



## TEACHING EARLY LATIN COMEDY IN LATE ANTIQUITY

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### **Abstract**

Studying Virgil at school in Late Antiquity was challenging for students. Epic verse is both highly stylised and frequently archaic, set in a far distant mythological world that often required considerable explanation. In addition to teaching Virgil's poetry, Donatus also taught his students the comedies of Terence, which present slightly different, but no less significant, challenges. Terence's vocabulary and syntax were significantly archaic for late antique readers. Comedy is written in a far less formal register of language than epic verse. The natural idiom of late antique students would have differed significantly from that of Terence. Terence's plays contain considerable humour, and this is particularly difficult to teach, since explaining jokes frequently ruins their humour. In this paper, I examine how Donatus addresses these various difficulties. I show how he dealt with linguistic challenges, such as archaic language and early conversational idiom. I explore the ways in which he tries to ensure that students understood the plot and action of the play. And finally, I evaluate how Donatus addressed humour. How did he ensure that his students understood the jokes without ruining their humour? I ground this analysis in what we know about the activities and interactions that took place in the late antique classroom. In doing so, I place Donatus into his educational context alongside Servius.

### **Zusammenfassung**

*Vergil zu studieren bedeutete für Schüler der Spätantike eine Herausforderung. Epische Verse sind sowohl hochgradig stilisiert als auch häufig archaisch, angesiedelt in einer längst vergangenen mythologischen Welt, die oft umfangreiche Erklärungen erforderte. Zusätzlich zu den Dichtungen Vergils unterrichtete Donatus seine Schüler auch in den Komödien des Terenz, die etwas anders, aber ebenso herausfordernd waren. Das Vokabular und der Satzbau des Terenz war archaisch für Leser der Spätantike. Die Komödie bedient sich einer deutlich weniger formellen Sprachebene als die Epische Dichtung, jedoch wird sich das Idiom der spätantiken Schüler deutlich von jener des Terenz unterscheiden haben. Die Dramen des Terenz enthalten viel Humor und das ist besonders schwer zu unterrichten, weil das Erklären von Witzen diese häufig ruiniert. In diesem Aufsatz untersuche ich wie Donatus diese verschiedenen*

*Probleme gelöst hat. Ich zeige wie er mit sprachlichen Herausforderungen umgegangen ist, beispielsweise mit der archaischen Sprache und dem frühen Unterhaltungsstil. Ich erforsche die Art und Weise in welcher er sicher stellen wollte dass seine Schüler den Plot und die Handlung verstanden. Und schließlich bewerte ich wie Donatus mit dem Humor umging. Wie stellte er sicher, dass seine Schüler die Witze verstanden ohne deren Humor zu zerstören? Ich stütze diese Untersuchung auf das Wissen, das wir über die Aktivitäten und Interaktion des spätantiken Klassenzimmers haben, dabei stelle ich Donatus in den erzieherischen Kontext neben Servius.*

### **1.1. Introduction**

Virgil's *Aeneid* was a staple reading text in the late Roman classroom. It is evident from Servius's commentary that Virgil's epic was a challenging text for late antique students to study for a number of reasons. Epic verse is both highly stylised and frequently consciously archaic, and it is set in a far distant mythological world that often requires considerable explanation for a young reader to make sense of it. However, the late Roman curriculum extended beyond Virgil's poetry, as Donatus (and others) also taught students the comedies of Terence. These plays present slightly different, but no less significant, challenges. Terence's Latin may be described as ante-classical since he lived over a century before the standardisation of the register that was to become understood as Classical Latin. As such, Terence's vocabulary and syntax were significantly archaic for late antique students, who would have needed support to understand some of the expressions that characters use. Robert Maltby has shown that Donatus's stylistic comments on Terence aimed to teach not just literary analysis of the plays, but also knowledge of correct contemporary Latin.<sup>1</sup> This is something that Servius does frequently in his commentary on Virgil.<sup>2</sup> However, the genre of comedy — and the frequently fast paced dialogue in such dramatic texts — uses a very different register of language, and in many ways a far less formal register than epic verse. These conversational and colloquial elements in the text may have felt quite alien to late antique students, since their own native idiom would have differed significantly from that of Terence. Moreover, comic stagecraft sometimes requires characters to step outside the main action and speak directly to the audience, in order to explain their thoughts and motivations. Such statements can feel quite unnatural when reading (rather than watching) the play, and may employ a variety of linguistic registers. Terence's plays are comedies, and contain considerable humour to amuse the audience, both linguistic and physical (such as gesture, clowning and impersonation) — and this can be challenging to access without watching a performance. Humour is

<sup>1</sup> MALTBY 2014.

<sup>2</sup> FOSTER 2019.

particularly difficult to teach, since explaining the jokes frequently ruins their humour.

In this paper, I examine how Donatus addresses these various difficulties that his students must have encountered when reading Terence. I show how he dealt with linguistic challenges, such as archaic language and early conversational idiom. I also explore the ways in which he tries to ensure that students understood the plot and action of the play, including those elements of stagecraft that are self-explanatory when watching a performance, but not so easy to follow when reading the text outside this context. And finally, I evaluate what it is possible to find out about how Donatus addressed perhaps the most difficult aspect of all: humour. How did he ensure that his students understood the jokes without ruining their humour? I ground this analysis in what we know about the activities and interactions that took place in late antique classrooms, both from the school scenes in the *Colloquia*, and from Servius's lengthier commentaries on Virgil. In doing so, I place Donatus into his educational context as a practitioner alongside Servius.

