territories. I single out the dynamic between the soldiers Thraso and Gnatho, whose characters are developed throughout the play in multiple ways, but most provocatively through self-comparisons made to mythological figures. In the play, Thraso, the *miles gloriosus* 'stock' character, compares himself to Hercules while also comparing Thais, the *meretrix*, to Omphale (*Eunuchus* 1027). Hercules is usually the epitome of belligerent masculinity, but in the Omphale myth he is enslaved and engages in activities that undermine his masculinity and position of control. The parallel essentially grafts this mythological version of Hercules, an enslaved hero, onto the stock figure of the *miles gloriosus* and thereby creates a unique character who represents a *socius miles* in Terence's time.

Gnatho, the play's *parasitus* 'stock' character, compares himself to Sisyphus and Thraso to Sisyphus' rock (*Eunuchus* 1085). This parallel, which grafts the cunning Sisyphus onto the freeloading parasite, reveals an ironic point of view in which Gnatho feels burdened by the relationship between himself, the parasite, and Thraso, the parasite's host. Gnatho relies on Thraso to maintain his lavish lifestyle at no cost to himself, a situation comparable to Rome's demands of its 'allies' who had to provide for, arm, and feed their own troops for Roman use, without any financial support from Rome (Gabba 1989). Gnatho's self-righteous feelings of burden reveal a plausible Roman reaction to the incorporation of foreign soldiers into its ranks.

My analysis aims to demonstrate that when making changes to the paradigmatic nature of the 'stock' characters Thraso and Gnatho, Terence draws attention to the type of Roman soldier each one represents, either the *ciuis* or *socius miles*. Moreover, their dramatic relationship can be read metaphorically for Rome's parasitical relationship with its *socii milites* wherein the *socii* took on all the burdens of war for Rome while Rome provided nothing of substance in return.

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