

THE STANDARDISATION OF ‘CLASSICAL LATIN’:
THE CASE OF TERENCE’S TEXTBy GIUSEPPE PEZZINI 
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ABSTRACT

This short piece aims to provide further evidence supporting two of Adams’s main claims: (1) the situation of late Republican Latin cannot be isolated from other diachronic varieties, and (for the purpose of my analysis) earlier Latin in particular, as regards both the absence of systematic standardisation and the presence of sporadic and idiosyncratic standardisation efforts; (2) manuscript traditions of literary authors are unreliable, due to extensive linguistic regularisation, which also contributed to foster the construct of a standardised ‘classical Latin’. The evidence I will provide comes from the textual tradition of Terence, a key figure in the history of the standardisation of Latin, in various ways. This is not a systematic study,¹ but rather a methodological overview, focusing on selected orthographic and morphological phenomena.

1. TERENCE’S *PURUS SERMO*

That the early 2nd-century BC author Terence should be considered in a discussion of Classical Latin should not surprise, given that he was praised by Cicero and Caesar—the two ‘model writers of “classical” prose’ (cf. Adams p. 433)—for his *purus* and *lectus sermo* (‘pure’ and ‘elegant speech’),² that is, the kind of language advocated by late-Republican grammatical purist movements (cf. Adams pp. 372–3). Cicero in particular, not only extensively quotes from Terence’s plays,³ but also alludes to his linguistic eminence, commending, for instance, his *elegantiam sermonis* (‘elegance of speech’) (*Att.* 7.3.10). In Cicero’s view, this was related to the general linguistic excellence of the age of Scipio and Laelius (allegedly Terence’s ghost-writers), which had been accordingly an *aetas innocentiae* (‘age of innocence’) for *locutio emendata et Latina* (‘faultless and pure Latin diction’), to paraphrase an important passage from the *Brutus* (258),⁴ discussed by Adams (p. 370)⁵ This

See further Pezzini 2024a, 2024b (discussing in greater length and detail some of the material presented in this piece). For discussions of Terence’s language, see esp. the concise overviews of Barsby, 1999: 19–27, and Karakasis, 2019 (with a useful bibliographical overview).

²*puri sermonis amator* ‘lover of pure speech’ (Caesar), *lecto sermone* . . . *come loquens* ‘in elegant speech . . . speaking with graciousness’ (Cicero), cited by Suetonius (*Poet.* 11) in his influential *Vita Terenti*, integrated in Donatus’ commentary.

³See full list in Čulík-Baird, 2022: 266–7

⁴Latin texts are abbreviated as in the Oxford Latin Dictionary (Glare, 1968).

⁵Cf. also *Fam.* 9.15.2 (on language decline after the time of Lucilius, Crassus and Laelius), *de Orat.* 3.45 (on the direct and simple (*recto et simplici*) speech of a mother-in-law, preserving the unspoiled language of ancient times (*in corruptam antiquitatem*) of Plautus and Naevius). On *elegantia* in the linguistic and rhetorical debate of the late Republic see further Garcea, 2012 and Pezzini, 2017.

kind of phrasing arguably aligns most closely with the modern construct of ‘Classical Latin’. In other passages (discussed by Manuwald, 2023: 463–4), Cicero’s admiration becomes anchoring and emulation, and the usage of mid-Republican authors is summoned to justify morphological variation (Cic. *Orat.* 155–6, discussed below), neologisms (Cic. *de Orat.* 3.154) and rhetorical features (*Fin.* 1.10). While acknowledging the uneven quality of early Latin literature⁶ and avoiding the extremes of archaïsing conservatism,⁷ Cicero considered the Golden Age of ‘Classical Latin’ to be not his own era, but rather the (mid-late) 2nd c. BC, with Terence as one of its most important representatives.⁸

2. TERENCE’S STANDARDISATION EFFORTS

Cicero and Caesar did not provide many details about Terence’s linguistic purity, and most of Terence’s admirers from late antiquity to the Middle Ages and beyond also remained vague.⁹ Nevertheless, Terence’s reputation as the earliest ‘Classical’ writer finds partial confirmation in his texts. In particular, in his language, one can discern a restraint in the use of optional variants, suggestive of a standardisation effort, especially when compared to the practice of Plautus and other contemporary dramatists.