### **1.2. Donatus and his classroom**

Late Roman literary education particularly focused on creating distinct cultural capital, and as Peter Brown has observed, 'a late Roman education produced remarkable cultural homogeneity'<sup>3</sup>. Such an education was an expensive business, since sending a child to a good — and famous — *grammaticus* (such as Servius or Donatus) may have involved paying for the student's board and lodging in a different town as well as the teacher's fees. It was thus the preserve of wealthier citizens, and Raffaella Cribiore notes that those who experienced this literary education 'attained the mental fitness and the sense of identity required to be recognised as a person of culture: for the elite, education at this level was closer to a common experience'<sup>4</sup>. This common cultural capital served to identify members of the elite group, and served as a means by which they could recognise each other and affirm their common identity. Students in these schools studied literary texts which were for them already 'ancient', in order to learn good written and spoken Latin — and to use a range of different formal registers. They also learnt the metalanguage with which to talk about language and literature, as well as a range of cultural material including historical, geographical, mythological and religious information.

Chrysanthi Demetriou suggests that Donatus seems to have had a number of purposes in his teaching and that, in addition to his teaching of Latin language and literature, Donatus also enabled students to practise rhetoric and public speaking. She argues that, as many of the *scholia* analyse and explain particular pieces of action, Donatus also aimed at 'assisting the reader in understanding and interpreting

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<sup>3</sup> BROWN 1992, p. 39.

<sup>4</sup> CRIBIORE 2001, p. 187.

individual scenes'<sup>5</sup>. We can gather, from Servius's frequent corrections and clarifications, that students found many aspects of the curriculum challenging, and particularly struggled with reading Virgil's archaic and consciously literary style. It is likely that Terence's plays presented their own linguistic difficulties for students, even though the register of the plays is markedly different. If the experience of reading Virgil for late antique students can be compared to modern British students reading Shakespeare<sup>6</sup>, then reading Terence's comedies can perhaps best be likened to studying Shakespeare's comedies, particularly his *Comedy of Errors*, which takes its model from Roman comedies. This comparison does not take into account the fact that Terence's language is even more archaic than Virgil's, but it does highlight differences of register and audience. A play such as the *Comedy of Errors* tends to be immensely entertaining for audiences watching a performance in London's Globe Theatre, but it is quite another matter for young people studying it in a classroom context. Without actors performing the text on a stage, physical clowning has to be imagined and characters' mistaken identities, fast exits and subsequent re-entrances tend to be confusing rather than funny. It is likely that Roman students may have struggled with similar aspects of plot and action in Terence's plays when they read them in a classroom as opposed to seeing them performed in a theatre.

### 1.3. Learning in Late Roman Classrooms

In order to place Donatus into the context of late Roman education, it is helpful to outline what we know about how learning took place in the classroom. Ancient classrooms were not quiet spaces in which teachers spoke and students listened in silence. Our best evidence for how ancient schools operated and what students did while at school comes from the set of Latin and Greek bilingual dialogues known as the *Colloquia*. These late antique texts seem to have been used as ancient language learning materials, and they contain scenes set in schools narrated from the child's point of view. Eleanor Dickey suggests that the school sections of the *Colloquia* were probably composed in the Latin speaking West before the first century BCE, and then copied, used and adapted in subsequent centuries all over the Roman world<sup>7</sup>. They depict a wide range of student interaction and activities, and the classrooms in the scenes contain students at all levels, from the most basic to the advanced. They give an indication of the strong emphasis on oral work in ancient schools, since the students frequently need to perform their work aloud, rather than write in silence.

The *Colloquium Celtis* describes a scene in which students receive a piece of stimulus material, described as: passages of history, a story, rhetorical speeches and

<sup>5</sup> DEMETRIOU 2014, p. 787-788.

<sup>6</sup> FOSTER 2017, p. 277.

<sup>7</sup> DICKEY 2012, p. 21.

a long list of other alternatives, including extracts from comedies. The long list including many synonyms in this *Colloquium* is a feature of the *Celtis*, and was probably used to help vocabulary learning in the target language when the *Colloquium* was used for language learning. The students then return to their places and work on their tasks, some writing and others practising an oral task. After they have completed the task assigned to them, the students show their work to the teacher (or assistant teacher). Those who have prepared an oral task have to perform their work:

εἰς τάξιν ἀναγορεύουσιν ἕκαστος κατὰ τῆ<v> δύναμιν·

*in ordinem recitant quisque pro posse;*

“They recite in order, each one according to their capability;”

(*Colloquium Celtis*, 39c)

They seem to perform these recitations in front of others, both teachers and other students. The students in the *Colloquia* are required to pay attention to the manner in which they perform, as the narrator in the *Colloquium Stephani* explains,

προήνεγκα χεῖρα δεξιάν, ἀριστερὰν ὑπέστειλα πρὸς τὰ ἱμάτια. καὶ οὕτως ἤρξάμην ἀποδοῦναι καθὼς εἰλήφειν ἀναλήμματα·

*protuli manum dextram, sinistram perpressi ad vestimenta. et sic coepi reddere quomodo acceperam ediscenda:*

“I extended my right hand, I drew back/pressed my left hand to my clothing.

And thus I began to produce my work, just as I had received it to be learned:”

(*Colloquium Stephani*, 12b-13b)

The narrator focuses on taking the correct stance and posture for declamation before starting a prepared recitation. This suggests that others are listening and watching, since the visual clues to the speaker’s action highlight that they are about to speak in a formal declarative fashion. It also indicates that students must have been taught about aspects of formal gesture and posture, such as how to hold their bodies, where to look and how to use their arms while performing a formal speech.

