

The Mask of the *Pseudokore*

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AMONG THE NEW COMEDY MASKS listed by Pollux, two which belong to the group classed as ‘young women’ are named *pseudokore* and *hetera pseudokore* and are described by him (4.152) as follows:

ἡ δὲ ψευδοκόρη λευκότερα τὴν χροιάν, καὶ περὶ τὸ βρέγμα δέδεται
τὰς τρίχας, καὶ ἔοικε νεογάμῳ. ἡ δ’ ἑτέρα ψευδοκόρη διαγινώσκειται
μόνῳ τῷ ἀδιακρίτῳ τῆς κόμης.

“The *pseudokore* is paler and her hair is bound round the front part of the head, and she resembles a newly-wedded bride. The second *pseudokore* is distinguished from the first only by not having her hair parted.”

If Pollux is describing masks that were actually used by actors in theatrical performances, the *pseudokore* masks pose a difficulty since such a stock-type does not appear in Greek comedy. In an attempt to find a female dramatic character that could be an appropriate candidate for donning this mask, Carl Robert was the first to interpret the term *pseudokore* as referring to a young woman who has been raped before her marriage and therefore is not a *kore*, a ‘virgin’, but rather a *pseudokore*, namely a ‘pseudo-virgin’.¹ Robert’s interpretation is questionable in two respects. If ἔοικε νεογάμῳ means, as Robert understands it, ‘a young married woman’,² then the term *pseudokore* is otiose, for we assume that, in the natural course of events, all women once married, are not virgins any more; therefore, if we follow Robert’s reasoning, all of them, regardless of their premarital history, should be considered *pseudokorai* and don that mask. Moreover, the combining element *pseudo-* denotes pretension, deception, falsehood. Accordingly we should expect the *pseudokore* to pretend that she is a virgin. Yet none of the female characters mentioned by Robert, or,

¹ C. Robert, *Die Masken der neueren attischen Komoedie* (Halle 1911) 41 n.2, 74; Robert’s interpretation is adopted by M. Bieber, *Die Denkmäler zum Theaterwesen im Altertum* (Berlin and Leipzig 1920) 167 (no.158); 170 (no.175); *idem*, *RE* 14 (1930) 2102,7; 2013,8; *idem*, *The History of the Greek and Roman Theater*² (Princeton 1961) 97.

² According to Robert (*supra* n.1) the description ἔοικε νεογάμῳ applies only to *pseudokore* and not to *hetera pseudokore*; see below.

for that matter, any other female character in comedy, ever pretends to be a virgin when she is not. Thus, if we were to accept Robert's interpretation, we would have to assume that the combining element *pseudo-*, if prefixed to the noun *kore*, conveys the idea of simple negation, while in all other compound words in which it is found it denotes pretension and deception.

Simon accepts Robert's interpretation that the *pseudokore* is a pseudo-virgin, but she challenges his assertion that the *pseudokore* is a married woman raped before her marriage, like Pamphile in the *Epitrepontes*, and that the *hetera pseudokore* is a wronged girl not yet married, like Phaedria in the *Aulularia* and Glycerium in the *Andria*.³ As Robert himself admitted and as Simon correctly emphasizes, such girls do not appear on stage, and there is no need to have a mask for them. Therefore Simon proposes to construe the term *pseudokore* as referring to a girl who lives in concubinage with her lover but whose respectable father will be found in the course of the play, whereupon she will be recognized as a *kore*, i.e., a *puella honesta*, and a legitimate marriage with her lover would become possible. The term *pseudokore* applies only to a concubine who may be lifted from the status of concubinage to legitimate marriage and who *ἔοικε νεογάμῳ*, which—according to Simon—does not mean 'newly-wedded bride' but is a description of the relationship between the girl and her lover; he loves her as if she were his legitimate wife, and she does not simulate her affection, as a *hetaera* does, but loves him truly in return.

Although the motif of the long-lost girl—separated from her family by unfortunate incidents and ultimately found to be the daughter of a respectable citizen who lives next door to her lover's family—is a stock theme of New Comedy, it is highly unlikely that she can be identified as *pseudokore*. The difficulty lies again (a) in the notion of deception implied in the combining element *pseudo-*, which is not accounted for by Simon's interpretation, and (b) in the description of the mask as resembling a 'newly wedded bride'. Simon's claim (p.103) that these words pertain to "die Situation und das Gehaben der Pseudokoren, nicht aber auf eine Besonderheit an der Maske" is untenable, for Pollux throughout his catalogue describes only peculiarities of masks and not the behaviour of the stock-type that

³ A. K. H. Simon, *Comicae Tabellae* (Emsdetten 1938) 100ff; Simon's interpretation is accepted by T. B. L. Webster, *Greek Theatre Production* (London 1956) 86ff, and by A. Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*² (Oxford 1968) 228.

dons it or the situation in which he is involved. Moreover, it is quite difficult to believe that the words 'resembles a newly wedded bride' can carry the burden of Simon's explanation, *viz.*, a girl in a state of concubinage who is truly loved by her lover and loves him in return.

