CHAPTER ONE

The State of Roman Theater c. 200 BCE

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To understand the works of any playwright, we should know the theatrical context in which those works were first performed. Playwrights respond to the theater they know, and what spectators have experienced elsewhere profoundly affects the expectations they bring when they watch a play. This context is especially important in the case of Plautus, whose plays are adaptations of Greek comedies. Because his Greek originals are lost, one of the key questions of Plautine scholarship has been the extent to which he changed those comedies as he adapted them, especially how in doing so he responded to the theatrical traditions he knew at Rome (see Chapter 2). Yet we also have no surviving plays written by Plautus's predecessors or contemporaries at Rome, so a reconstruction of the theatrical world he and his audience knew presents many challenges. Much of what follows in this chapter, therefore, will involve probabilities rather than certainties.

Sources

We rely on several kinds of sources for our information on Roman theater in the late third and early second centuries (all ancient dates BCE unless noted). Plautus's plays themselves include explicit and implicit references to the theater of his day; and while the plays of Plautus's contemporaries have been lost, a number of fragments (quotations from those plays by later authors) survive. We can learn about the spaces where some of Plautus's plays were performed by examining remains of temples, on the steps of which audience members sat for some performances (Goldberg 1998; see Chapter 3 in this volume). Some Roman objects from Plautus's day and earlier may show theatrical scenes, and archeological evidence from elsewhere in Italy, including performances painted in Etruscan

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tombs and portrayals of theatrical scenes on vases from southern Italy, provide analogies and signs of possible influence.

Later Roman authors, ranging from Plautus's successor Terence (died 159) to grammarians of late antiquity such as Donatus and Diomedes, provide most of our evidence. The most important among these texts are passages in several authors that describe the origins of Roman theater. All these accounts probably go back to one or more now-lost works on theater by the great scholar Marcus Terentius Varro (116–27). The fullest version of Varro's account is a digression (7.2.3–12) by the historian Livy (59 or 54 BCE–12 or 17 CE), who wrote a history of Rome from its beginnings to his own day. Livy reports the following steps in the development of Roman theater:

1. Hoping to appease the gods in response to a plague in 364, Roman leaders introduced to their religious games (*ludi*) "dancers, summoned from Etruria," who "performed quite refined dances in the Etruscan manner, without singing or imitating any specific action." They were accompanied by a *tibicen*, who played the *tibia*, a woodwind instrument consisting of two pipes with double reeds (see Chapter 17, pp. 252–253).
2. Roman youth imitated these dancers, "at the same time hurling insults at each other with rude verses; and their motions were in agreement with their voices."
3. Professional actors abandoned the rude verses of the Roman youth and introduced more refined versions of this combination of song and dance, which were called *saturae*.
4. Some time later, Livius Andronicus brought plays with plots to Rome.
5. Because he lost his voice performing in his own plays, Livius Andronicus introduced a new practice, in which actors vocalized only the spoken parts of the drama. Instead of singing the musical parts, they gestured silently while someone else sang to the accompaniment of the *tibia*. Not having to sing themselves, the actors could gesture more energetically.
6. The youths left these more sophisticated performances to professional actors, "and they themselves began to toss back and forth jokes intermingled with verses, just as they had done in the old days." These ruder performances became associated with *exodia* (short performances after regular plays) and with the *fabula Atellana*, an Oscan performance genre imported into Rome.

We must use Varro's account of Roman theater's origins, and especially Livy's version of it, with extreme caution. It is unknown what sources Varro had available to him, and he may have filled gaps in those sources with speculation based on accounts by Aristotle and others on the origins of Greek theater. Further suspicion of Livy's account arises from the historian's personal bias against theater and what appears to be his determination to minimize Greek influences. Not surprisingly, therefore, Livy's digression is one of the most controversial passages in Latin literature, and it is beyond the scope of this chapter to evaluate its truthfulness regarding how Roman theater began (see Oakley 1998 for a full discussion). Because the steps of Livy's account are likely to reflect aspects of theatrical practice in his own and/or earlier times, however, they will provide a good starting point for much of what follows.