An example is the use of the archaic sigmatic subjunctive (e.g. *faxint*). While common in Plautus (c. 106 instances of 34 different verbs), in Terence, it is considerably less productive (12 examples of 4 verbs only).¹⁰ Furthermore, in Terence, sigmatic subjunctive seems to be more stylised, especially in main clauses; its two Terentian occurrences in main clauses (Ter. *Hau.* 161, *Hec.* 354) both belong to the fossilised formula *utinam ... di faxint* (‘may the gods grant (this)’), already found in Plautus (e.g. *Amph.* 632; cf. also *Aul.* 50 *utinam me diui adaxint* (‘may the gods grant (this)’). This usage is also occasionally preserved in Classical Latin, and especially in Cicero, in the elliptic phrase *di faxint* (Cic. *Ver.* 2.3.8, *Mur.* 84 *di faxint ut ...* (‘may the gods grant that...’), *Fam.* 14.3.3 *Att.* 15.29.1, 16.1.5). This shows the continuity between Terence and Cicero as regards both the use of these variants and their conditioning and stylisation.

Another noteworthy example is the old, inherited form *-um* of the genitive plural of the second declension (Leumann, 1977: 428, Meiser, 2006: 134). This was replaced by the modern *-orum*, attested as early as the 3rd c. BC (cf. *duonoro* [= *bonorum*] (‘of good (men)’)) in *CIL* 1².9), but was retained for long in fossilised formulae and compounds (e.g. *deum atque hominum fidem*, *in liberum loco*, *centuria fabrum*, *triumvirum*¹¹), in expressions of money,

⁶ Cicero, for example, quotes very sparingly from Plautus and Naevius (whose works he considers to be less polished than those of Ennius, cf. *Brut.* 75–6), and severely critiques Livius Andronicus (*Brut.* 71), Caecilius Statius and Pacuvius (*Brut.* 258 *male locutos* ‘[they] used bad Latin’; also *Att.* 7.3.10, *Orat.* 36, 155), as well as the playwright Atilius (*Att.* 14.20.3).

⁷ At *de Orat.* 3.39 Cicero praises the clear diction (*praeclare locuti*) of early writers (*ueteres*), and invites anyone who wants to speak good Latin to become familiar with their language, while at the same time stressing that words that are no longer ‘in customary use, except occasionally and sparingly’ should be avoided (*neque tamen erit utendum uerbis eis quibus iam consuetudo nostra non utitur (...) parce*); he alludes to the same point at *de Orat.* 3.170 (*uetustum uerbum sit, quod tamen consuetudo ferre possit* ‘the word may either be archaic but at the same time acceptable to habitual usage’). In addition, at *de Orat.* 3.153 he allows for the use of archaisms in rhetorical prose but only on rare occasions (*raro*), in contrast with the greater freedom of poetry (*inuitata ... sunt poetarum licentiae liberiora quam nostrae* ‘rare words are usually archaisms are words which because of their antiquity have long passed out of use in everyday speech’). On Cicero’s views on archaism see further Pennacini, 1974: 41–68; on his use (and avoidance) in practice, see Hofmann & Szantyr, 1965: 770–1 (with bibl.), von Albrecht, 2003: 27–32, 86, 92.

⁸ See further Čulík-Baird, 2022, esp. 51–2, 163–6.

⁹ See Monda, 2015: 109–11 (late antiquity) and Hardin, 2007: 801–4 (Renaissance), quoting e.g. Sambuco’s assessment in n. 54, *sit quamvis elegans, purus, et politus Terentius: Plautum tamen uere comicum esse dicemus* ‘although Terence may be elegant, pure, and polished, we will say that Plautus is truly a comic playwright’.

¹⁰ See further de Melo, 2007: 191–223, with figures.

