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Plautus and Terence in Their Roman Contexts

Introduction

Scenic productions formed a significant element of Roman festival culture from its inception. Literary versions of such performances came into being with the adoption of the dramatic genres of tragedy and comedy from Greece; soon, further dramatic genres established themselves. Out of the great number of plays written over the centuries only a few have been preserved in full: from the Republican period there are comedies by Plautus and Terence; from imperial times there are tragedies and one *fabula praetexta* transmitted under Seneca's name. It is no surprise then that works by Plautus, Terence, and Seneca have received the greatest attention; but their historical, social, and literary contexts have not always been adequately taken into account.

Even though modern recipients will never be able to approach Roman dramas in the same way as original audiences did, attempts at appreciating these plays within their historical framework are possible. With regard to the comedies of Plautus and Terence from the Republican period, this means that they have to be placed within the context of their dramatic genre, which covers, beyond the two well-known playwrights, a large number of poets over an extended period of time. These dramas should also be seen within the context of other dramatic genres and of Republican literature more generally, of their historical and social settings, and of the performance conditions as determined by organisational structures and audience reception. This chapter will look at these framing contexts, which mutually condition each other (on Roman vs. Greek comedy, see Telò in this volume).

Context 1: The Dramatic Genre of *Fabula Palliata*

The emergence of literary Roman drama is conventionally dated to 240 BC. In this year Rome's first poet Livius Andronicus brought Latin drama(s)

based on existing Greek models on stage; his plays were shown at a festival organised by Roman magistrates right after the conclusion of the First Punic War (264–241 BC).¹ Discrepancies in the sources leave it unclear whether Livius Andronicus produced one or two dramas on this occasion and whether these were a tragedy and/or comedy; at any rate the poet established Greek-style tragedy (*fabula crepidata* = tragedy in Greek dress) and Greek-style comedy (*fabula palliata* = comedy in Greek dress) in Rome. By the time Plautus (c. 250–184 BC) started producing Greek-style comedies towards the end of the third century BC, this type of drama had already been composed and watched at Rome for a few decades. In addition to Livius Andronicus (c. 280/70–200 BC), poets active in the area of comedy before Plautus or contemporary with him include Naevius (c. 280/60–200 BC) and Ennius (239–169 BC).

Hence Plautus could build on established dramatic conventions and rely on the audience's familiarity with them. The increasing sophistication of dramatic genres is probably the reason why Plautus is the first known Roman dramatist to have concentrated on one dramatic genre only (*fabula palliata*). In this area he seems to have been prolific: twenty-one (almost complete) plays are extant, and many more titles and fragments survive under his name, some of which, however, are likely to be spurious. Many plays came to be attributed to this successful playwright; 130 plays circulated under his name at some point, according to ancient evidence (Gell. NA 3.3). This situation served as an incentive for early scholars to look at Plautus' output and try to separate genuine from spurious works.²

While the surviving fragments of comedies by Livius Andronicus and Ennius are meagre and do not allow a valid assessment of their specific characteristics, the extant remains of Naevius' comedies (titles of about 35 comedies and about 140, partly incomplete, comic verses) are more substantial; in fact, Naevius was mainly regarded as a writer of comedies in antiquity.³ On the basis of the available titles and fragments it seems that his comedies exhibited typical motifs and plot structures of (Greek and Roman) New Comedy: there are figures such as parasites, braggart soldiers, rivals, prostitutes, twins, and even quadruplets; plots feature love affairs, conflicts between fathers and sons because of love relationships or the need for money, as well as slaves directing the course of action. Some comedies were apparently made more complex by 'double' plots, i.e. featuring two fathers and two sons with similar problems, by issues around mistaken

¹ Cf. Cic. *Brut.* 72; *Tusc.* 1.3; *Sen.* 50; Liv. 7.2.8; Val. Max. 2.4.4; Gell. NA 17.21.42; Cass. *Chron.*, p. 128 MGH AA 11.2 (on 239 BC).

² Cf. Manuwald's chapter on reception in this volume.

³ Cf. Gell. NA 15.24; Hieron. *Ab Abr.* 1816, 201 BC (p. 135g Helm).

identity or by metatheatrical statements, some of which seem to come from prologues.⁴

The prologue to Terence's *Andria* claims that Naevius was one of the Roman comic poets who used *contaminatio*, i.e. who combined elements from several Greek models into one Latin play (Ter. *An.* 15–21). On the whole Naevius kept the Greek setting and the Greek point of view of his models, while at the same time including allusions to Roman reality as well as references to Roman virtues and socially and politically relevant values.⁵ Equally, Naevius enhanced the Roman element in other literary genres, composing dramas and an epic on topics from Roman history. All this points to creative adaptation and poetic originality in Naevius' output.

