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THE CULTURAL POETICS OF TERENCE'S LITERARY COMEDY



In memory of Olga Vartzioti

The present paper discusses the cultural and literary forces behind the accusations of plagiarism and inappropriate composition hurled against the comic playwright Terence by his anonymous accuser(s). The only source for these accusations is Terence's own work, specifically the prologues set at the opening of each of his six plays — as a matter of fact, the accusations are said to have been the *raison d'être* for the six prologues. The exact nature of these charges has never ceased to be a debated issue on account of the absence of explicit additional information. This absence is probably deliberate: the main objective of the Terentian prologues is the communication of the idea that Terence is the victim of literary polemic, not unlike Callimachus and the Alexandrian poets following on his footsteps and against the Homeric tradition.

The main objective of the present paper however is not the inventive Terentian poetics per se, the Callimachean terminology that abounds in his prologues, or even the interpretation of the prologues along the lines of poetic emulation,¹ but the employment of terminology with cultural significance in the context of Roman Republican ideology. This terminology pointedly appears in key lines of the prologues, such as the opening or the closing verses, and in association with phrases that emphasize the advancement of new poetics. This special political terminology that demonstrates Terence's interaction with contemporary aristocratic ideology is discussed in the first part of the paper (I). The discussion begins with the opening lines of the prologue of the *Andria*, Terence's first play in order of performance, and explores how the diction in these lines interacts on many levels with contemporary rhetoric, especially since the ideologically marked vocabulary in *Andria* 1-3 is reproduced in the other Terentian prologues as well. The systematic

1. This has been discussed in convincing detail most recently in Sharrock (2009).

recurrence of key language aims at ingratiating the dramatist with the ruling aristocracy, the *nobiles homines* of Terence's prologues, who admired and imported Greek culture and literature, and eagerly sought to accommodate it in the Roman cultural context.

In the second part of the paper (II) I would like to provide a plausible explanation for the strong support Terence received from certain Roman aristocrats. I would like to argue that the reason for this support was the production of plays different from those the audiences had been accustomed to attend so far. The originality of those plays may be observed in Terence's systematic violation of several stereotypical conventions of the *palliata* as articulated in the plays of Plautus, the only other *palliata* playwright whose compositions have survived in full. At the same time, I would like to suggest that another notable divergence from traditional performance might have been Terence's intervention to traditional acting practices, by curbing the actors' improvisation and instructing them to follow his script to the letter. The performance of plays from scripts which actors could not change made the playwright and the impresario assisting him the leading directors of the performance, at the expense of the actors. These innovations would have alarmed the earlier generation of *palliata* traditionalists and prompted them to seek to ban Terence from competing, but they likely excited the Roman elite. The latter would have detected the promise in Terence's experiments with comic dramaturgy, and perhaps saw their contribution to the advancement of the young poet in light of the literary patronage of the Hellenistic rulers whom they had come to know as a result of their leading the Roman territorial expansion eastwards.

I. Roman ideology and the acceptability of playwriting

Terence's dramatic career was launched in 166 BCE: the temporal adverb *primum*, 'for the first time', at the opening line of the play emphasizes that the *Andria* was his first attempt to introduce himself as a new playwright at the *ludi*:

Poeta quom *primum* animum ad scribendum adpulit,
id sibi negoti credidit solum dari,
populo ut placerent quas fecisset fabulas.

When the poet first turned his mind to writing, he believed that his only business was to ensure that the plays he had already created would offer pleasure to the public.²

2. The translations of Terence quoted throughout are based on Barsby (2001) with often substantial adaptations; translations of other texts are my own, unless otherwise noted.

The three lines above from the opening of the *Andria* prologue comprise Terence's introduction to the literary world. The person who delivered these verses was not Terence himself but the leading actor of the troupe hired to stage the play. This should not have surprised the audience that had previously seen adaptations of Greek New Comedy: the opening of a *palliata* with an extradiegetic *prologus* speaker was a typical opening mechanism in Plautus (cf. the *Casina*, which likewise opens with the monologue of an anonymous speaker; or the *Rudens*, which features a similar informative monologue by the god Arcturus), a widely employed technique in Menander's New Comedy (the *Dyskolos* and the *Aspis* open with monologues by omniscient minor deities not involved in the plot), and actually originated in the later plays of Euripides (*Hecuba*, *Ion*). Still, by the time Terence's speaker had completed the first three lines of the prologue, several among the audience would have realized that a new chapter in the history of comic drama was about to begin.

The opening word to the prologue, *poeta*, is a term that, although employed previously by Plautus several times, is hardly of firm content. A Plautine *poeta* wears too many hats: he is the tragedian (cf. *Curc.* 591 *antiquom poetam audivi scripsisse in tragoedia*, 'I have heard that an ancient poet wrote in a tragedy...'), the comic dramatist (cf. *Men.* 7 *hoc poetae faciunt in comoediis*, 'this the comic poets do in their comedies...'; also, *Capt.* 1033 *huius modo paucas poetae reperiunt comoedias*, 'the comic poets find few comedies of this kind'), and the dramatist in general (cf. *Miles* 211 *poetae... barbaro*, 'a Roman poet', for Naevius³; *Vid.* 7 *poeta hanc noster fecit Vidulariam*, 'our poet wrote this *Vidularia* play'; *Cas.* 18 *ea tempestate flos poetarum fuit*, 'in that era lived the cream of poets'), but also the improviser (cf. *Pseud.* 404 *nunc ego poeta fiam: viginti minas... inveniam*⁴, 'now I shall become a poet: I shall come up with twenty minas'), including the conceiver of fictitious, false tales (*Pseud.* 401 *quasi poeta... quaerit quod nusquam genitumst, reperit tamen*⁵, 'like a poet... he seeks what has never been born and yet he finds it'), as well as the schemer and the trickster (cf. *Asin.* 748 *tu poeta's prosus ad eam rem unicus*⁶, 'you are the one and only poet for that sort of thing'; while in *Cas.* 841 *nec fallaciam astutiozem ullus fecit poeta*, 'no other poet constructed a

3. Cf. Hammond/Mack/Moskalew (1963/2000), ad loc; on *barbarus/barbare* as synonymous to Latin in the meta-language of Roman comedy, see Rochette (1998).

