

*Cicero and Early Dramatic Latin**Gesine Manuwald***22.1 Introduction**

Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BC) is well known for providing a great deal of information on early Roman drama (of the period from c. 240 BC up until Cicero's lifetime) since he offers a number of comments on performances of plays, on biographical details and characteristics of playwrights, on motifs in dramas as well as on their language and style, especially with reference to the more highly regarded dramatic genres of tragedy and comedy.<sup>1</sup> Since Cicero frequently interprets the meaning of specific scenes in particular plays as well as the potential application of behaviour shown in drama to the contemporary audience or voices statements about the dates or techniques of dramatists, scholarship often focuses on determining Cicero's views on individual playwrights and dramatic genres, if it is not concerned with Cicero himself by analysing his citation practices and the distribution of references to drama across his works.<sup>2</sup> Other than in more comprehensive surveys of Cicero's comments and quotations it has often been overlooked that Cicero also makes a number of meaningful comments on the language, metre and style of early Roman playwrights, both generally and with reference to particular writers and phrases.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For overviews of the lives and works of the playwrights discussed as well as references to key primary sources and secondary literature see the relevant entries in Suerbaum 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Bertrand (1897) assembles and discusses Cicero's comments on various aspects of theatre and drama, Kubik (1887) and Zillinger (1911) those on the early poets, including playwrights. Laidlaw (1959; 1960) surveys Cicero's quotations from early comedy and his assessments of playwrights and performances, and Wright (1931) gives a full list of Cicero's references along with interpretative comments. Blänsdorf (1974) provides an overview of comments from the late Republic on all aspects of early comedy. Shackleton Bailey (1983) discusses Cicero's reactions to early Roman poets. Spahlinger (2005: 223–53) offers a detailed survey of the quotations of earlier Roman writers in Cicero's philosophical writings. Malcovati (1943) provides an overview of poetic passages quoted by Cicero.

<sup>3</sup> A reason for this situation might be that the formal side was not regarded as being Cicero's main interest (see e.g. Prinzen 1998: 35–6 'Wie sehr Cicero dem Vorwurf, den Tragödien des Ennius mangle es an sorgfältiger Ausarbeitung zugestimmt haben würde, ist nur schwer zu entscheiden; sein Interesse an den alten Dichtern gründete sich mehr auf die inhaltliche als auf die formale

Therefore, the most telling of these passages in Cicero will be looked at here, so as to ascertain Cicero's assessment of the language and style of early Roman drama and its playwrights as well as potential reasons for his engagement with that aspect, which is one way of gaining insight into the linguistic characteristics of early Roman drama and their potential development, both as such and in the view of later Roman writers.<sup>4</sup> While Cicero is not the only Roman author to comment on linguistic and stylistic aspects of republican drama,<sup>5</sup> his statements are of particular interest: Cicero was still close in time to these poets, since he had conversations with the last republican tragic playwright Accius (c. 170–80 BC) (Cic. *Brut.* 107) and frequently mentions dramatic performances (Cic. *Att.* 2.19.3; 4.15.6; 16.2.3; 16.5.1; *Fam.* 7.1.2; *Phil.* 1.36; *Rab. Post.* 29; *Sest.* 118–23). In addition, he believed himself to be in a similar position to the dramatists when he transposed Greek philosophical texts into Latin (Cic. *Ac.* 1.10; *Fin.* 1.4–7; *Opt. Gen.* 18). Further, from the structure of Quintilian's statement on orators who insert quotations from the early poets into their speeches (Quint. *Inst.* 1.8.10–11), it has been inferred that Cicero was the first to do so and this habit was taken up later, but was not pursued by his immediate contemporaries to the same extent.<sup>6</sup> Such an assumption would suggest that Cicero engaged more with early Latin poetry in theory and practice than educated contemporaries of his, which again would give his comments more weight.

Moreover, Cicero was active in a crucial period as regards the development of the reception of drama: for by Cicero's time scripts of early Roman dramas had become available (besides performances); therefore plays were also being recognised as objects of study and were acquiring a status as poetry and literature and thus exerting an influence on first-century BC writers such as Catullus, Lucretius, Virgil and Ovid.<sup>7</sup> In addition, this

Seite ihrer Dichtung'; contrast Wright 1931: 78 'He [Cicero] was interested in the style, vocabulary, and grammatical usage of the great Latin dramatists and in their methods of translation'; see also Bertrand 1897: 92, 104–5).

<sup>4</sup> See Rosén 1999a: 12 'For much knowledge can be acquired about the true characteristic of Archaic Latin from looking from the right angle at what it constituted for a Cicero, a Gellius or a Fronto; their statements must be carefully weighed, and though we may take Cicero seriously, when he admits to having fabricated his own brand of archaic legalese, we still can gain some knowledge about the true image of earlier Latin from the very selection of features he picked out in order to typify it, all easily perceivable types of morphemes (...); less salient traits, such as word order or participial usage, would have been less efficient in marking archaic eloquence.'