As has been recognised, there are similarities in diction and individual motifs between Naevius and Plautus,⁶ and a few titles are assigned to both poets in the textual tradition (*Carbonaria*, *Colax*, *Nervolaria*).⁷ Plautus is said to have revised and updated plays of older poets, which thereby gained characteristic features of his style and were ascribed to him (Gell. *NA* 3.3.13). This relationship to predecessors and the fact that some traits commonly associated with Plautus are already present in the works of his older contemporary indicate that Plautus worked in an emerging comic tradition and developed existing elements further.

The dramas by Plautus and those by Terence (c. 195/4–159 BC) are separated by several decades, during which the poet Caecilius Statius (c. 230/20–168/7 BC) was active. Owing to this chronological position, modern scholars often regard Caecilius as an intermediary or transitional figure.⁸ As his dramatic output only survives in fragments (42 titles of comedies and almost 300, partly incomplete, lines), it is difficult to get a proper idea of his plays. But Caecilius' comedies must have been impressive: Cicero says that

⁴ Cf. e.g. parasites (Naev. *Colax* [cf. Ter. *Eun.* 23–34]; *Pall.* 60 R.³ = 57 W.); braggart soldiers (Naev. *Colax* [cf. Ter. *Eun.* 23–34]); rivals (Naev. *Pall.* 41–2 R.³ = 42–3 W.); prostitutes (Naev. *Pall.* 75–9 R.³ = 74–9 W.); conflicts between fathers and sons on account of love relationships and money (Naev. *Pall.* 95; 96–8 R.³ = 105; 94–6 W.); twins and even quadruplets (Naev. *Pall.* 2–3 R.³ = 2–3 W.; *Quadrigenini*); love affairs (Naev. *Pall.* 55; 90–1; 96–8 R.³ = 60; 88–9; 94–6 W.); banquets (Naev. *Pall.* 81 R.³ = 72 W.); important role of slaves (names of slaves as titles); double plots (Naev. *Pall.* 83–4; 86 R.³ = 80–1; 82 W.); confusions between characters (Naev. *Pall.* 2–3 R.³ = 2–3 W.); metatheatrical statements (Naev. *Pall.* 1; 17; 72–4 R.³ = 1; 15; 69–71 W.).

⁵ Cf. e.g. Naev. *Pall.* 69; 83–4; 92–3; 108–10 R.³ = 67; 80–1; 90–1; *Inc.* 1–3 W.

⁶ Cf. e.g. Naev. *Pall.* 53 R.³ = 58 W.: Plaut. *St.* 118–19 – Naev. *Pall.* 82 R.³ = 84–5 W.: Plaut. *Most.* 323–4 – Naev. *Pall.* 95 R.³ = 105 W.: Plaut. *Most.* 233–4.

⁷ In the case of *Nervolaria* this depends on an emendation of the title for Naevius' play as transmitted in Nonius Marcellus (Non., p. 151.2 M. = 220 L.: *Nervularia Ritschl*: *herularia codd.*).

⁸ On the position of Plautus, Caecilius Statius, and Terence within the *palliata* tradition cf. esp. Wright (1974); Franko (2013).

Caecilius may ‘perhaps’ (*fortasse*) be called the greatest comic writer (Cic. *Opt. gen.* 2); Volcacius Sedigitus’ canon (c. 100 BC) of the ten best writers of comedy is headed by Caecilius (cf. Gell. *NA* 15.24); Quintilian reports that the ancients extolled Caecilius (Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.99); and (on one occasion) Gellius refers to him as ‘that famous writer of comedies’ (Gell. *NA* 4.20.13: *ille comoediarum poeta inclutus*).⁹

Caecilius’ impact may have been based on stunning scenes as well as on sophisticated and dramatically effective plot construction (cf. Varro, *Sat. Men.* 399 B.) In addition, he is mentioned as one of those poets who easily moved the emotions (cf. Varro, fr. 40 Funaioli). In terms of content he seems to have used stock comic plots, but to have varied them significantly in some of his plays and included metatheatrical statements on typical features of *fabulae palliatae* (e.g. Caec. *Pall.* 243–4 R.³ = 236–7 W.). His father figures were apparently known to be harsh (cf. Cic. *Cacl.* 37–8; Quint. *Inst.* 11.1.39). Questions of social interaction and reputation, problems concerning the legitimacy and education of children, other issues of family relationships, the portrayal of human conditions, such as poverty or old age, appear to have been prominent in his plots (e.g. Caec. *Hypobolimaesus*, *Plocium*, and *Synephebi*; Cic. *Sen.* 24–6).

