The Masks of Pseudolus

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Pseudolus: servus callidus

Mask
He has a large head with a fierce appearance, and a large trumpet mouth. The eyes are wide open, with above them asymmetrical brows with the tips drawn together. The hair is reddish.

Humour
As the servus callidus of the play, Pseudolus is elan vital personified. He is a combination of bomolochos and eiron, and as such is driven by love of 'the deception game' more than anything else. It is Pseudolus, as leader of 'the Fun Party' who is primarily responsible for the conduct of the performance. He is far more mobile than he is mechanical, is a chameleon, and able to take on roles, improvise, and get out of a tight spot (though by the skin of his teeth sometimes). He loves bluffing and lying, including to the audience to whom he 'plays' a great deal in performance. He is insolent to his elder master, Simo, belches in his face when drunk, and is unafraid of punishment.

Calidorus: adulescens

Mask
He is young and pallid, with a crown of hair. His lowered brows suggest a tragic demeanor. His general appearance, less exaggerated than most others, suggests the delicacy of one reared in the shade, and he appears cultured rather than athletic.

*Humour*

Calidorus is a delicate "blade of grass". He is desperately in love with Phoenicium, and wretchedly unhappy at the prospect of losing her. Hopeless in a tight situation, all he can do is burst into tears and wail about how unhappy he is. Still a little boy, he loves to be melodramatic and silly. He thinks Ballio is a beast.

**Simia: young servus callidus**

His mask is similar to Pseudolus: Trumpet mouth; more open eyes; reddish hair; raised, asymmetrical brows with the tips drawn together; fierce appearance, big head.

*Humour*

As Pseudolus’ pupil, Simia has all the attributes of a young servus callidus: he is insolent, clever, rugged and quick thinking. He is so good at being bad, Pseudolus is scared that he too will feel his pupil’s bite.

**Ballio: leno**

He has curly hair and a long beard, but is bald on his forehead and pate. His brows are clenched, one of them is raised, and he has a slight grin on his
Humour

Ballio is the alazon, the 'Arch Baddie', the 'bastard' of the play, and totally 'in bondage' to his work. As leader of 'the Money Team', he is driven by a desire for money: procuring it and keeping it. He will break an oath as soon as click his fingers, especially when a profit is to be made. Quite prepared to threaten - and carry out - physical punishment and prostitution if his orders are not carried out, he is also pitiless towards young lovers. He is also impervious to insults, which he accepts as fully justified but irrelevant, and there is a strong suggestion of pede-rasty with the 'puer'. He demands gifts from his boys and girls for his birthday.

His other desire is to beat Pseudolus at his own game and see him in the torture room.

Simo: senex iratus

Mask

He has a wreath of hair around his head and a beard. He has a flat face, a hooked nose, is gloomy around the eyes, and the right brow is raised.

Humour

Like Ballio, Simo is 'bonded to work'. He is very 'careful' with his money, a preoccupation that Pseudolus plays on in the finale. As father of Calidorus, and (senior) master of Pseudolus, Simo is caustic and suspicious, and furious at the amatory antics of his son. He would love to see his slave permanently in the torture room. Although one of the 'blocking agents' in the play and punished as such, he is nevertheless handled more sympathetically than Ballio, and is assimilated rather than expelled from the play community.

Harpax: bonus servus militis
Mask

His mask is part soldier and part 'good slave'. As the representative of the military, he has a dark complexion and curly, perfumed hair that moves about.

As a bonus servus, he has a trumpet mouth, bulbous eyes and reddish hair. His brows are symmetrical and he has a snub nose.

Humour

Harpax is a bonus servus who wants to be a miles. He is highly 'bonded' to his work, dogged in pursuit of his duty, and determined to carry out his instructions to the letter. Proud of his military life, he is insolent to a mere civilian slave (Pseudolus) but respectful and precise to his superiors, Ballio and Simo (at least until they impugn his virility and dignity).

Table of Key Plautine Personae, Listing Evidence for Masks, Physicality, Costumes and Props

The following table is a work in progress, a provisional model which does not claim to include all the available evidence. Nor does it cover all character types in Plautus. It should be regarded as an 'assemblage' of evidence collected by various scholars, and as one of the bases upon which the 'The Masks of Pseudolus' have been constructed.

