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Stylistic Features of Roman Republican Tragedy

Abstract: This contribution will look at a selection of fragments from all known Roman Republican tragic playwrights and aim to determine a description of the style of each writer as well as of this dramatic genre in general. As a result of the transmission situation little can be said about larger stylistic structures; thus, the study will focus primarily on aspects of word choice, use of particular forms and effects of word order. Despite the limited material available, some distinctive stylistic features of early Roman tragedy can be discovered.

1 Introduction

When one attempts to describe the stylistic features of Roman Republican tragedy, one is faced with the issue of the lacunose transmission (as in the case of many questions relating to the dramatic literature of this period); therefore, the approach to the analysis of style must be adjusted to the nature of the available material. That means that some aspects typically included in a study of dramatic style cannot be explored or only to a limited extent; consequently, any statements on frequency and trends must come with a substantial caveat.

Since the texts of Roman Republican tragedies survive in short fragments, it is almost impossible to identify and describe stylistic patterns extending beyond one or two lines. As most fragments are not assigned to a speaker or a specific section of a play, they provide only limited material on the question as to whether certain forms of expression might be linked to specific types of characters, individuals, or kinds of scenes. Also, because hardly any of the plays can be dated, there is not a sufficient basis for determining as to whether the style of a playwright changes over the course of their career. Further, the frequency of observable features has to be set in relation to the number and the length of lines preserved. This applies especially when one phenomenon seems to be more frequent in the works of one playwright than another; while tendencies might exist, it has to be borne in mind that the number of preserved fragments and the reasons for their survival vary.

This situation does not mean that one should not or could not explore the stylistic features of Roman Republican tragedy: in some areas details can be established, and even limited results lead to insights into the stylistic character of

Roman Republican tragedy within the context of early Roman literature. What will be attempted here is an analysis of testimonia and fragments to identify aspects of the stylistic character of Roman Republican tragedy, drawing also on the views on the use of language inferred for the playwrights themselves and as emerging from later ancient authors commenting on the works of these dramatists. The survey will cover the period from the origin of the genre in Republican Rome in c. 240 BCE to the early first century BCE, concentrating on the five main playwrights known by name, Livius Andronicus (c. 280/270 – c. 200 BCE), Naevius (c. 280/260 – c. 200 BCE), Ennius (239–169 BCE), Pacuvius (c. 220 – c. 130 BCE), and Accius (170 – c. 80 BCE).¹ Cicero's characterisation of a song in Ennius' *Andromacha* as 'in content and words and rhythm mournful' (Cic. *Tusc.* 3.46 *et rebus et verbis et modis lugubre*) demonstrates the awareness that content, style/expression and rhythm/music combine to endow a section with a characteristic atmosphere² and that specific forms of language and style are therefore among the constitutive elements of tragedy.³

Later ancient authors often quote lines from the works of Republican writers because of 'archaic' words they contain; obviously, the playwrights of the Republican period use a version of early Latin. At the same time, unless occurrences of words or forms quoted are noted as peculiarities, these cannot be counted as distinctive stylistic features of a specific poet or genre since these words or forms have not been chosen for stylistic effect and instead are part of the standard language of the time.⁴ Moreover, the first Roman playwrights could not build on an already established Latin literary language in general or a specific language for tragedy; instead, they contributed to developing a literary language on the basis

1 For general information, testimonia, and bibliography on these tragic playwrights see the respective contributions by Suerbaum and Stärk in Suerbaum 2002; for the contents of individual pieces see Ribbeck 1875 (still useful in addition to modern commentaries and annotated editions); for overviews of Roman tragedy see Erasmo 2004; Boyle 2006.

2 In modern terminology such a combination might be called 'convergence of expressive factors'. See the introduction to this volume.

3 Passages not in spoken metres tend to be stylistically more elaborate. Still, since metre is a separate category to some extent, this aspect of the form of early Roman tragedy will not be considered here.

4 In the works of the later Roman Republican tragic playwrights scholars have identified 'archaic' forms. As these poets will have continued a generic tradition established by the first Roman tragedians, it is plausible that they continued to use words and expressions becoming old-fashioned; identifying these linguistic peculiarities precisely in relation to the standards of their own time is difficult owing to the limited availability of comparative material.

of the contemporary language in use through the composition of their plays;⁵ once certain features had been introduced, these could be identified by later representatives of the same genre as generic and therefore taken up, whereby they became recognisable and typical generic characteristics.⁶ Across all preserved dramatic fragments one can observe that tragedy (*fabula crepidata*) tends to employ a more elevated language than comedy (*fabula palliata*) of the same period, so that there are fewer short and incomplete sentences, phrasal expressions, and colloquial words.⁷ In fact, each literary genre in ancient Rome seems to have been associated with a generic style,⁸ so that stylistic differences can be observed between works of different literary genres within the output of a single author. Thus, as most of the early Roman writers produced pieces in more than one literary genre, the evidence provided by fragments from works other than tragedies can provide a foil to what can be deduced from the tragic fragments.⁹

Accordingly, this study will look at a selection of phenomena in early Roman tragedy for which there is sufficient evidence to identify them and that, at least to a certain extent, can be deemed to be the result of deliberate decisions for certain options rather than of using generally available expressions and the language of the period.¹⁰ These features include elements underlining the expected solemn character of tragedy, such as occurrences of alliteration, asyndeton, *figura etymologica*, synonyms, marked word order, specific terminology, different sentence length, paraphrase, and metaphor. Since this study is concerned with the style of a literary genre within a circumscribed period rather than with that of

5 Riscato (1966², *passim*) surveys how Ennius' literary output includes elements of both spoken and literary language and explores the links of this combination with the development of a Roman poetic language at the time.

