INTRODUCTION: TERENCE’S MIRROR STAGE

A. J. Boyle

tu quoque qui solus lecto sermone, Terenti,
conuersum expressumque Latina uoce Menandrum
in medium nobis sedatis motibus effers,
quiddam come loquens atque omnia dulcia dicens.

Cicero apud Suet. Vita Terenti 5

You, too, Terence, who alone puts Menander
On our public stage, transformed by choice speech
And shaped by the Latin tongue, in calm measures,
Speaking finely and saying all things sweetly.

tu quoque, tu in summis, o dimidiate Menander,
poneris, et merito, puri sermonis amator.
lenibus atque utinam scriptis adiuncta foris uis,
comica ut aequato uirtus polleret honore
cum Graecis, neue hac despectus parte iaceres.
unum hoc maceror ac doleo tibi desse, Terenti.

Caesar apud Suet. Vita Terenti 5

Your place, also, yours, lies, O demi-Menander,
Among the best, and justly, lover of pure speech.
If only your smooth writings possessed vigour, too,
To win for your comic prowess respect to match
The Greeks and thereby avoid this scornful neglect.
This one deficiency vexes, pains me, Terence.

rursum inter latinos quis utilior loquendi auctor quam Terentius? purus,
tersus et quotidiano sermoni proximus, tum ipso quoque argumenti
genere iucundus adolescentiae.

Erasmus, De Ratione Studii (1512)

Again among the Latins what writer of dialogue is a better model than Terence? Pure, terse and most close to ordinary speech, and in the form of ‘argument’, too, pleasing to youth.

Quant a bon Térence, la mignardise et les graces du langage latin, je le trouve admirable à représenter au vif les mouvements de l’âme et condition de nos mœurs.

Michel de Montaigne, Des livres (1580)

The purity of his style, the delicacy of his turns, and the justness of his characters, were all of them beauties which the greater part of his audience were incapable of tasting.

William Congreve, The Way of the World (1700)
Térence est unique, surtout dans ses récits. C’est une onde pure et transparente qui coule toujours également, et qui ne prend de vitesse et de murmure que ce qu’elle en reçoit de la pente et du terrain.

D. Diderot, *Discours sur la poésie dramatique* (1759)

The language which he received from Plautus he improved and rendered more artistic by shaping it carefully to the graceful rhythm and diction of the Greek dramatists, notably Menander. This is his great gift to Roman Literature.

S.G. Ashmore, *The Comedies of Terence* (1908)

Terence is the most Christian writer of pagan antiquity. It is not difficult to find in Greek, even in Latin, literature authors who surpass him in profundity of thought and feeling, in beauty of language, in wideness of appeal. But in this noble realization that ‘We are members one of another’ he comes nearest to St Paul.

G. Norwood, *The Art of Terence* (1923)

Terence died young, and could be judged a failure in his own day.


The kind of seriousness that Terence brought to comedy was never a Roman seriousness, and, ultimately, his comedy failed to be a Roman comedy.


The life and dramatic production of Publius Terentius Afer, known in the English-speaking world as Terence, have perplexed, fascinated and inspired readers, audiences and playwrights from the time of the poet’s disappearance from the Roman public scene c.159 bce until the present day. Conflicting accounts of Terence’s life and death make it impossible to recover plausibly what transpired after the proclaimed ‘third’ performance of *Hecyra* in 160 bce. Nor is it much easier to recover what happened in the two and a half decades of life conventionally attributed to him. None of this has prevented the creation of a whole set of detailed fictions concerned with Terence’s relationship with the Roman elite, especially the ‘circle’ of Scipio Aemilianus, based upon unreliable and contradictory sources, of which the Suetonius-Donatus ‘Life’ is a conspicuous instance. The dramatic texts themselves come equipped with ancient but non-contemporary production notices, which were attached to the medieval manuscripts and have been the basis for much speculative, biographical construction.

The following nine previously unpublished essays (most were commissioned specifically for this project) address those dramatic texts afresh. The biographical and production literature surrounding the texts is not ignored, nor is the well
documented influence of Terence's comedies on Renaissance and post-Renais­sance European drama, letters and education, to which Betty Radice drew atten­tion in the introduction to her 1976 Penguin translation. The focus, however, is on the texts themselves and on them as mirrors not only of the Roman world which produced them but of the values and ideological debates which were re­constituting that world and the poet’s ener­gic role in that reconstitution. The notion of the ‘mirror’ may seem crude, but its use is designed in part to create an analogy between the ‘mirror stage’ of Lacanian psychoanalysis when the ‘self’ begins to be constituted and the (at least auxiliary) role of Terentian drama in recreating Roman identity. The notion of the mirror also proves useful in drawing attention to, and distinguishing between, the (unintentional) self-reflex­ion of much Terentian criticism and the culturally, socially and textually spe­cific essays which form this volume.

