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The Originality of Terence and His Greek Models

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It is remarkable what different judgements about the poetical achievement of Terence can be found in modern scholarship. One finds him represented sometimes as a mere translator and adapter, sometimes as an original poet worthy to stand beside Menander himself. The best representative of the first view is Jachmann, who saw Terence's independence at work only in *contaminatio*. But the main tendency in Terentian scholarship of the last few decades has been to go in the other direction, to emphasize the originality of Terence as a poet and to discover that in remodeling the Greek comedies he created a new kind of drama and that he added important new elements of his own, even when he lost some of the beauties of his Greek sources. Norwood was the most extreme in this line—he granted Terence the liberties of a Shakespeare using Plutarch—and therefore his views have not been accepted by the majority of scholars. But a considerable number of German and Italian Latinists also depict Terence as a Roman poet in his own right. There are divergencies, but on the whole they share a view of Terence remodeling and reworking the Greek comedies according to his own artistic ideals. Terence, in their view, aimed at a more realistic drama, avoiding the comedy of typical scenes and characters, eliminating actors' addresses to the public, shortening unrealistic long gnomic reflexions, strengthening the colloquial language and attempting to give his figures individual features. Likewise, according to these critics, he despised coarseness and vulgarity and deepened noble and humane sentiments, trying to show to his audience the right values. I may confess at the outset that I regard this picture in its essential points to be wrong and distorted, although I do not deny that some useful observations have been made; but, in my opinion, they have not been properly evaluated.

There seem to be three main reasons for this great range of opinion

about Terence's originality. First, we lack complete agreement about the nature and extent of Terence's departures from his lost Greek originals, and in some cases it will never be possible to determine them with certainty. Second, even if we agree about a specific alteration made by Terence, it is still often difficult to state its motive. And finally, classical scholars often seem in the case of Terence more emotionally involved than usual. Those who see in him a highly original poet sometimes accuse their opponents of a romantic phil-hellenism, while they in their turn seem not entirely uninfluenced by a certain determination to vindicate the independence of Latin literature at any price, or even by a nationalistic Italian pride in the Roman past. Nevertheless we should not give up before the problem of the originality of Terence. The problem is and will remain important for the development of Roman literature. It can be solved only by taking into consideration the relation of Terence's plays to his Greek models, and this relation is by no means in every case so impossible to determine objectively that we must restrict ourselves to a neutral *non liquet*. Although we do not have space here to discuss in detail all relevant arguments, I should like to touch on certain points which seem to me of special importance.

It has always been noticed that Terence in choosing his Greek models was influenced by definite characteristics of his own interests and tastes. He limited himself to Menander and his follower Apollodoros of Karystos. He was careful about a certain morality, keeping within the bounds of what the Roman meant by *decorum*. A lovesick old man, who perhaps becomes his son's rival for a *hetaira*, is not to be found in his plays. Menander's *senes* are all quite respectable, well-intentioned and serious fathers, who are as sincerely concerned as their wives for the happiness of their children. His slaves do intrigue, but are not too unscrupulous about it. He did not enjoy presenting frivolous *meretrices*. The respectful prostitute aroused his interest. He avoided the low and the fantastic, putting on stage domestic affairs such as could happen every day. He also preferred an action rich in characters, if possible with two pairs of lovers and a correspondingly double happy ending. There is normally a moving recognition of someone long lost. Finally, he is attracted not least by psychologically subtle delineation of humane and sensitive characters, by the representation of problems of interpersonal relations and of those concerning the proper behavior by the older generation towards the younger.

But it would be rash to suppose not only that these interests determined the choice of his models, but that in adapting the Greek comedies he deliberately emphasized and expanded these elements and thus was working on his own in the direction we have described. It can easily be shown that the opposite was often the case.

For three of his six plays Terence used a second Greek original. As he himself explains in a prologue (*Eunuchus* 7 ff.), he was convinced that it was not enough to translate a good Greek play in order to write a good Latin one, and so took the liberty, where he thought it in place, to work scenes or parts of scenes from a second Greek play into the primary model, the practice called *contaminatio*. What considerations guided him in the choice of his secondary models?