6 This aspect is highlighted by Lennartz 2003, who stresses that the Latin tragic language aimed for a highly wrought style from the start and incorporated elements from existing specialist discourses.

7 For considerations on how to describe and define literary and colloquial styles for 'dead' languages see Happ 1967.

8 Such distinctions are implied by Horace in an overview of the main topics and metres of different literary genres and the conclusion that poets are expected to observe these (Hor. *Ars* 86–87: *descriptas servare vices operumque colores / cur ego si nequeo ignoroque poeta salutor?*).

9 To keep the study focused, it will look at Greek-style Roman tragedy on mythical subjects (*fabula crepidata*) and not include the fragments of Roman historical drama (*fabula praetexta*). While historical drama is equally distinguished from the comic genres by a more elevated style and the associated features, it forms a separate dramatic genre displaying, naturally, a higher percentage of Rome-specific vocabulary.

10 Cancik (1978, 338) argues that differences in vocabulary, syntax, and style can still be observed between the different sections in Roman tragedies.

individual writers, it will be arranged according to phenomena rather than by playwrights, while characteristics of specific playwrights will be noted where relevant.¹¹ Moreover, this overview is not intended to be a comprehensive list of all examples of a given phenomenon;¹² instead, it aims to indicate which features can be recognised in the fragments and, where possible, to explore how they are used and what the effects on audiences might be.¹³

11 Cf. Stärk in Suerbaum 2002, 152–153: ‘An die Stelle eines tragischen Gehalts tritt als auffälligste Erscheinung ein gemeinsamer tragischer Stil. Der Römer habe, erklärt Horaz, einen tragischen Atem. Er neige von Natur zu Erhabenheit und Pathos (T.1) [i.e. Hor. *Epist.* 2.1.161–7]. Dies schlägt sich zuerst in der Sprache nieder. Die rhetorisch-pathetische Ausdrucksweise verbindet die römischen Tragiker und trennt sie von der klassischen Tragödie’. [In the place of a tragic plot a common tragic style emerges as the most notable phenomenon. The Roman has, Horace explains, a tragic spirit. He inclines naturally to sublimity and pathos (text 1, i.e. Hor. *Epist.* 2.1.161–167). This is immediately expressed in language. A rhetorical-pathetic mode of expression unites the Roman tragedians and separates them from classical tragedy]

12 Summaries of selected stylistic features and descriptions of the style of individual playwrights exist (for overviews of key features of the style of Roman Republican tragedy see e.g. Ribbeck 1875, 642–646; Cancik 1978, 338–341; on the style of Roman Republican tragedies with regard to their being ‘translations’ of Greek plays see Traina 1970; for a discussion of linguistic characteristics of Ennius’ tragedies see Untermann 1972; for a summary of stylistic features of Pacuvius’ plays see Schierl 2006, 30–34; on the style of Accius’ tragedies see Casaceli 1976; D’Antò 1980, 33–46; Degl’Innocenti Pierini 1980, esp. 91–144; Dangel 1995, 57–68); these tend to be compilations of material rather than attempts at characterising the stylistic outlook of the literary genre and its impact on recipients (a brief summary of stylistic features in Manuwald 2011, 325–330). In the context of ‘style’ the focus will be on the usage and arrangement of words in a sentence rather than on word formation. Thus, for instance, the well-known propensity of at least later Roman Republican tragedians to create elaborate compounds, including abstract nouns, or the relative high number of *hapax legomena* (partly as a result of the nature of the transmission) will not be discussed (for examples of the use of compounds see e.g. Wills 1996, 441, 446; on the use of abstract expressions in early Roman comedy see Molsberger 1989, 174–205; on features of the language and style of early Roman dramatic poetry see Haffter 1934; on the connection between specific linguistic forms and the communicative function of language see De Rosalia 1983 [1985]).

13 Fragments from Roman Republican tragedy will be quoted with the numbering of the editions of both O. Ribbeck (R.² [1871] / R.³ [1897]) and E.H. Warmington (W. [1936]) as well that of *Tragicorum Romanorum Fragmenta* (*TrRF* [2012]) where that exists. Fragments whose transmission is corrupt or for which readings are disputed have been excluded from this study since it does not aim to give a comprehensive overview of potential instances of certain phenomena and rather to establish tendencies by means of a selection of clear examples. That means that the texts of the reference editions will generally be accepted and that textual discussions will be kept to a minimum.

2 Playwrights' reflections on language

That it is not inappropriate to look at early Roman tragedy from the point of view of style and language is confirmed by some tragic fragments including comments on the quality and character of language and its effect. Irrespective of the original context, such excerpts show that playwrights (and audiences) knew that speech may be manipulated and that the effect may depend on the type of speech.

