



Demetriou, C. (2010) 'Crossing the Boundary of Dramatic Illusion in Terence:

Courtesans in Terence and Donatus' Criticism'

*Rosetta* **8.5**: 16-33.

[http://www.rosetta.bham.ac.uk/issue8supp/demetriou\\_terence/](http://www.rosetta.bham.ac.uk/issue8supp/demetriou_terence/)

---

**Crossing the Boundary of Dramatic Illusion in Terence:  
Courtesans in Terence and Donatus' Criticism**

Chrysanthi Demetriou

*University of Leeds*

**Abstract**

This paper is concerned with Terence's methods of commenting on dramatic conventions; this is mainly achieved through the exploitation and alteration of comic stereotypes. The discussion focuses on the representation of the stock character of the comic courtesan (*meretrix*) by Terence. The playwright presents this character in contradictory instances, altering in many cases what is considered to be a comic norm. Terence's 'innovation' is already identified by the ancient commentary of Aelius Donatus. The paper argues that this multiple representation of the courtesan is a sophisticated technique of theatrical self-reference, suggesting that the ancient commentary of Donatus noted this instance, among others, as a case of the playwright crossing the boundary of dramatic illusion, by combining tradition with innovation, as well as comic exaggeration with naturalism.

**Introduction**

The attendance of a theatrical performance requires that the audience 'enters' a concrete world which is governed by certain rules and customs. This is particularly prominent in comedies, where we often encounter exaggerated stock characters, such as cunning slaves who are capable of deceiving their masters and who manage to obtain their freedom at the end of the play.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, in many instances, the playwrights dare to interrupt this dramatic illusion and they remind the audience that they are in fact spectators of a theatrical performance constructed according to dramatic norms. Such cases are those in which a character of the play addresses the audience or

---

<sup>1</sup> For this stock role in the *comoedia palliata*, see Duckworth 1994<sup>2</sup>: 250; Segal 1987<sup>2</sup>: 99-136.

when the characters refer explicitly to their fictional roles. In Roman comedy, the phenomenon of the interruption of the dramatic atmosphere is very often encountered in Plautus, who has been considered a principle example of the use of such techniques – commonly described by the terms ‘metatheatre’ or ‘theatrical self-reference’.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, Terence has often been considered as a playwright who composed naturalistic works, which lack the interruption of the dramatic illusion.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, modern scholars have demonstrated that Terence uses theatrical self-references in a sophisticated way and transforms well-known comic conventions of the *comoedia palliata* (i.e. Roman comedy based on Greek originals), commenting thus on the norms that govern this particular genre.<sup>4</sup> In this framework, terms like ‘metatheatre’ or ‘theatrical self-reference’ are used in the study of Terence in a broader sense, since he makes use of sophisticated methods addressed to an informed audience, such as the alteration in the representation of well-known stock comic roles.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, my aim is to reconsider Terence’s exploitation and variation of comic stereotypes of the *comoedia palliata*. For the purpose of this paper, I will focus exclusively on one stock comic character, that of the courtesan (*meretrix*). My aim is to examine different representations of this character in Terence and to argue that his exploitation of this comic stereotype is based on a sophisticated means of interrupting the dramatic illusion, serving as a theatrical self-reference. Courtesans have principal parts in three of Terence’s six comedies: Bacchis in the *Heautontimorumenos* (The Self-Tormentor), Thais in the *Eunuchus* (The Eunuch) and Bacchis in the *Hecyra* (The Mother-in-law). In relation to this examination is the second purpose of this paper: the study of the most ancient surviving commentary on Terence, the *scholia* that come down to us in the

---

<sup>2</sup> For definitions of metatheatre, see Gentili 1979: 15; Slater 1985: 14. For a comprehensive overview of the use of the terms ‘metatheatre’ and ‘theatrical self-reference’ in scholarship, see Rosenmeyer 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Duckworth 1994<sup>2</sup>: 389.

