
Slavery and the Roman Literary Imagination

WILLIAM FITZGERALD

University of California at San Diego



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CHAPTER

I

The other self: proximity and symbiosis

Aristotle (*Politics* 1255b) says of the slave that he is “part of the master – he is, as it were, a part of the body, alive yet separated from it.” The symbiosis of master and slave is the subject of this chapter, a paradoxical symbiosis between the master and his “separate part” that expresses itself in complementarities, reversals and appropriations. This symbiosis, and the attendant ironies of domination, are central to the European tradition of literature about servants, passing from the ancient literature into Cervantes’ Sancho Panza and Don Quixote, Diderot’s Jacques and his master, Wodehouse’s Jeeves and Wooster and a host of other pairs; it is epitomized by Hegel’s discussion of the dialectic of slave and master in the *Phenomenology*.¹

Aristotle might have added that the slave is part of the master’s *mind* as well as his body, both an unruly part of the master’s knowledge of himself and, by virtue of the huge difference in status, a parodic version of the master’s knowledge of the world. For the slaves in this chapter (with one exception) it is manifestly *not* true that “a slave does not know his master’s business” (John 15.15). Some slaves, of course, were deeply involved in their masters’ business, performing crucial tasks as secretary and amanuensis.² Cicero’s Tiro is a famous example. Just how indispensable such a slave could become is graphically shown by the letters (collected in *ad Fam.* 16) that Cicero wrote to Tiro, whom he freed in 53, and the master’s love for his (now ex-) slave is vividly expressed in the letters he wrote when Tiro was dangerously ill with malaria. Pliny (*Ep.* 7.4) quotes an erotic poem written by the great man to his slave, a poem suggesting at the least

¹ Hegel (1977), 111–19.

² On secretaries, Teitler (1985).

that an atmosphere of free badinage prevailed between them. Tiro's legacy to the future was the invention of the first system of tachygraphy (*Tironianae notae*), and one of the most poignant representations of the need that the master might develop for a trusted slave is the epitaph for one of Tiro's descendants, the slave-stenographer Xanthias, whose life was cut off prematurely. Xanthias' epitaph (*CIL* 13.8355) was found in Cologne, preceded by the unfinished epitaph of another slave:³

hoc carmen, haec ara, hic cinis
 pueri sepulcrum est Xantiae,
 qui morte acerba raptus est,
 iam doctus in compendia
 tot literarum et nominum
 notare currenti stilo
 quod lingua currens diceret.
 iam nemo superaret legens,
 iam voce erili coeperat
 ad omne dictatum volans
 aurem vocari at proximam.
 heu morte propera concidit
 arcana qui solus sui
 sciturus domini fuit.

This poem, this altar, this ash
 is the tomb of Xanthias,
 who was taken away by bitter death,
 already skilled at abbreviating
 so many letters and words,
 he could transcribe with fluent pen
 what the fluent tongue had said.
 Already he was second to none at reading,
 already he had begun to be summoned
 to be his master's closest ear,
 flying to every dictate of his master's voice.
 Alas, he succumbed to hasty death,
 he who alone would have known
 his master's intimate thoughts.

³ Text, translation and commentary in Courtney 1995 (no.131).

Compassion for Xanthias, cut off before he attained the position in his master's confidence that might have earned him his freedom, is mingled with regret on the part of the master – regret that the person who alone would have known his secrets has died before being called to the position of confidant. The voice of this kind of funerary inscription hovers somewhere between that of Xanthias speaking of himself in the third person to a passer-by, of the master speaking of his own loss, and of some impersonal speaker reflecting on a poignant fate. The final *heu* is spoken from all three perspectives. For the impersonal speaker, there are ironies in the situation: the boy's powers of abbreviation are trumped by death who, like the boy, is also in a hurry (*propera*, 12; cf. *currenti*, 6 and *volans*, 10); as the boy rushes to keep up with his master, death outruns him. But perhaps hurrying has been the death of him, and he died by “a hurrying death” (*propera morte*). It is as though the preternatural speed with which the boy keeps up with his master's voice is demanded by the social distance between them, the ground that must be made up before intimacy can arise. The very effort that is required to bridge this gap in nature is dangerous. Did the boy know how close he was to his master's confidence? Perhaps not, but the emergence of mutuality out of the servile relationship is beautifully caught in lines 9–11: rushing to every word of his master's voice, the slave finds this very voice calling him to the master's closest *ear* (whether to be his master's ear, or to have his master's ear is not entirely clear).