¹¹ ‘In the name of gods and men’, ‘in place of children’, ‘the century of the craftsmen’, ‘of the triumviri’.

weight, and measure (e.g. *sestertium*, *nummum*¹²), and as a high stylised variant (cf. Virg. *Aen.* 3.704 *magnanimum* ... *equorum*¹³). However, even in such formulae, regularised forms (e.g. *deorum* ('of gods')) were occasionally employed, favoured by analogical theoreticians (see below).

While *-um* genitives are prevalent in non-comic mid-Republican texts, they often occur in the contexts mentioned above or within high-style registers, particularly tragedy (e.g. *meum* ('of my (deeds)') at Enn. *Trag.* 39 J. [=151.6 G–M, *TrRF*], Pacuvius 80 R. [= 101 W., *adesp.* 1.1 *TrRF*], Accius 424 R. [427 W., 536 D., 251 *TrRF*], *exitium* ('of deaths') at Enn. *Trag.* 44 J. [=151.13 G–M, *TrRF*] and see further Cic. *Orat.* 155–6 quoting other examples from tragedy; *socium* ('of allies') in the *Senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus* [CIL 1².581]). Plautus presents 65 cases of *-um* vs. 119 of *-orum*, but most of these are confined to particular collocations (e.g. *maiorum meum* ('of my forefathers')); figures and discussion in de Melo, 2023: 111–112) or parodic passages (cf. the mock-heroic *nostrum socium* ('of our allies') at *Men.* 134, on which see Gratwick, 1993: 151; also, the fictional legal context of *Bac.* 878 *tu aurum rogato; ceterum uerbum* [= *uerborum*] *sat est*,¹⁴ featuring the idiomatic collocation *uerbum sat est*). In mid-Republican Latin, genitives in *-um* remain relatively common, but their usage tends to be conditioned linguistically or stylistically rather than being arbitrary (to use the important distinction of Vine, cited by Adams at p. 402).

This trend becomes almost a norm in Terence, who uses the genitive-*um* only 13 times, including many cases with fossilised forms (*Ph.* 393 *talentum* ('of talents'), *Ad.* 793 *liberum* ('of children'), and six cases with the form *deum* ('of gods'), all in formulae (e.g. *Hau.* 61 *pro deum atque hominum fidem* ('in the name of gods and men'); the only real exceptions are found in the prologue of *Hau.* (24 *amicum*, 27 *iniquom* ... *aequom*¹⁵) and *Hec.* (22 *aduersarium* 'of the opponents')), spoken by the same veteran actor, and in an utterance of the *senex* Demea in *Adelphoe* (411 *maiorum suom* 'of his forefathers'): all these are probably to be construed as stylistically marked, contributing to the old-fashioned patina of the old speaker's diction (cf. Karakasis 2005: 47–48). Terence's use of *-um* genitives therefore stands out in mid-Republican Latin because of its distinct restriction in both quantity and context—a standardisation which, however, does not eliminate optional variants entirely. In this regard, Terence's approach is similar to that of a 'Classical' author like Cicero, both in theory and practice. At *Orat.* 155–6, for instance, Cicero dissociates himself from excessively artificial uses of the *-um* genitives and defends the variety of mid-Republican poets on the basis that analogical genitives *-orum* often go against accepted *consuetudo* ('usage') (and especially so in the case of *uirum/uirorum*). By rejecting extreme analogical regularisation, Cicero seems to suggest a different form of standardisation, which recommends conditioned variants (i.e. *uirum* instead of *uirorum*), where 'there is no variation in usage' (*consuetudo uaria non est*), and accepts (apparent) arbitrary variants where different usages are found. An example of the latter scenario is *deum* vs. *deorum* ('of gods'), which are both accepted by Cicero—and both are in fact attested in his corpus (cf. esp. *Lael.* 52 *pro deorum fidem* vs. *Ver.* 2.3.137 *pro deum hominumque fidem* 'in the name of men and gods'), as already in Terence (6 occ. *deum* vs. 2 *deorum* at *An.* 959, *Hau.* 69—both found, however, in non-formulaic contexts). Cicero's criterion for this 'mild' standardisation is *consuetudo*, a concept that yet may also encompass the usage of earlier writers, including Terence.¹⁶ Terence is openly cited in the following section (*Orat.* 157) as a model for other optional variants, namely syncopated vs.