<sup>5</sup> Indeed, it has been maintained that Cicero was influenced by the views of contemporaries (Prinzen 1998: 36).

<sup>6</sup> See Shackleton Bailey 1983: 242.

<sup>7</sup> See esp. Goldberg 2005: 87–114 on comedy, 115–43 on tragedy. Almost all of Cicero's quotations from Terence's comedies come from the first third of the plays; this has been linked to learning these off by heart in schools (Marti 1974: 161) or to accessing the texts in scrolls (Wright 1931: 70).

period was characterised by the increasing prominence of the groups of poets now called 'Pre-Neoterics' and 'Neoterics' as well as the confrontation of the 'Attic' and the 'Asiatic' styles in oratory, when, as a result, issues of form, style and linguistic expression as well as questions concerning the appropriate form of Latin literature in relation to Greek writings came to the fore.<sup>8</sup>

Accordingly, it is all the more revealing and important to explore Cicero's thoughts on the language of the early dramatic texts and their value as models. Obviously, Cicero's comments refer to stage language, but it has been suggested that this draws on real speech of the respective periods;<sup>9</sup> and if Cicero sees the language of particular playwrights as representative of their time, he must not only have assumed linguistic change, but also a relationship between the language in drama and ordinary contemporary language. At any rate, he was aware that language, style, rhythm and music change over time and that this might be a positive or a negative development (on music see *Cic. Leg.* 2.39). In combination with his discussions of the relationship between the Latin versions and their Greek models (*Cic. Ac.* 1.10; *Fin.* 1.4–7; *Opt. Gen.* 18), this indicates that Cicero regarded early Roman dramas as pieces of poetry in their own right, which could therefore display a distinctive stylistic character.

## 22.2 Drama

Some of Cicero's statements on the language and style of early Roman drama are not linked to particular playwrights or dramatic genres; these rather indicate his views on general features and developments and illustrate the criteria and categories applied.

Such comments provide information on the question of the extent to which dramatic language can be regarded as representative of the time in which the plays were written. When Cicero says about the time of around 204 BC that 'the language of that period can be learned from the writings of Naevius' (*Cic. Brut.* 60 *illius autem aetatis qui sermo fuerit ex Naeuianis scriptis intellegi potest* (transl. G. L. Hendrickson)), this statement implies that a playwright is seen as influenced by his time and at least to a certain extent as reflecting contemporary linguistic usage even in a literary work. In *De oratore* Cicero has the interlocutor L. Licinius Crassus (cos. 95 BC) compare the language of his mother-in-law with that of the dramatists

<sup>8</sup> See also Zillinger 1911: 17–19.

<sup>9</sup> See Adams 1984: 76–7 (with respect to female speech in Roman comedy).

Plautus (c. 250–184 BC) and Naevius (c. 280/260–200 BC), since women generally preserve old-fashioned characteristics of language for longer (Cic. *de Orat.* 3.45): such a parallel again indicates that the language of these playwrights is regarded as representative of an earlier period and linked to the everyday speech of real individuals.

While certain linguistic features locate poets in particular periods due to the diachronic development of language, a personal style can exist independently of that: Cicero is aware that writers of the same dramatic genre may each have an individual style (Cic. *de Orat.* 3.27; see p. 461) and that, while differences can be described, assessments of the respective quality of the different styles may differ, as they are determined by subjective views and personal preferences (Cic. *Orat.* 36). Moreover, Cicero recognises that the style of a single writer might vary and, for instance, alternate between higher and more colloquial levels; he seems to assume that even tragedy can include passages employing everyday speech (Cic. *Orat.* 109). When in this context Cicero singles out Ennius as a named Roman example, this may be due to his admiration for this poet or suggest that there are more instances of colloquial or ordinary language in his plays than in those of other republican playwrights. The latter assumption is in line with Cicero's statement elsewhere that, in contrast to other tragic poets, Ennius kept to the 'common usage of words' (*communis mos uerborum*), though this seems to refer to vocabulary rather than style (Cic. *Orat.* 36).<sup>10</sup>