Although the *Colloquia* tend to depict good, model students undertaking tasks obediently, there are moments when the students behave differently. In the *Colloquia Monacensia–Einsidlensia* there is a scene in which the narrator argues with a fellow student:

ἀλλ’ εὐθέως ὑπαγόρευσέν μοι συμμαθητής. Καὶ σύ, φησίν, ὑπαγόρευσόν μοι. εἶπον αὐτῷ· Ἀπόδος πρῶτον. καὶ εἶπέν μοι· Οὐκ εἶδες, ὅτε ἀπεδίδουν πρότερόν σου; καὶ εἶπον· Ψεύδη, οὐκ ἀπέδωκας.

*sed statim dictavit mihi condiscipulus. Et tu, inquit, dicta mihi. dixi ei: Redde primo. et dixit mihi: Non vidisti, cum redderem prior te? et dixi: Mentiris, non reddidisti.*

“But at once a fellow student dictated to me. ‘And you’, he said, ‘recite to me.’ I said to him, ‘You do yours first!’ And he said to me, ‘Didn’t you see, when I did mine before you?’ And I said, ‘You’re lying; you didn’t.’”

(*Colloquia Monacensia–Einsidlensia*, 2k-1)

This scene shows students performing and reciting to each other, even without a teacher listening. However, it also gives a flavour of (relatively) unregulated student interaction, where the students speak informally to each other, perhaps potentially raising their voices, judging by the narrator’s accusation that the other student is lying. The inclusion of a minor disagreement in this dialogue suggests that even in the language learning context of the *Colloquia*, students may have needed to learn to speak in different roles and registers, with appropriate tone and gesture. If students in Donatus’s classroom were reciting passages from the comedies of Terence, appropriate tone and gesture would have been important to make the meaning clear.

Several centuries earlier, Quintilian states that comic actors are very important for the study of rhetoric, and that their skills can be adapted for achieving different effects in delivering a speech:

*Debet etiam docere comoedus quomodo narrandum, qua sit auctoritate suadendum, qua concitatione consurgat ira, qui flexus deceat miserationem*

The comic actor should also teach how to deliver a narrative, how to persuade with authority, how to rouse an angry passion, what change of tone is fitting for compassion.

(Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 1·11·12)

Here, Quintilian suggests that the comic actor can model the various different performances required for a range of contexts. If students were constantly practising these skills and trying to achieve particular modes of delivery as befitting the context, passages from Terence’s comedies would have provided them with opportunities for a wide range of contexts and emotional effects. The variety of scenes and the naturally heightened emotions of the stage as well as the exaggerated situations inherent in comic drama lend themselves well to training in different rhetorical deliveries. It is difficult to deliver comic speeches and dialogues successfully without understanding the comedy in the scenes, and the humour is often more difficult to see unless the material is performed successfully. Therefore, in order for his students to recite and perform passages from the plays effectively, Donatus would have also needed to ensure they had some understanding of the jokes, ideally without ruining the humour. I read Donatus’s comments in the context of what may have taken place in a classroom setting, based on the evidence we have of activities in late Roman classrooms.

#### 1.4. *Donatus and his Commentary*

The text we possess which has Donatus's name attached to it is somewhat distant from the commentary that Donatus once wrote. James Zetzel has warned that what we have is a compilation of marginalia on Terence, which were probably put together from at least two manuscripts containing extracts (but not the whole) of Donatus's commentary, as well as notes from other sources which made up the marginalia<sup>8</sup>. Nonetheless, some of what Donatus wrote lies behind much of the text we have, even if it is very difficult to tell which comments reflect Donatus's observations and which stem from other sources. This is further complicated by the nature of commentary as a genre, since commentators make use of the commentaries of their predecessors in order to develop their own. Chrysanthi Demetriou acknowledges the problems facing scholars attempting to write about the commentary, given the numerous authorial hands involved in the creation of the surviving text. While Donatus is not the direct author of the corpus of surviving *scholia* with his name attached, the 'core' of these *scholia* reflects what Donatus wrote<sup>9</sup>. Following Demetriou, I treat the text we have as representative of Donatus's commentary, and therefore also representative of his teaching and classroom practices. I use the text edited by Paul Wessner (1902-1905) with italics for the second tradition, and on occasions supplemented by the editorial changes suggested by the *HyperDonatus* online project.

#### 2.1 *Linguistic Challenges: Archaisms*

If one of the reasons late antique students found Virgil's poetry challenging was because it seemed to them archaic, they must have found Terence's language significantly stranger. Donatus makes frequent remarks on archaic forms and distinguishes them from contemporary language use in his own day. Robert Maltby has observed that such remarks show that Donatus was aware that 'certain features that sounded archaic to him and his contemporaries would have been normal in Terence's time'<sup>10</sup>. Donatus needed to make it clear to students that the reason certain features sounded strange was because those words or expressions belonged to a much earlier era. Barrios-Lech points out that although Donatus possessed native-speaker intuitions about Latin, these intuitions were 'relevant to the variant of Latin spoken by the educated Romans of his own time' and he is sometimes wrong in his assessment of Terence's Latin<sup>11</sup>. Nonetheless, Donatus would still have had an accurate sense of contemporary Latin, and this is the type of Latin he needed his

<sup>8</sup> ZETZEL 2018, p. 254.

<sup>9</sup> DEMETRIOU 2014, p. 784.

<sup>10</sup> MALTBY 2014, p. 221.

<sup>11</sup> BARRIOS-LECH 2014, p. 8.

students to learn and use correctly. I have demonstrated how Servius addressed students who were not native Latin speakers<sup>12</sup> and it is likely that Donatus also taught some students who were not native Latin speakers. These students in particular would have needed guidance on archaic features in order that they did not copy them unwittingly.