Looking for evidence of ancient performance is a project of 'theatre archaeology' as described by Pearson and Shanks (2001). What we 'find' is inevitably conditioned by not only what has survived, but also where one looks, the way in which one looks, and by who is doing the looking. The evidence is fragmentary, often illusive and contradictory. It 'always has a multiple identity. Objects as clues are inherently unstable' [Pearson & Shanks, 2001, 61]. The existential condition of such a search is always one of interpretation, reconstruction and recontextualisation. It is an assemblage of fragments which attempts to represent past activities rather than record them accurately. Julian Thomas (1994, 158) describes archaeology as involving 'the production of narratives which stand for the past, rather than constituting faithful replicas of the past'. The documentation of performance practice (which is always 'in the past') therefore involves a degree of poesis, a creative leap of the imagination whose feet nevertheless strive to remain rooted in the remains of the past.

This is what I have done with 'The Masks of Pseudolus', and the remains of the past, or rather some of the clues, are collated in this table. I have also drawn on four productions of Plautine comedy - *Menaechmi*, *Mostellaria*, *Casina* and *Miles Gloriosus* - three of which I directed, and all of which I performed in as servus *callidus*. All but the *Miles* were performed in Latin, and for all we used masks, costumes, props and physicalities such as are described in this table and shown here.

Sources for the Table: Pollux (IV.118-20) Donatus (On Comedy, VIII.6–7), Wiles 1991, 75-77, 151-87, 188–220; Saunders, 1966; Bieber, 1961; Webster *et al*, 1995, vol.1, 1-5; the visual evidence in their collection; and the playtexts of Plautus.

A note on Costume: all actors wore notional "Greek" dress, consisting of body tights to represent naked flesh, with long sleeves and legs, which might be brown, yellow or other colours. The *chiton* was a long or short tunic, and the *pallium*, or *himation*, a simple rectangular cloth which was wrapped...
around the body. It was then taken over the right shoulder and leaving the left hand poking out. No pins or broaches were used. Trail the pallium behind on the ground might indicate either decadence or self-neglect. Bright cloths signified happiness, worn-out cloths were for those in hardship. Purple signified wealth.