It was supposedly characteristic of the free man to walk at a moderate pace, displaying the appropriate *constantia*, and characteristic of the slave going about his errands to run.⁴ In fact, the entry of the running slave, clearing a path for himself, became one of the most hackneyed jokes of ancient comedy.⁵ Here the running slave (*currenti*, 6) has been metamorphosed into an almost tragic figure, and that very metamorphosis expresses the changing terms of the relation between slave and master. What is caught by this poem is the drama of the developing relation between master and slave; of the hopes and needs of both parties, in this case cruelly cut off when they were on the point of realization. If one had to sum up the affect of this inscription, the formulation of Dupont (1992) will do quite well: “A special sentiment that was neither friendship nor

⁴ Cf. Alexis 263K–A and Plautus *Poenulus* 522–3; also Cicero *De Officiis* 1.131.

⁵ Guardi (1974).

love but a sort of grateful compassion bound citizens to their slaves” (58). But any formulation that tries to fix the affect will miss the dynamism of the relationship and the way it strains against its own limits.

It is quite possible that this epitaph from Cologne was read by the fourth-century writer Ausonius and struck him enough to influence his own poem, “In Notarium” (*Ephemeris* 7), in which case we would have the very unusual phenomenon of an inscription influencing a literary work, rather than vice versa.⁶ Ausonius’s emphasis is rather different, and for him the astonishing skill of the boy, which seems to anticipate the master’s very thoughts, is a little disturbing:

quis quaeso, quis me prodidit?
 quis ista iam dixit tibi,
 quae cogitabam dicere?
 quae furta corde in intimo
 exercet ales dextera?
 quis ordo rerum tam novus,
 veniat in aures ut tuas
 quod lingua nondum absolverit? (22–9)

Tell me, who is it who betrayed me?
 Who told you everything
 I had in mind to say?
 What thefts from deep in my heart
 does your winged right hand perform?
 What is this novel state of affairs,
 that what my tongue has not yet formed
 should reach your ears?

The regret of the inscription’s master that he will not have anyone with whom to share his secrets has turned into a suspicion of the mind-reader, and the stenographer’s winged hand has become the thieving hand of the stereotypical troublesome slave.⁷ Ausonius raises the specter of an *ordo novus* in which slave anticipates master, but quickly dispels it by concluding that this skill comes not from *doctrina*, nor even from a swift hand, but rather from nature and from god:

⁶ Green (1991), 261.

⁷ Bradley (1994), 115–16; a good example is Pliny *NH* 33, 26–7.

natura munus hoc tibi
 deusque donum tradidit
 quae loquerer ut scires prius
 idemque velles quod volo. (33–6)

Nature, and god
 gave this gift to you
 to anticipate what I'll say
 and for my wish to be yours.

Here is a more reassuring interpretation of the slave-stenographer's anticipation of his master, and it suggests that this poem is not so much about the skill of a swift hand as about the intimate knowledge that any slave may have of his master. The slightly facetious tone of Ausonius' wonder at the stenographer's mind-reading papers over a deeper anxiety. Only if the slave's knowledge of the master is restricted to the latter's needs is it reassuring, and the poem reaches closure when an interpretation of this puzzling and potentially disturbing ability of the slave is found that is compatible with his subordination. The final line depends on a pun on the word *volo*, both "mean" and "wish": anticipation of the master's thoughts becomes accordance with his wishes.

Ausonius wrote two poems about another stenographer, Pergamus, as incompetent as his fellow was impressive (*Epigrams* 16 and 17). Pergamus tried to run away, but he was as slow a runner as he was a writer, and ended up with a tattoo on his brow (a common punishment for run-aways).⁸ In these poems, Ausonius makes nasty fun of the slave's punishment, joking that his brow receives the letters that his right hand missed, and that he should either inscribe the hand that won't run or weigh down his fugitive legs with irons; as it is, he's punishing the wrong part of his body. So much for Christianity's humanitarian effect on ancient slavery!⁹ It is tempting to read into this comic overkill a reassertion of power over a slave for whose abilities his master feels a slightly disturbing wonder.

As we will see, it is a recurring paradox of domestic slavery that in order to serve the master properly the slave must have knowledge and abilities that contradict his official status. As Martial puts it in a more down-to-earth and decidedly unthreatening context:

⁸ Jones (1987).

⁹ On the vexed question of the effect of Christianity on slavery, see de Ste Croix (1981), 418–25, Lane Fox (1986), 295–9 and Garnsey (1997), 102–4.

Non satis est ars sola coco: servire palatum
 nolo: cocus domini debet habere gulam. (14.220)

Art alone is not enough for a cook: I would not have his palate that of a slave; a cook ought to possess the taste of his master.