The most obvious example is the description of speech (*oratio*) as mind-bending and powerful in one of Pacuvius' plays; the fact that the line is transmitted as an address to *oratio* might suggest a reaction by one of the characters to a display of eloquence or in anticipation of it (Pac. *Trag.* 177 R.²⁻³ = 187 W. *o flexanima atque omnium regina rerum oratio*). Similarly, another fragment (where the reading is uncertain) indicates that prolixity of speech may influence the interlocutor (Pac. *Trag.* 124 R.²⁻³ *oro: minime flectas fandi me prolixitudine* = 129 W. *oro, nive plectas fandi mi prolixitudinem*). Fragments from Ennius' tragedies demonstrate the perception of different types of speech, when an utterance is qualified as harsh (Enn. *Trag.* 265 R.²⁻³ = 316 W. = F 110 *TrRF quam tibi ex ore orationem duriter dictis dedit*), and of the fact that it is not only the quality of the speech and the argument, but also the standing of the speaker that might influence its effect when speech is related to social status (Enn. *Trag.* 165–7 R.²⁻³ = 206–8 W. = F 73 *TrRF haec tu etsi perverse dices, facile Achivos flexeris; / nam cum opulenti locuntur pariter atque ignobiles, / eadem dicta eademque oratio aequa non aequae valet*). A fragment of Accius shows an awareness of the fact that language can be employed purposefully and potentially deceitfully (Acc. *Trag.* 414 R.²⁻³ = 405 W. *nisi ut astu ingenium lingua laudem et dictis lactem lenibus*). That one of Pacuvius' plays includes a riddle and the comment that this is not an open expression displays a high level of knowledge and artistry in the manipulation of language and the expectation that such thought experiments will be enjoyed by at least part of the audience (Cic. *Div.* 2.133 [Pac. *Trag.* 1–3, 6–7 R.²⁻³ = 4–6, 9–10 W.] *Pacuvianus Amphio: 'quadupes tardigrada agrestis humilis aspera / capite brevi, cervice anguina, aspectu truci, / eviscerata inanima cum animali sono.' cum dixisset obscurius, tum Attici respondent: 'non intelligimus, nisi si aperte dixeris.' at ille uno verbo: 'testudo'. non poteris hoc igitur a principio, citharista, dicere?*). In addition, Accius engaged with literature and specifically drama in his theoretical works *Didascalica* and *Pragmatica*: a fragment from the former again indicates familiarity with the concept of different types of speaking and the potential unreliability of speech (Acc. *Did.* 9–10 W. = 7–8 D. *ut dum brevitatem velint consequi verborum / aliter ac sit relatum redhostiant responsum*). If such a sophisticated use of language is

thematised by playwrights, it is likely that they employed it in a correspondingly reflective way when composing tragedies.

Because the early Roman playwrights based their dramas in Latin on Greek precedents and they all seem to have spoken more than one language (e.g. on Ennius see Gell. *NA* 17.17.1; Suet. *Gramm.* 1.2), they must have been familiar with the existence of different languages and the opportunities and constraints of each. Beyond reproducing specific Greek terms by Graecisms or by developing equivalent Latin expressions (as Cicero and Lucretius later also did),¹⁴ these differences are voiced in some of the tragic fragments.¹⁵ Pacuvius, for instance, has one character identify another as ‘Greek-born’ on the basis of their way of speaking (Pac. *Trag.* 364 R.²⁻³ = *Trag. inc.* 14 W. *Graiugena; de istoc aperit ipsa oratio*). In another fragment by the same author a character contrasts the term *caelum* for ‘sky’, used by ‘our people’, with the Greek term *aether* (Pac. *Trag.* 90 R.²⁻³ = 111 W. *id quod nostri caelum memorant, Grai perhibent aethera*).¹⁶ Cicero, who transmits this line, comments on the perspective applied as being out of step with the dramatic scenario; for, within the context of the play a Greek person is speaking and, although they are speaking Latin, the audience is meant to assume that they are speaking in Greek (Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.91). Cicero rightly observes that the remark of the Pacuvian character breaks the dramatic illusion. That the playwright chooses to do so to enable a discussion on natural philosophy might indicate a readiness to reflect on properties of languages and the use of terminology in that area; it is in line with the prominence of philosophical discussions (and the corresponding language) at least in the tragedies of the later Republican playwrights.¹⁷

A similar framework, though within a single language, appears from a passage in one of Accius’ tragedies (*Myrmidones*), where the speaker, possibly

14 On Graecisms in Accius (even more frequent in works other than tragedy) see e.g. Degl’Innocenti Pierini 1980, 93–109; Dangel 1995, 61–62.

15 The explicit interaction with Greek material is different from the application of grammatical conventions for treating Greek words, where there seems to have been a development towards staying closer to Greek forms (Varro *L.* 10.70 *Accius haec in tragoediis largius a prisca consuetudine movere coepit et ad formas Graecas verborum magis revocare, a quo Valerius ait: ‘Accius Hectorem nollet facere, Hectorsa mallet.’*).

16 Similar statements appear in Ennius’ epic *Annales*, where, however, they do not disrupt the narrative situation to the same extent (Enn. *Ann.* 147–148, 218–219 V.² = 151–152, 229–239 W. = 139–140, 211–212 Sk.).

