

THE MIRROR OF LIFE : INTERPRETATIONS OF A  
METAPHORICAL DEFINITION OF COMEDY

Kevin Alexander Wallace

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**THE MIRROR OF LIFE:  
Interpretations of a Metaphorical  
Definition of Comedy**

by

**Kevin Alexander Wallace**

A Thesis submitted on 7 May, 1997 in conformity  
with the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Philosophy  
in the  
University of St. Andrews.



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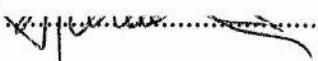
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## ABSTRACT

Cicero's dictum, *comoedia est imitatio uitae, speculum consuetudinis, imago ueritatis*, as found in the prefatory essays to Donatus' commentaries on the Terentian comedies, has become accepted as the standard definition of New Comedy, without any external evidence as to the precise meaning. There are two possible interpretations: either the mirror is philosophical and it was comedy's main purpose to provide ethical instruction to its audience, or the mirror of comedy is realistic because it reflects the language, customs, and social values of the people. The issue is further complicated by the difference in objectives between the three main extant examples of New Comedy: Menander, Plautus and Terence, but also the differences in between the theory of comedy, and the actual practice.

In the Renaissance, those playwrights who dutifully learned the Ciceronian-Donatian definition of comedy in their editions of Terence's comedies, were forced, when turning their hand to comedy themselves, to interpret the dictum in a practical way that would also reflect the age in which they were living.

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**NOTE**

For consistency and accessibility, all translations are those as found in the *Loeb Classical Library series*. The translators of these works are listed in the bibliography under the classical author. I provide my own translations for those works for which there is not adequate translation available. All exceptions are noted.

## INTRODUCTION

*Comoediam esse Cicero ait imitationem uitae, speculum consuetudinis, imaginem ueritatis.* "Cicero said that comedy is the imitation of life, the mirror of manners and the image of truth". So is the definition of comedy quoted in the prefatory essay *De Comoedia* by Evanthius<sup>1</sup> which was appended to the commentaries on the five<sup>2</sup> comedies of Terence by the fourth-century grammarian, Aelius Donatus.<sup>3</sup> It is in this essay that we find not only Cicero's definition but also that of the earliest practitioner of Roman drama, Livius Andronicus:

Liuus Andronicus... aitque esse comoediam cotidianae uitae speculum, nec iniuria. Nam ut intenti speculo ueritatis liniamenta facile per imaginem colligimus, ita lectione comoediae imitationem uitae consuetudinisque non aegerrime adnimaduertimus.<sup>4</sup>

- ✦ Livius Andronicus rightly says that comedy is the mirror of daily life. For just as gazing into a mirror we easily see the features of truth in the reflected image, so by the observation of comedy we perceive with pleasure the imitation of life and custom.<sup>5</sup>

It is perhaps because Cicero's definition came at the beginning of the work that it overshadowed that of Livius Andronicus, and it is for this reason that it is more relevant to our investigation.

Although the definition is popular and well-known, there has not been a full study dedicated to it. Indeed, when it is noticed by scholars,

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<sup>1</sup>*Excerpta de Comoedia*, V.1

<sup>2</sup>The commentary to *Heauton Timorumenos* either did not survive after the sixth compilation, or else it was never written. cf. Hilger (1970), 4-5 and Wessner (1962), VII-XXXIII.

<sup>3</sup>Because the prefatory essay was thought in the period with which I am dealing to have been written by Donatus, I do not find it necessary to distinguish this essay from the rest of the work. It is understood as a single entity by Donatian commentaries.

<sup>4</sup>Evanthius, *Excerpta de Comoedia* V.5.

<sup>5</sup>Trans. Hilger (1970), 15.

their comments are either cursory or else tucked away in a footnote.<sup>6</sup> It is not a self-evident definition, and owing to the fact that Evanthius offers us nothing of the context from which either definition was extracted, there is little proof that any critical explanation is correct other than what we find in the plays.

The mirror was an important figurative instructional aid for the Greeks. The mathematician illustrated symmetry with it,<sup>7</sup> the astronomer described the stars with it<sup>8</sup> and the philosopher employed it to demonstrate the contrast of appearance versus reality. A famous example of the latter is found in Plato's *Republic* where the Socrates is discussing the use of mirror to fashion an appearance of everything around them:

Οὐ χαλεπός, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ἀλλὰ πολλαχῆ καὶ ταχὺ δημιουργούμενος, τάχιστα δέ που, εἰ θέλεις λαβὼν κάτοπτρον περιφέρειν πανταχῆ· ταχὺ μὲν ἥλιον τοιήσεις καὶ τὰ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, ταχὺ δὲ γῆν, ταχὺ δὲ σαυτόν τε καὶ τὰλλα ζῶα καὶ σκεύη καὶ φυτὰ καὶ πάντα ὅσα νῦν δὴ ἐλέγετο.<sup>9</sup>

[The way for you for you yourself to make all these things] is not difficult, but one widely and quickly practised; and quickest of all, I suppose, if you're prepared to take a mirror and turn it everywhere. You'll soon produce the sun and the objects in the sky, soon produce the earth, soon produce yourself and other creatures and plants, and everything that was mentioned a moment ago.<sup>10</sup>

The mirror as a metaphor was also a popular image in tragedy. Tragedy generally shows the process of self-recognition and realisation in

<sup>6</sup>For example, Curtius (1948), I: 339 I; Fraenkel (1950), II: 386 n.1; Fraenkel (1960), 68 n.2.; Fantham (1972), 68; Gratwick (1987), 8; Hilger (1970), 58; Marx (1905) *ap. fr.* 1029; Rostagni (1955), I: 339 n.5; Pfeiffer (1968), 51; Wilamowitz-Möllendorff (1959), 56. Zanker (1987), 143 ff.

<sup>7</sup>Euclides, 9.19.4 f., 10.176.14 f.,

<sup>8</sup>Eudoxus, 1.6.4 f.

<sup>9</sup>*Republic*, 10. 596d-e.

<sup>10</sup>Trans. Halliwell (1988), 39.

its hero. In the *Agamemnon*, Aeschylus used the mirror to describe the revelation of a crowd's true nature. Upon returning home, Agamemnon announces his plans for the future and expounds how he will rule. In this speech, he explains why he will be a just and liberal ruler:

εἰδὼς λέγοιμ' ἄν· εὖ γὰρ ἐξεπίσταμαι  
ὀμιλίας κάτοπτρον, εἰδῶλον σκιᾶς,  
δοκοῦντας εἶναι κάρτα πρηνεμενεῖς ἐμοί. 11

I can speak from knowledge--well I know  
the mirror of society, the image of shadow,  
those who seem kindly towards me.<sup>12</sup>

There is debate over what precisely Aeschylus meant by this. Verral translates ὀμιλίας κάτοπτρον as "the mirror of friendship". Fraenkel rejects this translation, arguing that κάτοπτρον never means "reflection" but always "mirror", and that in this mirror, Agamemnon "sees the image of the true disposition of his fellow beings".<sup>13</sup> In any event, the mirror in this instance reflects the nature of *others*.

Conversely, in Euripides' *Hippolytos*, the mirror is *self-revealing*,<sup>14</sup> although it is held up by another's hand:

κακοὺς δὲ θνητῶν ἐξέφην', ὅταν τύχη,  
προθεὶς κάτοπτρον ὥστε παρθένῳ νέᾳ  
χρόνος· παρ' οἷσι μήποτ' ἀφθείην ἐγώ.<sup>15</sup>

But in his hour Time lifts his mirror, and shows the vile his  
vileness there, as a girl sees her face. I want to be nowhere  
near there.

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<sup>11</sup>Ag. 838-840.

<sup>12</sup>Trans. Lloyd-Jones (1970).

<sup>13</sup>Fraenkel. *op.* 838.

<sup>14</sup>Barrett (1964), 238.

<sup>15</sup>*Hipp.* 428.

In this passage, Phaedra is dreading the mirror that in time will reveal the full horror of her crime. While important for the history of the metaphor, these two quotations do little to further our knowledge of 'the mirror of life' as a critical metaphor.

The first instance of the mirror-metaphor applied as a description of literature is found in Pindar's seventh *Nemean* ode:

σκότον πολὺν ὕμνων ἔχοντι δεόμαι·  
 ἔργοις δὲ καλοῖς ἔσοπτρον ἴσαμεν ἐνὶ σὺν τρόπῳ,  
 εἰ Μναμοσύνας ἕκατι λιπάμπυκος  
 εὔρηται ἄποινα μόχθων κλυταῖς ἐπέων ἀοιδαῖς.

"We can hold a mirror to fine things  
 In one way only,  
 If with the help of Memory in her glittering crown  
 Recompense is found for labour  
 In echoing words of song.<sup>16</sup>

Here, poetry in general is a mirror in which one can see his. her own deeds immortalised long after the fact.

Our final example of the metaphor is most important for our discussion. Amongst a list of 'frigid' and 'hollow' metaphors, Aristotle cites Alcidamas' description of the *Odyssey* as a 'fair mirror of human life': καλὸν ἀνθρωπίνου βίου κάτοπτρον.<sup>17</sup> Why it is that Aristotle disapproves so ardently with this particular criticism is difficult to speculate<sup>18</sup> since we have no context of Alcidamas' original work from which Aristotle excerpted the quotation. Although the metaphor was used to describe an epic poem rather than a comedy, by examining how later critics viewed the *Odyssey* and comedy, we can see how they came to apply the criticism to comedy.

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<sup>16</sup>Trans. Bowra (1969).

<sup>17</sup>1406<sup>b</sup>120; III.iv.3

<sup>18</sup>J.H. Freese, in his translation of the "Art" of *Rhetoric* in the Loeb series also finds this objection puzzling, pg. 354n.a.

The *Odyssey* certainly contains what was to become comic material. The earliest explicit statement of this affinity is made in the Aristotle's *Poetica* when discussing plot. In the twenty-fourth chapter he comments that, like comic plots, the *Odyssey* has a double structure, ending with the good being rewarded and the bad being punished (τελευτῶσα ἐξ ἐναντίας τοῖς βελτίοισι καὶ χείροσιν, xiii.11), whereas the *Iliad* has only a single plot (ἀπλοῦν, xxiv.3). Even Aristotle in book 4 of his *Poetica*, records that Homer was the earliest poet extant in the philosopher's time 'to mark out the main lines of comedy, since he made his drama not out of personal satire but out of the laughable as such' (οὕτως καὶ τὰ τῆς κωμωδίας σχήματα πρῶτος ὑπέδειξεν οὐ ψόγον ἀλλὰ τὸ γελοῖον δραματοποιήσας). Although it was not the *Odyssey* but the *Margites*<sup>19</sup> to which Aristotle explicitly traces the roots of comedy, the philosopher implies on several occasions the similarities between comedy and Homer's second epic.

Evanthius, in the fourth century A.D., thought that Homer composed the *Iliad* in the mould of tragedy (*instar tragoediae*) and the *Odyssey* in the likeness of comedy (*imaginem comoediae*).<sup>20</sup> A century earlier, Pseudo-Longinus was more explicit as to his reasons for the comparison: he comments on the representation of lower characters:

τοιαῦτα γάρ που τὰ περὶ τὴν τοῦ Ὀδυσσέως  
ἠθικῶς αὐτῷ βιολογούμενα οἰκίαν, οἶονεὶ κωμωδία  
τίς ἐστὶν ἠθολογουμένη.

For instance, his character-sketches of the daily life in Odysseus' household are in the style of some comedy of character.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup>Aristotle ascribes this work to Homer.

<sup>20</sup>Evanthius, *De Fabula*, I.5.

<sup>21</sup>*On the Sublime*, 9.15.

It is striking that Alcidamas calls only the *Odyssey* a mirror of *human life* (ἀνθρωπίνου βίου), and makes no mention whatever of the *Iliad*. The explanation may be found in the differences between the two epics that the ancients found.

Aristotle in the *Poetica* distinguishes the *Iliad* from the *Odyssey* on the grounds that the former is 'evocative of emotion', that is, παθητικόν, and the latter, 'expressive of character', ἠθικὴ (xxiv.3). Exactly what Aristotle means by this distinction is hardly clear because the difference of approach in characterisation between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is itself obscure. Both epics have well-portrayed characters; the *Iliad* focuses primarily on three heroes--Achilles, Agamemnon and Hector--just as the *Odyssey* concentrates almost exclusively on Odysseus and his family. Aristotle himself admires Homer's skilful characterisation in *both* works: ... [Ὅμηρος] εὐθὺς εἰσάγει ἄνδρα ἢ γυναῖκα ἢ ἄλλο τι ἦθος καὶ οὐδέν' ἀήθη ἀλλ' ἔχοντα ἦθη.<sup>22</sup> Since there appears to be little evidence that ancient critics thought that Homer altered his style of characterisation between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, we must turn our attention elsewhere to determine why Aristotle labelled only the *Odyssey* ἠθικὴ.

To return now to Alcidamas' quotation. If we decide that τὴν Ὀδύσειαν καλὸν ἀνθρωπίνου βίου κάτοπτρον should be interpreted as meaning something like 'the *Odyssey* is an accurate depiction of everyday human life"--as I think we must--we may find a clue why this metaphor was applied exclusively to comedy. Alcidamas likens the poem to a mirror because it faithfully represents the lives of *average* people in such a way that we can recognise it.

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<sup>22</sup>... [Homer] brings in a man or a woman or some other character, never without character, but all having character of their own.' (24.24 ff = 1460a8ff.)

In this dissertation, I shall examine three main interpretations of the mirror-metaphor as a definition of comedy. The first of these is that of comedy as a realistic mirror, in which the playwright employs close attention to familiar detail, probability and characterisation to provide a faithful reflection of familiar customs and characters of the age. The second interpretation: comedy mirrors people so that they might see their reflections in the comedy, and apply what they learn to their own lives. Thus, comedy becomes a philosophical mirror. Already one can see the problem that arises, for there is a necessary connection between the 'realistic' and the 'philosophical' mirror. That is, one cannot recognise himself in a 'philosophical' mirror unless that mirror is reasonably faithful to reality. Furthermore, the mirror may also be distorted; like in a house of mirrors, details may also be exaggerated or reduced.

The interpretation of the sixteenth-century Humanists who were familiar with Cicero's definition of comedy from their study of Terence's comedies and Donatus' commentaries on them, and who attempted to make it applicable to their own theatrical experiences and criticisms, is the third and final section of my investigation.

CHAPTER I:  
THE REALISTIC MIRROR

I. INTRODUCTION

The primary property of a mirror is its ability to produce an exact image of whatever is placed before it. When a sample of literature or art is likened to a mirror, one's first and most natural thought is that that piece offers an accurate reflection of something else. The "mirror of life" metaphor thus implies life-likeness, verisimilitude or even realism. This discussion on comedy and the "mirror of life" will examine realism in ancient literature in an attempt to establish how ancient critics and poets themselves viewed the concept. Our exploration of the 'realistic mirror' will be chronological, beginning with Menander as the example of New Comedy before moving on to the Roman comedians, Plautus and Terence.

**i. DEFINITIONS**

Before embarking on our investigation, it must first be clarified what shall meant by "realism". Wellek interprets the term as an "objective representation of contemporary society."<sup>23</sup> This is at once a concise and misleadingly simplistic definition, which requires further qualification. Graham Zanker examines realism primarily in Alexandrian poetry, but his observations are applicable also to "classical" and "ante-classical" authors, for the techniques employed by Alexandrian poets were surely the same as those that were embryonic in earlier works. Zanker lists the most salient features:

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<sup>23</sup>Wellek (1961), 10.

Realism, as a universal mode, can be observed principally, as far as literature is concerned, in a style which emphasises detail, in a subject-matter which tends towards the everyday and familiar, or in an intellectual approach which pays especial attention to probability and plausibility.<sup>24</sup>

He then divides realism as a general term into three more specific subsets.<sup>25</sup> First is aetiology, or the "appeal to learning," which is a mode of realism more appropriate to poetry of the Alexandrian--than to the classical--period. The next two subsets are more applicable to our discussion: 1) the "realism of subject matter", that is, the depiction of "subjects drawn from familiar experiences" and 2) "realism of style" or "realistic pictorialism". In an earlier article, Zanker explains that the aim of every sort of realism, either individually or in tandem with others, is to

<build bridges> between the remote world of myth and the immediate sensual experience of the audience, who may visualise with precision the mythical material brought before their eyes and thus be enabled the more easily to enter into the fiction of the poets' representations, if not actually to view them as credible.<sup>26</sup>

The study of the affairs of everyday people allows the poet to examine familiar details to evoke emotion in its audience in such a way as to make the comedy more credible to the audience and thereby creates an immediacy between the audience and the poet. It is thus an appeal to the familiarity of the reader/audience.

We must finally distinguish realism from illusionism. Whereas the former aims for an accurate portrayal of the real world of the audience,

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<sup>24</sup>Zanker (1987), 8.

<sup>25</sup>Zanker (1987), chapter 1, *passim*.

<sup>26</sup>Zanker (1983), 126.

the latter strives to create an impression of reality, or *vraisemblance*; if the events portrayed are not true, at least they *could* be. We must be careful with these terms, for an author may present a life-like scene, but this does not necessarily mean that the details therein correspond with historical reality. For our purposes, those items can be deemed realistic which correspond to universal reality. For instance, our everyday experience enables us to determine if an author describes a baby crying in a realistic way, but it does not help us in determining the historical accuracy of references to laws or customs.

## ii. THEATRICAL CONVENTIONS

The ancients were certainly not unaware of the advantages of realism on the stage. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle remarks on the delight of the audience when the visual artist represents a real-life person so accurately that the audience recognises people they know who appear on the canvas as εἰκόνες αἱ μάλιστα ἠκριβωμέναι (1448<sup>b</sup>15 ff.). Aristotle also implies the need for verisimilitude in tragedy in observing that the best tragedians, 'when drawing their characters aim for 'goodness' (χρηστὰ, xv.1), 'agreement with the mythical character' (τὸ ὅμοιον, xv.5), 'consistency' (τὸ ὁμαλόν, xv.6), and 'appropriateness' (τὰ ἀρμόττοντα, xv.4). On the last quality, he elaborates: ἔστιν γὰρ ἀνδρεῖον μὲν τὸ ἦθος, ἀλλ' οὐχ ἀρμόττον γυναικείῳ τὸ ἀνδρεῖαν ἢ δεινὴν εἶναι, 'the characters should be appropriate. A character may be manly, but it is not appropriate for a woman to be manly or clever'. Later in the chapter, Aristotle expands the need for verisimilitude to include plot as well:

Χρὴ δὲ καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἥθεσιν ὥσπερ καὶ ἐν τῇ τῶν πραγμάτων συστάσει αἰεὶ ζητεῖν ἢ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον ἢ τὸ εἰκός, ὥστε τὸν τοιοῦτον τὰ τοιαῦτα λέγειν ἢ πράττειν ἢ ἀναγκαῖον ἢ εἰκός καὶ τοῦτο μετὰ τοῦτο γίνεσθαι ἢ ἀναγκαῖον ἢ εἰκός.

In character-drawing just as much as in the arrangement of the incidents one should always seek what is inevitable or probable, so as to make it inevitable or probable that such and such a person should say or do such and such; and inevitable or probable that one thing should follow another.<sup>27</sup>

It is clear from this that the ancients respected the need for realism, although dramatic conventions present a large obstacle to the modern experience of them.

If a person from today could go back in time to view an ancient dramatic performance, one can well imagine how much he/she would be overwhelmed by the ancient stage practices.<sup>28</sup> Because the Greek stage did not have stage-curtains, the actors would have had to enter out of character and then get into character on-stage, but for the most part such 'cancelled entries' are seldom required of the actors. Further, when a prop needs to be brought on in the middle of a scene, a stagehand would have had to cross the stage during the performance.<sup>29</sup> In the absence of elaborate backdrops and lighting, the spectators were asked to imagine the setting and the time of day.<sup>30</sup> They were also required not to object if the passage of time within the play does not coincide with actual time. Finally, they must not criticise the poet if it takes a herald only five-hundred lines of play-time to run from Troy to Argos.<sup>31</sup> Three actors performed all parts--even those of women. The formalism and elevation of the tragic language--its stichomythia, for instance--was unlikely to be

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<sup>27</sup>*Poet.* xv.10

<sup>28</sup>Further information on comic conventions: Dedoussi (1995) and Handley (1969).

<sup>29</sup>Dover (1972) cites an example in the *Clouds* where a bed that was onstage at line 509 is called out again at 631. It was have been moved offstage at some point between those 122 lines, although there is no direct indication of this in the text.

<sup>30</sup>Webster (1962/3), 236.

<sup>31</sup>Webster (1962/3), 237 cites the beginning of the *Agamemnon*.

found in everyday speech, but neither were the ancients likely to speak in verse in the street. All of these elements would hamper the modern idea of dramatic illusion because in the modern theatre, they would remind us that we are watching a play, not real life.

Each of these items is a convention, a term which Bain profitably defines as "a kind of compact between playwright and audience which entails the audience accepting without qualm or question some technical device used by the dramatist."<sup>32</sup> The ancient audience would have accepted these conventions without question, partly because it would have had no other opposing experiences of the theatre with which to compare them. While the *vraisemblance* of the play (as we understand it today) would have suffered because of these conventions, the ancient audience was doubtlessly accustomed to the general practice of the theatre and was aware that it was watching a play. Upon entering the theatre, the audience applies a "willing suspense of disbelief;" it accepts the 'terms' of the play and views the lapses in the realistic illusion of the play not as faults in the dramatist's art but rather as necessities of the art.

Of the dramatic conventions, that of the "dramatic illusion" in the ancient Greek theatre is the most hotly debated. Sifakis is most cynical of the lot and denies that there was an "illusion" at all.<sup>33</sup> His view is understandable; the concept of the 'fourth wall' would indeed be hard to establish if the actors delivered their lines to the audience rather than to each other.<sup>34</sup> Professor Dover is more moderate, and is willing to concede

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<sup>32</sup>Bain (1977), 1.

<sup>33</sup>This view is shared with Dedoussi (1995) and Mueke (1977), 54.

<sup>34</sup>Along with this suggestion, Sandbach (1973), 15 provides the following testimony on English stage acting: 'It is by no means certain that the modern method of speaking dialogue was even known to Shakespeare's stage. When the naturalist movement reached its climax in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, reformers of the drama all

that there was a dramatic illusion in the ancient Greek theatre if we define the term as "the uninterrupted concentration of the fictitious personages of the play on their fictitious situation".<sup>35</sup> Bain simplifies the definition: "Actors pretend to be the people they play and the audience accepts that pretence." The dramatic illusion is thus a convention and as such, it is taken for granted until it is explicitly ruptured by the actor who steps out of his character to interact with the audience.

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over Europe found that it was necessary to train actors not to speak dialogue "out front", B.L. Joseph. (1951)*Elizabethan Acting*. Oxford, 130.

<sup>35</sup>Dover (1972), 56.

## II. MENANDER

### i. TESTIMONIA

#### i.1. ARISTOPHANES OF BYZANTIUM

The comedies of Menander, judging from extant ancient criticism, appear to have been the most realistic drama within an un-realistic (relative to modern standards) genre. Several testimonia on Menander mention his precision in reproducing contemporary reality; the most famous of which is that of Aristophanes of Byzantium who, barely a century after the death of Menander, was quoted as asking,

ὦ Μένανδρε καὶ βίε,  
πότερος ἄρ' ὑμῶν πότερον ἀπεμιμήσατο;<sup>36</sup>

'O Menander and life, which of you imitated the other?'

The primary interpretation of this citation is that Menander's comedies were so convincingly realistic that, apart from the dramatic conventions, they could be mistaken for contemporary life.<sup>37</sup> Aristophanes is in effect likening Menander's comedies to a mirror accurately reflecting its surroundings. The quotation is important to our discussion because Aristophanes was the head of the library at Alexandria circa 200 B.C. and therefore presumably had wide access to comedies of other writers. This accreditation implies that Menander in particular was extraordinary in his portrayal of current life around him. Aristophanes' question is the closest any extant ancient critical work comes to applying the mirror-metaphor to the works of Menander, although many commentators on the comedies use language that is at least suggestive of a reflective glass.

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<sup>36</sup>Syrian. *comment. in Hermoge.* II 23 Rabe (= *Testimonia* 32 Körte); for a discussion of the metrics of this quotation, see Cantarella (1969), 190 ff.

<sup>37</sup>This is not the only interpretation. We will examine this quotation again in the next chapter.

## i.2. QUINTILIAN

Quintilian employs catoptric language to advocate the emulation of Menander by the young orator-in-training: "So perfect is his representation of actual life" (*ita omnem uitae imaginem expressit*<sup>38</sup>). That the word *imago* is appropriate to any discussion of mirrors is supported by Cicero's famous definition of comedy: ...*imitationem uitae, speculum consuetudinis, imaginem ueritatis* in which *imitatio*, *speculum* and *imago* are treated as synonyms, and all of which can be loosely rendered 'reflection'.

## i. 3. MANILIUS

In the same century, Manilius similarly recommends to any potential comic playwright Menander as an exemplar of fidelity to truth in the portrayal of contemporary life:

475    quis in cuncta suam produxit saecula uitam  
doctior urbe sua linguae sub flore Menander,  
qui uitae ostendit uitam chartisque sacrauit.<sup>39</sup>

In such plays Menander made his own day live for all generations: a man whose eloquence surpassed that of his native Athens (and that when its language attained its richest bloom), he held up a mirror to life and enshrined the image in his works.

Professor Goold opts for an eloquent and free rather than a close and literal translation: "he held up a mirror to life" for *qui vitae ostendit uitam*. He is quite justified in such a translation, of course, as the language itself implies the mirror and its image. *Vitae* is the slightly imperfect reflection of *uitam*. Life (within the play) reflects life (in the 'real' world outside the play).

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<sup>38</sup>Quintilian, *Inst.* x.1.69.

<sup>39</sup>Manilius, *Astronomica* 5.470 ff. (=Testimonia 36 Körte).

#### i.4. AULUS GELLIUS

Not every critic of Menander uses mirror-suggestive language when commenting on the poet's verisimilitude. Aulus Gellius in the second century A.D., for instance, when contrasting Caecilius with Menander, has occasion to remark that Menander's material was taken from "actual life" (*de uita... sumptum*), and that in the comedies he rendered life "simple, realistic and delightful" (*simplex et uerum et delectabile*).<sup>40</sup> The capability of Menander's comedy to mirror life is indubitably captured in this quotation--especially in the positioning of the word *uerum* immediately following the statement that the poet chose the elements for his plays from life. It is possible that Gellius was aware of the earlier criticisms and was echoing familiar, popular teachings about Menander; it is also likely that he noticed independently that which others before him had already observed.

#### ii. STAGE CONVENTIONS

##### ii.1. THE STAGE

From Old to New Comedy there is a marked trend towards--although still falling far short of--the modern-day realistic illusion in theatrical conventions. It has been suggested by scholars that New Comedy was better suited to a raised stage.<sup>41</sup> If the elevated stage was in use in Menander's time, it would have provided a greater distance between the actors and their audience. The illusionary 'fourth wall' would have been easier to maintain as the chasm would have made difficult any direct interaction with a single member of the audience. However, it is ambiguous exactly when the raised stage was built. After investigating the

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<sup>40</sup>Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 2.23.12 -13.

<sup>41</sup>Webster (1962/3), 21; Winter (1983).

remains of the fourth-century skene of the theatre of Dionysos at Athens, Townsend noted that archaeological evidence admits the possibility that the actors performed atop the roof of the central section of the stage (if, indeed, it had one in this period).<sup>42</sup> There is not enough of Menander's comedies extant (and that which is extant is hardly datable in any certain way) that suggests that sometime in his career Menander had to adapt his technique to this new raised stage, and so it must remain at least a possibility that Menander took advantage of this distance from the audience in his later plays.