<sup>4</sup> Knorr 2007: 167-168; McCarthy 2004: 104.

name of Aelius Donatus.<sup>5</sup> Donatus' commentary, written in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, constitutes the first scholarly work that identified the alteration of certain comic motifs and stereotypes on the part of our playwright, creating characters that extend the boundaries of the comic conventions. Therefore, Donatus' *scholia* will play a major part in my discussion of Terence's methods of going beyond dramatic conventions, as well as of my examination of the representation of the dramatic character in question, the comic courtesan.<sup>6</sup>

### **Terence's courtesans and Donatus' criticism**

As mentioned in the introduction, modern scholars have identified Terence's tendency to explore and alter well-known comic stereotypes. In this context, scholars have also identified the playwright's preference to depart from the stereotype of the *meretrix mala*, thus presenting unique courtesans, distinguished from the stereotype known from Plautus, since Terence's courtesans are in many cases not bad and greedy but good-hearted and possibly even sympathetic to the audience.<sup>7</sup> The first scholar who identified this unique feature of Terence's comedy was Donatus, whose comments constituted the starting point for modern criticism.<sup>8</sup> Donatus refers to Terence's 'innovation' of altering the typical *mala meretrix*, thus creating the *bona meretrix*. In his discussion of two of Terence's courtesans, Bacchis in the *Hecyra* and Thais in the *Eunuchus*, Donatus points out that Terence offers a different type of the stock character of *meretrix*. In both cases, the courtesans possess a major role in the comedy and the commentator's observations revolve around their exceptional character.

---

<sup>5</sup> On the process of the creation of the commentary and the its surviving form under the name of Donatus, see Barsby 2000: 492-493; Grant 1986: 60-96; Marti 1974: 163-164.

<sup>6</sup> On a general overview on Donatus' *scholia* on the attitude and language of Terence's courtesans, see Hilger 1970: 135-139.

<sup>7</sup> See for instance Knorr 1995: 222 and, more recently, Fantham 2000: 287-288. Gilula 1980 is the only scholar who believes that all Terence's courtesans are variations of the *mala meretrix* type. For a good argumentation against this thesis, see Anderson 1984: 133 n. 2.

<sup>8</sup> On the influence of Donatus on subsequent scholarship, see Gilula 1980: 142-143.

Let us begin the discussion with the courtesan Bacchis from the *Hecyra* and her words in lines 774-776:<sup>9</sup>

*BA. [...] Haec res hic agitur. Pamphilo me facere ut redeat uxor oportet: quod si perficio non paenitet me famae, solam fecisse id quod aliae meretrices facere fugitant.*

BACCHIS [...] This is what is happening here. I must make Pamphilus' wife go back to him. If I succeed in that, I don't mind it being said that I am the only one to have done what the other courtesans would avoid to do.

In this scene, the courtesan attempts to assure the father of her former lover that she has not caused problems to his son's marriage, emphasising her distinguished character and her differentiation from other women of her profession. However, Bacchis' words come in contradiction with the statement by her former lover's slave in the introductory act of the play, where he asserts that his master continued his relationship with the courtesan after his marriage. The slave Parmeno gives a negative view of Bacchis' character in the following instance when describing the situation to a female slave, Philotis (lines 157-9):

*PH. Quid interea? Ibatne ad Bacchidem? PA. Cotidie. Sed ut fit, postquam hunc alienum ab sese videt, maligna multo et mage procax facta ilico est.*

PHILOTIS What happened in the meantime? Did he continue seeing Bacchis? PARMENO Every day. But, as it happens, when she saw that he does not belong to her, she immediately became much more spiteful and impudent.

It is thus obvious that we encounter a difficulty regarding Bacchis' characterisation. It is noteworthy that Bacchis' character is explicitly discussed only in these two instances: in Parmeno's expository description (lines 157-9), which attributes negative epithets to Bacchis (*maligna, procax*) and during her

---

<sup>9</sup> The citations of Terence's comedies come from the edition of Kauer and Lindsay 1926. All translations of Latin passages are my own.