The prologue to Terence’s *Hecyra* reveals (Ter. *Hec.* 1–57) that Caecilius worked with the same producer as Terence, Ambivius Turpio. According to Terence’s text, Ambivius Turpio was interested in both poets and supported them through the difficult early stages of their careers. Both dramatists were apparently confronted by opponents and initially driven off the stage; hence both are likely to have written plays that had the potential for success and therefore annoyed rivals.¹⁰ The two dramatists might therefore share characteristics, even if other sources testify to differences in specific areas such as language or character portrayal. The story, though chronologically problematic, that Caecilius enjoyed *Andria* when the young Terence read this play to him¹¹ also indicates that some affinity was perceived between the two.

Caecilius’ dramas are likely to have discussed serious topics, but also to have included impressive stage effects. Issues and values featuring in his plays, as can be inferred from the fragments, are mostly concerned with

⁹ Elsewhere Caecilius is criticised for ruining Menander’s *Plokion* (Gell. *NA* 2.23).

¹⁰ The interpretation of the prologues to Terence’s *Hecyra* has been controversial, and the two unsuccessful performances of the play have often been seen as a sign of Terence’s failure to produce plays of sufficient interest to Roman audiences. However, the text of the prologue suggests that the performances were interrupted not by the original audience leaving, but by other people entering the venue; these disturbances might have been arranged by Terence’s opponents. On the *Hecyra* prologues, cf. esp. Gilula (1978); (1981); Sandbach (1982); Parker (1996) 592–601.

¹¹ Cf. Suet./Donat. *Vita Ter.* 3; Hieron. *Ab Abr.* 1859, 158 BC (p. 142a Helm).

family life, the corresponding relationships, and the impact on one's position in society, which looks forward to Terence, just as the more limited range of models and the use of Greek titles. By contrast, Caecilius' predecessors Naevius and Plautus not only drew on a wider variety of models and plot variations, but also touched on a broader range of socially and politically relevant values. Hence, with regard to themes, elements of dramatic technique, and contributions to literary discussions, Caecilius' plays indicate a development towards Terence, while they seem to have continued the Plautine tradition in areas such as metre, style, language, and comic effects.

Connections between all these poets and the emergence of generic conventions, including modifications within this framework, are further indicated by the fact that Terence refers to the practice of Ennius, Naevius, and Plautus as a precedent and distances himself from his contemporary opponent Luscius Lanuvinus, who seems to have followed different poetic principles (Ter. *An.* 6–7; 18–21; *Haut.* 22; *Eun.* 6–26; *Ph.* 1).

Terence does not mark the end of the history of *fabula palliata*: in the second half of the second century there was Sex. Turpilius (d. 104/3 BC). Turpilius' works, of which thirteen titles and just over 200, partly incomplete, lines survive, show the continuation of characteristics of Terentian comedy in titles and themes, but also feature innovations in the comic plot, determined partly by the dramatic conventions of his time.

In addition to the standard characters and situations of New Comedy,¹² Turpilius' dramas include attention to everyday occupations, such as sailors, fishermen, and conditions at sea.¹³ Some fragments have the character of sayings, sometimes combined with a (popular-)philosophical connotation (e.g. Turp. *Pall.* 9–10; 28; 40; 142–4; 213 R.³). Additionally, the possible appropriation of plays from Greek Middle Comedy and a play entitled *Leucadia*, with its reference to the story of Sappho and Phaon, indicate that Turpilius might have pursued the development of *fabula palliata* towards the presentation of more serious topics and introduced 'supernatural' or 'mythical' aspects.

This suggests that Turpilius continued the tendency towards a more refined, 'Hellenic' style of drama and made his plays attractive by including reminiscences of Plautine comedy, at a time when audiences could be said to prefer revivals of Plautine comedy to productions of new plays (cf. Plaut.

¹² Cf. e.g. love affairs (Turp. *Pall.* 37–9 R.³); marriages (Turp. *Pall.* 3; 41; 163; 164; 166 R.³); evil pimps (Turp. *Pall.* 133–5 R.³); (greedy) courtesans (Turp. *Pall.* 33; 42; 160–2; 185–8 R.³); slaves (Turp. *Pall.* 69–70 R.³); strict old men/fathers (Turp. *Pall.* 35–6 R.³); tricks/intrigues of scheming slaves against old men (Turp. *Pall.* 136–8; 205–6 R.³).

¹³ Cf. e.g. Turp. *Pall.* 21–2; 23; 48–9; 139–41; 214–16 R.³; *Leucadia*.

Cas. 5–20). Thus it may be concluded that Turpilius combined characteristics of both Plautus/Naevius and Terence/Caecilius: he followed Terence's (and Caecilius') 'Hellenised' version of *fabula palliata* in titles, models, and themes, but remained closer to Plautus (and Naevius) in style, language, and scene structures. This adaptation of standard comic techniques was presumably also a reaction to the tastes of contemporary audiences, since additional features such as turbulent and sophisticated incidents on stage or a higher frequency of low-life figures can also be observed in works of other dramatic genres produced in this period.

