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THE PARASITE CURCULIO

ABSTRACT. Skwara Ewa, *The Parasite Curculio* (Pasożyt Kurkulio).

At first glance, *Curculio* is no different from other Plautine parasites. However, the uniqueness of this character lies not so much in his characteristics as in the way Plautus uses him on stage. *Curculio* disguises himself as the soldier, and by playing the role of *servus currens*, he takes on the role of a slave. Moreover, by reporting off-stage conversations, he doubles as some of the other characters in the comedy. *Curculio*'s stage movement and its influence on the comings and goings of the other characters make one look at this character as the author of the structure of the entire comedy. Moreover, his rants about bankers and pimps make him the porte-parole of Plautus himself.

Keywords: Roman comedy; palliata; Plautus; *Curculio*; the parasite; play within a play; the soldier; *servus currens*

Curculio is the shortest play by Plautus, but is nevertheless rich in many interesting stage solutions that have become an inspiration for modern comedy.¹ In *Curculio*, Plautus introduced not only all professional masks (parasite, soldier, pimp and cook) but also unknown variations of established figures, like a moneylender (*trapezita*)² or supplier of costumes (*choragus*). It is also worth emphasizing that the text contains an accumulation of popular Plautine

¹*Curculio* became the inspiration for L. Holberg's (1684–1754) *Diderich Menschen-Skräk* as well as for R. Lenz's (1750–1792) *Die Türkensklavin*. In addition, some characters and certain elements of the plot have been updated both in Aeneas Sylvio Piccolomini's humanist comedy *Chrysis* (1444) and in the musical *A Funny Thing Happened on The Way to The Forum* by Stephen Sondheim, Burt Shevelove and Larry Gelbart (1962 film version).

²Actually, the type of moneylender exists in palliata, but usually is named *danista*. Andreau (1968: 481, n. 1) points out that Lyco is referred to in comedy as *argentarius*, meaning a banker (*trapezita/tarpezita*) who holds money as a deposit. Therefore, he is different from other representatives of this profession, such as the usurers (*danistae*) of other comedies (*Epid.* 620–647; *Most.* 532–654). On the other hand, Moore (1998: 221, n. 40) believes that Plautus blurs this distinction when the parasite accuses Lyco and his alike of being greedy and oppressing people with usury (*Curc.* 508). Therefore, it is difficult to unequivocally claim that Lyco presents a mask unknown to palliata.

motifs, such as disguises, recognitions, prophetic dreams or letters. There are also allusions to other literary forms like *paraklausithyron*.³ However, the most unusual idea in this comedy is the eponymous hero, Curculio, and especially the way he is used on stage.

1. CURCULIO AS A PARASITE

At first glance, Curculio does not differ greatly from other Plautine parasites. Like any of them, he is a free-born man (*Cur.* 624–625). Like Ergasilus (*Capt.*), Peniculus (*Men.*), Saturio (*Pers.*), Gelasimus (Stich.) or the unnamed *parasitus* in *Asinaria*, he is not a soldier’s companion, namely he is an “independent” parasite, if one can speak of independence when filling the stomach is his main purpose. In any case, he is a character who offers his services to those who provide a sumptuous meal, and in the comedies mentioned before, the “feeder” is not the soldier.

Table 1. Parasites in Plautus’ comedies

Comedy	Name of parasite	Accompanying the soldier			Independent				
		<i>edax</i>	<i>colax</i>	<i>servus</i>	<i>ioculator</i>	<i>edax</i>	<i>colax</i>	<i>auxiliator</i>	<i>ioculator</i>
<i>Asin.</i>	Parasitus (no name)							x	
<i>Bacch.</i>	Parasitus (no name)			x					
<i>Capt.</i>	Ergasilus					x			x
<i>Curc.</i>	Curculio					x	x	x	x
<i>Men.</i>	Peniculus					x			x
<i>Mil.</i>	Artotrogus	x	x	x					
<i>Pers.</i>	Saturio					x		x	
<i>Stich.</i>	Gelasimus					x		x	x

Curculio is at the service of the young man Phaedromus, who sent him to Caria with the task of borrowing money from a friend (*Curc.* 67, 143, 206–207, 225, 251–252, 275). Of course, this sum is needed to buy the young man’s beloved girl from the hands of her pimp. Curculio therefore acts as *servus callidus* or a helper, a savior (*auxiliator*) who must find a solution to his friend’s love troubles. Not only was he ready to go to Caria to bring back the silver Phaedromus needed, but he is also responsible for the whole intrigue that will

³Copley 1942.

bring the lovers together. It is he who, having stolen the ring, draws up a forged letter and disguises himself as the soldier's envoy to help his "benefactor".