As Cicero has the interlocutors in *De oratore* point out, a variety of styles may exist within the same literary genre as a result of the different preferences of individuals (Cic. *de Orat.* 3.25–37; cf. Cic. *Orat.* 2); still, he insists that all these varieties belong to the same genre (see also Cic. *Orat.* 53), presumably because all of them still display distinctive generic features, since Cicero points out elsewhere that each genre has its characteristic style and these should not be confused (Cic. *Opt. Gen.* 1). As an unusual example of a unique style, the speakers in *De oratore* refer to the orator and tragic poet C. Iulius Caesar Strabo (aed. 90 BC; *TrRF* 1.130–3), who was able to treat 'tragic matters almost comically' (*res ... tragicas paene comice*) and to create similar mixtures of other styles without the result appearing inappropriate (Cic. *de Orat.* 3.30). This is remarkable since the mixture of styles belonging to different literary genres is frequently criticised elsewhere. Thus, by contrast, Cicero notes for C. Titius (*TrRF* 1.139) that he transferred the Attic refinements of his speeches also to his tragedies, where they seemed

<sup>10</sup> See also Kubik 1887: 262. On elements of colloquial language in Ennius see Riscato 1966.

‘clever, but scarcely tragic’ (Cic. *Brut.* 167 *satis ... quidem acute, sed parum tragice* [transl. G. L. Hendrickson]). In Cicero’s view, Titius was apparently not successful in creating a specific style suitable for each of the literary genres he cultivated.

Despite the stylistic differences, the rhythmical distinction between drama and other texts might be slight: Cicero recognises that the free use of metres in republican drama, especially as regards the main spoken metre of the iambic senarius (Cic. *Orat.* 191), means that, if it were not for the music, some lines could be regarded as prose (also regulated by rhythm). In his view this situation is particularly prominent in comedy because, in addition, its language (*sermo*) is not particularly elevated and thus close to ordinary speech (Cic. *Orat.* 184).<sup>11</sup> At any rate Cicero regards dramatic poetry as a valid source from which examples for language use may be drawn (e.g. Cic. *Orat.* 155–7).

### 22.3 Comedy

Apart from noting comedy’s closeness to ordinary speech, Cicero does not make a great number of general comments on the language and style of this dramatic genre; he has, however, several statements on individual playwrights.<sup>12</sup> Of Cicero’s quotations from and references to *palliata* comedy a far greater number come from Terence and Caecilius than from their predecessors Plautus and Naevius.

Cicero’s references to comic poets reveal that for him judgments on style and language are a distinct category that may be separate from an assessment of the overall quality of a playwright:<sup>13</sup> for instance, on one occasion Cicero claims that the *palliata* writer Caecilius Statius might perhaps be regarded as the best comic playwright (Cic. *Opt. Gen.* 2);<sup>14</sup> elsewhere he defines him as a bad model for Latinity (Cic. *Att.* 7.3.10 *malus ... auctor*

<sup>11</sup> On Cicero’s comments on metre and music in early Roman drama see Moore 2008: 39–41.

<sup>12</sup> For descriptions of aspects of the language of Roman comedy (irrespective of Cicero’s views) see e.g. de Melo 2011; Karakasis 2005; 2014; Barrios-Lech 2016; of Terence’s comedies see e.g. Allardice 1929; of early Roman poetry see Haffter 1934. Wright (1974) and then Karakasis (2005; 2014) argue that Terence deviates from an otherwise stylistically coherent *palliata* tradition.

<sup>13</sup> See e.g. Zillinger 1911: 45, 48; Schmid 1952: 244 n. 35; Blänsdorf 1974: 152 n. 38; Shackleton Bailey 1983: 245–6. Harries (2007) argues for changes in Cicero’s attitude (contrast Zillinger 1911: 68), noting (2007: 129) that the ‘earlier half of the first century seems to have been more at ease with this robust, fertile language’, while ‘as the fifties darkened, a refined aesthetic marked the growing isolation of the intellectual’.

<sup>14</sup> Cic. *Opt. Gen.* 2 *itaque licet dicere et Ennium summum epicum poetam, si cui ita uideatur, et Pacuuium tragicum et Caecilium fortasse comicum*. ‘Therefore, one may call Ennius supreme in epic, if he thinks that is true, and Pacuvius in tragedy and Caecilius, perhaps, in comedy.’ (transl. H. M. Hubbell).

