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STAGING ROME

> populi sensus maxime in theatro et spectaculis perspectus est.
>
> (Cicero *Ad Atticum* 2.19.3)
>
> The will of the people is most clearly seen in the theatre and at the shows.

Theatricality and power

Rome was always already theatrical. As an Etruscan city in the sixth century BCE and an independent state in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, Rome from its genesis was shaped by institutions, religious rituals and social practices that involved complex performances by political and religious leaders before an engaged audience of citizens and slaves. Public celebrations, sacrifice, divination, communal prayer, political and military oration, legal trials and executions, marriage, funerals, religious and triumphal processions, even a magistrate's movement through the city streets, as later his departure for or return from provincial office, involved self-conscious (re-)enactment of a social script. The re-enactments served several functions, among the more important of which was an acting-out of relations of power. Thus Polybius' account in the mid-second century BCE of the typical funeral of a Roman aristocrat (6.53):

> When a prominent man dies, he is carried into the forum to the so-called rostra, sometimes in an upright, conspicuous position, more rarely in a reclining one. Encompassed by the whole people standing, an adult son (if one survives and is present) or another relative climbs the rostra and speaks on the virtues and achievements of the dead man.

> The result is that the crowd, both those who participated in the achievements and those who did not, as they recall and visualise the past, are drawn to such sympathy that the loss seems not a private one for the mourners but a public one affecting the people. Then after the interment and the customary rites they put the image of the dead man in the most conspicuous place in the house, enclosed in a wooden shrine. This image is a mask (*prosopon*) which reproduces the deceased's features and colouring with remarkable likeness. These images, honorifically adorned, are displayed at public sacrifices, and, when a prominent family member dies, are taken to the funeral procession and put on men whose stature and general appearance most resemble those of the different ancestors. The men wear togas – with a purple border if the ancestor had been a consul or praetor, whole purple if he had been a censor, embroidered with gold if he had celebrated a triumph or had accomplished something similar. The men parade in chariots, and before them are carried rods and axes and the other magisterial insignia according to the status of the offices of state held by each during their lifetime. And when they reach the rostra, they all sit in a row on chairs of ivory. It would be difficult to find a more glorious spectacle (*theama*) for a young man who aspires to fame and nobility. For who would not be stirred by the images of men renowned for their virtue, all together, as if alive and breathing? What could be a more glorious spectacle?

The funeral as political theatre: audience, dialogue, action, actors, costumes, masks, props, stages – one of the stages being the processional route through Rome itself, another the rostra in the place which became the principal site of Rome's early 'literary' drama: the Roman Forum. Like a stage play, this theatrical procession was accompanied by music (omitted by Polybius) played loudly on the flute, trumpet and sometimes horn by musicians who led the way, and was accompanied, too, by a dirge from professional mourners, who sometimes interspersed and/or followed the funeral oration with a 'chorus' of lamentations, orchestrated by their own 'chorus-leader', the *praefica*.[1] The inspirational force of the event for the young elite Roman is well observed by Polybius; it was a function of aristocratic Rome's obsessive, competitive culture. The funeral not only paraded the

achievements of an individual aristocratic family, but furnished in the parade the grounds for that family's superior social and political position.[2] Collectively, such funerals celebrated the values and traditions of the political elite and sustained its hegemony, employing the artifice of theatre to naturalise the past in justification of the existing social order.

More obviously directed to the validation of social supremacy was that coveted pinnacle of Roman military achievement, the triumph. Here is Silius Italicus' account (some three hundred years after the event) of the triumphal procession of Scipio Africanus in 201 BCE:

> mansuri compos decoris per saecula rector,
> deuictae referens primus cognomina terrae,
> securus sceptri, repetit per caerula Romam
> et patria inuehitur sublimi tecta triumpho.
> ante Syphax feretro residens captiua premebat
> lumina et auratae seruabant colla catenae.
> hic Hannon clarique genus Phoenissa iuuenta
> et Macetum primi atque incocti corpora Mauri,
> tum Nomades notusque sacro, cum lustrat harenas,
> Hammoni Garamas et semper naufraga Syrtis.
> mox uictas tendens Carthago ad sidera palmas
> ibat et effigies orae iam lenis Hiberae,
> terrarum finis Gades ac laudibus olim
> terminus Herculeis Calpe Baetisque lauare
> solis equos dulci consuetus fluminis unda,
> frondosumque apicem subigens ad sidera mater
> bellorum fera Pyrene nec mitis Hiberus,
> cum simul illidit ponto quos attulit amnes.
> sed non ulla magis mentesque oculosque tenebat
> quam uisa Hannibalis campis fugientis imago.
> ipse adstans curru atque auro decoratus et ostro
> Martia praebebat spectanda Quiritibus ora:
> qualis odoratis descendens Liber ab Indis
> egit pampineos frenata tigride currus;
> aut cum Phlegraeis, confecta mole Gigantum,
> incessit campis tangens Tirynthius astra.
> salue, inuicte parens non concessure Quirino
> laudibus ac meritis non concessure Camillo.
> nec uero, cum te memorat de stirpe deorum,
> prolem Tarpei mentitur Roma Tonantis.
>
> (*Punica* 17.625–54)

