

## **LOOK AT PLAUTNE'S COMEDIES**

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**Abstract:** The article is devoted to the comedies of Plautus. Plautus, like other Roman comedians, was never a teacher of the audience. It was completely out of line with the traditions of the Roman republican theater, it was just entertainment. However, the author of the article proves that the play under discussion is unique in the work of the Roman poet with both the plot and all its styles. Plautus himself singles out this comedy and notes that it was not written to please the audience, like others, but to improve their morals, i.e. Plautus appears here for the only time as a teacher, unusual for the Roman stage.

**Key words:** Comedy, Plautus, Roman literature, theatre, audience.

**INTRODUCTION.** It is quite well known what a different place the theater occupied in the life of ancient Athens and Republican Rome. In Athens, the performance was a real sacred rite, under the patronage of the god Dionysus. This is not enough. Aristophanes in “Frogs” directly defines the role of the author of theatrical plays in Athenian society:

**Main part.** “...Little children / The teacher instructs the good and the way, and the mature people are taught by poets (1054–55).” Thus, the poet was thought of as a teacher of adults. And Aeschylus, in the same comedy, directly demands from his successor Euripides an account of the moral state of Athens. Naturally, both the author and the actors were surrounded with the deepest honor. People considered it an honor to perform on stage.

Things were completely different in Rome. For the Romans, theater from the very beginning was empty fun, entertainment, actors were something like rope dancers or buffoons. No self-respecting person could become an actor. Anyone who performed on stage automatically lost their civil rights. Therefore, the artists were mainly slaves and freedmen. The authors of the plays were also usually not Romans. Terence is a former slave, Plautus is a foreigner, an actor himself, who at one time worked in a mill where only criminal slaves worked. A characteristic fact. In Athens, on the slopes of the Acropolis, there was a magnificent Theater of Dionysus. In Rome III–II centuries. there was no theater at all. The actors came from the south and set up improvised stages anywhere. It was something like a European farce. When in the 2nd century. BC. lovers of Greek culture decided to build a stone theater, then at the insistence of the strict guardians of antiquity it was destroyed “As an object useless and detrimental to public morality.”

The content of the plays fully justified the attitude of the audience. In Aristophanes, the characters are citizens of Athens, respectable people in all respects, and they discuss the pressing problems of the state. The heroes of Plautus are spendthrifts, revelers, libertines and deceiver slaves. The action often takes place on the threshold of a brothel.

That is why there can be no talk of any edification in Plautus's comedies. It's a cheerful whirlwind of masks that was meant to inspire nothing but joyful merriment. But Plautus has one amazing comedy, not at all similar to the others. This is "Prisoners". The author himself distinguishes it from all the others. In the prologue he announces to the audience:

"It will be very beneficial for you to pay attention to this play. It is written unusually, not at all like the others. There are no obscene verses here that cannot be repeated later. There is no dishonest pimp, no evil courtesan, and no boastful warrior" (Plaut. Capt., 54–58). And in the Epilogue he again insistently repeats: "Viewers, our play was written to cleanse morals. There is no love, no intrigue, no abandoned child, no money fraud, no young man in love who secretly buys a slut from his father." As we see, Plautus briefly and with mocking contempt lists the plots of Hellenistic comedies. Why was this such an unusual comedy written? The author explains: "Poets rarely write such plays to make good people even better."

This contemptuous attitude towards actors spread to Europe. Even Moliere, the greatest playwright of France, was forbidden to be buried on consecrated ground, since he himself acted in his plays.

So, this is a rare play, designed not to amuse fellow citizens, but to correct them and teach them goodness! This puts our comedy on a par with Aristophanes's: for the only time Plautus appears before us in the role of a "teacher of adults." What is he teaching them?

To answer this question, we must consider the plot of the comedy.

A certain Hegion, a worthy man and respected by his fellow citizens, had two sons. The eldest was kidnapped as a child. The unfortunate father concentrated all his love on the smaller one, in whom he doted. But then the war began, and his favorite was captured by the enemy. The father literally went mad with grief - in general, Hegion, a man of great passions, who knows no measure either in love, or in anger, or in grief, or in joy. And so he did something unheard of: he began to buy up prisoners in the hope of finding some noble person who could be exchanged for his son. One of the characters says about this:

"Whenever I look at this house, I cry every time: after all, for the sake of his son, he took up a dishonest trade that is completely alien to his character - he buys prisoners... It pains me that the unfortunate old man, out of grief for his son, took up the craft of a jailer" (Capt., 97 –100, 129–130).

Among the next batch of prisoners, two young men fall into the hands of Hegion. When they are brought onto the stage in handcuffs, shackles, with iron collars around their necks, the appearance of these unfortunate people, so young, so devoted to each other, yesterday happy and free, and now pathetic slaves, evokes sympathy from the overseer himself. Hegion was also touched. He cannot look at them without tears and immediately orders the chains to be removed from them. Seeing that these are educated young men from a good circle, he hastens to explain to them why he took up the vile craft, so that they would not mistake him for a professional slave trader.

"I do not at all believe that all profit is useful to a person," he says, "many people have been tainted by profit. Sometimes even the damage is better than the profit. I hate money: it has seduced too many people into evil. Now listen carefully to understand my feelings well. My son is your slave and prisoner in Elis. Give it back to me, and I will let you and it go for free, and I will not take a penny from you" (Capt., 325–332).

One of the prisoners turned out to be a noble young man, the other - his slave. They know very well who Hegion's son ended up with and promise to arrange everything. It was decided to send a captive slave on an errand to his master, the father of the young man, who could rescue the son of Hegion. The agreement is concluded. I remind you that all the plays of Plautus and Terence unfold in conditional Greece.