Curculio also describes himself as a person who tells *nugae*,⁴ because through this "he lives more easily" (*Curc.* 604). This feature makes him look like a funny guy, a jokester (*ioculator*).

The main distinguishing feature of this or any other parasite is his insatiable appetite. Curculio, like all other representatives of his profession, is obsessed with eating: he almost dies of hunger in a spectacular way (*Curc.* 309–325), he lists the dishes with which he will start a feast (*Curc.* 366–370) and comments on the delight he feels after filling his belly (*Curc.* 386–388).⁵

edepol ne ego hic me intus explevi probe,
et quidem reliqui in ventre cellae uni locum,
ubi reliquiarum reliquias reconderem.

Honestly, I filled myself properly inside here,
and I left place for one room in my belly where
I can store the remains of the remains.⁶

Moreover, he is giddily looking forward to the anticipated feasts, which, in his opinion, will be organized not only by the soldier for finding his sister, but also by the young man in celebration of his own wedding (*Cur.* 660–661). He also offers himself as dowry to the newlyweds so that they may feed him for life (*Curc.* 664).

Even when he puts on a soldier's costume, he does not lose his basic characteristics as a parasite – he is a regular in the kitchen, as well as a zealous flatterer. Curculio admits that cooks often throw pots at him, probably to drive him out of the kitchen (*Curc.* 395–398). And as he presents the conquests of his supposed "feeder" Therapontigonus, he cites a long list of distant and non-existent lands he conquered, which sometimes bear humorous names (*Cur.* 442–448):⁷

⁴When Planesium accuses Curculio of telling *nugae*, it should be understood as "lies, nonsense", but the parasite's reply that he makes a living off of it allows the term to be extended to "made-up stories", "jokes". The role of the parasite was to tell imaginary stories, in exchange for which he could count on free support from his employer.

⁵Perhaps the only innovation is that the parasite invokes the "nurse" of Heracles (*Curc.* 358), whom he regards as his patron, since the hero is also known for gluttony.

⁶All quotations and translations: De Melo 2011.

⁷Most of the lands mentioned by the parasite lie in Asia Minor (Paphlagonae, Caria, Lycia, Cilicia), on the territory of today's Turkey. Sinope is a city on the Black Sea coast, and Crete and Rhodes are islands in the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas. The other lands are a creation of Curculio's imagination: *Centauromachia*, a mythical land where centaurs, half-horses and half-humans lived; *Unomammia* – a land ruled by Amazons known as warriors who cut off one breast; *Conterebromnia* – a toponym formed from the words *conterere* – "to destroy by frequent use" and

dicam. quia enim Persas, Paphlagones,
 Sinopas, Arabas, Caras, Cretanos, Syros,
 Rhodiam atque Lyciam, Perediam et Perbibesiam,
 Centauromachiam et Classiam Vnomammiam,
 Libyamque, {et} oram omnem Conterebromniam,
 dimidiam partem nationum usque omnium
 subegit solus intra viginti dies.

I'll tell you. Because within twenty days he single-handedly subjected the Persians, the Paphlagonians, the inhabitants of Sinope, the Arabs, the Carians, the Cretans, the Syrians, Rhodes and Lycia, Gobbleonia and Booziania, Centaurobattaglia and Classia, Onenippleania, Libya, and the entire coast of Wineknockoutia, in short, half of all nation on earth.

Both of these jokes are used by two other parasites from the comedies *Captivi* and *Miles gloriosus*.⁸ Ergasilus (*Capt.* 88–89) argues that pots hitting the head of the parasite like projectiles are commonplace in his profession. On the other hand, Artotrogus (*Mil.* 42–45) amuses the audience with a list of territories conquered by Pyrgopolinices the soldier, and this catalog is also proof of his high creativity as a flatterer.⁹ Both of these comic ideas (flying pots and creative geography) further emphasize that Curculio fits perfectly within the description of the parasite mask. The uniqueness of this character lies not so much in his characteristic features as in the way Plautus uses him on stage.

2. CURCULIO AS A SOLDIER AND AS A RUNNING SLAVE

Through *Curculio*, the comedy writer increases the number of colorful characters on stage. The parasite not only disguises himself as a soldier, which happens in front of the audience, but later also takes on the role of a slave, and at that the most characteristic type of slave, which is the *servus currens*. When Curculio pretends to be an envoy of Therapontigonus, he puts on a soldier's

Bromius – the name of the god of wine; *Peredia* – Gobbleonia, *Perbibesia* – Booziania, *Classia* – a difficult to decipher toponym associated with *classis* – “ship”.

⁸Plautus' plays cannot be dated precisely. However, the number of cantica and allusions to various events contained in the plays allow for an approximate dating: *Miles gloriosus* ca. 204 or later; *Captivi* ca. 191 or later; *Curculio* ca. 193 or later. Thus, the comedy *Curculio* discussed here was created after *Miles gloriosus*, but more or less at the same time as *Captivi*.