17 Pacuvius uses words that the quoting lexicographers define as ‘Oscan’, such as *ungulus* (instead of *anulus*, ‘ring’: Pac. *Trag.* 64, 215 R.²⁻³ = 59, 224 W.). In this case there are no comments on the words in the fragments as transmitted; they are used like genuinely Latin words. Thus, they seem to have been incorporated as loanwords and not to have been regarded as requiring comment.

Achilles, agrees to be characterised by *pervicacia* ('steadfastness'), but not by *pertinacia* ('stubbornness'), with the two words also in alliteration and assonance and juxtaposed in a structure parallel in form and contrasting in sense (Acc. *Trag.* 4–9 R.²⁻³ = 452–7 W. *tu pertinaciam esse, Antiloche, hanc praedicas, / ego pervicaciam aio et ea me uti volo; / nam pervicacem dici me esse et vincere / perfacile patior, pertinace nihil moror. / haec fortis sequitur, illam indocti possident. / tu addis quod vitio est, demis quod laudi datur*). Such definitions and distinctions of terms may reflect contemporary scholarly discussions.

When Roman and Greek terms are juxtaposed, the interaction between the two cultures and the role of language in this context become obvious. Frequently and without reflection or comment, Roman political or religious terminology is applied to describe activities or situations of Greek characters (e.g. Enn. *Trag.* 219–21 R.²⁻³ = 266–8 W. = F 90 *TrRF*; Pac. *Trag.* 80–2 R.²⁻³ = 101–3 W.; Acc. *Trag.* 119–21, 357–65 R.²⁻³ = 83–5, 351–9 W.). The chosen wording is probably felt to be equivalent to the concept in Greek, to have been used to make it more comprehensible to Roman audiences and thus not to require discussion. In a number of cases this adjustment of terminology is not merely a linguistic element and, moreover, introduces terms linked to Roman values; thus, it enhances a play's expression of a Roman perspective relevant to contemporary audiences, for instance, when characters talk about supporting the *res publica* (e.g. Enn. *Trag.* 219–21 R.²⁻³ = 266–8 W. = F 90 *TrRF*; Acc. *Trag.* 357–8 R.²⁻³ = 351–2 W.). A comprehensible and accessible Roman setting as shown in the terminology seems to be more important than a consistent stylistic format reflecting the original Greek environment.

The structure of some of the longer fragments is in line with principles of rhetorical argument, and some extracts can be described as set speeches in dramatic speaking contests (e.g. Enn. *Trag.* 205–13 R.²⁻³ = 253–61 W. = F 89 *TrRF*; Pac. *Trag. inc.* 366–75 R.²⁻³ = 37–46 W.; *Trag. inc.* 49–54, Acc. *Trag.* 205–13 R.²⁻³ = Acc. *Trag.* 103–8, 169–77 W.). The surviving instances are probably not isolated examples: for instance, Accius was allegedly asked why he did not plead in the Forum although his tragedies included forceful speeches (Quint. *Inst.* 5.13.43); thus, rhetorical showpieces in the plays are likely to have been a notable feature. And when the author of the *Rhetoric to Herennius* mentions Ennius next to the orator C. Sempronius Gracchus as a source for examples, the poetic texts must have been deemed to have a rhetorical quality (*Rhet. Her.* 4.2; cf. also Cic. *De or.* 1.154).¹⁸

¹⁸ At the same time Cicero says about another tragic writer, C. Titius, that he employed the same features that he used in his speeches also in his tragedies, where they seemed 'scarcely tragic': Cic. *Brut.* 167 *eiusdem fere temporis fuit eques Romanus C. Titius, qui meo iudicio eo pervenisse videtur quo potuit fere Latinus orator sine Graecis litteris et sine multo usu pervenire. huius*

Along with the influence of Greek tragedy, a reflection of and engagement with contemporary oratory, developing at Rome since before the production of the first literary plays, is not surprising, as is also the case, for instance, for the prologues of Terence's comedies.¹⁹

3 Views on early tragic style by later ancient authors

In view of the limited amount of material available from the Republican playwrights, both for assessing the general stylistic shape of early Roman tragedy and for identifying specific features, comments by later ancient authors acquire more importance. If these are not descriptions of phenomena and rather assessments, they need to be treated with the appropriate caution, as these later authors speak from the perspective of their own times.

In summary, later ancient writers know that Roman dramas are based on Greek precedents, but they still assess them as works in their own right.²⁰ They agree that the Republican playwrights belong to an early phase of Roman literature and that therefore the language and the style of their works are different from what is common in their own times; they differ as to whether they therefore praise the playwrights as pioneers or describe their style as rough and obsolete. Ovid, for instance, characterises Ennius as lacking in art (*Ov. Am.* 1.15.19–20; *Tr.* 2.423–424).²¹ Others criticise the artificial, overblown, and old-fashioned language especially of Pacuvius and Accius (e.g. *Pers.* 1.76–78; *Mart.* 11.90.5–6; *Tac. Dial.* 20.5; 21.7). Cicero, however, has an interlocutor in one of his dialogues claim that Ennius had already always found the most appropriate way of expression (*Cic. De or.* 1.154).

orationes tantum argutiarum tantum exemplorum tantum urbanitatis habent, ut paene Attico stilo scriptae esse videantur. easdem argutias in tragoedias satis ille quidem acute sed parum tragice transtulit. quem studebat imitari L. Afranius poeta, homo perargutus, in fabulis quidem etiam, ut scitis, disertus. Such an assessment suggests that not all rhetorical features were regarded as fully appropriate in tragedy.