In the fourth essay below John Henderson comments on the abuse of Ter­ence’s plays for a number of extraneous purposes, including their systematic and repeated infantilisation in the service of pedagogy and their appropriation as paradigms of ‘the classical’. Terence has often been paraded as the embodiment of ‘classical humanism’, when what seems to have been involved is less the de­scription of properties of the dramatic texts or of their performance, more the transformation of those texts into a mirror of the reader/­critic/teacher’s concept of the ‘classical’. The object of such a reader’s hermeneutic eye has often not been ‘classical’ Terence, but her/his ideology displayed in the text. Think of some of the most famous ‘humanistic’ lines ripped from their dramatic context:

homo sum: humani nil a me alienum puto.
(Heautontimorumenos 77)

I am a man: I regard nothing human alien to me.

Thus a ‘humanistic’ translation. These words are spoken by an unsympathetic busybody (Chremes) pretentiously defending his right to interfere—an overbear­ing, self-deceived or even hypocritical busybody, who by the end of the play has repeatedly insulted his wife (HT 630ff., 1006ff.) and threatened to ‘alienate’ his own son for behaviour contrary to his wishes (HT 940ff.). Less ‘humanistic’ and closer to the mark is Henderson’s rendering:

I’m a person; no ‘personal stuff’s other people’s’, I reckon.

The same meddling, opinionated paterfamilias is the author of another wisdom of ‘classical humanism’, the list of bona or ‘assets’ underlying happiness—

parentis, patriam incolu­mem, amicos, genus, cognatos, diti­as
(Heautontimorumenos 194)

Parents, secure homeland, friends, bloodline, relatives, wealth
A plethora of such aphorisms could be cited. Three follow:

quot homines, tot sententiae.

(Phormio 454)

As many opinions as people.

Quoted by the prince of humanism, Cicero, at De Finibus 1.15, the phrase in Terence is spoken by an unattractive legal adviser who wishes to avoid responsibility for his own advice.

ingeniumst omnium
hominum ab labore procliue ad lubidinem.

(Andria 77f.)

It’s human nature
To be inclined to pleasure after toil.

This generalising reflection on the human condition comes from the mouth of a ‘simulating’ father as an ‘explanation’ of the process by which impoverished women prostitute themselves. It is uttered shortly after the Greek proverb ‘nothing in excess’ (ne quid nimis, And. 62) is quoted as life principle by his own status-conscious ex-slave.

nullumst iam dictum quod non dictum sit prius.

(Eunuch 41)

Nothing is said which has not been said before.

Not an anticipation of a poststructuralist theory of language in which everything is already said but a justification of Terence’s own reformulations of Greek plays.

The plays in fact are highly sententious, but many of their sententiae derive not from any ideals of humanism, but, as befits the comic genre, from proverbial ‘wisdom’ and popular discourse:

Lorsqu’il généralise une maxime, c’est d’une manière simple et populaire; vous croiriez que c’est un proverbe reçu qu’il a cité.

(D. Diderot, Discours sur la poésie dramatique [1759])
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Indeed often it is a ‘received proverb which he has cited’: fortis fortuna adiuuat (‘Fortune favours the brave’, Phorm. 203); dictum sapienti sat est (‘A word is enough to the wise’, Phorm. 541); amantium irae amoris integratior (‘Lovers’ quarrels are love’s renewal’, And. 555); sine Cerere et Libero friget Venus (‘Without food and wine love freezes’, Eun. 732). The plays also contain ‘anti-humanistic’ or at least ‘unhumanistic’ aphorisms, which ought in themselves to prohibit the decontextualisation of Terence’s ‘wisdoms’:

obsequium amicos, ueritas odium parit.

(Andria 68)

Obsequiousness begets friends, truth hatred.

qui mi, ubi ad uxor uentumst, tum fiunt senes.

(Phormio 1010)

Only with their wives do men remember their age.

persuasit nox, amor, uinum, adulescentia:
humanumst.

(Adelphoe 470f.)

He was led astray by night, love, wine, youth:
It’s human nature.

