

Alienation in Terence: When You Feel You Don't Belong

This paper is about the notion of alienation in Terence and the way the playwright contrasts *alienum* and *suum* to reveal how comfortable characters feel in their social relationships, whether inside or outside the family.

The path towards marriage and union in Terence's plays is riddled with obstacles, as in other New Comedy: struggles arise because of a girl's status, a father's disapproval, conflicting marriage arrangements, and other problems as well. Terence often marks these difficulties between households with the word *alienus*: in the *Andria*, Chremes admits he felt *alienus* towards the boy who wants to marry his daughter (998a); in the *Hecyra*, Pamphilus tells his father that his estranged wife has an *animus alienum* to him (668; see Goldberg 2013 *ad* 158); and in the *Adelphoe*, Geta tells Sostrata that Aeschinus, who had promised to marry her daughter, is in fact *alienus ab nostra familia* (326; see also *alieno animo* in 338).

In some of his plays, however, Terence uses *alienus* not only to indicate disaffection *between* families, but also for the isolation a character feels in his own family. Instead of a distinction between *alienum* and *suum*, in other words, he feels like an outsider at home. I focus here on the *Heauton Timoroumenos* and the *Adelphoe*, plays where the issue of adoption only adds to a character's sense of not belonging. In the first play, a son accuses his mother and father of not being his true parents because they treat him so harshly. In the second, it is a father who feels isolated from his sons, one of whom he gave to his brother to raise. Both plays end happily, with the relationships between father and son apparently repaired. Yet in using *alienus* for conflicts that arise within a family as well as between separate households, Terence blurs the lines between outsiders and insiders. He shows characters' doubts about where they belong, suggesting a kind of confusion and instability within the home.

I look first at the *Adelphoe*. The issue of estrangement between households is raised in connection with Aeschinus and what looks like his broken promise to Sostrata's daughter (mentioned above). Yet this rupture is juxtaposed with the alienation within Aeschinus' own family over what role Demea should play. Though Demea has given his son Aeschinus to his brother Micio to raise, he has relinquished none of his parental concern, and his involvement causes tensions throughout the play. While he insists *non alienus sum* (137), the very fact that he needs to say this indicates how marginalized he feels. At least until the surprise ending when he regains control, Demea is cast as the laughing-stock of the rest of the family, an outsider without knowledge or authority over his family. The depiction of Demea's isolation from his family helps illuminate the more positive notion of belonging and what it would mean to feel comfortable and at ease (see Traill 2013).

The lines between insider and outsider are even more blurry in the *Heauton Timoroumenos*. In a famous exchange at the play's opening, Chremes justifies his meddling in Menedemus' own affairs by claiming that *humani nil a me alienum puto* (77). The play explores Chremes' "good intentions" as well as his ignorance about how his own son has behaved; ironically, what he thought was Menedemus' situation turns out to be his own (see 503-5, and on Cicero's quotations of this line, Manuwald 2014). But while the distinction between *alienum* and *suum* at first serves to define the relationship between the two fathers, the same vocabulary is later used to describe Chremes' household alone. Chremes' son, Clitipho, thinks real parents would be more understanding of his mistakes. When his mother begs him not to even think he is *alienus*, he answers simply *sum* (1028-9). An earlier scene had Chremes acknowledging the discovery of a daughter he thought had been exposed; here it appears that Clitipho needs a "recognition scene" of his own. Outsiders have turned out to be insiders, while insiders think

they are outsiders. Terence's use of *alienus* thus goes beyond any straightforward marking of kinship relationships. It brings out more fundamental questions about belonging within the family, even at the very threshold of marriage and union with another household.

Bibliography

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