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TERENCE

THE WOMAN OF ANDROS
THE SELF-TORMENTOR
THE EUNUCH

Edited and Translated by
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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Terence and His Background

Most of our information about the life and background of Publius Terentius Afer comes from the biography written by Suetonius in the second century A.D., preserved for us (with an additional paragraph) by the fourth-century commentator Donatus. This tells us that Terence was born at Carthage and became the slave at Rome of the senator Terentius Lucanus, by whom on account of his intelligence and good looks he was given not only a liberal education but also his freedom. He enjoyed the friendship of many of the nobility, especially Scipio Aemilianus and Laelius; he also gained the approval of Caecilius, the leading comic dramatist of the day, to whom he read the script of his first play, *The Woman of Andros*, before it was approved for performance. After writing six comedies, allegedly with the help of his noble friends, Terence left Rome for Greece, still not yet twenty-five years of age, and died on the return journey. He left a daughter, who married into an equestrian family, and a small estate near the temple of Mars.

NOTE. This Introduction is an adapted version of the Introduction to John Barsby (ed.), *Terence: Eunuchus* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 1–32.

Suetonius, who quotes a number of conflicting sources, is himself unhappy with several of these details; and modern scholars have been even more sceptical. Terence's alleged Carthaginian origin could simply be a false deduction from the cognomen Afer (= the African), and the story of Caecilius reading the script of *Andria* is open to the chronological objection that Caecilius died two years before that play was performed. It may be too neat a coincidence that Terence's departure from Rome at the age of twenty-four in 160 B.C. puts his birth in 184 B.C., which is precisely the year of the death of Plautus; it also means that he was a young man of only eighteen years when his first play was performed in 166.[1] Terence's connections with Scipio and Laelius, though vouched for by several authorities mentioned by Suetonius, may ultimately be a conjecture based on the reference in the prologue of *The Brothers* (15–16) to "the malicious accusation that members of the nobility assist our poet and collaborate with him in his writing" and on the evidence from the Production Notices (*didascaliae*) of *The Brothers* and *The Mother-in-Law* (second performance) that these two plays were put on at the funeral games of Scipio's father Aemilius Paullus.

There is very little about Terence's life that can be asserted as fact; if we reject Suetonius' evidence, we have to admit that we know very little about him at all. But, given Terence's involvement with the funeral games of Aemilius Paullus, it is by no means an implausible assumption that he was an associate of Scipio's and indeeed of Laelius and

[1] However, there is an alternative reading in the MSS of Suetonius' biography which would put Terence's birth ten years earlier.

others who shared Scipio's philosophical and literary interests and his predilection for Greek culture. Terence does not in fact deny the allegations that he received help from his noble friends, but "regards it as a great compliment if he finds favour with men who find favour with you all, men whose services have been freely available to everyone in time of need in war, in peace, and in their daily affairs" (*The Brothers* 17–21). This description does not in fact fit Scipio and Laelius, who were young men of Terence's own age, as well as it would fit Scipio's father Aemilius Paullus and men of his generation; but Terence may well be disguising the truth here in order to turn an allegation into a compliment.

The Production Notices which have been transmitted in the MSS together with the texts allow us to date Terence's six plays to the years 166–160 B.C. This puts them at a very interesting period in Rome's social and cultural history. It was a time when Roman contact with the civilisation of mainland Greece was at its height. Only two years before Terence's first play, in 168 B.C., Aemilius Paullus had won the decisive battle of the third Macedonian war and had brought home as part of the booty the library of the defeated king Perseus. The booty also included enough paintings and statues to fill 250 wagons; and, among the huge numbers of slaves, many must have been educated enough to serve as tutors in the houses of wealthy families or execute artistic commissions for their Roman masters.

The hellenisation of Rome was, of course, a lengthy process spread over several centuries, with Greek culture mediated first through the Etruscans and then through the Greek cities of South Italy and Sicily. Its effect is visible in

a number of ways long before the days of Terence, for example in the assimilation of Roman gods to their Greek counterparts or in the adoption by the lower classes of Greek colloquial vocabulary, as reflected in the plays of Plautus. But two clear trends are discernible in the second century B.C.: Greek influence is now derived direct from mainland Greece rather than from South Italy and Sicily, and a clear distinction begins to appear between the gradual hellenisation of the populace and the embracing by the aristocracy of the "higher" Greek culture of literature and the arts. And this cultural split between the aristocracy and the lower classes was accompanied by an ever growing economic division, caused by the sheer amount of wealth that foreign wars generated, whether fought in Greece or in Asia or in the west. The number of sumptuary laws passed in this period, attempting to restrict luxury of various kinds, shows both that luxury was widely enjoyed by the upper classes and that there were those among these same classes who thought that its spread should be controlled.