4. E.g. Sharrock (2009) 116-117; Fantham (2011) 202; also Hunter (2006) 82.

5. Cf. Schiappa de Azevedo (1975-1976).

6. The interpretation of *poeta* as 'trickster' in this passage has been noted already in Goetz and Schoell (1894) 97 ad loc.

deception so crafty', the schemer and the poet clearly interfuse⁷). The identification of the poet with the schemer, the trickster and the teller of tall tales in Plautus has actually a long tradition that reaches back to Plato and his well-known objection to all poets, because, according to him, they make up stories and ultimately do more harm than good to their audiences (cf. Pl. *Republic* 2.363a-367a); the tradition goes back even earlier, to the epic *aidos* of Homer and Hesiod, who is a *poeta creator*, a craftsman who toils over a task, but also an agent of crafty deception, since his creations are of compromised veracity as products of inspiration by the Muses who are famously known to speak both truth and falsehood (*Theog.* 24-28; see also Homer, *Od.* 19, 203).⁸ Terence's *poeta*, however, has a very specific identity: the importance of writing is noted by the use of a gerund of purpose (*ad scribendum*) also on the first line. Writing requires labor (writing is a physically and mentally toilsome process), and labor ascertains that playwrighting is serious business for the young Terence — indeed his profession or *negotium* (*An.* 2).

Negotium is a core term in the ideology of the mid and late Republic, broadly meaning 'duty, obligations, even business (necessitated by some external agent)' and encompassing all activity pertaining to the political life in Rome. The employment of the term in this conspicuous position may be deliberate. *Negotium* developed as a signifier of Romanness in the second century BCE following the influx in Italy of Greek culture and money from the Hellenistic East. *Negotium* was identified with the public sphere of life, the Roman sense of duty to the *res publica*, in the dichotomy between the public and the private spheres that the Roman aristocrats formed for the first time in the 2nd c. BCE in order to indulge in their private, off-duty time, in various expressions of Greek culture, which in turn came to be defined as *otium*, 'relaxation, political inactivity, private life'.⁹ But even earlier than that, *negotium* was an ideologically charged term, referring to a Roman citizen's business, his active participation in the administration of the Republic. The *negotia publica*, a combination of the practice of law, public oratory,

7. For Moore (1998) 176, *poeta* here clearly means the playwright, and in n. 43 (p. 288) he lists a number of uses of the term *poeta* in the Plautine corpus with the exact same metaphorical meaning; also MacCary and Willcock (1976) ad loc.

8. Despite the prerequisite that they have to be divinely inspired, that is, taught the art of epic composition by the Muses in Homer and Hesiod, the bards or singers (*aidoi*) are classified as *demiourgoi*, "public" or "professional" craftsmen (*Od.* 17.383-85; *Op.* 26).

9. D'Arms (1970) chapters 1 and 2, discusses the social and cultural attitudes towards *otium* among the ranks of the aristocracy in the late Republic. Works on the notion of *otium* as defined in the cultural and political context of the 2nd c. BCE in direct relationship to the influx of Hellenism at Rome include André 1966; Fontaine 1966; Burke 1995; Connors 2000; and the papers in the collection by Sigot (2000).

military service, and government administration, were the ideal expression of aristocratic activity.¹⁰

Next to its strictly political meaning, *negotium* retains its original, broader and a-political definition, of doing business in general, or being occupied with activities dictated by some external force. Truly, *negotium* originally is defined as the functional opposite, the privative of *otium*, for it derives from phrases such as *mihi neg (nec) otium [est]*, 'I have no *otium*'.¹¹ So it follows that *otium* as the opposite of *negotium* means time during which one is occupied with activities pleasing to one's self and initiated by one's desire rather than by an external agent—although the activities one might choose to engage in are nowhere specified. With this original meaning of 'business imposed upon', or 'duty', *negotium* is employed in Roman comedy, especially in Plautus, where it features over a hundred times; it means business in general, one's comings and goings in the course of a day in the city, or a specific occupation or profession: to mention but a select few representative examples: in *Merc.* 279-280 *negotium* is tied to one's living and belonging to the world of the *urbs*: *negotio | mihi esse in urbe*; in *Most.* 884 it is associated with the *forum*: *apud forum negotium*; in *Poen.* 1938 it refers to the business of a *leno*: *lenonem... inter negotium*. It is frequently used generally in the sense 'I am busy' (*Aul.* 369 *verba hic facio quasi negoti nihil siet*; *Ps.* 380 *negoti nunc sum plenus*; *Mil.* 816 *nisi negotiumst, progredere ante aedis*); furthermore, *negotium* is often used figuratively, in the modern sense of 'minding of one's own business', and in a colloquial expression that builds on the interrogative formula *quid negotist*, 'what is your business', i.e. why do you care, why are you interested in so-and-so (*Curc.* 601; *Men.* 1063; *Mil.* 173; *Rud.* 641, 1058, etc). In six out of the thirteen cases in which *negotium* occurs in Terence's plays outside the prologues, it is part of the same colloquial formula of inquiry, while the remaining seven occurrences denote generally the engagement of the speaker (or of the person spoken about) with business of his own choice.¹²

The *Ludi* were the time in the course of the Roman year when public

10. Baldson (1969) 130, 136-137.

11. Definition according to the *Etymologicum Magnum*, s.v. *negotium*; cf. also the similar etymology in the *OCD* s.v., *neg (neque) + otium*.

