

*Parasitus colax* (Terence, *Eunuchus* 30)\*)

At the start of Terence's *Eunuchus* the prologue-speaker says that a rival poet, upon examining an advance rehearsal of Terence's latest play ... (as punctuated by Barsby;<sup>1</sup>) I omit as irrelevant to this discussion vv. 27-9):—

exclamat furem non poetam fabulam  
 dedisse, et nil dedisse verborum tamen.  
 Colacem esse Naevi et Plauti veterem fabulam: 25  
 parasiti personam inde ablatam et militis.  
 [...]
   
 Colax Menandrist, in east parasitus colax 30  
 et miles gloriosus.

In his 2001 Loeb edition of Terence, Barsby translates as follows, although I omit for now his translation of the phrase *parasitus colax* in v. 30:—

He shouted that the play was the work of a thief, not a playwright, but that the attempt to deceive had not worked. There was, he claimed, a 'Flatterer' by Naevius and an old play by Plautus, and the character of the parasite and the soldier had been stolen from these. [...] There is a 'Flatterer' of Menander, in which there is *parasitus colax* and a swaggering soldier.

The punctuation and exact meaning of the earlier lines are, of course, much discussed; our concern for now is solely with the end of v. 30. What is the precise meaning and grammatical construction of the phrase *parasitus colax* at the end of the line?

Donatus is regrettably silent here, and renderings of the phrase by modern writers and translators are surprisingly varied; I count no fewer than five currently in circulation, viz.:—

- (i) 'a flattering parasite' (*colax* an attributive adjective modifying *parasitus*)<sup>2</sup>
- (ii) 'a parasitic flatterer' (*parasitus* an attributive adjective modifying *colax*)<sup>3</sup>

\* My warm thanks to *Mnemosyne's* referee for insightful suggestions, corrections, and recommendations, nearly all of which I have adopted.

<sup>1</sup> Barsby 1999.

<sup>2</sup> So Fabia (1895, *ad loc.*): "*Parasitus colax*. Le mot *colax* joue ici le rôle d'un adjectif modifiant *parasitus*: un parasite flatteur", Brothers (2000), who translates (*ad loc.* and p. 35 n. 169) "toadying sponger", and Barsby in his 2001 translation, "a flattering parasite" (omitted from the translation above).

<sup>3</sup> So Damon (1997, 14): "a parasitic flatterer".

- (iii) 'a parasite flatterer' (compound substantive)<sup>4)</sup>
- (iv) 'a parasite—(sc. *namely*,) the flatterer (sc. *of the title*)' (predicative apposition)<sup>5)</sup>
- (v) 'a parasite (sc. *whose name is*) Κόλαξ' (apposition of the Greek proper name)<sup>6)</sup>

All five interpretations entail problems, three of which anyway should probably be ruled out by grammar alone.

The Greek word κόλαξ was never naturalized as a Latin word at all,<sup>7)</sup> and, more importantly, in Greek it is never an adjective (contrast *κολακεύων*; and cf. *κολακευτικός*, *κολακικός*). As a noun, therefore, it cannot modify *parasitus* ('a flattering parasite'), Fabia's bare assertion to the contrary (n. 2 above) notwithstanding, and so (i) must be ruled out.

Likewise, since *parasitus* is not an adjective either (contrast Latin *parasitans* or *parasiticus*, Greek *παρασιτών* or *παρασιτικός*), it cannot modify *colax* ('a parasitic flatterer'). (The title of the lost Plautine or pseudo-Plautine play *Parasitus Medicus* is no true exception, since, like the titles *Maccus Virgo*, *Maccus Miles*, and *Pappus Agricola* of Atellan farce, it is a title of a play, in which both words in the pair are natural or naturalized Latin, and at any rate one word in the pair is probably to be construed in predicative apposition ['The Parasite playing the role of a doctor'] rather than attributively.) Therefore (ii) must also be ruled out.

Nor can we easily regard the construct as a compound substantive (view (iii), 'parasite flatterer'), a formation easy enough in English or German<sup>8)</sup> but hardly so in Latin or Greek, for which one would naturally expect either

<sup>4)</sup> So Barsby in his 1999 commentary, *ad loc.*: "*parasitus colax* 'a parasite flatterer'".

<sup>5)</sup> So Brown (1992), who translates (105), "... in it there's a parasite (the Toady of the title)".

