Menander, *Epitrepontes* 366[[1]](#endnote-1)\*

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The central scene of the *Epitrepontes*, from which the drama took its name, is an arbitration-scene between two slaves, Davus and Syrus. When our papyrus begins, they are mid-argument, but quickly decide to move to an informal arbitration, with a passing gentleman, Smicrines, as their mediator. The point at issue is the ownership of the tokens left with an abandoned child whom Davus found but gave to Syrus (who was childless) to raise as his own. Davus wishes to keep the tokens for himself; Syrus argues that the tokens must stay with the child. After their speeches, Smicrines decides in favor of Syrus, and Davus is made to hand the tokens over. In the process of the removal of the tokens from the possession of the reluctant Davus, Smicrines makes the following remark:

Men*. Ep*. 366 δός ποτ᾿, ἐργαστήριον

The use of the term ἐργαστήριον as a form of address in this passage is unusual,[[2]](#endnote-2) since the common function of the suffix –τήριον is to form the names of places. Indeed, the word is attested in the sense “workshop” elsewhere in comedy,[[3]](#endnote-3) as well as in other texts.[[4]](#endnote-4) Commentators on the *Epitrepontes* have generally interpreted this word as “scoundrel”, deriving the meaning from an individualisation of a collective meaning “workshop, gang”.[[5]](#endnote-5) This is facilitated by the occurrence in Demosthenes of phrases like τὸ ἐργαστήριον τῶν συνεστώτων “the gang of followers” (37.39.8), ἐργαστήριον συκοφαντῶν “a gang of sycophants” (39.2.4, [40].9.8), ἐργαστήρια μοχθηρῶν ἀνθρώπων συνεστηκότων “gangs of wicked people standing about” (32.10.4). In each case, the ἐργαστήριον is conceived of as a collection of people (in 37.39.8 it is in apposition to τοὺς μεθ᾿ ἑαυτοῦ “his followers”). By metonymy, it is reasoned, the term might then be applied to an individual member.[[6]](#endnote-6)

On the face of it, this seems a logical thing to do. It seems even more logical when it is compared to certain Latin idioms. The best parallel is perhaps Terence, *Phormio* 373 *carcer* “jail-bird” (voc.);[[7]](#endnote-7) Plautus uses *stabulum* “stable” with a genitive (*nequitiae* *Cas.* 160, *flagiti* *Truc.* 587, *confidentiae* *Mo*. 350) or adjective (*servitritium* *Pers*. 418).[[8]](#endnote-8) Only the final example is in the vocative. Latin writers also use abstract nouns in a concrete collective sense; thus *servitium* “slavery” > “slave” (Pl. *Curc.* 300) or *mancipium* “purchase” > “purchased commodity, slave” (Plaut. *Ep*. 686). Exceptionally, such words are used as forms of address, as Plautus *Menaechmi* 489, 709 *flagitium hominis*. In other words, were the form under discussion a Latin word, the usage of ἐργαστήριον as a singulative form of address derived from a collective usage of a place-noun would be regular, or at least paralleled. This however is highly suggestive; for the first interpreters and commentators of *Epitrepontes* went about their work with Roman comedy in their ears. And in fact the form under discussion has been interpreted as the source for the Latin form *ergastulus*; this form was assumed by Wilamowitz to continue, and have identical function as, the Greek form in *Epitrepontes*.[[9]](#endnote-9) But given what we know about the freedom with which Roman playwrights treated their originals, relying on the practice of Latin playwrights is not, perhaps, a robust method. We shall nevertheless return to the Latin plays at the end of this paper.

One might, then, seek a Greek parallel, and in fact something of the kind seems to be attested in Menander: the character speaking at the opening of Act IV of the *Sicyonius* (Smicrines in most editions) refers to his interlocutor as an ὄχλος...φλυάρου μεστός “a crowd full of nonsense” (*Sic*. 150). This would be a candidate for the use of a collective in singulative function as an appellative; on the other hand it is not a syntactic parallel, as it is not being used here in the vocative as a form of address.[[10]](#endnote-10)

The traditional explanation relies on a segmentation of the word as ἐργασ–τήριον. The suffix –τήριον is known to be productive in Greek in forming the names of places.[[11]](#endnote-11) But since –τήριον is in origin a suffix compounded from –τήρ and –ιον, this is not the only segmentation open to us. Another analysis could take –ιον to be the only suffix present, thus ἐργαστήρ–ιον. On this explanation, the word would be a diminutive of the form ἐργαστήρ “workman”.[[12]](#endnote-12) In order to secure this analysis, the form must fulfil certain criteria:

1. It must be a likely form for Menander to use, whether he coined it or inherited it;
2. It must fit the context of the dramatic utterance;
3. It should preferably tell us something about the Latin forms used to adapt it.