The stage, quite apart from the prospect of it being raised at the time of Menander's productions, also offered new features to aid the dramatic illusion.<sup>43</sup> The stage was decorated in more scenery than in tragedy and earlier drama. Because comedy deals so much with the lowly activities of eating and drinking, the need to be able to represent symposia was pressing. To that end props such as garlands, *τύμπανα*, *φιάλαι*, *ἀλάβαστρα*, jugs and cups could be hung on the panels of the stage-building to represent the *ἀνδρῶν*, the man's chamber, in which feasts and symposia were held. Side panels now also represented rural scenes to demarcate which part of the stage is to be considered the countryside. As Webster points out, Menander was "a long way from the realism of the modern producer, but the different elements were sufficient to stimulate the audience's imagination so that they could realize his words."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Townsend (1986), 435.

<sup>43</sup>The list that follows is from Webster (1962/3).

<sup>44</sup>Webster (1962/3), 272.

## ii. 2. COSTUMES

There is no evidence that Menander continued to rely on outrageous costumes of Old Comedy to raise a laugh.<sup>45</sup> The padded costumes and φαλλοί of the Old Comic stage fell into disuse, and Menander reverted to the costuming practice of tragedy in which characters wore a basic chiton on top of which a mantle or other such prop indicative of the character's station, sex, or profession was worn.<sup>46</sup>

Masks of New Comedy were also more individualised.<sup>47</sup> Although there were set masks for character-types--the masks of old men still had white hair and beards, and slaves still often had red hair, etc.--New Comedy, with its portrayal of several examples of one character-type, required a feature that would differentiate between them. Webster suggests that the hairstyles of the masks accomplished this function, for if there were two youths, they were distinguished by the colour of their hair, or by the fact that one had curly hair while the other's was straight.

The analysis of the emotions, facial expressions and facial features themselves by the author of the *Physiognomonica* also bolsters our knowledge of what the masks of New Comedy may have looked like. Like the descriptions of faces in that work, some features as seen on masks are also representative of some especial trait of a certain character's:<sup>48</sup> long hair or a beard indicated an irascible personality (808 a 22); a straight nose signalled stupidity; a snub nose sensuality, and an aquiline nose can indicate either shamelessness or magnanimity (811 a 22f.) A round face could also suggest shamelessness while a long face signified sensibility

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<sup>45</sup>Sandbach (1973), 13 n. 1.

<sup>46</sup>Handley (1965), 32 ff.

<sup>47</sup>For an invaluable discussion of the masks and iconography of characters in the *Dyskolos*, see Handley (1965), 34 ff.

<sup>48</sup>Webster (1956), 76ff. Cf. Pickard-Cambridge (1968), 223-30.

(807 b 27, 32). Menander plays with costumes primarily clearly to demarcate the characters, thereby making the plot easier for the viewer to follow. In so doing, he also makes the characters more individual and more believable visually.

### ii.3. CHORUS

A further example of the inclination of New Comedy toward naturalism is found in the elimination of an organised chorus. Their function within the overall performance was reduced; no longer was there a parabasis of the chorus within the plot of the comedy. In fact, the chorus had no significant relevance to the plot at all; it seems that its only purpose in New Comedy was to provide entertainment between acts. Furthermore, if the stage was in fact separated from the orchestra at this period, the chorus was almost completely physically removed from the play.

### ii. 4. AUDIENCE ADDRESS

The actors on the New Comic stage continued to address their audience. This is one of the conventions of Old Comedy that did manage to pass down successfully to New Comedy, albeit with some minor changes. Characters frequently address the audience using the same formulaic vocative ἄνδρες as found in Old Comedy.<sup>49</sup> However, individuals in the audience are no longer singled out for ridicule. Like those in tragedy, addresses in New Comedy are almost always directed to the general audience, but unlike tragedy, Menander makes it obvious that he is speaking directly to the audience of the play with the occasional

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<sup>49</sup>See under '*allocutiones spectatorum*' in the index of *Notabilia varia* in Koerte (1959). In New Comedy, this formula is occasionally employed to foil the audience's expectations. When a character yells ἄνδρες, it is sometimes a call for help--a *hilfsrufe*--rather than an address. cf. Bain (1981) who examines the example of *Samia* 682. Also: *Dysk.* 666ff. and 522 ff.; *Epitr.* 878 ff and 419 ff; *Samia* 664 ff.

vocative θεαταί. Menander seems to have had no qualms about the rupture of the dramatic illusion to include his audience.

Asides are as common in New Comedy as in tragedy or Old Comedy but, as Bain demonstrates, in Menander they are almost always less than three lines long.<sup>50</sup> This is important, he explains, because the length of the aside aids verisimilitude: the shorter the aside, the more believable it is.

#### ii.5. 'EVERYDAY' CHARACTERS

As we have noticed in the introduction, comedy deals with the affairs of private citizens (ιδιωτικῶν πραγμάτων). In Old Comedy, the characters included famous historical figures such as Sophocles as well as the lowly fictional peasants such as Strepsiades. In New Comedy the characters are both fictional and average. Therefore, the New Comic playwright does not have to represent faithfully or base his caricature on a historical person, but is free to depict more general types of everyday folk.

Since average people are the subjects of New Comedy, it may incongruous to find deities such as Pan making appearances on the stage. However, as far as we can tell, divine or semi-divine characters only appeared in extra-dramatic prologues, never as part of the plot of the comedies. Because the divine prologue remains outside the plot, he/she does not affect the verisimilitude of the overall production any more than a human prologue would.

Unlike Old Comedy in which gods are treated as buffoons and the plots of 'Middle' Comedy which parodied legendary tales and characters, divine figures in New Comedy are treated reverently; they are never the butt of a joke. Sometimes these prologues are no more than abstract

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<sup>50</sup>Bain (1977), 151 ff.

deifications--"not divinities in whom true belief is expected"<sup>51</sup>--specially created to fit the general themes of the play they are to introduce; neither Ἄγνοια (Ignorance) in *Perikeiromene* nor Τύχη (Chance) in the *Aspis* are of the Olympian sort. The plot requires the prologue's divine status to allow him/her to reveal facts about the characters that no human character could possibly know.<sup>52</sup> For example, in the *Dyskolos*, Pan reveals that Sostratos fell in love immediately not because of his amorous and rash personality but because he was inspired by Pan (line 44). Not every comedy had a divine prologue; but the only contrary evidence that there was a human prologue is that of Moschion in the *Samia*. While Sandbach is willing to concede that this speech performs the rôle of the prologue,<sup>53</sup> Bain warns against falling into the trap of forcing a prologue into every play.<sup>54</sup> Finally, the delayed prologue also acts for the sake of naturalism. Several of Menander's plays began *in medias res* and then, after the first scene, had a prologue provide key information about the plot, characters, and setting.<sup>55</sup>

### iii. INTERNAL EVIDENCE

It is now time to look at the plays themselves to find realistic (or conversely, unrealistic) elements. Because of the limited scope of this dissertation, it is probably best to examine a single passage in detail and then relate it to the other comedies. I have chosen Demeas' monologue in the first scene of the third act (206 ff.) in the *Samia* primarily because of its wealth of verisimilar elements. It is a good sample because much of the *Samia* has been recovered and so will also avail the necessary context.

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<sup>51</sup>Sandbach (1973), 21.

<sup>52</sup>Sandbach (1973), 133 ff.

<sup>53</sup>Sandbach (1973), 544 on *Samia* 1-56.

<sup>54</sup>Bain (1977), 187 ff.

<sup>55</sup>Sandbach (1973), 20 cites *Aspis*, *Heros*, *Perikeiromene*, *Synaristosai*.

While it is unclear when this play was produced, Bain offers odds on the period 317 -307 B.C., which would make it either contemporary with, or later than, the *Dyskolos*, and probably in the middle of Menander's dramatic career (325-4 to 293-2 B.C.). On the one hand, therefore, we might expect to find much that is typical to Menander's plays owing to its median date, but on the other hand, we must employ caution since we have only a small fraction of the 105 plays Menander is reported to have written in his lifetime, and of that which is extant, only the *Dyskolos* can be considered complete. That which has been recovered may not necessarily go far in supporting trends, or it may in fact produce a false trend that is not applicable to his entire *œuvre*. Only more papyri will confirm or disprove these trends.

**iii. 1. SAMIA 206 ff.**

To Demeas' monologue in the *Samia*, then. At this point in the play, the audience has already learned that Moschion had raped a girl at the Adonis festival, but was ashamed of his action, and pledged to the girl's mother that he would make amends and take the girl as his wife as soon as his father, Demeas, returned from abroad. Demeas' absence was a fortunate--and necessary--co-incidence because, before he left, Chrysis, the Samian slave-girl, also conceived. It seems that Chrysis did not carry her pregnancy to term, and so she brought Plangon's baby into Demeas' home and is rearing it under the pretence that it is her own. When Demeas returns, he is enraged to find that Chrysis gave birth without his approval, and so threatens to eject her from his household. In the second act, we discover that Demeas will not be an obstacle to the marriage of his son to Plangon, but he still has not yet learned that it is because Moschion is the father of Plangon's son that he wants to marry her. The second act ends

with Demeas, still ignorant of the fact that the baby boy in his house is not his *son* but his *grandson*, making preparations for Moschion's wedding. In the choral break between the second and third act, Demeas has stumbled upon the recognition that the infant is Moschion's and is enraged because he believes that Chrysis is the mother. He begins the third act with an explanation of what occurred 'behind the stagehouse' while the audience was being entertained by the chorus.

Demeas' speech is complementary to that of Moschion at the beginning of the play; while the latter is expository and discloses elements which are necessary for the foundation of the plot, the former only affirms what the audience already knows. Significantly, this is a monologue rather than an aside. Since Demeas is alone on stage, he is able to speak both freely and at length.<sup>56</sup> Because it is made explicit that this is a direct address to the audience (269: ἄνδρες, ὑμᾶς), there is no pretence of the old man merely externalising aloud to himself his thoughts about a recent event.

This momentous point in the plot demands that Demeas make such a speech; it marks the beginning of the father's unravelling of the facts about Moschion's and Plangon's pre-marital 'relationship'. That the baby is the son of Moschion is a minor ἀναγνώρισις leading up to the larger one that the mother is not Chrysis but Plangon, and that she conceived as a result of being raped at a festival.

### iii.2. VERISIMILITUDE

Such coincidences and recognition-scenes lead Tarn, when writing an account of Hellenistic history, to maintain that Menander is "the

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<sup>56</sup>As opposed to in an aside, where such a lengthy speech would strain the belief that the other character could not hear (see above).

dreariest desert in literature." He reasons, "Life is not entirely composed of seductions and unwanted children, coincidences and recognitions of long-lost daughters, irate fathers and impertinent slaves. Doubtless he had met these things; but, though his characters were types, the life was not typical. The world, however, has decided that it was typical, and on the material drawn from the New Comedy is chiefly based the traditional belief in Athens' decadence..."<sup>57</sup>

### iii.3. HISTORICAL ACCURACY

As a historian, Tarn questions the historical accuracy of some of the incidents that occur in his comedies. There is no reason to doubt that children in classical Athens were abandoned, and if we concede this fact, we must also concede that there was at least the possibility of later recognition if the child was saved before it died of exposure.<sup>58</sup> Granted, Plangon's recognition relies a little less on chance than that of Oedipus. The difference lies in the fact that ancient critics, as we have seen, praised Menander and not Sophocles for his 'true' representation of contemporary life.

The articles of Camille Préaux, Martina and in Zucker go far in demonstrating that Menander does in fact offer a reflection of fourth century B.C. Attic laws and practices.<sup>59</sup> However, some aspects of Menander's comedy seem to contradict glaringly the contemporary custom. That Cnemon's daughter is able to walk by herself alone at the beginning of the play is a case in point, for surely a young girl would not be given such a liberty as strolling unaccompanied. But in this particular

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<sup>57</sup>Tarn (1959), 273.

<sup>58</sup>Zagagi (1995), 187 n. 63 gives a valuable bibliography of scholarship on the question of exposure of children.

<sup>59</sup>Préaux, Camille (1957) and (1960); Martina, A. (1972/3); Zucker, F., ed. (1965).

instance, we are to acknowledge that the girl herself knows that this was not standard contemporary practice as is made clear by her protestations at line 205. Her unaccompanied jaunt in this passage helps to re-inforce her family's rusticity.

One should also remember that the features of Menander's comedies that Tarn mentions--"seductions... unwanted children, coincidences... recognitions... irate fathers and impertinent slaves"--are conventional themes in New Comedy which are renewed and reworked in the comedies again and again. Menander does not represent the whole of life, but only certain elements that were relevant to his audience. It is fiction Menander is writing, not a history in the modern sense of the word. As such, we might expect to find unrealistic chinks in Menander's comic armour. P.G. McC. Brown, in an article discussing Menander's use of Attic law in the *Aspis*, warns that we must not, upon discovering some non-conformity with contemporary Attic law as it now known to us, "pillory it; (but) rather [we should] welcome it as evidence that Menander created realistic characters whose discussions of Attic law were as vague as we might expect those of many Athenian citizens... to have been."<sup>60</sup> As a poet, Menander uses his medium to his own benefit; in some instances, it makes no real difference either to the plot or the presentation if elements within the plot are true to life so long as the whole is both possible and probable.

#### iii.4. PROBABILITY

Aristotle observed that tragedy is most effective when "the incidents are unexpected and yet one is the consequence of the other" (παρὰ τὴν δόξαν δι' ἄλληλα) rather than mechanically and accidentally

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<sup>60</sup>Brown (1983), 412.

(ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐτομάτου καὶ τῆς τύχης).<sup>61</sup> But this is not only applicable to tragedy; probability is also necessary for the plot of a comedy which deals in mistaken identities and recognitions such as the *Samia* or the *Epitrepontes*. In Demeas' monologue, we recognise Menander's desire to keep the account both plausible and credible. His speech lends itself to convincing the audience that the scene did take place and that he did not just learn the facts miraculously. It was pure random coincidence that the old man was in the right place in the right time to overhear the nurse. It just so happened (ἔτυχον, 229) that he was in the store organising the arrangements for the wedding. It also just happens (τυγχάνει, 234) that the weaving-room where the baby and the nurse were, was beside the store-room. The repetition of forms of τυγχάνειν within the speech stresses the circumstantial chain of events leading to the recognition.

The probability is enhanced and bolstered by the use of minute details that, when pieced together, form a credible whole. The blueprint of Demeas' house is thus established so that the audience can better imagine where all the players in the scene were placed. First, Demeas is already in the store room (229), which is on the ground floor of the house, when the nurse descends from the women's chambers (233). Joining the stairs to the store-room is a weaving room, and it is in this room that the nurse is talking to herself. Granted, this scene occurs within the house and may have been reported to avoid performing an indoor scene on-stage,<sup>62</sup> but we find in another of Menander's play a similar detailed description of outdoor regional detail.

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<sup>61</sup>*Poet. ix.11 ff.*

<sup>62</sup>Sandbach (1973), 12 ff.; for an opposing view, see Webster (1956), 24 ff.

### iii. 5. GEOGRAPHY

There are constant geographical markers in the *Dyskolos* that engage the audience's familiarity with the area. In the prologue, Pan invites the audience to visualise the setting:

τῆς Ἀττικῆς νομίζετ' εἶναι τὸν τόπον,  
 Φυλήν, τὸ νυμφαῖον δ' ὅθεν προέρχομαι  
 Φυλασίων καὶ τῶν δυναμένων τὰς πέτρας  
 ἐνθάδε γεωργεῖν, ἱερὸν ἐπιφανὲς πάνυ.

Imagine that the scene's in Attica--  
 It's Phyle--and the shrine from which I come  
 Belongs to the villagers and people who  
 Can farm rocks there; it's a holy place  
 Of great renown.

It is on this 'great renown' of the shrine and the spectators' acquaintance with the Nymphaeum in this scene that Menander's art depends. It provides a good place for the prologue to start because it is the one feature in Attica that the audience could imagine even if they had never been there.<sup>63</sup> The paradox is that an audience familiar with the region would also know that Pan's shrine was isolated by rugged terrain. However, as Professor Handley demonstrated,<sup>64</sup> in order that the shrine and Cnemon's farm can be placed on the same stage, Menander must move Pan's shrine at Phyle from an isolated cave to an open agricultural region in which both Gorgias and Cnemon are farming. Stage distance, like stage time, is thus ignored as conventional by the audience. Instead, the spectators must simply imagine that there is a much larger distance separating the shrine from Cnemon's farm. The dramatist overcomes this convention with his keen observance of naturalistic minute detail. Even if the particulars are

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<sup>63</sup>Handley (1965), 24 ff.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*

not topographically accurate, they are at least illusionistic, for Menander makes his scenery *seem* accurate. The *Dyskolos* begins with Pan announcing that the comedy is set in Attica, and more explicitly in Phyle near his own shrine; then the audience is told that the region is so infertile and barren that men can only 'farm rocks' (3 ff.) there. This is an important detail for another reason: it foreshadows the personality of the man who we will later discover *chooses* to farm there (327 ff).

Menander expands the description of the area by casually scattering particulars of the scenery throughout the play and in so doing, he sparks the imagination of his audience. The inclusion of these details is neither artless nor artificial, however; they are mentioned as the plot requires or can use them.<sup>65</sup> The spectators learn quite incidentally that there are fig-trees nearby from Sikon as he curses his goat for biting tenaciously onto overhanging branches while being carried on the cook's shoulders (395-6). Cnemon himself informs us that his farm is situated on a hill (165), the lower section is bordered by a road on the lower part (162) which Cnemon, being anti-social, does not cultivate. Through Pyrrhias, who cites Cnemon's pelting him with pears as proof of the old man's irascibility, we discover that pear-trees are growing on the higher levels (100f.). Finally, a detail we have already learned from the prologue is reiterated by Getas when complaining of his master's stinginess: the terrain on Cnemon's farm is sterile and stony and grows only thyme and sage (605). All of these details may or may not fit the actual geography and topography of the site at the time of the play's production, but what is more relevant is that it presents an illusionistic impression of actuality.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup>Handley (1965), 25.

### iii.6. THE APPEAL TO FAMILIARITY

Such geographical items are not the only items that Menander incorporates in the bulk of the comedy. We thus return to our passage in the *Samia* to notice the inclusion of domestic activities in Demeas' monologue. As soon as the old man had entered his house, he tells us, he ordered his household to attend to certain duties in preparation for the imminent wedding: the house had to be cleaned, the food prepared, and the sacrificial utensils collected--clearly tasks that anyone organising a wedding would have to consider. As a result of these orders, the women run around excitedly to the tasks at hand, and the audience is treated to an excited, asyndetical list of things they need to accomplish their chores: flour, water, oil, charcoal (227). The inclusion of these everyday elements might well have been neglected in a tragic account of a wedding or in that of a lesser comic poet, but Demeas' speech is so enhanced by such details to set the tone of excitement within the household, to demonstrate that his orders were being carried out, and also to establish the confusion in which the old nurse forgets that Demeas is in the house.

We find mention of other such οἰκεία in the *Dyskolos* as well, especially when it comes to cooking utensils. For instance, λεβήτιον 'stewpot' (471-6), χυτρόγαυλον 'skillet' (505), λοπάς 'a casserole dish' (520). In the final scene in which Getas is trying to organise the sacrifice for the wedding, we have an even higher incidence of cooking supplies. He orders the other slaves to get stewing pans (λέβητας, 914), basins (σκάφας, 914), seven stands and twelve small tables ( τρίποδας ... καὶ τραπέζας, 916), nine rugs (δάπιδας, 922), a foreign rug (παραπέτασμα βαρβαρικὸν, 923) and a large bronze mixing bowl (κρατήρα... χαλκοῦν μέγαν, 928). The inclusion of such equipment is unsurprising for three reasons. First,

the cook is a standard character type of New Comedy, and pots, pans and the like are part of his repertory. Secondly, as the scholiast to Dionysius Thrax observed, human affairs (βιωτικῶν πραγμάτων)<sup>67</sup> are within comedy's province, and while they are found in Old Comedy in no less a quantity, it is the attention to them that Menander gives that is significant, for in this scene, the detailed account of such common items and activities, (and surely no activity is more homely than cooking), engages the audience's familiarity and thereby captivates their belief in the illusion.

### iii.7. METRE

The metre can certainly aid the naturalism of speech within the plays. Demeas' speech is in trimeters, a metre that best approximates everyday Greek speech. The iambic trimeter is the most common metre in Greek drama, but in comedy it is much freer than in tragedy. The skill with which Menander takes advantage of this metrical flexibility is evident by the way which he gives stress to words without affecting the 'natural' order of speech.<sup>68</sup> Thus, we have the nurse's curse of her own big mouth (λαλιᾶς) placed emphatically at the beginning of *Samia* 261, which of course is significant because her blabbering is crucial to the later developments of the plot; if it were not for the nurse's prattle Demeas would not have the first clue to the real parentage of the baby in his home. It is perhaps with regard to the comic use of a life-like metre that Hephaestus comments that comic poets 'who are imitating life wish to appear to converse in a conversational tone' (τὸν γὰρ βίον οὗτοι μιμούμενοι θέλουσι δοκεῖν διαλελυμένως διαλέγεσθαι... )<sup>69</sup> or perhaps it is the language that the characters employ which is 'conversational'.

<sup>67</sup>Kaibel CGF 1.1. p. 17.3.

<sup>68</sup>Sandbach (1973), 37.

<sup>69</sup>ap. Hephaest. p. 19, 17 Westph. *de Comicis*.

### iii.8. CHARACTERISATION

Characterisation is the final feature of Menander's realism. A scholiast on Dionysius Thrax says that New Comedy<sup>70</sup> is called 'lifelike' (βιωτικῶς) 'because it imitates life, so that if [a character] is meant to be an old man, we should imitate the language of an old man; if it is a woman, we should imitate the language of a woman':

κατὰ μίμησιν τοῦ βίου, ἵνα ἂν μὲν ὑπόκειται  
γέρον, μιμησώμεθα τὴν φωνὴν τοῦ γέροντος· εἰ δὲ  
γυνή, μιμησώμεθα τὴν φωνὴν τῆς γυναικός.<sup>71</sup>

Menander did not invent linguistic decorum; Euripides, for instance, used language to distinguish the status of his characters, and Aristotle, in the *Poetics* similarly notes: 'the characters should be appropriate. A character may be manly, but it is not appropriate for a woman to be manly or clever'.<sup>72</sup>

### iii. 9. LINGUISTIC DIFFERENTIATION

And so we return to our passage to observe the language with which the Menander has Demeas imitate the old nurse. This isolated case of prosopopoeia gives us a hint about Menander's general practise of characterisation through vocabulary and diction. Demeas, before imitating her, tells the audience that she said 'all the usual things' (καὶ ταῦτα δὴ τὰ κοινὰ, 242). Demeas presumably means 'all the things nurses usually say to babies'<sup>73</sup> or perhaps the meaning is more general: 'all the things women usually say'. This may be interpreted as suggesting that Demeas is using linguistic stereotypes; nonetheless this is still helpful in

<sup>70</sup>Surely this definition can apply only to New Comedy.

<sup>71</sup>Kaibel, *CGF* 1.1. p. 11, 17

<sup>72</sup>*Poet.* xv.4

<sup>73</sup>Sandbach (1973), 568 ad *Sam.* 242.

our study. Surely Menander himself if he wanted to distinguish the sexes through language must have relied to a certain degree on stereotypes, even at the cost of amplification or simplification of characters.<sup>74</sup>

### iii.9.a. FEMININE SPEECH

The few words that Demeas puts in the nurse's mouth do in fact correspond to the language that women habitually use in the other plays and fragments of Menander, as Bain has shown in an important article.<sup>75</sup> The nurse's address to the infant, φίλτατον τέκνον, is found elsewhere in Menander when older women are speaking to a younger person,<sup>76</sup> and only once by a man. While cuddling the baby, the nurse coos, "Where's mummy?" Bain does not investigate the childish word μάμμη for μήτηρ but he does note the male equivalent, πάτερ,<sup>77</sup> possibly because mothers do not figure as much as fathers in the comedies and this is the only occurrence of μάμμη in Menander. The mother in Herodas' third *Mimiambos* (*Διδάσκαλος*) uses μάμμη twice, but with the sense of 'grandmother' not 'mommy'.<sup>78</sup> There is a passage in the *Lysistrata* parallel to the speech of the nurse in *Samia* where the Kinesias uses a form of this word, μαμμίη. He is coaxing his son, "Say Mommy!" and the baby yells, "Mommy! Mommy! Mommy!" (878). Without further evidence, we shall have to remain contented with the mere suspicion that μάμμη may also be a feminine word.

The most conspicuous indicator of gender in the nurse's speech is the exclamation ὦ τάλαιν' ('Dearie me!'). It is used almost exclusively by

<sup>74</sup>cf. Adams, (1984), 43.

<sup>75</sup>Bain (1984).

<sup>76</sup>Bain (1984), 38 ff cites also *Georg.* 25, 64, 84 and 109

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>78</sup>cf. Headlam, Walter (comment.) and Knox, A.D. (ed.). (1922). *Herodas: The Mimes and Fragments*. Cambridge. page 15 on I.7.

female speakers in Menander's plays.<sup>79</sup> It is significant that in the *Epitrepontes* Habrotonon while imitating all the usual things (again, τὰ κοινὰ; 526) a raped woman who is presenting the baby to her rapist for the first time might say, uses the feminine lament ἡ τάλαιν' ἐγώ (529). Out of character, Habrotonon also uses the expression herself five times elsewhere,<sup>80</sup> but the fact that she needs to play a poor woman convincingly if she is to catch Charisios in her and Onesimos' trap especially corroborates the notion that this word belongs more to an Athenian woman's vocabulary than a man's.

Later in Demeas' monologue, a slave-girl enters hushing the nurse with the vocative, δύσμορε (255). Bain observes that it is found in the Menandrian corpus five times, and is never used by a male character.<sup>81</sup> It is worthy of note that four of these instances are found in *Samia*, and that two of these occur when Demeas is imitating another character: first, the old nurse at line 255 and then again when he is mimicking Chrysis' wails at 370.

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<sup>79</sup>Bain (1984), 33 ff. cites *Dysk.* 438, 591; *Encheir.* 10; *Mis.* A56, 132, 189; *Pk.* 712, 725, 976, 1003, *Sam.* 369, *Sik* 34. Cf. Dedoussi (1964) and (1978).

<sup>80</sup>434, 439, 466, 547, 853, 970.

<sup>81</sup>Bain (1984), 36.

### iii.9.b. PROFESSION-SPECIFIC EXPRESSIONS

Habrotonon is not the only Menandrian character to be singled out through her language. Daos, the *paidogogos* of the *Aspis*, is similarly differentiated by the pride he has in his knowledge of the tragedians, and by his ability to quote them (407 ff.).<sup>82</sup> Another wealth of profession-specific vocabulary is to be found in the speeches of the doctor, again in the *Aspis*: in addition to his Doric dialect "probably to suggest that he is from Sicily, which produced many medical men,"<sup>83</sup> he uses such medical terms as φρενίτις: 'inflammation of the diaphragm' (446), βιώσιμος: 'likely to live' (450); ἀνερεύγεται 'belch' (451); and ἀναφρίζει: 'foams up at the mouth' (453).<sup>84</sup> While such profession-specific words are useful means of characterisation, they are hardly exclusive to Menander but are popular comic devices.

