THE CHARACTERISATION OF PARMENO IN THE OPENING SCENE OF TERENCE’S EUNUCH

John A Barsby
University of Otago

In the opening scene of Terence’s Eunuch the slave Parmeno is offering advice to the lovesick Phaedria, the older of the two sons of the family. Phaedria has been shut out by his mistress, the meretrix Thais, and has now been invited back, and he cannot decide what to do. Parmeno responds with a lecture on the uncertainties of love and the wiles of the meretrix, and finally advises Phaedria as follows (74-8):

PA. quid agas? nisi ut te redimas captum quam queas minimo; si nequeas paullulo, at quanti queas; 75 et ne te adflictes. PH. itane suades? PA. si sapis, neque præcter quam quas ipse amor molestias habet addas, et illas quas habet recte feras.

The starting-point of this article is the difficulty of deciding what the purport of Parmeno’s concluding advice is supposed to be: is he telling Phaedria to reject Thais’ latest approach, or to give in?1

There can be little disagreement about the characterisation of Parmeno in the play as a whole. Parmeno is one of those slaves who, in the absence of their older masters (the fathers) abroad, find themselves involved in the love affairs of their younger masters (the sons).2 The culmination of this character is the ebullient tricky slave of Plautus, who effectively runs the whole play on behalf of the son, cheating pimps, sending rival lovers packing, and often tricking the father shamelessly at the risk of dire punishments for himself when the truth comes out. But in Terence and Menander we do not find this fully developed character, but a paler version, and indeed in some instances we find an inversion, i.e. the 'failed'

1 In the notes to this article the following are referred to simply by the name of the author: P. Fabia, P. Terenti Afri Eunuchus (Paris, 1895), K. Büchner, Das Theater des Terenz (Heidelberg, 1974), G. Maurach, ‘Zu Terenz, Eun.I. 1’, Gymnasium 88 (1981) 123-38.

2 We should no doubt think of these slaves as the family pedagogues, though it is one of the puzzles of the ancient MSS that in only one play (namely Plautus’ Bacchides) is the character actually labelled paedagogus.
tricky slave or the 'bungling slave'. Parmeno in the Eunuch turns out to be an example of this latter 'bungling slave' type. He suggests the eunuch disguise to enable the younger son Chaerea to gain access to his girl - and then tries in vain to withdraw the suggestion when he perceives its implications (369-90); subsequently he is deceived by Thais's maid into believing that the worst has happened to Chaerea when it has not (941-70); and as a result he is trapped into blurting out the truth to the father instead of protecting his own and the son's interests (971-1001). The point at issue is whether Terence foreshadows this 'bungling slave' characterisation right from the beginning.

Most interpreters of the opening scene of the Eunuch, both ancient and modern, have seen Parmeno as representing the voice of wisdom in contrast to the folly and indecision of Phaedria. The earliest interpretations are those of the satirists Horace and Persius. The context of Horace's adaptation is Satires 2. 3, in which Damasippus is quoting to Horace a sermon by the Stoic Stertinius on the familiar text 'Only the Wise Man is Sane'. Stertinius is arguing that being in love is even more childish than an adult playing dolls-houses or sandcastles, and goes on to compare the sulkiness of a child who refuses an apple when you offer one - but would demand one if you didn't - to the sulkiness of the lover who similarly doesn't know what he really wants (258-61):

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porrigis irato puero cum poma, recusat: 260
'sume, catelle!' negat: si non des, optet: amator
exclusus qui distat, agit ubi secum, eat an non,
quo rediturus erat non arcessitus...?
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Stertinius goes on to describe the lover's deliberations (262-4 = Eun. 46-9) and his slave's lecture on the uncertainties of love (265-71 = Eun. 57-63); he does not use the names Parmeno and Phaedria, but there are clear verbal echoes of Terence's scene throughout. There is no doubt that the slave is seen as the wiser of the two (seruus non paulo sapientior 265), and in the Stoic context the moral must be that love is a folly which must be avoided.

Persius' Satire 5 is another Stoic sermon, this time on the text 'Only the Wise Man is Free'. Persius is arguing that we ordinary mortals have great difficulty in resisting the temptations of ambition, wealth, luxury, and so on, and that, even

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4 The scene was very well known in antiquity. Apart from the use made of it by Horace and Persius, various lines are quoted by Cicero (Nat. Deor. 3.72 Tusc. Dis. 4.76) and Quintilian (9.2.11,9.3.16,9.4.141,11.3.182).
when we have made a stand against these things, we can never be sure that we have finally broken the chain of enslavement to them. Like Horace, Persius inserts a slave-master conversation to illustrate his point. This conversation has a few verbal echoes of Terence's version (172f):

\[
\text{quidnam igitur faciam? nec nunc, cum arcessat et ultro suppliciet, accedam?;}
\]

but the names of master and slave are different (Chaerestratus and Davus); the scholiast asserts that Persius took the passage (and the names) from Menander's *Eunuchos*,\(^5\) which means that Persius may in fact be paraphrasing Menander rather than Terence.\(^6\) However that may be, the main point for our purpose is that the slave's response to his master's question is quite clear and unequivocal - the master should escape while he can (173f):

\[
\text{si totus et integer illinc exieras, nec nunc.}
\]

So both satirists see the scene as illustrating a Stoic truth; both cast the slave in the role of the wise (or wiser) man; and the gist of the slave's message in both cases (implicitly or explicitly) is 'reject the invitation'.