12. The only attempt to look both at the political and at the literary aspects of the *otium/negotium* distinction in Terence is André (1966) 125-127, recast more recently in Stroup (2011) 39-42, who offers an overview of the conceptualization of this cultural/ideological dichotomy in the 2nd c. BCE; see her in-depth examination (on pp. 32-63) of *otium* in the 1st c. BCE when it is defined (by Cicero and Catullus' neoteric circle) as time for the pursuit of literary activity par excellence.

business (civically imposed *negotium* to all citizens) was suspended, the time during which the Romans could let themselves relax and enjoy in activities of pleasure, that is, of their own desire. By offering them the products of his own *negotium* during the time of their *otium*, Terence toys with the co-existence in the theatrical space of *otium* and *negotium*, concepts mutually exclusive in ideological terms, for the one is defined as privative to the other: *negotium* means the absence of *otium*; Terence's *negotium* is precisely everybody else's *otium*.

One may advance this argument on the interrelation of *otium* and *negotium* further: it is believed that Cato was the first to have introduced literary activity as an appropriate occupation in one's time of *otium* during the early 2nd century BCE.¹³ This should be seen in conjunction with another statement by the same Cato, wherein the activities during *otium* and *negotium* are explicitly related: *HRR* fr. 2: *clarorum virorum atque magnorum non minus otii quam negotii rationem exstare oportere* ('the illustrious and noble men ought to place before them certain rules and regulations, not less for their hours of leisure than for those of business'). According to modern critics, in this passage Cato paraphrases the opening sentence to Xenophon's *Symposium*,¹⁴ but infuses it with a new cultural meaning. Cato uses the balance of *otium* and *negotium* to assert the responsibility of an important man to make a so-to-speak 'politically correct' use of his time of leisure. Any literary occupation (including the writing of history) was a leisure activity, and with the above statement Cato intends to provide a justification of the writing of history as a worthy leisure pursuit.¹⁵ Terence may have wished to take advantage of Cato's urge to accept the composition of literature (historiography) as an activity fitting for one's *otium*, by suggesting that Cato's acceptable *otium* may also apply to his own audience, specifically to their experience of attending his (i.e. Terence's) *palliata*, which is also a literary

13. In a passage paraphrased three times by Cicero, best in *Tusc. Disp.* 4.3: *gravissimus auctor in Originibus dixit Cato morem apud maiores hunc epularum fuisse, ut deinceps qui accubarent canerent ad tibiam clarorum virorum laudes atque virtutes* ('Cato, a writer of the greatest prestige, had noted in his *Origines* that at banquets it was the custom of our ancestors for the guests at table to sing one after the other to the accompaniment of the flute in praise of the virtues of glorious men').

14. Cf. Münscher (1920) 71, cited in Churchill (1995) 95 n. 19.

15. André (1966) 46, briefly suggests that Cato was the founder of the *otium litteratum*; Gruen (1992) 61, derives from Cato's equation of *otium* and *negotium* the combination of the *vita contemplativa* with the *vita activa*; more details on Cato as the first leading public figure to have advocated *otium* as time appropriate for the pursuit of literary compositions, in Churchill (1995).

composition, albeit belonging to a different genre.¹⁶ The possible association of playwriting with the composition of historiography — enhanced by the fact that Cato began the composition of his *Origines* around the same time that Terence launched his career¹⁷ — is reinforced by the mention of writing in the prologue of the *Andria* (*ad scribendum*), since historiography was a decidedly writing-based leisure activity, and an intellectual product of the same elite that supported Terence's career. Terence's plays, according to the above reasoning, comprise an *otium* activity that may withstand scrutiny. The literary products of Terence's *negotium* may be also regarded as worthy literary products of *otium*, fit for the members of the upper class, because they are fully scripted compositions like the historiographical compositions of Cato and his peers. In this way Terence draws attention to the scriptedness of the *palliatae* as an attribute which elevates their literary status: the plays enjoyed on stage are also written compositions which may be enjoyed repeatedly by those select few who can read them — as reading material, they are products for the aristocracy.

Terence refers to his literary compositions as products of *negotium* twice more in the prologues, in *Hec.* 24-27 and *Ad.* 18-21. Both passages are distinguished by similar complexity in meaning, for, among other things, they are concerned to bridge the *otium* / *negotium* dichotomy, by arguing that both the time of *otium* and the time of *negotium* are appropriate for engaging in literary activity, in the case at hand the comic business. By this argument Terence clearly states that his texts have a decidedly literary character.¹⁸ In both passages Terence equates his *negotium* with his audience's *otium*, and unlike in the *Andria* opening, here he does so expressly. In the second pro-

16. It is possible that Terence's consciousness of the elitist aspect of written text, including plays destined for mass performance, may be related to the development of Latin oratory which was going on at the same time, and that playwriting and oratory were influencing each other; it has been argued, for example, that the *clausulae* in Cato's speeches were influenced by the metrical patterns in Plautus' *cantica*; cf. Habinek (1985) 187-200.