In the *Adelphoe*, when Aeschinus knocks on Sostrata's door, he calls out *aperite aliquis actutum ostium!* ('Open the door immediately, someone!', 4·4·26). Donatus senses a problem with this expression and comments:

1 APERITE ALIQVIS ACTVTVM OSTIVM uim pluralem habet 'aliquis', quamuis singulare uideatur; non est enim aliquis nisi de multis. recte ergo 'aperite aliquis'. 2 ... proprie enim ueteres **et quis et aliquis et quisquam** non obseruabant quo genere aut quo numero declinarent. *est ergo figura ἀρχαϊσμός.*

1 APERITE ALIQVIS ACTVTVM OSTIVM there is a plural force in 'aliquis', although it seems to be a singular; for it is only possible to be 'someone' among many. Therefore the expression 'aperite aliquis' is correct. 2 ... For, properly speaking, the ancients did not observe a strict rule on the gender or number with which they declined the pronouns **quis (someone), aliquis (someone) and quisquam (someone)**. *It is therefore a figure of archaism.*

(Donatus, *Adelphoe* 4·4·26 / 634·1-2)

He starts by clarifying the use of the word *aliquis* ('someone') as the apparent subject of an imperative plural. He defends Terence's expression as *recte* ('correct') because he understands a plural sense behind the word 'someone', even though it is in the singular. He suggests that this arises because 'someone' only makes sense where there are many from which 'someone' may be singled out, in order to give an idea of the plurality. However, he subsequently warns the students about using *aliquis* in this way as it is an archaic feature, since the 'ancients' did not always decline the various pronouns meaning 'someone' in gender and number to agree with the noun they refer to. He concludes that this is an archaic figure, implying that this is not something students should imitate when composing their own texts. It is possible that students found Terence's expression confusing at this point, since Aeschinus makes his request in the plural, but knocks at the door of the widow Sostrata's house. There is some irony that the door is opened by Micio, who is talking to Sostrata as he comes out of the door. However, for students reading the text, this may be challenging to visualise, which in turn would make it more difficult to read aloud correctly and capture the sense of the exclamation. Students' errors in rendering this speech coherently perhaps required Donatus to clarify how the language functions and the reasons for it.

Elsewhere, Donatus gives further detail and contextualises archaic expression with literary evidence. In the *Andria*, when Simo describes Pamphilus's behaviour, he states that his son behaves in a way *quod plerique omnes faciunt adulescentuli*

<sup>12</sup> FOSTER 2017, p. 280.



(‘which almost all young men do’, 1·1·28). Donatus comments on the juxtaposition of two words:

3 PLERIQUE OMNES F· ἀρχαῖσμός est. — *nam errat, qui ‘plerique’ παρέλκον intellegit aut qui subdistinguit ‘plerique’ et sic infert ‘omnes’. hoc enim pro una parte orationis dixerunt ueteres eodem modo, quo Graeci ‘πάμπολλα’ et Latini ‘plus satis’ (Eunuch 1·2·5 / 85). — Naevius in bello Punico ‘plerique omnes subiguntur sub unum iudicium’.*

3 PLERIQUE OMNES FACIVNT it is an archaism. — *For it is wrong to understand plerique (‘very many’) as a pleonasm or to punctuate plerique by separating it from ‘omnes’ (‘all’). For the ancients made this into a single part of speech in the same way as the Greek πάμπολλα (‘very many’) and the Latin plus satis (‘more than enough’, Eunuch 1·2·5 / 85). — Naevius in the Punic War (libr. inc. frg. 14 M) writes, ‘almost all are brought under one judgement’.*

(Donatus, *Andria* 1·1·28 / 55·3)

Donatus explains that the words *plerique* (‘very many’) and *omnes* (‘all’) ought to be understood as a single unit of sense meaning ‘almost all’, rather than as a pleonasm in which ‘very many’ and ‘all’ repeat the same idea without qualifying or enhancing the meaning. He identifies this phrase as archaic, and the examples he provides of similar uses are taken from ante-classical Latin authors. He provides a second example from Terence, and a citation from the poet Naevius who lived a century earlier than Terence. Donatus selects the phrase *plus satis* from Terence’s *Eunuch*, and in his commentary on this play, he links this phrase back to *plerique omnes* in the *Andria*. He also provides a parallel example of a compound word in Greek.

Donatus focuses initially on both what the phrase means and how it should be read aloud. He points out that it is wrong to punctuate the phrase by separating *plerique* from *omnes*. This advice suggests that this was a common mistake students made when reading this passage aloud, assuming that there are two synonyms which have the same meaning, and thus pausing between the words rather than taking them as a single phrase. The references and quotations Donatus provides to other texts in which compound phrases occur seem to have different purposes. His reference to Terence’s *Eunuch* connects two instances of texts which students read in the school context, but the example phrase is different (‘more than enough’). Since his commentary on the *Eunuch* refers back to this phrase in the *Andria*, this suggests he expects his students to know the plays well enough to make the link between the two dramatic contexts and the two different phrases. His reference to Naevius, however, provides an example of another use of the same phrase as in the passage of Terence under discussion. We have no evidence that late antique students read the poetry of Naevius in school, but Donatus’s quotation and reference certainly suggests that they were expected to know something about his work. Donatus also draws a link to a compound word in Greek, πάμπολλα (very many), which is formed by combining two words together, πᾶς (all, every) and πῶς (all, every) and πῶς (all, every) and πῶς (all, every).