We have another interpretation of Terence's scene from antiquity in the commentary of Donatus. This confirms the Stoic interpretation of the scene (ad *Eun. 46*):

\[
\text{exemplum proponitur, quam non suae potestatis sit qui amat, quam sapiat qui non amat neque aliter affectus est;}
\]

and again underlines the superior wisdom of the slave (ad *Eun. 57*):

\[
\text{concessum est in palliata poetis comicis seruos dominis sapientiores fingere...}
\]

To turn to modern times, Fabia, whose 1895 commentary on the *Eunuch* is still the best available, offers a strikingly favourable interpretation of the character of Parmeno:


\(^6\) The question has been much discussed. Büchner's view (232f) that Persius was following Horace rather than either Menander or Terence is countered by Maurach (125 n.4), who sees Persius as basically reproducing Menander's scene with some verbal borrowing from Terence.
Ludwig, in his major 1959 discussion of the play, describes Parmeno in this scene as 'shrewd' ('der verliebte junge Herr und sein gewitzer Diener'). Büchner, in his authoritative 1974 book on Terence, summarises Parmeno's advice without any hint of criticism. It is only in the last decade that Parmeno's advice has been subjected to careful scrutiny. Maurach, in his important 1981 article, asserts that Daos in Menander's version (and by implication Parmeno also) did not understand his master aright, and explains the scene in terms of a type-scene, in which the slave fails to understand his master and urges him to do what he is not in a position to do. One might dissent from both these views; but Maurach is right to draw attention to inconsistencies in Parmeno's position, and this is the question to which we will now turn.

Faced with a master tempted to reject an invitation from the woman who had excluded him, a consistent response from Parmeno might have been: 'Fine, if you can hold out, but, meretrices being what they are, you will find yourself crawling back to her in the end and on her terms; so you might as well go back now while you have her at a disadvantage.' This would not be good Stoic advice, as Horace or Persius might have wanted, but it would be consistent. And it is what Parmeno says in 50-55 (if these lines are correctly assigned to him):

`siquidem hercle possis, nil prius neque fortius.
nerum si incipies neque pertendes gnauiter
atque, ubi pati non poterit, quom nemo expetet,
infected pace ultro ad eam uenies indicans
te amare et ferre non posse: actumst, ilicet
peristi: eludet ubi te uictum senserit.`

and again in 64-70:

7 Fabia, 24f.
9 Büchner, 231 (quoted below in n. 14).
10 See esp. 128 ("...der menandrische Diener...mit seinem Rate deutlich zeigte, dass er seinen Herrn nicht recht verstand: denn wer rät schon ernsthaft einem von den Stürmen der Liebe Umgetriebenen, sie gelassen zu ertragen?"). 128-32 (on the type-scene, giving Pl.Poen. 961ff, Men. Hydr., and Eur. Ion 725ff as examples), and 136 (on the inconsistencies of Parmeno).
Parmeno may be guilty of repetition here (and repetition may be a sign of pompous self-importance), but he cannot be accused of inconsistency. More questionable is the logic of 56-63:

It is something of a self-contradiction to urge someone to think and think again (cogita), and then in the next breath to tell him that his particular problem is one which is not amenable to thought (consilium). But we need to pause before taking this passage as confirming the idea that Terence chose to present Parmeno as a bungling slave from the outset. It is not too unreasonable to say 'Before you commit yourself (to rejecting Thais' invitation), consider carefully this point: love is an irrational thing which has its ups and downs, its quarrels and reconciliations (so that you should not be too upset by Thais' recent behaviour), and, in any case, if you do try to resist, she will wrap you round her little finger and you will be the one who is in the wrong.' And, in any case, if we follow the MSS evidence and the tendency of recent scholarship and assign lines 50-56 to Phaedria as a self-apostrophe, the contradiction disappears: with this division of the parts Parmeno is retorting to Phaedria's etiam atque etiam cogita (56) when in 57ff when he asserts that love cannot be controlled by reason.11  Even so, some question must remain about the relevance of the 'love cannot be controlled by reason' argument and Terence's purpose in giving it to Parmeno at this point. For one thing, it is out of place in the mouth of someone presenting a reasoned argument on how to deal with love, which is what Parmeno is doing; for another, it is not particularly helpful to Phaedria in his predicament. So we might cautiously see a hint of a characterisation by Terence of a slave who is a self-important parader of clichés rather than a purveyor of genuinely helpful advice.