A Well-Established and Cosmopolitan Tradition

Livy and the other sources available to us suggest that by Plautus's day Rome had known theater for many decades. Plautus's career probably started in the last years of the third century, over 150 years after Livy's Etruscan dancers joined the Roman *ludi* (step 1). Other sources suggest that the "plays with a plot" introduced by Livius Andronicus (step 4) were adaptations of Greek tragedies and comedies, and that Livius offered the first such play at a festival in 240, 30 or so years before Plautus began producing plays.

Our sources further suggest that Plautus's audience had a large number of opportunities to see plays. Plays were performed at several major annual *ludi* (see Chapter 21, pp. 319–320). The number of days at those *ludi* dedicated to theater increased in the years after 240, reaching about nine days a year by about 200, and still more by the time Plautus died in 184. Plays were also performed at festivals held to mark special occasions such as funerals and the dedication of temples. Terence's *Hecyra*, for example, was offered for performance first at a major annual festival (the *ludi Megalenses*) and then at funeral games.

There is no reason to doubt Livy's association of Rome's first theater with Etruscans. Rome was subject to the Etruscans early in its history, and dance performances play a conspicuous role on many frescoes adorning Etruscan tombs. Etruscan influence may have gone further than dance. Though Livy's Etruscan dancers use no words or mimesis, some figures on the frescoes are masked and may be in performances with characters and a plot. Several Latin terms for elements of theater, including *histrio* (actor), *ludius* (actor or dancer) and *persona* (mask), seem to have come to Latin via Etruscan. Considerable influence on Roman theater from other peoples of Italy is also very likely. Livy's *Atellana* (step 6) was an invention of Oscan speakers, Italic peoples who inhabited Campania and surrounding regions. Archeological evidence records a lively tradition of theater in Campania and areas around it from at least the fourth century. Of the early Roman playwrights, three either came from Campania (Naevius) or are known to have spoken Oscan (Ennius, Pacuvius). We even have evidence for performances in Rome of dramas in the Oscan language as late as the first century (e.g. Cic. *Fam.* 7.1.3).

Some modern scholars, most notably T.P. Wiseman in a long series of publications, have argued that Roman theater in the mid-Republic was older, more widespread, and more cosmopolitan than our ancient sources suggest. There were probably theatrical performances outside of festivals – casual street theater, stagings in private homes, and plays at smaller festivals – of which the literary tradition has no record, and such performances may well predate the official performances recorded by ancient sources. Most importantly, Wiseman and others have observed that the complete absence of Greek elements from Livy's account is an absurdity, an extreme version of a tendency of many Roman sources to assume that Rome was largely isolated from Greek culture until the second century. We now know that from a very early date – centuries before Plautus – Rome was part of a multi-state Italian community in which ideas and cultural forms, including theater, circulated freely. From its earliest days, Rome was subject to Greek influence, both indirectly through the mediation of the Etruscans and other Italic peoples, and through direct contact with the Greek cities of southern Italy. Roman theater was therefore more "Greek" from its beginning than the ancient literary sources would have us believe.

Forms

The grammarians of late antiquity divided the forms of Roman theater into the following genres, with some variations:

1. *Fabulae Atellanae*, named after the Campanian city of Atella.
2. Mime, with a name related to the Greek word *mimesis*, or imitation.
3. *Fabulae palliatae*: comedies set in Greece, named after the *pallium*, a Greek cloak worn by its actors.
4. *Fabulae togatae*: comedies set in Italian cities, named after the toga, a garment associated with Romans.
5. *Fabulae crepidatae*: tragedies with plots drawn from mythology, named after the *crepida*, a type of shoe worn by actors performing in these plays.
6. *Fabulae praetextae*: plays with plots drawn from Roman history, named after the *toga praetexta*, a toga with a purple border worn by Roman magistrates.