A note on Physicality: the evidence suggests that demonstrative hand movements were common. In 'real life' the body in equilibrium was a sign of free status and decorum, imbalance or distortion a sign of slavery either actual or 'moral'. But on the stage some of these forms were reversed or exaggerated. Whole body forms rather than isolations are suggested. For a fuller discussion, see my 'The Plautine Persona' in DRAMA: Beiträge zum antiken Drama und seiner Rezeption, Band 12: Greek and Roman Drama: Translation and Performance, Edited by John Barsby, M&P Verlag für Wissenschaft und Forschung, Stuttgart, 2002.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character Type</th>
<th>Mask</th>
<th>Physicality</th>
<th>Costume</th>
<th>Props</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OLD MEN</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senex iratus</td>
<td>Has a wreath of hair around his head; hook-nosed; flat-faced; right brow raised; gloomy around the eyes; beard</td>
<td>&quot;Old man” walk with stick; body not in equilibrium</td>
<td>Straight tunic to ankles; white pallium with purple hem (denoting tradition and status); sandals</td>
<td>Hooked or straight scipio or staff (denoting status, wealth)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senex lenis</td>
<td>Oldest; hair cropped close to the skin; gentle brows; full beard; thin cheeks; downcast gaze; pale complexion; forehead at ease</td>
<td>&quot;Old man” walk with stick; body in equilibrium</td>
<td>Straight tunic to ankles; white pallium with purple hem (denoting tradition and status); sandals</td>
<td>Hooked or straight scipio or staff (denoting status, wealth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bald Senex</td>
<td>Bald forehead; brows raised; beard; keen (or fierce) eyes</td>
<td>&quot;Old man” walk with stick; body not in equilibrium</td>
<td>Straight tunic to ankles; white pallium with purple hem (denoting tradition and status); sandals</td>
<td>Hooked or straight scipio or staff (denoting status, wealth)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leno</td>
<td>Curly hair; long beard; one brow raised; he has a slight grin on his lips, his brows are clenched and he is bald on his forehead or pate</td>
<td>Possibly a sideways, crab-like walk; has a paunch</td>
<td>Dyed tunic with floral multicoloured pallium; generally ugly looking; sandals</td>
<td>Straight scipio (denoting wealth and status); money bag (crumina) from neck; possible had a whip.</td>
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<tr>
<td>YOUNG MEN</td>
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<tr>
<td>Athletic Adulescens</td>
<td>Ruddy and athletic; skin slightly tanned; a few wrinkles on his forehead, and a crown of hair; raised brows</td>
<td>Handles pallium when amorous; probably body in equilibrium</td>
<td>Dark purple pallium (for status, but contrasting the white of older men); blue tunic; sandals</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Delicate Adulescens</td>
<td>Younger; pallid; has a crown of hair and the delicacy of one reared in the shade; appears cultured rather than athletic, lowered brows</td>
<td>Handles pallium when amorous; probably body in equilibrium; pigeon-toes might suggest lack of courage</td>
<td>Dark purple pallium; blue tunic; sandals</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Parasitus Dark</td>
<td>Spends time in the gymnasium; hook-nosed; comfort-loving; the parasite’s ears are somewhat crushed and he looks cheerful and ready to serve</td>
<td>Curved, broken body, lowered position; writhing manner of gathering up cloak on entering, pot belly like slave</td>
<td>Black or gray pallium (cheaper); tunic; sandals (soccus)</td>
<td>Strigil, oil flask, money bag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miles</td>
<td>Dark, stern complexion and dark curly and perfumed hair that moves about</td>
<td>Too high a centre of gravity (opposite to Parasite); struts; perhaps uses sword as phallic symbol</td>
<td>Purple chlamys fastened at shoulder with broach; shorter tunic (for freedom of movement); petusus or other hat; tunic; sturdy sandals</td>
<td>Sword (machaera); possibly shield (clipeus)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLAVES</td>
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<tr>
<td>Servus callidus</td>
<td>Trumpet mouth; more open eyes; reddish hair; raised, asymmetrical brows with the tips drawn together; fierce appearance, big head</td>
<td>Legs apart (opposite of decorum); knees turned outwards; buttocks projected backwards, pot belly; thick calves, large feet, hands active</td>
<td>Short tunic; sometimes has a small pallium that does not cover tunic; padded tights (representing bare flesh) more exposed than most others (denoting poverty), allowing greater freedom of movement</td>
<td>Money bag sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>A bald pate and dark complexion; two or three dark curls lie on top; similar ones on the beard; twisted gaze</td>
<td>Variations of the servus callidus</td>
<td>Double-length pallium, not fulled (denoting higher status); wound around body twice; May have extra cloak for getting about town</td>
<td>Knife, spoon; bowls, amphora, food provisions (obsonium) e.g. vegetables, fish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Slave</td>
<td>Trumpet mouth, prominent eyes; gray-haired</td>
<td>Variations of the servus callidus</td>
<td>Variations of the servus callidus</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bonus Servus</td>
<td>Trumpet mouth; bulbous eyes; obvious tawny hair and complexion; bald forehead; symmetrical brows; snub nose</td>
<td>Similar to <em>servus callidus</em> but with head sunk into shoulders which are raised, to represent greater servility; dogged walk?</td>
<td>Variations of the <em>servus callidus</em></td>
<td>Money bag sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matrona</td>
<td>Snub-nosed; hair discreetly smoothed down or curly; straight brows; white complexion; fierce looking</td>
<td>'Old', solid, menacing walk?</td>
<td>Longer <em>chiton</em>, a wrap of some kind; coloured shoes; quince or sky-coloured <em>pallium</em>, sometimes worn over her head</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nutrix</td>
<td>Has fat wrinkles in ample flesh; headband going round her hair</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lena</td>
<td>Slightly elongated; small, close wrinkles; pale, close to ochre; eye-squints; possibly missing some teeth; grey hair</td>
<td>Female version of <em>Leno</em>?</td>
<td>Money bag?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Prostitute</td>
<td>Reddish/pinkish complexion; has curls round the ears; adorned with jewelry and coiffure</td>
<td>Presumably accentuates her 'sexuality', body not in equilibrium</td>
<td>Yellow <em>pallium</em> (denoting avarice); purple band around the head; beautiful; adorned garishly (<em>exornata</em>) with cosmetics and jewelry; cloak (<em>amiculum</em>) for going out?; sandals</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Younger Prostitute</td>
<td>Younger, inexperienced; not made-up; hair bound tight with a little band</td>
<td>Presumably accentuates her 'sexuality'</td>
<td>Variation of more mature prostitute?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Woman</td>
<td>Pale complexion; has a part, and hair is smoothed down; straight, dark brows; beautiful</td>
<td>Body probably in equilibrium</td>
<td>White or yellowish linen costume</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ancilla</td>
<td>A slave girl with hair cut short all around</td>
<td></td>
<td>Simple clothing; wears only a white or scarlet <em>chiton</em> with a <em>girdle</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Bibliography**


Ketterer, R.C., 1986, "Stage Properties in Plautine Comedy 1, 2 and 3" in *Semiotica*, 1986, vols. 1 (pp.193-216), 2 (pp.93-135) and 3 (pp.29-72), Mouton de Gruyter, Amsterdam

Moore, T.J., 1998, *The Theater of Plautus: playing to the audience*, University of Texas Press, Austin


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