*Latinitatis; Brut.* 258 *male locutos*).<sup>15</sup> In the passage from the dialogue *Brutus* Cicero seems to identify pure language with the standard that was spoken by educated people in Rome at the time and regrets a decline of the language because of ‘an influx of many impure speakers coming from different places’ (*multi inquinata loquentes ex diuersis locis* (transl. G. L. Hendrickson)). It has therefore been suggested that Caecilius Staius was not regarded as a model for Latinity because he was an Insubrian Gaul (Hieron. *Ab Abr.* 1838, 179 BC (p. 138b Helm)).<sup>16</sup> But since other early Roman playwrights, notably Terence, who is praised for his language by Cicero and others, did not come from Rome either (Suet./Donat. *Vita Ter.* 1), this cannot have been the decisive factor. What was more relevant for achieving a style meeting with a favourable reception from the elite is probably that Terence was given a decent education by his master (Suet./Donat. *Vita Ter.* 1) and was in touch with the noblemen of his day; accordingly, he must have adopted their style of speaking, to the extent that he had to defend himself against the allegation that noble friends had written his plays or at least aided him in their composition (Ter. *Ad.* 15–21; *Hau.* 22–4; cf. Cic. *Att.* 7.3.10; Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.99; Suet./Donat. *Vita Ter.* 4). Caecilius Staius, by contrast, is said to have been a house-mate of Ennius (Hieron. *Ab Abr.* 1838, 179 BC (p. 138b Helm)), but he was probably of servile origin, and nothing is known about his interaction with people of the educated elite, in contrast to Terence (Suet./Donat. *Vita Ter.* 2 *hic cum multis nobilibus familiariter uixit*).

Terence is regarded by Cicero as a good writer who can be a model or precedent for his own use of language. In a letter to Atticus (Cic. *Att.* 7.3.10 (9 Dec. 50)) Cicero discusses the fact that in an earlier letter (Cic. *Att.* 6.9.1 (15 Oct. 50))<sup>17</sup> he added a preposition to a name of a place, since he did not regard it as the name of a town (where one would not use a preposition).<sup>18</sup> To justify his wording, Cicero does not rely on Terence’s

<sup>15</sup> Cic. *Brut.* 258 *mitto C. Laelium Philum Scipionem: aetatis illius ista fuit laus tamquam innocentiae sic Latine loquendi – nec omnium tamen, nam illorum aequalis Caecilium et Pacuuium male locutos uidemus – sed omnes tum fere, qui nec extra urbem hanc uixerant neque eos aliqua barbaries domestica infuscauerat, recte loquebantur.* ‘I need not refer to Gaius Laelius, Philus, or Scipio; pure Latinity, not less than uprightness of character, was the mark of their time, though not quite universal, since we note that their contemporaries Caecilius and Pacuvius did not use a pure idiom; still, practically every one, unless his life was passed outside Rome, or some crudeness of home environment had tainted his speech, in those days spoke well and correctly’ (transl. G. L. Hendrickson).

<sup>16</sup> See e.g. Laidlaw 1959: 22; Schierl 2006: 55 with n. 279.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Cic. *Att.* 6.9.1 in *Piraeae cum exissem prid. Id. Oct., accepi ab Acasto seruo meo statim tuas litteras.* ‘Immediately on landing at Piraeus on 14 October I received your letter from my slave Acastus’ (transl. D. R. Shackleton Bailey).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Cic. *Att.* 7.3.10 *uenio ad Piraeae, in quo magis reprehendendus sum quod homo Romanus ‘Piraeae’ scripserim, non ‘Piraeum’ (sic enim omnes nostri locuti sunt), quam quod addiderim ‘in’; non enim hoc ut oppido praeposui sed ut loco; et tamen Dionysius noster et qui est nobiscum Nicias Cous non rebatur*

predecessor Caecilius Statius, who did the same, but is characterised by Cicero as a bad authority for correct Latinity, but rather on Terence, well known for the ‘elegance of his language’. For this reason, Cicero says, Terence’s plays were thought to have been written by C. Laelius (cos. 190 BC). If the language in Terence’s plays seems appropriate for Laelius, they come even closer to the cultivated speech of contemporary orators and politicians, and therefore Terence can be a model for Cicero’s own language. Here Cicero looks at Terence as a user of elegant language, a quality of Terence’s work later also recognised by Quintilian (Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.99).<sup>19</sup> Since the criterion of *Latinitas*, as a part of *elocutio*, was a key element in rhetorical doctrine (e.g. Cic. *Brut.* 128; 132; 133; 135; 143),<sup>20</sup> the application of such categories to Terence’s text presents it as relevant for orators.