Wiseman has argued that Roman spectators watched many plays that transcended the generic boundaries imposed on the tradition by later Roman scholars. At the core of his approach is a proposal that many Roman legends contain dramatic elements because they were originally presented as theater. To cite just one among many examples, Wiseman notes what appears to be a reference in Varro to a play associated with a minor festival called the *Nonae Caprotinae* (*Ling.* 6.18). When the Latins demanded the Romans' daughters in marriage and the Romans did not have the means to resist, Roman slave girls disguised themselves as the daughters, slept with the Latins, and then helped the Roman army surprise and defeat them. This play and others like it, Wiseman hypothesizes, combined patriotic themes with ribald sexual dances in a manner that transcended any of the genres described in our literary sources (1998, pp. 8–11; 2004, pp. 171–174).

Whether or not the theater of Plautus's Rome included genre-defying performances such as those hypothesized by Wiseman, we can identify in it a wide variety of theatrical forms. Four different but overlapping types of performance stand out: dance to the *tibia*, improvisational farce, comedy, and tragedy.

Dance to the Tibia

At the heart of Livy's account of the origins of Roman theater is dance, accompanied by the *tibia*. Whether or not we accept Livy's progression of ever more elaborate dance forms, his narrative combines with other evidence to suggest that both before and during Plautus's time, Roman audiences watched a great deal of dance, and indeed that dance to the *tibia* was viewed as the core element of Roman theatrical *ludi* (cf. Dupont 1993; Habinek 2005, pp. 110–111). Rome's most important religious festival, the *ludi Romani*, began with processions including several groups of dancers (Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 7.72.5–12; cf. Chapter 21, p. 321). Later authors tell a story that in 212 a report came during the *ludi* that an enemy army was approaching Rome, and all left the theater to ward off the enemy. Fearing impiety at the interruption of a religious festival, the Romans were relieved to see that during the commotion an old performer named Pomponius had not stopped dancing

to the accompaniment of a *tibicen* (Serv. *ad Aen.* 8.110). The story gave rise to a proverb: *salva res est, saltat senex* ("the state is safe, the old man is dancing"). It implies that the central element necessary for theatrical performance was dance accompanied by the *tibia*.

According to the late antique author Cassiodorus, when the censors temporarily outlawed theatrical performance in 115, they exempted the *Latinum tibicinem* cum *cantore et ludum talarium* ("the Latin *tibicen* with a singer and the *ludus talarius*," *Chronica* ad 639 a.u.c.). The *ludus talarius* is mysterious, but its most likely explanation is that just as *Latinus tibicen* cum *cantore* is a singer accompanied by the *tibicen*, *ludus talarius* is someone dancing to the *tibia* (Jory 1995). Singing and dancing to the *tibicen* were spared the wrath of the censors, as they were seen as the key traditional elements of Roman theatrical *ludi*. In Plautus's *Curculio*, when the young lover Phaedromus wants the bolts of his lover's door to leap up for him, he begs them: *fite causa mea ludii barbari*, "for my sake become barbarian dancers" (150). *Barbari* means "Roman" in Plautus, a self-deprecating joke based on the characters' alleged Greekness. Phaedromus thus associates leaping dancers specifically with Roman performers (cf. *Aul.* 626–627).

Though dance to the *tibicen* may have been seen as an especially Roman practice, it is almost certain that from a very early date the Roman tradition of festive dance mingled with traditions of dance entertainment that pervaded the Hellenistic world. Various types of solo dancers apparently traveled between Hellenistic cities. Among the names given to these dancers were *kinaidos* ("cinaedic dancer") and *ionikos* ("Ionian dancer"). Plautine characters doing lewd dances compare themselves to *cinaedi* and *ionici*, suggesting that their Roman audiences would be familiar with these Hellenistic traditions of lascivious solo dance (*Pers.* 809; *Pseud.* 1274b; *Stich.* 769). Two dancers in Plautus's *Persa* even compare themselves to two specific dancers, Hegea and Diodorus (824–826). Hegea and Diodorus were probably traveling dancers of the Hellenistic world who included Rome on their tours.