In the *Adelphoe* he inserted a scene from the *Synapothneskontes* (comrades in death) of Diphilos, in which a young man appears who has just stolen a girl out of a brothel and who now has the *leno*, who pursues him with insults, brought to reason by the blows of his slave. In Menander's *Adelphoi* the carrying off of the girl was only narrated, probably by the young man, and the *leno* appeared on stage later to negotiate for the damages. Terence thought it fitting to substitute a lively slapstick scene in place of the narrated event. Thus he strengthened the part of the *leno* and introduced a cudgeling scene, both contrary to the intentions which guided him in the choice of his primary model.

He evidently found that thus enlivening the *Adelphoe*, otherwise distinguished by its ethical and psychological interests, would not harm the play. His intentions therefore entail a certain compromise. On the one hand he wanted to get away from the traditional and, in his view, vulgar jokes of a Plautus to the cultivated and meaningful drama of Menander; on the other hand he apparently felt that you could have too much of a good thing. In his opinion the play could only gain by a bit more color. He overlooked or chose to ignore the fact that the omitted narration of Aeschinus contained an indication that Aeschinus was stealing the girl not for himself but for his brother. Such an explanation however was extremely important for the understanding of the speeches of the two fathers, since only thus does a proper judgement of the attitude of the mild Micio and the strict Demea become possible, and this is the whole point of the play. In the *Eunuchus* we can observe an analogous situation. Here Terence inserted monologues and dialogues from Menander's *Kolax*. The proven sure-fire types of the parasite and the *miles gloriosus* were

meant to enliven the action even more (perhaps because the dramatist had indifferent success with the more staid *Hecyra*). In Menander's *Eunuchos* in place of the parasite there stood only a slave, in place of the *miles* a less colorful rival. Both roles were less prominent there. So in the second act of the *Eunuchus* Terence inserted an effective bravura scene from the *Kolax*, the entrance speech of the parasite Gnatho. But this also shifted the emphasis of the scene. In Menander a slave had brought Pamphila, the girl to whose recognition the play leads, across the stage to the house of the *hetaira* Thais. This an event full of consequence for the whole drama, for it is in the house of Thais that the rape will take place, because of which the happy ending of the play is seriously endangered. Pamphila appears on stage only in this scene. She does not speak a word. But although two slaves carry on the dialogue, she remains by her very silence the center of attention. In Terence the parasite upstages her. For the sake of a momentary comic effect the careful disposition of the action is somewhat obscured.

At the end of the *Eunuchus* the soldier and the young Athenian agree to share the *hetaira* Thais. The parasite draws a commission. Such arrangements occurred in Menander's Athens. But this can not have been the conclusion of the Menandrian *Eunuchos*. It is in contradiction not only to the goal of the external action of this play, but also to the completion of its inner dramatic development. Thais has revealed herself in the course of the play—contrary to what one would have expected first—as a *bona meretrix*. She has solved all difficulties and behaved in a truly humane fashion. As a reward she has got a rich old Athenian as a patron and is finally united with the young man whom she loves. For her then to be treated as an article of merchandise is irreconcilable with the external and internal structure of the Menandrian *Eunuchos*. Terence's ending seems to have been composed in imitation of the *Kolax*, where the *hetaira* was not free but the property of a *leno*, and where such an arrangement, in which the parasite too gets his cut, suits excellently the young man's repeatedly emphasized lack of money and the wealth of the proud and stupid officer. Terence may have added this conclusion in order to gain one final comic effect. That is, the *miles* is led around by the nose once more through the agreement (his share will consist mostly of paying the bills) and the lucky parasite is the only real winner. For the sake of such effects Terence has destroyed the unity of the play, which he had maintained so far. He has weakened the unconventional

theme of the *bona meretrix*, which he had chosen, by adding two traditional comic types.

A quick look to the *Andria*: the origin of the parts which concern Charinus, the second lover of the play, is controversial. I follow the view of those who regard these passages not as an independent addition by Terence but as essentially a borrowing from the *Perinthia*. In any case, Terence preferred in this play too the fuller double plot and chose as a primary model not the coarser *Perinthia* but the psychologically refined *Andria*. He took from the *Perinthia* only what seemed to him suitable to enliven and enrich the *Andria*, for instance the motif of the drunken midwife, although this involves a slight inconsistency in her character.