For the period after Turpilius' death there is no record of new *fabulae palliatae* written for the Roman stage. Yet, revival performances of comedies (like those of works of other dramatic genres) continued until the end of the Republic (cf. e.g. Cic. *Rosc. Am.* 47; *Sest.* 118–23; *Fam.* 9.22.1; *Sen.* 65). Eventually, however, alternative forms of comic entertainment and contests for actors and poets (cf. e.g. Macr. *Sat.* 2.7.2–9) became more and more prominent. In contrast to tragedy, comedy was not taken up as literary drama in imperial times, presumably since it was less effective without a performance dimension and did not lend itself equally readily to discussions of general questions of a more explicit ethical or philosophical nature.

Overall, the characteristics of the major writers of *fabula palliata* during the Republican period, in connection with their chronological position, indicate that there was a continuous evolution of this dramatic genre from the exuberant to the more refined and serious, while dramatic effects were kept for the benefit of audiences; these elements were altered and adapted in response to general changes in the evolution of dramatic performances. Beyond their individual poetic characteristics, the two comic playwrights of whom entire plays are extant, Plautus and Terence, can therefore be placed within such developments.

Context 2: Republican Drama

In order to establish the place of Greek-style comedy within the framework of Republican drama more precisely, the diachronic analysis of a succession of *palliata* poets must be supplemented by a synchronic look at contemporary dramatic genres in Rome, since *fabula palliata* developed within this broader dramatic context.

Looking in hindsight at the genres of Roman drama, ancient scholars, in particular the late-Republican polymath Varro, established a coherent system of Greek and Roman varieties, their characteristics, and their mutual relationship, which was taken up by late-antique commentators and

grammarians.¹⁴ In addition to dramatic genres such as *fabula Atellana* or *mimus*, which were regarded as low and relatively insignificant, there was a fourfold arrangement of two Greek and two Roman versions or two serious and two light varieties of drama: i.e. Greek-style serious drama (*fabula crepidata*/tragedy) based on Greek myth; Roman-style serious drama (*fabula praetexta*) based on events from Roman history; Greek-style comedy (*fabula palliata*/comedy) representing everyday events of ordinary people set in Greece; and Roman-style comedy (*fabula togata*) representing everyday events of ordinary people set in Rome. *Fabula palliata* is distinguished from its Roman comic counterpart by its setting and characters, but also by its more fanciful character and greater freedom from the conventions of Roman life, since the action takes place in a foreign country. It differs from serious forms of drama by its personnel, consisting of ordinary human beings including slaves, as well as by the atmosphere of its plots.

This arrangement of dramatic genres is a neat, academic system, which holds true for the most part, but there are also overlaps and mutual influences that cross generic boundaries. The most obvious instance is Plautus' *Amphitruo*, which the poet defines as a 'tragicomedy', using a term that seems to have been coined for the occasion (Plaut. *Amph.* 50–63). The play exhibits a mixture of dramatic genres, since both gods and slaves take part in the action, as outlined in the prologue. However, the 'combination' can be regarded as going beyond that because the piece includes scenes of a more serious and elevated nature set in a comic context. Plautus comes back to generic questions in prologues to other dramas (esp. Plaut. *Capt.* 55–62), but nowhere else does he explicitly transgress generic boundaries, even though plays such as *Captivi* or *Rudens* also include scenes and motifs reminiscent of tragedy (see Telò in this volume).¹⁵ In addition to these straightforward and rather serious uses of 'tragic' elements, Plautus exploits typical structures and diction found in tragedies in his own plots for comic or parodic effects (e.g. Plaut. *Merc.* 195–7; *Most.* 496b–504; *Pseud.* 702–7). He even refers to particular tragedies and tragic scenes, presumably Roman adaptations (Plaut. *Amph.* 41–5; *Poen.* 1–15; *Ru.* 86).

In Terence the impact of tragedy is not primarily felt by explicit allusions (but cf. Ter. *Eun.* 590 with Donat. ad loc.) or generic discussions; his works rather exemplify an increasing convergence of serious and light dramatic genres towards the end of the Republic, as his plays have a noticeably serious

¹⁴ Cf. e.g. Diom. *Ars* 3, *Gramm. Lat.* 1.482–91 Keil; Euanth. *Fab.* 4.1–3; Donat. *Com.* 6. 1–2; on Ter. *Ad.* 7; Lydus, *Mag.* 1.40; *Lib. gloss.* 1.2–8; 2.9–11.