Given the ephemeral nature of dance, it is not surprising that our evidence for it in mid-Republican Rome is thin, and that determining what specific forms it took is difficult. Livy's account may give us some clues. The dance of Livy's original Etruscan dancers, without any vocalization or imitation (step 1), may well correspond to a type of dance still seen in Plautus's day (the *ludus talarius*?). The dances of Livy's youths, with their rude verses and corresponding movements (step 2), may be a ribald dance form still performed in the late third century. We know *saturae* as a literary form, but Varro may have known of a more refined form of dance-with-words that matches Livy's description (step 3). It seems highly unlikely that the extant or fragmentary texts of Roman scripted drama were presented as Livy says Livius Andronicus performed after he lost his voice, miming plays' musical parts while someone else sang (step 5). But it is also unlikely that the practice is a figure of Varro or Livy's imagination. It most likely reflects a performance practice otherwise unrecorded, which was partly dialogue spoken by actors and partly an ancestor of pantomime (in pantomime a dancer danced silently while instruments played and a chorus sang; cf. Jory 1981).

Improvisatory Farce

At two steps in his history of Roman theater, Livy describes an infusion of improvised verses into the dance tradition. First, the Roman youth combined imitation of the Etruscan dancers with rude verses, which Livy associates with apotropaic insults chanted at Roman

weddings called fescennine verses (step 2). Later the youths again improvised, creating the form that developed into *exodia* and combined with Atellan plays (step 6). Again, the value of Livy's account for the origins of Roman theater is subject to doubt. But combined with other evidence the passage suggests that mixed in with the tradition of dance was a long tradition of improvisational verbal performance. Simple farcical plots probably joined the banter Livy describes at a very early date. As is the case with dance forms, types of improvisational farce probably existed for which no literary evidence survives. Two such forms, however, became literary genres in the late Republic and were thus included in later authors' lists of theatrical genres: the *fabula Atellana* and the mime.

Fabulae Atellanae appear to have been short farcical skits, which could serve as afterpieces after longer plays. The exact date at which they became a part of Roman entertainment is not known, but they were almost certainly a feature of Roman theater by Plautus's day. In the first century, several authors, most notably Pomponius and Novius, began to write scripts for *Atellanae*, of which some fragments and a number of titles survive. The exact degree to which these plays resembled their preliterary ancestors is not clear; but assuming at least some continuity, we can combine the fragments with references in other authors to make some educated guesses about what *Atellanae* were like in Plautus's day.

At the core of the literary *Atellana*, and presumably of its unscripted predecessor as well, were four stock characters. Maccus was a clown, Bucco a braggart, Pappus a foolish old man, Dossennus a trickster and/or a glutton. These characters are strikingly similar to some of the recurring characters of the *commedia dell'arte* of Renaissance and later Italy. Some have even proposed a continuing folk tradition to explain these similarities (Monaghan 2015). Whether or not we can assume such hidden continuities, we can be confident that the *Atellana*, like the *commedia dell'arte*, consisted of skits in which these characters found themselves in various comic situations. Thus we find titles of *Atellanae* such as *Maccus Miles* (*Maccus the Soldier*), *Bucco Adoptatus* (*Bucco Adopted*), *Sponsa Pappi* (*Pappus's Bride*), and *Duo Dossenni* (*Two Dossennuses*). Other titles suggest that the genre may have had a special interest in trades (e.g. *Agricola* [*The Farmer*], *Fullones* [*The Fullers*], *Medicus* [*The Doctor*]) and in marriage (e.g. *Dotata* [*The Woman with a Dowry*], *Nuptiae* [*The Wedding*]). The skits probably included a good deal of verbal dueling, corresponding to the rude verses of Livy's youths (steps 2 and 6), which may in turn have inspired scenes of competing insults found in Plautus (e.g. *Pseud.* 357–368, *Rud.* 494–558).