It is part of the job of Martial's cook to develop a master's palate, but other slaves might pick up their masters' sensibilities by the mere fact of cohabitation, just as Aristotle claimed that slaves would assimilate their masters' virtue (see above, p. 7). If the master is a satirist or philosopher, there is rich potential for irony when the slave starts to ape his master. This is what happens in Horace *Satires* 2.7, where the satirist's slave, Davus, decides that he has been a listener too long, and launches into his own diatribe against his master based on the Stoic paradox that every fool is a slave.¹⁰

It is the thrust of Davus' philosophical diatribe that "slavery" is something that affects us all to some degree or other, but the question is, "Who is the more slave, me or you?" Apparently, Davus has learnt his philosophy from the horse's mouth, or as near to that as a slave can get: "Stay your hand and control your temper," he says to his fuming master, "while I expound what Crispinus' doorman told me" (44–5). What Davus claims he has learnt from the philosopher's slave is that the master who pursues adulterous affairs, ending up in the most undignified and dangerous positions, is more of a slave than the slave himself, who satisfies his physical lust in the most expedient fashion.¹¹ Perhaps we are meant to smile at the lowly source of this second-hand Stoicism, but if the doorman is not the most reliable of philosophers, he is precisely the person who would be in a position to observe the comic comings and goings of upper-class love. The door who is the speaker of Catullus 67, garrulous as the *ianitor* himself, tells us a host of juicy secrets about his present and previous "masters." So Crispinus' doorman may be a good authority for what Davus has to say after all.

Horace, Davus contends, is himself the true slave, but that is a perception available to Davus because he is himself a real slave. The slave as metaphor is overlaid by the slave as metonym: the part of the master that

¹⁰ Compare Persius 5.73–91, where the speaker addresses a newly emancipated slave whom he claims is not truly (ethically) free – an inversion of this poem.

¹¹ Horace *Satires* 1.2 makes this same contrast, with the satirist taking the position that Davus appropriates here.

is his self-consciousness, even conscience. If it is comforting for Horace the master to think of slavery as a moral state which he must guard himself from falling into, it is less so to acknowledge that slavery is a form of knowledge, providing a privileged position from which the master is observed.

Davus' main exhibit is the Horace who, having no dinner invitations, protests that simple dining is more to his taste; but should Maecenas extend a last minute invitation, the same Horace shouts at the slaves to get ready:

iusserit ad se
Maecenas serum sub lumina prima venire
convivam: "nemone oleum feret ocius? Ecquis
audit?" cum magno blateras clamore fugisque . . . (32-5)

But suppose Maecenas
invites you, a last minute guest, just when it's getting dark:
"Won't someone bring me the oil, and fast? Is anyone
listening?" You bawl at the top of your voice, and rush off.

The master's "is anyone listening" is answered ironically by the opening words of the poem:

iamdudum ausculto et cupiens tibi dicere servus
pauca reformido. (1-2)

I've been listening for a while now and, wanting to say
a few words to you, as a slave I dare not.

Yes, there is someone listening. All the time. And that is the problem. As Samuel Johnson put it, "The danger of betraying our weakness to our servants, and the impossibility of concealing it from them, may be justly considered as one motive to live a regular and irreproachable life."¹² The number of *The Rambler* from which this passage comes (68) deals with the subject of private virtue on which, Johnson claims, it is the servant who has the authoritative perspective. He quotes as his epigraph Juvenal's "one must live an upright life, for many reasons, but mostly so that you can despise the tongue of the slave" (*vivendum recte, cum propter*

¹² Quoted by Robbins (1986), 100.

plurima, tunc est / idcirco ut possis linguam contemnere servi, 9.118–19), but Juvenal, unlike Johnson, is being sarcastic. It is doubtful whether any Roman master would have felt pressure to maintain appearances in front of the slaves, though Hopkins (1993) is surely right when he suggests that part of the reason why slaves were called “refuse” (*katharma*) and the like was that the free felt the need to cast back onto the slave the compromising qualities that slaves were in a position to observe in their masters (22–3). Furthermore, the very silence of the attendant slave prompts the master to imagine what he might be thinking, and to supply what he fears the slave has noticed, which is why Davus the slave can be read as a voice in Horace’s head – the voice of conscience.

Horace allows Davus to speak because it is the festival of the *Saturnalia*, a time of freedom from restraints, especially for slaves, who were allowed various symbolic liberties. During the *Saturnalia*, slaves dined with their masters and, according to some accounts, masters waited upon their slaves.¹³ Davus avails himself of the occasion to speak freely, without fear of his master’s retribution.

“iamdudum ausculto et cupiens tibi dicere servus
pauca reformido.” Davusne? “ita, Davus, amicum
mancipium domino et frugi quod sit satis, hoc est
ut vitale putes.” age, libertate Decembri,
quando ita maiores voluerunt, utere; narra.

“I’ve been listening for a while now and, wanting to say a few words to you, as a slave I dare not.” Is that Davus? “The same, a slave well-disposed to his master and honest enough, though not too good to live.” Go on, then, use the license December allows, since our ancestors wanted it that way. Speak up.