Possessed of eternal glory, the first ruler
To carry the name of a conquered land,
Confident of power, crosses the sea to Rome
And enters his ancestral home in a soaring triumph.
Before him Syphax on a litter held captive eyes
Downcast, and chains of gold guarded his neck.
There was Hanno and Carthage's noble youth
And Macedon's chiefs and black-bodied Moors,
Numidians and the Garamantes, whom sacred Ammon
Sees scouring the desert, and ship-wrecking Syrtis.
Soon Carthage passed, stretching conquered hands
Starward, and a model of Spain now peaceful,
Of Gades the world's end, Calpe once the limit
Of Hercules' fame and the Baetis which bathes
The sun's horses in its sweet river waters –
And, pushing her forested height starward, that fierce
Mother of wars, Pyrene, and the ungentle Ebro,
When it crashes the ocean with all its streams.
But no picture held their minds and eyes more
Than that of Hannibal fleeing the field.
Standing in his chariot, clothed in purple and gold,
Scipio gave Romans the spectacle of Mars' face:
So looked Liber when he drove from perfumed India
His vine-leafed chariot with bridled tigers;
So looked Hercules on Phlegra's plain when the Giants
Were destroyed and he touched the stars as he walked.
Hail, unconquered father unsurpassed by Quirinus
In glory, unsurpassed by Camillus in deeds.
Truly Rome tells no lie when she calls your stock divine,
And names you child of the Capitoline Thunderer.

Again the theatrics are undisguised – audience (at first the reader, and finally the Romans of 201 BCE); a stage (Rome); players, including a cast of former warriors, now costumed in golden chains and paraded in their role of defeated foes; painted scenery and props (images of conquered territories and rivers) which themselves present the 'plot' of Scipio's all-conquering campaigns, culminating in the climactic scene of the defeated general in flight; the whole accompanied, like the funeral procession, by music (the flourish of trumpets, again omitted),[3] and modulated to include scenes of pathos and awe and to lead to, as dramatic finale and closure, the *deus ex machina* Scipio, who in his triumphal chariot, costumed in

purple and gold, acts out through the *triumphator*'s 'red mask' his role as Mars and/or Jupiter. This 'red mask' was the *triumphator*'s face, painted red, which seemed to cast the Roman general in the role of Jupiter, whose cult image in the Capitoline temple, to which the *triumphator* made his ascent, was similarly painted, or, as in Silius' account (for the red on the general's face might signify, too, the blood of enemies), seemed to cast him in the role of Mars. Certainly the comparison with the gods – Mars, Liber, Hercules, Quirinus, Jupiter – underscores the prime political and social function of the triumph, its demonstration of the superiority of the *triumphator*. The triumph's theatricalised celebration of Rome, its gods, its army, its conquering might, arouses the 'patriotic' emotions of the citizen-audience, reinforcing community, solidarity and collective identity in the face of the enemy 'other'. But those emotions are made instruments of individual acclamation.[4]

Rome's funerary and triumphal rituals, and the *pompa circensis* or 'procession to the circus' with which they are frequently compared, seem to modern scholars to have been Etruscan in origin,[5] and were held by the writers of the classical period to have originated in the earliest period of the city. Their authority derived in part from their very antiquity, although their precise age is difficult to guess. There are some pointers to the age of the triumph, which is represented in classical texts as monarchic. The Triumphal *Fasti*, for example, record triumphs from the regal and the early republican period, Festus (504L) confirms the antiquity of the triumph, and Livy (2.16.1) assigns a triumph in the first decade of the republic to the consuls of 505 BCE, Marcus Valerius and Publius Postumius. The theatrics of Rome's social institutions and their political force were certainly well established before the city's first attested drama was produced.[6] Spectacle was always already both the display and the agent of power.

Drama and archaic Rome

Whether such spectacle included unattested 'dramatic' entertainment is debated. Reliable evidence for the detailed cultural practices of archaic Rome is scarce. Rational hypotheses rule. It is now generally supposed that Rome had a flourishing culture of poetry and song well before the third century BCE, associated primarily with the aristocratic symposium.[7] It seems reasonable to think that another aspect of archaic Roman culture, especially in a highly theatricalised society influenced by both Etruria and Greece, was some kind of formal drama, the existence of which would then

have preceded not only the traditional date of 240 BCE, assigned by the ancient *testimonia* to the appearance of the city's first performed play with a plot (written by Livius Andronicus),[8] but also Livy's much quoted mid-fourth century date for the introduction of theatrical entertainment to Rome. Livy's notice, which probably owes its controversial date to the first century BCE antiquarian Varro, who seems to have promoted a rustic origin for Roman drama, especially its derivation from the festivities of the *Liberalia*,[9] emphasises the religious motivation of the *ludi scaenici* ('theatrical shows') and their foreign derivation, especially their origin in Etruria. The *ludi* themselves in Livy's account are primarily performances of music and dance.

The famous passage deserves substantial quotation, at least in translation.[10] The year is that of the consulship of Gaius Sulpicius Peticus and Gaius Licinius Stolo, i.e. 364 BCE:

> When the force of the pestilence was alleviated neither by human strategies nor by divine help, they were overwhelmed by superstitious fears and are said to have also instituted theatrical shows (*ludi scenici*), a new phenomenon for a warlike people (for their only spectacle was the circus), among other efforts to appease the wrath of the gods. But this was a small thing, as almost all things are initially, and it was imported from abroad. Without any singing, without imitating songs, players (*ludiones*) who had been summoned from Etruria danced to the strains of the piper and performed not ungraceful movements in the Etruscan fashion. Next the young men started to imitate them, at the same time exchanging jokes in uncouth verses; nor were their movements out of harmony with their words. And so it was adopted and sustained through frequent use. The native performers, because a player (*ludio*) was called *ister* in Etruscan, were given the name of *histriones*, 'actors'; they did not, as before, take turns in hurling rushed and crude verses like the Fescennines, but performed *saturae* (medleys?) full of tunes with song now written for the flute and with appropriate movement. Some years later (they say) Livius, who was the first to move from *saturae* and compose a play (*fabula*) with a plot (*argumentum*) – like everyone then, he was an actor of his own pieces – when frequent calls upon his voice had dulled it and he had got permission for a boy to stand before the flautist and do the singing, acted a monody with increased vigour of movement because he was unrestrained by the need to use his voice. From that moment actors (*histriones*) started to have the singing done to their gestures, and reserved just the dialogue for their own voices. As this type of play moved away from merriment and loose jokes and a 'show' (*ludus*) had gradually become art, the young men abandoned the acting of plays to 'actors' (*histriones*) and began to revive the antique custom of hurling silly verses at each other. Whence arose what were later termed 'after-pieces' (*exodia*) and were most often joined with Atellan plays. The latter – a type of show (*ludus*) acquired from the Oscans – was kept by the young men, and they would not let it be polluted by actors (*histriones*): hence the tradition that performers of Atellan plays are not disfranchised and serve in the army as if they had no connection with the theatrical arts (*ars ludicra*). It has seemed worthwhile to position the prime origin even of shows among the small-scale beginnings of other things, so that one can see the sober start of a phenomenon which has now reached a madness scarcely able to be supported by opulent kingdoms.
>
> (Livy 7.2.3–13)