19 For a list of standard rhetorical features identifiable in Roman Republican tragedy see Ribbeck 1875, 643–644.

20 For Cicero's comments on 'translation' with respect to early Roman drama see *Cic. Fin.* 1.4–7; *Ac.* 1.10; *Opt. gen.* 18.

21 Similarly, Horace observes a lack of elegance with regard to Ennius' use of metre (*Hor. Sat.* 1.10.54; *Ars* 258–262).

Most later authors, even if they do not approve of the results, since the poetic works of the early writers are not as polished as the products of their own time, appreciate the poetic talent of these playwrights and their achievements as early representatives of the genre within their own time: a speaker in Macrobius acknowledges that it is unfair to regard the early poets as rough just because their style is less polished, because that was the accepted style of their period and it took a long time for people to get used to a more refined version (Macrobius *Sat.* 6.3.9 *nemo ex hoc viles putet veteres poetas, quod versus eorum scabri nobis videntur. ille enim stilus Enniani seculi auribus solus placebat: et diu laboravit aetas secuta, ut magis huic molliore filo adquiesceretur*), and Quintilian notes that any lack of polish is due to their times rather than to the poets themselves (Quintilian *Inst.* 10.1.97).

Comments by writers in other literary genre closest in time to the original production of the tragedies are those by the comic playwright Plautus (c. 250–184 BCE) and the satirist Lucilius (c. 180 – c. 102 BCE). Lucilius parodies and mocks the use of unusual words and the extensive descriptions of protagonists in dire plights (Lucilius 597–8, 599–600, 650, 653 M. = 729–30, 727–8, 675, 665 W.; cf. Gell. *NA* 17.21.49). Plautus too imitates overblown descriptions with ridicule.²² The underlying view of tragic style becomes especially obvious in a scene in Plautus' *Pseudolus*: when the words of the eponymous slave imitate tragic language in an exaggerated and highly stylised fashion (Plautus *Pseud.* 703–706), another character comments *ut paratragedat carnufex!* (Plautus *Pseud.* 707), thus identifying them as paratragedy and inappropriate in the context.²³

When these (near-)contemporary writers criticise an exuberant and perhaps overblown use of language in tragedies, this must be a noticeable generic characteristic, while the negative assessment is due to the satiric and mocking perspective. Still, that tragedy uses more elevated language is probably a true impression; it is observed by other authors too, particularly for the last two playwrights Pacuvius and Accius (Gell. *NA* 6.14.6).²⁴

Beyond generic features, it is noted, especially by Cicero, that at least the later three tragic playwrights, Ennius, Pacuvius and Accius, are characterised by different styles of writing, and Cicero adds that they are therefore liked by

²² For allusions to tragedy in Plautus see e.g. Plautus *Cas.* 759–762; *Pers.* 11–12; 712–713; *Pseud.* 771–772; Pacuvius *Trag.* 20^{a-b} R.²⁻³ = 13–14 W.; Plautus *Amph.* 232–233; Pacuvius *Trag.* 223 R.²⁻³ = 264 W.; *Amph.* 1062; Pacuvius *Trag.* 336 R.²⁻³ = 365 W.

²³ In this scene the combination of a comic plot and language in tragic style is highlighted as incongruous. Elsewhere, in the play *Amphitruo*, Plautus fuses elements of comedy and tragedy to create a 'tragicomedy' (Plautus *Amph.* 50–63) and thus mixes typical characteristics of comedy and features reminiscent of tragedy for a different effect.

²⁴ Cf. e.g. Beare 1964³, 71, 78; Stärk in Suerbaum 2002, 161 (on Accius).

different people, while the works of each of them are praiseworthy each in their own way (Cic. *De or.* 3.27; *Orat.* 36; cf. Hor. *Epist.* 2.1.55–59, Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.97; Fronto, *Ep. ad Ant.* 1.2 [133.11–134.1 van den Hout]). Although in view of the available evidence it is not easy to verify and specify these fairly broad characterisations, they suggest an increasing complexity, learnedness, and sententiousness in style towards the later Republican period.

Beyond that, Cicero does not comment on specific styles linked to individual characters or character types in the plays; yet he notes that the style may change within the writings of a single author, depending on context, so that even tragic style may approach colloquial language (Cic. *Orat.* 109).²⁵ Vice versa, other authors remark that comedy may include elements of tragic style, regarded as more or less appropriate (Hor. *Ars* 93–98; Gell. *NA* 2.23.21 [Caec. *Com.* 169–72 R.^{2–3} = 163–166 W.]). These comments confirm that the styles of these two dramatic genres were seen as distinct, with tragic style viewed as operating on a higher level, but that each style was not restricted to its genre.