The opening words anticipate the debut of Juvenal’s satirist, speaking up finally because he can hold it in no longer: “Am I always to be a mere listener, and shall I never talk back? (*semper ego auditor tantum, numquamne reponam?* 1.1) This anticipation reminds us that, like the satirist who has been forced to listen to bad poets reciting, Davus speaks from the position of the reader, who has been listening now for a long time,

¹³ On the *Saturnalia*, see Bradley (1987), 40–5, Versnel (1993), 150–63 and D’Arms (1991), 176.

though his status consigns him to silence. Horace's reaction to Davus' first words ("Is that Davus?") is the incredulous question of someone who thinks he has heard a statue speak. For the satirist, that statue is the reader, just as for the master it is the slave. In fact, there is always a potential satirist present, listening and observing, when someone, even a satirist, takes to speech; Horace himself begins his first book of *Satires* by castigating those who make pronouncements of the type "Happy the x, who doesn't have my problems."¹⁴ There could be no better figure for the infinitely regressive position of the satirist than the slave, unnoticed and waiting to have his say, even if in this case the uncomfortable similarity between the satirist and the slave is muted by the fact that Davus is graciously granted the license to speak by his master (which may tell us something about the function of the *Saturnalia*).

Davus the listening slave appropriates, or is lent, certain stances that are typical of the satirist. But his name alludes to a figure from another genre, the clever slave of comedy, to whose paradoxical status he refers when he describes himself as *amicum mancipium domino*, both chattel and friend. After his preamble, Horace breaks in like the master in a comedy: "Won't you tell me (preferably sometime today) where all this garbage is going, gallowsbird?" (21–2),¹⁵ and throughout Davus' speech he seethes with comic rage; violence hovers on the horizon (43–4) and finally breaks out in a barrage of threats at the end of the poem. This crossing of satire with comedy gives another dimension to the sexual accusations of Davus, for when he contrasts his own easily satisfied sexual desires to Horace's adulterous passions he not only speaks as the satiric moralist but he also conjures up, and refuses, the position of the comic slave who assists his young master in his amours, all the while mocking his witless besottedness.¹⁶ Like Mozart's Leporello, Davus refuses to serve any more.

Inserting his master into a stock scene from the adultery mime,¹⁷ in which the "slavish" lover, stripped of his equestrian insignia and dressed as a slave, is smuggled into his mistress's house, Davus asks the question "Aren't you what you pretend to be?" (*non es quod simulas?* 56). The play

¹⁴ Oliensis (1998), 51–63 shows how the satirists of Book 2 satirize the satirists of Book 1.

¹⁵ Horace has himself become the imaginary figure who interrupts the satirist at *Satires* 1.2.23, asking "*quo res haec pertinet?*"

¹⁶ A point made by Bernstein (1992), 46. ¹⁷ Muecke (1993), 221.

of masks goes deeper than Davus supposes, as we are indirectly reminded when Davus accuses Horace of being a puppet manipulated by foreign strings (82): the figure could just as well be applied to Davus who is, after all, himself Horace's creation. But if Horace the satirist impersonates his slave to voice (apparently unfair) criticisms of himself (72–3), might not Horace nevertheless be what he “pretends” to be?¹⁸ Even if he is not the stereotypical servile adulterer conjured up by Davus, is he not the doctrinaire moralist who makes sweeping and generic accusations of people he doesn't really know; in other words, is he not the Davus against whom he protests? Muecke (1993) puts this well, “On the one hand, the gap between the preacher and what he preaches [e.g. between Horace the “adulterer” and Horace the satirist of *Satires* 1.2], admittedly exaggerated, shows the difficulty of living according to a consistent set of principles. On the other, as we protest against Davus that our Horace is not like that, we are put in the position of defending the satiric victim in general against doctrinaire moralising” (213). The slave here is the imagined critical voice that, given its head, refuses to “serve” its limited purpose and proceeds to unravel the master's project.

Davus' final shot is a fairly standard satirical accusation:

adde quod idem
 non horam tecum esse potes, non otia recte
 ponere, teque ipsum vitas fugitivus et erro,
 iam vino quaerens, iam somno fallere curam. (III–14)

And into the bargain
 you can't be with yourself an hour, nor use your leisure
 properly, but flee yourself like a runaway or truant,
 looking to baffle care with wine or with sleep.

Being able to “be with oneself” here is being able to confront one's mental demons (*cura*), and is paradoxically figured as a relation between two people. The Horace who avoids himself is like the slave who either runs away (*fugitivus*) or goes AWOL (*erro*), an analogy supported by the use of *ipse*, a common expression for “the master.”¹⁹ Davus adopts the philo-

¹⁸ Bernstein (46) argues that Horace is trying to make himself innocent by association of the more worrying accusation of servility.