### iii.9.c. PET EXPRESSIONS

Although women and professionals as groups are distinguished from other types, there is also individualisation within the types themselves. Habrotonon, in the *Epitrepontes*, as we have noticed from her repetition of the exclamation τάλαν, is wont to make exclamations. It seems that she is equally given to calling out oaths. In less than seventy lines (484, 489, 548), she repeats the oath ὦ θεοί three times. This is significant for three reasons: first, ὦ θεοί is not an oath that is specific to the language of women, and so it is not a feminine marker.<sup>85</sup> Secondly, Habrotonon shows no sign of distress at any time she utters this oath.<sup>86</sup> It is simply a linguistic habit her character possesses. The tight concentration

<sup>82</sup>Arnott (1972), 150.

<sup>83</sup>Sandbach (1973), 99 on 439-64.

<sup>84</sup>Sandbach (1969), 115 and (1973), 99 on 439-64.

<sup>85</sup>Bain (1984), 41.

<sup>86</sup>Sandbach (1969), 131.

of these oaths is the third and final consideration. Taken together, these factors suggest that Menander is characterising Habrotonon in part by her repeated exclamations; he subtly paints a picture of this hetaira through a feature particular to her speech.<sup>87</sup>

Cnemon in the *Dyskolos* is distinguished from other old men in the extant Menandrian plays by the extremes in his language.<sup>88</sup> It is all or nothing for the misanthropist as is illustrated by such words as κούδενι (155) ἅπαντας (157), οὐδέν (158), πανταχοῦ (159), and οὐδαμοῦ (169) in his twenty lines. Later, we find his lines peppered with μηδενί (427), παντελῶς (429), οὐδέν (507), πᾶσι (508), and ἅπαντες (601). Even when Cnemon has had his 'transformation', appears to be more moderate, and is giving his blessing to the marriage of the girl to Sostratos, there is still evidence of his previous extremity in language: ἀπάντων (713), οὐδενός (714), αἰί (717), οὐδέν (720), εἰς οὐδέν μέρος (725), οὐδέν (728), and μηδαμῶς (751). Although one might have liked to detect a change in Cnemon's speech patterns to correspond with his change in attitude, the fact that one does not is enlightening. The point that this consistency illustrates is that Cnemon has *not* changed: he makes this one concession but he still wants to continue living as he had before (ἀλλ' ἐμὲ μὲν, <ἂν ζῶ>, ζῆν ἕαθ' ὡς βούλομαι: '[If I do live], let me live as I like!', 735).

We do find such a drastic change in self-expression elsewhere. Nikeratos usually speaks in concise, snappy phrases, but when moved to such indignation at Demeas' handling of his son, he lets loose with a relatively large (for him) twenty-one word- long-sentence with no less than eight clauses. Nikeratos, at 399 ff., seemingly excited about the

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<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup>Arnott (1975a), 147.

sacrifices, used a longer sentence as well, but there is only one clause in this sentence and in the next two sentences (399-402), his characteristic asyndeton is once again present. Thus, Menander uses language not only to fit the character but more importantly, the character within the plot.

#### iii.9.d. CHARACTER FOILS

Menander, like comic writers before him, used a pair of characters within a type to contrast each other. Gorgias and Sostratos in the *Dyskolos* are both young men, but there is no confusion between the two of them. Gorgias' speech is formal and symmetrical while that of Sostratos is casual and unstudied.<sup>89</sup> In the *Epitrepontes*, the slave and the shepherd, Syros and Daos, are contrasted against one another in that the latter employs literal, short phrases while the former's speech is more elaborate and figurative.<sup>90</sup> Nikeratos in the *Samia* is likewise characterised by his short, asyndetical sentences,<sup>91</sup> while Demeas is more superfluous, especially with the appendical use of εἰπέ μοι.<sup>92</sup> Distinction between two characters within a character type is thus achieved by using one to foil the other.

#### iv. CONCLUSION

To return to the ancient commentators on Menander's realism: when we examine the context from which these criticisms were extracted, we discover exactly how Menander was deemed to be realistic, and what the ancients meant by the term.<sup>93</sup> It was not because the stage-production and acting were so believable, because the later critics did not see the original fourth-third century B.C. Greek productions of Menander's

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<sup>89</sup>Sandbach (1969), 116-119.

<sup>90</sup>Arnott (1979b), xxxv.

<sup>91</sup>Sandbach (1969), 20.

<sup>92</sup>Arnott (1975a), 146.

<sup>93</sup> Of course we cannot do this with Aristophanes of Byzantium as his quotation is handed down to us without any context whatsoever.

plays, although they may have seen later 'revival' productions of which there were no doubt many in their time. Nor would it have applied to the historical element meant to be embodied in Menander, for these later critics were not in the best position to comment on law and social custom. Rather, the critics concentrate on that which Menander has captured in his plays, namely his characterisation. Just as modern critics have been keen to investigate Menander's linguistic decorum,<sup>94</sup> this aspect did not escape the notice of ancient commentators. Gellius, for example, notices that dramatists who do not follow Menander's lead in portraying his characters realistically do so at their peril. When comparing a passage of Caecilius with the original of Menander that he was adapting, he notes that the former is *ridiculus* whereas the latter was 'appropriate and suitable (*aptus atque conueniens*) to the character that he was representing.'<sup>95</sup> Because he did not retain Menander's linguistic decorum in his adaptation, Caecilius 'ruined' it. Manilius also specifically mentions Menander's language and commends his eloquence with which he wrote his comedies: *doctior urbe sua linguae sub flore*.<sup>96</sup>

Quintilian recommends Menander to the orator for his realism (*uitae imaginem*), as we have seen, but also for his "gift of style" (*eloquendi facultas*), and specifically because of his unique ability to "so perfectly... adapt himself to every kind of circumstance, character and emotion" (*ita est omnibus rebus, personis, adfectibus accommodatus*).<sup>97</sup> The ability to represent different characters types (*morum ac uitae imitatio*) in a speech would have been invaluable to the budding orator in order to manipulate

<sup>94</sup>Arnott (1970), (1975) and (1979b), xxiv ff.; Sandbach (1970); Del Corno (1975); Bain (1984); Katsouris (1975).

<sup>95</sup>Aulus Gellius, 2.23.12 -13.

<sup>96</sup>*Astronomica* 5.475

<sup>97</sup>Quintilian *Inst.* x.1.69

the emotions of his audience (*ad animos conciliandos uel maxime, saepe autem etiam ad commouendos*).<sup>98</sup>

Again, it does not appear that the ancient audience was looking for realism in the sense that someone attending a cinema does today; they were looking for characters who behave and speak in ways familiar to them from everyday life. Universal emotions and reactions such as an old lady speaking to an infant act in the same way as a common landmark might: they are particulars subtly included in the plot to encourage the audience to relate with the plot.

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<sup>98</sup>Quintilian *Inst.* ix.1.30.5

### III. DRAMATIC CONVENTIONS OF ROMAN COMEDY

When New Comedy shifted from the Greek to the Roman stage with Livius Andronicus' translations around the middle of third century B.C.--only about fifty years after the death of Menander--it retained many of the Greek conventions. The most important consistency between the two is the costuming: the actors continued to wear the tunic underneath a cloak, ἱμάτιον in the Greek but it was the Latin translation, *pallium*, which led to the title *comoediae palliatae* to describe Roman adaptations of Greek New comedy. Props continued to be used to differentiate types: the soldiers, for example, carried a sword (*machaera*) and wore a military cloak (*chlamys*).<sup>99</sup> Foreigners or travellers were indicated by their *chlamys* and wide-brimmed hat (*causea*).<sup>100</sup> Women were marked by their garments and jewellery.<sup>101</sup> Because the actors are enacting essentially Greek plays, the Greek dress does add to the Greek illusion, but it is more likely that the costumes have more to do with tradition than with an attempt at naturalism. There has been much argument over whether masks were employed by Roman actors. While the evidence is scanty on either side, it seems to me that tradition wins out.

True to the tradition of New Comedy, the characters are the common members of a household rather than a palace or the heavens. The obvious exception is the inclusion of Jupiter and Mercury on the stage, which may be explained by the fact that the original of this play is from "Middle" Comedy--a genre in which mythological themes were regularly parodied. Plautus recognises that it is unusual for a comedy to have kings

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<sup>99</sup>*Curc.* 632, *Miles* 1423, *Ps.* 1185; examples of those disguised as soldiers: *Poen.* 620 and *Ps.* 735.

<sup>100</sup>*Persa* 155.

<sup>101</sup>*Cist.* 487; *Curc.* 344, 435, 488; *Mil.* 1099; *Mil.* 1302; *Persa* 158; *Ps.* 182; *Heaut.* 248

and gods onstage (61), but he jokingly justifies their inclusion by classifying the play as a mixture of tragedy and comedy, because alongside the 'standard' tragic characters are also the cunning, running slave roles (62).

Some traditions of Greek comedy were abandoned by the Roman adapters. The decreased importance of the chorus seen in Menander runs its course to Roman comedy where it is omitted altogether and where the plot runs continuously without break. Plautus also breaks with his Greek predecessors in employing troupes, and not just three actors, to perform the plays.

#### IV. PLAUTUS

Plautus, when adapting Greek New Comedy for a Roman audience, had very different objectives than his models, for he is not working with just New Comedy as his model. He was also influenced by the Atellane Farces--a popular and unscripted dramatic genre in which fast-paced improvisation was the main element.<sup>102</sup> Plautus is thus more interested in farcical performance and entertainment of the popular Italian drama of his time than the subtle depictions of everyday life in Menander. To achieve these aims, he was forced to rework the originals--sometimes quite significantly. *Contaminatio*, or the merging of scenes, characters, jokes or even plot-elements from two (or more) originals, was part of his method. Early twentieth century scholars, thrilled with discoveries of Menandrian fragments, attempted to identify the places where Plautus (or Terence, for that matter) was less than faithful to his original by pointing to an incongruity in the Latin play. While this can be helpful to our understanding of the Roman dramatist's techniques, it is misleading if we do not take into consideration the two sources of Plautus' comedies. To fail to do so would be to measure the circumference of a circle with a straight rule.

##### **i. VERISIMILITUDE**

Plautus is not aiming for a faithful representation of his times. He is, after all, adapting Greek plays, which leads Duckworth to warn,

To attempt to derive from the comedies of Plautus and Terence a clear and coherent account of Roman economic and social life is obviously unwise, for the plays are Greek in theme and setting; the lives of the characters and the ideas

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<sup>102</sup>Gratwick (1993), 13 ff. and see articles in Benz (1995).

which they express reflect Greek far more than Roman conditions.<sup>103</sup>

Therefore, while there are certainly references to Roman laws and customs in Plautus,<sup>104</sup> Plautine comedy cannot be called a mirror of contemporary life because it does not give a coherent and consistent view of Roman social *mores*. In the prologue to the *Casina*, Plautus illustrates that he is not aiming to portray accurate history. The prologue anticipates an objection that slave-marriages were not common:

sunt hic inter se quos nunc credo dicere:  
 'quaeso hercle, quid istuc est? serviles nuptiae?  
 seruin uxorem ducent aut poscent sibi?  
 70 nouom attulerunt, quod fit nusquam gentium.'  
 et ego aiio id fieri in Graecia et Carthagini,  
 et hic in nostra terra in <terra> Apulia;  
 maioresque opere ibi serviles nuptiae  
 quam liberales etiam curari solent;  
 75 id si fit, mecum pignus si quis uolt dato  
 in urnam mulsi, Poenus dum iudex siet  
 uel Graecus adeo, uel mea caussa Apulus.  
 quid nunc? nihil agitis? sentio, nemo sitit.<sup>105</sup>

There are some here who, I suppose, are now saying to each other: "What is all this, for the love of heaven? A slave wedding? Slaves to take wives or propose marriage? Something new, this--something that happens nowhere on earth!" But I say it does happen in Greece and at Carthage, and here in our own country in Apulia; it is the regular thing there to make more of slaves' weddings than even of citizens'. If this is not so, let someone bet me a bowl of wine and honey if he likes--provided the referee be a Carthaginian, yes, or a Greek, or an Apulian, for all I care. (*pauses*) Well now? No takers? I understand: no one is thirsty.

<sup>103</sup>Duckworth (1971), 272.

<sup>104</sup>For a detailed bibliography, see P.J. Enk (1937). *Handboek der Latijnse Letterkunde van de oudste tijden tot het opstreden van Cicero. Tweede Deel: Het Tijdvak van Letterkundige Ontwikkeling onder Involed van het Hellenisme: I. De Dichters Livius Andronicus, Naevius en Plautus*. Zutphen. II, I, 2, pp. 308 ff.; and Watson, A. (1971). *Roman Private Law around 200 B.C.* Edinburgh.

<sup>105</sup>*Cas.* 67ff

The prologue knows that he is making a wager that he is bound to lose, but that is part of the joke; neither he nor, it seems, Plautus is at all concerned with historical accuracy. The Greek illusion is thus broken by Roman references just as the Roman illusion is unsustainable given the Greek setting.

## ii. DRAMATIC ILLUSION

The dramatic illusion in Plautus is also frequently ruptured. Menander, as we have seen, often tore down the 'fourth wall' with explicit audience address. Plautus goes much further, possibly incited by the close interaction between the audience and the actors that the temporary, moveable stage at this time encouraged. Not only do his actors shatter the 'fourth wall', they also step outside of the play to comment on their own characters, the other actors, comic conventions, and the events of the comedy so far, not in an extra-dramatic prologue, but *inter fabulam*.<sup>106</sup> This is quite outside the dramatic convention and license of audience address in asides and monologues. The result is a self-conscious comedy that never lets its audience forget that it is a play they are watching.

## iii. GEOGRAPHY

Oddly enough, Plautus, like Menander, sometimes opens his comedies with a prologue appeal to the audience to visualise the setting, an appeal that was most likely necessitated by the sparsely decorated stage. So just as Pan points to the farm on the right and informs the audience, τὸν ἀγρὸν δὲ τὸν ἐπὶ δεξι' οἰκεῖ τουτονὶ / Κνήμων (‘This farm here on the right's / Where Knemon lives’, 5ff), so too does Plautus often divulge who the inhabitants of the houses represented primarily by stage-doors are, with the formula (or a variation thereof) *in illisce habitat aedibus*

<sup>106</sup>e.g. *Ba* 649-50, *Cas.* 1029-32, *Mos.* 1149-51; *Ps.* 1082-83; *Ps.* 1240.

'in this house lives...'<sup>107</sup> or simply *hic habitat*.<sup>108</sup> This is mere explanation of the little backdrop there is.

What cannot be gleaned from the stage-scenery is the city in which the comedy is meant to take place; so this must be specified at some point in the production. Of the twenty Plautine comedies extant, only fifteen have prologues.<sup>109</sup> Of those with prologues, only eight specify the setting.<sup>110</sup> It is significant that in each of these eight, the location is somewhere other than Athens,<sup>111</sup> which suggests that there is only need to expressly mention the setting when it diverges from the Roman comic convention of giving the play a Greek air by setting it in Athens:

atque hoc poetae faciunt in comoediis:  
omnis res gestas esse Athenis autumnant,  
quo illud uobis graecum uideatur magis;<sup>112</sup>

Now writers of comedy have this habit: they always allege that the scene of action is Athens, their object being to give the play a more Grecian air.

Plautus seems to include the mention of the setting to flout the convention, or simply because he's following the original, as in the *Rudens* where the prologue intimates that 'Diphilus wished that this city be Cyrene' (32-3).

Plautus is not attempting to engage the familiarity of his audience; if he were doing so, he would have, for a start, set the play in Rome, not a Greek city. Menander, on the other hand, was able to take advantage of

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<sup>107</sup>*Am.* 97, *Cas.* 36, *Poen.* 78 and 95, *Trin.* 95

<sup>108</sup>*Truc.* 12

<sup>109</sup>Five do not have prologues and three have prologues that are either damaged or missing.

<sup>110</sup>*Am.* (Thebes, 97); *Capt.* (Aetolia, 25-31); *Cis.* (Sicyon, 190); *Men.* (Epidamnus, 72); *Miles* (Ephesus, 88); *Poen.* (Calydon, 94); *Rud.* (Cyrene, 32-3) and *Truculentus* (Athens, 1-2)

<sup>111</sup>*Truculentus* is the exception.

<sup>112</sup>*Menaechmi* 7-9.

his Athenian audience's firsthand knowledge of the city. The Plautine audience certainly would not have been as familiar with the customs of Athens as would the Menandrian audience. Anderson suggests that, by setting the comedies in Greece, Plautus is taking advantage of the audience's self awareness as Romans: "Greek domestic values and ethical materialism seem unreal and laughable to Plautus, so he makes them so. Plautus transforms the Greek text to adopt it to his occasion, Roman public show or *ludi*".<sup>113</sup> In turn, this translates into a lack of need of geographically accurate detail for the Roman playwright .

Nor does he care much for speciously accurate topographical descriptions. Why, in the *Amphitruo* when we are told the the setting is Thebes, for instance, should we be pedantic and unreasonably expect Plautus to represent the historic features of that city in the Latin playwright's day? It should not surprise us if the Plautine Thebes has a harbour although it never historically did (629). While there is a possibility that the error was from the original, Plautus made no effort to amend it. Blackman<sup>114</sup> examines several scholars' explanations for this 'error' before propounding his own ingenious suggestion that the harbour was in fact an out-port (ἐπίγειον) a distance away from the city. It seems to me that Blackman gives much more importance to the detail than Plautus or indeed the Roman audience would have given. The underlying supposition to Blackman's theory as well as most of the others is that Plautus was aiming for map-like exactitude. This, in my opinion, is false. His primary aim was to present a comical story, and if that story required a harbour, there was no reason to exclude it. The scholars who theorise

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<sup>113</sup>Anderson (1993), 150. On the role of the Plautine play in the Roman games, see Segal (1968) *passim*, but especially the introduction and chapter 2.

<sup>114</sup>Blackman (1969), 12 ff.

that since *Amphitruo* is a "mythological parody... set in an imaginary world, where anything is possible" are most convincing,<sup>115</sup> but this should be extended further. All the Plautine plays, whether they are mythological parodies or not, are set in the Roman adapter's "imaginary world, where anything is possible." Trying to demonstrate that geographical items in the plays are historically accurate is therefore misguided.

#### iv. PROBABILITY

This same lack of attention to detail may be extended to cover the plot as well. If we are looking for the same attention to probability as was found in Menander, we will be sorely disappointed. Demeas' monologue in the *Samia* demonstrates Menander's desire to render his plot-lines credible: Demeas clearly establishes how he learned about the baby in the house. In contrast, Plautine characters sometimes know things that they really could not. At *Poenulus* 821, Milphio notices the entrance of the pander's slave and observes that he is coming from the shrine. We are not told exactly how Milphio found out whence Syncerastus is arriving, but then again, it is "an unreal question to ask how he knows".<sup>116</sup> It matters little either to the story or to the audience.

A prime example of Plautine disinterest in probability is found in the beginning scenes of the Act IV in the *Aulularia*.<sup>117</sup> Norwood attacks Plautus and accuses him of "murdering dramatic art" by contriving to have Strobilus, the slave, overhear Euclio revealing in a pseudo-aside where he has stashed his cache of gold (608 ff).<sup>118</sup> It is to be conceded that we have examined a similar eavesdropping scene in Demeas' monologue,

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<sup>115</sup>The quotation is from Blackman (1969), 12, who, on note 4 of that page provides a bibliography of these scholars.

<sup>116</sup>Gratwick (1968), p. 670 *loc cit.*

<sup>117</sup>The *Aulularia* is admittedly fragmentary.

<sup>118</sup>(1932). *Plautus and Terence*. New York. p. 81.

but there Menander clearly establishes probable motive for Demeas being in the kitchen, and this reason fits in with the plot both preceding and following the scene. In the *Aulularia*, on the other hand, Strobilus does not appear onstage until the beginning of the fourth act (587), and he tells the audience that he has been sent by his master to monitor developments in the marriage between his beloved and Megadorus. Lyconides himself says later (815) that he had the slave visit the girl's nurse for information. It is not exactly clear what Lyconides hoped the slave would discover, but it need not concern us. It must be agreed that Lyconides is himself confused and therefore, his motives may not be reasonable, but there is no mention of this by the playwright. The plot clearly needed Strobilus to find and give the money to Lycodorus so that Lycodorus might marry Phaedria. If the author of the Greek original had concentrated on making the motive more plausible, Plautus has not bothered with such detail. It is enough that Strobilus is there (even if his reason for being there is extremely tenuous), finds the money and gives it to Lyconides who in turn gives it back to Euclio, and is rewarded with the privilege of marrying Phaedria.

A believable conclusion to the *Casina* is similarly sacrificed to the needs of the staging of the comedy. At the beginning Cleostrata enters absolutely beside herself with anger that her husband, Lysidamus, is scheming to marry Casina to his bailiff, Olympio, so that he himself may keep the slave-girl as his mistress (148). In fact, the whole play rotates around her anger, and the way she goes about trying to foil his plans. At the end, however, when Lysidamus is begging for forgiveness, she pardons him instantly, not because she believes that he has learned his lesson and has reformed, but merely because she does not wish to 'make a

long play longer' (1005 ff.).<sup>119</sup> There is no talk of motivation here, only the requirements of the play. Plautus is quite right to end at this point as the play could not possibly sustain interest and humour much longer.

We should not think that Plautus constructs his play solely with his eye to the plot. He is first and foremost a comic writer in the modern sense of the word. As such, he is primarily concerned with--and renowned for--making the theatre rock with laughter at the performance. Thus, the plot can suffer at the hand of the inclusion of the humorous element. Whereas in the extant comedies of Menander, there is marvellous economy of action in which no scene is wasted, in Plautus we find the inclusion of unnecessary scenes that do nothing to advance the plot. Two scenes in the first act of the *Persa* for example are completely superfluous. In the second half of scene ii (199-250), Sophoclidisca, a slave-woman carrying a message from her mistress, the courtesan, Lemniselenis, meets up with Paegnium, a slave-boy, who is carrying a message from Toxilus. Each is trying to coax the other to reveal the contents of his/her letter while simultaneously hiding his/her own letter. They both try different tactics but all are to no avail. The result is a tantalised audience that has learned nothing about the contents of the letters. In the fourth scene of the same act Paegnium is once again on stage, and is called over with Sagaristio, another slave. Sagaristio asks Paegnium where Toxilus is (277, 281) and receives insults rather than information. Indeed, abuse is the key ingredient of this scene. Like I.ii, I.iv serves no necessary purpose within the storyline.

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<sup>119</sup>cf. *Merc.* 1008 and *Ps.* 388.

## v. BURLESQUE ELEMENTS

These scenes and those like them are important within the context of a *comedy*, however, because they are wonderfully entertaining. In them Plautus demonstrates his ability to employ slapstick and abuse--the comic tricks of which Aristophanes was so fond--to raise a laugh. Both scenes from the *Persa* cited above illustrate the abuse technique but the slapstick scenes are no less lively and exist in no less quantity.<sup>120</sup>

A subset of the slapstick scene is the drunken scene. These do not occur, as they do in modern literature, for the sake of providing a motive for a character to overcome inhibitions, but Plautus does take advantage of the comic possibilities that occur as the result of a loss of one's inhibitions. Drunkenness, as most first-year undergraduates will confirm, is hysterical. In the *Mostellaria*, for instance, Callidamates enters leglessly drunk. Plautus plays with his loss of motor skills in many ways: he stammers (*mamma-madere* 319, 331; *O-o-ocellus* 325), falls over (328), is forgetful where he is going (333) and then passes out (344).<sup>121</sup> And when he is awoken, the first thing he asks for is another drink (373)! *Pseudolus* has a like scene in which the eponymous slave falls over immediately upon entering on-stage (1245), then rambles drunkenly (*multas... ambages* 1255) about the symposium which he has just left before doing several tipsy jigs. When Simo arrives, he is surprised to find the drunken slave, and shocked at his insolence not just in his being drunk but at belching in his master's face! There is no clear reason within the plot for this scene, but no doubt it would have been hysterical when performed.

## vi. LANGUAGE

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<sup>120</sup>eg. *Cas.* 403 ff; *Amph.* 374, *Mil.* 1397 ff.

<sup>121</sup>Duckworth (1971), 326 ff.

Plautine language itself is similarly over-blown and ridiculous. As with the drunken language, Plautus uses words for comic effect in much the same way as did Aristophanes. Elaborately conjunctive words especially occur in insults; as for instance, *inanilogistae* 'empty-handed windbag' (*Ps.* 255) and *turpilucricupidus* 'Old Boodlegrabitinski' (*Trin.* 100). These words may reflect the colloquialisms of Greek-educated slaves, as such formations were seen in Menander's comedies.<sup>122</sup> It is more likely, however, that the use of such fabulously long compound words is an "absurd exaggeration"<sup>123</sup> of the normal slave's language with which Plautus displays his linguistic virtuosity and imagination. But words such as *glandionidam* 'the son of a fattened ham' (*Men.* 210), *dentifrangibula* 'tooth-crackers' i.e. fists (*Bacc.* 596), *nucifrangibula* 'nutcrackers' i.e. 'teeth' (*Bacc.* 598) are clearly intended to raise a laugh by their ridiculousness. *Persa* 702 is a *locus classicus* for bizarre coinages. Sagaristio, the slave disguised as a Persian, gives his alias as:

Vaniloquidorus Virginesuendonides  
Nugiepiloquides Argentumextenebronides  
Tedigniloquides Nugides Palponides  
Quodsemelarrripides Numquameripides.

Gabblealotadori Girlsellerinsky Slushjabberotikin  
Cashsqueezeroutski Talkthatservesyourrightikin Nonsensikoff  
Oilyferouski Whatyouoncehavegrabbedstein  
Neverletemgetberg.

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<sup>122</sup>Phrynichus 393 p.492 R: (on *syssemon*) 'I do not for the life of me understand the state of mind of those who praise Menander and put him at the pinnacle of Hellenic achievement. Why am I surprised? Because I observe the sharpest of Greek minds going mad with enthusiasm for this comedian... who says things like 'mesoporein', 'gyros', 'lethargos', 'pornokopos', 'opsoniasmos', 'opsonion', dysrigos', and countless other such silly and rubbishy expressions...' (Gratwick, unpublished translation)

<sup>123</sup>F. T. Cooper (1895), *Word Formation in the Roman Sermo Plebeius*. New York., page 323 f., quoted by Duckworth (1971), 345.

Dordalus replies incredulously, *Eu hercle, nomen multimodis scriptumst tuom* ('Well! Well! Upon my soul, your name takes a lot of writing!'). The pimp's suspicion provides the slave with an opportunity to close the gag with the false explanation: *Ita sunt Persarum mores, longa nomina, / contortiplicata habemus* ('Oh, it is our Persian custom to have long names, somewhat contorpllicated'). Plautus is clearly playing here with ridiculous and unbelievably long words; these coinages strain believability (would anyone use such a word in real life?) but as in so many other elements, Plautus is not aiming for credibility but humour.

### vii. METRE

Plautus displays the same dexterity in manipulating metre as he does in forming strange new words. Whereas Menander employed a majority of iambic trimeters to represent normal speech, Plautus' metrics are much more varied and colourful. Only about 38% of the metres in Plautine comedy are spoken. A little under 50% of the metres is recitative, and almost 14% is sung.<sup>124</sup> All told, approximately 62% of all the verses in Plautus are musical in contrast with extant Menandrian comedy in which less than 20% of the verses are musical. A Plautine version of a Menandrian original is thus akin to making a musical out of a stage play. But like songs in a musical, lyric metres can also be manipulated to highlight emotion. For example, the bacchiac is a serious metre which can express sorrow or pity (*Am.* 173-79; *Am.* 633-652; *Cist.* 673-676; *Men.* 753-72; *Poen.* 210-230; *Rud.* 186-9; *Trin.* 223-31). With cretics Plautus signifies a whole gamut of emotions: delight (*Curc.* 105-9; *Rud.* 243-247), anger (*Cas.* 151-4), threats (*Cas.* 641-3), pride (*Bacch.* 643-668), fear (*Cas.* 950-3), abuse (*Most.* 105-16; *Most.* 133-53; *Truc.* 599-602) and lasciviousness (*Pers.* 803-

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<sup>124</sup>Gratwick (1987), 269.