only appearance on stage which comes towards the end of the play and reverses the audience's expectations created in the beginning (see quotation above, lines 774-776). What is more, the diverse representation of this character depends on each character's perspective: during the play we bear the impression of the male characters', either direct or indirect, reference to a vague image of a typical, 'bad' courtesan, whereas, towards the end, we actually see this person on stage.<sup>10</sup> This inevitably means that we, as audience, might think of the courtesan's actual character and attempt an evaluation of each witness. Donatus, commenting on Bacchis' own words (lines 774-776) seems to suggest that she is indeed the good type of courtesan, an exception to the rule:<sup>11</sup>

*774.3 Multa Terentius feliciter ausus est arte fretus, nam et socrus bonas et meretrices honesti cupidus praeter quam pervulgatum est facit. Sed tanta vigilantia causarum et rationum momenta subiungit, ut ei soli merito videatur totum licere. Nam hoc contra illud est, quod alibi (Eun. Prol. 37) ait, commune iam esse omnibus comicis 'bonas matronas facere, meretrices malas'.*

Terence dares to do many things successfully, relying on his skill, for he creates both good mothers-in-law and courtesans eager for what is morally honourable, beyond what is common. However, he subjoins points of occasions and affairs with such vigilance, so that the whole business seems to be permitted to him alone, deservedly. For this is against that which he says elsewhere (Prologue to the *Eunuchus*, 37), that it is common in all comic playwrights 'to create good matrons and bad courtesans'.

In addition, Donatus offers another comment on the same passage:

---

<sup>10</sup> Gilula 1980: 155-157 explains how the audience gets a negative impression of Thais, based to a great extent on the sharp contradiction between the positively representation of Philumena's character and Parmeno's references to Bacchis' character.

<sup>11</sup> Donatus' text comes from the edition of Wessner 1902-1905. The first number indicates the line in Terence's text that the commentator refers to, whereas the second number indicates the number of the comment on the line, e.g. text 774.3 is Donatus' third comment on line 774. The sentence or phrase in capitals, usually in the beginning of Donatus' comments, indicates Terence's passage to which the commentator refers.

776.1 SOLAM FECISSE bene 'solam', ne nescisse officium meretricis poeta videretur.

THE ONLY ONE TO HAVE DONE nicely 'the only woman', so that the poet should not appear to be unaware of the profession of the courtesan.

The commentator points to the fact that Terence is well-aware of the character of a courtesan, thus implying that the playwright deliberately chooses the representation of this unconventional character – that is, the role of a 'good courtesan', a courtesan different from women of her profession, as Bacchis herself indicates. The contradictory representations of the courtesan in the play and Donatus' positive criticism of her character lead to the question of whether she is good or bad-hearted. Certainly, this manifold representation of the same character creates suspense for the audience.<sup>12</sup> What is more, Donatus' second comment (776.1) seems to suggest that the unique position of the courtesan points to Terence's knowledge of the usual characteristics of comic *meretrices*, opening up the question of whether Terence is working in opposition with comic stereotypes. Of particular interest also is Donatus' reference to Terence's own lines from the prologue to the *Eunuchus* (*scholium* 774.3), which outline the playwright's knowledge of dramatic conventions. Donatus emphasises that Terence presents an unconventional character, against the expected norms formed in the tradition of the *comoedia palliata* in other instances as well (see comments on Praef. 1, 9; 727; 756; 834; 840). Therefore, according to Donatus' *scholia*, the exceptional representation of the courtesan is firmly connected with Terence's tendency to alter stereotyped comic motifs. Nevertheless, the question which arises here is why Terence represents the same character in contradictory spectrums, since the courtesan's self-presentation comes in contradiction to the slave's speech.

This is also found in the representation of other Terentian courtesans. The *meretrix* Bacchis of the *Heautontimorumenos* has received scholarly attention regarding the representation of her 'unique' features and the question of

---

<sup>12</sup> Gilula 1980: 159-161 discusses the dramatic effect of Bacchis' manifold representation.

whether she must be considered as *bona* or *mala*.<sup>13</sup> As in the case of Bacchis in the *Hecyra*, the statements regarding her character are contradictory.<sup>14</sup> The first description of Bacchis takes place in the monologue of her lover, Clitipho, in lines 225-7:

*CL. [...] Nam hic Clinia, etsi is quoque suarum rerum satagit,  
attamen  
habet bene et pudice eductam, ignaram artis meretriciae.  
Meast potens procax magnifica sumptuosa nobilis.*

CLITIPHO [...] For Clinia here, although he is also busy with his own affair, at least has a girl brought up nicely and respectably, ignorant of the art of the courtesans. Mine is powerful, impudent, boastful, costly, glorious.