17. Astin (1978) 212, dates the *Origines* to "after 168"; similarly, Beck and Walter (2001) 150: "around 170".

18. *Otium* appears also in the opening to the *Phormio* prologue (1-3): *Postquam poeta vetu' poetam non potest | retrahere a studio et transdere hominem in otium, | maledictis detertere ne scribat parat* ("Since the old poet cannot drive our poet from his calling and force him into retirement, he is trying to deter him from writing by the use of slander"). Here Terence cleverly uses the dichotomy of *otium*/*negotium* to advance himself as an aspiring professional playwright; *otium* is a kind of 'leisure of obligation' which his opponents wish to enforce upon him in order to stop his (threatening to their own professional existence) literary production.

logue to the *Hecyra* Terence's does much more than merely pairing *negotium* to literary endeavor (*Hec.* 24-27):

Quid si scripturam sprevissem in praesentia
et in deterrendo voluissem operam sumere,
ut in otio esset potius quam in negotio,
deterruissem facile ne alias scriberet.

But if I had rejected his works at the time and had chosen to spend my time discouraging him, thus consigning him to idleness rather than to industry, I could easily have discouraged him from writing any further plays.

Through the *prologus* speaker, the leading impresario Ambivius Turpio, Terence playfully enmeshes the literal significations of *otium* as 'one's own time' and *negotium* as 'one's time occupied by business not of one's own choice', with the cultural/political meanings of the same terms (the mandated, obligatory *otium* of the *Ludi*-time vs. the daily norm of the *negotium*), and also with the figurative meanings of the two terms as recorded in Plautus' plays (*otium* is the time a character has to spare to hear another character's concerns; *negotium* implicitly identifies with the duties of the particular character's role in the play). The *otium* in the *Hecyra* prologue is a combination of *otium* and *negotium*, since the *prologus* speaker explicitly notes that time of one's own is best spent writing texts (i.e. practicing *negotium*, and a truly laborious one) for others.¹⁹

In the *Adelphoe* prologue, finally, Terence draws on the ideology of the *negotia publica* as he sets side-by-side on the same line the three official phases in a Roman citizen's publicly structured life circle: *otium*, *negotium* (in times of peace) and *bellum*, the occasion when both *negotium* and *otium* in their traditional sense are suspended (*Ad.* 15-21):

nam quod isti dicunt malevoli, homines nobilis
hunc adiutare adsidueque una scribere,
quod illi maledictum vehemens esse existimant,
eam laudem hic ducit maximam quom illis placet

19. This *otium*, time free from one's political/social obligations, spent to the service of others, is most prominently philosophized a century later in Catullus, the historiographies of the same era (Sallust) and the philosophical writings of Cicero. Stroup (2011) describes the compromise of choosing the writing of literature as equivalent to one's *negotium*-time duties, thus fulfilling one's social obligations all the while maintaining one's political independence, as best manifested in the literature of the last century of the Republic; she calls this literature produced during this time of socially engaged *otium*, "textual *otium*"; Stroup (2011) 42 discusses briefly *Hec.* 24-27.

qui vobis univorsis et populo placent,
 quorum *opera in bello, in otio, in negotio*
 suo quisque tempore usust sine superbia.

As for the malicious accusation that members of the aristocracy assist our playwright and collaborate with him in his writing all the time, which his enemies consider a serious reproach, he regards it as a great compliment, if he finds favor with men who find favor with all of you and the people at large, men whose services have been freely available to everyone in time of need in war, in peace and in their daily business.

The text equates the *opera* that distinguish each of the three different occasions of *bellum*, *negotium* and *otium*. This equation suggests that we receive *opus* in the general sense of *labor*, 'physical labor', 'hard work', and accept that it is inherent not only in a *negotium publicum*, such as a war or public business, but also in a situation of *otium* (which in the case at hand may mean both the mandated leisure and the composition of literature, professional or not, during the time of leisure).

A second concept introduced in the *Andria* prologue is the author's concern to produce plays that would please his audiences (*An. 3 populo ut placerent quas fecisset fabulas*, '[he set he mind] that the plays he made should please the public'). The same preoccupation occurs in all other prologues, in very similar diction. In the *Eunuch* this concern is set, as in the *Hecyra*, at the very opening of the prologue: *Si quisquamst qui placere se studeat bonis / quam plurimis...* 'If there is anyone who aims to please as many of the good people as possible' (*Eun. 1-2*). In the *Phormio* it appears a little later, on line 11a, *et mage placerent quas fecisset fabulas*,²⁰ 'and the plays which he had made would have pleased more'. In the *Heautontimorumenos*, Terence's first complete play after the *Andria*, the poet's commitment to please appears not in the beginning but on the very last line of the prologue: *exemplum statuite in me, ut adulescentuli / vobis placere studeant potiu' quam sibi*, 'make an example of my case, so that the young men [sc. the aspiring young dramatists henceforth] may strive to please you rather than themselves' (*Heaut. 51-52*). Terence's particular decision is attention-catching: the reverse correspondence with the first prologue produces a ring composition structure which encourages the same audience to see the two programmatic texts as complementary. Instead of making his priority to combat the accusation for violating the rules of drama-making in order to win the dramatic