6).<sup>125</sup> The Plautine comedy performed with its preponderance of lyrical elements is thus made more lively, but it is also as unrealistic as a musical in which the characters all of a sudden break out into song.

### viii. LINGUISTIC CHARACTERISATION

#### viii.1. DIALECT

Finally we come to Plautine characterisation through linguistic means. Hubert Petersmann has noticed that Plautus employs dialect to characterise some of his lower classes.<sup>126</sup> Since in second century Rome, the slaves would have regularly been imported to Rome from Tarentum and would have a local Doric dialect, so too do some of the slaves on the Plautine stage.<sup>127</sup> We are also aware of the many places in which characters of the lower classes use Greek words; a good example of which is at *Captiui* 880 ff. where the parasite swears by a series of Halic towns in Doric Greek. A final example of Plautus' use of foreign languages to colour a *persona* is found in *Poenulus*, where Hanno, a Carthaginian old man, utters an oath in Punic.<sup>128</sup>

#### viii.2. FEMININE AND ELDERLY SPEECH

Adams has collected statistics on the places in which Plautus, like Menander before him, signals feminine and masculine speech with various indicators such as oaths, exclamations and modifiers.<sup>129</sup> He notes, for example, male Plautine characters in general are more inclined than female to utter the oaths *pol* and *edepol*. Only female characters in Plautus

<sup>125</sup>Duckworth (1971), 370 ff. provides a similar list: "joy (*Bacch.* 643 ff.), confidence (*Pseud.* 926 ff.), suspicion (*Most.* 690 ff.), anger (*Asin.* 127 ff., *Bacch.* 1109 ff.), grief (*Cas.* 186 ff.), feigned terror (*Cas.* 621 ff.), despair (*Rud.* 207 ff., 233 ff., 664 ff.)."

<sup>126</sup>In an unpublished seminar entitled "Language and Style as a Means of Characterization in the Comedies of Plautus" given at the University of St. Andrews, 27 October, 1995.

<sup>127</sup>For example, *Truc.* 675: *osculentium*.

<sup>128</sup>*Poenulus* 930 ff.

<sup>129</sup>Adams (1984).

use *ecastor* and *mecastor*, while *hercle* and *mehercle* are exclusive to male speech. Only men use the exclamation *ei* and women alternated between *uae*, or *(e)heu*. The oaths are certainly the most obvious signal of female speech although the statistics are certainly not as striking as those of Menander. Similarly, Petersmann<sup>130</sup> has shown that archaic uses of words such as *deblaterauisti* (*Aul.* 268) or *locassim* (*Aul.* 228), or old subjunctives like *fuat* (*Aul.* 232) and *duas* (*Aul.* 238) distinguish Euclio as an old man.

### viii.3. PROFESSION-SPECIFIC EXPRESSIONS

Similarly to Aristophanes and Menander, Plautus often uses professional terminology to portray professional characters. Lysidamus (*Mercator*), Truculentus and Strabax (*Truculentus*) are characterised as rustics by the agricultural words that are found in their speeches: *rusticus* (*Mer.* 714, 716; *Truculentus: Truc.* 263), *rus* 'farm' (*Merc.* 273, 543, 586, 705; *Truculentus: Truc.* 277, 280, 285, 669; *Strabax: Truc.* 645, 915); *rastrum* 'hoe' (*Mer.* 277), *ouis* (*Mer.* 524, *Strabax: Truc.* 649, 655, 947), *pecus* 'flock' (*Truc.* 269). Farmers also employ rustic metaphors and similes. For instance, Lysidamus twice calls Demipho a 'he-goat' (*Merc.* 272, 575). Strabax indirectly compares Phronesium to a sheep under threat from his father, the 'wolf' (657). And Truculentus threatens to crush Astaphium *quasi sus catulos pedibus* 'like a sow does a litter of pigs' (268).

In the same way does Plautus portray soldiers through military language. Antamoenides in the *Poenulus* uses such martial words as *occidi* 'I slayed' (473), *pugnam* 'battle' (492) *mercennarius* (503). Words like 'weapons' *armis* (450) and phrases such as 'surrender' *rettuleris pedem* (439), 'armed with martial courage' *uirtute belli armatus* (442) and *arte duellica* (450) are sprinkled throughout the speech of the *miles* in the *Epidicus*.

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<sup>130</sup>see footnote 126 above.

Pyrgopolynices is the classic example of the *miles gloriosus*, and his speech—especially in the opening scenes—contains several military terms: *aciem* 'army/battle' (4 *bis*), *machaera* 'sword' (5), *hostibus* 'foes'(7), *imperator* 'general' (13), *peditastelli* 'infantrymen' (54), *latrones* 'mercenaries' (74), *conscriberem* 'enlist' (76), and *satellites* 'guards' (78). Stratophanes in the *Truculentus* is particularly enlightening because he tells the spectators that they should not expect the normal soldier's boastful deeds. He may want to give the impression that he is not a conventional comic soldier but his language is certainly typical: *pugna* (482, 486), *duella* (483), *milites* (484), *gladiorum aciem* (492).

Sometimes it is just one word that characterises a professional. The language of Misargyrides, the loan-shark in the *Mostellaria*, centres around the word *faenus* 'interest', which he repeats no less than eleven times.<sup>131</sup> Tranio finally rebukes him for having such a one-track mind:

faenus illic, faenus hic!  
nescit quidem nisi faenus fabularier.

Interest, interest everywhere! Upon my soul, the only word  
he knows is "interest!"

Like the doctor in Menander's *Aspis*, Plautus peppers the doctor's speech with medical jargon: *laruatua* 'demoniacal visitation' (890), *cerritus* 'paranoia' (890), *ueternus* 'sleeping sickness',<sup>132</sup> *aqua intercus* 'dropsy',<sup>133</sup> *cura* 'care' (897) *curabo* 'I will care' (897), *morbo* 'sickness' (911), *ellebori* 'hellebore' (913; 950) and the phrases *sanum facere* 'to cure' (893), *oculi duri* 'glazed eyes' (923),<sup>134</sup> and *intestina ... crepant* 'rumbling of the bowels'

<sup>131</sup>Lines 532, 561, 575, 580, 585, 592, 600, 603 *ter*; 604.

<sup>132</sup>Gratwick (1993), 223 *ad* 890.

<sup>133</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup>Translation is that of Gratwick (1993), 225 *ad* 923, citing *OLD durus* 4a,b

(925). As Katsouris demonstrates, Plautus clearly simulates a doctor's consultation through the use of the doctor's many questions.<sup>135</sup>

#### viii.4. PET EXPRESSIONS

To a limited degree, Plautus follows Menander's characterisation in using diction to paint his characters. Quite apart from professional terms, Plautus uses a particular word that embodies the main trait of that character's 'personality'. For instance in *Aulularia*, Euclio, the miser, constantly repeats the word *aurum* 'gold'.<sup>136</sup> This is hardly surprising given the theme of the comedy. Nor is the word exclusive to Euclio, but when the other characters use *aurum*, of course it is going to relate to Euclio in some way because, after all, it is *his* gold!<sup>137</sup> The other word with which Plautus characterises Euclio is *pauper* or *pauperies* 'poverty'.<sup>138</sup> This is not, as Katsouris argues, to "emphasize the pretence that he is poor". Rather, it is meant to emphasise that poverty is Euclio's greatest fear. Euclio is only pretending to be poor so that no one will think of robbing him (186) and so that he might avoid paying a large dowry (190). This interpretation makes Euclio's monologue at 713 all the more dramatic because his worst nightmare has come true: he is no longer pretending when he moans *hic dies mi optulit famem et pauperiem*; '[This day has] made a starveling of me, a pauper!' (724). These two words certainly reveal psychology, but it is the psychology of the stereotypical miser rather than that of Euclio as an individual.

<sup>135</sup>Katsouris (132) furnishes the following profession-specific terms. For Gripus, the angler in *Rudens*: *piscis* 'fish' (7 times: 913, 941, 971, 979, 980, 993, 1010), *piscatus* 'caught', i.e. 'fished' (911, 921), *piscator* 'fisherman' (978, 994), *pisculentus* 'fishy' (907), *polypus* 'cuttlefish' (1010), *horia* 'boat' (1020), *hamus* 'hook' (984, 985) and *rete* 'net' (914, 942, 984, 985, 1020, 1068, 1071, 1292).

<sup>136</sup>Nineteen times: *Aul.* 63, 65, 110, 185, 188, 194, 201, 216, 265, 392, 581, 608, 611, 615, 726, 748, 763, 772, 786.

<sup>137</sup>Katsouris 128: *Lyc.* 765, 823, 829; *Str.* 663, 665, 617, 679, 701, 707, 709, 808, 822, 829.

<sup>138</sup>*Ibid.*: *pauper*: 88, 111, 184, 196, 227, 461, 543; *pauperies*: 190, 724; *inopem*: 221

### viii.5. JUNIPER'S CLASSIFICATION OF PLAUTINE CHARACTERS

It was Euclio's pronounced and highlighted avarice that led W.H. Juniper<sup>139</sup> to include him in his categorisation of *personae* who "seem to go beyond the type and approach individualization." In this way, he divides these so-called atypical characters into four categories based upon reasons why Plautus concentrated on the characterisation of some characters more than on others:

- 1) *Persona* upon whose character plot depends: Euclio [*Aul.*], Pyrgopolynices [*Mil.*], Phronesium [*Truc.*]
2. *Persona* who has a minor rôle, but whose character is important to plot: Acroteleutium [*Mil.*], Misargyrides [*Mos.*]
3. *Persona* whose character is not important to plot, but carried beyond the type for some definite reason such as humor: Scapha [*Mos.*], Philematium [*Mos.*], Ergasilus [*Capt.*]
4. *Persona* whose character stands out because it is different: Alcumena [*Am.*]<sup>140</sup>

An examination of Juniper's examples will best demonstrate that these characters are not individuals at all; they are types upon whom Plautus elaborates through exaggeration.

### viii.6. "DIFFERENT" CHARACTERS: ALCUMENA

Juniper's last division should be dealt with first, because it is the one most out of place. What Juniper means by a 'different' character is by no means clear. The *Amphitruo* itself is a 'different' comedy in that it contains mythological rather than completely new characters. Alcumena is 'different' in that she is the perfect wife--loving, innocent and unjustly accused. As such, she is more akin to Alcestis than to Cleostrata, a typical comic *matrona*; the only point of similarity that Alcumena shares with the

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<sup>139</sup>Juniper (1936).

<sup>140</sup>Juniper (1936), 279 ff.

latter is her husband's insults.<sup>141</sup> Because the *Amphitruo* is a mythological story, Plautus does not have the same scope in depiction as he had with other characters, for tradition prescribes she act in this way. Thus, one must concede that her character is atypical of the comic character because, strictly speaking, she is not a comic character but a tragic one who unwittingly finds herself in a comedy. She is necessary to the plot and to humour because she is the 'straight man' of the comedy; the audience knows that she slept with Jupiter who was disguised as her husband, because she thought he was her husband, and laughs at her because she now cannot understand her husband's scorn. Her confusion and innocent protestations set off the irony of the story. She has unwittingly become the butt of the joke.

#### ii.9.b. CHARACTERS "IMPORTANT TO THE PLOT"

Juniper's first and second divisions should be treated together, for it makes little difference to this discussion whether the character has a leading or a supporting role. It is better to combine them into a single category: characters who are important to the plot. But surely this is a false category anyway, because all characters (except perhaps the protactic characters of Terence who we shall examine later) aid the New Comic plot. Exactly why Juniper chose Pyrgopolynices as an example of an atypical character escapes me. He is a primary example of an overblown, boastful, lustful soldier. In that there is nothing atypical. We discover more about his character-type than we do about him as an individual. We learn, for instance, that the typical swaggering soldier is a lecherous, self-important liar, who knows no end to his own lies. Certainly the amount of dialogue devoted to his description does not individualise him if it

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<sup>141</sup>*Am.* 818, 858; cf. *Men.* 110 ff., *Cas.* 227, *As.* 900 ff., *Merc.* 556 ff.

adheres to what we expect of a typical braggart soldier. Stratophanes is a far more atypical *miles* than Pyrgopolynices anyway, but only because he *professes* to refuse to say all the 'usual things'.

We have already noticed that through linguistic means Euclio is shown to be an overblown miser. Nowhere does he do anything that separates him from other misers. Euclio is a caricature of a miser; his stinginess, avarice, and fear of poverty is exaggerated to a ridiculous degree. Of course, the plot depends on this character because he is the central character.

#### viii.8. "BEYOND THE TYPE" CHARACTERS

We turn at last to Juniper's third division which contains those characters who are "not important to the plot but [who are] carried beyond the type for some definite reason such as humor." Ergasilus in the *Captiui* is not an atypical parasite at all; he is the *quintessential* parasite. Juniper says that he characterises himself in his monologues,<sup>142</sup> but what Ergasilus actually does is characterise the parasitical profession of which he is a fully paid-up member. We thus find him talking about parasites as a group:<sup>143</sup> they are freeloading (77 ff.), they are constantly hungry, they use their wit to ingratiate themselves to their victims (477 ff.), they expect food for their troubles (780), and they abandon all table manners when presented with food (910 ff.). Through linguistic means the gourmand makes his association with other parasites perfectly clear. In his first monologue, after introducing himself (69-72), Ergasilus shifts from the first person singular to plural (72-90), a tactic he later repeats.<sup>144</sup> Particularly significant is the way in which Ergasilus repeats *parasiti* as

<sup>142</sup>Juniper (1936), 281 ff.

<sup>143</sup>Note the repetition of *parasitus* (75, 82, 85, 89, 469, 491) and *parasiticus* (469).

<sup>144</sup>*cf.* *Capt.* 461 ff. Ergasilus shifts to first person plural at line 469.

appositive subjects: *nos parasiti* (75) and *parasiti uenatici / sumus* (85). The boy also describes Ergasilus not as an individual but as part of a whole (909-910). Ergasilus is a shining model of a parasite and never leaves the confines of the type.

### viii.9. EXAGGERATION

Juniper neglects to specify *how* Plautus makes Ergasilus' character amusing. It remains for us to examine the humour in his rôle, and the culmination of this is most evident in the fourth act when Hegio promises him a meal in exchange for his information. First Ergasilus extravagantly describes: 'A more hungry day, a more bulged-out-with-starvation day, a more unprogressive day for every undertaking, I never did see!' (*neque ieiuniosiore* *neque magis ecfertum fame / uidi*, 466 ff.). Next, when describing how anxiously he is awaiting his promised meal, Ergasilus goes absolutely over the top as is illustrated by the repetition of *quanta*, the alliteration and asyndeton:

quanta pernis pestis ueniet, quanta labes larido,  
quanta sumini apsumedo, quanta callo calamitas,  
quanta laniis lassitudo, quanto porcinariis!<sup>145</sup>

Ah, ham's ease is hopeless, and bacon's in a bad, bad way!  
And sow's udder--done for utterly! Oh, how pork rind will  
go to pot! Butchers and pig-dealers--won't I bustle 'em!

Finally, the boy describes the piggish depths to which Ergasilus descends at the dinner:

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<sup>145</sup>*Capt.* 903-5.

clades calamitasque, intemperies modo in nostram aduenit domum.

\* \* \*

nimisq[ue] hercle ego illum male formidabam, ita frendebat dentibus.  
 adueniens deturbauit totum cum carne carnarium:  
 arripuit gladium, praetruncauit tribus tegoribus glandia;  
 aulas calicesque omnes confregit, nisi quae modiales erant.  
 cocum percontabatur, possentne seriae fervere.  
 cellas refregit omnis intus reclusitque armarium.<sup>146</sup>

Lord, how he did scare me, how he kept grinding his teeth!  
 In he came and tugged down the meat, rack and all--  
 grabbed a knife and lopped the choice bits off three necks of  
 pork--and smashed every pot and tureen that didn't hold a  
 peck or more! Kept asking the cook if he couldn't possibly  
 use the big pickle vats to boil things in! Broke into all the  
 cupboards and raided the pantry!

The metaphor in line 911 and the hyperbole in line 916 stresses Ergasilus' voraciousness. He out-gluttons the worst glutton. Exaggeration is clearly the common element of these three accounts, and the chief technique with which Plautus raises a laugh in his audience in them is through exaggeration.<sup>147</sup>

Ergasilus is hardly the only Plautine character to be caricatured to such an extent. Amplification is one of Plautus' most reliable means of making his characters humorous. Pygropolynices in the *Miles* is not just a liar, he is, as Artotrogus points out, the *greatest* liar around:

periuriorem hoc hominem si quis uiderit  
 aut gloriarum pleniorum quam illic est,  
 me sibi habeto, ego me mancupio dabo.<sup>148</sup>

If anyone ever saw a bigger liar and more colossal braggart than this fellow, he can have me for his own with full legal rights.

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<sup>146</sup>*Capt.* 910 ff.

<sup>147</sup>Plautus caricatures parasites similarly at *St.* 163, 638; *Per.* 342

<sup>148</sup>*Miles* 21 ff.

Likewise, in the *Mostellaria*, Truculentus insults Misargyrides by calling him the 'most disgusting beast' he had ever seen (*neque ego taetriorem beluam / uidisse me umquam quemquam quam te censeo*, 607-8). Although there are many more examples of exaggeration in Plautine characterisation, one will suffice to demonstrate that characters also caricature the physical appearance of others. In the *Mercator*, Charinus is describing to Eutyclus the man who bought to Pasicompsa, and clearly gets carried away in his portrayal:

canum, uarum, uentriosum, bucculentum, breuiculum,  
subnigris oculis, oblongis malis, pansam aliquantum.

a gray-haired, knock-kneed, pot-bellied, big-mouthed,  
stubby fellow, with blackish eyes, lantern jaws, and feet a  
bit splayed.

Recognising the incredibility of the description, Charinus replies, 'That's no description of a man, it's some collection of freaks!' (*Non hominem mi sed thesaurum nescioquem memoras mali*).<sup>149</sup> None of Plautus' descriptions are of real men or women, however; they are *all* collections of exaggerated faults. Plautine *personae* are grotesques who are meant to be neither realistic nor verisimilar—they are meant to be amusing.

## ix. CONCLUSION

We should not think that because Plautus did not follow Menander closely in character portrayal and attention to illusionistic detail that the Roman dramatist was in some way less skilled. He is the consummate performer who knows how to please his audience, and further he knows his craft very well. He varies his linguistic, dramatic, and metrical techniques to dazzle his audience and regale them with his

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<sup>149</sup>Cf. Harpax's exaggerated description of Pseudolus, *Ps.* 1218 ff.

virtuosity. More than anything else the audience's laughter and applause were Plautus' target.

## V. TERENCE

### i. INTRODUCTION

At last we come to the comedies of Terence in which it is manifest that the dramatist is attempting to maintain close ties with his sources and models in adapting their dramatic forms. The most important similarity between Menander and Terence is their common respect for presenting comedy that is at once probable, life-like and amusing; it is the way in which they differ which may be most revealing. We are fortunate to have the fourth-century commentaries of Donatus on Terence's comedies because, although he is removed from Terence by over five-hundred years, often he seems to have had the Menandrian original to compare, and as a native Latin speaker, he is perhaps more sensitive to the nuances of Terence's language than the modern reader. It is for this reason that we shall use Donatus exclusively when discussing Terence's verisimilitude, as the grammarian is keen to notice any such instances and provides valuable insights.

### ii. GEOGRAPHY

Professor Webster noted that Terence, when adapting Menander, blurred certain details.<sup>150</sup> The first example is from Terence's *Heauton Timorumenos* where Chremes exclaims about Menedemus' wealth, *in his regionibus / meliorem agrum neque preti maioris nemo habet*,<sup>151</sup> 'As for estate there is no one hereabouts has a better or one worth more'. The vagueness of this statement is especially emphasised when compared with the Menandrian original:

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<sup>150</sup>Webster (1962-3), 240.

<sup>151</sup>line 63.

... καὶ τῶν Ἑλλησι χωρίον  
 κερκτημένοις κάλλιστον εἶ, νῆ τὸν Δία,  
 ἐν τοῖς τρισίν γε καί, τὸ μακαριώτατον,  
 ἄστικτον.<sup>152</sup>

And of all the Halae folk you are the owner of a bit of land  
 and fairest, by Zeus, amongst all the three at least, and, best  
 of all, unmarked by mortgage stone.<sup>153</sup>

It is likely, though only new papyri finds will prove it, that Terence also omitted the specific name of the region when Phaedria, in the *Eunuchus*, asks Thraso, *quor ergo in his te conspicio regionibus?* 'Why do I see you in this bit of country?'<sup>154</sup> Terence's reason for generalisation in regard to topographical sites is clear: his Roman audience would not have been familiar with these specific places and so there is not need to mention them by name.

That does not mean, however, that Terence has removed all references to Athens: his comedies are clearly set in Greece. Indeed, it is only through allusion that Roman customs are mentioned. On *Andria* 771(3), Donatus concludes that, since testimonies of freed-women outweigh those of slaves, this line must be a Terentian addition because it is *de Romano more* 'according to Roman custom.'<sup>155</sup> Plautus, on the other hand, frequently and explicitly mentioned Roman habits and sites.<sup>156</sup> Terence is representing not his own contemporary society but that of Athens at least two generations earlier, and for that reasons, he is trying to uphold the Greek illusion. The result is that this comedies do not aim at

<sup>152</sup>Fragment 127 Koerte = Allinson 140 (Kock).

<sup>153</sup>trans. Allinson, page 349.

<sup>154</sup>line 1062.

<sup>155</sup>cf. Donatus on *Ph.* 393(46).

<sup>156</sup>Duckworth (1971), 136; cf. Evanthius, *De Fabula* III.6: *Adde quod nihil abstrusum ab eo ponitur aut quod ab historicis requirendum sit, quod saepius Plautus fecit et est obscurior multis locis.*

geographical accuracy, but because it is foreign land that is depicted, this hardly matters.

### iii. ATTENTION TO DETAIL

Not only in topographical matters did Terence exchange Menandrian detail for his own imprecision. Webster<sup>157</sup> also compared a line of Menander's Ἄνδρία with a corresponding line in Terence's comedy of the same name. In Menander, the prescription is clear and precise: καὶ τεττάρων ᾠῶν μετὰ τοῦτο,<sup>158</sup> 'And after that, the yolks of four eggs', whereas Terence's diluted and indefinite line (483) reads *post deinde/ quod iussi ei dari bibere et quantum imperavi*, 'After ablution give her the drink I ordered and in the prescribed quantity'. The charming detail of Menander is gone in Terence and is sorely missed.

### iv. PLAUTINE JOKES

Terence was aware of the farcical tradition that influenced Plautus, but it is also clear from the prologues of his comedies that he was keen to avoid the usual comic tricks employed so deftly by the senior comedian. For instance, the speaker of the prologue to the *Heauton Timorumenos* is quite relieved that he will not be required to act the rambunctious roles that were so in fashion with contemporary writers (37 ff.). Scenes of drunkenness<sup>159</sup> and abusive language<sup>160</sup> are still to be found in the Terentian plays just as they were in Menander, but they are nowhere near as extravagant as they are in Plautus although Donatus is only partly correct when he notes that the comedies of Terence 'lack Plautine jokes

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<sup>157</sup>Webster (1962-3), 240.

<sup>158</sup>Fragment 42 Kock = 37 Koerte; Allinson, page 316.

<sup>159</sup>*cf. Ad.* 589 ff. where Syrys announces that he is leaving to get drunk and also 763 at which point he re-enters having fulfilled his intention.

<sup>160</sup>*e.g. Eu.* 668 ff., *Ad.* 168 ff.

(*caerent Plautinis nugis*).<sup>161</sup> Whereas in Plautus such scenes are an end in themselves--they raise a laugh by portraying drunken people acting ridiculously--in Terence, they are more moderate and are tied more closely with the plot. At *Eunuchus* 727, for example, although Chremes admits that he is tipsy, Terence does not have him indulge in any falling over or belching. But it is nonetheless necessary that Chremes be a bit drunk so that he will be in a complaisant temper to meet with Thais. Such preparation and motivation for important actions in the plot recalls the plays of Menander, to whom Terence in many ways is more akin than to Plautus.

#### v. PROBABILITY

According to Donatus, Terence is especially concerned about the probability of his scenes; the grammarian frequently uses the words *uerismile* (or *ueri simile*)<sup>162</sup> and *incredible*<sup>163</sup> in connection with the plot to illustrate where he feels that Terence has taken steps to prepare the action so that it is properly motivated. On *Phormio* 212(2), the commentator writes, *uide satin artifex poeta debitum reddat rebus atque personis*, 'see how the skillful playwright infuses probability into events and characters.'<sup>164</sup> Another good example is at *Eunuchus* 301 (5) on which Donatus observes that Terence is establishing Chaerea's sexual frenzy so that he has motivation for the later rape of Pamphila:

et hic ostenditur iampridem motus in res uenerias  
Chaerea, et magna poetae cura est, ne incredibile

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<sup>161</sup>on *Eu.* 694 (1).

<sup>162</sup>*Eu.* 98 (2), 104 (2), 108 (1), 446, 560 (1), 563 (1), 968; *Ad.* 151, 321 (1); *Hec.* 58 (3), 76 (2), 140, 158 (2), 405 (1), 528 (2), 547 (3), 729, 756, 789 (2).

<sup>163</sup>*Eu.* 301 (5), 329, 1012 (1); *Ph.* 238 (2).

<sup>164</sup>trans. Hilger (1970), 64.

uideatur adulescentulum, qui pro eunucho deduci potuerit, tam expedite uirginem uitiasse.<sup>165</sup>

Here by the great carefulness of the playwright Chaerea is shown as hitherto inclined to venereal love, lest it seem to be incredible that a young man, who was able to be brought in the guise of a eunuch, had violate the virgin so quickly.

#### vi. DRAMATIC ILLUSION

We turn now to another contrast between Terence on one side and Menander and Plautus on the other: namely, the dramatic illusion. We have already noted how Plautus and Menander frequently employ a prologue to introduce characters and to reveal the basics of the plot. In Terence there is no longer an expository prologue; his opening speeches are extra-dramatic and they deal not with introductions, but with the complaints of the author and a general *captatio benevolentiae*. Terence's wish to allow the story to unravel itself with protactic characters rather than a prologue to provide any necessary background information invests a certain naturalism into the plot since the audience is allowed to be part of the recognition. Terence may have thought that those comedies of Menander and Plautus which did not have a prologue of any description<sup>166</sup> afforded greater verisimilitude and therefore abandoned them altogether in his own adaptations.

#### vii. AUDIENCE ADDRESS

While there are asides, there are little addressing of the audience-members in the plays of Terence, which were, in Evanthius' opinion, a recurring fault in Plautine comedy (*uitium Plauti frequentissimum*).<sup>167</sup> As we have seen, it was also a feature often employed by Menander. Apart

<sup>165</sup>*Eu.* 301 (5); trans. Hilger (1970, 65.

<sup>166</sup>II, indeed, there were any: we do not have sufficient evidence.