We will examine these points in turn.

Among the derivational morphology of Menander, the diminutives form one of the most productive categories, with sixteen new forms of different shapes attested: ἀπφάριον,[[13]](#endnote-13) ἀρτίδιον, ἑταιρίδιον, θεραπαινίδιον, θυγατρίδιον, ἱστάριον, λῄδιον, λοφίδιον, ξενύδριον, παιδισκάριον, πελτίον, πλόκιον, ποτηρίδιον, ῥοΐδιον, ταμιείδιον, χιτωνάριον. On this evidence, Menander was free to coin new diminutive formations, and we should not rule out new diminutives coming to light.[[14]](#endnote-14) It matters less that Menander invented each and every one of the forms first attested in his text – which is almost impossible to believe – than that new coinages of diminutive forms were possible in the period in general.

On the other hand, were *nomina agentis* in –τήρ possible inputs for diminutive formation? Chantraine already observed that where a form in –τήρ had been rebuilt in –τήριον, the base word had the function of a “tool”-word.[[15]](#endnote-15) This applies to some 21 examples of nouns in –τήριον which look like candidates for being genuine diminutives, all derived from tool words rather than from personal agent nouns. The form φυλακτήριον, for example, is first attested in the sense “castle” but later comes to mean “amulet”.[[16]](#endnote-16) It is more likely that both senses of the term coexisted, given the unlikelihood that context would ever result in genuine ambiguity, than that the form was reanalysed at a later date, but the latter scenario is not impossible. The polysemy of the form in –τήριον is suggestive, but does not prove that diminutives to agent nouns in –τήρ could be formed.

On the other hand, the existence of these place-terms in –τήριον, and their productivity, might explain the dearth of diminutives to agent nouns. A diminutive to an agent noun in –τήρ would be homophonous with a derivative in –τήριον to the same root. In such cases, the existence of one of the possible derivatives can be expected to block the formation (or at least the permanent lexicalisation) of the other;[[17]](#endnote-17) this phenomenon is known as homonymy blocking. Homonymy blocking is a contested phenomenon, but there are good examples which cannot be explained away very easily.[[18]](#endnote-18) The relative sparseness of attestations for diminutives derived from agent nouns in –τήρ can therefore be explained as being due to homonymy blocking; this will not have prevented occasional forms from occurring, however,[[19]](#endnote-19) and therefore allows us to consider segmenting nouns in –τήριον as diminutives. We therefore have license to interpret a given form as a diminutive, and an explanation for why such forms are apparently so rare.

To strengthen our hypothesis of a segmentation ἐργαστήρ-ιον we must examine the dramatic context to establish whether such a form is in place here. *Ep*. 366 is from the end of the *agon*-scene; Smicrines has adjudicated in favor of Syrus, and is attempting to prevail on Davus to hand the recognition tokens over. One of the remarks addressed by Smicrines to Davus is our line, *Ep*. 366.[[20]](#endnote-20) Davus, it seems, has accepted defeat, but like all good comic victims, is putting up a good if futile fight. The judgement happens in 355-7, but at 363 Davus has still not handed the goods over. At 366 an exasperated Smicrines tells him to give the things up. Davus” whining is well-characterized: it is repetitious (δεινή γ᾿ ἡ κρίσις “the judgement is harsh”, 358, 361; cf. οὐ γέγονε δεινοτέρα κρίσις “there”s no harsher judgement”, 372), sententious (ἅπανθ᾿ εὑρὼν [ἐγὼ] ἅπαντα περιέσπασμαι “I who found all am now robbed of all”, 360) and overladen with pathos (ὦ Ἡράκλεις, ἃ πέπονθα “Heracles! My sufferings!”, 363; cf. αἰσχρά γ᾿ ἃ πέπονθα “these *are* awful sufferings”, 367 and ὦ Ἡράκλεις, 372). Davus is shortly to leave the stage (as far as we can tell, never to reappear) – the character is thus being given its swan-song. Smicrines’ form of address, therefore, might best be interpreted as being maximally consistent with the portrayal of Davus’ character already, as well as with his tedious behavior.[[21]](#endnote-21) Can this requirement also be squared with our segmentation of the form?