⁹The connection between the two comedies is also evident in the reference in *Mil.* 13 *campus Curculionis*, as well as by the use of the toponyms *India* (*Mil.* 25, *Curc.* 439), and also *Cappadocia* (*Mil.* 52, *Curc.*: the name of the pimp is Cappadox, a man from Cappadocia). Mendelsohn (1907: 76–77) points out that a list of imaginary lands similar to the one in *Curculio* (444–446) also appears in *Captivi* (160–163). In the latter comedy, the fantastic names are mentioned by the old man Hegio, but they also refer to the parasite.

costume and adopts the most typical features of this mask (without giving up his parasitic traits). This in turn creates an extremely comical mixture of arrogance and conceit as well as flattery and obsession with food. Curculio as a soldier is a naughty conceited braggart who talks nothing but nonsense. It must be said that comparing the character Therapontigonus with Curculio, the parasite, although only pretending to be a soldier, is a much more colorful persona than his supposed employer. Curculio's nonsense and boastful behavior lend credence to his assumed identity even in the eyes of such a suspicious man as the banker (*trapezita*) Lyco (*Curc.* 452). Therapontigonus, in turn, appears mainly as an adventurer demanding his mistress (*Curc.* 533–590), and then as a participant in the recognition scene (*Curc.* 610–657). Only when he makes threats against the pimp does he mention, in a very general way, his wartime deeds (*Curc.* 573–574).

The second stock character that Curculio transforms into is a slave. Plautus probably consciously used the surprise effect – during the first 5 scenes Phaedromus, Palinurus, Coquos repeatedly announce Curculio returning from Caria, but when he does appear, he has the characteristic features of a *servus currens* (*Curc.* 280–298). The viewers knew that a parasite had entered the stage only because earlier it had been quite clearly explained who was approaching from the port (*Curc.* 274–277). As befits this type of character and the theme of a “running slave”, Curculio rushes to the stage in a great hurry, shouting and scaring the imaginary passers-by standing in his way¹⁰ (*Curc.* 280–282):

date viam mihi, noti [atque] ignoti, dum ego hic officium meum
 facio: fugite omnes, abite et de via secedite,
 ne quem in cursu capite aut cubito aut pectore offendam aut genu.

Make way for me, known and unknown, while I'm doing my duty here:
 flee, all of you, go away and get off the streets, so that while running
 I don't hit anyone with my head, my elbow, my chest, or my knee.

A similar concept appears in the comedy *Captivi*, where the parasite Ergasilus, announcing meta-textually that he will play the role of a “running slave” (*Capt.* 778–779), warns various social groups of what he will do to them if they try to stop him on his way (*Capt.* 791–828). An integral element of this motif is also not recognizing the person one is looking for. In these two cases, both Curculio and Ergasilus prolong the scene precisely because of the trouble with identifying their master (*Capt.* 833–835, *Curc.* 301–305). Curculio, on the one hand, takes on the role of a slave, but this does not mean that he gives up his role as a

¹⁰Moore (1998: 14, 128–9) suggests that Curculio could even be running through the audience, so it is not surprising that Sharrock (2009: 169) calls this transformation even “a magnificent parody of a running-slave scene”.

parasite. He dies not of exhaustion, like *servus currens*, but of hunger – as befits a parasite (*Curc.* 309–313):

Phaed. quid tibi est? **Cvrc.** tenebrae oboriuntur, genua inedia succidunt.

Phaed. lassitudine hercle credo. **Cvrc.** retine, retine me, opsecro.

Phaed. viden ut expalluit? datin isti sellam, ubi assidat, cito et aqualem cum aqua? properatin ocius? **Cvrc.** animo male est.

Pal. vin aquam? **Cvrc.** si frustulenta est, da, opsecro hercle, opsorbeam.

Phaed. What's wrong with you?

Cvrc. Darkness is spreading over me, my knees are giving way under me through lack of food.

Phaed. From exhaustion, no doubt.

Cvrc. Hold me, hold me please.

Phaed. Can you see how he's turned pale? Won't you give him a chair to sit on, quickly, and bowl of water? Won't you hurry faster?

Cvrc. I feel faint.

Pal. Do you want water?

Cvrc. If it's full of morsels, do please give it to me to gulp it down.

It is worth emphasizing that Palinurus, who plays a slave in this play, has the features of a grumpy servant-educator rather than a clever slave serving his master. Introducing the parasite as the de facto *servus currens* helps to insert a multidimensional character of slave into the plot that the audience might otherwise have missed in this play, since Palinurus' role is limited to complaining only about a young man.

