HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Characters in Terence

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.

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 Pamphylus. 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: Pamphylus 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?

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.

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?