20. The line is generally suspected as spurious; the OCT edition (= Kauer and Lindsay 1926) obelizes it.

contest at the *Ludi*, Terence emphasizes his philosophy about the mission of professional comic playwriting to provide quality public entertainment, or, in more politically correct republican terminology, opportunity for worthy use of one's *otium* time. In the conclusion to the prologue of the *Heautontimorumenos*, moreover, Terence projects his plays as models of *palliata* for the young aspiring playwrights-in-the-making—a declaration that contains a distinct trace of irony, since Terence, who so far has produced only one play and is about to stage his second, is hardly, at the tender age of twenty-something, the experienced playwright to serve as a mentor to the younger generation.²¹

The same idea, that of pleasing the people inasmuch as offering worthy *otium* entertainment, and garnering — deservedly — praise for this, reappears in the prologue to the *Adelphoe*: *eam laudem hic ducit maxumam, quom illis placet, / qui uobis uniuorsis et populo placent*, 'he [sc. the poet Terence] considers this a most great praise, that he pleases those, who are pleasing to all of you and to the people' (ll. 19-20). Notably, the subordinate clauses and the use of the subjunctive observed in Terence's statements, in the *Andria* and the *Heautontimorumenos*, that he writes plays which would please the *populus*, have been replaced in the *Adelphoe* by an assertive indicative accompanied by a superlative and a powerful deductive argument. The *Adelphoe* is the sixth of Terence's *palliatae*. Terence has no doubt by now that his dramatic art has been appealing and pleasing to the Roman people without failure since the staging of the *Andria*. What is more, Terence's success has been by now firmly grounded because he has won over not simply the anonymous *populus*, but selective members of the Roman aristocracy, the members of the upper class (*nobiles*). The latter actually are held by his rivals to have helped him write his plays, even to have written them themselves and given them to Terence to present as his own (*Ad.* 15-16: *nam quod isti dicunt maleuoli, homines nobilis / hunc adiutare adsidueque una scribere...* 'as for the malicious accusation that members of the aristocracy assist our playwright and collaborate with him in his writing all the time...'). Terence truly defuses his opponents' malicious accusations. He acknowledges his ties to members of the Roman elite and explains that he shares with these aristocrats the same close relationship that grows between the gifted dramatist and his loyal, enthusiastic audience; the members of the Roman aristocracy, according to Terence, are

21. Cf. Gruen (1992) 220: Terence's declaration that his sole intention from the very beginning of his career as playwright was to please the people aims at projecting his work as "a cultural mission", a characterization that would "set an aristocratic tone in his comedies"; attendance of these plays would "educate the public to an appreciation of that art form at a higher level".

his exclusive audience, before whom he rehearses his plays prior to staging them in public: once *they* approve of his plays, Terence has little doubt that the less refined Roman audiences (those referred to at l. 19 as *vobis univorsis* and *populo*) will also approve of the literary tastes their aristocratic leaders display publicly.

In the same year with the performance of the *Adelphoe* Terence reports in his prologues that he finally staged his *Hecyra*, the most experimental of his six plays, uninterrupted. Predictably, the *Hecyra* prologue also refers to the playwright's intent to gain the approval of a demanding audience. Unlike, however, the other five plays, the relevant phraseology in the second *Hecyra* prologue replaces the core verb, *placere*, 'to please, to entertain', with the stronger verb *servire*, 'to serve': *Hec.* 50-51 *et eum esse quaestum in animum induxi maximum / quam maxume servire vostris commodis*, 'and I have considered that the greatest profit [sc. for me] is to serve your own interests as much as possible'. The same superlative, *maximum*, observed in the *Adelphoe*, is present here, as well, twice, in successive lines, and in similar context. By means of this repetition that is hard to miss, Terence suggests an analogous relationship between the pleasure the audience reaps from Terence's plays and the acclaim Terence receives from the audience. This interrelation between the audience's pleasure and Terence's reputation is captured with the employment of *servire*: Terence is a servant of the Roman people; he views his call to produce quality plays as a call to duty.²²

The third major issue Terence raises in the opening of the *Andria* prologue concerns his intention to introduce a series of innovations to the tradition of the *palliata* and perhaps the leading reason that caused the ire of his rivals. Terence turns against established conventions and stereotypes by staging his characters to behave differently than expected. The embrace of a series of upsets in character formation and plot development would explain why Terence's language and style is so different compared to the language and style of Plautus, the leading representative of the earlier generation: Terence's characters are not the stereotypical *palliata* characters the audience has enjoyed on the Plautine stage, they behave differently than expected, and as a result the plot of Terence's plays does not progress predictably [sc. compared with the plot of a typical New Comedy] even as it seemingly adheres to the boy-marries-girl narrative core of the *palliata*.

22. It may be that the replacement of *placere* is tied also to the fact that Terence had already used this verb earlier in the same prologue (l. 29) to refer to the successfully performed first act of the *Hecyra* the second time he attempted to stage the play (*primo actu placere*) — a success however that did not continue beyond this first act.

Terence's contribution to the *palliata* includes most prominently the progressive marginalization of the wily slave, Plautus' leading character and director of the plot,²³ the moral elevation of the female characters, including the *meretrix* and the *matrona*,²⁴ and, in terms of structural development, an ostensible difficulty in moving the action forward. The absence of a designated *auctor* both causes confusion and ignites rivalry among several characters in the play, and many of them step forward to claim control of the plot.²⁵ The absence of an informative prologue with important extradiegetic information looking forward to the resolution enforces the unpredictable course of the story, which in a way becomes a project in-the-making.