The focus in Livy on the Etruscan origin of both the form and the vocabulary of Roman drama (a vocabulary which seems to derive from Etruscan adaptations of Greek),[11] reinforced by the evidence of Etruscan vase- and tomb-painting, have prompted some scholars to infer that drama came to Rome from Greece via Etruria and most probably at the time of Etruria's greatest influence on the city, i.e. during the sixth or fifth centuries BCE.[12] What this hypothesised drama might have been – and it needs to be underscored that Attic tragedy only reached its maturity in the fifth century – is unclear. Livy's comments indicate that no oral tradition concerning any pre-fourth-century drama existed and that the *ludi scaenici* of the mid-fourth century were thought of as primitive.

Archaic Rome is a barely documented society, and even in the case of the late fourth century, when a vigorous interest in the viewing of spectacle, including presumably *ludi*, is signalled by Gaius Maenius' addition of spectator balconies (*maeniana*) to the shops of the Roman Forum (318 BCE: Festus 120L), the city has left little trace of its theatrical interests. And if it seems reasonable to assume that some form of non-literary archaic drama existed of which inevitably no traces

have survived, conjectures to the effect that such Roman drama constituted a celebration of 'civic identity' by means of the performance of national myths have not automatically commanded assent.[13] Certainly when Roman drama begins (from 240 BCE) to generate texts to index both its existence and its nature, a number of the (tragic) titles show a potentially aetiological preoccupation with Troy and the Trojan cycle, and a few extant titles (*Romulus* or *Lupus, Sabinae*) indicate an overt interest in theatricalising myths of 'national significance'. Clearly, too, issues of civic identity would have been embedded in the performance of all early Roman plays through the social cohesiveness of the theatrical gathering, the plays' validation of Latin as the 'prestige language',[14] and the ambivalent spectacle of Rome's appropriation of Greek culture.[15] But the collective impetus of post-240 BCE attested early Roman drama – tragedy, comedy, 'history plays' (*praetextae*) (to which may be added Atellan farce, of which we possess scant but telling knowledge) – seems directed less to the glorification of the *populus Romanus* (although that is certainly involved), more to the celebration of members or families (*gentes*) of the Roman elite, especially the magistrates and the *gentes* of the magistrates who commissioned and financed the actual plays performed. More persuasive is the idea – supported by the passage from Livy,[16] by Fabius Pictor's description of a chorus of 'satyric' dancers in the *pompa circensis* at the end of the third century BCE (DH *Ant. Rom.* 7.72.5),[17] by Etruscan wall-paintings and the likelihood of an Etruscan theatrical tradition[18] – that some form of 'comic' satyric drama, filled with jesting, music and dance, existed alongside the other entertainments which accompanied the festivals of archaic Rome.

Dramatic kinds

When attested Roman drama emerged in the second half of the third century BCE it manifested itself in a variety of literary modes, influenced by both native Italian traditions and Greek literary forms. The Greek influence was clearly related to Rome's substantial exposure to Hellenistic culture in the first half of the third century BCE through her almost continuous contact with the Greek cities of southern Italy and Sicily during a series of military engagements which culminated in the First Punic War of 264–41 BCE. Rome's contact with the Greek cities of Italy is evident throughout the whole of her republican history, but there had never been anything on this scale or of such continuous duration. It resulted in a circulation (albeit small) at Rome of Greek literary texts. Furthermore, the increasing power of the Roman *plebs* had produced a body of influential Romans not averse to

the pleasures of art and the crafts, areas of human achievement traditionally viewed with suspicion, if not with outright contempt (*poeticae artis honos non erat*, 'no esteem was attached to poetry'),[19] by the city's landed aristocracy. Rome's competitive instincts also must have been triggered by the huge disparity in theatrical culture between the cities she had taken and the conquering city itself. She lacked the theatrical finery adorning the sophisticated Greek cities of the south, which, like other Greek cities in the Mediterranean world, projected their theatrical institutions as a defining constituent of an urban identity modelled on that of Athens (without its democracy). The Greek cities were not slow to advertise their cultural superiority.[20] Horace with Augustan hindsight and prejudice inverts late third-century Roman ideology to present the city captured by Greece:

> Graecia capta ferum uictorem cepit et artes
> intulit agresti Latio.
>
> (*Epistles* 2.1.156–7)
>
> Enslaved Greece enslaved her savage victor and brought
> The arts to rustic Latium.