¹⁹ On the *erro* (a dilatory slave, slow to return to the household), see Bradley (1990), 144.

sophical *topos* of the divided soul, in which the degenerate, recalcitrant or acrasic self is figured as the slave, a *topos* which implied that slavery was in the interests of the slave as well as the master (see chapters 4 and 5). As long as the slave is thought of as a person dependent on the master, not only materially but in his very being, then the runaway is one who loses, rather than reclaims himself. But, look at the situation from the point of view of the enslaved, or turn the philosophical issue into one of emancipation or autarchy, rather than ataraxy, and the runaway slave takes on a different aspect. Epictetus, himself an ex-slave, holds up the runaway as the example of one who trusts in himself rather than externals (*Dis.* 9.2); in other words, he gives the figure the opposite significance to what it has for Horace's Davus, who seems to voice the attitude of the masters. But there may be an unruliness to Davus' use of this figure if we accept that the slave is the very embodiment of the fact that the master cannot be alone for a moment. One of the things slaves were for, as Dupont (1992) remarks, was simply to be there: Statius ("he who waits") was a common name for a slave (58). If it seems paradoxical to say that the Horace who cannot be with himself is like a runaway slave, the runaway slave is nevertheless an appropriate figure to conjure up when accusing a master of being incapable of facing himself. To turn the *fugitivus* into the figure of the imperfect man who can't bear to be on his own is both to hide and to reveal the fact that the attendant slave protects the master from ever being alone.

The poem ends with Horace reaching not for the whip, but for a stone (as though Davus were a dog) and for arrows (as though Horace were a god):²⁰

unde mihi lapidem? 'quorsum est opus?' unde sagittas?
 'aut insanit homo aut versus facit.' ocium hinc te
 ni rapis, accedes opera agro nona Sabino. (116-18)

Someone give me a stone. 'What for?' Give me arrows.
 'The man's either insane or he's versifying.' Get out
 or you'll find yourself the ninth hand on my Sabine farm.

Calling Davus a dog assimilates the omnipresent slave, polar opposite to the *fugitivus*, to the "dark companion" (*comes atra*, 115) that pursues the

²⁰ Muecke (1993), 226.

haunted master. Davus' persistent presence can stand for the very *cura* that Horace seeks hopelessly to avoid. But if the slave is a dog to the master, the master is a god to the slave: asking for his arrows, Horace poses as the god Apollo. "The man's either mad, or he's versifying (*versus facit*, 117)," Davus retorts, in a brilliant deflation of his master's grandiloquence, and in the process he brings the poem full-circle, *versus* being an anagram of *servus* in the first line of the poem. But "Horace" is not so subtle, and he ends the interchange with a threat straight out of comedy: if Davus doesn't behave himself he'll be sent to work on the country estate. There the poem ends.

In comedy, the slave is not actually relegated to the country, for all his master's threats.²¹ Comedy's interchanges between clever slave and exasperated master, to which Horace's poem alludes, remind us that it is part of the ideology of slave literature that master and slave are locked in an antagonistic relationship that neither can do without. In Plautine comedy the underlying enmity is acknowledged but rendered comically compulsive. Sagaristio, one of the slaves in Plautus' *Persa*, compares the symbiotic relationship between master and slave to an itch:

ego nec lubenter servio neque satis sum ero ex sententia,
sed quasi lippo oculo me erus meus manum apstinere hau quit tamen,
quin me imperet, quin me suis negotiis praefulciat. (10–12)

I'm not a willing slave, nor much to my master's taste,
but like an itchy eye my master can't keep his hand off me,
he orders me about and uses me to shore up his affairs.

When he complains that his master can't keep his hands off him we expect Sagaristio to follow up with some grim joke about punishment, but instead he complains of being ordered about, which in turn translates into having to act as the prop of his master's affairs. Whose hand is on whom? The slave is as essential as an eye and as irritating and inconsequential as an itch, and this paradoxical form of intimacy results in a paradoxical response, just as the hand that rubs the eye only aggravates the symptoms it is trying to alleviate.²² Some twenty lines later, Sagaristio uses the figure of the itch again, this time supplying the flogging joke that we expected in the earlier passage. When a fellow slave invites him over to dine regally

²¹ Tyndarus, in the *Captivi*, being the exception that proves the rule.

²² Compare *Bacchides* 913–15.

while his master is away, Sagaristio replies “God, my shoulders itch on hearing you say that” (*Vah, iam scapulae pruriunt, qui te istaec audivi loqui*, 32). The slave is the master’s itch and the master the slave’s. *Prurire* (itch) is a verb that is also used for sexual desire, more particularly, the desire of the pathic, so Sagaristio’s words express the slave’s *desire* to transgress as well as his fear of punishment. Between them, these images of the master’s inflamed eye and the servant’s itchy back express the comic symbiosis of master and slave that is central to the economy of Plautine comedy, a symbiosis expressed in more condensed form by the following exchange from *Epidicus*: “I’m in love” says the master; “My shoulders feel it” answers the slave (66). The repetition of this stereotype reassures the audience that, beneath the gross inequity of the relationship, and in spite of the resentment of the slave, master and slave are bound together by a division of labor, a comic complementarity. “What’s up?” asks the master; “You’re in love and I’m hungry” comes the answer (*Casina*, 724–5; cf. 801ff.).