<sup>167</sup>*De Fabula* III.8.

from the prologues, there is little direct indication within the comedies of Terence, as in those of Plautus, that it is a play that the audience is watching. The only possible exception is to be found at *Hecyra* 866 where Pamphilus declares, *non placet fieri hoc item ut in comoediis, / omnia omnes ubi resciscunt*, 'I have no wish for it to be as in the comedies where everybody gets to know everything'. Clearly this is a metatheatrical remark and is extremely ironic because Pamphilus makes mention of comedy in general but does not explicitly state that he is in such a play himself. Donatus' comment on this line, *quasi haec comoedia non sit sed ueritas*, 'as though this were not a comedy, but real life' reveals that he acknowledges the play's pretence of reality.

#### viii. PROTACTIC CHARACTERS

In adapting his Greek originals, Terence has introduced characters to prevent long, unrealistic soliloquies. When Chaerea emerges from Thais' door at *Eunuchus* 546 ff., he is bursting for some busybody to appear who will ask him the cause of his dress, the reason for his haste, his destination, and if he is in full control of his faculties (550 ff.). It is a great coincidence that Antipho just happens to be such a busybody who indeed asks Chaerea all these questions, because if Antipho had not appeared, Chaerea would have had no internal reason for relating his story. And it is clear that Antipho *is* interested, as is demonstrated by the no less than twelve questions<sup>168</sup> that he asks, most of which are colourless, such as *quid tum?* 'what then?' (604) or *quid id est* 'and that was?' (571). Or else he amiably agrees (*sane hercle ut dicis*, 'quite true', 607) to show that he is following the story. Such comments add nothing to the plot, but

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<sup>168</sup> 557 ff., 567, 571, 573 bis, 577 ter, 604, 607, 608 bis.

Antipho uses them to urge Chaerea to continue his narration.<sup>169</sup> At 597, he interrupts Chaerea to comment on the story--a clever technique which Terence uses to approximate everyday conversation. As befits Antipho's complaisant nature, he ends his appearance on the stage with *fiat* 'right' (614). The audience needs to know Chaerea's story, and Antipho gives him a reason for relating it. His only purpose in this comedy is to act as a goad, and to break up Chaerea's narrative so that it does not look too much like a monologue. As soon as he fulfills these functions, he disappears and does not appear again.

Sosia serves a similar purpose in the *Andria*. He too is present for a single scene in which he is as inquisitive as Antipho. By making Sosia Simio's slave, Terence has side-stepped the issue of motivation for his presence: slaves are supposed to be at the side of their master at all times to assist them when required. Because it was a comic convention for a slave to be meddlesome, it is hardly surprising that a slave should be interested in the affairs of his master. And Sosia certainly is curious. In the few lines that he has, he asks thirteen questions,<sup>170</sup> and agrees three times.<sup>171</sup> Occasionally he anticipates Simo's story thereby emphasising key issues to the audience. At line 74, as soon as Simo mentions the Andrian woman, Sosia exclaims, *ei uereor ne quid Andria adportet mali!* 'Dear me, I'm afraid of some mischief from the Andrian'. At line 127, Sosia again builds suspense by blurting out, *quam timeo quorsum euadas!* 'How I tremble to think what you're leading up to!' Just as Antipho interrupted Chaerea's account with colourless observations, Simo interjects with a

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<sup>169</sup>See especially line 604.

<sup>170</sup>30, 21, 45, 48, 52 ff., 103, 116, 142 ff., 149, 154; especially vapid are those at: 137: *quid ais*, 150: *quis? cedo* and 163: *quapropter*.

<sup>171</sup>54, 60, 141.

single word, *teneo*, 'I see' speciously to encourage Simo to continue, but more to divide Simo's speech so that it at least looks like a dialogue even if Simo is the only one saying anything.<sup>172</sup>

#### ix. METRE

In metrical matters Terence has shied away from the exuberance of Plautus and has harked back to Menander.<sup>173</sup> As was observed above, about eighty percent of the Greek playwright's comedies are spoken rather than recited or sung. In Plautus, a little over thirty-five percent of the lines are spoken. In Terence, there is a marked increase in spoken content: now only fifty-four percent are spoken. What is particularly interesting is the significant decrease of cantica when moving from Plautus (13.8%) to Terence (3.2%). Plautus was a virtuoso of language and no doubt impressed his audience with his clever versifications. Terence, on the other hand, was more moderate perhaps to be more faithful to his model, but with the result that he managed to represent better the colloquial speech of Rome than Plautus.

#### x. LANGUAGE

Terence seems to be attempting to present a "slice of life" in his plays; he wants to give the impression that he has caught in their everyday mode of action average Greeks who, for the sake of presentation, speak the language of average Romans. At *Eunuchus* 91 (1), Donatus notes, *magna uirtus poetae est non sententias solum de consuetudine ac de medio tollere et ponere in comoedia, uerum etiam uerba quaedam ex communi sermone...* 'It is a great skill of the poet that he lifts not only

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<sup>172</sup>For other scenes where Terence is thought to have replaced a monologue from his source with a dialogue, see Lowe (1983), 428 ff., who cites *Ph.* 248-459, *An.* 459-67, *H.T.* 614-18, 743-8, *Eu.* 500-6, *Hec.* 415-29.

<sup>173</sup>The statistics which follow are from Gratwick (1987), 269.

*sententiae* from custom and from the realm of the ordinary and places them in comedy, but even certain words from everyday speech.' To do this, Terence turned to the rhetorical devices he doubtless learned in school.

#### x.1. ELLIPSIS

Ellipsis, a technique whereby a word or set of words necessary for the meaning of the sentence has been omitted, is a feature common in colloquial speech and therefore particularly significant in the plays of Terence.<sup>174</sup> In Terence, as well as in Plautus, are found elliptical phrases which were likely popular in Rome and whose popularity would have ensured that the missing elements were clearly understood. Some such phrases are *quid hoc* (*An.* 468), *quid istic* (*Ad.* 133, 956; *Eu.* 171) or common oaths such as *pro deum immortalium* where a word like *fidem* is missing.<sup>175</sup>

Donatus notices instances where Terence employs ellipsis to express certain emotion. At *Adelphoe* 158 Sannio is physically unable to complete his thought because he is trying to wriggle out of Aeschinus' restraints. The commentator observes the aptness of Terence's use of the device here: *nemo enim plene loquitur, qui luctatur*, 'no one finishes his sentences when he is struggling.' Ellipsis is also used to express that one is thinking out loud (*Hec.* 278), that one is crying (someone who is crying cannot finish her sentences since 'weeping hinders speech', *fletus impedit uerba*),<sup>176</sup> or even that one is angry. An instance of this last emotion is

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<sup>174</sup>Duckworth (1971), 359; Cf.:

*An.* 120, 122, 149, 191, 285, 300, 361, 468, 635, 803 -4, 817, 886

*Eu.* 143, 202, 271, 279, 626, 849, 1056

*Ad.* 158, 165, 264, 265, 277, 330, 758

*Ph.* 52, 78, 142, 144, 440, 508

*H.T.* 555, 690.

<sup>175</sup>Donatus on *Ph.* 351 (4).

<sup>176</sup>Donatus on *Ad.* 330 (3).

found in the *Eunuchus* (64) where Parmeno is trying to emulate Phaedria's rage: "*egon illam, quae illum, quae me, quae non...!*" ("What? I return to her after her treatment of me and of another man and so on..."). On this passage Donatus writes,

familiaris ἔλλειψις irascentibus... etenim <nec>  
necesse habet nec potest complere orationem, qui et  
secum loquitur et dolore uexatur.

Ellipsis is common in angry people... for the man who speaks with himself and is aggrieved, does not think it necessary or even possible to complete his sentence.

A further example of this is to be found at *Andria* 119 ff.: Simo, describing Glycerium to Sosia, begins, *unam aspicio adolescentulam, / forma--*, 'I caught sight of one girl whose figure was--' at which point Sosia interjects, *bona fortasse?* Simo continues: *et uoltu, Sosia, / adeo modesto, adeo uenusto, ut nil supra*, '--and her face, Sosia, so modest and so charming, it couldn't be beaten'.

Finally, Terence utilises ellipsis to indicate a particular trait in his characters. In the *Eunuchus*, Thraso's dim-wittedness is evidenced by his failure to articulate his thoughts clearly. At 405, he is speaking with Gnatho: ... *requiescere ubi uolebat, quasi... nostin?* 'when he wished to repose as if--do you know?' Apparently, Thraso is not clever enough even to finish his own simile, as Donatus notes:

grate expressit stulti infantiam militis, qui ante uult  
intellegi quod sentit, quam ipse dicat. 3 *Et proprie*  
*hoc morale est stolidis inerudite loquentibus.*<sup>177</sup>

[Terence] delightfully portrayed the inarticulateness of the stupid soldier who wants his thoughts to be understood

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<sup>177</sup>Donatus on *Eu.* 405 (3).

before he himself says them. 3 And this trait is appropriate to oafs who speak without elegance.

## x.2. APOSIOPESIS

Aposiopesis, “the deliberate interruption of a phrase, which leaves to the listener the task of completing it,”<sup>178</sup> is a technique similar to ellipsis which Terence also employs to simulate everyday speech.<sup>179</sup> The difference between ellipsis and aposiopesis seems to be that with ellipsis the character *neglects* to finish his sentence, whereas in aposiopesis the character *intentionally* leaves his thoughts incomplete for the effect. Anger can be indicated as effectively by aposiopesis as by ellipsis. At *Andria* 872 Simo is exploding with rage at his son. When Pamphilus enters, Simo is too angry to finish his sentence; all he can make out is an accusatory *quid ais, omnium... ?* ‘Is this credible? Of all the...’. Donatus comments, *Est irati familiaris ἀποσιώπησις cum pro dignitate peccati non inueniat conuicium*, ‘this aposiopesis is common to the angry man since he is unable to find a reproach strong enough to match the misdeed’.

Simo, earlier in the *Andria* (164), menaces, *quem quidem ego si sensero...* ‘If I catch him--’,<sup>180</sup> and heightens the severity of the threat by leaving it unspoken. A similar example is found at *Heauton Timorumenos* 912 ff. where embarrassment prevents Chremes from completing his thought:

quemquamne tam comi animo esse aut leni putas  
qui se uidente amicam patiatur suam...

<sup>178</sup>Conte, Gian Biaggio (1994), *Latin Literature: A History*. trans. Joseph B. Solodow. Baltimore. page 807.

<sup>179</sup>Indeed, Donatus often confuses the two; for example, *Hec.* 875 (1) and *An.* 149 (2).

<sup>180</sup>Other examples that Donatus notes aposiopesis used in threats are at *An.* 790, *Ad.* 135 (1), and *Eu.* 479 (3); cf. *H.T.* 919.

Do you think any man can be so complaisant and easy-going  
as to allow his own mistress before his very eyes to-- to--

The audience understands what Chremes is hinting at even more clearly than if he had explicitly stated it.

In general, aposiopesis, like ellipsis, lends both vivacity, because the dialogue is kept crisp by the interruptions of a second anxious character, as well as veracity, because aposiopesis also permits Terence to approximate more closely colloquial conversation in which people are not always permitted--or able--to finish their sentences.<sup>181</sup>

### x.3. ANACOLUTHA

A final use of language that is important to the playwright trying to approximate the colloquial speech of the Romans is the use of anacolutha, mistakes in grammar and syntax, to indicate stupid or uneducated characters. The use of faulty expression, Reich explains,<sup>182</sup> is used especially to distinguish a character of lower status. Thus, at *Hecyra* 311 (3), when Parmeno says, ... *quia enim eos gubernat animus eum infirnum gerunt*, 'to be sure, the mind which guides them is a thing of weakness', Donatus writes, *uitiosam locutionem seruili personae dedit Terentius*, 'Terence endowed the servile character with flawed speech'. It is easy to understand why Roman slaves might have been uneducated, and Terence makes them realistic and believable by having them make such mistakes.

In the mouths of swaggering soldiers or old men, grammatical or syntactical lapses are ridiculous. Donatus picks up Thraso' unlearned use of the archaic infinitive at *Eunuchus* 432: *disciplina est comicis ut stultas sententias ita etiam uitiosa uerba ascribere ridiculis imperitisque personis*, 'Among the comic playwrights it is customary to attribute foolish

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<sup>181</sup>*An.* 149 (2), *Ph.* 51 (2), 110 (2), 255 (1), 491 (2); *Eu.* 65 (1).

<sup>182</sup>Reich (1933), 75.

thoughts and even defective words to ridiculous and ignorant characters'. He then illustrates that this 'mistake' of Terence was intentional by referring to the correct form at *Heauton Timorumenos* 971.<sup>183</sup> The final example of a seemingly deliberate use of incorrect language in Terence is at *Eunuchus* 1063, when Thraso, explaining his presence in that region, says, *uobis fretus*. This response, according to the commentator, is an anacoluthon 'appropriate to the speech of ignorant men and soldiers' (1) because *sum* is omitted. Granted *sum* is easily understood but the example shows how diligent Donatus was in examining the comedies and explaining any divergence from grammatically correct Latin.

## xi. CHARACTERISATION

### xi.1. DECORUM

One of the techniques which Terence uses when aiming for verisimilitude in his characterisation is conforming to conventional character-types. The audience expects a certain character-type to behave in a certain way, and if that character does not conform to the expectation without good reason, it will not be believable. In his preface, Evanthius noted:

tum personarum leges circa habitum, aetatem, officium, partes agendi nemo diligentius a Terentio custodiuit. quin etiam solus ausus est, cum in fictis argumentis fidem ueritatis assequeretur, etiam contra praescripta comica meretrices interdum non malas introducere, quibus tamen et causa, cur bonae sint, et uoluptas per ipsum non deficit.

... no one preserved the laws of character concerning condition, age, rank in society, and part to be played more diligently than Terence. Indeed, he alone dared--when he

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<sup>183</sup>Donatus notes that Plautus also did this. Pyrgopolynices makes a similar blunder at *Miles* 152 (I.i.74).

was trying for verisimilitude in a fictional plot--to bring onto the stage prostitutes who were not evil women, even though this was contrary to rules for comedy. However, they were not lacking in a reason for their goodness or a certain charm in their characterization.<sup>184</sup>

Donatus often comments on a character that is described in accordance with custom<sup>185</sup> or to real life, usually using the words τὸ πρέπον<sup>186</sup> ('what is appropriate') and *proprium*.<sup>187</sup>

Part of Terence's art is that he adheres strictly to conventional character-typing. For example, in the *Hecyra*, not only do a 'kind mother-in-law, a chaste daughter-in-law, and a husband who is kind to his wife' appear, but also a 'good courtesan'.<sup>188</sup> However, that *bona meretrix*, Bacchis, herself makes it clear that she is the exception rather than the rule: *faciam, quod pol, si esset alia ex hoc quaestu, haud faceret*, 'I will do what on my word there isn't another woman of my profession that would, I'm sure of that.'<sup>189</sup> Donatus remarks:

uigilanter poeta, ne non uerisimile uideretur id ullam fecisse meretricem, ipse lectorem praeuenit. et sic fere in omnibus Terentius, quae minus peruulgata sunt quaeque abhorrent a consuetudine, agit.

The playwright vigilantly anticipates the reader, lest it seem to be not verisimilar that any prostitute do this. Terence does this with almost all matters which are less known and will deviate from custom.

<sup>184</sup>*De Fabula*, III.4; trans. Hilger (1970), 28.

<sup>185</sup>*Eu.* 1027 (1), 358 (4), 1027 (1); *Ad.* 259 (3), 476 (7); *An.* 118 (1); *Hec.* 76 (3); *Ph.* 258 (1), 324 (5).

<sup>186</sup>*An.* 325, 447 (2), 798 (2), *Ad.* 598.

<sup>187</sup>*eg. Ph.* 107 (3).

<sup>188</sup>*Hec. Praef.* I.9.

<sup>189</sup>*Hec.* 756.

## xi.2. LINGUISTIC CHARACTERISATION

Connected with this desire to portray a veristic language is the appropriate characterisation through linguistic means. It thus remains for this chapter to discuss Terence's relationship with Menander and Plautus in this regard. Here too, Terence is more moderate than Plautus, but not merely as observant and detailed as Menander. A fragment of the Ἐαυτὸν τιμωρούμενος of Menander has a character claiming that 'a man's character discovers itself in his speech' (ἄνδρὸς χαρακτήρ ἐκ λόγου γνωρίζεται).<sup>190</sup> Terence, following Menander closely here, in his version has Antiphila say to Bacchis (384), *nam mihi quale ingenium haberes fuit indicio oratio*, 'It is your conversation [which] has let me into your character.' Indeed, it is through the language that we better understand many of the characters.

In an important article,<sup>191</sup> Vally Reich discussed Donatus' view on characterisation in Terence and demonstrates that the playwright employed language to portray profession, social position, age and sex. Thus, in his commentary, the commentator often signals speeches which are appropriate to the speaker with such adverbs as *amatorie* (*Hec.* 319; *Ph.* 160), *seniliter* (*Hec.* 207), *seruiliter* (*Ad.* 646 or *seruilibus*, *Eu.* 926), *puelliter* (*Eu.* 898, *Ad.* 646), and *muliebriter* (*Hec.* 269: *proprie et muliebriter*; *Hec.* 347: *interiectio feminea ac matronalis*).

### xi.2.a. FEMALE SPEECH

Relying to a large degree on Donatus' commentaries on Terence, J.N. Adams has already catalogued the various markers of 'feminine'

<sup>190</sup>Allinson (1930), page 349, fragment 143 (Kock). *cf.* *H.T.* 384.

<sup>191</sup>Reich (1933). Later scholars have followed Reich's lead: Arnott (1970), Adams (1984), Maltby (1979), Nougaret (1945).

speech in Roman comedy.<sup>192</sup> These, he points out, like the ones found in Plautus' plays, are "sex-preferential rather than sex-exclusive,"<sup>193</sup> the only exception in Terence being the word *amabo* which is *only* spoken by female characters.<sup>194</sup> For instance, the speech of women is more clearly defined than in Plautus with the use of (to use Adams' term), 'polite modifiers' such as *amabo*, *quaeso* and *obsecro*.<sup>195</sup>

Women in Terence are also more prone to expressions of self-pity than men.<sup>196</sup> *Misera*, Donatus notes, is also a *muliebris interpositio*.<sup>197</sup> He observes, for instance, that *au* is an interjection especially apt in the mouths of women who are troubled.<sup>198</sup> Finally, Adams notes that oaths by Castor and Pollus in Terence are uttered predominantly by women.<sup>199</sup>

To sum up Adams' articles, there are trends within both Plautus and Terence to distinguish male from female speech, but in Terence those trends are more marked. These tendencies may be the result of the difference in size of corpora between the two playwrights which we have to compare, but Adams weighs his figures accordingly, and the trends remain significant. It was obviously more of a concern to Terence than to Plautus to mark his female character through their speech.

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<sup>192</sup>Adams (1984).

<sup>193</sup>Adams (1984), 76.

<sup>194</sup>Adams (1984), 61.

<sup>195</sup>Adams (1984), 55; Donatus on *An.* 685 (1): *anime mi: mollis oratio et feminea multis implicata blandimentis; Eu.* 565 (1): "*mea*" et "*mea tu*" et "*amabo*" et alia huiusmodi mulieribus apta sunt blandimenta; *Ph.* 1005: *nam feminarum oratio, etsi non blanditur, blanda est; Ad.* 289 (1): "*mea tu*": blandimentum est, sine quo progreditur colloquium feminarum et maxime trepidantium; *Ad.* 291 (2): *proprium est mulierum, cum loquuntur, aut aliis blandiri... aut se commiserari... nam haec omnia muliebra sunt... enumerantur nullius momenti querelae; Ad.* 482 (1): *hoc uerbo tenuis uictus ostenditur, quod bene frugi esse monstratur in feminis; Hec.* 824: *Haec blandimenta sunt muliebria.*

<sup>196</sup>Adams (1984), 73.

<sup>197</sup>Donatus on *Hecyra* 87 (2).

<sup>198</sup>Donatus on *An.* 751 (1) '*au*' interiectio est consternatae mulieris; *Eu.* 899 (3) '*au*' interiectio est perturbatae mulieris; *Eu.* 680 (2) '*au*' interiectio est conturbatae feminae nec constantis sibi.

<sup>199</sup>Donatus on *An.* 486 (3); On such oaths, see Ullman (1943-4) and Nicholson (1893).

### xi.2.b. OLD MEN

The speech of the *senex* in Terence is similarly distinguished as Robert Maltby has demonstrated.<sup>200</sup> The most common linguistic marker of old men is their use of archaisms,<sup>201</sup> their preferred use of one-word ablative absolute constructions<sup>202</sup> and their long-windedness.<sup>203</sup> Maltby has noted that once again, Terence clusters these markers, whereas Plautus employs them more sparingly.<sup>204</sup>

### xi.2.c. PROFESSION-SPECIFIC EXPRESSIONS

We turn now to the use of linguistic markers of profession. The most obvious and prevalent example is that of the soldier who is demarcated through his use of military terms,<sup>205</sup> but Terence is more subtle than Plautus in this regard, for the terms are not nearly as numerous. The younger playwright, it seems, would rather concentrate on depicting the soldier's stupidity than his military paraphernalia. Also significant is that the pimp, whose life revolves around the lusts of others, is the only character in the plays of Terence to use an obscene expression.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>200</sup>Maltby (1979).

<sup>201</sup>Maltby (1979), 138 ff.

<sup>202</sup>Maltby (1979), 139.

<sup>203</sup>Maltby (1979), 141 ff.; Reich (1933), 47; Hilger (1970), 106. Cf. Donatus on *Ad.* 68 (3): *senilis μακρολογία*; *Ad.* 482 (4) *senili loquacitate*; *Ad.* 959 (3).

<sup>204</sup>Maltby (1979), 145.

<sup>205</sup>cf. Nougaret (1945).

<sup>206</sup>Donatus on *Ad.* 214 (3): *et morem gerere proprie lenonis est et meretricis, unde et ipse sic respondet, ut non fugiens κακέμφατον dicat 'usque os praebui'.*

### xi.2.d. PET EXPRESSIONS

Professor Arnott<sup>207</sup> has observed that, like Menander, Terence uses expressions or verbal traits that are particular to one certain character. For instance, Davus in the *Phormio* is particularly fond of *sententiae* and diminutives, such as *rationcula* (36), *pauxillulum* (37), *puellula* (81), and *anicula* (98).<sup>208</sup> Sometimes it is a single word that recurs in a character's speech that is distinctive: *modo* is found scattered liberally throughout Geta's speech, also in the *Phormio*.<sup>209</sup> The best example is Thais' predilection for the blandishment *mi*. On her use of the word, Donatus remarks, *Vide quam familiariter hoc idem repetat blandimentum; uult enim Terentius uelut peculiare uerbum hoc esse Thaidis*, 'Notice how intimately she repeats this same blandishment; for Terence want this word to be uniquely that of Thais.'<sup>210</sup>

The language of Demea in the *Adelphoe* is seasoned with extremes just as much as that of Cnemon in Menander's *Dyskolos*.<sup>211</sup> Thus, we find the repeated use of absolute words like *omnem* (89), *omnes* (865), *omni* (93), and of negating phrases such as *neque... quicquam nec ... quemquam neque... ullam* (84 ff.). Professor Arnott has also remarked on the use of these extremes to mark a climax in the play, so at line 855 ff., just before Demea feigns liberality, we find an increased concentration of absolutes: *numquam ... quisquam... semper; semper* (863), *omnibus* (864), *omnes* (865) and *omnem* (876). This is somewhat to be expected in Demea's speech because, like Cnemon, his character is both harsh and unyielding.

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<sup>207</sup>Arnott (1970).

<sup>208</sup>Arnott (1970), 54.

<sup>209</sup>Maltby (1979), 145 cites *Ph.* 59, 68, 93, 95, 109, 142, 149, 198, 221, 566, 624, 773, 859 and 865 *bis*.

<sup>210</sup>*Eu.* 95 (2).

<sup>211</sup>Arnott (1970), 54.

## xii. CONCLUSION

In comparison with the comedies of Plautus, those of Terence are much more life-like. The latter poet seems to be aiming more for verisimilitude than for a laugh. In comparison to Menander, however, Terence does not quite match the subtlety of the Greek master; while the probability of his plots is maintained, the charming and familiar details are lost. His characters are not as detailed or as deftly drawn as Menander's. Despite his attempt at verism, however, Terence's comedies cannot be described as realistic 'mirrors of life' because they do not represent of society of his day. What they do reflect, as do the plays of Menander, and to a much less degree, Plautus, are the universal emotions and actions of everyday people, an aspect of the plays which we will now examine.

CHAPTER II:

THE PHILOSOPHICAL MIRROR

I. INTRODUCTION

Although there is no ancient criticism extant that specifically describes comedy as an instructive mirror, the idea may be gleaned from Aristophanes of Byzantium's famous dictum,

ὦ Μένανδρε καὶ βίε,  
πότερος ἄρ' ὑμῶν πότερον ἀπεμιμήσατο;<sup>212</sup>

'O Menander and life, which of you imitated the other?'

While this quotation can be interpreted as suggesting a 'realistic' mirror as we have already seen, it may also describe Menander as an educator of the way one should lead his/her life;<sup>213</sup> in other words, in his plays, Menander can be thought to provide examples--both good and bad--for life (that is, his audience) to follow.

I should like to anticipate a fundamental objection, that comedy is "not a philosophical tract".<sup>214</sup> To the Greeks who grew up learning about morals through their knowledge of the Homeric poems, poetry had always had at least a theoretical didactic aim, and comedy is not the exception. An anonymous poet of the Palatine Anthology noted, κωμικὸν εὖρε Θάλεια βίον καὶ ἥθεα κεδνά. 'Thalia founded the life and useful morals of comedy'.<sup>215</sup> There was thus a philosophical purpose inherent in the function of comedy that is found not only in Cicero's definition, but also in the works of Plato, Aristotle, the later critical authors on comedy.

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<sup>212</sup>Syrian. comment. in Hermoge. II 23 Rabe; = *Testimonia* 32 Koerte.

<sup>213</sup>Rostagni (1955), 339 and Cantarella (1969), 194 ff.

<sup>214</sup>Lord (1977), 184; Grant (1975), 46-47.

<sup>215</sup>AP IX 504; Εἰς τὰς Μούσας

Further, it can also be detected, to a certain extent, in the works of Menander and the Roman comic playwrights.

## II. SOCIAL FUNCTION OF COMEDY

### i. OLD COMEDY

Old Comedy was a social phenomenon whose primary aim was to delight its public, but that is not to say that it does not deal with issues which its audience met on a daily basis. Thus, Old Comedy had a secondary and incidental moral function of which Aristophanes was aware, as is suggested by the chorus in the *Frogs* :

τὸν ἱερὸν χορὸν δίκαιόν ἐστι χρηστὰ τῇ πόλει  
 ξυμπαραινεῖν καὶ διδάσκειν.<sup>216</sup>

Well it suits the holy Chorus evermore with counsel wise to  
 exhort and teach the city.

Further, in the *Acharnians*, Dikaiopolis likewise demonstrates that he is also conscious of the possible didactic function of theatre, both tragedy and comedy:<sup>217</sup>

μή μοι φθονήσητ', ἄνδρες οἱ θεώμενοι,  
 εἰ πτωχὸς ὢν ἔπειτ' ἐν Ἀθηναίοις λέγειν  
 μέλλω περὶ τῆς πόλεως, τρυγῶδιαν ποιῶν.  
 τὸ γὰρ δίκαιον οἶδε καὶ τρυγῶδιά.<sup>218</sup>

Bear me no grudge, spectators, if, a beggar, I dare to speak  
 before the Athenian people about the city in a comic play.  
 For what is [right]<sup>219</sup> even comedy can tell.