In this description, Bacchis is presented as the typical greedy *meretrix*. However, the following passage shows a different profile of her (lines 388-391):

*BA. [...] Nam expedit bonas esse vobis; nos, quibu'cum est res,  
non sinunt:  
quippe forma impulsu nostra nos amatores colunt;  
haec ubi immutata est, illi suum animum alio conferunt:  
nisi si prospectum interea aliquid est, desertae vivimus.*

BACCHIS [...] For it is profitable for you to be good; those who we have dealings with do not allow us; the reason is that lovers, driven by our beauty, cultivate us; when that is changed, they take their desire elsewhere; unless in the meantime there is some sort of provision for the future, we live in loneliness.

This passage is a part of Bacchis' confession to a freeborn girl and it does not suit her wicked character, as described not only by her lover but also by other male characters, as for instance Clitipho's father, Chremes (line 751) and his slave, Syrus (line 255). This contradictory representation has led to much

---

<sup>13</sup> Knorr 1995: 222 argues that Bacchis is not either *bona* or *mala*. For a negative evaluation, see Gilula 1980: 152-3. Henry 1985: 120 calls Bacchis *bona*, cf. Brown 1990: 246-247.

<sup>14</sup> For the dramatic functions of Bacchis' speech, see Knorr 1995: 226-230.



discussion regarding Terence's reaction to the Greek original.<sup>15</sup> As in the previous case examined, from the *Hecyra*, this passage is unexpected for the audience, who were prepared to see a completely different character. In this framework, Terence again seems to experiment with the spectators' expectations, thus creating suspense based on the distinction between the rumours about Bacchis and her actual character. Nevertheless, it seems that, in both cases, this differentiation is strictly connected with the theatrical awareness of the characters. The male characters who describe Bacchis represent the comic norms regarding the stock presentation of the *meretrix*.<sup>16</sup> Terence departs from what is widely expected in the fictional world of comedy, giving also a positive representation of the courtesans. In the above example from the *Heautontimorumenos*, Clitipho acts in the framework of the comic conventions which point to common greedy courtesans. However, Bacchis' character seems to extend beyond this boundary, pointing to a more naturalistic representation. In this context, a manifold representation can be regarded as an exploitation of the dramatic character in question, which possibly serves as a theatrical self-reference, a comment on Terence's composition, which breaks the dramatic atmosphere by reminding the audience of the norms that govern the particular genre and their manipulation by the playwright.

Analogous techniques are found in the *Eunuchus*, where another Terentian courtesan, Thais, is presented as the typical 'bad', greedy *meretrix* in the opening scene of the play.<sup>17</sup> For instance, when Thais tries to explain to Phaedria – her lover – her plan of saving her sister, the young man doubts her intentions by satirising her words in the following passage, accusing her of selfish behaviour (lines 158-161):

---

<sup>15</sup> Brothers 1980: 111, 1988: 190 suggests that Terence inserted Bacchis' confession to the Greek original. Cf. Lefevre 1973: 455 who believes that Bacchis was sympathetic in the Menandrian original and Terence changed her overall representation.

<sup>16</sup> For slaves being more biased against courtesans in comedies, see Fantham 1975: 72.

<sup>17</sup> Thais' character is variously evaluated by modern scholars; Barsby 2000: 508 gives a positive description, against Gilula 1980: 161-164.

*PH. [...] Nempe omnia haec nunc verba huc redeunt denique:  
ego excludor, ille—recipitur. Qua gratia?  
Nisi si illum plus amas quam me et istam nunc times  
quae advectast ne illum talem praeripiat tibi.*

PHAEDRIA [...] Certainly, in the end all these words come now back to this: I'm shut out, he's admitted. Why? Unless you love him more than me and you're now afraid that this girl who has been brought here will seize that 'exceptional' man from you.