¹² 'Of sesterces'.

¹³ 'Of noble horses'.

¹⁴ 'You should ask for the gold. As for the rest, we've had enough of words'. Transl. de Melo.

¹⁵ 'Of friends', 'of unfair ... of fair (people)'.

¹⁶ With some qualifications concerning the avoidance of excessive archaism (cf. above n. 6).

unsyncopated verbal forms (*nosse/nouisse* ‘to know’, *noras/noueras* ‘you knew’) and the (old) long vs. (modern) contracted forms of the conjunctive of *esse* (*sit/siet* ‘(she/he/it) might be’)

Interestingly, Cicero makes two important mistakes in this section. First, he wrongly attributes to Terence a quote featuring a close alternation of *sint/sient*, which is not found in his corpus and likely comes from a play of an unknown author (*Trag. Fr. Inc.* 3 R. [= 123–4 W.] *quae quam sint cara post carendo intellegunt, | quamque attinendi magni dominatus sient*¹⁷). Second, Cicero overlooks Terence’s efforts to standardise the use of verbal syncopation, particularly in the 1st conjugation past infinitives, which are consistently syncopated in Terence (cf. *Hau.* 23 *adplicasse* ‘(to have applied)’, *An.* 796 *habitasse* ‘(to have lived)’, etc.). This contrasts with Plautus, who alternates between the two forms (13 *-asse* vs. 11 *-uisse*), and also with that of several classical Latin authors (e.g. 34 *-asse* vs. 7 *-uisse* in Caesar; cf. Coleman, 1999: 39–40). In this case, therefore, Terence appears to be more ‘Classical’ than the supposed masters of standardised Latin prose.

Another area in which Terence’s standardisation efforts can be traced is word-formation: he generally avoids optional variants of equivalent semantic items, unlike Plautus, with a few exceptions (e.g. *Hau.* 414 *abitu* vs. 190 *abitio* ‘departure’, *Hau.* 90 *uociuom* vs. *An.* 706 *uacuom* ‘(empty)’). Typically, the word forms ‘standardised’ by Terence are those later established in classical Latin (a rare exception is *Hau.* 870 *cautim* vs. *caute* ‘(cautiously)’).

This raises a question: should the similarity between Terence and Classical Latin be explained by the concepts of anticipation or derivation, viewing Terence as a precursor or model for late-Republican purist movements? Alternatively, should we adopt a framework of continuity, viewing Terence as one of the many Latin authors who, in different ways and at different times, attempted to impose limitations on morphological variation—efforts that in any case rarely aimed at, and/or achieved, the complete elimination of arbitrary or conditioned variants?

3. CONDITIONED AND ARBITRARY VARIANTS IN TERENCE

It is important to emphasise that radical standardisation, as in the case of syncopated 1st conjugation infinitives, does not seem to be the norm in Terence. He still employs numerous optional variants, though often more sparingly and with greater restriction compared to other contemporary authors. Many of the variants are conditioned, limited by factors such as stylisation, collocation, and/or metrical convenience. In addition to those previously discussed (subjunctive *faxint*, genitive *-um*), other examples of conditioned archaisms are the passive infinitive *-ier*; the sigmatic future (e.g. *faxo* ‘I will do/have done’); the subjunctive of the type *duint* ‘(they might give)’; the future *-ibo(r)* for verbs in *-ire*; the imperative *face* ‘(do!)’; the contraction of the type *factust* for *factus est* ‘(he has been made)’; the subjunctive of the type *siem*, *sies*, *siet* (this latter form, *pace* Cicero (*Orat.* 157, see above), is apparently restricted to the end of the line in Terence, as a metrically justified variant). In all these cases, Terence’s usage appears to be more restrained than that of Plautus in terms of frequency (e.g. c.135 tokens of *-ier* in Pl. vs. only 29 in Ter.) and/or degree of conditioning (e.g. the archaic imperative *face* is found at the end of the line in 9 out of its 12 Terentian occurrences, whereas in Plautus only 14 out of 39 are at the end of the line). Another set of variants in which instead it is the modern form that appears to be conditioned is the type *potis es/potis est* vs. *potes/potest* ‘(you can / she/he/it can)’: the latter, modern forms are more common in Terence (56 vs. 8 *potis es(t)*), but unlike the older forms (which are all line-internal), they are mainly used at the end of the line (34 tokens).