With respect to Pacuvius, Cicero on one occasion describes him as the supreme tragic poet (Cic. *Opt. gen.* 2 *summum ... poetam ... Pacuvium tragicum*) and elsewhere reports that his verses were regarded as ‘ornate and elaborate’ (Cic. *Orat.* 36); on yet another occasion he notes that Pacuvius (and the contemporary comic playwright Caecilius) spoke bad Latin (Cic. *Brut.* 258). These statements are probably not contradictory and rather reveal a distinction between the construction of a drama, style, and language: i.e., Cicero recognises that Pacuvius creates impressive and effective dramas and produces sophisticated lines, while he is aware that the verses are written in a stylised unnatural language, not agreeing with the pure Latin spoken by educated individuals of the period.

If there is variety between playwrights and potentially even within a single play, generalisations about style beyond broad tendencies on the basis of scattered fragments become even more problematic. Still, it is clear that a sophisticated and elevated use of language in tragedy was obvious already in antiquity.

4 Stylistic features

Some of the observations of later ancient writers can be confirmed from the evidence of the fragments. As is well known, typical stylistic features of early Latin are based on sound effects (e.g. alliteration, assonance), stylistic figures linked

²⁵ On Cicero’s views on language of Republican drama see also Manuwald 2022.

to choice and arrangement of words (e.g. etymological jingles, anaphora, anadiplosis, tricolon, repetition, enumeration, climax, asyndeton, polysyndeton, sequences of short sentences, other types of artificial word order), or effects based on meaning and sense (e.g. antithesis, zeugma, metonymy, literal interpretation of common phrases, pun), often emphasised by a balanced distribution of correspondences over lines or parts of lines. Most phenomena of this kind can be identified in the space of short extracts.²⁶

4.1 Sound effects

One of the most frequent stylistic sound features of early Roman drama is alliteration.²⁷ While for some instances of what are technically alliterations there might not be any design since they are accidental as a result of the use of common words, some seem to be intended to convey a sense of an elevated atmosphere and to highlight certain concepts. The intentional use is plausible especially when alliterations occur in connection with other stylistically marked forms of expression; this is frequently the case and applies, for instance, to versions of *figura etymologica* (Naev. *Trag.* 38/35 R.²⁻³ = 49 W. = F 21 *TrRF ne ille mei feri ingeni atque animi acrem acrimoniam*),²⁸ double expressions (Enn. *Trag.* 4–5 R.²⁻³ = 14–15 W. = F 5 *TrRF quo nunc incerta re atque inorata gradum / regredere conare?*; *Trag.* 338 R.²⁻³ = 22 W. = 162 *TrRF Salmacida spolia sine sudore et sanguine* [with emphatic and pathetic repetition of s]), asyndeton (Acc. *Trag.* 592 R.²⁻³ = 595 W. *egredere exi effer te, elimina urbe* [including a list of near-synonyms for emphasis and expressiveness]), combinations of (near-)synonyms (e.g. Naev. *Trag.* 4/3 R.²⁻³ = 3 W. = F 11 *TrRF formam et faciem virginis*)²⁹ or expressions of contrast (Naev. *Trag.* 18/1 R.²⁻³ = 19 W. *ne mihi gerere morem videar lingua verum lingula*; Pac. *Trag.* 85 R.²⁻³ = 106 W. *magis audiendum quam auscultandum censeo*) or chiasmus (Pac. *Trag.* 143–5 R.²⁻³ =

²⁶ Sound effects include onomatopoeic descriptions, for instance of waves (Pac. *Trag.* 417 R.²⁻³ = *Trag. inc.* 6 W.; Acc. *Trag.* 569–73 R.²⁻³ = 573–7 W.), noises on ships (Pac. *Trag.* 335–6 R.²⁻³ = 363–5 W.), thunderstorm (Acc. *Trag.* 223–5 R.²⁻³ = 183–185 W.), storm and shipwreck (Pac. *Trag.* 333–4 R.²⁻³ = 361–2 W.), or rain (Enn. *Trag.* 2–3 R.²⁻³ = 16–17 W. = F 2 *TrRF*).

²⁷ For a discussion of the range of definitions applied to ‘alliteration’ see Traina 1999, 11–17, 75–76 with n. 82, for a historical overview and different types see Leumann et al. 1972², II, 700–704.

²⁸ For examples of *figura etymologica* in tragedy see Wills 1996, 244. They are particularly frequent in Ennius’ tragedies as well as in Plautus’ comedies, in Greek tragedy and in Latin formal language (Jocelyn 1967, 173); hence, this stylistic feature is not limited to tragedy.

²⁹ On expressions involving asyndeton and accumulation of synonyms see Timpanaro 1988; Dangel 1994 (with further references).

138–40 W. *quid quod iam, ei mihi, / piget paternum nomen, maternum pudet / profari?*; Acc. *Trag.* 560 R.²⁻³ = 568 W. *Phrygiam miti more esse, animo immani Graeciam*).³⁰ In many cases these stylistic features lead to more expressive, emphatic, and pathetic descriptions of strong feelings, extreme situations or sharp contrasts.