Livy distinguishes performers in *fabulae Atellanae* from actors in other genres. The youths who took up the *Atellanae*, he claims, "held on to them and did not allow them to be polluted by the professional actors. For this reason the policy has remained that actors in Atellan plays are not removed from their tribes [i.e. they do not lose their citizenship status], and they can serve in the army as if they had no part in theatrical performance" (7.2.12). Another source reports that actors in *fabulae Atellanae*, unlike other performers, were not forced to remove their masks when they finished performing. They could thus conceal their identity and maintain their dignity (Festus 238 L). Other evidence suggests that at a later date, at least, actors in *Atellanae* were not differentiated from those in other genres, and it is not clear whether we should envision for Plautus's day performances of *Atellanae* by amateurs.

While the extent to which Plautus was influenced by *fabulae Atellanae* is controversial, Plautus almost certainly shows an awareness of this tradition. In Plautus's *Bacchides*, the

old man Nicobulus rebukes himself as a *bucco* (1088). Another Plautine character compares himself to *Manducus*, who may also have been a character of *Atellana* (*Rud.* 535). Plautus's own middle name, Maccus, may be a name he created for himself or received because of experience performing that role in *fabulae Atellanae* (Gratwick 1973).

Mime, a Greek import, also began as an improvisatory tradition but became a literary genre in the first century. Mime performances at Rome date from the late third century at the latest. The old dancer Pomponius, who allegedly saved the games in 212, is described as a *planipes. Planipes*, meaning "flat-footed," was used as a generic identifier of mime actors, who performed barefoot.

Mimes were not performed as "mime" in our sense of silent imitation, but were, like *Atellanae*, spoken or sung skits with a highly farcical, improvisatory nature and simple plots centered on everyday life. Like *Atellanae*, mimes probably had recurring stock characters, though we do not have for mime the same set list of characters we have for *Atellanae*. By the late Republic mime seems to have replaced the *Atellana* as the primary source of afterpieces presented after longer dramatic performances, and by the time of the Empire it had become, along with its more musical cousin pantomime, the dominant theatrical form on the Roman stage.

At least in its later manifestations, mime differed from the *Atellana*, and indeed from all other Roman theatrical forms, in important ways. Mimes were performed without masks, and, uniquely, by both male and female performers. Mime was the lewdest of the ancient performance genres. Naked dancing appears to have been a regular occurrence at mime performances, and a standard plot was the so-called "adultery mime," in which an adulterer was hidden by a wayward wife from her returning husband, with farcical results. The genre also allowed a wide range of other plot types, including love stories similar to those of comedy, and mythological burlesques. Visual evidence and some remains of mimes preserved on papyrus suggest that musical elements, including dance, the *tibia*, and various percussion instruments, played an important role. The surviving fragments of Laberius and Publilius Syrus, who wrote mimes in the first century, are dominated by pithy moral sayings called *sententiae*. This dominance is a product of the interests of excerptors, but the existence of so many *sententiae* nevertheless suggests that at least in its later literary form this traditionally lewd and farcical genre also had time for moralizing. We have evidence from the late Republic and Empire of mime performers making topical, sometimes caustic, political allusions from the stage. Such topicality may have been a feature of mime's preliterary form as well.

As with the *Atellana*, Plautus's name may reflect experience with mime. The name "Plautus" itself, which means "flat-foot," is possibly a made-up name reflecting Plautus's own experience as a *planipes* who performed in mimes (Gratwick 1973).

