

S. M. Goldberg  
"The Death of Comedy"  
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S. M. Goldberg examines the decline of the popularity of Roman Comedy after Terence in his article "The Death of Comedy." He maintains that a lack of traditional tragic meters, combined with Terence's brilliance and inaccessibility led the decline in popularity of Roman comedy. Goldberg cites Turpilus as the final Roman comic playwright, who had returned to earlier comic traditions before declining into obscurity.

Greek Tragedy used a different poetic meter than was used in Old Comedy, and the New Comedy of Menander would reference this meter when dealing with serious subjects. Roman drama did not have such distinctions between the poetic meters and could not use such cues to prepare the audience. Thus the quiet, introspective works of Menander were not as effective when translated in a true Menandrian style. Although Goldberg cites evidence that earlier Roman playwrights would often make references to a more tragic style, it was often in parody and he maintains that the subtle allusions of Menander were impossible for the more subtle Roman dramatists like Terence.

Goldberg claims that Terence's style of comedy was further weakened by his treatment of his characters. Terence's characters, Goldberg holds, are presented in an unsympathetic style that is loaded with irony and serves to highlight their weaknesses. While the comedies of Terence were brilliant and popular, this excellence and inaccessibility caused a dissatisfaction with later imitators. Later comic playwrights were forced to return to Roman traditions of the Attellan Farce until the genre eventually dwindled into obsolescence.