There were also those among the ruling classes who wanted to control the spread of hellenisation because of the threat that it presented to traditional Roman beliefs and ways of life. The evidence is patchy, but there are enough recorded incidents to make it clear that the opposition to the spread of Greek culture had some political strength. The worship of Bacchus was strictly regulated by the *senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus* of 186 B.C.; two Epicurean philosophers were banished from Rome in 173; and there was a general banishment of Greek philosophers and rhetoricians in 161. It would be an oversimplification to talk of a philhellenic party on the one hand, admirers of

Greek art, thought, and literature, and a nationalist party on the other, opposed to the spread of Greek culture, or to suppose that Rome's freeing of Greece after the second Macedonian war and her favourable treatment of Athens after the third owed more to sentiment than to practical political and military considerations. But there is no reason to deny a general polarisation of opinion, which can conveniently be illustrated by reference to Plutarch's biographies of Cato and Aemilius Paullus: Cato himself instructed his son in Roman history and law, whereas Aemilius employed Greek tutors to extend the education of his sons to grammar, logic, rhetoric, sculpture, and painting.[2]

It would be surprising if the conflict between the two points of view did not extend to the theatre. Roman drama, both tragedy and comedy, was closely based on Greek models, and the morality depicted in it, whether the grand crimes of tragedy or the private peccadilloes of comedy, could easily be seen as inimical to the Roman ideals of the *mos maiorum*. In 194 B.C. senators were voted special seats in the theatre on the proposal of the consul Scipio Africanus, a known philhellenist, which looks like an assertion of the respectability of the theatre as a place for the ruling classes. On the other hand attempts to build a permanent stone theatre at Rome were thwarted on at least three occasions in the first half of the second century B.C.;[3] the opposition to the attempt by the censors of 154 was led by Scipio Nasica, a known upholder of Roman morality. In fact, there was no permanent theatre at Rome until

[2] Plutarch, *Cato the Elder* 20.3–5, *Aemilus Paullus* 6.4–5.

[3] See for example Livy 40.51.3, 41.27.5.

Pompey built one in 55 B.C., and there must have been other grounds for opposition than the vain hopes of the conservatives to protect public morality or to check the popularity of the drama. Whatever the precise explanation, the general point is clear: Terence was writing at a time when the conflict between Greek ethics and traditional Roman morality was a live issue, and this conflict was bound to be reflected by a dramatist adapting Greek models for a Roman audience.

Theatrical Conditions and Stage Conventions

Dramatic performances (*ludi scaenici*) were part of the regular public festivals (*ludi*) which were held at Rome in an annual season which ran from April to November and also of occasional private games held to celebrate triumphs or funerals. The four public festivals which included *ludi scaenici* in Terence's day were the Ludi Megalenses (in honour of the Magna Mater) in April, the Ludi Apollinares (in honour of Apollo) in July, the Ludi Romani (in honour of Jupiter Optimus Maximus) in September, and the Ludi Plebeii (also in honour of Jupiter) in November. We know from the Production Notices that four of Terence's plays were performed at the Ludi Megalenses, two at the Ludi Romani, and two at the funeral games of Aemilius Paullus.[4]

These festivals, though religious festivals in the names of the various gods, were in spirit very much public holidays, offering various forms of entertainment for the

[4] This total (eight) includes the two unsuccessful stagings of *The Mother-in-Law*.

people at large; apart from several days of *ludi scaenici*, the public festivals regularly included one or more days of *ludi circenses* (chariot races), and *munera* (gladiatorial shows) were a common feature of private games. In this atmosphere the comic dramatists were not always sure of their audience, and the plea for a fair hearing in silence which can be found at the end of each of Terence's prologues is no empty convention. The prologue to the third performance of *The Mother-in-Law* (33–42) reveals that the first performance had to be abandoned because of rumours that boxers and tightrope walkers would appear, and the second because a gladiatorial show was announced, and these were not isolated instances; the speaker of this prologue, the veteran producer Lucius Ambivius Turpio, makes it clear that he had had similar trouble in obtaining a hearing for the early plays of Terence's predecessor Caecilius (14–27).