Scripted Drama

Some 30 years after Plautus's death, a theatrical troupe expanded the prologue of his *Casina* for a revival performance. Among their additions was a statement that when *Casina* was first performed in the early second century, "there was a flowering of poets" (*ea tempestate flos poetarum fuit*, 18). This claim joins other evidence in suggesting that Plautus's audiences had the opportunity to see lots of scripted drama, including comedies

like Plautus's, known as *fabulae palliatae*. Two titles survive of *palliatae* by Livius Andronicus, and about 33 by Gnaeus Naevius, who probably began writing comedies about the same time as Livius Andronicus. Of Quintus Ennius, who would go on to become the greatest Latin author of the second century, two comic titles survive, one or both of which may have been written early in Ennius's career, and therefore during Plautus's lifetime. Forty-two titles survive of comedies by Caecilius Statius, whom one ancient critic considered the best Roman comic author. Though he survived Plautus by some years, Plautus's audiences probably knew Caecilius's earliest plays as well. Each of these playwrights may have written more comedies whose titles have not survived; and to these names famous in antiquity we can add several more comic playwrights of whom we have only a few titles and fragments, and others whose names alone have survived. There were probably more, of whom all trace has been lost. Some 53 titles have come down to us attributed to Plautus. Although Varro felt confident that just 21 of them were actually by Plautus, a scholar in the second century CE reports that in his day 130 plays were in circulation attributed to Plautus (Gell. *NA* 3.3.11). Some of these plays, perhaps, were actually by Plautus, and others were no doubt by later imitators. But some were probably by other authors of Plautus's day whose very names have been lost.

There were no doubt variations between these playwrights. Some evidence, for example, suggests that Naevius may have been more willing than his contemporaries to engage with politics in his plays (but see Gruen 1990, pp. 92–106). All in all, though, the remains of the *fabula palliata* suggest that the genre was remarkably uniform, and that Plautus's audience came to his plays with a well-developed set of generic expectations. As far as we can tell, all *palliatae* were adaptations of Greek comedies. They were set in the Greek world; but Plautus's contemporaries, like Plautus himself, did not hesitate to introduce incongruous elements of Roman life into their plots. Thus we find characters in Naevius referring to cities near Rome (*Ariolus* 23 Warmington). The plots of *palliatae*, with a few exceptions like Plautus's *Captivi*, had at their core a young man who gains access to a woman he loves in the course of the play.

The fragments also suggest that the comedies of Plautus's contemporaries were inhabited by the same stock characters we find in the Plautine corpus (see Chapter 8): clever slaves and prostitutes, love-struck young men, stern fathers who find themselves duped, wives who oppose their husbands, parasites, braggart soldiers. Many of the comic themes we find in Plautus, such as food and drunkenness, show up in the fragments as well. There also appears to be a remarkable similarity in the verbal style of all the early writers of *palliatae*: many fragments demonstrate the same kind of verbal exuberance we find in Plautus, including long comic lists, anaphora and alliteration, asyndeton, incongruous comparison and identifications, and farcical jokes (Wright 1974).

Palliatae were profoundly musical, far more so than their Greek models. Though they removed the choruses who had provided interludes in Greek comedies, the Roman comic playwrights had their actors perform to musical accompaniment far more often than their Greek predecessors had. The two dominant meters in the comic fragments of Livius Andronicus, Naevius, Ennius, and Caecilius, as in Plautus, are the iambic senarius, which we know from various sources was almost always spoken without accompaniment, and the trochaic septenarius, which was sung or chanted to the accompaniment of the *tibia*. There are hints as well in the other comic playwrights of some of the more complex meters for which Plautus was famous (see Chapter 17).

It is possible that a second form of scripted comic drama, known by later Roman authors as the *fabula togata*, also developed during Plautus's lifetime. The earliest known author of this genre, Titinius, probably produced his first play before Terence's first play appeared in 166 (Walsh 2011, pp. 126–138). As we can date the playwright with no greater precision, his floruit may have been after Plautus died, or the careers of the two playwrights may have overlapped. From the few surviving fragments of Titinius's plays, the similarly scanty fragments of later writers of *togatae* (especially L. Afranius [late second century] and T. Quinctius Atta [early first century]), and accounts of the genre in later authors, we learn that *fabulae togatae* were set not in Greece, but in towns around Rome. They appear, like *palliatae*, to have had plots centered on love; but they were probably not direct adaptations of Greek comedies. The fragments and other evidence suggest that *togatae* had a greater interest than *palliatae* did in family relationships – we hear a good deal about marriages and dowries, for example – and that, as in the literary *Atellana*, various kinds of rather mundane professions played an important role. There is some evidence that the overturning of social mores that played such an important part in *palliatae* was toned down in *togatae*. A regular feature of *palliatae* is the deception of masters by their slaves (see Chapter 9). While there is also evidence for deception plays among *togatae*, Donatus reports that in *togatae* slaves were in general not cleverer than their masters (ad *Eun.* 57).