Diminutive forms, in Greek as in many languages, have various functions beyond the prototypical sense of “small”.[[22]](#endnote-22) The most common are “pretty, neat” or “lesser in worth, bad, shoddy”, sometimes known as the deteriorative. In English, for example, *darling* and *weakling*, both attesting the (now lexicalized) diminutive suffix *–ling*, incorporate quite different value judgements in their semantics; sometimes languages have several diminutive strategies corresponding to different semantic ranges. Thus Hebrew *sak-it* “a small bag” contrasts with *sak-ik* “a nice small bag”.[[23]](#endnote-23) There is some evidence for the deteriorative diminutive in Menander: καλῴδιον at *Dysk*. 580, since it is a rope that has just broken, may be equivalent to “the blasted rope” or similar;[[24]](#endnote-24) the form παιδισκάριον(Men. *Mis*. frag. 4.1; frag. 296.15) has two diminutive suffixes, one (-ισκο-) simply indicating “diminutive”, one (-άριον) with deteriorative function; compare μισθάριον (frag. 220.2), apparently in the context of a complaint about wages; finally there is ξενύδριον (frag. 351.3) in a cook’s complaint. It is relevant that two of these are coinages; it is precisely in the context of emotive language that we expect speakers to coin new phrases. And since we are dealing in *Ep*. 366 with a unique form of address, it is this register we might expect to find.

The question remains what the stem of the formation is. If this is a deteriorative diminutive, what is Davus being labelled a “bad” version *of*? Again, we can appeal to the context of the scene more broadly. The professions of our men at arbitration are named: Syrus, at 257 is identified by Davus as an ἀνθρακεύς, a charcoal burner, while he at 243 describes what he does (ἐποίμαινον) – he is a shepherd. It is known that Davus’ speech is, while not without its rhetorical effects, comparatively unelaborate, while Syrus’ shows much more formal elaboration.[[25]](#endnote-25) We might therefore expect a dig from Syrus towards Davus’ more humble occupation. And we are not disappointed:

 βλέψον δὲ κἀκεῖ, πάτερ· ἴσως ἔσθ᾿ οὑτοσί

 ὁ παῖς ὑπὲρ ἡμᾶς καὶ τραφεὶς ἐν ἐργάταις

 ὑπερόψεται ταῦτα κτλ. (*Ep*. 320-2)

Consider this, sir: perhaps this child *is* a cut above us, and raised among husbandmen will despise these things, etc.

Syrus’ point in his speech is not that the child should be reunited with its original parents, but that the recognition tokens, held by Davus, should be restored to it, in order to facilitate later *anagnorisis*. In addition, he must combat Davus’ argument that an alternative course would be to restore the child to him again (*Ep*. 289-90). The sneer that the child will notice its superior nature if raised by peasants is therefore exactly to the point: Davus is characterized as an inappropriate father figure for the child. The insult may also be based on a tragic allusion: at Soph. *OT*. 859, Oedipus tells Jocasta to send for τὸν ἐργάτην, the former retainer of Laius who survived Oedipus’ attack on him. But it is clear what this man’s new profession is: he was sent ἐπὶ ποιμνίων νομάς “to the pastures of flocks” at 761, he is a βοτήρ “herdsman” at 837, 1044, 1111, 1114, a ποιμήν “shepherd” at 1040; and Oedipus perhaps puns on the occupation of the man who found him at 1080. The parallel of the exposure of Oedipus and its consequences is bound to have been evoked by the situation in *Epitrepontes*.

This can therefore be seen as the motivation for the use of the term ἐργαστήριον: Smicrines, having pronounced Syrus the winner, is siding also with his value judgement about the loser.[[26]](#endnote-26) He therefore uses a deteriorative diminutive in order to underscore his contempt for Davus. It is no objection that Menander uses the *a*-stem of the simplex ἐργάτης but the –τήρ suffix for the derived form ἐργαστήριον; this is an established pattern in the derivatives of first declension masculine (*ā*-stem) nouns.[[27]](#endnote-27)

The final piece of the puzzle is the relation of Latin *ergastulus* to ἐργαστήριον; Wilamowitz, it will be remembered, thought that the Latin form had been adapted from the Greek. The Latin form is often cited from Lucilius as *servus ergastulus*;[[28]](#endnote-28)but in fact, Lucilius has *non ergastilus unus*. This is a fragment cited by Nonius (447.7) in order to prove that the masculine *ergastulus* referred to a person (he glosses *custos poenalis loci*, “guard of a penal institution”), while the neuter *ergastulum* meant a place, a *carceris locus* “prison place”. Now Nonius may be wrong about this; Marx, for example, conjectures that the meaning of *ergastulus* was a “servus compeditus uilissimi generis, qui in ergastulo subterraneo uinctus operatur”, “a shackled slave of the worst sort, who works in chains in an underground workshop”.[[29]](#endnote-29) But the form *ergastulus* is a *hapax*; we are therefore not in a position to argue with Nonius. We must therefore assume that an *ergastulus* was a slave guarding an *ergastulum*.