<sup>6)</sup> So, I assume, Tromaras (1991), who, following among other earlier editions the Lindsay-Kauer 1926 Oxford text, prints... *parasitus Colax*, with a capital 'C'. Tromaras offers us no clue how to interpret that in his commentary, but it seems to take up a view expressed in the *TLL* s.v. *colax*, which asks, "TER. Eun. 30 'in east (sc. comoedia Menandri) parasitus -x (*an Colax nom. prop.?*)", and in McGlynn 1963-7, which likewise wonders (s.v. COLAX), "fabulae (et parasiti?) nomen".

<sup>7)</sup> Cf. Damon 1997, 14; Brown 1992, 105 n. 40.

<sup>8)</sup> Ribbeck (1883, 70) uses the expression κόλαξ-παράσιτος, but that is, of course, merely a German (educated) compound and not to be mistaken for anything actually found in Greek. For Greek compounds of κόλαξ and παράσιτος attested in literature, see Ribbeck's list of synonyms on pp. 93-100, and the discussion in Nesselrath 1985, 88-121. (If, incidentally, Ribbeck offers any interpretative comment on the phrase *parasitus colax* in *Eun.* 30, I have not succeeded in finding it; Nesselrath does not.)

\**parasit-o-colax* (i.e. \*παρασιτ-ο-κόλαξ; cf. ψωμ-ο-κόλαξ, etc.) in the Greek style, or else \**parasit-i-colax*, in the Latin style, but hardly to be paralleled, and which indeed, in light of the fact that κόλαξ was not a recognizable Latin word, would have made little sense to the Roman audience. It is true that a few words in Latin, such as *amicus* or *senex*, can function as either nouns or attributive adjectives, and so create compounds such as *senex amator*. But the number of such words seems to be fairly restricted, and the evidence inclines to suggest that neither in Greek nor Latin was either παράσιτος (*parasitus*) or κόλαξ one of them; again, the title *Parasitus Medicus* seems unlikely to signify whatever meaning might be denoted by, say, \**parasitimedicus*. Indeed, the only two ostensible parallels I can find for a concatenation of two substantives not of the type *amicus* or *senex* in Roman comedy are, one, the *vidulus-piscis* in Pl. *Rud.* 988, 991, 993, which, however, is in context self-obviously a farcical and sophistic nonce-creation, and a full accounting of which I plan to give in a discussion soon to appear elsewhere; and, two, the passage to which *that* is structurally parallel, viz., *agnus curio* (i.e. *agnus κουριῶν*) in Pl. *Aul.* 561-4, which I discussed in Fontaine 2004. In both of those cases, captuous syntax readily allows for the possibility of regarding one noun in predicative apposition to the other, and in both cases further epexegetis of the puzzling phrase provided by the text itself is then taken as a starting-point for more extensive wordplay and farcical banter.

If view (iv) ‘... a parasite, the ‘flatterer’ (sc. *of the title*)’ is actually the meaning Terence intended, it is, in my opinion, too abruptly expressed, perpetuates rather than resolves the mysterious meaning of a Greek word (thereby running directly counter to the usual operation a Roman audience familiar with Plautine, if not necessarily Terentian, comedy might have anticipated),<sup>9)</sup> and, in light of the phrase *miles gloriosus*... following in the next line, which consists of a single Latin word modified by a single Latin adjective (rather than, e.g., *miles ἀλαζών*), creates an almost Tacitean syntactical *variatio* hardly to be expected here.

<sup>9)</sup> Greek titles are usually translated or given in some other Latin form in Plautus’ prologues after their first mention: thus *Cas.* 31-2 Κληρούμενοι *vocatur haec comoedia / Graece, Latine ‘Sortientes’*; *Mer.* 9-10 *Graece haec vocatur ‘Ἐμπορος Philemonis, / eadem Latine ‘Mercator’ Macchi Titi*; *Mil.* 86-7 Ἀλαζών *Graece huic nomen est comoediae, / id nos Latine ‘gloriosum’ dicimus*; *Poen.* 53-4 Κραχήδονιος *vocatur haec comoedia, Latine Plautus ‘Patruos Pultiphagones’*; cf. *As.* 10-2, *Trin.* 18-21, and *Vid.* 6-7. Terence admittedly does not generally translate the Greek titles that he mentions (*Ad.* 6-7 Συναπο-θνήσκοντες *Diphili comoedias: / eam ‘Commorientes’ Plautus fecit fabulam* is not the same thing as in Plautus’ prologues, because the title *Commorientes* is only incidentally brought in, not to provide a translation, but because the playwright has to address the charge of having plagiarized from that play), but neither does he tease his audience with excessive amounts of untranslated Greek words.