(many). The word *πάμπολλα* is extremely common in Greek and there are multiple instances of its occurrence in the *TLG*, from fifth century authors such as Plato and Aristophanes through to late antique technical works such as the medical texts of Oribasius and afterwards in later Byzantine writers. Donatus expects his students to recognise the word and its meaning, since he does not gloss this in Latin, as Servius might have done (although there are no instances of *‘πάμπολλα’* in Servius’s commentary), and nor does Donatus clarify from which words the compound is formed. The range of knowledge Donatus provides for students to learn about archaic uses of language and the parallels in other texts — and even in Greek — points towards some of the cultural capital which he required students to become familiar with. This comment is less prescriptive than Servius might have phrased similar information, because Donatus does not warn his students not to use these archaic forms. However, he provides arcane knowledge about language which students would probably not need to use in their own composition, but would need to understand the meaning of Terence’s language.

## ***2.2. Linguistic Challenges: Early Conversational Features***

The register of language Terence employs in his comedies is often that of the natural spoken idiom of his own day, rather than the formal written register which would have been used in texts such as epic verse. In one sense this might make the text easier to read since the conversational register is one that students may have been familiar with from their own everyday conversations — at least, in the school context, if they spoke another language at home. However, in another sense, Terence’s everyday idiom would have been significantly removed from that of Donatus’s students, since Terence lived some five centuries earlier. As Nigel Vincent has noted, there may be some features of the colloquial spoken language which become ‘submerged’ during the late republic and early empire, but resurface in late antiquity<sup>13</sup>. However, James Adams points out in his conclusion that it is very difficult to find evidence for the ‘continuity of the submerged’, and thus that any perceived similarities may have subtly different meanings at different chronological moments<sup>14</sup>. We might therefore expect that students in Donatus’s classroom might have found some aspects of Terence’s conversational Latin challenging, since it differed to their own spoken language. In this sense, the comparable Shakespearean text would be the prose (rather than verse) dialogues spoken between characters of lower social ranks, where ordinary Elizabethan and Jacobean conversational register dominates. Modern British students find such dialogue challenging, although for different reasons than those they encounter in high register verse. Unusual word order and high register vocabulary form particular challenges in verse, while in prose challenges arise from cultural changes

<sup>13</sup> VINCENT 2016, p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> ADAMS 2016, p. 420-401.

as well as linguistic. Modern teachers have to explain comments about gestures like biting your thumb at someone, since this is a cultural feature that has long been superseded by other (obscene) gestures with which modern students are familiar.

Sander M. Goldberg has observed that Donatus's commentary often reflects the struggles of his students 'to understand the subtleties of a colloquialism not quite their own'<sup>15</sup>. These colloquial features required explanation to allow students to read and recite passages from the play meaningfully, showing that they had understood the 'διάνοιαν ῥημάτων τοῦ ποιητοῦ' | '*sensum verborum au<c>toris*' ('meaning of the poet's / author's words') (*Colloquium Stephani*, 17c). In his commentary on the *Eunuch*, Donatus declares that,

*magna uirtus poetae est non sententias solum de consuetudine ac de medio tollere et ponere in comoedia, uerum etiam uerba quaedam ex communi sermone*

"the great quality of the poet is to take not only ideas about linguistic usage from the common people and to put them into comedy, but also expressions taken from everyday language"

(Donatus, *Eunuch*, 1.2.11 / 91.1)

Donatus praises Terence for his use of the rhetorical opposition between ideas (*sententiae*) and expressions (*uerba*), an aspect that his students would have needed to understand and imitate. However, he draws attention to Terence's use of ordinary conversational idiom as well as the way different characters use language. In this comment, he does not feel that the language under discussion needs explaining since it presumably made sense to his students. What is important for Donatus is that his students understand the way Terence manages the different linguistic registers in order to make an effective drama.

Later in the same play, Donatus comments on a list of low level occupations. These are everyday words, some of which seem no longer to have been current by Donatus's own day and therefore required explanation for his students to understand the details. In a long monologue, Gnatho describes that when he went to the market, all sorts of people came up to him, including *cetarii lanii coqui fartores piscatores* ('fish-merchants, butchers, cooks, sausage makers, fishmongers', *Eunuch*, 2.2.26 / 257). Donatus explains what each of the different sellers are:

1 LANII qui 'laniant' pecora; unde et 'lanistae' dicti, qui 'laniandis' praesunt gladiatoribus. 2 Sic et 'macellum' a 'mactandis' pecoribus dictum. 3 PISCATORES qui recentem piscem praebent. 4 FARTORES qui insicia et farcimina faciunt. 5 CETARII qui cete, id est magnos pisces, uenditant et bolonas exercent.

"1 LANII butchers who 'cut' livestock into pieces; hence those who condemn gladiators to butchery are also called 'lanistae'. 2 Thus the word 'macellum' also comes from the verb meaning to slaughter ('mactare') cattle. 3

<sup>15</sup> GOLDBERG 2020, p. 86.

PISCATORES fishmongers who sell fresh fish. 4 FARTORES those who make stuffing and sausages. 5 CETARII fish-merchants who sell large sea animals, *that is, big fish*, and work as fishmongers.”

