Parasites Hype Men of the Ancient World

1. Reality of the Character
   a. Xenophon’s story of Criton, Socrates, and Archedemus
      Κύνα δὲ τρέφεις (Xen. Mem. 2.9)
      “you keep dogs don’t you?”
   b. Parasite is not a legal term in Roman or Greek world but a label for a behavior
      and one that is almost always negatively applied
      i. “He is a slave” vs. “He is a parasite”

2. Comedic Characters
   a. Original Greek word for character was κόλαξ
   b. παράσιτος: literally meaning ‘beside food’; first appeared as a joking nickname
      for κόλαξ character and was actually an official title for temple officials who
      participated in ritual feasts
   c. At one point in Greek Comedy the two terms came to represent two separate types
      of parasites but differentiation dropped out when transferred to Latin
      Colax Menandrist, in east parasitus colax
      et miles gloriosus  
      (Eun. 30-31)
      There is a Flatterer by Menander, in which there is a flattering parasite and a
      boastful soldier

3. Terence’s Boys
   Flattery and insults raise the same question: What do you want? - Mason Cooley
   a. Hunger
      i. Gnatho the Jaw, Eunuchus
Eager for dinner (459, 1057-60, 1081-82)

GNA si efficio hoc, postulo ut mihi tua domus
te prae sente absente pateat, invocato ut sit locus
semper.

(Eun. 1058-60)

GNA If I do this, I demand that your house be open to me whether
you are present or not, and that even uninvited there is always a place

ii. Phormio, Phormio

1. Claims he can’t be thrown in jail because they wouldn’t want to
feed him (Phorm. 334-37), obsessed with drinking (830), his grand
reward is an invitation to dinner (1052-54)

b. Service and Flattery

i. Gnatho: Taking a gift to Thais (229), shopping (255-58), acting as a
messenger (266), ensuring that the house is ready for party (499-500)

ii. Phormio

PHO ... tu rideas,
prior bibas, prior decumbas, cena dubia apponitur.
GE quid istuc verbist? PHO ubi tu dubites quid sumas potissimum.
haec quom rationem ineas quam sint suavia et quam cara sint,
ea qui praebet, non tu hunc habeas plane prae sentem deum?
(Phorm. 341-45)

PHO You can laugh, you can drink first, you can recline for dinner
first; a puzzling dinner is laid out for you GE What's this thing
you’re talking about? PHO When you must puzzle over what in
particular you should take. When you consider how sweet these
things are and how expensive they are, would you not think the
one who provides this is clearly a living god?
iii. False flattery

1. Gnatho doesn’t show any true fides for Thraso and openly petitions Chaerea and Phaedria to take advantage of him as quasi-parasites (Eun. 1069-87)

**GNA** labore alieno magno partam gloriam
verbis saepe in se transmover qui habet salem;
quod in test. **THR** habes.

(Eun. 399-401)

**GNA** A man who is wise can often transfer with his words the glory from another’s hard work to himself; you are this way. **THR** You’ve got it.

Bibliography