Thus Terence chose in each case a psychologically complex Menander play as his primary model. But he enriched it and strengthened its farcical elements from cruder plays of Menander and Diphilos, doing some damage thereby to the balanced organization of his primary models. If one observes this compromising tendency of Terence, one is in no danger of accepting the widespread idea that he is responsible for a fundamental humanizing and deepening of his models and that his use of *contaminatio* was guided by a humane aesthetic ideal.

Further consideration of the way in which Terence combined parts of a second Greek play with his primary model may save us from another error. It is frequently assumed that *contaminatio* was often in effect a dissolution of the primary model and meant a new conception of the play as a whole. In the *Adelphoe*, to be sure, no one could fail to see that only one or two scenes were replaced by the scene from Diphilos. But in the *Eunuchus* a fundamental remodeling of the middle part has been generally assumed. In my opinion the additions from the *Kolax* are limited to four separate scenes. There are no elements which would give the action an essentially new direction. Only the conclusion, about which we have already spoken, does not fit into this picture. Here Terence actually made a decisive change and destroyed the original conception of the play. But here too he was influenced not by a new conception of the play as a whole, but rather by the desire for an effective conclusion, which led him into the dénouement taken from the *Kolax*. The earliest play of Terence, the *Andria*, is the most deeply affected by *contaminatio*—the whole plot. But an analogous plot with two lovers was probably already to be found in the *Perinthia*, and Terence was generally able to insert scenes from the *Perinthia* at corresponding places in the *Andria* and so had to

compose independently only the short final scene, in which Charinus is informed of the happy solution.

In no case was a radical alteration of the construction of the primary model necessary in order to work in the desired parts of the secondary model. Terence was able to get by with a few omissions, the addition of suitable transitions, retouchings to remove obvious contradictions and similar devices; and in this he succeeded quite well. The additions are far more carefully inserted than in Plautus, where marked inconsistencies and contradictions often become apparent.

Terence altered his originals in still other ways. The listing of a few examples suffices to show that it is misguided to explain these alterations, as has been done, from principles such as 'progress towards realistic drama', 'humanising and ennobling of the characters' or 'a will to the universally valid'. The desire for comprehensive syntheses and the wish to find deep meanings everywhere have often led to exaggerations and forced interpretations, or to the overlooking of contrary instances.

When Terence omits the name of an Athenian suburb and instead writes *in his regionibus*, it is certainly paying too much honor to this modification to see in such an avoidance of a reference too specifically Greek a search for the universal. Naturally Terence left out Greek place-names and customs which meant nothing to his public, as far as he could do so without harm to the intelligibility of the action. Unlike Plautus he consciously avoided for the most part allusions to anything specifically Roman. It was his principle to keep the Greek milieu of the plays except for certain details which seemed to him pointless and could only make comprehension more difficult.

Thus, for instance, it was a specifically Greek custom to cut one's hair short as a sign of mourning. Apollodoros, the author of the original of the Terentian *Phormio*, had a barber report to the young men waiting in his shop that he had just cut the hair of a poor and beautiful girl who had lost her mother. The young Antipho decides to visit her and falls in love at once with the girl, who at the end of the play is fortunately recognised as the daughter of a well-to-do citizen—and they live happily ever after. In Terence, too, the young men are sitting in the barber's shop, but the barber as narrator must disappear, to eliminate the non-Roman custom of cutting the hair in mourning. Instead Terence has a weeping young man enter who has just seen the unfortunate girl and describes her with emotion. The barber will probably have told the story without tears. Terence then would have

also sentimentalized the scene. But it is certainly out of place to speak on that account of a deepening of emotional and spiritual content. In terms of the rest of the play this change, though it makes the scene itself more moving, creates difficulties later, because the agitation of the weeping young man is more than his merely intermediary role calls for. The spectators' interest in him is aroused and in his further connection with the poor girl, an interest which is not satisfied later on. For the young man immediately disappears into the wings, and, as in Apollodoros, only Antipho matters.

There are other instances of a certain sentimentalizing. This tendency however is not in undisputed command. Thus, to take one example, Terence does not allow an unhappy lover to think, as in Menander, of suicide, but only of emigration. A feeling for the limits of Roman common sense seems to have been at work here.