We begin with an obvious observation: the sense attested for *ergastulus* and *ergastulum* have little in common with ἐργαστήριον “work-shop” or the like. Like the Latin forms reviewed earlier in this article, *ergastulum* in the *plural* could be used to refer to the “inmates of a workhouse”;[[30]](#endnote-30) but there is no evidence for the singular being used in the vocative as we have with ἐργαστήριον. Importantly, when *ergasterium* is borrowed from Greek, it shows the expected semantics of a place-word.[[31]](#endnote-31) In order to understand the Latin forms, therefore, we have to consider them from the perspective of Latin word-formation rules. On this account, what kind of meaning would *ergastulus* have?

The *–ulus* suffix in Latin is used in two main functions: to form deverbal adjectives, and to form diminutives.[[32]](#endnote-32) On this analysis, one might suppose that *ergastulus* was a Greek loan-word adapted to a Latin deverbal pattern. If this is true, the deverbal meaning of the source-word (ἐργαστήρ?) must have been available to native-speaker intuition. This would then seem to be the most natural interpretation for *ergastulus*, –*um*.[[33]](#endnote-33) However this works in detail, however, is not our concern. The important point that emerges is that *ergastulus* is not good evidence for the usage of ἐργαστήριον at *Ep*. 366. Rather the Latin forms correspond to a well-established pattern of word-formation and forms of address. The Greek form, by contrast, is best analysed using what we already know about Greek derivational morphology.