If in fact Titinius's career overlapped with Plautus's, Plautus's theatrical milieu becomes more complex. Such an early date for Titinius would mean that at least in the last years of Plautus's career his audiences would be accustomed to some bold experimentation in scripted comedy, even as the plots, characters, and style of *palliatae* generally followed predictable patterns. At least for now that question must remain open.

Plautus's audience was also very familiar with mythological tragedies, later called *fabulae crepidatae*. From this genre we have about 8 titles attributed to Livius Andronicus, 6 to Naevius, and 20 to Ennius. Ennius's nephew Marcus Pacuvius, who also wrote tragedies, was born in 220, so the earliest of his tragedies may also date from Plautus's lifetime (about 13 titles survive). As is the case with *palliatae*, each of these authors may have written more tragedies whose titles have not survived, and there were probably other writers of tragedy in Plautus's day who have left us no titles or fragments. A character in Plautus's *Rudens* compares a storm to the one in the *Alcumena* of Euripides (86). He refers presumably to an adaptation of Euripides's *Alcmene* that Plautus's audience would have recently seen. There is no *Alcumena*, however, in the extant titles of Livius, Naevius, Ennius, or Pacuvius.

Crepidatae, like *palliatae*, were adaptations of Greek plays. In choosing which Greek tragedies to adapt, the Roman tragic playwrights appear to have had a decided preference for the "classics" of the fifth century: Aeschylus, Sophocles, and especially Euripides. Sometimes the Roman tragedians followed their Greek predecessors quite closely. Some surviving passages of Ennius's *Medea* are nearly direct translations from Euripides's *Medea*. Like the authors of *palliatae*, however, the Roman tragic playwrights did not hold to a standard of unswerving fidelity to their Greek originals. The fragments suggest that among the changes they made was an intensification of melodramatic elements. The title character of Ennius's *Andromacha* sings an elaborate lamentation that expands upon her laments in Euripides's *Andromache* (F 23 Manuwald). The tragedians were also fond

of Roman-style moralizing and political vocabulary, as when, in Naevius's *Trojan Horse*, Hector tells Priam, "I am happy that I am praised by you, father, a man who has himself been praised" (F 14 Schauer).

Mercury, delivering the prologue of Plautus's *Amphitruo*, says that the play about to begin is a tragedy. Alleging that that statement brings frowns from his audience, he says that he will make the play a comedy using the same verses (*isdem vorsibus*, 55). Mercury's *isdem vorsibus* is an exaggeration, but not an absurdity. As in Greece, Roman tragedies have more "serious" plots than comedies, and their characters are of higher status. In other respects, however, the difference between comedy and tragedy in Republican Rome is much less than that between tragedy and comedy in fifth-century Athens. Unlike in Athens, where the same author virtually never wrote both tragedies and comedies, Livius, Naevius, and Ennius all wrote both *crepidatae* and *palliatae*.