4.2 Organisation and repetition of words

A development of such sound figures is a structure involving the repetition of words or parts of words to emphasise certain concepts.³¹ In some cases this feature underlines the focus on a specific idea, such as *ira* in a line from Naevius (Naev. *Trag.* 39/36 R.²⁻³ = 48 W. = F 33 *TrRF* *cave sis tuam contendas iram contra cum ira Liberi*) or the relationship between *amici* and *hostes* (with double repetition) respectively in a verse from Accius (Acc. *Trag.* 132 R.²⁻³ = 253 W. *qui neque amico amicus umquam gravis neque hosti hostis fuit*). In Ennius' famous statement *amicus certus in re incerta cernitur* the repetition emphasises the importance of certainty (Enn. *Trag.* 388 R.²⁻³ = 216 W. = F 166 *TrRF*), or in *arce et urbe orba sum* (in a combination of words with similar sound and often connected in Latin literature) there is a stress on complete bereavement (Enn. *Trag.* 77 R.²⁻³ = 97 W. = F 23 *TrRF*; similarly Enn. *Trag.* 81 R.²⁻³ = 101 W. = F 23 *TrRF* *o pater o patria o Priami domus*), or a line from Naevius has an emphasis on the quality of *laus* (Naev. *Trag.* 17/15 R.²⁻³ = 17 W. = F 14 *TrRF* *laetus sum laudari me abs te, pater, a laudato viro*). The repetition of similar words can emphasise contrasts (sometimes highlighted by contrastive asyndeton), most obviously in the phrase from Accius *virtuti sis par, dispar fortunis patris* (Acc. *Trag.* 156 R.²⁻³ = 123 W.), or the relationship between different concepts (e.g. Acc. *Trag.* 296 R.²⁻³ = 274 W. *sapimus animo, fruimus anima; sine animo anima est debilis*; *Trag.* 308 R.²⁻³ = 295 W. *ut nunc, cum animatus iero, satis armatus sum*; *Trag.* 619–20 R.²⁻³ = 625–6 W. *nam si a me regnum Fortuna atque opes / eripere quivit, at virtutem non quivit*; *Trag.* 621–2 R.²⁻³ = 627–8 W. *nam is demum miser est, cuius nobilitas miserias nobilitat*).

List of synonyms or near-synonyms highlight the main idea and express the respective concept more emphatically (Naev. *Trag.* 46/43 R.²⁻³ = 39 W. = F 40 *TrRF* *pallis patagiis crocotis malacis mortualibus*; Pac. *Trag.* 301 R.²⁻³ = 328 W. *metus*

³⁰ Similar observations apply to cases of homoioteleuton (e.g. Pac. *Trag.* 274–5 R.²⁻³ = 299–300 W. *corpusque meum tali / maerore aegre macore senet*; *Trag.* 365 R.²⁻³ = *Trag. inc.* 21 W. *solatur auxiliatur hortaturque me*).

³¹ On such features see e.g. Wills 1996, 192–193, 207, 457–458.

egestas maeror senium exiliumque et senectus; Acc. Trag. 468 R.²⁻³ = 472 W. vim ferociam animum atrocitatem iram acrimoniam).

4.3 Expression of action and emotion vs background

How feelings or changes from one emotion to another were developed or demonstrated on stage cannot be inferred from the fragments, but the linguistic presentation of feelings in some of the fragments by means of elaborate descriptions points to an emphatic foregrounding of such situations for heightened impact. This effect may be achieved, for instance, by repetition and alliteration (e.g. *Acc. Trag. 60–61 R.²⁻³ = 26–7 W. ut me depositum immerentem nuntio repentino alacrem / reddidisti atque excitasti ex luctu in laetitudinem*), by exclamations with an accumulation of terms (e.g. *Acc. Trag. 80–80^a R.²⁻³ = 39–40 W. o dirum hostificumque diem, o / vim torvam aspecti atque horribilem*), by a series of short sentences, producing a staccato effect and often including interjections or imperatives (e.g. *Liv. Andr. 20–22 R.²⁻³ = Trag. 20–22 W. = F 14 TrRF da mihi / hasce opes quas peto, quas precor! porrige, / opitula!*; *Pac. Trag. 202 R.²⁻³ = 211 W. age asta; mane audi! itera dum eadem istaec mihi; 342 W. te repudio nec recipio; naturam abduco; facesse!*; *Acc. Trag. 191 R.²⁻³ = 155 W. ah! dubito! ah! quid agis? cave ne in turbam te inplices; 304 R.²⁻³ = 289 W. age age amolire! amitte! cave vestem attigas!*)³² or by a series of questions to express pathos (cf. *Macrob. Sat. 4.2.4*) and uncertainty (e.g. *Enn. Trag. 75–7 R.²⁻³ = 95–7 W. = F 23 TrRF quid petam praesidia aut exequar, quove nunc / auxilio exili aut fuga freta sim? / arce et urbe orba sim. quo accidam, quo applicem; 231–2 R.²⁻³ = 284–5 W. = Inc. F 25 TrRF quo nunc me vortam? quod iter incipiam ingredi? / domum paternamne anne ad Peliae filias?; Acc. Trag. 231–2 R.²⁻³ = 194–5 W. egone Argivum imperium attingam ut Pelopia digner domo? / quo me ostendam? quod templum adeam? quem ore funesto adloquar?*)³³ The fact that feelings are often put into words suggests that performances are not relying only on the actor's expression of them or that these passages function as implicit stage directions, so that the stylistic shape of the utterances contributes to dramatic effectiveness.