Ambivius Turpio was in fact, according to the Production Notices, the producer of all six of Terence's plays, and it is clear from the prologues of *The Self-Tormentor* and *The Mother-in-Law*, both of which he spoke in person, that he played a significant part in promoting Terence's dramatic career.[5] The producer (or actor-manager) was an important figure in Roman drama. It seems that, like the modern impresario, he acted as the middle man between the dramatist and the magistrates in charge of the festival (normally the aediles but a praetor in the case of the Ludi Apollinares), buying the text from the playwright and con-

[5] Ambivius' reputation in antiquity is attested by references in both Cicero (*On Old Age* 48) and Tacitus (*Dialogue on Orators* 20.3).

tracting with the magistrate to mount the performance of the play; this he did with his own company of actors, often taking the leading role himself (*The Self-Tormentor* 35–52). The size of these acting companies at Rome is a matter of speculation; most Roman comedies can be done with six or seven actors doubling parts as necessary and it would have been uneconomic to maintain troupes much larger than this. The actors themselves, it seems, generally belonged to the lower classes, including freedmen and even slaves, and it may be deduced from the fact that very few names have been preserved before the first century B.C. that, unlike their counterparts at Athens, they were not highly regarded in society.

As we have seen, there was no permanent theatre at Rome in Terence's day. Tacitus (*Annals* 14.20) envisages early Roman theatres as consisting of "hastily erected steps (that is, tiers of seats) and a temporary stage" (*subitariis gradibus et scaena in tempus structa*), and Terence's plays must have been performed in some such settings as these. It is uncertain whereabouts in Rome these temporary theatres were set up; the forum was an obvious place, and there is some indication that theatres were erected near the temple of the god to whom the particular festival was dedicated. The actual structures, being wooden, have left no archeological trace, and there is very little, if anything, that we can say with confidence about their size or shape. The external evidence suggests that we can assume a stage building (*scaena*) with three doors in its façade,[6] a platform stage (*proscaenium*) of which the depth and width and height cannot be determined, and

[6] For the three-door set see Pollux 4.124, Vitruvius 5.6.8.

an auditorium (*cavea*) consisting of benches (*subsellia*) probably raised in tiers but not necessarily arranged in a semicircle. The texts of the plays confirm the three-door setting, which itself implies a stage of a certain width but little else. The frequency of eavesdropping and asides does not of itself prove that the stage was of great length or equipped with suitable hiding places (such as side alleys or porches); once the eavesdropping convention was established, the audience would accept that characters looking the wrong way or engrossed in their own thoughts would fail to see or hear others onstage.

As for costumes and masks and styles of acting, we again lack contemporary evidence. The name *fabula palliata* or "play in a Greek cloak" (*pallium* is the Latin equivalent of the Greek ἱμάτιον), which the Romans gave to the type of Greek-based comedy written by Plautus and Terence, makes it clear that the costumes, like the locations, were Greek, and it seems highly likely that the *fabula palliata* took over the masks of the Greek tradition together with the costumes.[7] We have a list of 44 masks compiled by the encyclopedist Pollux in the second century A.D., which describes (for example) ten different types of old men's masks and seven different types of slaves' masks (Pollux 4.143–54), but our best guide to the appearance of masks and costumes and indeed to styles of acting is to be found in the artistic tradition (terracottas, reliefs, mosaics, wall paintings, bronzes) which remains surprisingly homogeneous over several centuries throughout the Greek and Roman world. The most striking masks are those of

[7] The literary evidence for masks in the early Roman theatre is curiously self-contradictory.

the leading *senex* and *servus* with their frowning foreheads, beetling brows, and trumpet mouths; those of the *adulescens* and the various female characters are rather more lifelike. Pollux (4.118–120) also provides us with a description of costumes, which can be similarly augmented by the artistic tradition. Free characters wear a long tunic reaching to the ankles (in the case of males) or to the ground (in the case of females) with a shorter *pallium* on top; slaves tend to wear a knee-length tunic only, with the *pallium* thrown around their shoulders (*pallium collectum*); soldiers wear an elaborate travelling uniform which includes a cloak (*chlamys*), sword (*machaera*), and military cap (*petasus*). Different characters wear different colours, for example red for young men, white for slaves, and green or light blue for old women. As for acting style, we can no doubt assume a lively style with much gesticulation (in masked drama seen from a distance the gestures provide a valuable clue to who is speaking); the artistic evidence suggests the brandishing of sticks by old men and the adoption of a particular wide-legged stance by slaves.