View (v) ‘... a parasite (sc. *whose name is*) Κόλαξ’ is open to the same objections of style and balance as (iv), as well as the unlikelihood either that the flatterer in Menander’s play was actually named ‘Flatterer’ (a datum at any rate unknown to us), or that Terence’s audience actually cared about such a detail.

I believe a new suggestion may solve the riddle.

It has hitherto always been assumed that the word *colax* at the end of v. 30 is a Greek word. But should it? If we adopt a different perspective, we will realize that the Greek word κόλαξ happens to look morphologically just like a Latin word. That is because Latin has a class of adjectives, mostly deverbative in origin, whose nominative form terminates in *-ax*. These adjectives have an active meaning, are usually applied to persons, and are very often used abusively.<sup>10</sup> They are especially frequent in Roman comedy, with some being known from a sole attestation there. Plautus has fourteen of them, including the memorable triplets *procax*, *rapax*, *trahax* and *edax*, *furax*, *fugax* (*Per.* 410 and 421 respectively), both in an abusive context, and Terence has many of the same words, including also *tenax*, *perspicax*, and *pervicax*.

In my view, then, the second instance of *colax* in *Eun.* 30 is to be regarded, not as the transliteration of the Greek word κόλαξ, but rather as a Latin deverbative adjective in *-ax*, not otherwise attested, from the verb *colere*, and meaning ‘one excessively fond of cultivating (sc. *friendship with a superior man*)’, ‘acting like a wannabe friend’, and so ‘adulatory’.<sup>11</sup> The adjective, a *hapax legomenon*, which can now of course easily modify *parasitus*, thus expresses roughly the same meaning, but in an intensified form, as the Greek word κόλαξ, but with a special Roman point, for in the language of patronage, *colere* has a specific meaning—namely, ‘to angle for friendship with a superior man’.<sup>12</sup> From a discussion of Roman friendship by P. White,<sup>13</sup> I quote the following remarks:—

*Amici* rarely could be and rarely considered themselves peers. When it became necessary to press the distinction, there existed ways of indicating with whom the

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Leumann-Hofmann-Szantyr 1977, 376, §2: “Suffix *-āc-* bildet im Latein in erster Linie Verbaladjektiva aktiver Bedeutung ‘mit Hingabe etwas betreibend’, also vorwiegend Personaladjektiva, öfters zur Bezeichnung einer tadelnswerten Neigung”.

<sup>11</sup> Such a person was later called a *popularis*; cf. Cic. *Amic.* 25.95 *contio, quae ex imperitissimis constat, tamen iudicare solet quid intersit inter popularem, id est assentatorem et levem civem, et inter constantem et severum et gravem.* (At Ter. *Ad.* 155, however, *populares* means only ‘people of one’s own country, countrymen’.)

<sup>12</sup> The meaning is amply attested in *TLL* s.v. *colere* V.A.1.a-b (= pp. 1680,1-1682,29), and that is presumably what lies behind later grammarians’ attempts to derive *cliens* from *colens* (cf. Isidore *Orig.* 10.53 *clientes prius colentes dicebantur, a colendis patronis*).

<sup>13</sup> White 1978, 81.

advantage or the disadvantage lay. [...] *Clients* was used of the person who sought his fortune by attendance on another. But its blunt, realistic tone made it unsuited for polite discourse; Pliny eschews it. *A less bald-sounding equivalent was cultor. But cultor is much less prominent than the corresponding verb colere, which regularly serves to mark the nature of amicitia where the distinction of persons is to be observed.* (emphasis added)

C. Damon (1997, *passim*) and others have demonstrated the close relation of Roman comedic portrayals of the Greek parasite to Roman attitudes toward *clientes*; and so *colere*, as White defines it, is precisely the meaning needed in *Eun.* 30, for it fits reasonably well, by the logic of comedy, with the description Gnatho is soon to give us of his newly-invented way of parasiting (248-53):—

est genus hominum qui esse primos se omnium rerum volunt  
 nec sunt. hos consector; hisce ego non paro me ut rideant,  
 sed eis ultro adrideo et eorum ingenia admiror simul. 250  
 quidquid dicunt laudo; id rursus si negant, laudo id quoque;  
 negat quis, nego; ait, aio. postremo imperavi egomet mihi  
 omnia adsentari.