¹⁷ ‘And afterwards, by being in want of them, they understand how dearly these are wanted, and that great sovereignties must be retained’ Transl. Warmington.

There are also several variants used by Terence with no clear or apparent conditioning, such as the genitive *anuis* ('of the old woman') at *Hau.* 287 (attested in all manuscripts) vs. *An.* 365 *ornati ... tumulti* ('of equipment ... of commotion'), metrically confirmed. Additionally, there are variant forms with weaker textual or metrical support, which are attested in some manuscripts (e.g. *necessus* at *Eun.* 998 and *Hau.* 360 in A^{ac}, both metrically uncertain vs. *Ad* 51 *necesse*, metrically confirmed ('necessary'); cf. also *Ph.* 296 *necessum* C^{ac}P^{ac}OY), preserved in indirect sources (e.g. *miis* at *Hau.* 699 ('to my (wedding) (pl.)'), by Velius Longus), or reconstructed by scholars (e.g. the genitive *-ai* at *An.* 439 and at *Hau.* 515). This leads to my final section, in which I will discuss the problems of Terence's textual transmission will be discussed, qualifying and partially deconstructing the assertions made so far.

4. STANDARDISATION (AND LACK THEREOF) IN TERENCE'S TEXTUAL TRADITION

Linguistic analysis of ancient texts typically relies on modern editions, which, in turn, heavily depend on the testimony of ancient manuscripts. For Latin authors, these manuscripts are predominantly medieval, although a few late antique manuscripts also survive. Contrary to what one might expect, medieval manuscripts often differ from their late antique counterparts in presenting an orthography and morphology (as well as syntax and word order) that appears to have been adjusted to (artificial) 'classical' standards. This 'classical cleansing' is more pronounced for authors who were read in school and/or considered to embody high linguistic purity, including Terence. While evident especially in the Middle Ages, this process of 'cleansing' commenced in antiquity and has left many traces in late antique manuscripts, which often present modernised readings in all, most, or some places. Such readings can create a false impression of standardisation by obscuring original variants, or artificially suggest a lack of standardisation, due to the (unsystematic) introduction of non-original forms. While metre can aid in navigating this complexity, it is not always decisive.

Terence's case, with over 700 manuscripts (including the heavily corrupted 5th-century codex A Bembinus and three other late antique fragments)¹⁸ and its intricate metre, illustrates the challenges of accurately assessing textual evidence. It also highlights how distorted perceptions of ancient standardisation (or lack thereof) can be, and emphasises the provisional nature of any linguistic analysis, including the present one. While a systematic discussion is beyond the scope here¹⁹, a series of case studies, primarily orthographic and morphological, will be briefly presented to illustrate various typical situations.

First, there are some original forms that are rare or absent in medieval manuscripts but found in the late antique A Bembinus. For example, at *Eun.* 315 and *Hau.* 44, the Bembinus transmits *si quae* ('if any' f.), while all medieval manuscripts have *siquā*, a form metrically impossible in this context. *Qua* is the standardised 'classical' form of the feminine nominative of *qui(s)* ('any') when cliticised after *si*, common in the poetry of the classical period, with very few exceptions. This form is already found in Plautine manuscripts (cf. *Asin.* 763, *Mil.* 193, *Pseud.* 1292, *Truc.* 344), but in no case is metrically confirmed (contrary to *Men.* 340 and *Stich.* 152, where the form *siquae* is metrically obligatory, as in the Terentian