To sum up, Curculio's transformation into a soldier or a slave does not duplicate characters already present on stage but serves to introduce tropes that would otherwise be missing, as it gives a chance for the playwright to present on stage those features that Therapontigonus, the soldier, and Palinurus, the slave, do not have.

3. ONE-PERSON PLAY WITHIN THE PLAY

Curculio takes on not only the roles of a soldier and a slave. He also plays and imitates the soldier Therapontigonus and the girl Planesium, and recounts conversations conducted off-stage.¹¹

The first time this happens is when, on his return from Caria, Curculio recalls a conversation he had with Therapontigonus (*Curc.* 337–353):

¹¹ McCarthy (2000: 202) lists the features of parasites – not only their venality, willingness to say anything or praise anyone for a meal, but also flexibility, which let them once to allied with tricksters, once with blocking characters or change sides during the play. I would add that this flexibility (as an extension of their untrustworthy nature) allows Curculio to play such a variety of roles.

forte aspicio militem.
 aggredior hominem, saluto adveniens. ‘salve’ inquit mihi,
 prendit dexteram, seducit, rogat quid veniam Cariam;
 dico me illo advenisse animi causa. ibi me interrogat,
 ecquem in Epidauru Lyconem tarpezitam noverim.
 dico me novisse. ‘quid? lenonem Cappadocem?’ annuo
 visitasse. ‘sed quid eum vis?’ ‘quia de illo emi virginem
 triginta minis, vestem, aurum; et pro is decem coacedunt minae.’
 ‘dedistin tu argentum?’ inquam. ‘immo apud tarpezitam situm est
 illum quem dixi Lyconem, atque ei mandavi, qui anulo
 meo tabellas opsignatas attulisset, ut daret
 operam ut mulierem a lenone cum auro et veste abduceret.’
 postquam hoc mihi narravit, abeo ab illo. revocat me ilico,
 vocat me ad cenam; religio fuit, denegare nolui.
 ‘quid si abeamus [ac] decumbamus?’ inquit. consilium placet:
 ‘nec diem decet [me] morari, nec nocti nocerier.’
 ‘omnis res parata est’. ‘et nos, quibus paratum est, assumus’.

By chance I saw a soldier. I approached him and greeted him. “Hello”; he said to me; he grabbed my right hand, took me aside, and asked me why I’d come to Caria. I said I’d come there to enjoy myself. Then he asked me if I knew some banker in Epidaurus called Lyco. I said I did. “What about a pimp Cappadox?” I gave him a nod to show that I’d often seen him. “But what do you want from him?” “Because I bought a girl from him for thirty minas, and ten minas more for her clothes and jewelry.” “Have you given him the money?” I asked. “No, it’s with the banker I was talking about, Lyco, and I told him to make sure that the man who brought tablets sealed with my ring should take the woman away from the pimp together with her jewelry and clothes.” After he told me this, I made as if to leave him. He called me back at once and invited me to dinner; it would have been against my principles, so I didn’t want to refuse. “What if we go and lie down?” he asked. I liked the plan: “It isn’t right to delay the day, and it isn’t right to waste the night.” “Everything’s prepared.” “And we, for whom it’s prepared, are present.”

This dialogue is quoted in direct speech, so the parasite not only plays the role of a soldier and “himself from the past”, but also acts as a narrator when he is “himself from the present”.¹² One gets the impression that Curculio creates a performance in front of Phaedromus and his slave Palinurus¹³: there are viewers (Phaedromus and Palinurus) and there are characters, played by the same single actor.

For the second time, Curculio recounts a similar off-stage conversation at the beginning of Act V, when he quotes Planesium’s questions about the ring (*Curc.* 595–598):

¹²Gellar-Goad (2021: 96) calls it “a parody of tragic messenger speeches”, but also classifies it as a type of metatheater (the type # 2).

¹³Scholars disagree on the attribution of the text in this scene. Some of them believe that Curculio was the one talking about his mission in Caria to the young Phaedromus and Coquos, instead of Palinurus. Attribution issues will be discussed later in this article.

quae ubi me habere hunc conspicata est anulum
 rogat unde habeam. ‘quid id tu quaeris?’ ‘quia mi quaesito est opus.’
 nego me dicere.

When she saw that I have this ring, she asked me where I got it from.
 “Why are you asking me this?” “Because I need to ask.” I refused to tell her.

This second “show” is staged on a micro scale and meant only for the audience watching the play. Nevertheless, the pattern remains the same: Curculio is the narrator and plays himself and the girl.

The technique used by Plautus also appears in other comedies. We hear similar accounts in direct speech from the parasite Ergasilus (*Capt.* 479–481) or from the slave Lydus (*Bacch.* 443–445).¹⁴ Usually, however, they are not so extensive and do not recreate the entire conversation, but only quote the interlocutor’s statements.