The last exegetic wisdom is a justification of rape. ‘Male sexism’, to use an anachronistic term, is a recurring feature of the presentation of elite fathers and sons in Terence, in which the playwright’s ‘humanism’ lies not in the crafted lines of the play but in a dramatic context of exposure and critique. Laches’ misogynistic outburst in Hecyra is well known:

pro deum atque hominum fidem, quod hoc genus est, quae haec est coniuratio!

utin omnes mulieres eadem aeque studeant nolintque omnia,
neque declinatam quicquam ab aliarum ingenio ullam reperias!
itaque adeo uno animo omnes socrus oderunt nurus.
uiris esse aduorsas aeque studiumst, similis pertinaciast,
in eodemque omnes mihi uidentur ludo doctae ad malitiam. et ei ludo, si ullus est, magistram hanc esse satis certo scio.

(Hecyra 198-204)

By the worth of gods and men, what a breed they are, what a conspiracy!
All women have the same passions and aversions about everything,
You would not find one whose nature differed a jot from the others.
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All mothers-in-law are of one accord in hating their daughters-in-law. They are equally passionate foes of their husbands, similarly wilful. I reckon they're all graduates in evil from the same school. And if that school exists I'm quite certain my wife is its principal.

What makes Laches' homily rebound upon its speaker is that the prejudicial 'truisms' at its heart are not simply hugely deficient as a description of women but in the specific case to which they apply (Laches' wife, Sostrata) totally, as the audience knows, contrary to fact. As often in Terence, the context of an utterance undermines the utterance itself.

Sensitivity to dramatic context is the required foundation of all Terentian studies, not only those engaged in the hunt for Terence's 'humanism', but also, and especially, those which seek, as the majority of essays in this volume do, to address another kind of context: the historical, social and cultural ideosphere with which the plays interact, by which they are constructed, and by which they themselves construct. This 'cultural context' is the predominant concern of the following essays. They direct their attention primarily to two under-investigated, coactive aspects of Terence's mirror stage: its reflection and reconstitution of a distinctly Roman world. The first essay by William Anderson provides a close reading of the Simo-Sosia scene at the beginning of Andria (28-171) aimed at displaying not only the inventiveness of the playwright (who is indebted neither to Menander nor to Plautus for the character and complex dramatic functions of this protatic figure) but that playwright's concern to mirror a specific and previously undramatised Roman social reality. 'Sosia is not only the only freedman character in Terence's six comedies but also, it seems, the first freedman to play an important role in Roman literature.' What Terence's audience sees dramatised before them, apparently for the first time, is social interaction between a patronus and his libertus-cliens (freedman-client), filled with reminders of the nexus of Roman obligations and values which define that relationship.

The relationship, however, which seems most to define Terentian comedy, the values and obligations of which are subject to insistent dramatic scrutiny, is that between fathers and sons. The essays of Elaine Fantham and Susan Lape examine Terence's dramatisation of that relationship. Fantham reviews the ancient evidence for Terence's life within the context of contemporary Roman realities and argues that the likely circumstances of that life would have necessitated the dramatist's evolution as an educator. She construes the focus on 'the maturing of the filius familias' and on father-son relationships as a paedagogic focus quite different from the socio-economic and civic obsessions of Menander and aimed not at the citizen body as a whole but rather at 'the fathers and more particularly the sons of Rome's elite'. Terence's goal is presented as a conservative one: 'the maintenance of respect for authority within the Roman family'. Lape's anthropological approach generates a different reading. Her investigation of Andria, Heautontimorumenos and Adelphoe examines what she sees as the
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problematic of Roman social kinship. She argues that the plays are concerned not simply with father-son relationships but with the conflict between fathers and sons and with the origin of that conflict and of its stresses and strains in the hierarchical relationship between them. Against the dictates of hierarchical social kinship the plays, Lape argues, often set 'natural kinship', the biological relationship of father to son, and its affective bonds. According to Lape Terence moves from a critique of 'the corrosive effects of excessive paternal power' in *Andria*, to a similar critique in *Heautontimorumenos* combined with a more complex presentation of the tempering of that power by 'the affective bonds of natural kinship', to a justification for the hierarchy of social kinship 'based on nature' in Terence's final play, *Adelphoe*. The emphasis in Terence is not, as in Menander, on the young lover's civic identity, but on his kinship identity—which makes Terentian comedy not less political, but more Roman.

A more detailed account of *Heautontimorumenos* may be found in John Henderson's analysis, in which he takes issue with the infantalising approach to the play and its paradigmatic role in western humanism. Henderson presents a complex and linguistically attentive exploration of the drama from prologue to finale, focusing primarily on the play's presentation of selfhood and alterity through the acting out of relationships between *paterfamilias*, *domus*, civic community and neighbourhood. It is a reading which integrates the inter-generational conflicts and complicities, including Chremes' treatment of his son in the final scene of the play and Menedemus' *domus*-brothel, into the drama's provocative thematic design, which shifts between a critical exhibition of social relations and 'a pangram of the self', aimed at 'telling Rome the truth'.