¹⁵ *Captivi* with its warlike theme has been compared to contemporary *fabulae praetextae* and interpreted as a comic version of a *fabula praetexta*, possibly performed in connection with Flamininus' return to Rome in 194 BC; cf. Lefèvre (1998).

dimension and take up themes such as family relationships and problems of education, which could equally feature in tragedy. Even if Terence builds on themes in Greek models, his choices and the way of presentation could be influenced by developments in contemporary tragedy.¹⁶

The reduced role of the clever slave and the less exuberant action in later *fabulae palliatae* could also have been shaped in response to the conventions and tone of the emerging *fabula togata*. This dramatic genre of comedy set in Rome seems to have been developed on the model of *fabula palliata* as an instance of differentiation, when the latter was becoming more restrained and Hellenic,¹⁷ in order to provide a Roman counterpart: while the subject matter and plot outlines of *fabulae togatae* and *palliatae* were similar, the character of *fabulae togatae* was more serious (Sen. *Ep.* 8.8; 89.7) and the atmosphere was more sober and closer to Roman reality, so that, for instance, slaves were not normally allowed to be cleverer than their masters (Donat. on Ter. *Eun.* 57).¹⁸ At the same time, Roman tragedy (just as Greek models by Euripides, for example) seems to have increasingly employed successful comic techniques (such as false identity) over the course of the Republican period.

Such connections and similarities point to mutual interdependence and influences among all forms of Roman Republican drama, which will have had an impact on the development of the *fabula palliata* and perhaps also on its eventual decline.

Context 3: Republican Literary Texts

Although the framework of Roman drama is most important for the development of Roman comedy, a public genre such as drama cannot be separated from other areas of formalised speech or writing. Prose genres such as oratory and historiography as well as the poetic genres of epic or satire were emerging and developing in Rome at the same time as drama; while in

¹⁶ On Terence and tragedy, cf. Sharrock (2009) 219–32; (2013) 55–61. On the relation of *fabula palliata* to tragedy, see Telò in this volume.

¹⁷ Sheets (1983) has suggested that in Plautus' time the *fabula palliata* was still in the process of acquiring its characteristic form, distinct from tragedy. Although the fluidity of generic boundaries in this period may be one of the explanations for the experimental character of his plays, there is already a clear awareness of the components of a standard comedy in Plautus.

¹⁸ Since there is no unambiguous evidence on the emergence of the *fabula togata*, different views have been put forward. All things considered, *fabulae togatae* are most likely to have appeared in the early second century BC, when *fabulae palliatae* were still being written, and therefore to be a further variant rather than a replacement. Cf. e.g. Duckworth (1952) 68–9; Beare (1964) 129.

this period epic poetry was produced by writers who were also dramatists, oratory and historiography were the domain of Roman politicians and noblemen from the start.

A link to epic and historiography may be noticed in humorous (real or fictitious) battle narratives, but otherwise a significant impact of these literary genres is not particularly noticeable in Greek-style Roman comedy. To oratory, however, there are closer correspondences, especially as it was becoming more sophisticated in this period and speeches started to get published (cf. also Cic. *Brut.* 65), which indicates their recognition as pieces of formal writing. A relationship to oratory is most obvious in Terence's metaliterary prologues, which acquire the status of defence speeches and in some of which the speaker explicitly defines himself as 'orator' in the double sense of the word (Ter. *Haut.* 11; *Hec.* 9; *Ad.* 1–5).¹⁹ In the body of a play characters' speeches may show signs of the conventions of rhetoric, such as *captatio benevolentiae*, ring-composition or rhetorical figures, or include parody of elaborate rhetoric (cf. e.g. Plaut. *Most.* 84–156; *Ps.* 394–414; Caec. *Pall.* 142–57 R.³ = 136–50 W.). Whether at this point in time both comedy and oratory, which developed in tandem, were influenced by Greek models and rhetorical theory or developed and formalised elements of a 'native Latin tradition of rhetoric' or a combination of both, close connections between the two genres are obvious.²⁰

Further (less literary) forms of formal speech, such as prayers, legal language, battle reports or other technical business, have also left their mark as formalised statements in the respective styles have been incorporated or parodied, particularly by Plautus (e.g. Plaut. *Amph.* 203–61; *Mil.* 200–34).²¹

References of this kind, as well as rhetorical construction of speeches, will have linked *fabulae palliatae* to real-life experiences of Roman audiences.

Context 4: Historical and Social Background

While the contexts surveyed so far are 'literary' (in a broad sense of the term), the genre of drama, being performed to mixed audiences, is rooted within contemporary historical and social conditions. In Rome, even plays developed from earlier Greek dramas were selected and adapted to fit a Roman framework. On a more superficial level such an adjustment is clear from the replacement of Greek terms and customs by the corresponding Roman versions, by the inclusion of allusions to Roman institutions and to Roman

¹⁹ Cf. esp. Goldberg (1983) (with references). ²⁰ See Barsby (2007).

