

Chapter 14.2: Terence

Roman Comedy after Plautus

- transitional figure between Plautus and Terence: **Caecilius Statius**
 - no play of his survives but many fragments
 - less boisterous comedy than Plautus
 - he was “more Greek,” e.g. titles in Greek
 - cf. Plautus and Naevius whose plays almost invariably have Latin titles that are often not even translations of the Greek original’s title

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Publius Terentius Afer

- Caecilius Statius reportedly heard the young **Terence** read his first play (*Andria*)
- “Publius Terentius Afer” was apparently his real name, even though he was a slave
 - cf. Livius Andronicus
 - supported by aristocrats, e.g. the Scipios
- his dates are uncertain: born ca. 195-185 BCE and died soon after 160 BCE

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Terence's Drama

- every play he wrote survives in full!
 - shows the high esteem in which he was held in antiquity and ever after — until our age!
 - we can track his career better than any other ancient playwright, including Sophocles
- his plays were produced at a variety of festivals, including state funerals
 - e.g. **Adelphoe** which premiered at Aemilius Paullus' funeral in 160 BCE

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Terence's Drama

- Julius Caesar wrote a treatise on Terence's ***sermo purus*** (“clean dialogue”)
- Saxon canoness **Hrotsvit** (or **Hrotswitha**) imitated the language of Terence's dramas
 - but she celebrated Christian virgins
- more than 600 Terence manuscripts survived the Middle Ages

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Terence's Drama

- also, scholia are attached to all of Terence's comedies, cf. Aristophanes
 - but A's scholia elucidate historical context
 - conversely, Terence's scholia discuss the nature of his drama, which shows how important Terence was as a Roman author
- some of these scholia are from the hand of **Aelius Donatus**, St. Jerome's teacher

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Terence's Prologues

- among the most important features of Terence's work are the **prologues** prefixed to all six of his comedies
 - Terence speaks to us directly in his own voice
 - cf. the *parabases* of Aristophanes' comedies
- but Terence doesn't discuss current politics, instead theatre-related issues
 - e.g. playwriting, producing plays

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Terence's Prologues

- e.g., the prologue of *Andria* mentions the complaints of a “malevolent decrepit poet”
 - Donatus: **Luscius Lanuvinus**
- also raises the issue of ***contaminatio***
 - “pollution”; lit. “touching together”
 - i.e. mixing two different Greek originals in one Roman adaptation
 - growing independence of Roman playwrights?

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Terence's Prologues

- why was *contaminatio* an issue?
 - were there too few Greek originals available?
 - was it a matter of excessive “Hellenism,” which dictated that Menander’s drama shouldn’t be tampered with?
- n.b. Terence “contaminated” *all* his plays
 - e.g. *Adelphoe*: scene from Diphilus inserted into Menander comedy

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Terence's Prologues

- prologue of *Hecyra* (“Mother-in-law”) notes difficulties in staging this comedy
 - based on an original by a Greek imitator of Menander: **Apollodorus of Carystus**
 - twice interrupted by crowds interested in other things (boxing match, gladiators, etc.)
 - shows the Romans’ basic inclination toward “popular entertainment”

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Terence and Menander

- n.b. the all-but-total victory of Menander over his rivals (Diphilus, Philemon, etc.)
- Terence's drama includes some of the best examples of Menander's formula for success: the humane treatment of character-types, esp. sympathetic "fools"
 - **Thraso** (*The Eunuch*)
 - **Micio** (*Adelphoe*, "The Brothers")

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The “Roman” in Roman Comedy

- the Romans’ only known innovation in theatre is **dramatic suspense**
 - no statement at the beginning of the play telling the audience the resolution of the plot
 - e.g. the end of the prologue of *Adelphoe*:

So, don't expect to hear the plot of the play here.
The old men who come on first will reveal it, some of it,
The action will unveil the rest.

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The “Roman” in Roman Comedy

- why did the Romans invent dramatic suspense?
 - better, why *didn't* the Greeks?
- the Greeks needed to feel superior to the play, whereas the Romans did not
 - part of the Romans' general attitude that a play is a *ludus* (“playtime”)