¹⁸ P.Vindob. L 103 (IIa), P.Oxy. 24.2401 (IIb), and St. Gallen 859 (Sa), which preserve a few lines from *Andria* (IIa, IIb) and *Heautontimorumenos* (Sa). Their text is too fragmentary for linguistic analysis, but one can note that at times they preserve an original form vs. A and/or (some) medieval MSS (e.g. *An.* 652 *cognoris* IIb edd.: *cognoueris* DpY ('(if) you knew'), *An.* 969 *Glycerium mea* IIbA edd.: *mea Glycerium cett.* ('my Glycerium'), *parentis* IIb: *parentes* ('parents') A cett., *Hau.* 859 *Chremes* ASa: *Chreme cett.* ('o Chremes'); probably also *An.* 944 *egomet* IIbδE: *ego cett.* ('I'); in other cases they agree with (some) medieval manuscripts in transmitting a 'cleansed' form (e.g. *An.* 637 *ubi fides est* IIbDGp: *ubi fides cett., edd.* ('where (is) good faith'), *Hau.* 857 *sum igitur* A edd.: *igitur sum* Sa cett. ('therefore I am / I am therefore'); perhaps also *An.* 549 *quasi si* IIaCYP: *quasi cett.* ('as if')).

¹⁹ For a more extensive discussion see Pezzini, 2024b.

cases). The reading *siqua* in Terence's (and Plautus') manuscripts must likely be regarded as a result of the 'classical cleansing', which only **A** escaped (in this case). If **A** had not been preserved, modern editors would have been forced to reconstruct the original form on the basis of metre, to avoid the false impression that Terence already used the standardised classical form.

In other cases, metre offers no assistance, but external evidence suggests that the form transmitted by **A** in contrast to the rest of the tradition is the original one. A notable example is the form *uociuum* for *uacium* at *Hau.* 90 ('empty, free'). The spelling *uociuus* is attested in Plautine manuscripts (*Cas.* 596 *uociuas*, *Trin.* 11), which are generally more conservative than Terence's manuscripts. At *Hau.* 90 already the corrector of **A** introduces the spelling *uac-*, but the form *uoc-* (likely derived from the weakening of the vowel in a pretonic syllable) should be preferred both as the *lectio difficilior* and because it was likely common in Republican Latin, as suggested by epigraphic evidence.²⁰ Forms in *uoc-* appear in late 2nd century inscriptions (e.g. CIL 1².583 (123 BC) *militiae uocatio estouvs*.²¹ CIL 1².585 (111 BC) *uacuaeque sien[t]*).²² Again, if **A** had not been preserved, editors might have reconstructed the original form only by comparing Plautine and epigraphic evidence (assuming that Terence conformed to contemporary orthographic practices, which is in fact a problematic assumption, as discussed below).

In both the cases discussed above (*si quae*, *uociuum*), the alternative forms (*si qua*, *uacium*) are not confirmed in other passages in Terence's plays, leading to the assumption that Terence knew and used only one type of form, with no variation. The same cannot be said for several other forms, also preserved by **A** but modernised in (all or most) medieval manuscripts, which, however, Terence certainly used alongside other variants. A good example is the contracted form of the type *-ust* (= *-us est*),²³ preserved by **A** in eight cases (two also in the medieval **D**), all metrically confirmed. In contrast, **A** transmits the form *-us est* in c. 194 other cases, at least 120 of which are metrically confirmed. This demonstrates that the 'classical cleansing' of medieval manuscripts not only replaced many original forms with classical ones, blurring the picture of Terence's latinity, but also introduced a misleading degree of standardisation that was absent in the original. Finally, there are c. 56 other cases in which **A** transmits *-us est* but only the contracted *-ust* is metrically acceptable; this confirms that even **A** cannot always be trusted, and that relying on its testimony (as several editors have done) can be misleading.

This introduces another large group of cases in which **A** transmits a modernised classical spelling, providing misleading impressions as regards both (1) the standardisation of Terence's language and (2) the lack thereof. For the first scenario, we can consider the previously mentioned case of the old form of the type *potis es(t)*: at *Hau.* 321, the Bembinus transmits the classical form *potes*, which is metrically impossible, while medieval manuscripts have the archaic, non-unverbated form *potis est*. As mentioned, there are many places where the classical unverbated form is confirmed in Terence, all at the end of the line. Apart from metrical problems, accepting the Bembinus' *potes* would obscure the original Terentian variety with a misleading impression of classical standardisation.