²¹ On passages with military allusions, cf. Gaiser (1972) 1,089–93.

or Italian localities and towns (e.g. Plaut. *Capt.* 90; 489; 877b–885a; Ter. *Eun.* 255–9), by references to Roman conventions such as praetorian edicts (e.g. Plaut. *Curc.* 280–98), and by the explanation of customs common in Greece, but not in Rome (e.g. Plaut. *Cas.* 68–78; *St.* 446–8).²² Above all, the adaptation is obvious from the choice of plots that showcase problems of relevance to all humans or the aftermath of a war, with both issues relevant to contemporary Roman audiences.

Although Plautus and Terence are frequently considered together, they are separated by several decades during which historical circumstances changed. Almost all of Plautus' plays were written during the Second Punic War (218–201 BC) or shortly afterwards, when Rome dealt with the threat of a foreign enemy and asserted the position of the emerging Roman empire, developing the Romans' view of themselves in the process. In Terence's time no major war was under way, but as a result of preceding conflicts in the East there had been a huge influx of Greek learning and culture, and Rome had to position itself in relation to this. Therefore it is not surprising that wars and their consequences play a significant role in Plautine comedy (e.g. Plaut. *Amph.*; *Capt.*; *Ep.*; *Mil.*) while more 'humane' and 'philosophical' topics or questions concerning the internal organisation of communities are prominent in Terence's works.

More generally, during the third and second centuries BC Roman society was subject to an increasing exposure to Greek culture.²³ In the age of Plautus, in the wake of the Punic Wars, the Romans adapted and adopted elements of Greek culture, then the leading cultural force, to demonstrate their growing standing. On the basis of a highly sophisticated model, the Romans began to shape their own literature in Latin. In Terence's time, after the Third Macedonian War (171–168 BC), the exchange intensified, when important Greek philosophers and other scholars spent time in Rome and interacted with the Roman cultural elite. Against this background it is not a surprise that Plautus and Terence, like contemporary dramatists, looked to Greek comedies as models: while this provided them with a paradigm for plot and themes, they were confident enough to adapt the dramas to the Roman context.

The incoming riches from Rome's conquests and the increased cultural interaction with the areas brought under Rome's control had an impact on Roman society and the attitude to Greek customs. Still, the world depicted in *fabulae palliatae* was a foreign world, where different conventions with

²² On references to the Roman world, cf. also Gaiser (1972) 1,088–95; for a study of some of the comic themes in a Roman context, see Leigh (2004); on allusions to the contemporary situation in Terence, cf. also Starks (2013).

²³ On this aspect, cf. e.g. Gruen (1990).

respect to the role of prostitutes, marriage conventions or the relationship between masters and slaves or the members of different generations operated, as the poets sometimes indicate (e.g. Plaut. *Cas.* 68–78; *St.* 446–8). Accordingly, lascivious and debauched behaviour can be defined as ‘behaving like a Greek’ (*pergraecari*: e.g. Plaut. *Bacch.* 813; *Most.* 22; 64; 960; *Poen.* 603). This contrast between societies does not mean, however, that the topics presented in the plays are irrelevant for Roman audiences: what these dramas say about inter-human relationships is transferable.

As regards the poets’ own social and cultural position, Plautus and Terence, like all early ‘Roman’ poets, did not come from the city of Rome: Plautus hailed from Umbrian Sarsina,²⁴ and Terence was a native of North Africa.²⁵ While these dramatists eventually moved to Rome and started writing in Latin for Roman audiences, because of their background, they will have been familiar with the literature and culture of peoples in the Mediterranean by the time they came to Rome. The poets’ movement between cultures is illustrated by the famous statement of Plautus’ contemporary Ennius, who said that he had three hearts, referring to his command of Oscan, Greek, and Latin (cf. Gell. *NA* 17.17.1).

Further information about the poets’ lives is mainly anecdotal. A report in Gellius (Gell. *NA* 3.3.14) suggests that Plautus may have had previous experience in theatre business before he started writing comedies, which could explain his familiarity with dramatic technique and the use of slapstick elements. Terence not only was not a Roman, but was also originally a slave of the senator Terentius Lucanus, who supported him because of his intelligence and later freed him; Terence thus enjoyed a good education (Suet./Donat. *Vita Ter.* 1), which may have been an important basis for his literary activity. Various bits of evidence, such as information in the ancient *Vita* (Suet./Donat. *Vita Ter.* 2), allegations that noble friends had actually written his plays or at least had aided him in their composition, which are refuted in Terence’s prologues (*Ter. Haut.* 22–4; *Ad.* 15–21), as well as the performance contexts of some comedies (at funeral games for L. Aemilius Paulus), suggest that Terence was in touch with prominent noblemen such as P. Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus Africanus and C. Laelius Sapiens. Therefore Terence is likely to have had first-hand knowledge of intellectual and cultural movements and of political developments in his time. Terence died young, and according to one version this happened on his way back from a voyage to Greece, which he had undertaken to find more Greek plays (Suet./Donat.