(Donatus, *Eunuch*, 2·2·26 / 257·1-5)

Donatus does not gloss the meaning of the word *lanius* (‘butcher’), but instead he focuses on ensuring students understand its derivatives and related words. He links the noun *lanius* to the verb *lanio* (‘I tear, mangle, lacerate’), and then declares that this is the root from which the word *lanista* (‘trainer of gladiators’) comes, since the *lanista* oversees the butchery of gladiators. This information is not relevant to understanding the content of Gnatho’s speech, and goes beyond the subject matter of the play. The note continues (in the other tradition, italicised following Wessner) to explain that the word for a butcher’s shop or a meat market, *macellum*, also comes from a verb meaning to slaughter, *mactare*. Gnatho uses the word *macellum* earlier in the same sentence, although Donatus makes no comment on it at that point (perhaps due to the nature of our transmitted text), so it is important for students to know this word in the context of reading Terence. Donatus does not define these words, suggesting that their meanings were familiar enough for his students to know what they meant. Instead, his focus on the etymologies and related words indicates that he expects his students to have an understanding of the way these words are linked, perhaps so that they can use any of these vocabulary items more sensitively in their own compositions.

Gnatho uses two words for people who sell fish, and Donatus disambiguates both of these and clarifies the meaning of the second. The first, *piscator*, is a very common word, which continues to be used in later Latin and particularly in Christian texts. Servius assumes that his students will know it, as he uses it without qualification (for example, at *Aeneid* 5·823). Donatus disambiguates its meaning from the much less common *cetarius*, explaining that the *piscator* sells fresh fish. It is interesting that his explanation for the *cetarius* starts by stating that they sell sea creatures called *cete*, even though this word requires further definition as *magni pisces* (‘big fish’). This part of the note feels garbled because of the structure and repetition, but the juxtaposition of the words *cetarius* and *cetus* suggests that Donatus again focused on the lexical relationship between the two words. The *TLL* gives a number of instances of the word *cetarius*, but many of these occur in glosses on this line of Terence’s *Eunuch* (3·964·55- 965·7). Other instances are generally rather specialised, such as in works by Columella and Varro, which students would have been unlikely to read first hand. The word is not recorded in Niemeyer’s *Medieval Latin Dictionary* and there are no descendents in Romance languages listed in Meyer-Lübke’s etymological dictionary. It is likely, therefore, that Donatus’s students were unfamiliar with the word *cetarius*, which had probably been conversational for Terence, but had become highly specialised and archaic by late antiquity. Its relative *cetus* is a Greek loan word, which occurs occasionally in literary texts students would have read, such as *Aeneid* 5·822. The supplementary

gloss explaining that *cetus* means big fish might suggest that this word was not always known by students. Servius also feels that students require assistance with this word, since he starts by demonstrating how it should be declined following Greek as a neuter noun before stating that these creatures *dicuntur canes marini* ('are called sea dogs', *Aeneid* 5·822). Servius usually provides support in declining Greek loan words when they do not form part of students' everyday language, and this suggests that the word *cetus* was not used conversationally in the mid and late fourth century.

Donatus provides a further gloss about what *cetarii* do. In addition to selling *cete*, he tells students that they also work as *bolonae*. This is another Greek loan word, but this time it seems to have been in everyday conversational use in late antiquity, since Donatus uses it to define a less well-known word. Lewis and Short<sup>16</sup> list the word *bolonas* as post-classical, and the *TLL* records very few instances of its use in written texts — aside from this instance in Donatus, it is used once by the Christian writer Arnobius Afer, and appears five times in Goetz's *Corpus Glossariorum Latinorum* (*TLL* 2·67·66-75). It is likely that Donatus has chosen the Greek loan word *bolonas* because it best represents the informal and conversational register of Terence's *cetarius*. Although *bolonas* appears not to have been commonly used in written language, Donatus does not warn students against its use, where by contrast Servius tends to be more prescriptive about students' use of nonstandard Latin words. It is possible, therefore, that the activities Donatus expected students to undertake as a result of reading Terence required a different register of Latin, in which some level of contemporary colloquial language was more acceptable.

### 2.3. Plot and Stagecraft

The plot of comic drama can be quite complicated, since a multiplicity of characters and mistaken identities are key ingredients. As Beatrice DaVela has noted, however, Terence's comedies are 'relatively understandable in terms of register'<sup>17</sup>, and the language would probably have felt easier than reading epic verse for late antique students. Nevertheless, the various elements of stagecraft which are evident when watching the play may be less obvious to students reading the text in a classroom context. Donatus sometimes clarifies elements about complexity of plot, and at other times he tries to ensure that students are aware of how the action works in performance. Terence's *Phormio* contains a complex plot of marriages and mistaken identities. The main character Demipho has a son who has recently married, and a brother who has two wives. Donatus observes:

<sup>16</sup> LEWIS and SHORT 1879, p. 243.

<sup>17</sup> DAVELA, 2017, p. 171.

nulla mentio fit uxoris apud Demiphonem — non enim conuenit argumento ut habeat ... causa enim quaesita est cur abesset, dum uxorem ducit Antipho, et causa ex argumento, id est auaritia, et quominus uideatur pati nurum pauperem.

“There is no mention of a wife in the case of Demipho — because it does not fit the subject matter that he has one ... So the problem is to know where he was while Antipho got married, and the reason comes from the plot — it is his greed, and to avoid seeming to endure a poor daughter-in-law.”

(*Phormio*, 2·1·81 / 311·1)

This narrative was perhaps necessitated by students who struggled with following which character is married, and the circumstances surrounding that marriage. He explains that Demipho’s wife does not feature in the plot, since the play focuses on his attitude to his son’s wife. Although this part of the plot is fairly straightforward, it is complicated by Demipho’s brother Chremes, who has one wife in Athens, and another in Lemnos. In addition, at the start of the play, both brothers are away from Athens, one in Lemnos, the other in Cilicia (visiting his second wife). Students could easily have confused the two old men and their journeys, thinking that Demipho had gone to Cilicia to visit a wife. Such a misunderstanding could have occasioned Donatus’s explanation.