Curculio’s performative way of presenting these off-stage conversations is extremely noteworthy, as is the distribution of his actions throughout the comedy, which we will discuss in the following part.

4. CURCULIO ON STAGE

Curculio does not appear until the end of Act II, but it always feels like he is on the stage. In every scene preceding his arrival, his return from Caria is loudly announced and anticipated – by Phaedromus (I 1 – v. 67; I 2 – v. 143; I 3 – v. 206–207), and then Palinurus (II 1 – v. 225) and the Cook (II 2 – v. 251). When Curculio finally arrives from the port (II 3), he takes on the characteristics of the *servus currrens*, and afterwards recounts his conversation with Therapontigonus, showing off his theatrical skills.

Table 2. Curculio on stage in Act I & II.

ACT I			ACT II		
1	2	3	1	2	3
v. 67	v. 143	v. 206–207	v. 225	v. 251	Parasite on stage
parasite	parasite	parasite	parasite	parasite	• As a <i>servus</i>
mentioned	mentioned	mentioned	mentioned	mentioned	• <i>currrens</i>
by	by	by	by Palinurus	by Coquos	• Performance
Phaedromus	Phaedromus	Phaedromus			of his
					conversation with
					Therapontigonus
					(338–353)

¹⁴This was repeated and extended by Terence in *Phormio* by having Geta’s slave act out his conversation with the parasite (*Ph.* 620–675).

In the next scene (III 1), he disguises himself as a soldier. First of all, to give credibility to his disguise, he always has a slave by his side. In addition, Curculio, allegedly on behalf of Therapontigonus, is demanding the release of the girl, so he persuades the banker Lyco, that he and the pimp Cappadox they met on the way, to go to the latter's house. Through this action the parasite sets these three on a certain path. Similarly, in the next scene, separated from the above-mentioned one only by Choragus' performance reflecting the passage of time, Curculio leads the silent girl and the accompanying slave out of the house, and Lyco and Cappadox follow them to solemnly complete the act of handing over the purchased girl (IV 2). And so the parasite becomes the character that sets others in motion and designates their paths.

Table 3. Curculio on stage in Act III-V.

III		ACT IV		ACT V			
1	1	2	3	4	1	2	3
Parasite • As a soldier	–	Parasite • As a soldier	v. 543–546 parasite mentioned by Lyco	v. 581–583 parasite mentioned by Cappadox & Therapontigonus	Parasite on stage • Performance of his conversation with Planesium (595–598)	Parasite on stage	

Curculio does not appear in the next two scenes (IV 3 and 4), but Therapontigonus hears about him first from Lyco (*Curc.* 543–546) and then from Cappadox (*Curc.* 581–583). The parasite, however, again remains present in the macrocosm of the stage. His next appearance in Act V brings a performative account of the conversation with the girl about the ring, and in the following scenes the parasite attracts the most important characters of this comedy, who either, like Planesium and Phaedromus, want to know the secret of the ring, or like Therapontigonus, want to take revenge on him.

Undoubtedly, the parasite determines the movement of the characters, often attracting characters towards himself, and this makes the stage seem at times almost overcrowded. As many as 4 actors may appear simultaneously, often surrounded by extras (I 3, II 2, IV 2, V 2).

This kind of character distribution brought with it consequences for the cast. It is known that in the Roman theater, one actor was entrusted with several roles in order to use his abilities in a more economical way. The comedy *Curculio* brings roles for 10 stock characters / masks, which is quite an average number, because Plautus used to create plays with as little as 7 speaking roles (*Amph.*) or as many as 13 (*Aul.*, *Bacch.*, *Epid.*, *Most.*, *Poen.*, *Rud.*). In addition to *Curculio*, *Asinaria* and *Mercator* bring 10 characters to

the stage. It was definitely crucial to keep in mind the on-stage movements of the characters while constructing the play, in order to decide on the number of actors necessary for the staging.

Table 4. List of characters in the following scenes.