²⁴ Cf. Fest., p. 274.12–14 L.; Hieron. *Ab Abr.* 1817, 200 BC (p. 135h Helm); Plaut. *Most.* 770.

²⁵ Cf. Suet./Donat. *Vita Ter.* 1.

Vita Ter. 7); this might indicate that he was dissatisfied with what was currently available at Rome, either because the supply of as yet untouched dramas (which seem to have been the models required) was exhausted or because he was looking for particular types of pieces.

Context 5: Organisation and Audience Reception

While the literary surroundings will have shaped the content, style, and structure of individual dramas, the physical circumstances of a drama's production influence the immediate effect of a performance on audiences and are therefore relevant for the context of reception.²⁶

Originally, comedies, like works of other dramatic genres in Rome, were written for a single performance at a public festival.²⁷ Because dramatic performances only took place at festivals, which were organised by the authorities (or individual noblemen) and were established typically in honour of a god (with the appropriate rituals), they were placed within a broad religious and political framework. Initially, the only way to approach a Roman comedy was to watch a production in the theatre. Only later did scripts of plays become more widely available, so that by the first century BC dramas could be both watched and read, as Cicero testifies (*Cic. Rab. Post.* 29); this triggered the first scholarly activities in the late Republic.²⁸

Since dramatic performances, like races in the circus, belonged to the festival entertainment provided by the organiser, there was no entrance fee. Performances were in principle open to everybody. Audiences therefore are likely to have been mixed as to background, social class, age, sex, and occupation, consisting of locals and visitors from elsewhere. Free citizens, slaves, married ladies, nurses with infants, prostitutes, attendants on magistrates, and ushers are mentioned as among the members of the audience in comic prologues (esp. Plaut. *Poen.* 5–35; Ter. *Hec.* 28–48). Dramatic poets seem to have taken the variety of social and intellectual backgrounds into account: they conveyed essential information in a straightforward format and produced scripts that could be received by different members of the audience on different levels, as the plays included both impressive stage action and discussions of complex topics. At the same time Plautus and Terence play with and talk about standard comic conventions (e.g. in prologues); this implies that they expected a significant portion of audiences to be familiar with these and thus able to appreciate such metatheatrical elements.

²⁶ For more details on setting and staging, cf. Marshall (2006) and his chapter in this volume.

²⁷ On Republican festivals, cf. Bernstein (1998).

²⁸ On the importance of scholarly activities in the late Republic for establishing 'dramatic literature', cf. Goldberg (2005).

As regards the venue for performances, poets writing plays for particular festivals will have been aware of the location and the arrangements for stage and auditorium; however, it is not known whether they took this into account when composing their plays. At any rate the particular character of the various festivals hardly seems to have affected the contents of dramas. For audiences, however, the venue contributed to shaping their overall experience. Since Rome did not have a permanent stone theatre until the dedication of Pompey's theatre in 55 BC,²⁹ all stages were wooden and temporary, although they had reached a remarkable degree of sophistication by the end of the Republican period.³⁰ Initially, temporary stages were erected in the Forum, the Circus Maximus or in front of the temple of the deity honoured by the festival. This means that many of the original venues were rather cramped spaces, where the audience used seating created *ad hoc* close to the stage.³¹ In the early days there was no stratified seating according to social class, which later brought senators and equestrians to the front. Close interaction with the audience in the early days is indicated in Plautine comedies by the fact that they have characters address audiences or adopt the viewpoint of audiences (e.g. Plaut. *Merc.* 160; *Ru.* 1249–53; *Truc.* 931–2).

After the structure of the Roman theatre had developed into the form that is known from preserved stone theatres and from the description by the Augustan architect Vitruvius (Vitr. 5.6), stage and auditorium each filled about a half-circle opposite each other, and all action took place on stage.³² Since there was no view into the distance as the stage bordered on a high stage wall (elaborately decorated in later periods) and Roman theatres tended to be erected on flat ground, audiences were turned into onlookers watching events in an enclosed space. The creation of such an illusion might have been appropriate for dramas such as *fabulae palliatae* set in a foreign country.

There is little evidence on the immediate impact of Roman plays. Terence's *Eunuchus* is known to have been the most successful Republican comedy in financial terms, as it earned the poet an unprecedented high sum, which was recorded on the title page of the script (Suet./Donat. *Vita Ter.* 3; Donat. on *Ter. Eun., praef.* 1.6*). Clearly, one of Terence's comedies was a success. The problems arising at the first performances of some of his plays, which

²⁹ On the building and the inaugural ceremonies, cf. e.g. Cic. *Fam.* 7.1–4; *Off.* 2.57; *Pis.* 65; Asc. on Cic. *Pis.*; *Pis.* 65 (p. 1; 15–16 C.); Tac. *Ann.* 14.20.2; Plin. *HN* 7.158; 8.20; Tert. *De spect.* 10.5; Cass. Dio 39.38.1–3; Plut. *Pomp.* 52.5.