At the other end of the spectrum there might be 'epic' descriptions by one speaker of a situation or scenery, for instance the approach of the *Argo* from the perspective of a shepherd who has not seen a ship before or the sketch of *Philoctetes'* abode in *Accius*, presumably to characterise the respective speakers and to

³² On the use of interjections in *Accius* see Casaceli 1976, 86–87.

³³ On this trope of the 'rhetoric of desperation' see Fowler 1987.

create a surprise effect for audiences (Acc. *Trag.* 391–406, 525–36; *Trag. inc.* 71–2 R.²⁻³ = 381–96, 527–40 W.).

4.4 Effects based on meaning (paraphrase, metaphor, sententia)

A number of the surviving fragments have a sententious quality. While this impression may be enhanced by them being quoted as meaningful extracts of one or two lines, the fact that these kinds of excerpts are possible suggests that a certain tendency to phrase statements as memorable self-contained expressions was inherent in the complete plays, so that they could be extracted from those (cf. *Rhet. Her.* 4.7). These sententious statements include comments on maxims of conduct, moral guidelines, considerations on the impact of behaviour and the role of fortune, the effect of emotions and circumstances on conduct or the impact of divine activity (e.g. *Enn. Trag.* 388, 240 R.²⁻³ = 216, 271 W. = F 166, 90 *TrRF*; *Pac. Trag.* 268–9, 279/80 R.²⁻³ = 294–5, 304 W.; *Acc. Trag.* 109–10, 154–154^a, 159, 31, 422–3, 621–2 R.²⁻³ = 68–9, 120–1, 126, 246, 411–2, 627–8 W.).

A style favouring sententious statements might be the result of a tendency towards elaborate phrasing, which also comes to the fore in the use of metaphor and paraphrase. A simple example is the occurrence of metonymy, in the sense of using names of gods for the areas they represent (e.g. *Liv. Andr. Trag.* 30 R.²⁻³ = 31 W. = F 21 *TrRF*; *Pac. Trag.* 291 R.²⁻³ = 314 W.; *Acc. Trag.* 321 R.²⁻³ = 312 W.), a feature of poetry since Homer (e.g. *Il.* 2.426). More specific examples are instances such as ‘the floods of war’ to illustrate a great and turbulent war (e.g. *Acc. Trag.* 608 R.²⁻³ = 609 W. *belli fluctus*).

Elaborate phrasing appears as complex paraphrases instead of simple words, when, for instance, dolphins are described as ‘the herd of Nereus’, along with various descriptive adjectives (*Liv. Andr. Trag.* 5–6 R.²⁻³ = 5–6 W. = F 6 *TrRF tum autem lascivum Nerei simum pecus / ludens ad cantum classem lustratur*; *Pac. Trag.* 408 R.²⁻³ = 352 W. *Nerei repandirostrum incurvicervicum pecus*),³⁴ or when both bodyguards and a naturally grown wood are indicated by descriptions rather than the use of brief words (*Naev. Trag.* 24–6/21–3 R.²⁻³ = 27–9 W. = F 34 *TrRF vos qui regalis corporis custodias / agitatis, ite actutum in frundiferos locos /*

³⁴ The compounds in this line were criticised by Quintilian (*Inst.* 1.5.67 *ceterum etiam ex praepositione et duobus vocabulis dure videtur struxisse Pacuvius: ‘Nerei repandirostrum incurvicervicum pecus’*). Cf. also what seems to be a parody in Lucilius: *Lucil.* 212 M. = 235 W. *lascivire pecus Nerei rostrique repandum*.

ingenio arbusta ubi nata sunt non obsitu). Such mannerist phrasing indicates the aim of poets to display poetic virtuosity.

5 Conclusion

While the extant material for Roman Republican tragedy does not reveal anything about the stylistic texture of such plays in their entirety, surviving lines and comments by other authors demonstrate stylistic features on a smaller scale. Some of these may have been adopted from the underlying Greek models; others, in line with the properties of the Latin language and also observable elsewhere in Roman literature, might have been emphasised or developed by the early playwrights.

Stylistic differences from other literary genres indicate that from the beginning playwrights conceived of tragedy as a separate literary genre with associated typical stylistic features. It was received as such by later ancient authors, who also observed characteristic tendencies for individual playwrights. Generally, tragedy is regarded as and can be shown to be using a more elevated and exaggerated language than, for instance, contemporary comedy, although there can also be sections approaching colloquial language; thus, a range of different styles may be represented in tragedy, some influenced by the technical discourse of other contemporary forms of speech (such as the languages of religion, law, the military, or politics). Naturally, Republican tragedy is written in the language of the period, which later came to be seen as archaic, old-fashioned, obsolete, and somewhat basic. Still, a number of sophisticated stylistic features, often based on sound effects (such as alliteration), accumulation of synonyms, or repetition of words for emphasis or contrast, can be observed in the transmitted fragments; often several of such features can be found in a single passage, especially if an aspect of the content or the emotional atmosphere of a passage is to be highlighted.

Accordingly, it is obvious that, despite the low regard for the style of early Roman tragedy in some quarters in certain later periods, the first playwrights established a generic style that influenced subsequent writers and prompted engagement with it. Therefore, it is worth exploring the language and style of the pioneers as an element of Roman literary history.

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