Name of a character	OTHER CHARACTERS in the same scene	Available roles for the same actor
Palinurus	Phaedromus, Leaena, Planesium, Cappadox, Coquos, Curculio, Lyco	Choragus, Therapontigonus
Phaedromus	Palinurus, Leaena, Planesium, Cappadox, Coquos, Curculio, Lyco, Therapontigonus	Choragus
Leaena	Palinurus, Phaedromus, Planesium, Cappadox,	Coquos, Curculio, Lyco, Choragus, Therapontigonus
Planesium	Palinurus, Phaedromus, Leaena, Cappadox, Curculio, Lyco, Choragus, Therapontigonus	Coquos
Cappadox	Palinurus, Phaedromus, Leaena, Planesium, Coquos, Curculio, Lyco, Therapontigonus	Choragus
Coquos	Palinurus, Phaedromus, Cappadox, Curculio, Lyco	Leaena, Planesium, Choragus, Therapontigonus,
Curculio	Palinurus, Phaedromus, Planesium, Cappadox, Coquos, Lyco, Choragus, Therapontigonus	Leaena
Lyco	Palinurus, Phaedromus, Planesium, Cappadox, Curculio, Choragus, Therapontigonus	Coquos, Leaena
Choragus	Palinurus, Phaedromus, Leaena, Coquos, Therapontigonus	Planesium, Cappadox, Curculio, Lyco
Therapontigonus	Phaedromus, Planesium, Cappadox, Curculio, Lyco,	Palinurus, Leaena, Coquos, Choragus

In the case of *Curculio*, if we eliminate all the characters that appear simultaneously on the stage, as well as in the preceding and following scenes (because it makes changing costumes impossible), it turns out that the possibilities of playing double roles are quite limited. Phaedromus can only play the role of Choragus, and Planesium (although silent in many scenes) can only play the role of Coquos. Therefore, the banker Lyco is left only with the role of Leaena, the old nurse. The actor playing the pimp Cappadox does not get a second role.¹⁵

¹⁵Cappadox the pimp could only play the role of Choragus, but we have already assigned that role to Phaedromus. Of course, the double casting could be reversed: the same actor would play the parts of the pimp and Choragus, and then Phaedromus would be a single character played by another actor.

Three characters remain: the slave Palinurus, the soldier Therapontigonus, and the parasite Curculio. As the table above shows, the role of Palinurus can only be combined with the role of the soldier. However, the matter is not so obvious. The list has been prepared on the basis of the attribution provided by the manuscripts.¹⁶ Some scholars, however, believe that at the end of II 2, the slave Palinurus leaves the stage earlier (after verse 257), and his lines are taken over by Coquos. Such a change of attribution would allow the actor playing the slave Palinurus to change costume and appear before the audience in II 3 as the parasite Curculio.¹⁷

From the point of view of the theatrical performance logic, it is certainly a better solution to entrust the entire scene to Coquos, as the slave Palinurus, for unknown reasons (without justification), must reappear at the door of the house (*Curc.* 276) to announce the arrival of the parasite. This unmotivated entry is completely unnecessary. Undoubtedly, Curculio takes over the role of a clever slave in the furtherance of the intrigue, he complements this creation, and even strengthens it. There is some kind of consistency between these two types of characters.¹⁸ It is difficult to assume, however, that this different attribution was intended to enable the actor to play a double role – Palinurus and Curculio. The actor playing both characters would have to be on stage for almost the entire performance (five scenes as Palinurus and six as Curculio), which would be a significant burden, and he would have only 20 lines to change costume and enter again from backstage.¹⁹ The economy of the theater requires rather to combine roles that are distant in the play and give the actor time to transform into a different character. Even if we assume that Palinurus disappears from the stage forever after line 257 and Coquos takes over the rest of his lines, it would make more sense to combine the roles of slave and soldier.

¹⁶Weissar 2019: 77.

¹⁷Wright 1993: 63, Fantham 1965, Papaioannou 2009, Urbanová / Poláčková / Weissar / Černoch 2019.

¹⁸Papaioannou (2009: 117–119) points out that the etymology of the names Palinurus and the fictitious name invented by the parasite, under which he appears as the soldier's emissary – Summanus, proves the affinity of these characters. The name Palinurus, if one believes the etymology given by the later (1st century AD) poet Martial (III, 78), can be perceived as a compound of πάλιν – “again, constantly” and οὔρα – “urine”. The nickname of Curculio dressed as a soldier is Summanus. Although this is one of Jupiter's nicknames, it also evokes associations with the verb “to leak”, which is used to make a joke suggesting trouble in maintaining urine. Thus, the name of the slave, Palinurus, and the parasite disguised as a soldier, Summanus, would suggest the same physiological problem.

¹⁹Marshall (2006: 114) underlines: the audience is not interested in seeing a leading actor's flexibility as he creates different parts in the same performance. Such an approach also carries with it an assumption that leading actors want to identify with one part alone. Undoubtedly, the role of the parasite Curculio is intended for the star actor. This is evidenced by both the importance of this character in the play and the size of the role – 172 lines = 24% of the entire play.