Most conspicuous among Rome's newly flaunted dramatic modes were tragedy and comedy, the latter modelled substantially (at least from Naevius' time)[21] on the third-century Greek New Comedy of manners (hence its descriptor, *fabula palliata*, 'Play in a *pallium* or Greek cloak') but influenced also by such local traditions as Fescennine jesting (ribald, versified abuse at weddings and similar events),[22] the Roman *Saturnalia*,[23] and the parodies of tragic themes apparent in the so-called *phlyakes* farces, which were popular in the Greek communities of southern Italy during the fourth and third centuries BCE.[24] Like its Greek progenitor, Roman comedy was essentially domestic and bourgeois, generally concerned with the removal of barriers to young love, but in the hands of Plautus and Terence it achieved (in the case of the former) a precocious metatheatrical dimension and (in the case of the latter) a level of social criticism at odds with generic expectation. Roman tragedy (*fabula* – more precisely, to use the term of the grammarians, *fabula crepidata* – or *tragoedia*) was similarly oriented towards Greece. Like comedy, it remodelled and 'Romanised' the dramas of the Greek mainland, but its predilection was for Attic drama of the fifth century, even if modulated (perhaps substantially) in and by Hellenistic and south Italian theatrical practice.

This Roman remodelling of Greek comedy and tragedy was nothing like our idea of translation. Described by the ancients

through the concepts of *contaminatio* ('combination'), *aemulatio* ('rivalry') and *imitatio* ('imitation'), it generally involved a substantial reframing and reworking of the Greek play or plays in a competitive attempt to rival or, preferably, outdo the 'source-text'. The texts of the Greek plays available to the early Roman dramatists may have already been substantially reworked by the Greek 'actor-interpolators' of the travelling Dionysiac guilds. The cuts, expansions, insertions and remodelling of the Roman playwrights, their 'translations', were perhaps an extension of current non-Roman theatrical practice.[25] The Roman dramatists are, however, unlikely to have altered such matters as the scenic location or the scenic and temporal unity (or occasional disunity) of their 'source-texts'.

Often accompanying a tragedy or comedy, from early on, was a performance of an Atellan farce (*fabula Atellana*), a knockabout style of unscripted comic drama, featuring clown-like stereotypes with exaggerated masks, engaging in slapstick humour and horseplay, often of a sexual nature.[26] This kind of dramatic entertainment was associated with the Oscan town of Atella in Campania and seems much older than the late third-century explosion of literary tragedy and comedy. Such is clearly implied by the passage of Livy quoted above (7.2.12), where it is also stated that later they functioned as *exodia* or 'after-pieces'. By the early first century BCE a literary form of the *Atellana* had been developed.

Another mode of drama evident in the late third century is the historical play known as the *fabula praetexta*, which derived its name from the purple-bordered toga (*toga praetexta*) worn by a Roman magistrate and which dramatised an event in Roman history. This most interesting dramatic form was designed according to Varro to 'teach the people' (*docuit populum*, *LL* 6.18), and would have had a potent impact on Rome's *pueri nobiles*, 'boys of high birth', also wearers of the *toga praetexta*.[27] It began its attested literary life in the late third century BCE with the epic poet and dramatist Gnaeus Naevius, who directed the form's focus not only to distant, defining events in Rome's history (such as Romulus' foundation of the city), but to more immediate contemporary events. Partly aetiological, partly celebratory of Rome's history, success (especially military success) and divine favour, the *praetexta* functioned also on notable occasions as political acclamation of particular contemporary (or recently deceased) Romans.[28] It was (in its earlier and in its later but more aetiological instances) perhaps more likely than any other kind of drama to have been produced in an overtly religious context such as the dedicatory games of a temple, and was thus perhaps in

its early instances the most sacral of Rome's dramatic forms. Allied with tragedy in form and language from the start, and identified by some later grammarians as a subspecies of that genre,[29] the *fabula praetexta* within a century of its birth had begun to tackle such 'tragic' subjects as the rape and suicide of Lucretia and the self-sacrificing death-in-battle (*deuotio*) of Decius Mus at Sentinum.[30]

Indeed in the mid-second century BCE, even as tragedy was dividing itself into mythological (*fabula crepidata*) and historical (*fabula praetexta* – although not all *praetextae* were 'tragic'),[31] comedy bifurcated into the traditional *fabula palliata* and the new *fabula togata*,[32] which, as *togata* implies, dealt with specifically Roman or at least Italian characters, transferring the comic situations of the bourgeois *palliata* to the lower-class citizens (even manual labourers) of the country towns of Italy.[33] But whereas tragedians wrote both *fabulae crepidatae* and *praetextae*, no comic dramatist seems to have written both *palliatae* and *togatae*. No complete *fabula togata* is extant. Nevertheless, ancient witnesses suggest that it could be obscene (Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.100) and it could be moralistic (Sen. *Ep. Mor.* 8.8). Recent commentators also suggest that a recurring contrast in the *togata* was between the (decadent) 'Greecising' ways of the town and the (truer) Italian ways of the country.[34] Surviving fragments indicate that some of its creative practices were not dissimilar to those of the *palliata*.[35] There may also have been a third kind of comic drama, viz. that suggested above for archaic Rome: the satyr play. Certainly Vitruvius (5.6.9) and Horace (*AP* 220–50 – a much debated passage) seem to imply this for the Augustan stage, and, although Diomedes talks only of Greek satyr plays, a plausible argument can be mounted to suggest the existence of satyr plays in late republican Rome, perhaps in the form of (topical?) 'satyric comedy' or 'satyric mime'.[36]

Ludi scaenici

The social context of Roman plays varied. By the late republic, if not earlier, elite Romans might arrange for a private performance of a play or other theatrical show in their own houses as part of the entertainment accompanying a banquet.[37] The normal context, however, for dramatic performance was that of the official *ludi*, the 'games' or rather 'shows' which accompanied one of the great religious festivals held annually at Rome in honour of Jupiter, Flora, Apollo, Magna Mater (the 'Great Mother'), and Ceres. These 'games/shows' featured a variety of entertainments, including boxing-matches, chariot-races, animal hunts (*uenationes*), tightrope-walking, juggling, and all kinds

of 'circus' acts – as well as, increasingly, plays. The different entertainments were spread over a number of days and involved a variety of venues or sites. By the end of the third century BCE the major *ludi* were six in number, although in some cases 'dramatic shows', *ludi scaenici*, were not included until the second century.