Still another tendency becomes apparent when we consider the negro slave girl who appears in the *Eunuchus*. Terence added her as a mute part, certainly for no other reason than that the audience would like to see this exotic figure. He sometimes kept minor figures on stage longer than in the original, or had them appear earlier. In these cases he gives them a few unimportant lines; otherwise they stand around rather purposelessly. His aim was to enrich the appearance of the stage.

But the playwright gives evidence of a more creative ability when he transforms a narrative monologue into a dialogue by introducing a second person, as he apparently sometimes did (Cf. Sosia and Simo in *An.* 11 and Antipho in *Eun.* 3. 4/5 (but this figure may have been in the original already, see *Philologus* 103 (1959) 32, n.1). There he enlivened the scene with poetical talent. But once, on the contrary, he eliminated a highly effective dialogue. The case in point is the dialogue of the *matrona* Myrrhina and the *hetaira* Bacchis in the original of the *Hecyra*. (Cf. Donatus *ad Hec.* 825). It was in this dialogue that the decisive recognition took place. The reason for the elimination of this scene and the substitution of a short narration of the event is difficult to see. Scholars have supposed that Terence wanted to avoid recognition on stage as too worn a theatrical motif. But this is improbable. Terence knew very well that comedy to a certain degree consisted of conventional *topoi* and that all depended on their variation in the particular situation (Cf. *Eun.* 355 ff.) The recognition scene in the *Hecyra* was quite unusual. Nevertheless Terence eliminated it. Why has he introduced the parasite and the *miles*

gloriosus into the *Eunuchus*, why has he added a beating on stage to the *Adelphoe*, if he was in principle against typical comic figures and scenes? And why has he, contrary to Plautus, generally chosen recognition plays? One might consider another motive: perhaps the meeting of the respectable wife of a citizen with a prostitute, who saves the desperate lady, offended Roman morals. Roman *meretrices* seem to have had a worse social reputation than their Athenian counterparts. And it has already been noticed that Terence had a respect for proper behavior. Regard for Roman morality seems to have been at work, too, at the end of the *Adelphoe*, where the strict father Demea comes off better than in the original, in which the mild and humane Micio apparently was preferred. So in the *Hecyra* regard for Roman *decorum* seems to have worked against his general preference for dialogues.

But he was consistent in his refusal of a prologue in the form of a narrative monologue and gave the exposition always in dialogue. He could already find this form in Greek plays, he certainly sometimes substituted a dialogue of two persons for a Greek prologue spoken by a god. Expository material which he could not use here he skillfully distributed later in the play. One reason for avoiding exposition by monologue surely was that after a long personal prologue, which he regularly used for introducing the play, a second long speech could have been boring. Further, the suspense was heightened when the audience was not informed by a god about the ultimate solution (but at the same time certain dramatic ironies were necessarily lost). It is not impossible that the prologue-god was eliminated also to avoid a fantastic and unreal theatrical device.

But other instances which have been adduced to show the greater realism of Terentian drama often need correction. It is true that we have less breaking of the dramatic illusion in Terence than in Plautus (perhaps even less than in Menander), but Terence too kept the unreal convention of the speaking of asides which are not to be heard by the interlocutor but by the audience. And it is surely wrong to see in Terence's treatment of gnomic reflexions an attempt at greater realism. Terence did not at all avoid gnomic sentences; on the contrary he liked them in rhetorically brilliant form. Perhaps he cut off longer reflexions, but obviously not because of an inherent unreality of the scene, but simply because his public would not have favorably accepted too much philosophy.

Let me now remark briefly on the problems of Terence's translating

from the Greek. Scholars have often attempted to show the special way Terence translated by a comparison between the few existing Greek fragments and their Terentian counterparts. But one should not try to discover in each slight deviation an important artistic principle, and the wish to balance each loss by an equivalent gain has sometimes prevented a just evaluation. Comparison of one-line fragments needs a cautious critic who does not burden our small material with too heavy deductions. But there is another way to investigate the translations of Terence which has not yet been used sufficiently. Papyrus discoveries have brought rather extensive fragments of Menandrian comedies to our knowledge. Although no play which served Terence as a model has yet been found, a general comparison between Menandrian and Terentian style has become possible. For instance, the relative frequency of colloquial and rhetorical elements, of stereotyped and individual expressions can be observed. It seems that Terence used more rhetorical figures than Menander. With them he aimed at stronger effects, sometimes at the price of specific nuances. He used more interjections; the intent was vivid colloquialism, but the result occasionally yielded a sort of cliché. On the whole we must be careful not to attribute to Terence what should be attributed to differences between Greek and Latin or to the traditional language of the Roman stage. Only from this background can the specific character of the Terentian way of translating be investigated.