*oppidum esse Piraeae. sed de re uidero. nostrum quidem si est peccatum, in eo est quod non ut de oppido locutus sum sed ut de loco, secutusque sum non dico Caecilium, ‘mane ut ex portu in Piraeum’ [Caecilius, Pall. 258 R. 2–3] (malus enim auctor Latinitatis est), sed Terentium, cuius fabellae propter elegantiam sermonis putabantur a C. Laelio scribi, ‘heri aliquot adolescentuli coimus in Piraeum’ [Ter. Eu. 539; codd. Ter.: in Piraeo]; et idem, ‘mercator hoc addebat, captam e Sunio’ [cf. Ter. Eu. 114–15: mercator hoc addebat: e praedonibus, | unde emerat, se audisse abreptam e Sunio.]; quod si δῆμους oppida uolumus esse, tam est oppidum Sunium quam Piraeus.* ‘Now I come to Piraeus, in which matter as a Roman I am more open to criticism for writing *Piraeae* instead of *Piraeum*, the form universally used by our countrymen, than for adding the preposition. I prefixed it not as to a town but as to a locality – and after all our friend Dionysius and Nicias of Cos, who is with us, think Piraeus is *not* a town. But the matter of fact I leave for further enquiry. If I *have* made a mistake it is in speaking as of a locality instead of a town, and I had for precedent I won’t say Caecilius (‘when I went early from the harbour to Piraeus’), for his Latinity is not much to go by, but Terence, whose plays were supposed from the elegance of their diction to be the work of C. Laelius: ‘Yesterday a party of us young fellows went to Piraeus’ and ‘The trader added that she was taken from Sunium’ – if we are going to say that demes are towns, then Sunium is as much a town as Piraeus’ (transl. D. R. Shackleton Bailey). Cicero here quotes *mercator hoc addebat, captam e Sunio* from Terence’s *Eunuchus* instead of *mercator hoc addebat: e praedonibus, | unde emerat, se audisse abreptam e Sunio*. (Ter. *Eu.* 114–15 ‘The merchant did add that he had heard from the pirates who sold her to him that she had been kidnapped from Sunium.’ (transl. J. Barsby)). Cicero focuses on the phrase *e Sunio*, important for his argument, and effectively combines two verses into one; thereby some details are omitted, but the basic sense and the original construction remain.

<sup>19</sup> Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.99–100 *in comedia maxime claudicamus. licet Varro Musas, Aeli Stilonis sententia, Plautino dicat sermone locuturas fuisse si Latine loqui uellent, licet Caecilium ueteres laudibus ferant, licet Terenti scripta ad Scipionem Africanum referantur (quae tamen sunt in hoc genere elegantissima, et plus adhuc habitura gratiae si intra uersus trimetros stetissent), [100] uix leuem consequimur umbram, adeo ut mihi sermo ipse Romanus non recipere uideatur illam solis concessam Atticis uenerem, cum eam ne Graeci quidem in alio genere linguae optinuerint.* ‘It is in comedy that our steps most falter. True, Varro (quoting the view of Aelius Stilo) held that the Muses would have talked like Plautus if they had chosen to speak Latin; true, older critics extol Caecilius; true, Terence’s works are attributed to Scipio Africanus (and they are in fact the most elegant of their kind, and would have possessed even more attraction if they had been written wholly in trimeters): nevertheless, we barely achieve a faint shadow, and I have come to think that the Latin language is incapable of acquiring that grace which was vouchsafed uniquely to the Athenians – for the Greeks too failed to achieve it in any other dialect of their language’ (transl. D. A. Russell).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. e.g. Lausberg 1998: 220–40.



Cicero's most famous statement on Terence, including his style, is the comment in the poetic piece *Limon* (Cic. F 2 *FPL*<sup>4</sup>), whose precise character and purpose are subject to debate. In these verses Cicero praises Terence for the style in which he has reproduced Menander in Latin: Terence is characterised by his exquisite diction and his smooth and temperate writing.<sup>21</sup> Here Cicero describes Terence's output in rhetorical and stylistic terms (cf. Cic. *Brut.* 83; 105; 247; 295; 250), ignoring the contents or the dramatic effect of his plays, focusing on the linguistic quality of the Latin composition.<sup>22</sup> From Cicero's comment it is not immediately obvious what literary genre he is discussing. Only for recipients familiar with the names Terence and Menander and aware of the literary genre these writers were active in is it clear that Cicero talks about comedy. Yet analysing comedy in the categories of style derived from rhetoric may have been in line with ancient criticism: Varro is said to have regarded Terence as an example of the middle style (Gel. 6.14.6), and Cicero's comments point in the same direction (for the three styles see Cic. *Orat.* 20–1). Such a perspective might have been anticipated by Terence's plays, in particular because he has some of his prologue speakers describe their appearance as that of *oratores* (Ter. *Hec.* 9 *orator ad uos uenio ornatu prologi*; *Hau.* 11 *oratore[m] esse uoluit me, non prologum*), and one of them reports the criticism of Terence's opponent that the plays are 'thin in style' (Ter. *Ph.* 4–5).<sup>23</sup>