Dikaiopolis realises that the audience may not believe that Aristophanic comedy with its ridicule, 'low' humour and heavy caricature, could

<sup>216</sup>*Frogs*, 686-687.

<sup>217</sup>Taplin (1983), 333.

<sup>218</sup>*Acharnians* 497f.

<sup>219</sup>B.B. Rogers, translates δίκαιον as "true", but "right" is more appropriate.

provide an educational message. In all good caricature there is an element of truth that has been amplified many times. It is this exaggeration that makes it humorous. The audience laughs because it recognises the truth, and because it realises that the truth has been distorted.

One would do well to remember that Aristophanes does not attack men just because he has a personal dislike towards them; his invective may stem "from a profound affection and concern for [the people's] welfare" as Ehrenberg argues,<sup>220</sup> but it is probably more general than this. It is not the individuals but the social problems themselves that Aristophanes is mocking. Dodds argues that after the fifth century, Greece shifted from being a shame culture to a guilt culture,<sup>221</sup> but Lloyd-Jones found this simplistic and propounded instead that the elements of shame and guilt culture were present both before and after this period.<sup>222</sup> Old Comedy seems to be a product of a shame culture since, if there was a social vice that offended against society, it would be ridiculed before all the citizens. Old Comedy thus contained at least the threat of notoriety and shame by his peers for any person--public or otherwise--who was deemed to have committed the offence.

## ii. NEW COMEDY

New Comedy inherited Old Comedy's social function, but on a different scale. It was not the public personality, but the private individual who was ridiculed and then only indirectly. By working in generalities and displaying characteristics with which its whole audience was familiar, New Comedy was much more immediate to a larger section of its spectators. Since there was no direct personal invective, the audience

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<sup>220</sup>Ehrenberg (1951), 31.

<sup>221</sup>Dodds, E.R. (1971), 28 ff.

<sup>222</sup>Lloyd-Jones (1983), 26.

could not deny the social criticisms by saying, "it is him, not me"; in New Comedy, the ways and customs of everyone is offered up for scrutiny.

### III. MENANDER IN EDUCATION

After Menander's death, his comedies became school texts, and children were being taught ethics from his comedies just as they had been from Homer's epics. In the first century A.D. when only revivals of his comedy were being performed, Plutarch notes in the *Moralia* how the teacher could take advantage of the amusing plays of Menander and other writers of New Comedy to disseminate philosophical ideas at the symposium:

περὶ δὲ τῆς νέας κωμωδίας τί [ἄν] ἀντιλέγοι τις; οὕτω γὰρ ἐγκέκραται τοῖς συμποσίοις, ὡς μᾶλλον ἂν οἴνου χωρὶς ἢ Μενάνδρου διακυπερνῆσαι τὸν πότον. ...γνωμολογίαι τε χρησταὶ καὶ ἀφελεῖς ὑπορρέουσαι καὶ τὰ σκληρότατα τῶν ἠθῶν ὡσπερ ἐν πυρὶ τῷ οἴνῳ μαλάττουσι καὶ κάμπτουσι πρὸς τὸ ἐπιεικέστερον· ἢ τε τῆς σπουδῆς πρὸς τὴν παιδιὰν ἀνάκρasis ἐπ' οὐδὲν ἂν πεποιῆσθαι δόξειεν ἀλλ' ἢ πεπωκότων καὶ διακεχυμένων ἡδονὴν ὁμοῦ καὶ ὠφέλειαν.<sup>223</sup>

What objection, however, could anyone make to New Comedy? It has become so completely a part of the symposium that we could chart our course more easily without wine than without Menander. ...excellent unaffected sentiments are an undercurrent that can melt the hardest ear and with wine to supply the heat, like the smith's fire, reshape and improve the character. The blend of serious and humorous would seem to have no other poetic end in view than to combine pleasure with profit for men relaxing over their wine.

Poetry, with its mixture of philosophy with fables, makes education more enjoyable. Apparently Menander's writings were especially

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<sup>223</sup>*Quaestiones convivales*, VII.8.712 (= *Moralia* 712b ff.). Trans. by Minar, E.L. Volume IX. Loeb.

beneficial for Plutarch often quotes them, when writing on the role of poetry in a child's education.<sup>224</sup> Plutarch notes that the teacher should make clear the teachings in Menander so that the pupil may take his examples from the works. Not everything in Menander is morally upright, however; and when the comedy seems to display an inappropriate action or statement, Plutarch explains that this too can be useful if the teacher illustrates how the playwright makes it seem shameful.

Καὶ ταῦτα δὴ τοῖς νέοις ὑποδεικνύοντες οὐκ  
 ἐάσομεν φορὰν πρὸς τὰ φαῦλα γίνεσθαι τῶν ἠθῶν  
 ἀλλὰ τῶν βελτιόνων ζῆλον καὶ προαίρεσιν, εὐθὺς  
 τοῖς μὲν τὸ ψέγειν τοῖς δὲ τὸ ἐπαινεῖν  
 ἀποδιδόντες.<sup>225</sup>

By indicating these things to the young, we shall not allow them to acquire any learning towards such characters as are mean, but rather as emulation of the better, and a preference for them, if we unhesitatingly award censure to the one class and commendation to the other.

Plutarch then goes on to show that once the child has been properly taught how to interpret comedy correctly, he can extract the 'message' from it himself. In this way, New Comedy is seen to lead both by good and bad example.

#### IV. CICERO'S DEFINITION

Evanthius cites Cicero's definition of comedy without providing any hint of the context from which it was taken. We do not know, for instance, if the essayist cites the definition because it supports his previous statement of the didactic purpose of comedy: *Comoedia est fabula ... continens affectum ciuiliū ac priuatorum, quibus discitur, quid sit in uita utile,*

<sup>224</sup>ΠΩΣ ΔΕΙ ΤΟΝ ΝΕΟΝ ΠΟΙΗΜΑΤΩΝ ΑΚΟΥΕΙΝ (= *Moralia*, 14 ff.). Trans.by Babbitt, F.C.. Volume 1, Loeb.

<sup>225</sup>27e.12; cf. also 16f.4.

*quid contra euitandum* (V.1), or simply because he himself is applying this interpretation on it. However, the scanty evidence of the work from which Cicero's definition was excerpted strongly suggests there was an inherent philosophical element. This is not surprising, for although Cicero was a schoolboy over a century before Plutarch was writing, there is no doubt that Cicero learned the Menander's comedies in the same way, and that he intended his definition of comedy to be interpreted as philosophical is evidenced in many ways.

### **i. SOURCE**

Scholars have conjectured that Cicero's *De re publica*,<sup>226</sup> a work that has been fragmentary since the early middle ages, was the original home of the definition. It is clear from the scraps of the *De re publica* which have survived that this work as a whole was definitely philosophically charged: its aim was to propose an ideal commonwealth, much like its model, Plato's *Republic*, in which the Greek proposed the creation of an ideal city-state based on philosophical principles.<sup>227</sup> Between the two works stand many points of similarities: but most significant to our purposes is the suggestion that Book IV of Cicero's *De re publica* (now almost completely lost) dealt with the role of drama within that commonwealth.<sup>228</sup>

#### **i.1. PLATO'S REPUBLIC**

We turn then to Plato's *Republic* to see what Cicero's model for this work says about theatre and comedy. In that work, when discussing the role of the art and artist in an ideal commonwealth, Socrates notes that the imitation of the painter or the poet is false; it is 'an appearance but is not

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<sup>226</sup>It is attributed to IV.11.13, cf. Ziegler (1969) and especially Büchner (1984), 381.

<sup>227</sup>e.g. Zetzel (1995), 14.

<sup>228</sup>Ziegler, *De re publica* IV. 11.13, p. 114.5, although Pfeiffer (1968), 190 n.9 questions the validity of the attribution.

real and is not the truth' (φαινόμενα, οὐ μέντοι ὄντα γε που τῆ ἀληθείᾳ).<sup>229</sup> Because 'all art is thrice removed from the truth' (περὶ τρίτον μὲν τί ἐστὶν ἀπὸ τῆς ἀληθείας),<sup>230</sup> Socrates reasons, it can be a corruptive agent (λώβη) for those who are not sufficiently prepared to interpret it properly.

In the tenth book, the Plato argues specifically against comedy. It is especially corruptive because it potrays publicly the clownish behaviour that remains passive, bridled by reason, in our characters, :

ἂν αὐτὸς αἰσχύνοιο γελωτοποιῶν, ἐν μιμήσει δὲ κωμωδικῇ ἢ καὶ ἰδίᾳ ἀκούων σφόδρα χαρῆς καὶ μὴ μισῆς ὡς πονηρά... ὃ γὰρ τῷ λόγῳ αὐτὸ κατεῖχες ἐν σαυτῷ βουλόμενον γελωτοποιεῖν, φοβούμενος δόξαν βωμολοχίας, τότε αὐτὸ ἀνιείς, καὶ ἐκεῖ νεανικὸν ποιήσας ἔλαθες πολλάκις ἐν τοῖς οἰκείοις ἐξενεχθεὶς ὥστε κωμωδοποιὸς γενέσθαι.<sup>231</sup>

Whenever, at a comic performance or in private life, you get keen pleasure from, and refuse to detest as wicked, humour which you would be personally ashamed to indulge in... For the urge which you used your reason to suppress in yourself when it wanted to indulge in humour, out of fear of appearing a buffoon, is what you then in turn release; and by behaving *there* in an adolescent manner, you are often induced unawares into becoming a comic poet in your own life.<sup>232</sup>

Seeing people onstage act in a ridiculous way incites the viewer in a negative manner; he does not, Plato suggests, avoid the shameful behaviour, but rather imitates the buffooneries himself.

In the *Laws*, Plato concedes that if comedy adheres to strict moral prescriptions, such as being performed only by slaves and not citizens for whom it would be improper to put on public display shameless ideas and

<sup>229</sup>Republic, 597e.

<sup>230</sup>Republic, 602c.

<sup>231</sup>Republic, 606c.

<sup>232</sup>trans. Halliwell (1988), 66-67.

actions,<sup>233</sup> it serves the function of showing both the serious and the laughable. This is important because the philosopher cannot know the serious unless he also knows the laughable (ἄνευ γὰρ γελοίων τὰ σπουδαῖα... μαθεῖν μὲν οὐ δυνατόν). Thus, the philosopher who recognises the shameful deeds and words will avoid them in the future (ἄγνοιαν δρᾶν ἢ λέγειν ὅσα γελοῖα μηδὲν δέον), while emulating that which is virtuous.<sup>234</sup>

Like Plato in his later dialogue, Cicero was willing to admit comedy to the commonwealth, but only if it served a social function. It had to mirror the lives of its audience and provide exemplars which they could apply (negatively or positively) to their own lives.

## i.2. THE 'MIRROR' IN EARLIER PHILOSOPHICAL WORKS

The phrasing of the definition also suggests a philosophical basis, for the mirror was frequently used as a metaphor in philosophical works. Plato, with reference to the concept of transcendental Forms and their corporeal particulars, often opposes earthly images with a higher truth, a fact to which Hilger seems to be alluding when he suggests that Cicero's definition of comedy as an *imitatio uitae, speculum consuetudinis, imago ueritatis* 'implies the existence of a universal truth that transcends human life.'<sup>235</sup> Indeed, the final two elements of Cicero's phrase do suggest a 'higher truth' analogous to the Platonic description of particulars and their Forms, a notion that Plato in the *Laws* (905b) also explains with the use of the mirror-metaphor:

ἀνοσιουργήσαντας ἢ τι τοιοῦτον πράξαντας  
ψήθης ἐξ ἀθλίων εὐδαίμονας γεγονέναι, κᾶτα ὡς

<sup>233</sup>*Laws*, 802 f.

<sup>234</sup>Of course, Plato is referring to either Old or Middle Comedy; he could not have been aware of New Comedy.

<sup>235</sup>Hilger (1970), 58.

ἐν κατόπτροις αὐτῶν ταῖς πράξεσιν ἠγήσω  
καθεωρακέναι τὴν πάντων ἀμέλειαν θεῶν...<sup>236</sup>

those whom you saw growing to great estate from small after doing acts of impiety or other such evil--concerning whom you deemed and imagined, therefore, that in their actions as in mirrors, you beheld the entire neglect of the gods.

Here, Plato is describing how one man witnessing the success of a second evil man, attributes the latter's success to the gods' apathy. Thus the mirror acts as a link between the corporeal action and that of the universal cause: the carelessness of the gods. Fantham cites this passage as an example in Plato where "life itself [is] the mirror of the soul", and suggests that the metaphor as used by Cicero in his definition originated in this very passage.<sup>237</sup>

In his first *Alcibiades*, the philosopher once again employs the mirror to describe the relationship between the mind and the soul, through which we might ponder the gods and, significantly, we might know ourselves:

**ΣΩ**· ... καὶ ψυχὴ εἰ μέλλει γνῶσεσθαι αὐτήν, εἰς ψυχὴν αὐτῇ βλεπτόν καὶ μάλιστ' εἰς τοῦτον αὐτῆς τὸν τόπον ἐν ᾧ ἐγγίγνεται ἡ ψυχῆς ἀρετή, σοφία, καὶ εἰς ἄλλο ᾧ τοῦτο τυγχάνει ὁμοῖον ὄν;  
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**ΣΩ**· Ἄρ' οὖν, ὅθ' ὥσπερ κάτοπτρά ἐστι σαφέστερα τοῦ ἐν τῷ ὀφθαλμῷ ἐνόπτρου καὶ καθαρῶτερα καὶ λαμπρότερα, οὕτω καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἐν τῇ ἡμετέρᾳ ψυχῇ βελτίστου καθαρῶτερον τε καὶ λαμπρότερον τυγχάνει ὄν;

**ΑΛ**· Ἐοικέ γε, ὦ Σώκρατες.

**ΣΩ**· Εἰς τὸν θεὸν ἄρα βλέποντες ἐκείνῳ καλλίστῳ ἐνόπτρῳ χρῶμεθ' ἂν καὶ τῶν ἀνθρωπινῶν εἰς τὴν

<sup>236</sup>*Laws* 905.b.4 f.

<sup>237</sup>Fantham (1972), 68f.

ψυχῆς ἀρετήν, καὶ οὕτως ἂν μάλιστα ὁρῶμεν καὶ  
γιγνώσκοιμεν ἡμᾶς αὐτούς.<sup>238</sup>

**Socrates:** ... and the soul, if it wants to know itself, must observe another soul, and especially the part in this soul where rests its faculty, wisdom, or some other part where the object which resembles it?

\* \* \*

**Socrates:** Undoubtedly, because just as mirrors are clearer, purer, and brighter than the mirror of the eye, that of the god is purer and brighter than the better one in our soul.

**Alcibiades:** It seems so, Socrates.

**Socrates:** Therefore, that is how we can see the god: it is the better mirror of worldly objects with which one should judge the excellence of the soul, and it is in it that we can better see and know ourselves.

In this passage, Plato demonstrates the relationship between the higher truth and the mirror with which we may look upon it.

### i.3. THE MIRROR ELSEWHERE IN THE *DE RE PUBLICA*

We have further evidence also from Cicero's *De re publica*, that Cicero used the mirror as a metaphor for instruction. In the second book, Scipio is describing the perfect statesman:

Hic scilicet, Africanus, uni paene (nam in hoc fere uno sunt cetera), ut numquam a se ipso intuendo contemplandoque discedat, ut ad imitationem sui uocet alios, ut sese splendore animi et uitae suae sicut speculum praebeat ciuibus.<sup>239</sup>

(Scipio): Of course he should be given almost no other duties than this one (for it comprises most of the others)--of improving and examining himself continually, urging others to imitate him, and furnishing in himself, as it were, a mirror

<sup>238</sup>*Alcibiades* I.133b6 ff. The edition I am using here is that of Croiset, Maurice. (1946), *Platon: Oeuvres Completes*. Volume 1. Paris. The second section of this passage (ΣΩ<sup>τ</sup> Αρ' οὖν, ὅθ' ὡσπερ, κτλ.) has eluded discussion as it is not found in the manuscripts; Eusebius (*Praeparatio evangelica* 324).is its only witness Croiset (110) finds it redundant given the preceding passage, and suggests that it was a neo-platonic interpolation.

<sup>239</sup>*De re Republica*, 2.69.4.

to his fellow-citizens by reason of the supreme excellence of his life and character.

The words, *imitationem* and *speculum* parallel those of his definition of comedy, and also reflect the philosophical language used by Plato.

#### i.4. PLAUTINE QUOTATIONS IN CICERO

The third and final reason why Cicero's definition of comedy was philosophically based is evidenced by those plays that Cicero quoted. In his extant works, Cicero quoted from only two plays: once from the *Aulularia*, and a number of times from the *Trinummus*, which in itself suggests what Cicero was looking for in a 'good' comedy.<sup>240</sup> If we interpret his definition of comedy as being philosophical, the *Trinummus* was a natural play from which one should excerpt, because it is so packed with moral statements. Indeed, it is the most preachy of the Plautine works, with the first three acts especially heavy-handed in the morality department. The application of the epithet *speculum consuetudinis* to the *Trinummus* is clear right from the beginning of the comedy, when Megaronides, an old Athenian man comes on stage full of observations on the failing ethics of the city around him:

nam hic nimium morbus mores inuasit bonos  
 ita plerique omnes iam sunt intermortui.  
 sed dum illi aegrotant, interim mores mali  
 quasi herba inrigua succreuerunt uberrime:  
 eorum licet iam meter messem maxumam,  
 neque quicquam hic *nunc* est uile nisi mores mali.<sup>241</sup>

Why, a regular murrain has attacked this city's morals; and now nearly all of 'em are moribund. But while they

<sup>240</sup>Gratwick (1982), 97.

<sup>241</sup>*Trinummus* 23 ff.; Italics are my own.

languish, meantime moral laxity has been springing up and flourishing like watered weeds. Men are making that their major crop at present. The only cheap thing about here nowadays is moral laxity.

Nor is Megaronides the only one in the play to notice the failing ethics; at line 284 ff, Philto declares, *noui ego hoc saeculum moribus quibus siet*, 'I know this age and what its moral standards are'. The emphasis on the words *iam* and *nunc* in the first passage and *hoc saeculum* in the second brings the play into the present of the performance, and is a charge which every generation of every society makes. A problem then arises this definition is not applicable to every Plautine play; as far as we know of the Plautus' comedies, the *Trinummus* may have been exceptional in this regard. No doubt Cicero was aware of the other Plautine plays but apparently they did not fit into his scheme of what "true" comedy is.

#### V. A LOST HELLENISTIC DOCTRINE

Wilamowitz suggested that Cicero's definition of comedy was a translation of a Hellenistic Peripatetic doctrine on drama and offered a reconstruction of what he deemed to be the 'original': μίμησις βίου, κάτοπτρον ὁμιλίας, ὁμοίωμα ἀληθείας.<sup>242</sup> He next summed up his conception of what the doctrine must have been: "Das τέλος aller Poesie ist ψυχαγωγία, was er mit *voluptas* wiedergegeben zu haben scheint".<sup>243</sup>

Wilamowitz's suggestion was buttressed by the discovery of a fragment of Neoptolemus of Parium, a Hellenistic critic, who succinctly summarises the role of the poet thus: καὶ πρὸς ἀρετὴν δεῖν τῶι τελείῳ ποιητῇ μετὰ τῆς ψυχαγωγίας τοῦ τοῦς ἀκούοντ[ας] ὠφελείν καὶ

<sup>242</sup>Wilamowitz-Möllendorff (1959), 56.

<sup>243</sup>*Ibid.*

χρησι[μο]λ[ογεί]ν,<sup>244</sup> '... that the perfect poet in order to fulfill his capacity must not only thrill his hearers but improve them and teach a lesson.'<sup>245</sup> According to this tenet, comedy entertained while subtly teaching its audience. Rostagni has shown that Cicero's work was influenced by Philodemus<sup>246</sup>; and it was this same Philodemus who quotes Neoptolemus' definition of comedy. It is likely, therefore, that Cicero was also influenced by Neoptolemus' theory.

A connection in critical thought is thus shared between Cicero and Horace since Horace was also influenced by Neoptolemus' poetic doctrine.<sup>247</sup> It was from Neoptolemus that Horace learned that poetry must 'either teach or delight':

Aut prodesse uolunt aut delectare poetae  
aut simul et iucunda et idonea dicere uitae.<sup>248</sup>

Poets aim at benefit, or to amuse, or to utter words at once  
both pleasing and helpful to life.

In order to fulfill this role as teacher, the poet must have an understanding (*sapere*, v. 309) of moral theory (*Socraticae chartae* at v. 310) and a "knowledge of typical human features derived from ethics,"<sup>249</sup> which he imparts onto his reader/audience by providing good model, or *exemplar uitae morumque*, 'model of life and manners' (317), which, as we shall next see, was the primary way of comedy's instruction.

<sup>244</sup>*ap.* Philod. *Poem.* v.13.8 ff., cited by Brink (1971), 352; also (1963), 55 (Neopt. no. 10), 128 f., 135.

<sup>245</sup>translated by Brink

<sup>246</sup>Rostagni, 'Risonanze dell'estetica di Filodemo in Cicero' (1920) = *Scr. Min. I.* 356-446.

<sup>247</sup>Jensen, 'Neoptolemus und Horaz', *APA* (1918). also Brink (1971), 352. *cf.* Brink (1963), 43, who quotes the scholiast, Porphyrius, on Horace's *Ars Poetica* 1: *in quem librum conguessit praecepta Neoptolemiroû Παριανοû de arte poetica, non quidem omnia sed eminentissima.*

<sup>248</sup>*Ars Poetica*, 333.

<sup>249</sup>Brink (1971), 340.

## VI. EDUCATION THROUGH MODELS

As we have been noticing above with Plutarch, Menandrian comedy (and later, that of its adapters) was thought to offer moral examples to the audience and reading public. On the Ὑποβολιμαῖος of Menander, Cicero comments, *haec conficta arbitror esse a poetis ut effictos nostros mores in alienis personis expressamque imaginem vitae cotidianae videremus*, 'I think, in fact, that these fictions of the poets are intended to give us a representation of our manners in the characters of others and a vivid picture of daily life.'<sup>250</sup> Once again, we see the use of the mirror-metaphor, but here he is referring to the reflections of the mirror: we are to see ourselves on-stage. The important element of this quotation is *nostros mores in alienis personis ... videremus*, for it implies comedy's use of examples.

### **i. ARISTOTLE**

The notion of using the example of someone else to learn about one's self was not original in Cicero; it is also found much earlier in Aristotle:

...ἔστι καὶ χαλεπώτατον, ὥσπερ καὶ τῶν σοφῶν τινες εἰρήκασιν, τὸ γινῶμαι αὐτόν, καὶ ἥδιστον (τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸν εἰδέναι ἡδύ). αὐτοὶ μὲν οὖν αὐτοὺς ἐξ αὐτῶν οὐ δυνάμεθα θεάσασθαι (ὅτι δ' αὐτοὶ αὐτοὺς οὐ δυνάμεθα), δῆλον ἐξ ὧν ἄλλοις ἐπιτιμῶμεν, αὐτοὶ δὲ λανθάνομεν ταῦτ' αἰτιῶντες· τοῦτο δὲ γίνεται δι' εὐνοίαν ἢ διὰ πάθος· ὥσπερ οὖν ὅταν θέλωμεν αὐτοὶ αὐτῶν τὸ πρόσωπον ἰδεῖν, εἰς τὸ κάτοπτρον ἐμβλέπαντες εἶδομεν, ὁμοίως καὶ ὅταν αὐτοὶ αὐτοὺς βουλευθῶμεν γινῶναι, εἰς τὸν φίλον ἰδόντες γνωρίσαιμεν ἅν' ἔστι γὰρ, ὡς φαμέν, ὁ φίλος ἕτερος ἐγώ.<sup>251</sup>

<sup>250</sup>S. Rosc. Am. 47.

<sup>251</sup>Magna Moralia, 2.15.7.4.

Now to know oneself is a very difficult thing--as [certain] philosophers have told us--and a very pleasant thing, knowledge of self being <proverbially> pleasant. Direct contemplation of ourselves is moreover impossible, as is shown by the censure we inflict on others for the very thing we ourselves unwittingly do--favour or passion being the cause, which in many of us blind our judgement. And so, just as when wishing to behold our own faces in a mirror, whenever we wish to know our own characters and personalities, we can recognise them by looking upon a friend; since the friend is, as we say, our 'second self'.

It is significant that Aristotle uses the mirror-metaphor to describe his method of self-knowledge. While he is not discussing dramatics here, the principle is applicable to comedy, as is shown by a later satirist.

## ii. LUCILIUS

In a fragment addressed to an unknown comic writer, Lucilius suggests the role of comedy is to act as a paradigm of morality: "*sicuti te qui ea quae speciem uitae*<sup>252</sup> *putamus esse*",<sup>253</sup> 'just like you who [portray?] those things which we consider a model for life.' Nonius Marcellus, a fourth-century A.D. grammarian glosses *speciem*: *Speciem, specimen uel exemplar*.<sup>254</sup> We do not know who it is that is 'just like' the comedian, although it is likely Lucilius himself who is allying the social function of the satirist with that of the comic writer.

## iii. HORACE

Here too, Horace follows Lucilius, for this notion also appears in *Epistle I. ii*, which Horace begins by noting the value of Homer; *qui quid sit pulchrum, quid turpe, quid utile, quid non, / planius ac melius Chrysippo et Crantore dicit*, '[Homer] who tells us what is fair, what is foul, what is

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<sup>252</sup>Perhaps *speciem uitae* is meant to be a pun for *speculum uitae*.

<sup>253</sup>Lucilius *lib. XXX* (1029 Marx), from Nonius p. 173.21

<sup>254</sup>Marx (1905), *loc cit.*

helpful, what not, more plainly and better than Chrysippus or Crantor.<sup>255</sup> In the *Odyssey*, Horace notes, the epic poet provides us with a model whom we might copy: *quid uirtus et quid sapientia possit, /utile proposuit nobis exemplar Ulixen*, '... of the power of worth and wisdom he has set before us an instructive pattern in Ulysses.'<sup>256</sup> The *exemplar* is *utile* to us if we emulate the hero's *uirtus* and *sapientia*.

The final example is one that is most akin to what we find in comedy. In the *Satires*, I.iv, 105 ff., Horace is describing his father's methods of moral education:

... insueuit pater optimus hoc me,  
ut fugerem exemplis uitiorum quaeque notando.  
cum me hortaretur, parce, frugaliter, atque  
uiuere uti contentus eo quod mi ipse parasset,  
'nonne uides Albi ut male uiuat filius, utque  
Baius inops? magnum documentum ne patriam rem  
perdere quis uelit.

My dear father accustomed me to this, that I should flee from the examples of shortcomings which he noted. When he urged me to live sparingly and frugally and happy with that which he prepared for me, "surely you see how badly the son of Albus lives, and how poor is the Baius? This is a great demonstration that one should not want to waste his inheritance.

#### iv. NEW COMEDY

This is very similar to what we find in Menander as we see in a passage of Terence's *Adelphoe*, which was almost certainly translated from Menander's 'Ἀδελφοί β'.<sup>257</sup> At this point in the play, Syrus has just told Demea that the old man's son, Ctesipho, was chastising his brother, Aeschinus, for paying out money to a courtesan. Demea proudly boasts,

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<sup>255</sup>v. 3 f.

<sup>256</sup>*Epistle* I.ii.17 f.