The stagecraft of comedy requires various characters to address the audience, in a soliloquy to explain their thoughts. When the slave Davus is left by himself on stage, he speaks to the audience about his thoughts and fears for his master. Donatus notes:

hic breuis et comica deliberatio est magna expectatione populum rerum imminentium commotura, aestuantis Dauis consideratione proposita.

“Here is a brief and comical deliberation, intended to provoke great expectation in the audience of imminent events and to show a portrayal of Davus agitated.”

(*Andria*, 1·3·1 / 206·1)

Donatus gives dramatic reasons about why Davus speaks directly to the audience. He suggests that the speech helps to portray Davus’s character and his agitation, as well as moving on the plot and raising the audience’s expectations about what will happen. He also points out that the speech is meant to be funny — it is a *comica deliberatio* (‘comical deliberation’) prompting the audience to laugh at Davus.

#### 2.4. *Humour and Comedy*

Chrysanthi Demetriou has examined the ways in which Donatus comments on gesture<sup>18</sup> and Rainer Jakobi has considered the ways in which the commentary

<sup>18</sup> DEMETRIOU 2014 and 2015.

indicates the use of *ethopoeiae* in the classroom<sup>19</sup>. These studies are helpful in understanding how Donatus was interested in ensuring that students understood the dramatic nature of the text, and how to perform readings from the text. However, comedy is an essential part of the success of Terence's plays. It is difficult to convince students of the comic value of a speech by telling them that it is supposed to be funny, because when they read it to themselves without an actor's skill and the context of the stage, it is rarely funny. As Edwin Rabbie observes, some forms of humour rely on shared knowledge between the speaker and the audience, and even though the reader may be supplied with the necessary background knowledge, 'once a joke has to be explained, it is no longer funny'<sup>20</sup>. This makes comedy and humour possibly the hardest aspect of Terence to teach, since these difficulties may leave students largely unconvinced of the comic value of what they have studied. Cicero already noted that humour is very difficult to teach (*De Oratore*, 2.2.2), but, as Rabbie notes, humour and wit were essential components of rhetorical training from the time of Quintilian<sup>21</sup>. While the text we have is a poor representation, both of Donatus's actual commentary, and of what he might have said and done in the classroom with students, I would like to explore if it is possible to gain any insight from the text into how Donatus dealt with this aspect of Terence's plays.

At the end of Gnatho's list of occupations from the *Eunuch* which I analysed for comments on colloquial language above, Donatus observes that the list is itself amusing:

σχήμα comicum, nam in palliata Romanas res loquitur.

'It is a comical figure because in a play in Greek costume we are talking about Roman realities.'

(*Eunuch*, 2.2.26 / 257.6)

He reminds students that, despite the Roman details, the play is set in an imaginary Greek world, and that the juxtaposition of banal Roman details with the idealised Greek setting is humorous. This must have been a difficult idea to communicate fully to students (beyond the idea that it is *supposed* to be funny), since this type of humour is dependent on setting, costume and context, which the classroom would lack.

A more straightforward aspect of humour for students to appreciate is humour linked to characters. Donatus makes a number of comments about the portrayal of characters and their roles in comedy. Ancient (and, indeed, early modern) dramas were constructed around stock characters such as the young lover, the cunning slave and the old man. An understanding of how these roles functioned and the linguistic features associated with each role would have helped students when reciting a

<sup>19</sup> JAKOBI 1996, p. 158-175.

<sup>20</sup> RABBIE 2007, p. 208.

<sup>21</sup> RABBIE 2007, p. 217.

passage from the text in character. At the beginning of the *Eunuch*, the slave Parmeno tells his master Phaedria (a young lover) that love is a business which has *in se neque consilium neque modum* ('in itself neither sense nor moderation', *Eunuch*, 1·1·12 / 57). Donatus notes that:

concessum est in palliata poetis comicis seruos dominis sapientiores fingere,  
quod idem in togata non fere licet.

"It is allowed to comic poets, in the *palliata*, to portray slaves wiser than their masters, which is scarcely allowed in the *togata*."

(*Eunuch*, 1·1·12 / 57)

Donatus draws students' attention to the way in which the slave advises his master, and highlights that this is a feature of the Greek-style *palliata*. It alerts the students to the relationship between the two characters, so that they are aware of the ways in which the slave advises and manipulates his master. In a classroom activity, this may have encouraged students reading the parts of Parmeno and Phaedria to emphasise the role-reversal between master and slave, which — for them — would have been very unlike daily life.

Donatus develops these ideas about the characters in his comments on a later dialogue. In the *Eunuch*, when the soldier Thraso first appears on stage, he talks to his crafty hanger-on, Gnatho and boasts about a smart remark he made at a dinner, claiming that everyone present nearly died of laughing (*risu omnes qui aderant emoriri*, *Eunuch*, 3·1·42 / 432). Donatus makes some observations on the soldier's character and use of language:

disciplina est comicis ut stultas sententias ita etiam uitiosa uerba ascribere  
ridiculis imperitisque personis, ut Plautus 'ibus denumerem stipendium' inquit  
ex persona militis. itaque hic 'emoriri' dixit, at uero Atticus adulescens in  
*Heautontimoromenos* 'emori cupio'. uide igitur poetam pro loco ac tempore  
scire quid dicat.

"It is the practice among comic writers to attribute stupid statements and also incorrect words to ridiculous and unskilled characters, as Plautus makes the soldier character say 'so I may count out pay for them' (*Miles Gloriosus*, 1·1·74). This is why he says *emoriri* here, whereas the Attic young man in *The Heautontimoromenos* says 'I want to die' (5·2·18). See, then, that the poet knows what to say according to the place and time."