11 On the textual problem see Appendix.
We may now return to the end of Terence's scene and the lines with which this article began. Parmeno's concluding advice falls into two parts; if he is being consistent, both parts should say the same thing,12 and what they say should be consistent with his arguments in the rest of the scene. And, as we have seen, the logic of his previous arguments is 'give up any thought of resistance; go back to the woman now, while you can do so on reasonable terms'. The first part of his advice is dressed up in imagery (74-6): 'What you should do? What else than ransom yourself as cheaply as you can; if you can't do it for a tiny amount, do it for what you can; and don't torment yourself.' The natural interpretation of te redimas captum is 'buy yourself out like a prisoner-of-war',13 and in the context this should mean 'make good your escape from Thais's clutches'. But in what sense can a lover besotted by a courtesan buy himself out? Fabia in his note ad loc. talks of a ransom consisting of presents which Phaedria is obliged to provide to his mistress;14 but giving presents would not be buying himself out but buying himself in. It does not cost anything - in monetary terms - to refuse an invitation to go to see a courtesan; to make any sense at all of the notion of price, we should have to interpret it in terms of mental anguish, but that is hardly the interpretation that the metaphor invites. So what is the purport of the advice, reject the invitation, or go back to the woman? If the former, Parmeno is contradicting his whole argument to date; if the latter, he has obscured his meaning by his choice of imagery. The following ne te adflictes ('don't torment yourself') does nothing to remove the ambiguity: this could equally mean 'make a clean break' or 'give in to the inevitable'.

Once these seeds of doubt have been sown, the second part of the advice is equally ambiguous (76-8): 'Do not add to the troubles which love brings of itself, and bear those that it does bring in the proper way.' This sounds like a piece of resounding good sense, and yet it is not immediately clear what it means in the context. In the end it presumably does mean 'don't add to your troubles by resisting Thais's invitation', but there would have been clearer ways of expressing this.15

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12 There is no adversative particle in the Latin, nor any suggestion of 'preferably (a) but failing that (b)'.
13 The image of the military ransom seems undeniable: see OLD s.v. redimo 5a; Donatus ad 74: perseuerauit in translatione, quam iamdudum [viz. 60f] sumpsit a bello.
14 Fabia ad 74 (p. 88): '...fais en sorte d'obtenir pour ta rançon les meilleures conditions qu'il te sera possible.' Cette rançon se compose des présents que Phaedria est obligé de faire à sa maîtresse.
15 Maurach (136) sees a clear contradiction between the advice in 74-6 (=end the affair) and that in 77-8 (= continue it), and he may be right: alternatively, we might see both pieces of advice as bafflingly ambiguous. Büchner (231) summarises without comment: Parmeno gibt ihm zwei Ratschläge: sich möglichst billig aus der Schlinge zu ziehen und zu den Beschwerlichkeiten der Liebe keine selbstgemachten hinzuzufügen. Fabia (24) sees a simple
These concluding lines, then, confirm the suggestion that Terence intended us to view Parmeno in the opening scene, not as the clear-sighted Stoic of Persius, nor again as a pragmatic adviser of surrender, but as the pompous parader of metaphors and clichés who gives the impression of great wisdom but leaves it not entirely clear what he is actually saying. And this of course would foreshadow, for those in the audience who pick up the hint, the bungling slave who will in the end be made to look a fool.

It is interesting to compare the Menandrian original of the second part of Parmeno’s concluding advice (76-8), which is preserved for us by Stobaeus (Ecl. 4. 44. 38 = Men. fr. 162 K-T):

μὴ θεομάχει μηδὲ προσάγου τῶ πράγματι
χειμώνας ἑτέρους τούς ἀναγκαίους φέρε,

where the reference to not fighting the god (μὴ θεομάχει) clearly implies surrender to love and thus removes the ambiguity.\(^\text{16}\) If we can accept that the ambiguities of 74-6 were also of Terence’s own making,\(^\text{17}\) we have the intriguing possibility that Menander’s Daos was a consistent adviser of surrender, whom Terence has deliberately transformed into a bumblingly ambiguous Parmeno.

APPENDIX ON THE SPEAKER ASSIGNATION OF 50-56

The choice is between (i) dividing the speakers at 50 (siquidem hercle possis...) so that PH. speaks only 46-9 and PA. has the whole of 50-70 and (ii) dividing the speakers at 57 (ere, quae res...) so that PH. speaks 46-56 and PA. has 57-70. The Kauer-Lindsay OCT (1926, rev. 1958) took the first course, following a host of

message: Qu’il se résigne donc à son joug et s’arrange pour le porter le plus doucement possible.