It is, further, likely that Terence's choice to describe dismissively his comic speech as *tenuis* and *levis* in the prologue to his *Phormio* (*tenui... oratione*, 'thin of speech [sc. in style]' and *scriptura levi* 'light in writing') had been motivated by another factor which, once taken into consideration, places the phrases in question inside a new literary context and infuses them with poetically-significant semantics. As Sharrock has rightly observed²⁶ the phrases *tenui... oratione* and *scriptura levi* evoke the *voces propriae* of Callimachean poetics, *λεπτός*, 'thin, slender', *ὀλαχίς*, 'light'. The erudite Roman elites would have recognized this, and the possible (and desirable, on Terence's part) association between Terence and Callimachus may have prompted Terence to use them in his text, thus inviting his elite readers to view his work in light of Callimachus' invitation to strike his own literary path and weather the attack of his antagonists.

From a different perspective, the characterization 'thin' and 'light' may reflect the audience's reaction to a performance that defies and even undoes popular dramatic conventions, such as the dominance of the wily slave, but

23. Amerasinghe (1950) first argued that Terence reduces the role of the *servus-auctor*; in his view, Terence did so, because the Plautine convention of a clever slave controlling everything makes serious drama impossible; also Duckworth (1952) 249-53 and *passim*; Spranger (1984). More recent studies convincingly point out that the marginalization of the slave-*architectus* does not necessarily mean loss of comic effect; see Kruschwitz (2004), who further notes that the disempowering follows a chronological progress; Sharrock (2009) 140ff. (esp. 143-4) who defines this deposition as "confusion" ["one of the games Terence plays with Plautus is to take the earlier playwright's invention, the controlling clever slave, use him, but then confuse him" (p. 140)]; Karakasis (2013); Papaioannou (2014b) Chapter 6.

24. Best exemplified in the *Hecyra*; see full discussion in Sharrock (2009) 233-249. On the women in Terence, see the most recent survey in James (2013).

25. The *Andria* represents the best example, for it features four different characters, each trying to advance a different plot; see the relevant discussion in Sharrock (2009) 140-150.

26. Sharrock (2009) 80-83.

more than that, instructs the actors to reproduce the original script to the letter. The verbatim reproduction of the original script on stage, which the actors would not have the liberty to enrich or adapt in-performance and according to the response of the audience, with improvised jokes and gigs, emerges as a potential explanation for judging a plot 'thin': talented actors who could improvise on the spot (gifted professionals whose skill was observed in the incarnation of characters such as Pseudolus, Epidicus, or Chrysalus) were the best guarantee for a 'tight' comic *sermo*.²⁷

Terence's idiosyncratic style has been imprinted in the language of his compositions: the language of Terence's characters is markedly different than the language of their Plautine counterparts. In comparative examinations of the two great *palliata* authors, there is unanimous agreement that Terence's language is restrained, while Plautus' own exuberant. Barsby's assessment renders the *communis opinio*: "The essential difference is that Plautus deliberately exaggerates the colloquial elements [i.e. terms and expressions, and frequency of abuse; terms of endearment; an assortment of interjections on various occasions aiming at infusing the action with high emotion; and most importantly, colloquial word-formation, specifically diminutives, frequentatives, slang of all kinds, figures of speech and exuberant rhetoric] of the language of his characters in order to make a greater impact on his audience, whereas Terence aims at a colloquialism of a more refined or studied kind, such as will not detract from his portrayal of character and theme".²⁸ This "more refined or studied" language of Terence's disciplined plot development and speech, and the notable violations of popular dramatic conventions likely caused anxiety to Terence's antagonists who thus criticized him. Yet, contrary to the accusers, several members of the aristocracy saw favorably Terence's new dramatic style and decided to support his career.

II. *The Role of the Homines Nobiles*

The staging of Terence's non-traditional *palliatae* required actors willing to put up with the curbing of their gigs and overall involvement in the development of the play, and confident in the merit of the young poet. It

27. I have developed in detail the argument that one of Terence's great innovations was his bringing on stage plays that reproduced verbatim a completed script without and excluded any impromptu additions by the actors in-performance, in Papaioannou (2014a).

28. Barsby (1999) 19-27, for a good comparative discussion of the playwrights in terms of language and style; earlier detailed studies on the topic include Duckworth (1952) 331-60; Palmer (1954) 74-94; Haffter (1934) 126-143.

is highly probable that Terence collaborated with the same team of theater professionals for the staging of all his plays; the *didascaliae* of his plays have survived and are very helpful in ascertaining this as they inform us about the people involved in the production of each performance. Thus, we learn that all six plays of Terence were produced by the same actor-manager, Ambivius Turpio, while a certain slave Flaccus, belonging to a Claudius, provided the music for them.²⁹ This preference for a stable team of collaborators had an additional effect: it enhanced the impression Terence's performances had on the audience's memory. It also explained why a stable acting team of professionals who trained to enact roles that were different from the norm, and were familiar with each other's acting, might have been ideal for putting Terence's plays successfully on stage.