Some of that 'truth' is patently economic. Joseph Smith in his study of Terence's *Phormio* sees imbricated within the play's double plot competitive economies of exchange: the conservative and conserving market of fathers and the open fluid market of the town which lures sons to independent and radical choices and to spending and spreading their fathers' wealth. That the paternal economy is not evaluated by the play as intrinsically prestigious or as superior to that of the sons is interpreted by Smith as something intended for the audience's social and not simply dramatic consumption. Issues of economics and of 'familial reproduction' are central also to Kathleen McCarthy's inquiry into the slave-figures of Terence's plays, whose dramatisation she construes as radically conservative, involving both a break with the fantasy figures of the Roman comic tradition (especially with Plautus) and a return to the greater social realism of Terence's Greek models. According to McCarthy, 'Terence not so much reduced the role of slaves as normalised it to a surrounding frame of naturalism', integrating them 'as members of the household' and focusing on their function in fostering familial (but not their own) reproduction. Social interaction between slave and free in Terentian comedy seems often 'double-edged', allowing the audience/reader to entertain conflicting perspectives on the hierarchy of the Roman *familia*. 
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It will be clear from the preceding essays that Terence is a thoroughly Roman playwright and not a slavish reproducer of the language and ideology of his 'source-texts'. Translation was the defining Roman activity. Rome translated everything (well, almost everything) in its appropriation of the world. It translated nations, people, birds, buildings, sculpture, poems, paintings, livers, historians, poets, ideas and idea-makers into constituents of Roman culture. Siobhan McElduff’s essay on Terence as translator emphasises not only the language of Terence’s self-descriptions but his casual treatment of inherited plots and his relationship to the Roman comic tradition to argue for a translator who rewrote Greek texts both to reflect ‘his culture’s aims and needs’ and to surpass his Greek masters. McElduff’s essay reminds us that literary ambitions and aims should not be neglected in a final evaluation of Terence. Such aims are at the centre of John Penwill’s analysis of the complex and difficult Hecyra, which examines the ‘comedy’ through its rewriting of the play immediately preceding it (in composition, if not successful performance), namely Andria. He presents Terence’s second play as an exposure of the fragility of the conventions of New Comedy, a ‘stripping bare’ of the comic love-hero and dramatisation of the hypocrisies and lies underlying the values—pietas, pudor and especially hones-tas—(not only) of its characters.

What McElduff and Penwill underscore is how the plays mirror Terence’s literary as well as cultural context—indeed his dramatic and personal situation. Here, of course, the famous allegedly ‘non-expository’ prologues of the comedies come into their own. Until recently, the prologues were seen as designed to be read as personal documents separate from the plays, concerned with (in Goldberg’s phrase: 1986, 32) ‘arcane literary polemics’. So too Norwood (1923), Duckworth (1952), Radice (1976), Brothers (1988), Anderson (2003-4)... There have been exceptions, such as Dessen (1995), who argued for the relevance of notions advanced in the prologue of Eunuchus to the thematic thrust of the play, and Henderson, who in this volume sees the prologue of the Heautontimorumenos as setting out a model of ‘a socially reliant selfhood’ relevant to the dramatic action. Emily Gowers takes this further and reads all Terence’s prologues as integral to, indeed programmatic of, the ideological structure and development of the specific plays they individually introduce. Ideas such as knowledge, style, transference, neglect, labour, exemplarity, violence, theft, ‘contamination’, ingratiatin, service, impartiality etc. used in the prologues with reference to Terence’s dramatic situation become the central ideas of each play, directing thematic movement, plot and moral force. There is a clear sense in which, far from jettisoning the expository prologue, Terence reinvented it in a new and covert form. An aspect of this newness is, Gowers argues, the way in which each prologue makes the play which follows self-reflexive, although this is not Gowers’ term, a mirror of the poet himself and of his dramatic and personal situation. The resulting image of the vulnerable poet dependent on social acceptance is precisely the image ‘rehearsed’ in the ancient biographies. To which should be added Anderson’s gentle suggestion below that Terence’s first
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‘original’ character, Andria’s freedman Sosia, may well reflect aspects of the playwright’s own vulnerable social context.

Readers are invited to enjoy this collection of essays. If further hermeneutic guidance is required, they might try Hamlet’s famous homily on what the greatest of English dramatists called ‘playing’:

[The] end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as ‘twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.

(Hamlet 3.2.1ff.)

Terence’s ‘playing’ displays, dismembers and reconstitutes the ‘body’ of his time.

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