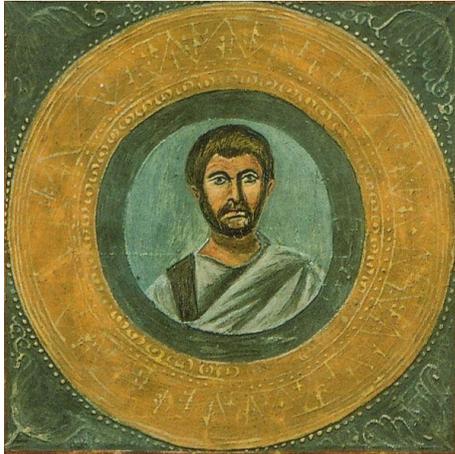


Publius Terentius Afer

Publius Terentius Afer, a Phoenician, was born about 190 B.C. in Carthage. He was brought to Rome as a slave, but his master quickly recognized the young man's potential and chose not only to emancipate him, but to provide him with a classic Roman education.



Unlike Plautus, Terence was not the people's poet, but the darling of the aristocracy. His refined literary abilities made the young man a popular companion of the cosmopolitans of high society. He even won the admiration of figures such as Cicero and Horace.

Terence took for his springboard the comedies of Menander. His first play, *Andria*--which was written at the age of nineteen--was later adapted by Richard Steele in *The Conscious Lovers*. The only one of Terence's plays not adapted from Menander was *Phormio*, which was based on the work of Apollodorus, another writer of New Comedy. Moliere, in turn, adapted *Phormio* in one of his earliest plays, *The Trickeries of Scapin*.

From his first play to his last, Terence's works became more and more polished. He cared little about public taste. Instead, he devoted himself to capturing the spirit of the Greek originals which he adapted. However, this did not necessarily mean exact translations, for Terence felt free to adapt them as he pleased.

Terence tried to cultivate a certain refinement of sentiment. He does not laugh so much as smile, and instead of ridicule he employs irony. Among the Roman playwrights, he is perhaps the only one who aimed at perfection rather than at instant pleasure. His characterization is subtle, and his dialogue combines grace with economy.

His output was meager not only because he was lost at sea when he was about thirty on a journey to Greece, but because he was a scrupulous stylist.

The taste of the impatient Roman populace, however, denied him widespread popularity. They preferred the coarse jokes of a playwright such as Plautus over the refined sentiment of Publius Terentius Afer.

Terence's Plays:

- *Andria* (*The Girl from Andros*) (166 BC)
- *Hecyra* (*The Mother-in-Law*) (165 BC)
- *Heauton Timorumenos* (*The Self-Tormentor*) (163 BC)
- *Phormio* (161 BC)
- *Eunuchus* (161 BC)
- *Adelphoe* (*The Brothers*) (160 BC)