For the opposite scenario (2), we can consider *Hau.* 884 and 891, where **A** transmits the unsynopated forms *nuntiaui* ('you announced'), while most medieval manuscripts have *nuntiasti(n)*. Conservative editors might be tempted to accept the reading of **A**, but this would

²⁰ Karakasis (2005: 60) suggests that the form *uoc-* was already perceived as old-fashioned in Terence's time and therefore had a stylising effect in context, but there is not enough evidence to be sure of this.

²¹ 'There shall be exemption from military service'.

²² 'They should be empty'.

²³ See Pezzini, 2015: 141–7 and 249–53.

not be wise: both because at *Hau.* 884 the unsyncopated *facilior* reading *nuntiausti* is metrically problematic, and especially because all other cases of the second person perfect indicative of 1st conjugation verbs in Terence are found with the syncopated form *-asti* (21 tokens). The only apparent exception is *Hec.* 544 (*cessauisti* ‘you ceased’), where, however, the form *cessasti* is also attested in manuscripts and is not metrically impossible (cf. the apparatus of Kauer and Lindsay). Introducing the variants with *-auisti* in this case would obscure Terence’s apparent standardisation of 1st conjugation verbs (paralleled in the treatment of present infinites, discussed above).

In the last two cases discussed (*potis est, nuntiasti*), medieval manuscripts preserve the original forms, while **A** transmits the modernised form. Many more cases exist where the classical ‘cleansing’ has left little or no trace in all the manuscript tradition, from the Bembinus onwards. For instance, at *Ter. Hau.* 806, all manuscripts (including the Bembinus) have *quam ... facias* (‘which ... you might do’), which could be interpreted as a relative subordinate (*res ... quam* (‘the thing ... which’)) with potential subjunctive (a construction that, however, has no exact parallels in Terence). It is preferable to accept Flecksein’s conjecture and print temporal *quom* ‘when’ (cf. *Pl. Aul.* 790–1 *nullust tam parui preti, | quom pudeat, quin purget sese*²⁴) thereby considering *quam* as a simplifying misreading of an original form.

In many other cases, the classical ‘cleansing’ left no trace. A typical example is the spelling *-ss-* for *-s-* after a long vowel or diphthong (e.g. *caussa* ‘cause’), which, as Adams notes, was common in Republican sources and, despite Classical standards, was still used by authors such as Cicero and Virgil as discussed by Adams (pp. 377–8). The type *caussa* is common in republican inscriptions and occasionally found in Plautine manuscripts, particularly in the Ambrosianus (11 instances; only 2 in the Palatini). It is plausible that Terence knew only this spelling; its total absence in the Bembinus, as well as in all other *codices*, is not significant and instead confirms the pervasive effects of the ‘classical’ filter in Terence’s manuscript tradition.

The unreliability of both medieval and late antique manuscripts in matters of spelling and morphology should be now apparent. Before concluding, I would like to briefly address, with the aid of two case studies, some challenges presented by other types of evidence (such as epigraphy and metre), which further emphasise the need for caution in any study of ancient standardisation practices.

The first case involves the use of the form *uo* for the classical *ue* in words like *uostrum* (‘(of) your(s)'), *aduortunt* (‘they turn’) *aduorsus* (‘opposite’) and similar. Epigraphic evidence may suggest that *-uo-* was the original Terentian form: this is in fact the standard spelling in Republican inscriptions (cf. *CIL* 1².586 (ILLRP 512) c. 156 BC), while the ‘classical’ spelling is clearly attested only from the end of the second century (cf. *CIL* 1².583 *auersum* (vs. 5 cases of *uo*) and *CIL* 1².584 (117 BC) where the spelling *controuors-* alternates with *controuer-*), only to become predominant in imperial inscriptions (where the ancient form *uos-* has almost disappeared).²⁵ Both forms appear in Terence manuscripts, seemingly distributed in a chaotic manner, though the modern form *-ue-* generally prevails particularly in the Bembinus. However, contrary to what one might expect, the ‘archaic’ spelling *-uos-* is instead more prevalent in some medieval manuscripts: should we think that this is yet another case in which the Bembinus has undergone the ‘classical cleansing’? Probably yes, but there are other possible explanations. Quintilian provides an interesting account, reporting that it was Scipio Africanus (Terence’s alleged patron) was the first to attempt to standardise the ‘classical’

²⁴ ‘No man who’s stained himself with guilt is so worthless that he wouldn’t be ashamed and wouldn’t apologize’.
Transl. de Melo.