We can therefore assume that to stage this play one needs a minimum of 6 actors²⁰:

1. Phaedromus + Choragus
2. Planesium + Coquos
3. Lyco + Leaena
4. Cappadox
5. Palinurus + Therapontigonus
6. Curculio

Such a large cast must be astonishing, especially when we compare it, for example, with *Aulularia*, in which 13 roles can be assigned to 4 actors.²¹ The need to cast the main characters with different actors (with minimal duplication of roles) undoubtedly had positive consequences for the clarity of the characters created on the stage. Despite the mask, the audience recognized the actors by their voice. Thus, it can be said that the way in which *Curculio* organizes the characters' movement on stage makes it difficult to duplicate the roles, but it certainly has a positive effect on the creations of the main protagonists.

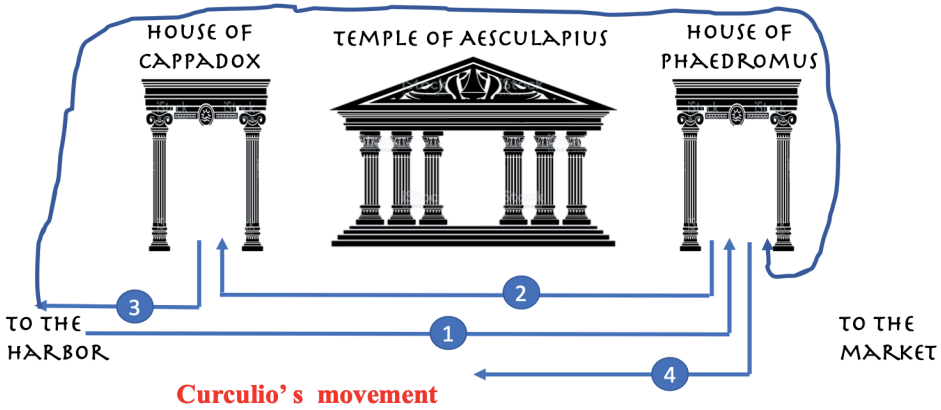
It is also worth tracing the movement on the stage of Curculio himself. He is the only character who visits the entire stage and enters both houses. He comes from the port (II 3), enters the house of his patron Phaedromus to change there, and when he appears as a pseudo-soldier, he disappears with the pimp and banker entering the house of Cappadox (III 1). After taking the girl from there, he pretends to go to the port, but using the *angiportum* he hides in Phaedromus' house (IV 2), and from there he leaves in Act V to stay on stage until the end of the comedy.²²

This extraordinary activity of Curculio on stage may also have been encoded in his name. It is traditionally assumed that it refers to parasitism, as Curculio is a genus of weevils belonging to the family *Curculionidae*. The most famous representative of this family is the wheat weevil (*Sitophilus granarius*), also known as the grain weevil or granary weevil. It is an insect that feeds on cereal grains. This extremely dangerous pest can significantly damage grain and

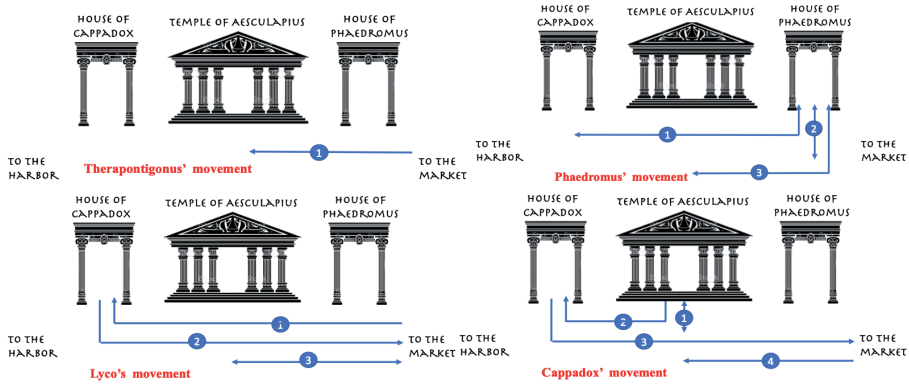
²⁰Marshall (2006: 109) believes that *Curculio* requires a minimum of 5 actors, but he determined this number only by using the scene with the greatest number of people onstage. In his calculation, Marshall does not take into account other scenes in which characters appear simultaneously or pass each other on entering or exiting. It is, therefore, impossible for one actor to play many of the roles.

²¹Stockert (1983: 24–25) proved that if the roles of Congrio (II 4–6 and III 1ff) and Eunomia (II 1 and IV 7) were divided between two actors and each of them played only in one act, then the play could be staged with a cast of 3 actors. More examples are presented by Marshall (2006: 94–114).

²²Gellard-Goad (2021: 78) presents the character movement at the end of *Curculio*, but the diagram looks a bit different because Gellard-Goad incorrectly assigned the directions of exits from the stage (to the port and forum).