As evident in the above passage, Phaedria considers Thais' plan as an intrigue which aims at shutting him out of her house, thus giving her the opportunity to admit his rival (implied by *ille* – he), the rich and braggart soldier who, throughout the play, attempts to establish a relationship with Thais. What is interesting is that Phaedria seems aware of the typical *meretrices malae* of comedies and their intrigues.<sup>18</sup> This interpretation is supported by the fact that *meretrices* similar to the one Phaedria describes constitute a common comic character, an ultimate example of which is the courtesan Phronesium from Plautus' *Truculentus*.<sup>19</sup> As in the previous cases examined, Thais' speech alters our impression about her in lines 197-203:

*TH. Me miseram, fors[it]an hic mihi parvam habeat fidem  
atque ex aliarum ingeniis nunc me iudicet.  
Ego pol, quae mihi sum conscia, hoc certo scio  
neque me finxisse falsi quicquam neque meo  
cordi esse quemquam cariorem hoc Phaedria.  
et quidquid huius feci causa virginis  
feci;*

THAIS Poor me, it may be that he has little faith in me and he judges me by the character of other women. I, for god's sake, to the extent I know myself, certainly know this, that I have not invented anything deceiving and that there is nobody more precious and dearer to me than Phaedria. And whatever I did for this issue, I did it for the girl's sake.

---

<sup>18</sup> *Meretrix mala* as a comic stock character is attested by the playwrights themselves, see for instance Plautus' *Captivi* 57-58 and Terence's *Eunuchus* 37.

<sup>19</sup> Fantham 2000: 294-296 suggests that Phronesium can be considered as a literary example which affects the reactions of Parmeno and Phaedria towards Thais.

Here we have a monologue, practically addressed to the audience, and thus Thais' words can only be taken as a sincere confession. Thais tries to differentiate her role from the other courtesans, stressing that what she does is not for her own sake but for her sister's.<sup>20</sup> She refers to the other women with the phrase *aliarum ingeniis*, as a possible allusion to similar roles in comedies and as an indication of her self-consciousness about the fact that she is enacting the particular stock role of a *meretrix*. Donatus acknowledges the distinguished character of Thais:

198 *ATQUE EX ALIARUM INGENIIS NUNC ME IUDICET hic Terentius ostendit virtutis suae hoc esse, ut pervulgatas personas nove inducat et tamen a consuetudine non recedat, ut puta meretricem bonam cum facit, capiat tamen et delectet animum spectatoris.*

HE JUDGES ME BY THE CHARACTER OF OTHER WOMEN  
Here Terence demonstrates that this is a feature of his ability, to bring onto the stage widely-known characters anew and nevertheless not depart from the custom, as for example when he creates a good courtesan and he nevertheless entertains and pleases the spectator's mind.

As the commentator indicates in his previous comment from his *scholia* on the *Hecyra*, the representation of the character of the 'good courtesan' comes in contradiction with the common practice of playwrights to 'present good matrons and bad courtesans', stressing thus Terence's aim to surpass the stereotyped practices. Moreover, of particular interest is the last part of Donatus' comment on Thais, which points to the balance in Terence's techniques, which make a good combination of the innovation in altering the typical representation of the courtesans with the preservation of stock characteristics that nevertheless amuse the audience. In this framework, it is probable that Donatus' comment is consistent with what we have seen in all

---

<sup>20</sup> Thais' intentions seem to be presented differently towards the end of the play (lines 867-871), when she states that handing the girl over to her family would offer her some sort of benefit.

the cases discussed, and this is the multiple representation of the *meretrix* in a play, since on the one hand the playwright creates a distinguished character but, on the other hand, the negative and stock characteristics of this role are preserved in the play through other characters' statements, offering the audience the stock type of humour they are used to.