²⁵ See Zair, 2023: 106–8.

spelling *-ue-* (cf. Quint. 1.7.25 *quid dicam uortices et uorsus ceteraque in eundum modum, quae primus Scipio Africanus in e litteram secundam uertisse dicitur?*).²⁶

Although this evidence may not prove that Terence standardised the modern form *-ue-*, to please his patrons' family, it raises important methodological questions: can one use the evidence of republican inscriptions, formal and conservative by nature (as demonstrated by Adams), to reconstruct the use of a literary author, in a linguistic context that was not comprehensively standardised, and simultaneously, in which individual writers (like, apparently, Terence) were actively attempting to promote the use of some modern standardised forms? Furthermore, can we be certain that Terence consistently used a single form in all cases, or should we agree with Lindsay's statement in the preface to his Terence edition that *Terentium interdum uester scripsisse non nego?*²⁷ And also, if *uester* ('your(s)') and the like were to be considered Terentian originals, how to explain the *uoster* forms in some medieval manuscripts? Is this a matter of archaising hypercorrection? Or is it more simply the effect of the late/medieval/proto-Romance linguistic background, in which *uostrum* forms might also be explained as analogical forms of *nostrum* ('(of) our(s)') (widespread in Romance languages).

These questions introduce the final case I would like to discuss, which is also emblematic from a methodological point of view. This case illustrates how even metrical criteria are not always decisive when assessing the effects of the classical filter. At Ter. *Hau.* 555, manuscripts of the δ family preserve the reading *quid opus siet* ('what there may be need of'), whereas the 'classical' subjunctive form *sit* is attested in the other manuscripts. As seen, the archaic subjunctive form *siet* is often used by both Plautus and Terence, especially at the end of line, where the disyllabic *siet* is the only possible form, and is also well attested in republican inscriptions (although the modernised *sit* already occurs in the Scipio epitaph, CIL 1².11 (170 BC)).

Siet is frequently normalised to its classical equivalent (e.g. *Hau.* 675 *possit* N, 1021 *sit*), including in the Bembinus (e.g. 620). This would appear unproblematic if not for the fact that numerous cases exist where manuscripts have the form *siet*, in places where only the monosyllabic form *sit* is metrically possible (cf. Ter. *Haut.* 435, 485 *sit* > *siet* and also 555 *sit*, 826 *sis* > *sies*). One possibility is that these instances are hypercorrections (cf. Questa, 2007: 9), further confirming that manuscript evidence is not always reliable, even in cases involving *difficiliores* readings, and that imposing linguistic uniformity on Terence text would be inappropriate: as Cicero explicitly confirms (albeit with a misquote, see above), Terence seems to have used both forms. However, there is another possibility, that is that *siet* was the only spelling used by Terence with the distinction between the two forms being purely prosodic (disyllabic *siet* vs. monosyllabic *siet*, possibly due to some form of synizesis). Although it is impossible to confirm this scenario, the possibility alone raises questions about the appropriateness of visualising in the text prosodic phenomena that may not have been graphically represented in Terence's original.

This adds another layer of complexity to an already blurred picture—one that no extant evidence (manuscript, metrical, or epigraphic) can fully restore to its original form: certainly, like other 'classical' authors such as Cicero, Terence partly strove to standardise his language, by deselecting some optional variants and conditioning others, but the precise nature and extent of his efforts may never be fully known.

²⁶ 'And what about *uortices* and *uorsos* and the like, which Scipio Africanus is said to have been the first to spell with an *e* as second letter?'. Transl. Russell.

²⁷ Kauer & Lindsay, 1958: v: 'I do not deny that Terence wrote sometimes *uester*, sometimes *uoster*'.

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