<sup>257</sup>Gratwick (1987), 245.

nil praetermitto; consuefacio; denique  
 inspicere tamquam in speculum in uitas omnium  
 iubeo atque ex aliis sumere exemplum sibi:  
 'hoc facito'. **SY:** recte sane. **DE:** 'hoc fugito'. **SY:** callide!  
 'hoc laudist'. **SY:** istae res est. **DE:** 'hoc uitio datur'.<sup>258</sup>

**DE:** I pass nothing over; I train him; in short, I tell him to look into people's lives as if into a mirror and take his model from others: 'Do this in the future.'

**SY:** Quite right!

**DE:** 'Always avoid *that*.'

**SY:** Subtle!

**DE:** 'This is a source of praise.'

**SY:** That's just the job!

**DE:** 'That counts as a failing.'

Demea believes it is his son to whom people will be pointing admiringly and saying, *hoc facito* or *hoc laudist*, but just the opposite is the case. The whole scene is wonderfully ironic as it is Demea's son, Ctesipho, who is entangled in financial problems with a *meretrix*. Syrus knows the truth and his sarcastic sycophantic remarks add to the ironic humour. Menander is treating the idea of the didactic mirror frivolously here;<sup>259</sup> Ctesipho is certainly not a moral paragon at this point in the narrative, but the idea of gaining self-knowledge in a mirror is significant; it shows that Menander was aware of the metaphor, and further suggests that the Peripatetic doctrine which Wilamowitz propounded was current in Menander's time.

Fragments and γνῶμαι--even though the attribution to Menander of some of the lines in the collections of such works is often spurious--nonetheless suggest that this was a common *topos* in Menander's plays. A fragment from Menander's Θρασυλέων illustrates the importance that the playwright put on the knowledge of one's self gained through others.

<sup>258</sup>*Adelphoe*, 414 -419.

<sup>259</sup>Gratwick (1987), 245.

κατὰ πόλλ' ἄρ' ἐστὶν οὐ καλῶς εἰρημένον  
τὸ γνῶθι σαυτόν· χρησιμώτερον γὰρ ἦν  
τὸ γνῶθι τοὺς ἄλλους.<sup>260</sup>

In many ways the saying "know thyself" is not well said.  
It were more practical to say: "Know other folks."

It is ambiguous here whether Menander is advocating knowing other people to better know one's self or if this is merely a quote from a busy-body slave. Three of his γνῶμαι are more explicit: Βλέπων πεπαίδευμ' εἰς τὰ τῶν ἄλλων κακά, I learnt by observing the failings of others;<sup>261</sup> and again, Ἄ ψέγομεν ἡμεῖς, ταῦτα μὴ μιμώμεθα, 'We should not imitate those things with which we find fault,'<sup>262</sup> and finally, Μιμοῦ τὰ σεμνά, μὴ κακῶν μιμοῦ τρόπους, 'Imitate the noble deeds, not the habits of scoundrels.'<sup>263</sup> These can be applied to the comedies themselves; the actors on stage can assume the role of mirror-image of their audience. In the faults of its stage-mirror, the audience can see its own reflection and shun these faults in their own life in the future.

In Plautus' *Persa*, there is also a reference to using others as guides for one's self. The slave, Dordalus, philosophises, *sed te aliis, quam alios de te suavius fieri doctos*, 'but it is pleasanter to profit by a horrible example than to be one.'<sup>264</sup> However, in Plautus, the models are not too extreme, and it is likely that this is a hollow platitude on the part of the slave.

## VII. PHILOSOPHY IN NEW COMEDY

The vital question remains: since all references to the edifying purposes of Menander's comedies have been from critics after his death, is

<sup>260</sup>Allinson (1930), 360 = 240 Kock.

<sup>261</sup># 121, Jäkel (1964), cited by Grant (1971a). Volume 1 *ap.* line 415.

<sup>262</sup># 7, Jäkel (1964).

<sup>263</sup># 461, Jäkel (1964).

<sup>264</sup>*Persa*, 540.

Menander himself aware of the didactic function that later critics imposed on his comedies? and if so, to what extent does it apply?

### i. MENANDER

Diogenes Laertius reported that Menander was a pupil of Theophrastus and that Theophrastus, in turn, was a disciple of Aristotle,<sup>265</sup> but this seems to stem more from the fact that ancient critics have seen what they deem 'moral truths' in the comedies than a factual Peripatetic pedigree. Menandrian scholars were attracted by the notion and examined what they deemed to be correlations between Peripatetic and Menandrian thought.<sup>266</sup> Certainly later Roman comedies that were modeled on Menandrian originals such as Terence's *Adelphoe* and the *Heauton Timorumenos* in which systems of education are explicitly examined and explored, suggest the philosophical interest of the playwright. But the views expressed in the plays are not always consistent with one known school. Rather, what morality is demonstrated in the comedies is popular rather than particular to one specific philosophy. As Arnott has shown in an important article, the philosophies at work in the comedies are as individual as the characters.<sup>267</sup>

### ii. TERENCE

When we turn to the Roman dramatists, we note a vital difference; with the exception of Terence, who tends to keep the examinations of people found in Menander intact,<sup>268</sup> there does not appear to be a philosophical system propounded. Terence seems to be advocating his predecessor's views in a Roman context; surely there was much universal

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<sup>265</sup>V, 36: 79

<sup>266</sup>Webster (1950), 195 ff.; Tierney (1936); K. Gaiser (1967), 'Menander und der Peripatos', *A&A* 13:9-10.

<sup>267</sup>Arnott (1981), 221.

<sup>268</sup>To see how he changed the ending of the *Adelphoe*, see Gratwick (1987).

instruction for a Roman audience to learn from the plays, but there does not seem to be any evidence that Terence altered his plays to be more didactic or to deliver a clearer philosophical message. Perhaps he chose to adapt the plays he did for the messages they contained and which he, in turn, could exploit. Why, for example, did he choose to adapt 'Αδελφοί β' rather than 'Αδελφοί α', the model for Plautus' *Stichus*? Was it just because Plautus had already used it? Do the plays that Terence chose to adapt suggest that he had a predilection for 'moral' comedy? If so, he chose such plays at his own peril, for the Roman theatre ceased to have the educational atmosphere that the Greek tragic stage had. Roman audiences were at the theatre to enjoy themselves,<sup>269</sup> and by offering heavy-handed plays, Terence risked losing their support. The ending of Terence's *Adelphoe* is clever and ironic, but it happens so quickly that the audience may not have followed the dramatist's aims, especially since Terence appears to be supporting the opposite mode of child-rearing throughout most of the play.<sup>270</sup> If Terence was not trying to propound these philosophical views, why then did he not make the drama easier to follow? It may well be that Terence did not fully understand the philosophical system which would have been more familiar to his models. In that case, it would have been the overall quieter (relative to the work of Plautus) nature that attracted Terence and not any philosophical 'message'.

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<sup>269</sup>Goldberg (1986), 219.

<sup>270</sup>Goldberg (1986), 218.

### iii. PLAUTUS

It is clear that Plautus is also aware of the theoretical and educational role a comedy could have in mirroring universal actions, as is seen in this passage from *Epidicus*:

**Periphanes:** Non ora caussa modo homines aequom fuit  
sibi habere speculum ubi os contemplant suom,  
sed qui perspicere possent [cor sapientiae,  
igitur perspicere ut possint], cogitarent postea  
uitam ut uixissent olim in adulescentia.<sup>271</sup>

**Periphanes:** It would be a good thing for each man to have a mirror, not only for his face, not only to scrutinise that in, but one that would let him see into the rationality of his wisdom; then, when they had inspected that, they might next consider what sort of life they had lived in the distant days of youth.

But it is also clear that he does not believe in the effectiveness of drama in moral instruction:

**Gripus:** Spectaui ego pridem comicos ad istunc modum  
sapienter dicta dicere atque eis plaudier,  
cum illos sapientis mores monstrabant poplo:  
sed cum inde suam quisque ibant diuorsi domum,  
nullus erat pactio ut illi iusserant.<sup>272</sup>

**Gripus:** I've seen actors in comedies talk in that wise way before now, and get clapped after preaching these rules of wisdom to the people. But when folks left and they each went away home, not a one of 'em acted as those actors told 'em.

Plautus rejects the didactic role of comedy in this passage, but it is obvious nonetheless that he was aware of such a theory.

It seems to me to be futile to try and piece together Plautus' own philosophical beliefs out of his plays, because amusement, not moral

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<sup>271</sup>*Epidicus*, 382 ff.

<sup>272</sup>*Rudens*, 1249 f.

enlightenment was the intention of the author. His comedies contain as many traces of Stoicism, Epicureanism and Peripateticism as are to be found in the later Roman tragedies.<sup>273</sup> However, the philosophical examples in Plautus, like in Menander, are everyday commonplaces and do not suggest that the characters, or indeed the author, is to be seen as an advocate of the particular school of thought. Most of the instances to which Coleman-Norton draws attention are unconvincing as examples of a serious discussion and dramatic representation of philosophy in comedy. There is much moralising in Roman comedy by old men and slaves,<sup>274</sup> but in the mouths of these characters, the philosophies appear ridiculous or overblown; they are not to be taken seriously. The Roman comedies show the influence of Greek philosophy, but they do not appear to attempt to impart philosophical wisdom onto their audience.

#### VIII. CONCLUSION

Cicero's definition of comedy is almost certainly suggesting the function of comedy as a *moral* mirror, and that the plays of Menander and Terence do support this notion if we do not limit it too much by suggesting that the authors were proponents of any one particular philosophy. It is nevertheless misguided to think that these two playwrights were writing with the single aim of education. Obviously morality figured in the plays of some authors more than others; whereas Menander's plays were written at a time when such the ridicule of such morality would have been appreciated by the audience, but may have been lost on Terence's audience which was living later in a different social contest. Finally, Plautus's plays were geared rather toward the enjoyment

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<sup>273</sup>See especially Coleman-Norton (1936).

<sup>274</sup>The old men in the *Trinummus* and Demipho in the *Mercator* are especially good examples.

of the audience. The comedies of all three do contain philosophical elements, but these are included because they are a part of a society which the playwrights are representing rather than the poet's own precepts on life.

CHAPTER III:  
THE COMIC MIRROR IN THE MIDDLE AGES  
AND ENGLISH RENAISSANCE

I. INTRODUCTION

It would be difficult to overestimate the influence that Terence and the Donatus commentary on Terence's comedies had on both Medieval and Renaissance readers; together these works were pivotal in the transmission of the mirror-metaphor from the time of Terence to the Renaissance, both directly and indirectly. In this chapter, I intend to demonstrate that the Donatian commentaries and the comedies themselves shaped the way in which Augustine, and thereby later Mediaeval writers who perhaps did not have access to the commentaries, used the metaphor. The advent of printed editions of Donatus' commentaries increased the direct influence the ancient commentator had on the critics, commentators and writers of comedy and drama generally. We shall see that through these later works, the mirror-metaphor was greatly promulgated and drama as a mirror became a *topos* in Elizabethan critical dramatic criticism. There are of course, other sources of this metaphor in the sixteenth-century, but due to the length-limits on this paper, I shall deal only with the mirror-metaphor as it was effected by the study of Donatus in the English Renaissance.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>275</sup>Martinet, Marie-Madeleine (1980). *Le miroir de l'esprit au temps de la Renaissance anglaise. Variations dramatiques sur une idée philosophique, littéraire et artistique*. Diss. Université de Paris, Sorbonne, offers a very expansive examination of the many other facets of the mirror-metaphor. Her bibliography is also very helpful. See also Grabes (1982). *passim*. For investigations of the mirror in French literature, see Michaud, G. (1959). 'Le thème du miroir dans le symbolisme français', *Le Thème du Miroir dans la Littérature Française*, Cahiers de l'Association Internationale des Etudes Françaises 11: 199-216.

## II. TWENTIETH-CENTURY SCHOLARSHIP

At the University of Illinois in the 1940's and 1950's there was much interest in Donatus and the influence his Terentian commentaries had on Renaissance theories of drama. No doubt this was sparked by the exhaustive and path-breaking work done by T.W. Baldwin, first in his *William Shakspeare's Small Latine and Lesse Greeke*<sup>276</sup> and then his *Shakspeare's Five-Act Structure: Shakspeare's early plays on the Background of Renaissance Theories of five-act structure from 1470.*<sup>277</sup> In the former, Baldwin investigates the curriculum of grammar-schools in the second half of sixteenth-century England, and clearly illustrates that in this curriculum the comedies of Terence and the Donatus' commentaries on them figured as a standard part of third and fourth form instruction. Therefore, anyone with even an elementary level of education would have had to memorise large parts--if not the whole--of the Terentian corpus. Because the editions of this time included Donatus, and because of the pertinent information in the prefaces, the commentaries were a perfect accessory to the study of the comedies in the school. Thus, Baldwin concludes that the average schoolboy would have known not only Terence, but also Donatus as well.

Baldwin's second book, *Shakspeare's Five-Act Structure*, complements his first very nicely, for with the conclusions that both critics, commentators and writers would have had a strong grounding in Terence and Donatus from an early age already reached from his earlier book, Baldwin is able to concentrate on his main objective in the book: to demonstrate the influence on structure that the commentaries of Donatus

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<sup>276</sup>Baldwin (1944).

<sup>277</sup>Baldwin (1947).

and other Renaissance scholars had both on the Renaissance critics of comedy, but also on the playwrights themselves.

Following in the path already laid out by Baldwin, Marvin Herrick in 1950 published his *Comic Theory in the Sixteenth Century*,<sup>278</sup> which examines how Donatus influenced sixteenth-century comic theory with regard to rhetoric, the function of comedy, plot, comic character and diction more than any other ancient critic. He begins by pointing out that it was not until 1550 that commentaries on Aristotle's *Poetics* were published, and by that time the commentaries of Donatus had become such a fundamental part of the school curriculum that later commentators followed Donatian theories for the most part and supported--rather than supplanted--them with Aristotle's treatise.<sup>279</sup>

Edwin Robbins was on the same trail for, in 1951, he published *Dramatic Characterization in Printed Commentaries of Terence (1473-1600)*, an examination of the import of Donatus' commentaries on the later commentators' views of comic characterisation.<sup>280</sup> Both these works follow Baldwin's basic--and given the preponderance of evidence, probably correct--assertion that Donatus was widely used in English schools as well as on the continent. But whereas Baldwin wanted to show ultimately how the theories affected the practice, both Herrick and Robbins do not explore this realm even in passing. Admittedly, there is much work to be done, and more than this confines of this dissertation will allow except in a limited way.

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<sup>278</sup>Herrick (1950).

<sup>279</sup>Herrick (1950). page 1 ff.; cf. also the same author's (1930). *The Poetics of Aristotle in England*.

<sup>280</sup>Robbins, Edwin W. (1951).

### III. THE MIDDLE AGES

#### **i. THE COMMENTARIES' ROLE IN THE CURRICULUM**

Aelius Donatus was also a major player in establishing a place for Terence in the Mediaeval schoolboy's curriculum. Since the time of Cicero, Terence had been an author popular for his pure Latinity and style. Indeed he and Vergil were regarded as Latin analogues to Menander and Homer.<sup>281</sup> There was thus good reason for Donatus to choose to comment on Terence, for he had already written a commentary on the other Latin "great," Vergil. Donatus made more accessible the texts of Terence to teachers and students alike by providing a detailed commentary which highlighted the rhetorical devices that would be useful for a schoolboy to emulate.<sup>282</sup> It is the convenience of Donatus' commentaries that contributed in part to keeping Terence's comedies on the curriculum. That Donatus was popular in the fourth century is testified to with pride by Jerome who wrote that 'Victorinus and my teacher, the grammarian, Donatus, were considered famous at Rome.'<sup>283</sup> Although Jerome is specifically mentioning Donatus as a grammarian in this passage, elsewhere<sup>284</sup> he mentions that Rufinus, like most young boys of his age, would have read, among other commentaries on other authors, that of Donatus on the comedies of Terence. It is thus clear that Donatus was the standard commentator on Terence's comedies at this time.

In the Middle Ages, the pagan classics were coming under heavy fire from some members of the clergy who wanted their students to read Christian authors rather than those of pagans. But herein lies the dilemma,

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<sup>281</sup>Gratwick (1987), 2.

<sup>282</sup>Hilger (1970), in his appendix catalogues Donatus' mention of rhetorical devices.

<sup>283</sup>Jerome. *Chronica ad. a 353* (= Wessner, *testimonia* 1, vol. I page VI)

<sup>284</sup>*Apol. adv. Rufinum* 1,16 (Wessner, *testimonia* 2)

for the young clerics could not learn to compose eloquent Latin without the example that the writings of the classical authors offered. Donatus, either because he had been brought up in the same tradition as Plutarch in reading philosophy into comedy, or else had the attacks against the classical authors in mind when he wrote the commentary, not only provides useful rhetorical information to be found in Terence's comedies but also moralises them, often by introducing scenes by stressing the moral "exemplum" to be extracted. *In hac scaena exemplum inducitur hominum* ('in this scene, the *exemplum* of men is introduced') becomes a formulaic introduction to scenes in the *Adelphoe*.<sup>285</sup>

## ii. MORALIZING IN THE DONATIAN COMMENTARIES

Indeed, the commentaries anticipate the objections of the church to the frivolous nature of the comic genre. Evanthius, in his *De Comoedia* (which was appended to Donatus' commentaries), makes the purpose of comedy strictly moral: 'to teach what is useful in life and what should be avoided.'<sup>286</sup> Donatus allows himself to admit that Terence's plays are enjoyable as well as instructive. In his introduction to the *Adelphoe* (I.3), he closely echoes the Horatian tag that it is the role of drama to 'teach and delight in equal measures'<sup>287</sup> by commenting that Terence both 'benefits and delights with his plot and style' (*prodest autem et delectat actu et stilo*). Donatus similarly emphasises the playwright's moral purpose in the *Eunuchus*: *in hac Terentius delectat facetiis, prodest exemplis et uitia hominum paulo mordacius quam in ceteris carpit*, 'in this comedy, Terence delights us with his wit, benefits us with examples, and seizes upon the failings of

<sup>285</sup>*Ad.*, 713(1), *Ad.* 719(1); 763(1); *Ad.* 855(1); *Ad.* 763; cf. *An.* 28: *in hac scaena haec uirtus est...* and *Ad.* 540(1): *in hoc actu exemplum est...*

<sup>286</sup>Evanthius, *De Comoedia* V.1.

<sup>287</sup>*Ars* 344.

men a bit more biting than in his other comedies.<sup>288</sup> These 'ethics' are assigned to the comedies by Donatus who was more than five-hundred years removed from Terence, and so the exempla that Donatus finds may not have been meant to be taken doctrinally by the playwright.<sup>289</sup> What is important is the fact that anyone who approached Terence through Donatus' commentaries would have been made to see these morals where they might otherwise have missed them.

### iii. SAINT AUGUSTINE

That St. Augustine knew his Terence is obvious; a list of the references of the playwright in the saint's works would fill the page. He himself admits, albeit with remorse,<sup>290</sup> that he had memorised Terence as a schoolboy, and this knowledge clearly stayed with him for the rest of his life. What is not so clear is if Augustine used Donatus' commentaries when studying Terence. It is a likelihood, for Augustine was born in A.D. 354,<sup>291</sup> and so would have been a student learning his Terence only a few years after Jerome states that the commentaries were popular in Rome.<sup>292</sup> Even if Augustine did not have access to the commentaries of Donatus in Tagaste where he was growing up, it is extremely probable that he encountered them when he was teaching rhetoric in Rome after 383,<sup>293</sup> and thus before his Christian writings.

It is through the commentaries of Donatus that Augustine is introduced to the mirror-metaphor, and he in turn introduces it to the

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<sup>288</sup>*Eunuchus*, preface. I.9

<sup>289</sup>On this, see the previous chapter.

<sup>290</sup>One example among many is *Epistle* I.xvi.1 ff.

<sup>291</sup>Butler, Alban(1995). *Butler's Lives of the Saints*. Kent. Volume III. page 428.

<sup>292</sup>probably around A.D. 350. see Jerome's testimonia above, footnotes #9 and #10.

<sup>293</sup>Butler (1995). Volume III. page 429.

world with a twist. Sister Bradley has noticed that the “mirror image in mediaeval Latin and English literature goes back in a direct line to St. Augustine’s concise phrasing of it.”<sup>294</sup> About A.D. 430 Augustine had written a work entitled simply *Speculum*, which he prefaced with an explanation for the title:

quae sunt posita in litteris sacris uel iubendo uel  
uetando uel sinendo ... ad uitam piam exercendam  
mores que pertineant... ut facile inspici possint, in  
unum tamquam speculum congeram.

These things which are found in the sacred letters either as commandments or prohibitions... and the habits which will be relevant to the leading of a pious life, I collect together just as in a mirror, so that they may be easily observed.

The reader is to look upon the work as though in a mirror, and take his examples from the writings in it. Augustine did not create this use of the mirror-metaphor; rather, it is likely that he remembered it from his study of Terence’s *Adelphoe* (415) where Demea is elucidating how one should use the example of others as an instructive mirror for oneself: *hoc facito... hoc fugito... hoc laudist... hoc uitio datur*, ‘Do this... Avoid that... That is a credit to you... That is reprehensible.’ It is curious that Donatus does not offer a moral interpretation of this passage; but rather questions the validity of the metaphor! Nevertheless it was from within the body of Donatus’ commentaries that Augustine borrows his interpretation of the mirror-metaphor, for the saint’s passage bears a resemblance to the purpose of comedy as laid out by Evanthius: *Comoedia discitur, quid sit in uita utile, quid contra euitandum. Vetando* in Augustine seems to echo

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<sup>294</sup>Bradley, Sister Rita Mary (1954). “Backgrounds of the Title *Speculum* in Medieval Literature”, *Speculum* 29: page 105, although she quotes from the *Ep.* 211, “Ad Virgines” or *Regula ad Seruos Dei* (PL. xi. 1384)

*eutandum* in Evanthius, just as *ad uitam piam exercendam mores que pertineant* recalls *in uita utile*. At first, this connection seems specious but one would do well to remember first how much of Terence Augustine remembers, and that Evanthius' purpose of comedy immediately precedes Cicero's famous description of comedy as a mirror. The saint who is so well versed in Terence, when thinking about the mirror as a metaphor, is likely to have echoed the most popular instance of it quite unintentionally when applying the metaphor to his own purposes. Deliberate or not, Augustine's new application of the mirror-metaphor was to have outstanding effects in both the sacred and secular writings.

Herbert Grabes,<sup>295</sup> investigating the metaphor of the mirror as a book-title in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, demonstrates that Augustine's *Speculum* is the earliest known work to bear such a title.<sup>296</sup> Because St. Augustine was such an influential church father, the popularity of the book especially within the church was assured in the Middle Ages.<sup>297</sup> Nearly six-hundred years later, books with the title *Speculum* began to appear. The evidence that we have shows that the mirror-title at first was used mainly for ecclesiastical writings,<sup>298</sup> which suggests that these books were influenced by Augustine's use of the metaphor. Later, the trickle of books with mirror-titles turns to a flood, and now the title *Speculum* also indicates a kind of encyclopaedia or handbook, as in *Speculum medicinae*<sup>299</sup> (12th C.) or *Speculum astronomiae*<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>295</sup>Grabes (1982).

<sup>296</sup>Grabes (1982), 23.

<sup>297</sup>Grabes (1982), 236, notes that it was quoted by Possidius, *Vita Aurelii Augustini* (PL 32.57) and Casiodorus, *Liber de institutione div. script.*, cap. xvi.

<sup>298</sup>Appendix in Grabes (1982): cf. such titles as *speculum caritatis* (Grabes #7 in the appendix), *Speculum ecclesiae* (#10, 11, 12, 12).

<sup>299</sup>Grabes # 18

<sup>300</sup>Grabes #32

(late 13th C.). In the English Renaissance, the flood then turned into a deluge. In the second half of his appendix, Grabes cites almost four hundred books published in Britain in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries with the title of *Speculum*, Mirror (or its phonetic variants) or 'Looking-glass.' Of course, with the variety of different books bearing such a title, the meaning of the mirror-metaphor becomes greatly extended, but the idea of the *speculum* that provides examples which the reader could use for his or her own instruction and improvement remained current up to and including the Renaissance, and it is this aspect that most concerns us.<sup>301</sup>

#### iv. LATER MORAL INTERPRETATIONS OF TERENCE

While people in the Renaissance would have been made familiar with the metaphor of the mirror by the frequency of its use as a book-title, they would also have encountered it in its very specific use as the figurative definition of comedy as quoted by Donatus, for the printing press ensured that an even wider audience had access to Donatus' works in the Renaissance. The earliest complete copy of the manuscript of Donatus' commentaries was discovered in 1433 in Mainz.<sup>302</sup> It was not until almost forty years later that an incomplete version was printed at Rome. Four years after that Joannes Calphurnius took the monumental step of publishing an edition of Terence's plays to which he had appended Donatus' commentaries, and to make the commentaries of the comedies complete, he supplied

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<sup>301</sup>Although outwith the limits of this dissertation, the idea of the 'historical mirror', in which kings are held up as paradigms, is investigated in Farnham, Willard (1963). *The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy*. Oxford. especially chapters 7 and 8, and Cambell, Lily. (1947). *Shakespeare's "Histories": Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy*. San Marino, California. chapter 10. and Anderson (1939).

<sup>302</sup>Baldwin (1947), 103 ff.

his own commentary on the *Heauton Timorumenos*. Following this publication, most editions of Terence included the Donatian commentaries (along with that of Calphurnius);<sup>303</sup> those editions that do not include Donatus' commentary for the most part do not fail to quote or at least paraphrase the prefatory essays of both Donatus and Evanthius. It is also imperative to note that many of the early continental editions made their way to Britain.

Besides the advent of the press, the 1516 publication of Erasmus' treatise on education, the *De ratione studii*, which included a prescription on how one should teach Terence, strengthened the need in the schools for a thorough commentary on the comedies. Erasmus suggests that the teacher provide a general history of the playwright and then the genre of comedy itself. Next, he should deal with the plot of the comedy scene by scene, and then the diction. The comedies should then be contrasted with other works dealing with similar themes. 'Finally, the teacher should deal with the morality of the piece, and should treat the plots of the poets with regard to the ethical applications', (*Postremo ad philosophiam ueniat, et poetarum fabulas apte trahat ad mores*).<sup>304</sup> It is no coincidence that the Donatan commentaries dealt with every single one of these aims, if only in a cursory way in some cases, thereby making them the ideal companions to Terence for any teacher following Erasmus' prescriptions, and many did. On 1 September, 1528, Cardinal Wolsey, headmaster at Ipswich, in a letter to his teachers, concurs with Erasmus, but promotes the pointing out of the morals in Terence to second position after the

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<sup>303</sup>Robbins (1951) and Herrick (1950) provide useful bibliographies of commentaries on Terence, in which they note the editions that include the commentaries of Donatus, but most valuable is that of Wessner, vol. I, XXXIII-XXXVII.

<sup>304</sup>527a, Erasmus 'De ratione studii', ed. Jean-Claude Margolin. in *Opera Omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami*. (1971). Amsterdam. I.ii. page 138, line 6 ff.

background.<sup>305</sup> Thus, it was the morality in the works of Terence that were to be especially important in education, and indeed, as was shown above, Donatus had provided the foundations of such an interpretation. Later commentators took this to almost bizarre lengths.

#### IV. THE RENAISSANCE

##### i. MELANCHTHON

Philip Melanchthon, who published his commentary on Terence about 1525,<sup>306</sup> was the most influential commentator in the sixteenth century and he was also the most extreme with his moralising comments.<sup>307</sup> In his notes on Terence's comedies he elucidates the 'moral' of each play, act, and often, individual scene. In his introduction to the *Andria*, for example, he writes,

There is no kind of life where you will not find many a Thraso... Wherefore the portrait of Thraso in this play must be diligently understood and deliberated upon that you may learn how inept, how useless these busybodies are<sup>308</sup>

Thrasos are everywhere and they do not reveal their true nature readily, Melanchthon warns, but if one studies Terence's character, one will be better prepared in real life not to be deceived by their pretensions.