Donatus' remarks constitute a good ground for the re-examination of Terence's exploitation of this dramatic character and suggest a new reading: Terence not only re-constructs this comic stereotype; this manifold representation of the *meretrix* lies in the principal part of our discussion, the crossing of the boundary of theatrical convention, moving from what is widely used in theatre to what is new and innovative. The varied representation of the courtesan in Terence's comedies is a technique that serves as a theatrical self-reference, since Terence seems to allude to the fact that this is a stereotyped comic character which is presented in a more naturalistic context in his comedy. This thesis can be traced in a number of Donatus' comments, which are concerned with the idea of moving from reality to comedy and vice versa. Thus, in order to better understand Donatus' criticism on Terence's courtesans, we should also examine a number of *scholia* that are concerned with the 'preservation' or the 'crossing' of the boundary of dramatic illusion.

### **Donatus' *scholia* on Terence's composition**

Although the term 'metatheatre' is a modern one, Donatus had identified many instances in Terence which interrupt the dramatic illusion. The ancient commentator pointed out cases in which the comic characters move away from their theatrical role, for instance when addressing the audience:

*ad Andriam 456.3 Et 'commovi' dixit apud se, ut spectator audiat, non senex.*

He says 'I have stirred him up' as an aside for the spectator not for the old man to hear.

*ad Andriam* 495 CERTE HERCLE NUNC HIC SE I. F. H. E. hoc ita dixit, ut audiat spectator, non ut Simo

BY HERCULES, THIS TIME [HE CERTAINLY DECEIVES HIMSELF] He says this in a manner so that the spectator will hear, not Simo.

It has been suggested that the addressing of the spectators breaks the dramatic illusion and results in engaging the audience in the process of the creation of a theatrical performance.<sup>21</sup> Thus, although a naturalistic work, Terence's theatre does not refrain from the use of techniques that urge the audience to move across their position as observers of the theatrical play to the active enrolment and participation in the theatrical process.

What is more, the ancient *scholia* discuss what is widely accepted as possibly the most explicit metatheatrical instance in Terence's theatre, in *Hecyra* 866-868:

*PAM. neque opus est  
adeo muttito. Placet non fieri hic itidem ut in comoediis  
omnia omnes ubi resciscunt. Hic quos par fuerat resciscere  
sciunt; quos non autem aequomst scire neque resciscent  
scient.*

PAMPHILUS There is no need; not even to whisper. It doesn't seem good for the same thing to happen here as happens in comedies, where everybody finds out everything. Here, those to whom it would be appropriate to know, know already. Those who indeed should not know will not find out or know.

Here, the dramatic character, Pamphilus, refers to a general comic norm and differentiates himself and the situation from ordinary comedies, possibly serving as a representative of Terence's voice and proclaiming the originality

---

<sup>21</sup> See for instance Slater 1985: 130-32.

of the playwright's work.<sup>22</sup> The *scholia* by Donatus had already marked out this instance with two observations on the passage:

866.2 *NON FIERI HOC ITIDEM VT IN COMOEDIIS mire, quasi haec comoedia non sit sed ueritas.*

WHAT HAPPENS IN COMEDIES TO HAPPEN HERE admirably, as if this is not comedy but the truth.

867.2 *HIC QVOS PAR FVERAT 'hic' in hac comoedia.*

IN THIS CASE, THOSE WHO NEED TO KNOW 'in this case' in this comedy.

The first *scholium* explains that this is 'admirably unexpected', since Pamphilus speaks as if this is not a comedy, but real life, suggesting that he makes use of a phrase to point out the naturalistic atmosphere of the situation. Nevertheless, in the second comment on the passage, the commentator seems to adopt a rather different interpretation: that Pamphilus' case – designated by *hic* in Terence's text – implies that the character makes a reference to 'this comedy', which is in possible opposition to the 'other' comedies. Thus, this comment suggests that Pamphilus acknowledges the fact that he participates in a comic play. Such an interpretation lies in contradiction to the previous comment, possibly reflecting the manifold structure of the commentary which, while in its core preserves Donatus' original comments, simultaneously includes additional comments from other sources.<sup>23</sup> More importantly, it points to the difficulties of distinguishing between references to theatre and real life and understanding whether a character acts within the preservation of the dramatic atmosphere or in favour of its interruption. The comments acknowledge the difficulty of identifying the boundary between theatre and reality, between the world of comedy and the

---

<sup>22</sup> On this passage see Anderson 2002: 6-7; Büchner 1974: 168; Cicu 1996: 52 n. 19, 54; Goldberg 1986: 152, 166; Ireland 1990: 156; Norwood 1923: 105; Perelli 1973: 173; Slater 1988: 259.