To sum up: the hitherto accepted interpretation of *pseudokore* as a pseudo-virgin does not satisfactorily explain the words *ἔοικε νεογάμῳ* and does not account for the notion of deception implied in that term. These two difficulties would find their explanation if we assume that the *pseudokore* is not a *kore* at all but a male dressed as a bride and substituted for her on the wedding day.

The substitution of another person for the one who is the subject of passion is a popular narrative topic. It "belongs to the most widespread folk-lore traditions."⁴ Frazer describes it as a marriage custom known under the name of 'False Bride': "... when the bridegroom or his representative comes to fetch the bride from her home, a false bride is substituted for the real one . . . or even a man being palmed off as the bride."⁵ In the extant Greek and Roman comedies we have only one example of such a substitution, in the mock-wedding ceremony at the end of Plautus' *Casina*, when Chalinus is dressed up as a bride and wed to Olympio. Skutsch, however, found a parallel for the dressing up of Chalinus as *Casina* in the story of Hercules and Omphale told by Ovid (*Fasti* 2.303ff), where Hercules dressed as Omphale receives her lover Faunus.⁶ A number of plays on the Hercules–Omphale theme are known in the Greek comic tradition,⁷ and they suggest that the "transvestite motif, as it is developed in Plautus' *Casina*," was known in Greek drama.⁸ Moreover, titles of plays (such as *Maccus Virgo*) from literary Atellan farce, which was influenced by the themes of Greek New Comedy, suggest dressing of males in female clothes.⁹

⁴ S. Trenkner, *The Greek Novella in the Classical Period* (Cambridge 1958) 138.

⁵ J. G. Frazer, *The Fasti of Ovid III* (London 1929) 125.

⁶ F. Skutsch, "Ein Prolog des Diphilos und eine Komödie des Plautus," *RhM* 55 (1900) 272ff; cf. also F. Bömer, *P. Ovidius Naso, Die Fasten II* (Heidelberg 1958) 104; E. G. Suhr, "Heracles and Omphale," *AJA* 57 (1953) 251ff.

⁷ The titles of the plays are collected by W. T. MacCary, "The Comic Tradition and Comic Structures in Diphilos' 'Kleroumenoi'," *Hermes* 101 (1973) 197ff.

⁸ MacCary, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.7) 197ff; cf. also J. M. Cody, "The *senex amator* in Plautus' *Casina*," *Hermes* 104 (1976) 473ff; see also T. B. L. Webster, *Studies in Later Greek Comedy* (Manchester 1953) 161; W. R. Halliday, *The Greek Questions of Plutarch* (Oxford 1928) 188, 212ff.

⁹ P. Frassinetti, *Atellanae Fabulae* (Roma 1967) 37, and 103 note on *Kalendae Martiae*; Cody, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.8) 475: "... the later Atellan literary farce was influenced by the themes of

All female parts in Greek comedy were played by male actors dressed in female costumes and masks. An actor playing the part of a male dressed as a bride needs a special mask which would indicate that the actor donning it is a male disguised as a female. Such a special mask is that of the *pseudokore*. The features of the mask have to be different from those of a *kore*-mask, and the difference has to be easily discernible, so that the audience on seeing the mask would be aware of the impersonation. Chalinus, dressed up as a bride, would have to be recognizable as a false-bride—among other means, also by the mask of the *pseudokore* that indicated the deception.¹⁰

If this interpretation of the *pseudokore* mask is correct, it may add an argument in favour of the Greek origin of the false-bride scene in Plautus' *Casina*.

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July, 1977

Greek New Comedy"; O. Szemerényi, "The Origins of Roman Drama and Greek Tragedy," *Hermes* 103 (1975) 319: "Greek drama seems . . . to be the sole fountain-head of European stage-craft."

¹⁰ For identifications of *pseudokore* masks, cf. T. B. L. Webster, *Monuments Illustrating New Comedy* (London 1969) 22ff. As an almost certain identification of mask no.34, Webster cites terracotta C.309 in H. B. Walters, *Catalogue of the Terracottas in the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities, British Museum* (London 1903), a photograph of which appears in Pickard-Cambridge, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.3) fig. 133. The terracotta statuette of a pregnant woman proposed as an identification by Bieber, *Theater* (*supra* n.1) 97, fig. 355, does not fit Pollux's description. She has her hair "bound on the upper head," whereas Pollux describes the hair as "bound round the front part of the head." The difficulty presented by Pollux's distinction of two *pseudokore* masks is treated by Webster, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.3) 86, who rightly rejects Simon's theory of slightly distinct character types only to invent a similar theory of his own. We should note that the masks did not come into being all at once (cf. Pickard-Cambridge, *op.cit.* [*supra* n.3] 229, "There was no clear break at the beginning of New Comedy, and some [masks] have origins in Middle Comedy and earlier"). Perhaps one of the masks of the *pseudokore* that Pollux describes was used in Middle Comedy and the second added in New Comedy. Such a chronological divergence would account for the difference in hair-style, which tends to follow trends of fashion. Pollux describes a 'stock' of masks used by a theatrical troupe. There may very well have been a choice of several masks for each stock character, used alternatively in different performances.