

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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THE WOMAN OF ANDROS

Terence

Overview Terence's *Woman of Andros* is a comedy based on the work of the Greek dramatist Menander (342-291 B.C.). It follows the outlines of the so called Greek New Comedy, and forms part of the Hellenistic cultural world—producing drama of a sort totally severed from classical Greek comedy. The present drama is the first published play of Terence—a freed slave of startling talent—and was first performed in 166 B.C. Far in the future—1476 A.D.— this very play made its reappearance in a version by the Italian political theorist and dramatist, Niccolò Machiavelli.

Story

Terence's first play, *The Woman of Andros* (166 B.C.E.), is a complex situation comedy with a happy ending. It involves marital desires and plans, and tricks galore played by a crafty servant.

Simo, the father of a spoiled young man around town, Pamphilus, is anxious to nail him into a good conservative marriage, which will bring two prosperous families together. Unfortunately for dad, however, the young man has fallen for Glycerium, the sister of a whore. Chremes, the father of the girl Simo favors, has hitherto been impressed by the good reputation of Pamphilus, but having learned about Glycerium he withdraws the offer of his daughter's hand. Simo, meanwhile, continues with his plans for the nuptials between his son and Chremes' daughter.

Davus, the roguish slave of Pamphilus, is working in the background for his master, trying to undermine the staid marriage Pamphilus dreads. In the course of his planning, Davus also announces that Glycerium claims to be a free-born citizen of Athens, shipwrecked in childhood, and not of lower class birth. Although Davus scorns this idea, he sees that it plays into an eventual union of Pamphilus with Glycerium. Meanwhile we learn that Glycerium is just about to give birth, another landmark in her relation to her lover, Pamphilus—who continues to adore her. Davus contrives the idea that Pamphilus should tell his father, Simo, that he is prepared to marry Philumena, Chremes' daughter. Davus believes that Chremes will at that point decide to cancel his daughter's marriage—he will have heard enough about Pamphilus' outrageous reputation—and that Pamphilus will then be free to marry Glycerium. Simo accordingly demands that Pamphilus should marry Philumena that day, and is amazed to hear that his son—who is in on Davus' plot—agrees.

The problematics of Pamphilus' marriage to Philumena are increased when Simo learns that Glycerium has given birth, or that such a rumor is abroad. It seems more than likely that by now Chremes has canceled his daughter's wedding, and when the two dads meet in town, Simo begs Chremes to reconsider the match between their two children. Simo assures Chremes that Glycerium is just faking childbirth. It looks as though Pamphilus is going to be trapped in the wedding to Philumena. Davus is at the end of his ingenuity on behalf of his master.

In the last act Davus comes on what seems a solution. He hurries to Glycerium, who has truly given birth, and asks Mysis, Glycerium's maid, to take the baby and place it on Simo's doorstep, where Chremes will come on it. He does, and once and for all cancels his daughter's marriage, convinced of the rascality of Pamphilus.

At this point a fatal turn of events bursts onto the scene. Crito, a relative of Glycerium, arrives in Athens with the news that he wants to claim the estate of Glycerium, whose mother has died. Glycerium, Crito insists, is an orphan. Upon further prompting, Crito reveals that Glycerium is the niece of a noble Athenian who had been shipwrecked on their island, Andros, while searching for his brother. Chremes

declares that he is that brother, and, turning to Glycerium, gives her a ten talent dowry, to support her marriage to Pamphilus.

Characters

Pamphilus is the spoiled young man around town whose irresponsible passion for Glycerium is ultimately justified, by the discovery that she is a bone fide Athenian citizen, and appropriate marriage partner. Pamphilus has no values except his own pleasure.

Davos is the canny slave, of Roman comedy, ready with all kinds of tricks to protect his master, and to further his master's schemes. He is ingenious, but in the end works only for the benefit of others.

Simo is the solicitous dad, easily duped by his son, who is trying his best to consolidate a wealth and status preserving marriage—and who, in spite of himself, ends up on the winning side. He is clueless, when it comes to the motivations of his son.

Themes

Destiny. Without the help of Crito, who comes in at the end with news about Glycerium's ancestry—her personal destiny—it is hard to imagine a resolution to the tangle of personal conflicts which make up this play. Destiny is the *deus ex machina* here.