With respect to Plautus, Cicero notes his elegant wit, putting him on a par with Attic Old Comedy and the Socratic philosophers (Cic. *Off.* 1.104). Such an assessment may indicate a distinction between *fabula palliata* and the less refined forms of comic drama such as *fabula Atellana* and mime.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Suet. /Donat. *Vita Ter.* 7 (Cic. F 2 *FPL*<sup>4</sup>) *Cicero in 'Limone' hactenus laudat: 'tu quoque, qui solus lecto sermone, Terenti, | conuersum expressumque Latina uoce Menandrum | in medium nobis sedatis uocibus effers, | quidquid come loquens atque omnia dulcia dicens.* 'Cicero praises him in *Limon* thus much: 'And you, Terence, who alone bring Menander, transposed in select diction and expressed in the Latin language, into our midst in a temperate style, expressing everything gentle and saying all sweet things.' On Cicero's and Caesar's comments quoted by Suetonius see e.g. Schmid 1952; Luiselli 1965; Marti 1974: 159–60; Müller 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Elements of Cicero's characterisation of Terence (along with comments in Hor. *Ep.* 2.1.174 and Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.99) are taken up by the late-antique writer Ausonius; here the focus is more clearly on a refined, measured and appropriate comic style (Auson. *Protrepticus ad Nepotem* 58–60 (p. 23 Green): *tu quoque, qui Latium lecto sermone, Terenti, | comis et adstricto percurris pulpita socco, | ad noua uix memorem diuerbia coge senectam.* 'You also, Terence, who adorn Latium with a select language and run across the stage with your actor's boot restrained, direct my old age, scarcely remembering, to new *deuerbia*' (transl. T. J. Moore)).

<sup>23</sup> A line from Terence's *Heautontimorumenos*, which is often adduced because of its wording, is probably not a stylistic statement (Ter. *Hau.* 46 *in hac est pura oratio.* 'This play depends purely on its language' (transl. J. Barsby); on the verse's interpretation see also Müller 2007, who reads it differently from Barsby).

<sup>24</sup> On the language of *fabula Atellana* see Chapter 20 by Panayotakis in this volume.



Since Cicero says less about Plautus than about other comic playwrights, he does not comment on his specific style; but there were some in his time who thought that they were able to identify a characteristic style of Plautus and to determine questions of authenticity thereby (Gel. 3.3.1–3).

## 22.4 Tragedy

In the realm of tragedy Cicero focuses on the three later of the five main playwrights, that is, Ennius (239–169 BC), Pacuvius (c. 220–130 BC) and Accius (c. 170–80 BC),<sup>25</sup> who are compared to the Greek tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, though it is stated that they all differ from each other in style (Cic. *De or.* 3.27).<sup>26</sup> As for the pioneers preceding them, Cicero says about Rome's first poet Livius Andronicus (c. 280/270–200 BC) that 'nothing is brought to perfection on its first invention' and that 'the plays of Livius are not worth a second reading' (Cic. *Brut.* 71 *nihil est enim simul et inuentum et perfectum ... Liuianae fabulae non satis dignae quae iterum legantur* (transl. G. L. Hendrickson)). Cicero does not reveal any reasons for this view of Livius Andronicus, but, in the context of the discussion of the development of poetry, at least one element must be that these early verses are not yet sufficiently developed (cf. Cic. *Brut.* 69). For Naevius (c. 280/260–200 BC) Cicero admits that he is not quite as polished as later writers, but grants that he wrote *luculente* and that his epic delights just like a work of Myron (Cic. *Brut.* 75–6):<sup>27</sup> this verdict again

<sup>25</sup> On Cicero's views on tragedy see e.g. Styka 1990; on Cicero's comments on Ennius see Prinzen 1998: 28–39, 161–85; on the reception of Ennius generally see Prinzen 1998; Consoli 2014; on references to Pacuvius in Cicero see Artigas 1990, on Cicero's assessment of Pacuvius see Kubik 1887: 286–8; Schierl 2006: 54–6.

<sup>26</sup> Cic. *de Orat.* 3.27 *atque id primum in poetis cerni licet, quibus est proxima cognatio cum oratoribus, quam sint inter sese Ennius, Pacuvius Acciusque dissimiles, quam apud Graecos Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, quamquam omnibus par paene laus in dissimili scribendi genere tribuatur.* 'In the first place, in the case of the poets (who are closely akin to the orators), we can observe how different Ennius, Pacuvius and Accius are from one another, and among the Greeks, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. Yet in their different types of writing, they are all accorded almost equal merit.' (transl. J. M. May/J. Wisse).