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1. \* My thanks to Wolfgang de Melo for discussion of this article at an early stage, and to the helpful comments of the anonymous reviewer. All translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The only parallel I have found is Greg. Naz. 40. 393. But this reflects an extremely productive metaphor in Christian writers (see n.3 below) and is therefore not strictly parallel. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. See Ar. *Eq.* 744, Antiphanes frag. 251. Alexis frag. 206.5. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Hdt. 4.14.6; in the sense “shop”, or “premises” Aeschin. 1.123; Ephesus is the “workshop of war” at Xen. *Hell*. 3.4.17 ~ *Ages*. 1. 26 (cf. Polyb. 10.20.7, Plut. *Marc*. 21.3.3, Ath. 10.421b, Suda ε 2903.1); “brothel” at Artem. 4.9; “barber”s shop” at Ath. 12.518a (ἐργαστήρια are similarly venues for gossip at Isocr. *Areop*. 15, *Callim.* 9, Plut. *Nic*. 12). The metaphorical description of man as a “workshop” of virtues and vices is extremely common in ecclesiastical writers (e.g. in Athanasius ἀνομίας ἐργαστήριον *decr*. 40.12, τὸ χριστόμαχον ἐργαστήριον *ep. mort. Ar.* 4.3, *syn*. 20.4, τὸ μυσαρὸν ἐργαστήριον τῶν θεομάχων *Dion.* 13.3). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Wilamowitz 1925, 69 “Insasse eines Zuchthauses für Sklaven”; Furley 2009, 159 “rabble, riff-raff, scum”. Translations render “jailbird” (Murray 1945, 48, Arnott 1979, 427, Ireland 2010, 149), “convicted criminal” (Miller 1987, 88), “you thief” (Balme 2005, 91), “pilier de mauvais lieu” (Blanchard 2013, 90). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Martina (2000, 231) gives the semantic evolution “luogo per i lavori forzati” >> “persona adatta a quel luogo” and renders (1997, 39) “pezzo di galera”. Wilamowitz (1925, 69) compares the use of abstract nouns as insults in tragedy and comedy: ἡ πᾶσα βλαβή (S. *El*. 301, *Ph.* 622), πᾶν δεῖμα (S*. Ph*. 927), ὄλεθρος (Ar. *Lys*. 325), and see Barrett 2007. But since we do not have an abstract noun in this case, this approach will not take us much further. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Dickey 2002, 177, and compare τύμβε, Ar. *Lys*. 372. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. *Pers*. 418 is difficult. The codices read *servitritium*, which could only be an adjective. But Woytek (1982, 304) following Leo rightly prefers the emendation *servitricium* (i.e. from *servitrix* on the analogy of *meretrix*), bringing the phrase into line with Plautine practice; thus also de Melo (2011, 504) translating “brothel for slave girls”. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Wilamowitz (1925) 69. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. This is significant, as it is well-established that vocatives may not have the same semantics as predicates; see Dickey 1996, 9-12. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Chantraine 1933, 63; Schwyzer 1939, 470. Debrunner 1917, 143 does not explicitly state the semantics of the formation, but his examples show that he considers these forms primarily the names of places. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Chantraine 1933, 62-3, esp. 63 “la finale –ιον dans ces cas a parfois été considérée comme une finale de diminutif”. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Theodoridis 1975. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Amundsen 1965 for the diminutives of the *Dyskolos*. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Chantraine 1933, 63. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Contrast Hdt. 5. 52, Thuc. 4.31 with Plut. *de Is. et Os.* 378b, NT *Matt*. 23:5. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. I quote an example I observed myself: a friend referred to a group of scholars working in reception studies as “receptionists”. Upon using the word, she stopped speaking, looked puzzled, and said that the expression did not quite “sound right”. Although she was capable of coining the word “receptionist” to mean “scholar of reception studies”, she was unhappy with it, due to the pre-existing homonym “someone who staffs a reception desk”. My referee informs me that the word is used pejoratively about scholars of reception. This, however, is a different phenomenon, in which the homophony is exploited deliberately, and does not reflect the pragmatics of the situation I observed. It is an example of the kind of studied exceptions to blocking possible in particular situations – Shakespeare’s “stealers” (see n. 18) are comparable. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Plag (2003, 64) is critical, but see the examples in Bauer (2003, 234-5), (1988, 82). Blocking phenomena are rarely entirely consistent, see Matthews (1991, 76-80); this discussion also shows how blocking can nevertheless be a helpful tool to understand morphological change (and its absence). [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. This phenomenon has been used to argue against the very notion of blocking; see Bauer (1983, 81) on Shakespeare’s expression “the ten stealers” (= fingers), despite *stealer* being blocked in standard language by *thief*. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. The speaker is not clear – it could be Syrus or Smicrines. But none of the argument below is affected by this; in fact, some details would be simpler if it were established that Syrus was the speaker. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Furley (2009, 160) suggests that Smicrines is simply addressing a member of the kind of work-force referred to as an ἐργαστήριον by that term. This is of course possible; but the utterance seems to lose in force as a result. This is the moment the objects are handed over (πάντ᾿ ἔχεις 367, whether punctuated as a question from Smicrines or a sigh of surrender by Davus, shows that the transaction is complete), a moment of dramatic significance as the audience sees the tokens for the first time. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. For a survey, see Jurafsky 1995; for Greek, Schwyzer (1939, 470) on the semantic range of the diminutive in Greek (indicating small size; affection; derogatory; partitivity). [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Aikhenvald 2007, 54. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. This is admittedly not secure: the word may already have been lexicalized given the use of the term in Ar. *Vesp*. 379. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Krieter-Spiro 1997, 244. Cohoon (1914, 164-6) is unclear whether this is being portrayed as Davus’ strategy, or whether Davus is simply given a plainer style (but see 170 on παιδάριον vs. παιδίον). Such a distinction in a literary text is somewhat artificial (or at least would need to be made by an actor, rather than by a philologist). Prato in Prato et al. (1983, 32-3) observes that Davus’ metre is noticeably more “severe” than Syrus’. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. The forms ἐργαστήρ and ἐργάτης were synonyms in the classical period, one being an archaic noun in –της, the other a deverbal *nomen agentis* from ἐργάζεσθαι; the forms ἐργαστής by contrast is a *hapax legomenon* attested only in the Roman period in the sense “businessman” (*negotiator*). See Fraenkel (1910, 146-9). [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Chantraine 1933, 321, with examples of both feminines and locatival derivatives. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Thus Wilamowitz 1925, 69; Martina 2002, 366. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Marx 1905, 187-8. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. E.g. Caes. *B. C.* 3.22.2. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. This form is in fact attested but purely in the sense “workshop” (Cod. Just. 1.3.2, 12.41.2); this can therefore be considered a loan from Greek, retaining the sense the form had in ordinary language. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Leumann 1977, 305-312. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Leumann 1977, 231 assumes that *ergastulum* is a loan from Greek ἔργαστρον with dissimilation of the second /r/, but ἔργαστρα “rewards of labor” is *plurale tantum*, and a poor semantic match. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)