

Demea and Crude Exemplarity in Terence's *Adelphoe*

This paper argues that an unsophisticated embrace of behavioral exempla is a key element of the grouch Demea's characterization in Terence's *Adelphoe*. It is one, moreover, which helps make sense of Demea's seemingly inconsistent shift from a stated intention at the play's climax to outdo his brother Micio in indulgence in order to win back the love of his two sons to the intentional humiliation of Micio through such "generosity" (see Traill 2013's survey).

Scholarship has often characterized Demea as a sendup of the conservative Roman *paterfamilias* (Rieth 1964, Lehmann 2003), in no small part as a result of the character's repeated insistence on the importance of molding proper behavior through exempla (94, 415-416 with Leach 1971, 767, 771). Terence even has the *servus callidus* Syrus provide an incisive critique of Demea's overly literal approach to exemplarity, humorously likening how Demea models behavior for his son to his own process of instructing fellow slaves in preparing fish through pointing out good and bad technique (412-432). The comparison is doubly deflationary: First, it calls attention to the mismatch between "slavish" technical instruction, in which absolute rules are appropriate, and the more complex task of ethical formation (equating the former's *peccata* with the latter's *flagitia*, so Donatus ad 422). Second, through admitting that his fellow slaves ignore him due to their different character (431), Syrus ironically alludes to the failure of Demea's own parenting, still unknown to the latter.

Once Demea learns that Micio has actively abetted both his sons in love affairs that Demea's stern morality rejects as unbecoming, he marvels at how easily indulgence buys filial loyalty (860-865). Crucially, he also expresses amazement at how his brother's cheap (*paullo sumptu*) and easy actions erase any gratitude owed for his own larger and longer-term investment

in what he envisioned for his sons' futures (868-876). In the final act, the crudely imitative Demea thus attempts to mimic both aspects of his brother's success, giving way to his sons' fancies in a manner that has them simultaneously shortchange the gratitude and loyalty they should now owe Micio. Rather than a fun bachelor uncle, Micio finds himself, at Demea's insistence, pushed by his son Aeschinus into becoming the elderly fiancé of the boy's bride's widowed mother.

Some scholars have also been surprised at the miser Demea's willingness to go so far as contributing a small sum of his own money as part of a stratagem to have Aeschinus also pressure his brother into manumitting their slave Syrus (see Martin 1976 on 977). But the effort imitates Micio's own minor outlays as part of what Demea has interpreted as a gambit to steal away his children's love. Ultimately, Micio's more generous and flexible character means he reacts with good nature to the seemingly adverse situations into which Demea forces him, so that the latter's enacted exemplum (985-988) does not entirely produce its desired emotional effect. This underlines the play's sub-theme that ethical behavior is a more complex matter than simple imitation can accommodate (cf. Langlands 2018).

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