<sup>27</sup> Cic. *Brut.* 75–6 *tamen illius, quem in uatibus et Faunis adnumerat Ennius, bellum Punicum quasi Myronis opus delectat. sit Ennius sane, ut est certe, perfectior: qui si illum, ut simulat, contemneret, non omnia bella persequens primum illud Punicum acerrimum bellum reliquisset. sed ipse dicit cur id faciat. 'scripsere' inquit 'alii rem uorsibus'; et luculente quidem scripserunt, etiam si minus quam tu polite. nec uero tibi aliter uideri debet, qui a Naeuio uel sumpstisti multa, si fateris, uel, si negas, surripuisti.* 'For all that Ennius counts Naevius among primitive bards and fauns, his *Bellum Punicum*, like a work of Myron, still yields pleasure. Grant that Ennius is more finished, as undoubtedly he is; yet if Ennius had really scorned him, as he professes, he would not in undertaking to describe all our wars have passed over that stubbornly contested first Punic War. But he tells us himself why he does so: "Others," he says, "have written the theme in verse" – yes, and brilliantly too they wrote, even if with less polish than you, sir; and surely you ought not to think otherwise, you who from

must refer to style, expressed in rhetorical language (e.g. Cic. *Brut.* 102; 129), and indicate progress for Rome's second poet though characteristics are not specified. The discussion in this passage focuses on epic, which the three first dramatists also wrote, but can be applied similarly to their dramatic production.<sup>28</sup>

The playwrights from Ennius onwards seem to have been regarded by Cicero as sufficiently sophisticated to be considered as models:<sup>29</sup> he notes, for instance, that Ennius uses hiatus only rarely, as he himself does (Cic. *Orat.* 152).<sup>30</sup> Cicero describes Ennius as *perfectior* and his writing more *polite* in comparison with his predecessors (Cic. *Brut.* 76; for these rhetorical terms cf. e.g. Cic. *Brut.* 35; 69; 115; 120; 135; 143; 194), and he records the problem that, when as a young boy, someone tried to reproduce a piece of poetry by Ennius as an exercise, he could not find better words to express it (Cic. *de Orat.* 1.154). Apparently, Cicero regarded Ennius, in contrast to his predecessors, as more of a forerunner for his own use of language; at any rate Ennius seems to occupy a prominent place in Cicero's writings. Cicero is more critical, though, of Pacuvius' language, probably because it included more unusual forms and phrases, despite its elaborate nature (Cic. *Brut.* 258; *Orat.* 36; 155).

Cicero recognises that all these playwrights were writing in an earlier period than himself, used corresponding forms and followed the conventions of the stage; at the same time he presents their literary activity as comparable to what orators do. For instance, in *De oratore* Cicero has one of the speakers outline that each emotion has a characteristic appearance in mien, sound and gesture and then gives a series of lines from tragedy expressing different kinds of feelings owing to their content, style and presentation. He goes on to suggest these instances as models for orators in wording and pronunciation, but insists that gestures of orators should be different from those of actors (Cic. *de Orat.* 3.216–20). On a linguistic level Cicero thereby acknowledges that the language of early tragedy is capable

Naevius have taken much, if you confess the debt, or if you deny it, much have stolen' (transl. G. L. Hendrickson). In view of other mentions of Myron in Cicero (e.g. Cic. *de Orat.* 3.26 *una fingendi est ars, in qua praestantes fuerunt Myro, Polyclitus, Lysippus, qui omnes inter se dissimiles fuerunt, sed ita tamen, ut neminem sui uelis esse dissimilem; Brut.* 70 *nondum Myronis satis ad ueritatem adducta, iam tamen quae non dubites pulchra dicere*), Naevius' comparison with Myron implies that his works are more accomplished than those of the pioneer Livius Andronicus, but not quite as polished as those of Ennius and his successors.

<sup>28</sup> On this passage in Cicero's *Brutus* see e.g. Zillinger 1911: 47; Barchiesi 1962: 21–38; Degl'Innocenti Pierini 1975.

<sup>29</sup> On Ennius' language see e.g. Untermann 1972.

<sup>30</sup> See also Kubik 1887: 261.

of expressing vividly a wide range of emotional situations, akin to what orators should be able to achieve. Ennius is again singled out, and Cicero highlights that this poet is able to express emotions by an effective combination of contents, diction and metre (Cic. *Tusc.* 3.45–6).

The rhetorical treatment of early Roman drama places it squarely in the Roman tradition. Cicero is obviously aware that the characters on the Roman stage speak Latin, but that in certain dramatic genres they are meant to represent Greeks. He therefore criticises Pacuvius for having a character speak about ‘us’ and ‘the Greeks’ while elsewhere someone is identified as Greek on the basis of his language (Cic. *N.D.* 2.91). This, however, is a comment on the playwright’s conceptual inconsistency rather than a linguistic assessment.

As for the status of the language in the period of the early tragedians, Cicero notes that in Ennius’ time the Latin language had not adopted as many Greek letters as it had in his time and that Ennius therefore used the forms *Burrus* and *Bruges* rather than *Pyrrhus* and *Phryges*; when he adds that this is proved by *antiqui ... libri*, it seems that he had access to old editions of Ennius’ works (Cic. *Orat.* 160).<sup>31</sup> The comment demonstrates that Cicero is aware of linguistic change that goes beyond vocabulary or style. Although he uses an example from Ennius, the remark is not an assessment of his language, but illustrates generally the development of language determined by what is pleasing to the ear.