Ambivius Turpio was one of the greatest and best-known lead actors and theatrical impresarios (*dominus gregis*) in Republican Rome. His support of Terence should be seen as an investment, on the part of a great professional, in a promising young dramatist, and it is an issue that deserves closer consideration. According to Manuwald, Lucius Ambivius Turpio has "an aristocratic name" and was "in contact with members of the nobility"; he is therefore likely "to have been a respectable man of substance".³⁰ The job of the stage manager was mainly to act as the middleman between the *aediles*, the city magistrates responsible for selecting and buying the plays to be performed at the various *Ludi*, and the authors of these plays. The stage manager negotiated the purchase price, also accounting for his own share in the total price the *aediles* eventually paid; the playwright was compensated directly by either of them. Once the deal was made, the stage manager received the script directly from the playwright — the magistrates rarely took possession of the scripts they contracted for — and financed its production by hiring and training the actors and the musicians to stage it. It is reasonable to expect that a stage manager expected to make a profit of this business, which might be increased if the play turned out to be very successful; in that case the stage manager could renegotiate the purchase price with the *aediles* and ask for more money.³¹

29. See, e.g. Marshall (2006) 85-86, on Ambivius' troupe as the primary performer of Terence's plays; on Flaccus, see Manuwald (2011) chapter 2.6.

30. Manuwald (2011) 81, citing evidence collected in Garton (1972) 236-237 n.4; also Gratwick (1982) 80f.

31. See Beacham (1999) 2-44, for an extensive discussion on the occasions of public entertainment in Rome; also Brown (2002) 229-231; on the function of the stage manager, see Beare (1964) 164-165; Duckworth (1952) 74; Barsby (1986) 7-8; Manuwald (2011) 81-83.

It so happens that the case study for the way this system likely worked is the production of Terence's *Eunuch*, according to our sources the most successful Republican *palliata*, which on account of its great success was staged a second time very soon after its first performance and earned the playwright (and presumably the impresario) an unprecedented sum of money (cf. Suet. *Vita Ter.* 3). Taking advantage of the great success of the *Eunuch*, Ambivius not only managed to convince the aedile appointed to the task, to buy the *Hecyra* for the third time even though the impresario had tried unsuccessfully to stage the play in the past, but he bought the play at his own asking price as well (*Hec.* 57 *pretio emptas meas*).³²

Still, when Ambivius agreed to act as impresario for Terence as soon as the latter presented the aedile with the script of his first play, the *Andria*, he obviously was taking a risk with this twenty-year-old aspiring dramatist. It is probable that Ambivius who had earlier collaborated with Caecilius, one of the most popular comic dramatists of the generation prior to Terence, could tell talent when he saw it; thus, he did not hesitate to offer his services to a promising candidate, especially when he himself could appreciate the artistry of the plays he sponsored.³³ This might explain why Terence makes Ambivius mention his collaboration with Caecilius in context that may appear partly similar to Terence's situation at hand: the stage manager is directed to declare that through his own production skills he managed to salvage the reputation of Caecilius when the latter was facing a professional and personal crisis, and helped him make a successful comeback (*Hec.* 14-23). All in all, the above line of argument is possible, but a second line of argument is tempting as well, especially since it may complement the first one: it is likely that Ambivius championed Terence because he could see behind

32. That asking price, according to Donatus, is the speaker's, Ambivius', estimated price, which the aediles paid up; that money the stage manager had to return if the play failed: *pretio emptas meo: aestimatione a me facta, quantum aediles darent, et proinde me periclitante, si reiecta fabula a me ipso aediles quod poetae numeraverint repetant*, 'if after my appraisal of how much the aediles might pay and similarly my assessment of the work, it fails, the aediles may seek to recover from me personally the price they paid to the poet'; cf. Ireland (1990) 109, whose translation of Donatus' phrase is quoted here; also Carney (1963) 35.

33. Manuwald (2011) 82-83 makes an interesting suggestion when she interprets the information in Terence's prologues (specifically the whole *Hecyra* prologue and *Ph.* 30-34) about Ambivius' taking pride in promoting young and talented poets even though their early plays were not met with success, as reflecting Ambivius' true beliefs, as much as Terence's composition about what he himself would like Ambivius to project as personal opinions.

the young dramatist a group of powerful supporters who were eager to help him succeed.

One of the various accusations Terence had to weather, challenged his merit and talent: his opponents sought to disqualify his work because allegedly a group of noble friends had written the plays Terence staged as his own, or at least assisted him closely. This accusation is reported in two of Terence's prologues, *Heaut.* 22-24, and *Ad.* 15-21. Terence does not deny that he received assistance from such an elite group of people 'who are pleasing to all of you and to the people, men whose works in war, in leisure, and in business everyone has at time employed without arrogance' (*Ad.* 19-21 *qui vobis univorsis et populo placent, / quorum opera in bello, in otio, in negotio / suo quisque tempore usust sine superbia*), but he firmly notes that the plays he staged under his name were his own compositions, not other people's writings (*Heaut.* 22-24; *Ad.* 15-16). Earlier critics held these *homines nobiles* (*Ad.* 15) to have been the leading members of the so-called 'Scipionic Circle', a coterie of powerful aristocrats formed around P. Scipio Aemilianus Africanus (cos. 147, 134), and included C. Laelius (cos. 140), L. Furius Philus (cos. 136), Sp. Mummius and P. Rupilius (cos. 132), according to a late 2nd / early 1st c. BCE fragment attributed to a Porcius Licinius.³⁴ Even though the exact character of this 'Scipionic Circle' is accepted tradition by the middle 1st century BCE, nowadays it is generally believed that the existence of this 'Circle' is more a matter of conjecture, if not a literary construction of Cicero, than knowledge gathered through uncontested, historically proven data. There is complete lack of information about any particular cultural initiative undertaken by Scipio, while we have no concrete evidence about other literary works composed under the patronage of this Circle.³⁵ On the other