The six major *ludi* were, in order of institution: *Ludi Romani* ('Roman Games/Shows', also called *Ludi Magni*, 'Great Games/Shows'), the most ancient of Rome's festivals, held annually in September in honour of Jupiter, Juno and Minerva (the 'Capitoline Triad'), with *ludi scaenici* attested from 364 BCE and tragedies/comedies from 240 BCE; *Ludi Florales*, celebrated in honour of the goddess Flora from 241 or 238 BCE (Vell. Pat. 1.14.8; Pliny *HN* 18.286) but not made annual until 173 BCE (Ovid *Fasti* 5.295–330), when the festival was held in April–May and included dramatic shows; *Ludi Plebeii* ('Plebeian Games/Shows'), instituted in 220 BCE with plays attested from 200 BCE, when Plautus' *Stichus* was presented at them, and held annually in November in honour of Jupiter; *Ludi Apollinares*, held in July in honour of Apollo from 212 BCE (annually from 208 BCE), with *ludi scaenici* from the start; *Ludi Megalenses*, held in April in honour of the Great Mother, *Magna Mater*, from 204 BCE, with plays from 194 BCE (Livy 34.54), performed from 191 BCE in front of the goddess' newly dedicated temple on the Palatine; *Ludi Ceriales*, attested from 201 BCE (Livy 30.39.8) and held annually in April in honour of Ceres, Liber and Libera, with *ludi scaenici* later attached. Theatrical shows seem also to have been part of the *Liberalia* of March 17, at least in the late third century, when they were famous for their liberty of speech:

> libera lingua loquemur ludis Liberalibus.
>
> (Naevius *Incerta* frag. v Ribbeck)
>
> We will speak with free tongues at the shows of Liber.

But during the second century, probably as a result of the repression of Bacchic cults evidenced by the senate decree of 186 BCE, these *ludi* were amalgamated with those of the *Cerialia* in April.[38]

Ludi scaenici were not of course restricted to comedies, tragedies and Atellan farces, but included music, dancing, and mime, all intermingling in the carnivalesque atmosphere of the Roman religious festivals. Unlike at Athens, comedies and tragedies were not performed on separate days. Occasionally, too, there were performances of Greek plays by Greek actors, and (perhaps as early as the Second Punic War) plays in Italian languages other than Latin.[39] Mime (*mimus*) was to prove especially important. Despite its name, mime was not mute, but a lively,

maskless, initially unscripted farce or vaudeville, featuring women 'actresses' (*mimae*) in the female roles and uninhibited in its staging of sexual activity and display of female nudity. Introduced in its erotic form at the early *Ludi Florales*, with which it remained associated, it had by the late republic coupled its obscenity with a strong vein of sententiousness, and occasionally revealed a sharp political edge.[40] Like the *Atellana*, the mime became scripted and 'literary' in the first century BCE, even employing comic metres.

The religious nature of the *ludi scaenici* merits emphasis. Polybius, writing in the middle of the second century BCE, was impressed by the religious convictions of the Romans and the penetration of those convictions into both public and private life (Polyb. 6.56.6–8). The *ludi* were in no sense secular events framed by religious ritual. Included (along with the *ludi circenses*, 'Circus shows') as a religious institution in Varro's monumental work, *Antiquitates Rerum Diuinarum*, the *ludi scaenici* enacted collective homage to the various deities, in most cases initially to secure, and later to offer thanks for, their assistance in national crises. The *Ludi Apollinares* and the *Ludi Megalenses*, for example, were inaugurated during the strains and pressures of the Second Punic War. Although clearly part of an aristocratic strategy to create social cohesion in the face of the threat from Hannibal, they were highly charged religious occasions designed to enlist and then preserve the gods' favour in the struggle against Carthage. And the fact that in the case of these *ludi* the religious observance was of a foreign deity, worshipped in accordance with the prescriptions of an alien cult,[41] underscored the religiosity of the occasion even as it signalled the imperialist appropriation of both ritual and god and the evolving transformation of Rome.

All *ludi* began with a sacrifice to the appropriate deity and a procession from the cult temple to the theatre, where the ritual of the *sellisternium* took place – viz. the placing of the special chair (*sella*), decked with emblems of the relevant deity, in a position of honour in the theatre from where the god could view the plays.[42] Frequently, the theatre was erected near the temple of the deity. The plays themselves were technically a religious ceremony performed in homage to the respective deity and subject to religious rules governing their completion. If a play was interrupted, for example, by the observation of religious *prodigia* or simply through audience desertion for more attractive entertainment (see the prologue of Terence's *Hecyra*), or if it suffered a mishap and was in some way incomplete, the rule of religious *instauratio* was invoked and the play was repeated from the beginning. This often occasioned the addition of an extra day of *ludi* or more.[43]

The days devoted to *ludi scaenici* would vary from year to year and increased considerably in the first half-century following Livius Andronicus' debut. Four days were allocated to *ludi scaenici* at the *Ludi Romani* of 214 BCE (Livy 24.43.7), but by 190 BCE perhaps some seventeen official days each year were devoted to them.[44] To these should be added an unknown number of days given over to the repetition of improperly performed or interrupted plays and to the performance of plays in other less regular contexts: at the triumphs or funerals of distinguished citizens (in the latter case the shows were called *munera*, 'Duty-Shows'), and at the dedication of temples, spectacular occasions which the spectacle of theatre appropriately enhanced. Occasionally also there were 'great votive shows', *ludi magni uotiui*, in honour of Jupiter, vowed by a Roman military commander in battle or by the consuls instructed by the senate.[45]