In the same context Cicero argues against those criticising the irregularity of the ancients, exemplified by the use of both the standard and the contracted forms of the genitive plural of the second declension in the tragedians; as he points out, this flexibility agrees with his own usage, apart from cases not allowing for variation (Cic. *Orat.* 155–6). Cicero correctly observes the existence of variation and of different views on it, while the issue is not discussed primarily with reference to the tragic playwrights; instead, the comments on the linguistic phenomenon, like interpretations of the content of dramatic scenes elsewhere, serve as a means to an end in a controversy and to justify Cicero’s own practice.

<sup>31</sup> Cic. *Orat.* 160 ‘*Burrum*’ semper Ennius, nunquam ‘*Pyrrhum*’; ‘*ui patefecerunt Bruges*’, non ‘*Phryges*’. *ipsum antiqui declarant libri. nec enim Graecam litteram adhibebant – nunc autem etiam duas – et cum ‘Phrygum’ et ‘Phrygibus’ dicendum esset, absurdum erat aut etiam in barbaris casibus Graecam litteram adhibere aut recto casu solum Graece loqui; tamen et ‘Phryges’ et ‘Pyrrhum’ aurium causa dicimus.* ‘Ennius always says *Burrus*, never *Pyrrhus*; “*ui patefecerunt Bruges*”, not *Phryges*, is the reading of the oldest manuscripts of the poet. For in his day Latin had not adopted the Greek letter, now they use two, and since they had to say *Phrygum* and *Phrygibus* the strange situation arose of using a Greek letter in a word with foreign endings, or of using the correct Greek form only in the nominative; nevertheless we say *Phryges* and *Pyrrhum*, following the dictates of the ear’ (transl. H. M. Hubbell).

Similarly, Cicero has one of the interlocutors in *De oratore* claim that orators may use neologisms (Cic. *de Orat.* 3.152); he goes on to illustrate the principle with examples from Ennius and an unknown tragedian (Cic. *de Orat.* 3.154; cf. Hor. *Ars* 48–59).<sup>32</sup> So, again a linguistic principle identified in the tragedians is adduced as a justification for an oratorical feature (see also generally Cic. *Fin.* 1.10). Equally, there is criticism of inappropriate metaphors in Ennius: these are not advised for the orator either (Cic. *de Orat.* 3.162).

## 22.5 Conclusion

As an orator and a member of the educated elite, Cicero engaged not only with the effectiveness and political repercussions of dramatic performances, but also with the texture of plays, including their structure, argumentative strategies, motifs, language, style and metre. In line with the developments of his time, when dramatic scripts became available in writing and started to be regarded as literature, Cicero looked at plays and playwrights as a literary critic and voiced judgments not only on the quality of the poets and the effectiveness of their works, but also on the appropriateness of their language and its adherence to rules. Cicero frequently exploited these linguistic assessments (just like evaluations of scenes and motifs) for the purposes of his own argument by presenting linguistic peculiarities of the playwrights as a parallel or model for contemporary orators or as features to avoid in oratory. Since in the rhetorical treatises, where most of the comments on the style and language of early Roman drama are made, Cicero focuses on this aspect of the plays in relation to what is advised for orators (using terminology also applied to the assessment of orators), the discussions are limited to the ‘higher’ dramatic genres, and it becomes possible to provide different assessments of the same playwright, distinguishing the language from dramatic effectiveness.

Cicero obviously realised that the playwrights (only the latest of whom he had personal contact with) belonged to a bygone period, and he occasionally comments on archaic forms or conventions in their works. Yet the abstract concept of linguistic development is not his main focus: the attention to earlier forms and spellings of words, flexibility in the use of different forms or the creation of neologisms serves to justify his own practice or to explain what is or is not advisable for orators.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> See also Kubik 1887: 263.

<sup>33</sup> On the possible interests of Nonius Marcellus governing his engagement with early Roman drama see Chapter 27 by Welsh in this volume.

Thus, Cicero shows himself aware of the fact that earlier stages of the language were different from what was common in his own time, that language develops and that in certain respects the early ways of writing were unpolished and should not be imitated while well-known and well-respected playwrights from the 2nd century BC onwards (despite a few archaic features) can serve as models for orators in Cicero's time. In his assessments Cicero is not a disinterested linguistic historian; instead, he is keen to find authoritative precedents for the kind of oratory he recommends; therefore, his evaluations are carried out within a rhetorical framework and, while he occasionally comments on issues such as spelling, he mainly focuses on stylistic aspects relevant to oratory, acknowledging also individual styles. These discussions contribute to Cicero's aim to establish a Roman literary tradition (even across literary genres), of which he is an important part.