SCEPARNIO'S 'RAINCOAT' IN PLAUTUS, *RUDENS* 576

CH. at uides me ornatus ut sim uestimentis uuidis:
recipe me in tectum, da mihi uestimenti aliquid aridi
dum arescunt mea; in aliquo tibi gratiam referam loco.
SC. tegillum eccillud, mihi unum id aret; id si uis dabo:
eodem amictus, eodem tectus esse soleo, si pluit.
tu istaec mihi dato: exarescent faxo. CH. eho an te paenitet,
in mari quod elaui, ni hic in terra iterum eluam? (573–9)

WHAT is the dry garment which Sceparnio offers to the sea-soaked Charmides? First of all, there is doubt about the spelling of the word. The Palatine tradition is *tigillum*, though T has *tixillum*; the Ambrosian palimpsest is provokingly defective at this point and Studemund was unable to determine whether the vowel is *e* or *i*. Since the beginning of the sixteenth century editors have chosen to print *tegillum*, being influenced by notes preserved in the collections of two grammarians—Nonius and Paulus. I quote these from Lindsay's Teubner editions.

Nonius 179. 1

Tegillum, diminutivum a tecto. Varro Sesqueulixe (464):

iugere volitans visus aquam e nubibu' tortam
indicat fore, ut tegillum pastor sibi sumat.

Paulus, *Exc. Fest.* 366

Tegillum cuculliunculum ex scirpo factum. Plautus (*Rud.* 576):

'Tegillum mihi aret; id, si vis, dabo.'

At first sight the evidence of the authority quoted by Festus might appear conclusive, but unfortunately it seems tailor-made for the *Rudens* and looks suspiciously like a scholiast's guess based upon an association between *aridi*, *arescunt*, *aret*, *exarescent* in this passage and lines 523–4, which would probably have stood in the adjoining column of the commentator's text:

o scirpe, scirpe, laudo fortunas tuas,
qui semper seruas gloriam aritudinis

The testimony of Nonius presents difficulties both of orthography and of interpretation. The word used by Varro appears as *texillum* in the manuscripts. It can be presumed that the form in the heading and the form in the quotation were originally identical and editors have preferred *tegillum*. What does the word mean in Varro? The usual answer is 'hood' or 'cloak'. Marx, for example, in his edition of the *Rudens* assumes that Varro (who, he thinks, borrowed the word from Plautus) refers to a shepherd putting on a rough garment like the rainwear described in Hesiod, *Op.* 543–5, or the goatskin cape of Eumaeus in Homer, *Od.* 14. 530, and that Nonius' explanation must be mistaken. Buecheler, however, in the course of an article on 'Altes Latein' in *Rh.M.* xxxix (1884), 422–3, took the view that the shepherd seeks refuge in a shelter. Buecheler attempted to distinguish two words of different origin, meaning, and quantity: (1) *tēgillum* or *tīgillum* (Buecheler admitted both forms), a rare word, diminutive

of *tegulum*; (2) *tĭgillum*, a common word, diminutive of *tignum*. He identified examples of (1) not only in *Rudens* 576 and in the passage of Varro quoted by Nonius but also in *Aul.* 301 (*de suo tigillo fumus si qua exit foras*). The line from the *Aulularia* is quoted in Nonius (134 s.v. *ligellum*), where *ligello* is glossed *tuguriolum, domicilium breve*, and Buecheler assumed, as many others have done, that the word is corrupt but the gloss correct. This may well be right, but it cannot increase our confidence in the accuracy of Nonius' note on *tegillum*. If Buecheler's philogical speculations are justified, there existed a word *tēgillum*/*tīgillum*, meaning 'a little roof', which could be applied both to a poor or makeshift shack and to a piece of matting thrown over the head or the shoulders to keep out the rain. So perhaps Festus was correct after all.

But drama has a logic of its own which is sometimes more reliable than the arguments of etymologists and the notions of scholiasts, and there are grave dramatic objections to the explanation recorded by Festus. First, it is totally inappropriate for Sceparnio to make an offer which has even a momentary semblance of helpfulness. According to the standard interpretation, of course, the joke is supposed to depend upon the obvious wretchedness of the proffered garment compared with the sartorial requirements of a free man, however wet and wicked. This seems an extraordinarily weak joke and it mars an otherwise particularly well-wrought comic passage. It would fit the context and the speaker better, and be much funnier, if the offer were immediately seen to be not simply a poor one but no offer at all. Secondly, it has to be assumed that the 'raincoat' is a 'prop' which has been left somewhere on the stage in readiness for the moment when it should be needed for the joke. Within the limits of his theatrical conventions Plautus does make excellent use of 'props', but when they are to serve as material for foolery they are normally brought on stage in a deliberate and obvious way, often with verbal preparation and explanation. A careful scrutiny of all the comedies of Plautus and Terence has failed to produce a satisfactory parallel to the sudden production of an unusual object as the foundation of a jest, which is what is supposed to occur at line 576 of the *Rudens*. The difficulty might not be so great if it could be assumed that Sceparnio himself is wearing the 'raincoat', as a soldier could naturally be expected to wear a *chlamys*, but this solution seems to be ruled out by *eccillud*.