The *Eunuchus* is similarly beneficial to its audience, the commentator tells the reader embarking on the play, because *meretricii amores describuntur, ut in hoc exemplo cernant iuuenes, tamquam in speculo*

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<sup>305</sup>"You are next to explain both the Pleasure and Profit that attends the reading of Comedies." *Rudimenta Grammatices Et Docendi methodus, non tam scholae Gypsuichianae per reuerendissimum. D. Thoma Cardinale Ebar. feliciter institutae, quam omnibus aliis totius Anglie scholis prescripta*, 1529. cited by Baldwin (1947), 169.

<sup>306</sup>For the dating of this work thus, see Baldwin (1947), 171.

<sup>307</sup>Baldwin (1947), 170.

<sup>308</sup>Trans. Baldwin (1947), 386.

*amentiam huiusmodi amatorum*,<sup>309</sup> 'brothel loves are described, so that in this example young men, as in a mirror, may see the folly of this kind of loves.'<sup>310</sup> The assumption is that if young men recognise the risibility of the actions of the characters on stage, they may themselves avoid them in real life. This use of the mirror-metaphor is clearly that of Terence himself at *Adelphoe* 414, but Melanchthon is able to apply this mirror to fit the Terence's comedies.

## ii. THE CRITICS

In the mid- to late sixteenth-century, anyone who had only an elementary education was aware of the metaphor of comedy. It was not only in the widespread text of Donatus but was also included in all the works dealing with comedy and the plays themselves. Professor Baldwin, who has done exhaustive work on the sixteenth-century commentaries and critics of comedy, notes that he is himself aware of no one who fails to include Cicero's definition in their analyses.<sup>311</sup> Again, this is partly due to Erasmus' prescription for the teacher to discuss comedy in general when studying Terence's plays with his class. But it is not the idea of the realistic comedy that we find in the commentaries. In the Renaissance, the comic mirror is strictly philosophical rather than realistic. As far as I have been able to find, there is no case where a play is called a mirror when the commentator finds a character in the play particularly lifelike.<sup>312</sup> At this time, public drama was in a crisis; the dramatists were constantly forced to defend themselves against the Puritans who argued that the

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<sup>309</sup>*P. Terentii Comoediae. A Phil. Melanchthone restitutae eiusdemque scholiis illustratae.* Mogunt. 1523. page 128.

<sup>310</sup>trans. Baldwin (1947), 1983.

<sup>311</sup>Baldwin (1947), 567.

<sup>312</sup>Although commentators did notice Terence's decorum in characterisation; see Robbins (1951), *passim*.

professional acting-companies were amoral and who feared they were corrupting their audiences.<sup>313</sup> As a result, comedy was defined using the standard dictum of Cicero and Donatus, but now that definition had a decidedly moral twist.

## ii. 1. ELYOT

Sir Thomas Elyot, in *The Boke Named the Governour* (printed 1531), was one of the first to defend the Latin playwrights, using the image of the instructive mirror:

First comedies whiche they suppose to be a doctrinall of rybaudrie, they be undoubtedly a picture or as it were a mirrour of mans life. Wherin ivell is nat taught but discoverd, to the intent that men beholdynge the promptness of youth unto vice, the snares of harlottes and baudes laide for yonge myndes: the disceipte of servantes: the chaunces of fortune contrary to mennes expectation: they being therof warned: may prepare them selfe to resist or prevent occasion. Semblably remembering the wisdomes: advertisements: counsailes: dissuasion from vice and other profitable sentences: most eloquently and familiarely shewed in those comedies, undoubtedly there shall be no litle frute out of them gathered....<sup>314</sup>

Like Melanchthon, Elyot defends comedy by arguing that it offers us practical advice of how *not* to behave. That Elyot counts as a benefit the fact that the plots are ‘familiarely shewed’ is curious. In other words, the comedy is familiar because it reflects concerns and emotions with which the audience can all relate for “the Renaissance looked upon man as a universal being repeating in his life the deeds of other men.”<sup>315</sup> It is thus not at all surprising that in the early half of the sixteenth century, Terence

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<sup>313</sup>Ringler (1963), 204.

<sup>314</sup>Rude, Donald W. (1992). *A Critical Edition of Sir Thomas Elyot's The Boke named the Governour*. New York. page 62 ff.

<sup>315</sup>Anderson (1939), 48.

became a staple mine of examples for preachers to quote in their sermons.<sup>316</sup>

## ii. 2. SIDNEY

Much critical argument about the benefits of drama intervenes, and reaches its zenith in 1595 with the printing of the most significant essay on poetry in general, Sir Philip Sidney's *Defense of Poesie*. In this work, Sidney seizes upon on the idea of comedy as a philosophical mirror and takes it even further. He starts off with the now standard<sup>317</sup> quotation of Cicero's definition of comedy and, like Melanchthon, interprets the mirror as showing examples of characters and actions so that the audience will know what to avoid in their own life:

Comedy is an imitation of the common errors of our life, which he representeth in the most ridiculous and scornfull sort that may be; so as it is impossible that any beholder can be content to be such a one.<sup>318</sup>

The comedy that displays contemptible, but nonetheless common actions is especially beneficial to the audience because, as Sidney points out, "nothing can more open his eyes then to finde his own actions contemptibly set forth."<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>316</sup>Baldwin (1947), 388 cites two preachers who use Terentian quotations to support their sermons: John Hooker and Roger Huchinson (both d. 1555)

<sup>317</sup>The argument between Thomas Lodge, *Defence of Poetry* (1579) in Gregory (1904). Volume I, p. 80 and Stephen Gosson, *Playes Confuted* (1581), page 369 of the same volume is especially interesting. Gilbert (1940), includes the following critics who quote or paraphrase this definition: page 510: Giambattista Guarini, *Il compendio della poesia tragicomica* (1599), 9b; page 543 and 548: Lope de Vega, *El arte nuevo de hacer comedias* (1609) §2 and 6, page 556: Thomas Heywood, *An Apology for Actors* (1612), Book III. See also Antonio Minturno, *De Poeta* (1559), Book IV, page 280-281 and Grévin Jacques. *Brief Discours pour l'Intelligence de ce Théâtre*. (1561), page 7-9, in Lucien Pinvert, ed. (1922). *Théâtre Complet et Poésies Choisies de Jacques Grévin*. Paris.

<sup>318</sup>Gregory (1904). Volume I, p.176.

<sup>319</sup>*Ibid.*

What follows in the next passage in which Sidney discusses tragedy is his most dazzling innovation to English criticism of drama, for he gives an ancient example of an instance when the actions shown in a tragedy were too familiar to a particular member of the audience.

But how much it [Tragedy] can moouē, *Plutarch* yeeldeth a notable testimonie of the abhominable Tyrant *Alexander Pheraeus*; from whose eyes a Tragedy, wel made and represented, drew abundance of teares, who, without all pittie, had murdered infinite numbers, and some of his owne blood. So as he, that was not ashamed to make matters for Tragedies, yet could not resist the sweet violence of a Tragedie. And if it wrought no further good in him, it was that he, in despite of himself, withdrew himselfe from harkening to that which might mollifie his hardened heart.<sup>320</sup>

Sidney probably found this tale in either Plutarch's *Life of Pelopidas* (393F)<sup>321</sup> or else in the same author's *On the Fortune of Alexander* (= *Moralia* 334A), although there was also a version in Aelian's *Varia historia* 14.40. Ringler notes that the story was popular in England,<sup>322</sup> that in 1559 it was published in Brusonius' *Facetiarum exemplorumque libri VII* (1559), a book that went into many editions, and also that in a chapter of his

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<sup>320</sup>*Ibid.* Volume I, p. 176-177

<sup>321</sup>For comparison, I include this passage in full:

τραγωδῶν δέ ποτε θεώμενος Εὐριπίδου Τρωάδα ὑποκρινόμενον ᾤχετο ἀπὸν ἐκ τοῦ θεάτρου, καὶ πέμψας πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐκέλευε θαρρεῖν καὶ μηδὲν ἀγωνίζεσθαι διὰ τοῦτο χεῖρον, οὐ γὰρ ἐκείνου καταφρονῶν ἀπελθεῖν, ἀλλ' αἰσχυρόμενος τοὺς πολίτας, εἰ μηδένα πώποτε τῶν ὑπ' αὐτοῦ φονευόμενων ἠλεηκῶς, ἐπὶ τοῖς Ἑκάβης καὶ Ἀνδρομάχης κακοῖς ὀφθῆσεται δακρύων.

Once when he was seeing a tragedian act the "Trojan Women" of Euripides, he left the theatre abruptly, and sent a message to the actor bidding him to be of good courage and not put forth any less effort because of his departure, for it was not out of contempt for his acting that he had gone away, but because he was ashamed to have the citizens see him, who had never taken pity on any man that he had murdered, weeping over the sorrows of Hecuba and Andromache. (trans. Bernadotte Perrin, vol. 5 Loeb)

<sup>322</sup>Ringler (1963), 205.

*Apophthegmata*, entitled 'de crudelitate', Lycosthenes included the Aelian version.<sup>323</sup> The story was already available, and was likely known by others before the publishing of the *Defense of Poesie*, but it was no doubt Sidney who made it widespread.

### iii. THE PLAYWRIGHTS

When we turn to the actual practitioners of drama, we notice that they readily accept this notion of the theatre. The critics and the playwrights are not divided because they were working with the same materials, primarily the texts of Terence, as well as the Donatian and Renaissance commentaries on Terence. It is not surprising then that even before Sidney's *Defense*, playwrights were using the metaphor on the stage.

#### iii. 1. FULWELL

The earliest instance of influence by the works surrounding the study of Terence is that of Ulpian Fulwell's *Like Will to Like* (1568), in which the prologue introduces the comedy,

Our author thought good such a one for to choose  
As may show good example, and mirth may  
But no lascivious toys he purposeth for to use.  
Herein, as it were in a glass, see you may  
The advancement of virtue, of vice the decay:  
To what ruin ruffians and roisters are brought;  
You may here see of them the final end.<sup>324</sup>

While it is a comedy that Fulwell is presenting, it is a *serious* comedy in which there are no 'toys', only instruction.

#### iii. 2. JONSON

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<sup>323</sup>Ringler (1963), 205.

<sup>324</sup>Line 14 ff.

There is no doubt that Jonson was a well-educated man; he was a playwright but he also knew the theories behind his art well, and he shows that he subscribes to the critical theories when writing his comedies. He refers or alludes to the Ciceronian-Donatian definition of comedy no less than three times in his plays. The earliest occurrence is found in *Every Man in his Humour* (1598):

And persons, such as *Comoedie* would chuse,  
When she would shew an Image of the times,<sup>325</sup>

What Jonson presents in this quotation is a contraction of the standard definition, *comoedia est imitatio uitae, speculum consuetudinis, imago ueritatis*, into simply *comoedia est imago consuetudinis*.

A year later, in the Induction of *Every Man out of his Humour*, Jonson once again refers to drama as the mirror of the age:

Well I will scourge those apes;  
And to these courteous eyes oppose a mirrour,  
As large as is the stage, whereon we act:  
Where they shall see the times deformitie  
Anatomiz'd in euery nerue, and sinnew,  
With constant courage, and contempt of feare.<sup>326</sup>

As the sixteenth century rolled into the seventeenth century, the debate over comedy was still raging, and so Jonson maintains that the mirror of comedy is based in ethics. That Jonson was directly familiar with Cicero's definition of comedy as found in Donatus is doubtless, both because he is familiar with Terence and the works surrounding him,<sup>327</sup> but also because

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<sup>325</sup>Prologue line 22 ff. in Herford, C.H and Percy and Evelyn Simpson, eds. (1925-53). *Ben Jonson: The Works*. 11 volumes. Oxford, volume III, page 303. All citations to Jonson are from this edition, hereafter referred to as Herford-Simpson.

<sup>326</sup>*Every Man out of His Humour*. The Induction, ll. 117-22, Herford-Simpson, Vol. III, p. 432.

<sup>327</sup>Baldwin (1947), 577 cites Jonson's *Staple of News* III intermean lines 46-50, Herford-Simpson, Volume IV, p. 345: "*Doe wee pay our money for this? wee send them to learne their*

later in that same play, Cordatus, a member of the Grex, quotes the dictum verbatim:

I would faine heare one of the *autumne*-judgments define once, *Quid sit Comœdia*? if he cannot, let him content himselfe with CICEROS definition (till hee haue strength to propose to himselfe a better) who would haue a *Comœdie* to be *Imitatio uitæ, Speculum consuetudinis, Imago ueritatis*; a thing throughout pleasant, and ridiculous, and accommodated to the correction of manners.<sup>328</sup>

It is a definition of comedy that was to stay with Jonson for the rest of his life, for 1632, two years prior to his death and some thirty years after *Every Man out of his Humour*, saw the performance of his *Magnetick Lady*, in which the playwright is still working under the interpretation of comedy as a correctional mirror:

If I see a thing vively presented on the *Stage*, that the *Glasse* of custome (which is *Comedy*) is so held up to me, by the Poet, as I can therin view the daily examples of mens lives, and images of Truth, in their manners, so drawne for my delight, or profit, as I may (either way) use them.<sup>329</sup>

The idea is still explicit that comedy must, by definition, reflect the habits of its audience, but Jonson now allows for the possibility, influenced by Horace perhaps, that comedy can teach *or* delight. However, by the time Jonson had written *The Magnetick Lady*, the mirror as a metaphor of drama had been fully exploded by Shakespeare's famous passage in *Hamlet*.

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Grammar and their Terence, and they learne their play-books," as proof that Terence was part of the contemporary grammar-school education.

<sup>328</sup>Grex at III, vi, 202-209. Herford-Simpson, Volume III. p. 515; Snuggs, H.L. (1950). 'The Source of Jonson's Definition of Comedy', *Modern Language Notes* 65: 543-4, demonstrates that this passage is a translation of the passage in Minturno's *L'Arte Poetica* (see footnote 317), but is quick to concede that Jonson doubtless saw "Donatus' well-known essay".

<sup>329</sup>Chorus after Act. II. lines 36-41, Herford-Simpson, Volume VI, p. 545

### iii. 3. SHAKESPEARE

The most famous and subtle use of the mirror-metaphor in the Renaissance is that used by Hamlet in his directions to the players in the second act of that tragedy. Hamlet, trying to “catch the conscience of the king,”<sup>330</sup> instructs the players,

Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance, that you o’erstep not the modesty of nature. For anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is to hold, as ’twere, the mirror up to nature: to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.<sup>331</sup>

There is much on which to remark in this passage. First of all we notice the debt Shakespeare owes to Donatus, for Hamlet’s instructions conform to Cicero’s definition of comedy: the mirror of nature (= *speculum consuetudinis*) reflects virtue, as well as “the very age and body of the time.”<sup>332</sup>

Later in the same scene, (lines 244), Hamlet observes, “This play is the *image* of a murder done in Vienna.”<sup>333</sup> This of course alludes to the notion of comedy as a *imago veritatis*, since the *Murder of Gonzago* is the ‘image’ of Claudius’ ‘real-life’ (from Hamlet’s perspective) murder of Hamlet’s father. Further, some forty lines later, Hamlet calls his production a ‘comedy,’ not because, as Hibbard suggests, “For Hamlet the *Mousetrap* has indeed been a comedy, because it has had a prosperous

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<sup>330</sup>II.ii.594. The edition I am using is that of G.R. Hibbard, ed. (1987). *Hamlet. The Oxford Shakespeare*. Oxford.

<sup>331</sup>III.ii.16 ff.

<sup>332</sup>Hibbard glosses ‘the age and body of the time’ in line 21 as “the true state of things as they are now.” p. 248.

<sup>333</sup>Italics are my own.

outcome, having produced the effect it was designed to."<sup>334</sup> In essence Hibbard is suggesting that all comedies have prosperous outcomes, and it is true that there was a theory current at this time that "Comedies begin in trouble and end in peace; Tragedies begin in calmes, and end in tempest."<sup>335</sup> But the play-within-the-play does not end happily; it is not allowed to end at all! It is therefore not to this definition of comedy that Hamlet is alluding but rather to the more common definition of comedy as a mirror.<sup>336</sup>

The exact source of the mirror-metaphor as used in this passage by Shakespeare is unclear. Jonson, as has been shown above, had used the metaphor in exactly the same way. It is therefore at least possible that Shakespeare is merely borrowing it from Jonson. For that matter, because it was such a strong critical convention, Shakespeare may have absorbed it from the dramatic tradition. Cicero's definition was everywhere, and even if he did not know that he was quoting from Donatus' commentary, Baldwin has shown conclusively that he would have been encountered it directly, so it is possible that he is just remembering from school.<sup>337</sup>

More significant is the way which Shakespeare uses the mirror-metaphor, and the indirect source of this use is Sidney's *The Defence of Poesy*. The contents of the tale of Alexander Phereus quoted above are clearly the source for the idea of the play pricking the conscience of the guilty spectator, although it must be conceded that Shakespeare may have

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<sup>334</sup>Hibbard (1987), page 265 *ad line* 276.

<sup>335</sup>Thomas Heywood, *An Apology for Actors*, cited by Whitaker, Virgil K. (1965). *The Mirror Up to Nature: The Technique of Shakespeare's Tragedies*. California.

<sup>336</sup>The only references I can find for application of the mirror to tragedy are those of Antonio Minturno, *L'Arte Poetica* (1564) II.76, in Gilbert (1940), page 291, and the prologue in Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* (acted 1588)

<sup>337</sup>Baldwin (1947), 559.

known the story of Alexander Phereus directly from Plutarch,<sup>338</sup> or that he remembered it from a version that his own company performed in 1599.<sup>339</sup> But Shakespeare was also familiar with Sidney's version, which was published first in 1595, but also reprinted in the 1598, 1599, and subsequent editions of the *Arcadia*<sup>340</sup> by 1600,<sup>341</sup> the time when he is thought to have written *Hamlet*. In his treatise, Sidney mentions the Alexander story in conjunction with *tragedy*, although the discussion of comedy as a mirror is only a few lines above. Shakespeare has provided a dramatic analog to Sidney's critical theory, by synthesising the account of

<sup>338</sup>Marindin, G.E. (1896). 'Shakspeare and Plutarch', *Athenaeum* 3572 (11 April), 487-8, suggests that II.ii.547 ("What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba, / That he should weep for her?") shows Shakespeare's debt to Plutarch's *Life of Alexander Phereus*. This dissertation is far too limited to discuss the age-old problem of Shakespeare's "Smalle Latine and Lesse Greeke." The most extensive examination of this subject is that of Baldwin (1944). In two volumes of roughly 750 pages each, Professor Baldwin supports his theory that Shakespeare was a "learned grammarian" capable of reading in Latin Aesop, Terence, Plautus, Quintilian, Ovid, Virgil, Horace, Juvenal and Caesar. With regard to Shakespeare's use of Greek, Baldwin, in chapter XLIX, volume 2 of the above book, concludes that "there has been some not wholly conclusive evidence that Shakspeare had read in Greek at least part of the New Testament.... But Shakspeare could not really have read Hesiod and Homer" (661). Although Jonson was honouring Shakespeare with this poem, he is drawing attention to the fact that, although Shakespeare's own Art (or training) was inferior to his own wide learning, his Nature (or genius) made up for it in due measure. On this, see Baldwin (1944), volume 1, chapter 1: 'Genesis of Jonson's Aphorism: "Small Latine, and Lesse Greeke"'.  
<sup>339</sup>*A Warning For Women*, lines 1077-87.

A woman that had made away her husband,  
 And sitting to behold a tragedy  
 At Linne, a towne in Norfolke,  
 Acted by Players travelling that way,—  
 Wherein a woman that had murdered hers  
 Was ever haunted with her husband's ghost,  
 The passion written by a feeling pen,  
 And acted by a good tragedian,—  
 She was so mooved with the sight thereof,  
 As she cried out, 'the play was made by her.'  
 And openly confess[ed] her murder.

An anonymous play cited by Ringler (1963), 206, from Richard Simpson, ed. (1878) *The School of Shakspeare*. London. Volume II p. 311. It is worthwhile noting that there was a prose version of this story printed both in Dutch and in English in Antwerp around 1518, but Ringler thinks it improbable that Shakespeare could have been aware of them.

<sup>340</sup>Ringler (1963), 204.

<sup>341</sup>Hibbard (1987), p. 5 cites E.A.J. Honigmann. (1956). 'The Date of *Hamlet*', *Shakespeare Survey* 9: 24-34.

comedy as a mirror with tragedy's ability to move the emotions of its audience. The step is a natural one for a professional playwright; Hamlet is telling his actors not to overact, to be natural and lifelike. He wants Claudius to recognise himself in the performance of the actor playing Gonzago. Thus, it is imperative that the play is a *comedy*, as opposed to tragedy, because it is *comedy*, which, by definition, is a mirror reflecting life, custom and truth.

The mirror-metaphor peaked with Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, after which, it became such a "threadbare platitude"<sup>342</sup> that in 1606, the prologue of the anonymous comedy, *Wily Beguiled*, exclaims in frustration, "What, *Spectrum* once again?"<sup>343</sup> To conclude, I should like to demonstrate how the tradition had been established after Shakespeare and how it was viewed in the seventeenth-century, through the use of an artist's interpretation of comedy. On the title-page of a 1644 Leiden edition containing both Terence's comedies and the Donatian commentaries<sup>344</sup> stand three figures behind a rostrum. On the far right, Prudentia is unmasking Simulatio with her right hand, while with her left she holds a large mirror of comedy. Veritas, who is standing on the far left is reflected without distortion: comedy is thus a *speculum ueritatis*. The reflection of Simulatio in the mirror is different from the figure pictured between the

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<sup>342</sup>Baldwin (1947), 567. Other later examples of the mirror-metaphor in drama include Philip Massinger, *The Roman Actor* (1626) in Gilbert (1940), p. 568; Vanbrugh, Sir John, *The Provok'd Wife* (1697); and see especially the extended play on the mirror-metaphor and the poetic genres in the Thomas Randolph, *Muses looking -glasse* (ca. 1638), I.iii and iv. For the later tradition, see Petersen, W.M. and Morton, R. (1962). 'Mirrors on the Restoration Stage', *N & Q* 207 NS. 9: 10-13 and 63-7.

<sup>343</sup>Volume IX: p. 221 of Dodsley, Robert, ed. (1964) *A Selection of Old English Plays* (1744). 4th rev. edition by William Carew Hazlitt, 12 volumes. New York. (this edition originally published in London, 1874-5).

<sup>344</sup>*Publii Terentii. Comediae sex, post optimas editiones emendatae*. 1644. Leiden. (Thomas Fisher Rare Book Room, University of Toronto. also in Grabes (1982), 77 and Waith (1966), 17.

two others. In the mirror, we are able to see a wizened old man underneath the young, cheerful mask. Thus, comedy reveals the pretence. In a general sense, it is a good metaphor for comedy, for comedy, as interpreted by the Renaissance critics and dramatists, only seemed cheerful. But from below this shallow veneer was much to be learned, and we only need Prudence when using the comic mirror to find the truth. Finally, it is curious that Terence is not viewed as a jolly comedian in the Renaissance, but a sagacious and austere onlooker.<sup>345</sup> The comic mirror, at least in Renaissance, was no laughing matter.

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<sup>345</sup>I owe this suggestion to Dr. Gratwick.



### CONCLUSION

An examination of the ways Cicero's metaphorical definition of comedy as a 'mirror of life' has been variously interpreted reveals that no single interpretation, be it 'philosophical' or 'realistic' is adequately applicable to all extant samples of Greek and Roman New Comedy. The purpose of the first, the theoretical purpose of literature, was to produce a piece of work that could somehow educate, while the purpose of the second, what appears to be the practical purpose of comedy, was to produce realistic 'slices of life'. The problem is further complicated by the fact that neither interpretation need be mutually exclusive of the other; since a philosophical mirror requires that the one looking upon it, can recognise him/herself. Thus, the philosophical mirror must also be somewhat realistic. Conversely, the realistic mirror may have a didactic purpose, but does not of necessity require one.

It is not without significance that the earliest statements we have about Menander refer to the verisimilitude in the Greek comedian's plays. Of the three playwrights we have examined, the comedies of Menander are clearly the most life-like. In them there is a sustained attempt at probability apparent both in the sequence of actions in the plots as well as in the characterisation of the *personae*. His plays thus faithfully reflect average people of his day in their language, in their customs and in their everyday actions. In this way, the comedies of Menander are 'realistic' mirrors. However, that is not to suggest that realism was Menander's only concern. References to contemporary theories about the didactic role of drama in his plays demonstrate that Menander was at least aware of them, but do not imply that he himself believed or subscribed to them. Some of the characters' statements seem to display a notion of common

morality which reinforces the suggestion that Menander was aiming for realism. Ordinary folk do have a popular ethics system, and Menander's plays capture this as well.

The aims of Menander were not necessarily the aims of his Roman adapters. Neither Plautus nor Terence can therefore be realistic in the full meaning of the term as Wellek described in the first chapter because the characters do not provide an "objective representation of *contemporary* society". The society they are portraying is that of a different place at a different time than the one in which the Roman plays were first performed; their characters reflect the people, times and customs of the Greeks. Because Terence could not possibly hope to engage the familiarity of his Roman audience with details of Greek sites and situations, much of Menander's detail was diluted. With regard to characterisation, Terence is in many ways as deft as Menander. His characters and the plots in which they are entangled are believable as mirror-images of Roman life, even if in dress and by nationality, they are ostensibly Greek. Terence appears to have had an interest in education as is shown especially in the *Adelphoe*, but that is not to suggest that he wrote the plays to indoctrinate his audience. The Terentian mirror is more 'realistic' than 'philosophical'.

In Plautus, on the other hand, the characters and actions are exaggerated and caricatured to the point of incredibility. The Plautine mirror is neither 'realistic' nor 'philosophical' nor does it have any aspirations to be. It is warped and can only produce grotesque, distorted images of its original. From such a mirror, it is difficult to extract any ethical system.

None of the New Comic plays are philosophical, but yet they all mirror common universal emotions and concerns; a seemingly impossible

love-affair or marriage, raising of one's children, the possible damages of pretentious people, deception and intrigue are all issues which are as relevant today as they were in the times of Menander, Plautus, Terence, or, for that matter, Molière, Wilde or Shaw.

It was thus easy for Cicero who was doubtless aware of Hellenistic critics' writing on moral education in literature to apply a philosophical interpretation to the 'mirror of life' metaphor. Cicero was writing a century after the plays had already been written and performed; he imposed the theory onto the practical rather than allowing the practical to define the theory. No doubt the application of the theoretical philosophical mirror was successful in his mind, for if one looks, one can find a supposed moral message anywhere, even in the *nugae* of Plautus.

The interpretation of metaphor by the Humanists of the Middle Ages and Renaissance is even more complex. Early in the Middle Ages, Donatus, displaying the anxieties of a Christian society over pagan literary works, applied Cicero's philosophical definition to the plays of Terence. Any schoolboy thereafter who read the comedies using Donatus' commentaries as guides would have come to know it. It thus became part of the critical literary theory that the 'realistic' aim of the comedies was subordinated to the supposed moral purpose. In the Renaissance, the prevailing religion of the time compelled defenders of dramatic art to employ the Ciceronian-Donatian definition to support its philosophical nature, and it was this new interpretation that the Renaissance playwrights wrote their own comedies.

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