In Plautus, there are practical reasons why the master needs the slave: high-class love makes you lose your wits as well as your dignity and, like Wodehouse’s Wooster, the young master is not overendowed with wits in the first place. The clever slave is there to help his young master outmanoeuvre the father, pimp or braggart soldier who stands between him and the consummation of his desires. In the process, the scheming slave becomes (in his own eyes, at any rate) a general, a politician or even a playwright, turning the tables on his master.²³ There is a social reality shadowing this farce, the reality of the “clever, talented, educated slave occupying a position of responsibility, who has a realistic prospect of freedom and the constant image before his or her eyes of other slaves who had achieved freedom.”²⁴ Though the literary motif of the clever, scheming slave comes from Greek New Comedy (see Menander’s *Aspis* and *Dis Exapaton*), it takes on new meaning in adaptations of Greek plays at Rome, where scheming and deceit are “Greek” characteristics.²⁵ It is significant, for instance, that Greek words and phrases in Plautus are usually spoken by slaves, and that they are likely to be Plautine additions rather than echoes of his Greek sources.²⁶

²³ Fraenkel (1960), 223–31 and Segal (1987), 143–54. ²⁴ Hopkins (1993), 6.

²⁵ Fraenkel (1960), 223–41 argues that Plautus significantly increased the role of the slave. Dumont (1987), 498–9, puts the case against Fraenkel. For ancient references to the clever slave in New Comedy, see Spranger (1961), 37, n.1.

²⁶ Shipp (1953).

Just as the desire of the enamored master finds its lower equivalent in the hunger of the slave, and the former's amatory torment in the latter's tortured back, so in other contexts the slave's street savvy provides a cut-price version of the sagacity of his masters. In Terence, two delicious scenes revolve around the slave's parody of the conventional wisdom of the free: Syrus mockingly adapts Demea's pompous exposition of his principles of education to his own precepts on the proper way to prepare fish (*Adelphoe* 412–32) and Geta recasts the philosophical Demipho's remarks on the wisdom of being prepared for the worst to reflect his own mental preparation for a beating (*Phormio* 239–251). But such scenes are most characteristic of another literary pair, namely the philosopher and the slave, and it is worth dwelling on them for a moment.

On the face of it, the slave is the polar opposite of the philosopher, body to the latter's mind. But the slave, like the philosopher, is an outsider, and both, in their different ways, have knowledge of underlying causes. The affinity of slave and philosopher is bolstered by the fact that many philosophers, especially of the Cynic persuasion, had been, or were reputed to have been, slaves.²⁷ The most extended representation of this comic pair is the *Life of Aesop*, an anonymous biography of the legendary fabulist which seems to have accreted a collection of popular stories about slaves and masters, and was written down in its present form in the early Empire.²⁸ Like Horace and Davus on the *Saturnalia*, Aesop and his master Xanthos are a reversible pair, Xanthos being a common name for a slave and Aesop a figure who has much in common with Socrates. Aesop is every bit as ugly as the snub-nosed philosopher; he harries professional intellectuals, and finally he dies at the hands of citizens he has insulted. Where the slave-satirist sees the foibles and inconsistencies of humanity by virtue of his position as attendant, the slave-philosopher knows how the world works through being at the bottom of the ladder. One of the students dining at Xanthos' house proposes the question "What will cause great disturbance among men?" To which Aesop, standing behind his master, replies "If the dead arise and ask for the return of

²⁷ Patterson (1991), 184.

²⁸ Text in Perry (1952); I quote from *Vita G.* The ancient testimonia on Aesop, from Herodotus on, are collected in Perry, 211–41. See Holzberg (1993), 17–18 for a brief discussion of Aesop's historicity, and 80–4 on the manuscripts of the *Vita*. Hopkins (1993) is a splendid study of this work and of what it tells us about slavery.

their property” (47). If slavery is social death, as Patterson (1982) has argued, then Aesop speaks as one of those dead who threaten to reclaim their rights. Another student asks “Why is it that a sheep being led to the slaughter doesn’t cry out but a pig squeals loudly?” (48) Only Aesop can come up with an answer: because the sheep knows it can be sheared or milked, whereas the pig knows it has only its meat to offer. Other examples of Aesopian wisdom exhibit the same understanding from below (e.g. 49–50).