The two objections outlined above throw doubt upon the conventional interpretation, but they also, I suggest, supply the clues to the correct one.

1. Sceparnio's main role in this rather genteel play is to provide a rough and rude character who can supply laughs at times when the plot is not meant to be moving forward, and who is no respecter of persons, male or female, high or low. He needs no provocation to make him insolent, as he shows in 1. 2, when he gratuitously gives the most barefaced cheek to Plesidippus in front of his master. Since then he has had a grievous disappointment and been made a fool of, as he thinks, by a girl (2. 4 and 5). When he encounters a pair of unattractive castaways, the inquisitive Labrax and the mendicant Charmides, he is in the very worst of tempers and can be expected to be as offensive as it is possible to be. Once Labrax goes into the temple to seize 'his' girls, the audience must be in a state of keen suspense, wondering what ructions are taking place within and what the outcome will be. To prolong the anticipation the dramatist gives his patrons first a richly comic interlude between two 'low' characters and then a splendid 'I-had-a-dream-last-night' episode. The comic interlude begins with an ingratiating appeal by Charmides to the naturally farouche and now

ferocious Sceparnio: *opsecro, hospes, da mihi aliquid ubi condormiscam loci* (571). Sceparnio's hospitality consists in the ludicrous offer of a 'bed' in the open roadway. He offers, in effect, nothing. Charmides, undeterred, now asks for a roof over his head and a change of dry clothes. 'Certainly,' says Sceparnio, 'You are welcome to have the one dry thing I've got.' What is this second offer, which must be immediately recognized as utterly worthless, if the comic pattern is to be maintained? Surely it is simply a little bit of roof—a *tegula*, preferably a broken one. My contention is that, no matter how *tegillum* is to be spelled, no matter what its derivation was, no matter what the word may sometimes mean elsewhere, the logic of this context and the stage usage of Plautus demand that here it can refer only to what is literally a piece of the roof of Daemones' house. Whether the piece is a tile, as I suggest, or a portion of roof-matting or thatch (made of *scirpi*?) makes little difference. Whether it is *tegula* or *tegulum*, it is certainly a *tectum* of sorts, certainly *aliquid aridi*, certainly a gift which the 'generous' Sceparnio has at his disposal. Spoken with reference to a tile line 577 is verbally very funny and could be rendered even more amusing by appropriate gestures with the *tegillum*. The preposterous exchange offered by Sceparnio puts an end to Charmides' obsequious appeals, and Sceparnio abandons him and disappears from the play after giving his '*hospes*' a few more metaphorical kicks in the teeth (580–3).

2. At the beginning of the play emphasis was laid on the effect which the storm has had on Daemones' house, and the audience might reasonably expect to see some token evidence of the damage (a few broken tiles would be sufficient). Roofing material—unlike a 'raincoat'—has therefore good reason to be on the stage and so fits perfectly into the Plautine fashion of employing stage properties, which are usually brought into comic action after a careful and sometimes lengthy build-up. Sceparnio was closely concerned with the damage to the roof (see 85–8, 100–2, 122–3, 152–3) so the brief return to that theme falls neatly into place in the last few lines of his part.

If I am right about the meaning of *tegillum/tigillum* in the *Rudens*, we have here an interesting example of the way in which a false explanation can become firmly embedded in the tradition of exegesis. The earliest Italian editors, reading *tigillum*, explained it as a reference to *fustis*, the stick with which Sceparnio gets beaten. This explanation does at least yield the kind of joke that we expect in the context, and it survived for a long time after *tegillum* had become the accepted version. It was quoted, for example, by Lambinus.[1] But a generation later Taubmann (1612) is pouring scorn on such a notion: 'Caeterum in hac Plautini *tegilli* enodatione, de fuste quod consomniat Lamb. frustra est.' Taubmann, following Guilielmus and Dousa, transmits what has continued to be the standard explanation.[2] It is perhaps unfortunate that the early commentators did not pay much attention to Isidore's note on tiles (19. 10. 15):

> Tegulae vocatae quod tegant aedes, et imbrices quod accipiant imbres. Tegulae autem primae positionis nomen, cuius diminutivum tigillum. (teg- *dett.*)

[1] 'Nonius, Tegillum, diminutivum a tigno, alias a tecto. fortasse demonstrat fustem, quo verberari solebat' (Paris, 1576).

[2] As well as making the usual references to Festus and Nonius, Taubmann cites Apuleius (*Met.* 9. 12). In his *Verisimilia* (Antwerp, 1582), ii. 5 Guilielmus had proposed that *tegili* should be altered to *tegillo*, an improbable emendation which continues to burden the apparatus of modern editions (e.g. Budé, Paravia, Teubner).

I should hesitate to claim that the learned Archbishop of Seville here preserves an element of tradition derived from Plautus, but his statement might have helped editors to reflect that in the *Rudens* the stage was more likely to be littered with tiles than lumbered with raincoats.

University of Durham A. T. VON S. BRADSHAW