34. The Porcius Licinius fragment is preserved in Suet. *Vita Ter.* 2.6; on Porcius Licinius, see Gundel (1953).

35. The classic treatment of the Scipionic Circle and the various questions surrounding its character along with a thorough reassessment of the cultural agents and movements of this crucial period of Greco-Roman interaction, is Astin (1967) esp. 294-306, "Appendix 6: The Scipionic Circle" and id. (1978); also Gruen (1992) 183-202; on pp. 197-202, Gruen sensibly remarks that Terence was already a widely known, albeit contested, playwright by the production of the *Adelphoe*, his sixth play, while the members of the 'Scipionic Circle' were in their early twenties, and some even younger—hardly the great patrons smoothing the way for the career advancement of a young poet. Paullus' *laudatio funebris* took place in the Roman forum, coincidentally, nine days prior to the performance of Terence's *Adelphoe* in the same location; prior to Gruen, the very existence of the 'Scipionic Circle' has been seriously contested also in Strasburger (1966); Astin (1967) 294-296; Zetzl (1972); while Goldberg (1986) 8-15, had already developed argumentation similar to Gruen's own.

hand, it is important to underscore that all these renowned leaders, as well as other members of the aristocracy at the time, were men highly educated, versed in Greek literature, and probably owners themselves of Greek literary manuscripts. And owing to their familiarity with Greek literature, they may have discerned Terence's talent or saw in his plays artistry of comparable quality. As a result, they supported his playwriting by providing the young dramatist with access to original Greek manuscripts of New Comedy plays. Terence's last play, the third staging of the *Hecyra*, was performed in the funeral games for Lucius Aemilius Paullus; this suggests that Terence was well-acquainted with Paullus' family. Lucius Aemilius Paullus, the victor of Perseus, brought to Rome Perseus' royal library — a library that included a complete collection of the plays of Menander, the only poet of his own time popular with the Macedonian court. Terence's devotion to Menander's dramaturgy may be related to his relationship with Paullus, on account of which he was allowed ready access to the full collection of Menander's plays in the library of Paullus.³⁶

The testimonies that Terence enjoyed the patronage and assistance of powerful friends would not have sprung up unless backed up by the information provided in Terence's own prologues. In the passages discussed above from the prologues to the *Heautontimorumenos* and the *Adelphoe*, Terence admits that his fans include members of the senatorial aristocracy and takes pride in this support.³⁷ Even though he strongly refuses that his aristocratic friends wrote his plays for him, Terence wants his audience to know that he is being accused for fraternizing with the aristocracy, and that he is grateful and proud for the acknowledgement and respect he has been receiving by these upper classmen for his work. In doing so, Terence actually built praise for himself: his plays for the general spectator were possibly not easy to like due to their disciplined speech and curbing of improvisation, but they were admired by the aristocratic elite of his time. Even the accusation that the sophisticated Roman nobles wrote Terence's plays for him, ultimately may have proven more a praise than a rebuke: it implies the strongest approval by judges who are uniquely qualified to assess the value of these *palliatae*. This explains why Terence highlights rather than silences the accusation that the *nobiles homines* wrote his plays for him—such an admission operated as an advertisement of his innovations to the *palliata* tradition and of his talent,

36. Terence's access to Perseus' library is discussed in Umbrico (2010) 109-110.

37. Recently the fact that production of the *Adelphoe* was part of the various celebrations scheduled across the span of several days in honor of the deceased Paullus has prompted Umbrico (2010) 94-104 to argue that a common interest in Greek culture brought Paullus and Terence together.

and the circulation of this advertisement was much more important for the young dramatist than any concern to refute the accusers' bantering for literary theft and authenticity of voice.

III. *Conclusion*

Coming at the end of a tradition that had already seen two generations of very successful representatives and was dominated by the explosive performances of Plautus and his reigning cunning slaves / *auctores*, Terence knew that in order to succeed and even leave his own mark behind, he had to provide more than great plays; he had to produce plays that would both make an impression and be original in some conspicuous way. He accomplished this, I claim, by attacking the conventions of the *palliata*, the employment of stereotypical characters and improvisatory speech in-performance. His stepping away from the *palliata* norm alarmed his rivals who accused him of plagiarism, theft and forgery. Yet, the Roman aristocrats who were versed in Hellenistic literature were attracted to Terence's artistry probably because they discerned in Terence's initiatives the beginning of a new methodology in the production of comic drama, which introduces a new, more literary form of *aemulatio* with the Greek tradition of New Comedy. Thus, Terence saw in the patronage of the aristocrats a prime opportunity to establish himself as a playwright almost immediately, and to distinguish himself from his predecessors by equating his composition practice with *negotium*, the Roman technical term for official business.

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Abstract

The paper discusses Terence’s interaction with the members of the contemporary political and cultural elite. Terence was among the early Latin authors who introduced the Callimachean poetics in Roman literature. Given the restrictions of the comic genre, he advertized his embrace of this new poetics through the construction of a defense against accusations for inappropriate playwriting, and by means of a language that would appeal specifically to the political experience and worldview of the aristocratic members of his audience. This ideology is inscribed in the use of key vocabulary that recurs systematically in all six Terentian prologues.

Further, the accusations against Terence, real or inventive, may be attributed to his attempt to introduce a more disciplined staging of comic plays — an initiative that likely gained favor among the playwright’s aristocratic patrons, who saw in his scripts evidence of comic talent similar to that of Menander whom they admired and held second only to Homer.