Like Davus lecturing Horace, Aesop repeatedly finds opportunities to teach his master, the professor, a lesson about the proper way to give orders. Xanthos, in turn, looks for excuses to beat his slave. Together they perform a dance. At one point, Xanthos, frustrated by Aesop’s ingenious misunderstanding of his instructions, tells him to do nothing more or less than he is instructed. Naturally, this only leads to further “misunderstandings” as Aesop takes his master exactly at his word; when Xanthos tells Aesop “Take the oil flask in your hands, and the towels, and let’s go to the baths,” Aesop brings the flask but not the oil (38), and so on.²⁹ Aesop can prove he has “obeyed” Xanthos using the same kind of demonstrations the philosopher uses with his pupils, and he adds “you shouldn’t have been so precise in laying down the law, and I would have served you properly. The way you decreed the law to me will be useful to you, for it will teach you not to make mistakes in the classroom. Statements that include or exclude too much are no small mistakes” (43). Not only does Aesop have a version of his master’s theoretical knowledge, but this knowledge derives from a practical experience of one of the great contradictions of slavery, identified by Hopkins (1993) in his study of this work. We could rephrase it as follows: on the one hand the master wants the slave to be an automaton who is nothing more than an extension of his will, but on the other hand he needs the slave to take some initiative if he is to be properly served.

For another master who wants nothing of the slave’s initiative, we can turn to what looks like a much more straightforward view of the relationship between master and slave, namely Horace, *Odes* 1.38, in which the poet addresses an excessively officious slave. Here, more conventionally, it is the master, not the slave, who has a lesson to teach.

²⁹ On this episode, see Hopkins (1993), 18–19, who cites a very similar anecdote about M. Pupius Piso, consul of 61 BCE.

Persicos odi, puer, apparatus,
 displicent nexae philyra coronae:
 mitte sectari, rosa quo locorum
 sera moretur.
 simplici myrto nihil allabores
 sedulus curo: neque te ministrum
 dedecet myrtus neque me sub arta
 vite bibentem.

Boy, I hate those Persian preparations:
 crowns woven with baste displease me;
 don't bother to look for where
 the late rose lingers.
 I care nothing that you labour to improve
 plain myrtle: myrtle's not unsuitable
 for you who serve, nor for me, drinking
 under the thick vine.³⁰

Horace goes further than Xanthos and denies the whole structure of command on which the relationship is built. After telling the slave in some detail what he doesn't want, he issues no order, and the peremptory tone fades into the final double negative (*neque . . . dedecet*, 6–7). For the slave-owner, all pleasures are accompanied by imperatives, but the persona of this poem has no orders to give, and the imperatives try to negate the fact that the slave's work comes between the master and his pleasure. In fact, Horace seeks to substitute the pleasures of textuality for the pleasure that is mediated, and alienated, by the slave. Hegel pointed out, in his discussion of the relation between master and slave at the beginning of the *Phenomenology*, that the master relates to the material world solely as consumer, whereas the slave transforms it with his work.³¹ Horace's poem, itself a thing made, rebels against this division. Although this is not a dramatic work, and contains no dialogue, there is nevertheless an interesting dialectic being played out between the work of the slave and the work of the poet. Here, far from the slave triumphing by virtue of his parodic version of the master's own capacities, it is the master who appropriates and transforms the work of the slave.

³⁰ Excellent discussion of this poem in Lowrie (1997), 164–75. See also Fitzgerald (1989). ³¹ Hegel (1977), 115–18.

Waving away the preparations of the slave, Horace denies both the luxury and the servility that are conjured up by the word *Persicos*. Since the poem closes the first book of Horace's *Odes*, and follows a grand, public poem (the "Cleopatra" Ode), we are teased with the possibility that there is a programmatic aspect to the poem. Is it a vindication of the simple style? If so, this highly wrought and jewelled poem, whose protestations of easy carelessness are belied by the obvious care that has been taken by the poet, turns the poet into a higher-level version of the officious slave. We might invoke the language of Hegel to say that the work of the slave is *aufgehoben*: removed, preserved and also, in the process, lifted to a higher plane. Take the second line of the poem, *displacent nexae philyra coronae*: juxtaposed to *nexae*, *displacent* becomes a pun (and an oxymoron) as the *-plic-* that is the compounded form of *placeo* metamorphoses into the *-plic-* of *plico* (fold): 'the woven chains unfold'. This wordplay is reinforced by *simplici* in the same position of the first line of the next stanza. The careful effect of textuality emerges from the rejection of a more literal textuality (wovenness) as the slave is told not to weave an elaborate crown – plain myrtle will do fine. Even here the double negative, *neque dedecet*, is a circumlocution that is complicit with the very elaboration it rejects. We could say that the work of the poet and the elaboration of his poem become visible at the very point where the work of the slave is being undone (*dis-plic*).