Roman tragic language, not surprisingly, tends to be more bombastic than Plautus's (except when Plautus himself is parodying tragedy), but in many respects the styles of comedy and tragedy were remarkably similar in the Roman Republic. Both comic and tragic playwrights of Plautus's day had a fondness for elaborate language, which abounds in such features as alliteration, word play, and long lists. What exactly happened to Greek tragic choruses in the hands of their Roman adaptors is not clear, but it is reasonably certain that they played a less significant role, while actors sang much more than they did in the Greek originals. Tragedy thus shared with comedy the same basic musical structure, in which spoken passages in iambic senarii alternated with passages in other meters chanted or sung to the *tibia*. Several tragic fragments also hint at the kind of metrical variety Plautus is known for, and it has been suggested that the lyric passages of Ennius, Naevius, and other tragedians may have been the inspiration for some of Plautus's musical extravaganzas (Fraenkel 2007, pp. 219–251). This close relationship between tragedy and comedy meant that Plautus could respond to his sister genre easily and fluidly, in passages ranging from hilarious parody to those where language reminiscent of tragedy increases the emotional power of sentimental scenes (see Chapter 14).

Fabulae praetextae had plots drawn from Roman history, sometimes from the mythical past, and sometimes from more recent events (compare Aeschylus's *Persians*). Our first known *fabulae praetextae* are two plays by Naevius: *The Wolf* or *Romulus*, drawn from the life of Rome's legendary founder, and *Clastidium*, which recounted events surrounding a Roman victory in 222. We also have titles of two *praetextae* by Ennius (*The Sabine Women*, about another event from Rome's foundation legend, and *Ambracia*, about a successful Roman siege in 189), and a few by later authors. Their meager remains suggest that in style and structure *fabulae praetextae* were similar to *fabulae crepidatae*. In a long fragment from a *praetexta* of the later playwright Accius (170 -c. 84), for example, characters move between unaccompanied iambic senarii and accompanied trochaic septenarii in identical ways to what happens in *crepidatae* and the plays of Plautus (651–672 Dangel 2002). The existence of the *praetexta* indicates the degree to which Roman audiences and playwrights in Plautus's day were willing to move beyond the range offered them by Greek drama, whether or not we follow Wiseman in assuming that mid-Republican Rome featured types of theater that go well beyond those explicitly described in our sources.

Conclusion

The fleeting glimpses we are offered into what happened on the Roman stage of Plautus's day make clear that we would understand the plays of Plautus much better if more of this lively theatrical life had survived. Even without whole texts, extensive archeological remains, or contemporary accounts, however, one thing is clear: Plautus and his audience had considerable experience with a wide variety of scripted and unscripted theatrical forms, including many *palliatae* very similar to those of Plautus; just possibly *togatae*, which brought to scripted comedy a uniquely Italian flair; mythological tragedies (*crepidatae*), to which Plautus frequently responded; *praetextae* with plots drawn from Roman history; numerous forms of dance; two distinct but related types of farcical skits, the *Atellana* and the mime; and probably other performance types of which no record has survived. Though the exact degree to which all these forms determined how Plautus changed the Greek comedies he adapted cannot be determined with certainty, there can be little doubt that this theatrical smorgasbord helped to make Plautine comedy the rich phenomenon that it is.

FURTHER READING

The best general survey of Roman Republican theater is Manuwald (2011). The older surveys of Duckworth (1952), Bieber (1961), Beare (1964) and Beacham (1991) also remain useful. Wiseman has discussed his theories on Roman theater in numerous volumes, including (2004, 2015). On the *fabula Atellana*, see Frassinetti (1967), and the essays in Raffaelli and Tontini (2010, 2013). Panayotakis (2010) offers an excellent introduction to mime. For the fragments, see Bonaria (1965). See also Fantham (1989). For essays on various aspects of pre-literary Italian farce and its possible influence on Plautus, see Vogt-Spira (1989, 1993), and Benz et al. (1995). Boyle (2006) is a good introduction to Roman tragedy. Manuwald (2001) provides the most thorough review of our evidence for the *praetexta*. See also Flower (1995). For the fragments of both comedy and tragedy, Ribbeck (1897–1898) and Warmington (1935–1936), while dated, remain good starting places. For tragedy, Schauer (2012) on Livius and Naevius, Manuwald (2012) on Ennius, and Schierl (2006) on Pacuvius are more reliable. Feeney (2016) describes how remarkable it is that Livius Andronicus and his successors created a new national literature.

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