Munera were organised by private individuals to pay tribute to a recently – or not so recently[46] – dead relative, and could feature plays and other entertainments, including from 264 BCE (at funeral celebrations) gladiatorial bouts.[47] The annual *ludi*, on the other hand (*ludi sollemnes*), were organised by Roman magistrates,[48] who used them to impress their peers, clients and the citizen body as a whole, often – and increasingly so in the late republic – for specific political goals, most obviously for election to higher office.[49] The plays produced at the *ludi* were not part of a dramatic competition, as in Athens; they were, however, competitive in the sense that the magistrate who commissioned them was competing with his peers for the favour of the citizen body seated in the theatre. And that citizen body became increasingly to feel the provision of extravagant spectacles and *ludi* its due, an appropriate tribute from one of Rome's elite to its own civic status and *dignitas*.[50]

Playwrights and actors

Accordingly, initially and into the late republic, the bulk of the credit or odium for a performance went not to the playwrights, actors or other theatrical personnel, but to the magistrate who chose and bought the plays, contracted their staging and arranged the *ludi*, sometimes (despite occasional attempts to control this)[51] at great expense as a result of personal supplementation of the funds (*lucar*) allocated by the state. The earliest playwrights themselves were of low social status and were paid employees of the commissioning magistrate. The existence by the end of the third century of a 'Guild of Writers and Actors', a *collegium* based from *c.* 207 BCE in

the plebeian stronghold of the Temple of Minerva on the Aventine (Festus 446–8L), confirmed their banausic status.[52]

The situation began to change somewhat during the second century BCE, when the reputation of Roman playwrights spread beyond Rome to the theatrical centres of southern Italy, which may have commissioned repeat performances of the successful plays of the capital.[53] By the middle of the second century, as the prologues of Terence reveal, playwrights were becoming major bearers both of credit and of odium. Early in the following century the existence of a *collegium poetarum*, a 'Guild of (Dramatic) Poets', is attested quite separate from the previous joint *collegium* with actors; it seems to have contained patrician members.[54] And later in that century it is clear that the early writers of Roman drama were regarded as the founders of an important indigenous literature. In fact there was no major poet between the end of the First Punic War and the time of the Gracchi who did not write drama, which clearly surpassed in its diversity and popular appeal the other literary forms, including epic. The tragedians were later occasionally thought even to excel their Greek counterparts (Cic. *Tusc.* 2.49).

Tragic and comic actors, however, were from the beginning socially stigmatised, and, at least from the late republic, legally marginalised:

> praetoris uerba dicunt: 'infamia notatur qui ab exercitu ignominiae causa ab imperatore eoue cui de ea re statuendi potestas fuerit dimissus erit; qui artis ludicrae pronuntiandiue causa in scaenam prodierit; qui lenocinium fecerit …'
>
> (Justinian *Digest* 3.2.1)

> The praetor's words declare: 'The following are branded with *infamia*: one who has been discharged from the army for disgraceful conduct by the general or the person with appropriate authority; one who has appeared on stage for acting or recitation; one who has maintained a brothel …'

> ait praetor: 'qui in scaenam prodierit, infamis est.'
>
> (Justinian *Digest* 3.2.2.5)

> The praetor rules: 'Whoever has appeared on stage incurs *infamia*.'

The first passage is from Julian's edition of the praetor's edict (131 CE), the second from that of Ulpian (213–17 CE), but it is clear that the praetor's ruling dated from the republic. Roman writers and

inscriptions from the late republic onwards draw attention to the *infamia* that attends acting.[55]

Many actors were either slaves or non-citizens; in the late third century several were probably Greeks previously associated with the itinerant actors, writers and theatricals known as the 'Artists' or better 'Artisans' of Dionysus (*technitai Dionusou*), who performed in the Greek theatres of southern Italy and throughout the Greek world and organised themselves into Guilds on the model of city-states.[56] But even those who were Roman citizens were legally classified as *infames*, 'infamous', banned apparently from the army and disfranchised, removed from the higher social orders of which they were members,[57] liable in the late republic to be flogged by Roman magistrates anywhere,[58] unable (by Augustan times) to marry free-born citizens, and subject along with prostitutes and gladiators to a large range of other restrictions.[59] The Atellan farce seems to have been exempt from these restrictions, if Livy is to be believed (7.2.12: quoted above). There were distinguished actors who managed to escape the various bans, including the great comic actor of the first century BCE, Roscius, raised to equestrian status by the dictator Sulla and regarded by Cicero as a friend (Macr. *Sat.* 3.14.11ff.). But, on the whole, actors (*histriones*), like gladiators, were Rome's celebrities and its dregs, a social contradiction, penalised by Roman law and adored by Rome's citizens, who 'loved those they punished': *amant quos multant* (Tertullian *Spec.* 22.2). Their employment by Rome's elite in something so prestigious as a great statesman's funeral procession changed nothing (Diod. Sic. 31.25.2). The guilds in which actors and other theatricals organised themselves, unlike their Greek Dionysiac counterparts, seem to have had no political clout.[60]