<sup>23</sup> See note 5.

world of the audience; nevertheless, it is clear that some instances belong solely to the world of comedy and differ from reality, such as the following:

*ad Andriam 67 SAPIENTER VITAM I. N. Q. H. T. O. improbatur a sapientibus haec sententia, nam obsequium adsentator debet, amicus veritatem. sed in theatro dicitur, non in schola.*

HE HAS CHOSEN A WISER WAY FOR LIVING This way of thinking is condemned by the wise, for a flatterer owes compliance, a friend the truth. However, this is delivered in theatre, not at school.

*ad Eunuchum 751.1 NE PRIUS QUAM HANC ACCIPIAS A. C. hoc in comoedia licet more vulgi dicere.*

NOT TO LOSE HER BEFORE YOU EVEN GET HER, CHREMES It is permitted to say this in comedy according to a common custom.

These examples demonstrate that Donatus had already occupied himself with this question of how the playwright moves from reality to fiction and to what extent his comic characters stand far from the real world known to the audience. Furthermore, the commentator reveals his concern about what traditionally belongs to theatre and how the playwright manages to break the theatrical atmosphere by revealing to the audience the fictional status of his comedies. In this framework, it is plausible that Donatus' criticism about Terence's courtesans is another indication of the playwright's techniques in moving away from the comic stereotypes, being an indirect comment on the way Terence manages to comment on his own composing techniques, by presenting characters that stand on the boundary between convention and innovation.

## **Conclusion**

This paper was concerned with Terence's indirect references to the nature and norms of theatre, with emphasis on the creation of characters standing somewhere between stereotypes and innovation, an ultimate example of

which is Terence's courtesans. Such techniques, identified in the ancient *scholia* preserved in the name of Donatus, are defined in modern scholarship with terms such as 'metatheatre' or 'theatrical self-reference'. The examination of the representation of the courtesan by Terence is firmly associated with Donatus' commentary on Terence's comedies. My purpose was to suggest that Terence's innovation in the representation of the comic courtesan seems to be another theatrical self-reference technique, pointing to the conventions of the genre. What Donatus emphasises is the crossing from the exaggerated comic stereotypes to the realistic representations of characters and presumably the fact that the characters themselves differentiate their position from the expected stereotyped representation.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the multiple representations of a character within the same comedy constitute a sophisticated means of the combination of comic exaggeration and naturalism. Donatus' comments on Bacchis and Thais resulted in a long discussion about whether the commentator suggests that our playwright altered his Greek originals or he differentiates himself from Roman predecessors, such as Plautus.<sup>25</sup> Most scholars attempted an evaluation of Donatus' accounts of Terence's courtesans, examining the extent to which these characters are 'bad' or 'good'. In this paper, I suggested another reading of Donatus' *scholia*, as the first study on the combination of comic tradition and exaggeration with innovation and naturalism in Terence's composition, pointing to what the commentator had demonstrated in a wide range of *scholia*, that is, the difficulty of identifying the boundary between tradition and invention, theatre and naturalism.

## Bibliography

Anderson, W. S. 1984. 'Love Plots in Menander and his Roman Adaptors', *Ramus* 13, 124-134.

---

<sup>24</sup> Jakobi 1996: 172 points to Donatus' interest in Terence's naturalism.

<sup>25</sup> Barsby 2000: 508.



Anderson, W. S. 2002. 'Resistance to Recognition and Privileged Recognition in Terence', *The Classical Journal* 98 (1), 1-8.

Barsby, J. A. 2000. 'Donatus on Terence', in Stärk, E. & Vogt-Spira, G. (eds.) *Dramatische Wäldchen: Festschrift für Eckard Lefèvre zum 65. Geburtstag*. Hildesheim: Olms, 491-513.

Brothers, A. J. 1980 'The Construction of Terence's *Heautontimurumenos*', *The Classical Quarterly* 30, 94-119.