\(^\text{16}\) As has often been noted, these lines neatly illustrate the fact that Menander tends to ascribe love to external forces, Terence to internal. Maurach (127) points out that θεομαχεῖν is a Euripidean word, citing Ba. 45, IA 1408; in the context the nurse in Hipp. (433ff) is also very relevant.

\(^\text{17}\) As Büchner (232) argues, contrasting what he sees as the sympathetic consolation of Daos with the boisterous wit of Parmeno.
earlier editors; Marouzeau however in his 1942 Budé preferred the second, and his position has received strong support in recent discussions.

The argument centres on three factors, the MSS evidence, points of language and style, and the general development of the scene.

1. The MSS evidence is overwhelmingly in favour of the second course (i.e. the introduction of Parmeno for the first time at 57). This is the reading of the 4th/5th c. Bembine (A), which constitutes one half of the whole MSS tradition, and of the first hands of three of the major 9th-10th century Calliopian MSS (C, P, D), which represent the other half. These latter have been corrected to introduce Parmeno at 50 and to bring back Phaedria for one line at 56; the rest of the Calliopians have this 'corrected' reading from the outset. The only support for the OCT's assignation of the whole passage 50-70 to Parmeno is the first hand of the 10th century MS L, though this too has been subsequently corrected to agree with the other Calliopians. It is not difficult to supply a motive for the original corrector. He was misled by the self-address of Phaedria in the second person at 50, and so introduced Parmeno at this point; he then had to reintroduce Phaedria before the PA. in his exemplar at 57 and chose 56 as the only possible place. In this sort of situation all the rules of textual criticism direct us to accept the older reading (i.e. that of the Bembine and of the Calliopians before correction), unless there are some very good grounds for rejecting it.

2. The Bembine reading implies a second-person self-address by Phaedria from 50-56 and a response by Parmeno beginning with the vocative ere in 57. Various stylistic objections have been raised. The view that self-apostrophe in comedy is generally restricted to slaves has been undermined by the Menandrian examples (and cf. Pl. Bac. 399ff); parallels for the switch from first-person monologue to second-person self-address are lacking in Terence but can be found in Plautus; perhaps most significantly, self-apostrophe in comedy usually contains the proper name in the vocative as a clear marker of the self-address, and this is lacking in the Eunuch.

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18 Bentley (1726), Fleckeisen (1842), Umpfenbach (1870), Dziatzko (1884), Fabia (1895), Ashmore (1908), Bonino (1909), also Prete (1952).

19 Apart from Maurach (132f), the crucial recent discussions are B. Bader, Terenz, Eunuchus 46-57, RM 116 (1973) 54-9, and A. Minarini, Terenzo, Eun. 46 ss.: un Problema di Interlocuzione (Fascicoli di Studi e Ricerche: L'Aquila, 1979), repr. in Studi Terenziani (Bologna, 1987) 11-28. Bader argues for the second (Budé) version; Minarini for the first (OCT). The reader is referred to these articles for full details and earlier bibliography. O.S. Due prints the Budé version in his Danish edition (Copenhagen, 1982).

20 Donatus, who clearly had the Bembine reading in front of him, had no such problem: διαλογισμός quasi ad alterum (ad Eun. 50).

21 Minarini's alternative scenario (25-7), whereby the PA. siglum at 50 was missing in the archetype and the PA. which all our MSS except L have at 57 derives from an early copyist's attempt to replace it, is less convincing.
passage. As for slave speeches beginning with the word *ere*, there are a number of examples in Terence (and cf. Hor. *Sat.* 2. 3. 265), but these tend to be in rapid dialogue rather than at the beginning of a long speech. It has also been pointed out that the periodic style of 50-55 is typical of Parmeno rather than of Phaedria, who elsewhere in the scene speaks in short excited sentences. These are all interesting observations but not in the end decisive.

3. The OCT reading produces a more coherent scene. Phaedria is tempted to reject Thais’s invitation (46-49); Parmeno warns him that he will not be able to hold out (50-70); Phaedria now (*nunc* 70) perceives the reality of the situation, and is reduced to indecision (70-73); Parmeno advises him to submit (74-8). With the Bembine reading, Phaedria already realises that he may not be able to hold out (50-56), and Parmeno merely repeats this in other words (64-70), so that the *nunc* of 70 rather loses its point. Again the case is not compelling: if Terence intended to characterise Phaedria as indecisive and Parmeno as bungling, can we really expect coherence to be the hallmark of the scene?

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22 Maurach (134) makes the bold but interesting suggestion that Phaedria has not really been listening to Parmeno’s oration, so that in 70 he is simply carrying on from his own musing at 56.