Staging

As to how early Roman drama was staged, much remains obscure. Clearly, however, Roman productions were more operatic than their Greek predecessors. Lyric sections, which are prominent in Plautine comedy and take up a far greater proportion of the surviving lines of Roman republican tragedy than of extant Attic tragedy, were accompanied by a piper or flute-player, *tibicen*, whose importance to the production is indicated by the practice (unknown in the Greek tradition) of the recording of his name in the play-notices. Both comedy and tragedy featured three distinct kinds of verbal performance, corresponding to different metres: simple dialogue (in iambic senarii) unaccompanied by music; recitatives (in trochaic septenarii, iambic

octonarii and related systems), accompanied by music; and *cantica*, arias sung to music by actors in complex lyric metres. Unsurprisingly, given that Roman playwrights, unlike those of Greece, frequently wrote both tragedy and comedy, the sharp metrical distinctions that exist between Greek tragedy and Greek comedy are not manifested in Roman drama.[61] One generic distinction, however, in Roman drama was that tragedy – but not comedy – featured passages of choral lyric, sung by a dramatic chorus.[62] Although some ancient scores for the plays of the Greek tragedians existed in the second century BCE, the music composed for the double piped reed instrument of the Roman *tibicen* was probably not only original, but quite different from that written for the Athenian *aulos*.[63]

At least by the first century BCE actors were wearing the tragic and comic mask (Cic. *De Or.* 2.193, 3.221), and generically appropriate footwear: the *coturnus* or raised boot for tragedy, the *soccus* or slipper for comedy. Some have suggested that masks were worn from the beginning of Roman drama.[64] From 56 BCE there is evidence of a stage-curtain (*aulaeum*), which was rolled down at the beginning of a performance and raised to conceal the stage at the end.[65] An acting company (*grex*, literally 'flock') seems to have included a *choragus*, responsible for the costumes (and possibly also the props).[66] Elaborate costuming was normal in tragedy; the *fabula praetexta* featured characters wearing the purple-bordered toga of a Roman magistrate. In the *fabula palliata*, those taking the roles of free men wore the *pallium* or 'Greek cloak' over a tunic, slave characters wore a sleeveless tunic, short cloak and red wig, and 'free-born women' a full-length tunic or gown beneath a woman's cloak or *palla*. Little is known of the costuming of the *fabula togata*, but apparently the Roman toga was worn by appropriate figures. In both tragedy and comedy, specialist roles (soldiers, sailors, travellers, shepherds, kings, queens) required specialist costuming. All actors in tragedy, comedy, *praetextae* and the Atellan farce seem to have been male. Frequently, too, the same actors performed both tragedy and comedy; these forms were never the separate institutions they were in Greece. The plays (especially the prologues of Terence) provide evidence of considerable theatrical rivalry between companies or *greges* of actors, managed by their leading actor, whose slaves in some cases they may have been (Plaut. *Cist.* 782–5).

Acting itself seems to have been a virtuoso performance in a self-consciously 'grand' or 'comic' style, involving highly expressive movement, stance and gesture, as well as power and nuance of voice. They, like the dramatists themselves, played for the favourable judgement of an audience, who were quite explicitly represented by the

comic writers as 'judges' (*iudices*) of the performance (e.g. Ter. *Ad.* 4). Claques (*fautores*) supporting particular actors are known from Plautus' day (*Amph.* 65–85), and audience response was often noisy and disruptive. The Latin word for that 'audience', *spectatores* (*spectatores, plaudite*, 'audience, your applause', Plaut. *Curc.* 729),[67] defines it as a body of 'viewers' not 'listeners'. And what those Roman *spectatores* necessarily wanted and received in increasing quantity and splendour – at the theatre, amphitheatre and triumphal or funeral procession – was spectacle:

> si foret in terris, rideret Democritus, seu
> diuersum confusa genus panthera camelo
> siue elephans albus uulgi conuerteret ora;
> spectaret populum ludis attentius ipsis,
> ut sibi praebentem nimio spectacula plura;
> scriptores autem narrare putaret asello
> fabellam surdo. nam quae peruincere uoces
> eualuere sonum referunt quem nostra theatra?
> 'Garganum mugire putes nemus aut mare Tuscum,
> tanto cum strepitu ludi spectantur et artes,
> diuitiae peregrinae, quibus oblitus actor
> cum stetit in scaena, concurrit dextera laeuae.
> 'dixit adhuc aliquid?' 'nil sane.' 'quid placet ergo?'
> 'laena Tarentino uiolas imitata ueneno.'
> (Horace *Epistles* 2.1.194–207)

> Were he on earth, Democritus would laugh, whether
> Some mongrel breed of camel-crossed-with-panther
> Or a white elephant enticed the crowd's eye;
> He'd watch the people more keenly than the shows
> As providing far the greater spectacle;
> He'd think the playwrights were telling their tale
> To a deaf ass. For what voices have prevailed
> To drown the din echoing from our theatres?
> You'd think the Garganus forest or Tuscan sea roared,
> So great is the noise when they view the shows, art-works
> And foreign finery, plastered with which the actor
> Steps on stage to the crashing of right hand with left.
> 'Has he said something yet?' 'Nothing.' 'Why the applause?'
> 'It's that violet cloak dyed in Tarentum.'

The Horatian commentary is prejudicial. But it points to a consistently attested emphasis in Roman cultural and theatrical practice.

Cicero reported to his friend Marcus Marius that, at the opening of Pompey's theatre, the entrance of Agamemnon in Accius' *Clytaemestra* was accompanied by 600 mules and in *Equos Troianus*, 'Trojan Horse' (by Naevius?), 3,000 wine-bowls were used (*Fam.* 7.12). The audience, if not Cicero, loved it. A generation later Livy, as observed above, writes of the theatre's 'madness (*insania*) scarcely able to be supported by opulent kingdoms' (7.2.13).