A similar effect occurs at the beginning of the second stanza, where it is not clear whether we should translate *sedulus* with *allabores* ("I care nothing that you should labor to improve on plain myrtle") or with *curo* ("I carefully see to it that you do not labor to improve . . .") – *nihil curo* or *sedulus curo*? In my translation I have gone for the first alternative, which fits the casual voice of the master's persona, and the trajectory from the stronger expressions of the first stanza's *odi* to the weaker *neque dedecet* with which the poem ends. But the word order and the enjambement make it more natural to read *sedulus curo*. Again, the poem as text conflicts with the poem as fictional utterance of its persona, and the master's casual indifference to the slave's work becomes the poet's careful prevention (getting there first). Finally, the placement of the words '*sera moretur*' at the end of the first stanza, filling the stanza's shorter line, lovingly prolongs the separate lingering of the late rose that the master tells the slave not to search out. Far from the rose being a matter of indifference to the master, it would seem that it is being *preserved* from

the officious ministrations of the slave in this alternative, textual incarnation.

When the master pictures himself and the boy, crowned with plain myrtle, they are beneath “a thick vine” (*arta vite*), the slave serving and the master drinking.³² This thick vine is not only an efficient sunshade but also the tightly woven text, and the sense of intricacy and tautness that the word *arta* conveys in this connection works in counterpoint to the casual picture that is being conjured up. We are left with a poised balance between closure and openness in the final picture of the master, whose *sprezzatura* is displayed against the laborious preparations of the slave.

Horace’s slave, unlike the stenographer Xanthias with whom we started, has clearly not read his master’s mind, nor are his tastes those of his master, like Martial’s cook. And yet it is through the quarrel with the person who is most intimately implicated in the poet’s pleasure that the textual work and pleasure of the Horatian poem is realized. Another Horatian slave who is betraying his master’s principles appears in the envoi to the first book of Horace’s *Epistles* (*Ep.* 1.20), addressed to the finished opus as though it were a young and recently manumitted slave, eager to display himself to a broader public and see something of the world.³³ The published book (*liber*) is a free (*liber*) slave, a pun echoed by Ovid in *Tristia* 1.1 (1–2, 15–16, 57–8), where, ironically, it is the book that is free (to go to Rome) while the master is not.³⁴ Horace the master warns his book/slave of the fickle public and of the sordid life that awaits him once his bloom has worn off. As the finished book, the slave both is and isn’t an extension of the master, who seems to be questioning the very impulse that brought him to publish the book. The boy’s ambition is misguided, and yet it echoes Horace’s: he is instructed to tell the world that Horace, the freedman’s son, “spread wings too wide for his nest” (20–1). Here, the poet’s internal quarrel with himself through the medium of the slave bears a relation to the Davus *Satire*.³⁵

³² West (1995), 193 argues that the myrtle indicates an erotic relationship between master and slave. ³³ On this poem, see Oliensis (1995) who compares *Sat.* 1.10.92.

³⁴ Hinds (1985), 13–14 and 29, n.2.

³⁵ *Epode* 4, a savage attack on a freedman who has become *tribunus militum* (like Horace himself, *Satires* 1.6.45ff.), begins “you and I are as inimical to each other as wolves and lambs.” Is Horace “making faces at the mirror”? See Oliensis (1998), 66–8. If Williams (1995) is right that Horace’s identification of himself as a freedman’s son is exaggerated, then the “reality” that might be thought to underlie Horace’s servile tropes may itself be one of them.

We will return to Horace in chapter 3, apropos an elaborate simile in which the poet casts himself as both slave and slave-dealer in relation to a friend to whom he has promised a poem that has not been forthcoming (*Epistles* 2.2.1–25). But a comparison of *Odes* 1.38 with a poem like *Odes* 3.29 uncovers another sense in which Horace the poet overlaps with the slave. In 3.29 Maecenas is called away from the city with its smoke, wealth and noise, to the retreat where Horace has readied for him wine, roses and a pillow for his head. The poet now plays the role of the ministering *puer* to his great friend. But the framework has changed: here it is Maecenas, not the slave, who is the laborious one, preoccupied with concerns about the state (25–8); Horace’s plain fare and humble dwelling may serve to unknot the furrowed brow (*sollicitam explicuere frontem*, 16) of Maecenas just as Horace undid the laborious preparations of the boy in 1.38. Maecenas is invited to reclaim himself, as his own master (*potens sui*, 41), from his servitude to the Roman people.³⁶

In these poems, Horace plays variations on the theme of slavery, locating himself in different or multiple positions within the unit of slave and master, which itself admits of a variety of determinations. As poet, he is concerned both with pleasure, which he purveys to those more laborious than himself, and with a certain kind of technique. The figure of the slave allows him to place himself by means of differentiations and redistributions within the master/slave relationship. What is striking in these usages is the way slave and master interpenetrate, extend each other, or exchange positions, a feature of the symbiotic relation between master and slave in all of the material that I have cited in this chapter.

³⁶ See Martin (1990), chapter 3, “The Enslaved Leader” on this figure (compare Publilius Syrus 519 Duff).