In other words, then, the Latin word *colax* disparagingly denotes one acting as a would-be *clients*, and so ends up having in practical application much the same meaning of ‘one who fawns over’, or ‘one who flatters in order to befriend’ as the Greek word κόλαξ has, though the two words arrive at that meaning via different linguistic avenues.<sup>14)</sup>

In short, then, we have a bilingual παρά προσδοκίαν pun. Regardless of whatever alphabet Terence used to write these words, I therefore suggest v. 30 be printed thus:—

‘Κόλαξ’ Menandrist: in east parasitus—colax

The prologue-speaker’s surprising point is that the parasite in this play is not your hackneyed stock *parasitus ed-ax* (cf. v. 38), but a *parasitus col-ax*, or toadying parasite.

<sup>14)</sup> It will be seen that this interpretation is actually not inconsistent with Eugraphius’ comment (ed. Wessner 1908) on our passage, ‘*parasitus autem colax—id est adulator: hoc enim significat... et gloriosus et colax mores sunt etc.* A Bembine scholium (ed. Mountford) also here glosses *colax* with *adulator*; but I doubt that Eugraphius and the Bembine scholium interpreted the word as I do, and, given the late date at which those remarks were penned, neither counts for much anyway.

The Latin attributive adjective therefore balances *parasitus* nicely against *gloriosus* (not, I repeat, ἀλαζών) modifying *miles* in the next line (who in v. 25 had been merely a *miles*, as the parasite had there been merely a *parasitus*, as Gnatho is elsewhere in the play always called *parasitus*). The dash I have inserted indicates the sly look, gesture, or suggestive pause that, in modern performance, would undoubtedly be used to activate the pun.

Indeed, the context is very suitable for a pun. As a joking translation of the play's Greek title, one can compare the pun in Pl. *Poen.* 53-4 Καρχήδονιος *vocatur haec comoedia*, / *Latine Plautus 'Patruos Pultiphagonides'*, where the final word is a cross-lingual pun (*Pult-i-phag-onides* - Καρχ-ήδ-ονιος 'Uncle Mushroom', where *καρχ-* is hypothesized to represent a conjectural Punic word \**qarh̄/karh̄* 'chickpea', or 'porridge', equivalent to Latin *puls*, and -ηδ- puns on the Latin root *-ed-* 'to eat').<sup>15</sup> *Colax* is also the *final* word in the line, where a *παρὰ προσδοκίαν* joke often falls: compare the prologue-jokes at Pl. *Rud.* 2... *civitate—caelitum* (for *Caeritum*),<sup>16</sup> *Men.* 12... *sicilicissitat* (for *sicelissitat*),<sup>17</sup> and *Poen.* 4... *imperator—histricus* (for *Histricus*). And *colax* in v. 30 appears as the *third* instance in a triplet (*Colacem* already at v. 25 and Κόλαξ in v. 30 at verse-head), which is a well-known feature of jokes and wordplay in many languages, Latin included (compare again *graecissat - atticissat - sicilicissat* at *Men.* 12).

The Latin word *colax* whose existence I am advocating is apparently a *hapax legomenon*. Whether *colax* is *also* a nonce-formation—that is, a word existing as an ephemeral coinage in this passage alone, but not in the Latin language generally—is more difficult to say. *Colax* is attested as a Roman name on two inscriptions (P. Alfenus Pl. Colax [*CIL* 6.5682] and M. Minatius (mul.) l. Colax [*CIL* 6.22495]), and so I wonder whether the name represents Latin *colax*, not Greek κόλαξ (compare, in a different respect, the name *Poplicola*). However that may be, a more interesting speculation is—whose pun is this?

One does not usually expect to find such puns in Terence. True, the *Eunuchus* is his most 'Plautine' play, and there is a paronomasia with *cognoscere* and *ignoscere* in v. 42, but the more ingenious wordplay on *fabulam dedisse* and *nil dedisse verborum* in vv. 23-4 belongs to Lanuvinus. Given that the title *Colax* is attributed by Lanuvinus in v. 25 to 'Naevius and Plautus', or perhaps to each independently

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Copley 1970. Since a noun \**qarh̄/karh̄* is not actually attested in Punic (though it is in other Semitic languages), Copley's argument is speculative, but it has the attractive advantage of making splendid sense out of what otherwise appears to be nonsense.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Chalmers 1962.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Fontaine 2006.

(a notorious crux I refrain from discussing), it is quite possible that those earlier poets, rather than Terence himself, came up with the Latin word, and thus the pun, themselves.<sup>18)</sup>

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<sup>18)</sup> Despite the Latin termination on *Colacem* in v. 25, however, Lanuvinus, as quoted by Terence, must have nevertheless considered the title of that play to have been Κόλαξ 'Le Flateur' (*Colācem* = Κόλακκα), not *Colax* 'The Would-be Client' (which would be *Colācem*).