³⁰ Cf. esp. Plin. *HN* 34.36; 36.5–6; 36.113–15 on the *scaena* of the curule aedile M. Aemilius Scaurus in 58 BC.

³¹ On the layout and size of the early performance spaces, cf. Goldberg (1998) (on the Palatine).

³² On the architecture of Roman theatres, cf. Sear (2006).

Terence only overcame thanks to the persistence and support of his impresario Ambivius Turpio, seem to have been caused by the envy and malice of opponents rather than by faults of his plays; that such steps were taken suggests that Terence's dramas were rather successful with audiences. Equally, revivals of Plautine plays were demanded by audiences in about the middle of the second century BC according to the prologue to Plautus' *Casina*, added for a revival performance about a generation after the first performance, since people enjoyed Plautus' plays and preferred them to worthless new ones (Plaut. *Cas.* 5–20).

Hence it seems that both comic playwrights whose complete plays are extant, Plautus as well as Terence, were successful in the Republican period, though presumably their plays made an impact in different ways due to their specific character.³³ Other *palliata* writers, such as Naevius and Caecilius, are likely to have enjoyed some success, at least initially, as ancient comments indicate. However, it was Plautus and Terence who soon developed into 'classics': the numerous plays that circulated under Plautus' name show his standing as a writer of comedies, while Terence was praised as a literary model and became a school author.

Conclusion

Since *fabulae palliatae* from the Republican period contain almost no specific references to contemporary events or individuals (as this seems to have been discouraged at Rome and is in line with the nature of the genre anyway), they may be studied on their own as entertaining pieces of literature. However, for an attempt at appreciating these plays in their historical setting and at explaining their characteristics and peculiarities, a range of contexts in which they were composed and transmitted has to be taken into account. These suggest a productive interaction with literary developments at Rome as well as the historical and social conditions at the time: obviously, despite being based on Greek models, these *fabulae palliatae* were an active element in Roman life, changing with the times, which may explain their popularity with contemporary audiences.

Further Reading

The surviving fragments of Livius Andronicus, Naevius, Ennius, Pacuvius, Accius, and Caecilius Statius are most conveniently accessible in E. H. Warmington's *Remains of Old Latin* (1935–6), including an English

³³ Cf. also Parker (1996).

translation and a brief commentary. The remains of the works of all fragmentary dramatic poets (with full critical apparatus) are assembled in O. Ribbeck's *Scaenicae Romanorum poesis fragmenta* (2nd edn, 1871/1873 and 3rd edn, 1897/1898). The fragments of Caecilius Statius, the *palliata* poet of whom the largest amount of text is extant (after Plautus and Terence), have been edited by T. Guardì (1974).

Essential information, *testimonia*, and bibliography on all Republican writers are provided in W. Suerbaum (2002, in German).

A. J. Boyle (2006) is a recent introduction to the contemporary genre of tragedy; G. Manuwald (2001, in German) offers information on the contemporary genre of *fabula praetexta*. There is no general treatment of *fabula togata*, but the introductions to editions of the fragments, e.g. A. Daviault (1981, in French) and T. Guardì (1985, in Italian), provide overviews, although the editions themselves have not met with universal approval.

Most works on Roman comedy focus on the plays of Plautus and Terence. J. Wright (1974) is a notable exception as his study includes poets whose dramas only survive in fragments; his analysis is designed to prove that Terence is the exception to an otherwise coherent *palliata* tradition. More general works on Republican drama such as W. Beare (1964) and G. Manuwald (2011) or on Roman comedy such as G. E. Duckworth (1952/1994) discuss details of context, setting, and generic conventions that apply to all Roman comic poets. N. J. Lowe (2008) surveys the development and the main features of both Greek and Roman comedy. For more details on stagecraft, see C. W. Marshall (2006); on Roman theatre architecture, see F. Sear (2006); and on festivals, see F. Bernstein (1998, in German).

Information on the historical, social, and cultural conditions in the Roman Republic can be found in H. I. Flower (2004) and in N. Rosenstein–R. Morstein-Marx (2006). E. S. Gruen (1990) discusses the period of interaction between Hellenic culture and Roman values, with particular reference to the mutual relationship between cultural activity and politics. M. Leigh (2004) is one of the few works that bridges the gap between cultural studies and analyses of Roman comedy by looking at the links between comedy and the contemporary historical situation.