But this kind of translating was at any rate a great achievement. It meant the creation of a new literary language in Latin with a purity, refinement and flexibility of diction that had not previously existed and that was capable of expressing complicated psychological processes. Even if Terence was stimulated by the urbane colloquial language of aristocratic Roman circles, the step to definite formation of a literary style was still a major one. It was brought about in the process of dealing with the texts of Menander and attempting to transpose the natural language of the Greek comedies into an appropriate Roman form.

Furthermore, Terence put before the eyes of the Romans in this new literary language subjects which had not been represented in Roman literature before. The psychological subtleties and problematical human situations of Attic comedy were reproduced with an understanding and a sympathy previously unknown. The Terentian conception of *humanum* is in my opinion such a reproduction of an analogous Greek idea. The term has neither been deepened,

compared with the meaning of the corresponding Greek words, nor has it been filled with a specifically Roman mentality. But Terence was the first to open Roman comedy to this conception. With all this he helped unlock new realms to the Roman spirit, and this intermediary function is certainly not to be underrated.

Finally, Terence took an independent view of the question how Greek plays should be adapted in detail. On the one hand he strove, in reaction to the liberties taken by Plautus, for a closer imitation of the originals. On the other he kept to his own judgement and considered it his task not only to make the Greek plays accessible to the Roman spirit, but also as far as possible to improve them as stage plays. He worked, however, not by inventing new plot threads, and only occasionally by adding characters or freely rewriting speeches and dialogues. Terence found in the Attic comedies such a completely formed tradition of the well-made play that he knew his own attempts could not, as a rule, compete with it. As long as this reservoir was not exhausted, it probably seemed to him pointless to offer necessarily weaker creations of his own. He was able in general to confine himself to enriching the plays with additional Greek material where it seemed suitable. He hoped in this way to combine the advantages of two Greek plays. Where he found occasion to alter his models with inventions of his own, the result was normally not an essentially new creation. The changes are mostly of the sort that would be considered today as falling in the province of a director or producer, who does not feel bound to strict adherence to the script.

The tendency of his changes was especially towards a richer visual element, livelier plots and stage business, increase in suspense or emotional effect, regard for Roman morality or even simply consideration for the limited knowledge of his public—tendencies which sometimes worked against each other but to a certain degree converge in the basic aim of adapting the comedies in such a way that, while sticking as closely as possible to the Greek comedies, they might also be more effective on the Roman stage for the Roman public.

It is striking that precisely in his earliest play, the *Andria*, he made his most independent contribution with the invention of the *libertus* Sosia, and that the *contaminatio* is more extensive and more consequential in this play than later. One might imagine that Terence would have proceeded to freer and freer reworking of the originals. The contrary was the case. Terence deliberately bound himself in the course of the six years of his productive career closer to his models,

even though he never adopted the principle of the absolute fidelity which his literary opponent Luscus Lanuvinus maintained. While the latter regarded addition from a second Greek play as well as independent interpolations as spoiling and defiling the beauty of the Greek original, Terence allowed himself alterations of this kind. But he willingly limited his liberties in reworking—a fact which can only be explained by his belief in the value of the Greek works which he wanted to bring to the Roman public.

Terence's deliberate adherence to his Greek models is basically different from the way in which Plautus used the Greek originals as raw material for his own creations, as well as from the way later Roman poets emulated the *exemplaria Graeca*. Terence was surely not the Virgil of Roman comedy, as Benedetto Croce has called him, and the picture of his literary development is totally distorted if we see him as a Latin poet who used the Menandrian comedies with the same liberty as, for instance, the Greek Apollodoros. The fundamental difference between Terence's achievement and that of a creative poet in the specific sense of the word (who may be very much indebted to literary predecessors) should not be obscured. Of course, we do not deny the kind of creativity which was necessary for the translating itself, nor do we see his activities restricted to the translating. But a warning against common misrepresentations of his poetical achievements may not be useless in order to gain a better view of the kind of originality which he did display.