Stock characters. Stock characters play off against one another, in this consummate Roman comedy. There is thiec slave, Davus, the out of it dad, the young woman of ill repute, the rebellious young son. Character types dominate the action of this play, suggesting that literary character can be one-dimensional, while meeting all the requirements of an entertaining show.

MAJOR CHARACTER

DAVOS (unconscientious)

Character Davos is a stock character—as in fact are all of Terence's characters; of whom none is 'full' and rounded like a modern dramatic persona (Hamlet) or even like a two or three sided ancient obsédée like Medea. Davos is slave to a wealthy Athenian nobleman, Simo, the father of Pamphilus. It will be Davos' character to do what he can to promote the romantic interests of Pamphilus, while saving his own skin—as one interested party after another assaults him for undermining their pet marital projects.

Parallels The sidekick—or nurse, or confidante-- is an essential part of theatrical staging, enabling us to understand the mind of the protagonist. In ancient Greek drama the sidekick is often the person who gives news to the protagonist; in Racine's *Phèdre* (1677) the nurse spurs on Phedre's fatal passion for Hippolytus. In Moliere's *Sganarelle* (1660) Clélie's governess becomes the source of the creative misunderstandings which generate the action. If one crosses the channel to Spain, there is *Don Quixote* (1605) offering us a Sancho Panza who is confidante, buddy, and mocker of his boss the Don. In classic TV oldies we have the beautiful examples of Barney, in *Andy Griffith* (1960-68) or Florence in *The Jeffersons* (1975-85), both of whom are fascinating, but who promote the 'plot' by their antic relations to their bosses.

Illustrative moments

Planning We first see Davos, as he emerges from the house of Simo, a well-placed Athenian merchant. (Much of the information creation in New Comedy, as in Shakespeare's comedies, derives from chance meetings and overheard conversations.) Davos does not see Simo, and is, as it were, absorbed in his thoughts. Davos mutters to himself about his own thoughts, of what the reason is, for his master's sudden relaxation at knowing his son will not be married to the girl his son wished to marry. Davos tunes up his muttering, so that Simo may—if the scene is played that way—be thought to overhear him.

Crafty Davos continues muttering—this is not long after his first appearance, and we assume that Simo overhears him, which he does. Davos' conversation (with himself) now turns to the plans he is making for Simo's son, Pamphilus, to marry Glycerium—the name means *sweetie*—a young lady of questionable social status. Davos reveals his awareness that Simo is probably right at that moment acting to impose an immediate marriage on his son, that day, with a proper girl, Philumena. Davos, as we see him here, is on the *qui vive*, trying to figure out who knows what when.

Conflicted In one of his longest self-directed speeches, Davos sums up the personal dilemma he finds himself in. (Note: the formality of presenting this interior case seems like the ritual of a debate, in which the speaker presents the pros and cons of a decision to be made. That is the way New Comedy constructs character.) If he supports Pamphilus, Simo's kid, he goes with his instincts—after all the dad has rather brutally decided that very day to insist his son marry the right girl—but if he goes against Simo the threatened punishment is, well, 'I'll flog you with the whips and send you to work at the mill until you're dead.'

Strategist Still on the same day, in an elaborate scene played out on the streets of mid-city Athens, Davos meets both Pamphilus, son of Simo, and Charinus, a young Athenian citizen, peer and buddy of Pamphilus. Davos—and this is the way his character serves as narrative glue for the whole plot development—explains to the guys how he has worked to make all turn out right for them: Pamphilus has been rejected by Chremes, the father of Philumena, as prospective groom—too disreputable and thus free to marry Glycerium; Charinus, by contrast, will be acceptable as the groom for Philumena, which will satisfy *his* passion. Are the guys happy?

Discussion questions

How does Davos, at the very beginning of the play, convey his 'inner thoughts and plans' to his boss, without speaking directly to him? Would the technique of 'self-conscious muttering' work today, as a dramatic device? Does such a device denote a self-conscious attitude in the muttering character?

Davos is crafty and planning, but is he enacting these values for his own sake or for that of his master, or do the two intentions coincide? What does Davos himself have at stake in the Master's decisions?

Has Davos—or have any of the characters he interacts with—personal depth or warmth? Do you care emotionally what happens to them? If not, what kind of pleasure is it that this type of comedy provides? Is it geometrical, the solving of problems, the working out of slapstick? What would be the key factor in bringing an audience to watch this play?