Brothers, A. J. (ed.) 1988. *Terence. The Self-tormentor*. Warminster: Aris & Phillips.

Brown, O. G. McC. 1990. 'Plots and Prostitutes in Greek New Comedy', *Papers of the Leeds International Latin Seminar* 6, 241-266.

Büchner, K. 1974. *Das Theater des Terenz*. Heidelberg: C. Winter.

Cicu, L. 1996. 'Spectator extra fabulam: La nascita del drama assoluto', *Sandalion* 19, 41-91.

Duckworth, G. E. 1994<sup>2</sup>. *The Nature of Roman Comedy: A Study in Popular Entertainment*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Fantham, E. 1975. 'Sex, Status and Survival in Hellenistic Athens: A Study of Women in New Comedy', *Phoenix* 29, 44-74.

Fantham, E. 2000. 'DOMINA-tricks, or How to Construct a Good Whore from a Bad One', in Stärk, E. & Vogt-Spira, G. (eds.) *Dramatische Wäldchen: Festschrift für Eckard Lefèvre zum 65. Geburtstag*. Hildesheim: Olms, 287-299.

Gentili, B. 1979. *Theatrical Performances in the Ancient World*. Amsterdam: Gieben.

Gilula, D. 1980. 'The Concept of the *bona meretrix*: A Study of Terence's Courtesans', *Rivista di filologia e d'istruzione classica* 108, 142-165.

Grant, J. N. 1986. *Studies in the Textual Tradition of Terence*. London & Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Goldberg, S. M. 1986. *Understanding Terence*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Henry, M. M. 1985. *Menander's Courtesans and the Greek Comic Tradition*. Frankfurt: P. Lang.

Hilger, M. J. 1970. *The Rhetoric of Comedy: Comic Theory in the Terentian 'Commentary' of Aelius Donatus*. Dissertation, University of Nebraska.

Jakobi, R. 1996. *Die Kunst der Exegese im Terenzkommentar des Donat*. Berlin: de Gruyter.

Ireland, S. 1990. *Terence. The Mother-in-Law*. Warminster: Aris & Phillips.  
Kauer, R. and Lindsay, W. M. (eds.) 1926. *P. Terenti Afri Comoediae*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Knorr, O. 1995. 'The Character of Bacchis in Terence's *Heautontimorumenos*', *The American Journal of Philology* 116 (2), 221-235.

Knorr, O. 2007. 'Metatheatrical Humor in the Comedies of Terence', in Kruschwitz, P., Ehlers, W.-W., Felgentreu, F. (eds.) *Terentius Poeta*, München: C.H. Beck, 167-174.

Lefevre, E. 1973. 'Der *Heautontimorumenos* des Terenz', in Lefevre, E. (ed.) *Die römische Komödie: Plautus und Terenz*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 44-62.

McCarthy, K. 2004. 'The Joker in the Pack: Slaves in Terence', *Ramus* 33 (1-2), 100-119.

Marti, H. 1974. 'Zeugnisse zur Nachwirkung des Dichters Terenz im Altertum', in Reinhardt, U. & Sallmann, K. (eds.) *Musa iocosa : Arbeiten über Humor und Witz, Komik und Komödie der Antike*. Hildesheim & New York: Olms, 158-78.

Norwood, G. 1923. *The Art of Terence*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Perelli, L. 1973. *Il teatro rivoluzionario di Terenzio*, Florence: La Nuova Italia.

Rosenmeyer, T.G. 2002. 'Metatheater. An Essay on Overload', *Arion* 10 (2), 87-119.

Segal, E. 1987<sup>2</sup>. *Roman Laughter. The Comedy of Plautus*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Slater, N. W. 1988. 'The Fictions of Patriarchy in Terence's *Hecyra*', *The Classical World* 81, 249-260.

Slater, N. W. 2000<sup>2</sup>. *Plautus in Performance. The Theatre of the Mind*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic.

Wessner, P. (ed.) 1902-1905. *Aeli Donati Quod Fertur Commentum Terenti*, I-II. Leipzig: Teubner.

---