1. A diagram of Curculio's movement.



2. Plan of stage movement of the main characters (Therapontigonus, Phaedromus, Lyco, Cappadox).

drastically reduce yields – in a word, an insatiable parasite bringing disaster to kitchen resources, just like the comedy character. Nevertheless, Fontaine argues that Curculio's name was Latinized, or perhaps an ancient editor or even Plautus himself could have transliterated the Greek name "Gorgylion" as Curculio or Corculio.²³ So if we assume that the parasite's name comes from the Greek adjective "gorgos" – "terrible, furious, spirited, vigorous, agile, quick, energetic", then all these terms perfectly match the title character of the comedy discussed here.

²³ Fontaine (2005: 66) argues his hypothesis using the spelling of the name of the cook from *Aulularia*. This character bears the Latin name Congrio, which is a transliteration of the Greek "gongrion". See more: Fontaine 2005: 63–66.

It can therefore be said that the parasite, influencing so many aspects of this comedy – its intrigue, the movement of characters on stage, and the cast of roles – almost takes over the competences of the author. This hypothesis is also supported by the tirade Curculio launches into against pimps and bankers. The parasite (*Curc.* 494–511) accuses the pimps of cynicism and lack of credibility, calls them “flies, gnats, bedbugs, lice and fleas”, describes them as “a pest, a pain, and nuisance” and says that “they aren’t of any use to anybody” (*Curc.* 500–501: *muscae, culices, cimices, pedesque, pulicesque: / odio et malo et molestiae, bono usui estis nulli*). He accuses bankers of bending the law and destroying people by usury (*Curc.* 508 and 510: *faenori [...] lacerant homines; aliquam reperitis rimam* – “you always find some loophole”). Usually, such complaints and curses are made in comedies by a young man in love (*Aul.* 127–152; *Pers.* 406–412) or a slave worried about the fate of his young master (*Most.* 657–658), and are therefore interpreted as the opinions of the author himself. As a parasite or a soldier in disguise, Curculio has no reason to complain about the pimp or the moneylender. His cursing at them is not a characteristic of his mask and is in no way justified because both the banker and the pimp have fulfilled their contract. The tirade probably follows “by the will of the poet”, and like Aristotle (*Poet.* 1454b, 30), we can say that Curculio “says what the poet wants, not what the chain of events requires”. After all, Plautus has always cast pimps and moneylenders as the villains of his comedies, and Curculio expresses the views of the author. Perhaps then, the parasite is the porte-parole of Plautus himself, whose name, Maccius, suggests the poet’s earlier connection to Atellan Farce. It was in these Oscan Games that the main character, called Maccus, played a silly glutton with the characteristics of a buffoon, whom we identify with the parasite of the palliate.

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DER PARASIT CURCULIO

Zusammenfassung

Bei genauerer Betrachtung unterscheidet sich der Charakter von Curculio nicht wirklich von anderen parasitären Figuren in Plautus' Stücken. Er ist ein unersättlicher Vielfraß (edax), der sich durch Schmeicheleien (als colax) und Witze (als ioculator) in die Gunst reicherer Personen bringt, die bereit sind, ihn für seine Gesellschaft zu unterstützen.

Die Einzigartigkeit von Curculio liegt jedoch nicht so sehr in seinen charakteristischen Merkmalen als vielmehr in der Art und Weise, wie Plautus diese Figur einsetzt. Curculio vermehrt zunächst die Protagonisten der Palliata – er spielt die Rolle eines rennenden Sklaven und verkleidet sich als Soldat. Zweimal führt er ein hinter der Bühne gehaltenes Gespräch auf der Bühne auf – zunächst mit einem Soldaten und dann mit einem Mädchen. Darüber hinaus initiiert er die Bewegungen anderer Charaktere auf der Bühne – er führt sie (einen Banker, einen Zuhälter) oder zieht sie zu sich und wird für sie zu einer wünschenswerten Informationsquelle (für den Soldaten – über den Brief und das Geld; für das Mädchen – über die Herkunft des Rings).

Die Folge dieser Bewegungen der Charaktere auf der Bühne ist eine große Besetzung, da nur einige Rollen von demselben Schauspieler zweimal gespielt werden können und die Figur von Curculio einen separaten Schauspieler erfordert. Man kann also sagen, dass der Parasit, der Einfluss auf so viele Aspekte dieser Komödie ausübt – ihre Intrigen, die Bewegungen der Charaktere auf der Bühne und die Besetzung der Rollen –, fast in die Kompetenz des Autors fällt. Darüber hinaus vertritt Curculio in einer Tirade gegen Zuhälter und Banker die Ansichten des Autors. Möglicherweise ist Curculio also ein Porte-Parole von Plautus selbst, dessen Name Maccius der Atellan-Maske ähnelt – Maccus, ein alberner Vielfraß mit den Zügen eines Possenreißers, der mit dem Palliata-Parasiten identifiziert wird.