(*Eunuch*, 3·1·42 / 432)

As Robert Maltby has pointed out, Terence's use of the archaic infinitive *emoriri* may be either intentional linguistic characterisation or may reflect the changing verbal system of his own time<sup>22</sup>. However, Donatus takes the unusually archaic form as an indication of the soldier's character, pointing out that ridiculous and ignorant characters use stupid statements and incorrect words. Petronius

<sup>22</sup> MALTBY 2014, p. 219.



similarly uses informal and nonclassical verb forms to represent the speech of his lower class characters, such as forming *loquor* ('I speak') as an active, rather than deponent, verb (Petronius, *Satyricon*, 46·1). The figure of a braggart (and ignorant) soldier is one of the stock character types, such as the protagonist of Plautus's *Miles Gloriosus*. Donatus links the figure of Thraso to Plautus's soldier and thus he signals to students what kind of a character they have encountered in the text. By explicitly pointing out that the soldier is the sort of character who speaks incorrect words and stupid statements, Donatus indicates the way in which the character's lines should be spoken. He defends Terence's use of inaccurate language in this context, because it is linked to character, and while he does not warn students not to write like this in their own compositions, his imperative *uide* ('see') instructs students directly to observe why the playwright has used language in a nonstandard way. A student performing the part of Thraso might have been encouraged to imitate an idiotic and self-aggrandising figure, and, if they performed the part well, their fellow-students will have been shown (rather than simply told) the humour.

Later in the same scene, Thraso complains to Gnatho that the latter's plan would work only if Thais was actually in love with him, thus showing that he has not been totally fooled. Donatus points out that this does not detract from the stereotype of the braggart soldier:

*Et hoc miles ut sapiens locutus est. ergo meminisse conuenit ridiculas personas non omnino stultas et excordes induci a poetis comicis, nam nulla delectatio est, ubi omnino qui deluditur nihil sapit.*

"And the soldier said this as if he was intelligent. It should therefore be remembered that ridiculous characters are not always portrayed by comic poets as brainless idiots; indeed, there is no pleasure when the character being performed has absolutely no intelligence."

(*Eunuch*, 3·1·56 / 446·2)

This comment reminds students that there is a limit to the extent to which the character can be portrayed as stupid or brainless, and that it is only funny if it is not taken too much to the extreme. If a student took their performance of the soldier too far, and acted too much of a clown, it would not be funny. He also reminds the students that Thraso appears not to have been deceived by Thais, and has some understanding of the action. This comment may have arisen to restrain students' interpretation of the braggart, so that they could learn the extent to which acting as an idiot leads to humour. It also helps the student reading Gnatho's part to develop a more cunning approach to manipulating Thraso.

### 3. Conclusion

There is no surviving evidence that any theatrical comedies in the style of Terence were written and performed in late antiquity. It is not clear whether early Latin comedies by Plautus and Terence were still performed in late antique theatres,

although Patrick Kragelund has argued that evidence from Donatus, alongside contemporary material objects, strongly suggests that performances might well have taken place<sup>23</sup>. The genre of comic theatre seems to have been itself archaic in Donatus's time, even if some performances still took place. Nonetheless, Terence's plays remained key educational materials in late antiquity, even if the form and language of the plays was out of date. A century after Donatus, Sidonius Apollinaris teases his acquaintance Domitius that Domitius has stayed in the heat of the city to teach Terence's plays, instead of joining him in the countryside (*Epistles* 2·2·2). Elsewhere, Sidonius describes reading Terence with his own son (*Epistles*, 4·12·1). What, therefore, did it mean to teach texts so archaic, in both language and form, and so far removed from anything students might have been expected to compose themselves? In spite of all the difficulties inherent in the task, Donatus does seem to want his students to understand how Terence used language for characterisation, and how the humour worked. Late antique writers such as Ausonius and Sidonius knew how to use and manipulate wit and humour in sophisticated ways in their writings. This skill would have needed to be learnt, through examples and careful practice, and may have involved activities with an altered focus from more formal compositions.

Donatus seems to be less prescriptive in his teaching of Terence's plays than Servius feels he has to be in his own teaching of Virgil's epic. One reason for this may lie in the tasks which he expected students to undertake in the context of reading Terence. If the *Aeneid* encouraged more formal recitations and compositions, perhaps Terence's dramas occasioned different kinds of reading and composing tasks, in which creation of stereotypical characters, informal language and jokes were more acceptable, so long as they were used appropriately to the context. Sander Goldberg has pointed out that the breadth of Donatus's commentary seems to suggest that his goals in the classroom were wider than what we expect to gain from studying Terence today. He observes that we don't read (or teach) Terence 'to improve our Latin style or our ability to speak in character or our grasp of rhetorical figures and their power'<sup>24</sup>. These were many of the goals of the Roman classroom, and students read texts in order to gain specific linguistic and performance skills. Some of these skills required students to learn linguistic and cultural knowledge that might seem to us arcane and not always relevant to their daily lives. However, these were skills required in adult life by the elite who exercised power through law, politics and government. Students attending an elite school in Rome such as Donatus's or Servius's also needed to be trained to participate in aristocratic exchanges, often full of witticisms. The arcane and highly specialised nature of the knowledge they learnt and the skills they practised in

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<sup>23</sup> KRAGELUND 2012, p. 420.

<sup>24</sup> GOLDBERG 2020, p. 99.

school allowed those who had undergone such training to be recognised and position themselves as members of this elite.

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