The theatrical space

Yet for almost two centuries after Rome's first attested drama, until 55 BCE, all plays performed at the *ludi* in Rome were staged on temporary wooden structures, erected for the duration of the *ludi scaenici* (Tac. *Ann.* 14.20) in the Roman Forum or at the site of the appropriate temple (that of Magna Mater, Flora or Apollo), or, occasionally, in the Circus Maximus.[68] Both the wide, deep, raised stage (*pulpitum*)[69] and the stage-building (*scaena*) with its roofing and painted scenery-panels would have been of wood. The facade of the stage-building (*scaenae frons*) featured (generally) three doorways, which not only led conveniently to the actors' quarters but could represent three houses, with the central door (*ualua regia*) often indicating in tragedy the main entrance to the royal palace. Tiers of wooden seating would have been erected for the audience, some members of which might sit on the ground or watch the play standing. The wealthier Greek cities of southern Italy and Sicily had stone theatres dating from the fifth or fourth centuries, and by the end of the second century BCE several Italian towns had acquired their own permanent stone-built theatre.[70] But Rome had to wait until the dying days of the republic for its 200-year dramatic tradition to receive a permanent theatre.

Even so, aristocratic competitiveness ensured that some of the temporary theatrical structures were extremely lavish and ornate, and by the late republic such features as *trompe l'oeil* scene-painting and awnings (*uelaria*) to protect the audience from the sun were common. The erection of temporary wooden theatres continued even after the construction of Pompey's theatre (Vitr. 5.5.7) – and not simply because of the volume of theatrical business. Indeed immediately upon the construction of Pompey's theatre (52 BCE) Curio's double wooden theatre was erected, consisting of two hinged theatres arranged back to back. Spectators could see dramatic performances in the morning, and in the afternoon, when the theatres had been turned around to form an amphitheatre, they

could watch gladiatorial fighting (Pliny *HN* 36.116–20). This novel concept ensured that Curio's wooden theatre lasted longer than most: certainly at least for a year (Cic. *Fam.* 8.2.1).

The delay in the introduction of the stone theatre to Rome requires comment. Attempts were made to build a permanent theatre at Rome in 179, 174 and 154 BCE.[71] They all failed. The censorial commission of 154 BCE almost succeeded. The stone theatre commissioned near the Lupercal (Vell. Pat. 1.15.3) was reaching completion three years later when it was knocked down by order of the senate.[72] It would be a hundred years before the next (and successful) attempt was made. The reasons for this reluctance on the part of Rome's elite to accept a permanent theatre in Rome are not difficult to divine. Although the annual recurrence and frequency of the *ludi scaenici* underscored their centrality to Roman culture, they constituted in that culture an ambiguous social force.[73] They may have served to ensure the linguistic hegemony of Latin and, through the works of certain playwrights, even promoted the values of Rome's elite,[74] but the theatres in which the *ludi* were performed became places associated, in the rigid ideology of Rome's aristocracy, with immorality and idleness. A stone theatre, it was claimed, would provide a permanent breeding-ground for vice.[75]

Perhaps more to the point is what remained unsaid: a stone structure would diminish the senate's control over the theatre itself. The constant construction and enforced dismantling of theatrical structures confirmed the senate's authority in theatrical matters.[76] A permanent theatre or group of theatres might not only erode that authority but damage the senate's authority *per se*. Theatres were places where 'the judgement and will of the Roman people in public matters' (*de re publica populi Romani iudicium ac uoluntas*, Cic. *Sest.* 106) could be, and in the late republic often were,[77] directly expressed. Inevitably, the resistance of Rome's elite to the construction of a permanent context for such expression was long and hard.

A further problem of control arose from the nature of the audience. Admission to the scenic games was free. The membership of Rome's theatrical audience, unlike that of Athens, came from all sections of the urban community: patrician, plebeian, aristocratic, base, free-born, slave, male, female, Roman, Italian, non-Italian – Asian, African, Gallic, Greek.[78] Its size is much disputed. A lower estimate restricts it in the early period to perhaps 1,600 to 2,000 per performance,[79] especially in the cases of those plays performed in the more restricted acting spaces in front of Rome's temples. The late republican Theatre of Pompey and the Augustan Theatre of

Marcellus seated (at the most conservative estimate)[80] 11,000 and 13,000 *spectatores* respectively. The temporary Theatre of Scaurus erected in 58 BCE seated even more.[81] But even in the late third and early second century BCE, since plays were often repeated, a much larger audience than the conjectured 2,000 could be reached. Initially the audience were seated unselfconsciously without regard for social status, but at the *Ludi Romani* of 194 BCE, on instructions from the censors and at the instigation of Scipio Africanus, special seating was set aside by the curule aediles for members of the senate (in the orchestra, between the stage and the wooden tiers), to the dismay of the plebeian *spectatores*.[82]

From that point onwards the theatre was a mirror of the city's social hierarchy. Laws were passed at different times restricting various sections of the theatre to particular social groups, the most famous being the Roscian Law of 67 BCE assigning the first fourteen rows in the theatre to members of the equestrian class. Although the Roscian Law was unpopular (Plut. *Cic.* 13), Augustan and later legislation went further, transforming the theatre into a place where Rome's complex structures of power were visibly – and, because visibly, vulnerably – made manifest. Such legislation made more visible and more vulnerable the very social hierarchy it was designed to confirm. The legal restrictions placed (perhaps from the early days of the Roman theatre) on actors, whose lines sometimes mentioned and in the late republic targeted prominent political figures, especially in the audience itself (Pompey, Julius Caesar, Nero),[83] were only one of the overt displays of deep cultural anxiety about the political and social power of the theatre itself. At Rome plays were never simply just plays. They were regular exhibitions of a complex political, social and religious system, defined by patronage and unequal distributions of power, the very structures of which became more patently, completely and strictly displayed as Rome's dominion expanded and her political and social institutions weakened and (in some prominent instances) collapsed.

AN INTRODUCTION TO ROMAN TRAGEDY

A. J. Boyle

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