



**Terence's *Phormio*:  
Italian translation and commentary**

**Dottoranda: Manuela Crimi  
Tutor: Prof. Maurizio Massimo Bianco**

**Abstract / Summary**

The aim of this project is to study and analyze a Terence's comedy, *Phormio*: starting from a careful textual analysis, the project intends to produce a translation with commentary, accompanied by an extensive introductory section that is both scientifically rigorous and wide-ranging; this introduction will address the historical and social context of the play, its linguistic, stylistic, metrical and rhetorical features, its variety of characters and characterisations, and its theatrical dynamics. The choice of *Phormio* stems primarily from the scarcity of Italian translations with detailed commentary. Several translations exist with introductions and occasional notes (Bonfanti 2009; Zanetto 1991; Bertini – Faggi – Reverdito 1989; Ronconi 1969), while more substantial commentaries accompany those by Bianco (1993) and Pratesi (1953), the latter now rather dated. Accurate commentaries in other languages do exist (notably Martin 1959), yet there remains a clear need for an updated, rich, detailed, accurate and comprehensive study to accompany the Italian translation. The proposed work aims to fill this gap by offering an in-depth analysis that incorporates the most recent scholarship on Terence and on this comedy.

**Description of the project and objectives**

The project aims to provide a rigorous and as complete as possible study of *Phormio*, a comedy that occupies a unique place in Terence's *corpus*, starting with its "plautine" title. The plot, as the title itself suggests, revolves around *Phormio*, a parasite who not only lives at others' expense but, as the ending shows, arrives at the banquet already "sated" by the artful tricks he has devised throughout the play. *Phormio* is thus a comedy of intrigue and action, bringing Terence closer to plautine dramaturgy and distancing him from the long-standing view that prioritises the reflective dimension of his theatre over its dynamism. The play's richness lies in its fast-paced dialogue and constant interplay of action and reflection, qualities that make it particularly suited to performance. Terence himself uses its prologue as a manifesto to counter accusations of "*scriptura levis*" (v. 5). Building on



these elements, the project intends to revitalise the theatrical, dramatic and dramaturgical perspective of Terence's work, as already demonstrated by several studies (Haffter 1969; Ronconi 1972; Frangoulidis 1996; Knorr 2007; Bianco 2010). An in-depth study that restores a talented playwright to the theatre.

The research will produce a modern and reliable translation that respects the original play and Latin language with all its semantic nuances, while remaining accessible to contemporary readers and potentially adaptable for performance. Close reading of the text will be followed by lexical analysis, with attention to word usage and etymology. Terence's language will be examined in its specific features and compared with plautine diction (with Traina 1999 as an essential reference), in order to show that Terence's style—often deemed less “effective”—is in fact a comic, dramatic language rich in expressive devices.

This linguistic analysis will serve as the basis for a broader commentary that integrates historical and social considerations, exploring how the cultural context of Rome and the author's literary background shaped *Phormio*.

Although producing a new critical edition is not the primary objective, the commentary will nevertheless discuss significant textual problems. The reference edition will be Kauer–Lindsay (1958), supplemented by comparison with other editions when necessary (e.g. Barsby 2001).

A thorough bibliographic review will accompany the entire project, taking into account existing studies on *Phormio*, on Terence, and on Roman comedy more broadly. While the scholarship on *Phormio* includes many valuable contributions, the present study aims to offer a comprehensive synthesis and to relaunch the themes and critical questions raised by the play.

The analysis will focus on theatrical dynamics, on the structure of the plot, and on the distinctive nature of the prologue, with its references to contemporary literary controversies. Particular attention will be devoted to characterisation: the play features a structural pattern typical of Terence, with a pair of old men set against a pair of young lovers, who in turn pursue two young women embodying traditional comic types. Alongside them are two schemers—servant and parasite—among whom the latter stands out for his self-assurance, which soon made him a proverbial figure in Latin culture. Given the testimony of ancient sources such as Donatus, the project will also examine the “fortune” of *Phormio* in antiquity and beyond (among the most recent studies, Cupaiuolo 2015; Giovini 2010; Consoli 2009; and others, including the reception studies collected in Augoustakis – Traill – Thornburn 2013).

Finally, the study will highlight the innovations introduced by *Phormio* within Terence's *corpus*, its relationship with plautine tradition, and the balance it strikes between inherited conventions and



original solutions. Since cultural contextualisation is indispensable, the project will also bring to light the universal reflections on human nature that permeate the play, elements without which any study of Terence would be incomplete.

### Bibliography

- A. Augoustakis, A.E. Traill, J. E. Thornburn (edited by), *A Companion to Terence*, Oxford 2013, 341-481
- J. Barsby (edited by), *Phormio*, The mother-in-law, The brothers, Cambridge 2001
- F. Bertini, V. Faggi, G. Reverdito (a cura di), *Terenzio*, Le Commedie, Milano 1989
- M.M. Bianco, Prove tecniche di recitazione in Terenzio: il volto della messinscena, in *“Comicum choragium: effetti di scena nella commedia antica”*, a cura di G. Petrone e M. M. Bianco, Palermo 2010, 107-122
- O. Bianco (a cura di), *Commedie di Publio Terenzio Afro*, Torino 1993
- M. Bonfanti (a cura di), *Eunuchus – Phormio*, Milano 2009
- M. E. Consoli, Il teatro di Terenzio nel commento degli autori tardoantichi, *Κοινωνία*, 33 (2009), 61-74
- G. Cupaiuolo, Tracce della ricezione terenziana, in *“Aspetti della fortuna dell’antico nella cultura europea: atti dell’undicesima giornata di studi”*, a cura di S. Audano e G. Cipriani, Foggia 2015, 159-181
- S.A. Frangoulidis, (Meta)theatre as therapy in Terence’s *“Phormio”*, *«C&M»*, 47 (1996), 169-206
- M. Giovini, Proverbi e *“sententiae”* a carattere proverbiale in Terenzio, *Philologia Antiqua: an International Journal of Classics*, 3 (2010), 75-116
- H. Haffter, *Terenzio e la sua personalità artistica*, introduzione, traduzione e appendice bibliografica di D. Nardo, Roma 1969
- R. Kauer – W.M. Lindsay, *P. Terenti Afri comoediae, supplementa apparatus curavit O. Skutsch*, Oxford 1958
- O. Knorr, Metatheatrical humor in the comedies of Terence, in P. Kruschwitz-W.-W. Ehlers-F.Felgentreu (hrsg.), *Terentius poeta*, München 2007, 167-174
- R. H. Martin (edited by), *Phormio*, Londra 1959
- A. Pratesi (a cura di), *Commedie, II: Formione, La suocera, I due fratelli*, Roma 1953
- A. Ronconi (a cura di), *Le Commedie*, Firenze 1969
- A. Ronconi, *Interpretazioni letterarie nei classici*, Firenze 1972
- A. Traina, *Forma e suono. Da Plauto a Pascoli*, Bologna 1999
- G. Zanetto (a cura di), *Formione*, Milano 1991