Roman comedy inherited a number of stage conventions from the Greeks together with the texts. The doors in the façade of the stage building represent neighbouring houses (or sometimes two houses and a shrine), and the stage represents a street. All the dialogue takes place in the street; indoor scenes cannot be portrayed, and more distant action has to be narrated. The two side entrances to the stage have a fixed conventional significance; unfortunately our evidence is confused, but the convention seems to have been that the right-hand entrance (from the audience's point of view) leads to the forum and the left-hand

one in the opposite direction (that is, to the harbour or the country).[8] Characters approaching from the wings are normally seen and announced by one of the characters on stage before they become visible to the audience; similarly an entry from one of the stage houses is often foreshadowed by a reference to the sound of the doors opening. Characters entering from the houses frequently deliver a final "over the shoulder" remark to complete a conversation which has been going on indoors; this gives the audience some inkling of what has been said inside, and helps to provide some continuity between house and stage. If two characters enter together (whether from the wings or from one of the stage houses), they usually enter in mid-conversation; more often a single character enters, who typically utters a monologue of greater or lesser length.

The monologue is another feature that Roman comedy inherited from Greek. Monologues are used to narrate what has happened offstage, or to offer reflections on the situation, or to deliberate on a course of action; some monologues fulfil more than one of these functions. A few monologues can be regarded as genuine soliloquies, where a character wrestles with some emotional problem, but most are in fact artificial speeches delivered for the audience's benefit, though the so-called "dramatic illusion" is normally preserved whereby the characters are enclosed within the world of the play and do not directly interact

[8] Vitruvius (5.6.8) states for the Roman theatre that one entrance led from the town (*a foro*) and the other from foreign parts (*a peregre*) but does not state which was which; Pollux's account for the Greek theatre (4.125–7) is hopelessly confused.

with the spectators. Monologues chiefly occur at the beginnings or endings of scenes. By far the commonest is the "overheard entrance monologue" at the beginning of a new scene, spoken by an entering character who is unaware of the presence of eavesdroppers onstage; such monologues can be quite lengthy and are often accompanied by asides and terminated by elaborate recognition formulas. Simple entrance monologues (ones delivered on an empty stage) also occur but are not so frequent. Monologues occur also at the end of the scene, where there are two possibilities, the "link monologue," where the speaker stays onstage to lead into the next scene, and the "exit monologue," after which the speaker departs leaving the stage empty.

The "eavesdropping aside" is not the only type of aside that Roman comedy took over from Greek comedy. There is also the "aside in conversation," where a character turns aside to utter a remark that is not meant to be heard by a dialogue partner. Asides of both kinds may be addressed to nobody in particular, or, where there are three characters on stage, to a second character unheard by the third. The object is often to amuse the audience, but the spectators are not normally directly addressed and the dramatic illusion is therefore maintained. The aside convention may seem to us highly artificial, but it is clear that it was readily accepted by both Greek and Roman audiences.

Terence and His Greek Originals

It was inevitable that the Roman dramatists in adapting Greek comedies for the Roman stage would modify them in significant ways. Not only were they writing for a differ-

ent kind of audience at a different kind of festival in a different kind of theatre. There was bound also to be some influence from traditional Italian forms of popular entertainment, notably the Atellan farce, the phlyax drama of South Italy, and the mime, whose common features seem to have included improvisation and a tendency towards farce, ribaldry, and stock characters.

The extent to which the Roman tradition had diverged from the Greek by the early second century B.C. can be highlighted by contrasting the typical features of Plautus, for whom we have twenty-one surviving plays spanning the years from about 205 to 184 B.C., with those of Menander, who is the only writer of Greek New Comedy whose plays survive to us in significant quantity. There is inevitably still much in common in terms of characters and plot elements, but there is a considerable difference both in tone and in structure. The setting of a Plautine play is formally Greek, but the stage is peopled by characters who, though they wear Greek clothes and are careful to refer to the Romans as "foreigners" (*barbari*), tend to lapse into Roman jokes or allude to Roman topography and laws and customs. The characters are overdrawn rather than realistically portrayed; real-life roles and relationships are inverted; and certain larger-than-life character types predominate, notably the tricky slave, the pimp, the swaggering soldier, the greedy courtesan, the lecherous husband. Intrigue and trickery are the main focus of the plot, and the dénouement turns on the success or failure of the tricksters and their schemes rather than on the resolution of a genuine human problem. The language of the play is no longer natural but artificial and exuberant, with abuse and insults, direct address to the audience, puns and word-