Hegion is delighted: in a few days he will hug his son! Alas! He does not even suspect deception. The young men managed to come to an agreement, and the one whom he let go was the master, and as a pledge he had a slave who voluntarily sacrificed everything for the master. Thus, Hegion holds in his hands not a pledge, but a shadow, a straw; can she force the master to make sacrifices and expenses ?

The name of the young man is Philocrates, the slave is called Tindar. Tindar is smart and dexterous, he thinks instantly. It costs him nothing to deceive the new owner with calm and majestic manners. But the unexpected happened: a man who knew the captives at home revealed the truth to Hegion. Tyndar was exposed. He faces imminent death. All the heroes of Plautus in the face of death show amazing firmness. Some of them show off, others face death with cold, emotionless calm, and others with daring daring. But not one of them is cowardly, does not cry or asks for mercy. Plautus was least inclined to idealize his heroes, so we can conclude that this was generally a distinctive feature characteristic of the poet's contemporaries. But no one shows such greatness of spirit and dignity as Tindar.

When, learning that all his hopes were dashed, Hegion rushes in rage at the deceiver and lists his crimes, Tyndar calmly replies (Capt., 678–749):

Tindar

I admit, everything was as you say: he left you by deception, and all thanks to my efforts and cunning. Is this why you are angry with me?

Hegion

Oh, for this you will pay me with terrible torment!

Tindar

As long as I don't die for a bad cause, and death itself is nothing to me. If I die... my feat will live and bring me glory to the dead. People will tell how I made my master, who was taken captive by his enemies, free and returned to his father and fatherland, and preferred to risk his head rather than destroy him.

Hegion

You will reap glory on the shores of Acheron!

Tindar

He who died valiantly did not die!.. After death we have nothing to fear. Even if I live to old age, life is still just a short period of time in which I can endure everything you threaten me with. Be alive and well, although you deserve completely different words.

Beside himself with anger, Hegion orders the prisoner to be shackled again and taken to the quarry. But he did not languish there for long. Philocrates rushed to free him. He brought with him his son Hegion, whom he had rescued from slavery. Now Hegion does not know how to express his gratitude. He asks how to repay Philocrates for his kindness. Philocrates replies that he wants one thing - Tyndara. But here the most surprising thing becomes clear. Hegion suddenly receives irrefutable evidence that the unfortunate Tindar is his own son, kidnapped from him in childhood! They immediately send for Tindar. He appears before the audience pale and exhausted; it seems to him that he has really returned from the kingdom of Hades. Hegion tearfully hugs him, asks for forgiveness and announces that he is his father. Thus ends this wonderful play.

The theme of the comedy is slavery. From beginning to end it is about slavery in its various forms. From the very first minutes, people in heavy shackles and chains appear on the stage. Plautus says that after watching his play, the audience will become better people. How? There can only be one answer. They will begin to look at slaves as the same people as themselves, only in trouble. The whole play is structured in such a way that we should feel sorry for the slaves of Hegion; the craft

of a slave buyer is equated with the craft of a jailer and even an executioner (Capt., 132). Today you are free, Plautus insistently tells us, but tomorrow you can become slaves. And the ending of the play – the usual motif of “recognizing” a missing child in Hellenistic comedy – takes on a new, deep meaning. We are all brothers, as the poet seems to say in conclusion. And the words of Tyndara should remain in the memory of the audience for a long time: “Fate molds and crumples people as it pleases. She made me, who was free, a slave, throwing me from the heights into the abyss. She forced me, who was accustomed to command, to carry out other people’s orders. True, if I had found such a master as I once was, I would not be afraid of cruelty and injustice... I was once free, like your son. Just like him, the enemy’s hand took away my freedom. He serves our people in the same way as I serve you. But there is a God who sees and hears everything we do. And he will take care of your son in accordance with the way you treat me. He will reward good with good, but he will also reward evil with equal measure. After all, my father yearns for me just as you yearn for your son” (Capt., 304–316).

I would like to draw your attention to the last most interesting feature of our comedy. Plautus gives a religious justification for his attitude towards slaves. God punishes for the evil that we cause to them. Where did Plautus get such views? Dumont noted the poet’s special sympathy for his slave heroes and explains this by the fact that he was close to the fans of Dionysus, whose secret society existed in Rome during his time. They had a kind of brotherhood of believers, both slaves and free. Nothing contradicts this hypothesis. At the same time, Plautus' sermon can be explained without resorting to it.

**Conclusion.** Firstly, we must not forget that Plautus’s entourage, his “working collective,” as we have seen, consisted of slaves or former slaves. Even the music for the plays was written by slaves. This could have forced the poet to come out so energetically in their defense. Secondly, not only the new cult of Dionysus, but also the traditional Roman religion, as G. Boissier noted, was very supportive of slaves. She constantly reminded the masters that slaves were the same people and called for humane treatment of them. They had common holidays, and the slaves received rest at this time. On the holiday of Fors Fortunae, gifts were given to slaves, and on the Nones of July - to slaves (Ovid. *Ars am.* II, 255–258). And on Saturnalia, in memory of the Golden Age, slaves reclined at the table, and the masters served them. That's not enough. Slaves not only prayed to the same gods next to their masters, but could be elected priests. During the holiday of the compitalia, slaves had to take part in sacred rites, “since the service of slaves was pleasing to the Laras” (Dionys. IV, 14). It was believed that the gods take care of both free and slaves. In a word, even if in the face of the law they were without rights, in the face of the gods they were the same people as the masters. That is why I think that Plautus's voice was heard and the appeal aroused sympathy.

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