Chapter 2

Under the Roman Sun

*Poets, Rulers, Translations, and Power*

The most useful fact arising from the debate concerning the ‘invention of Latin literature’ is that the notion of a sudden fascination of an inferior (Roman) culture for a superior (Greek) one is no longer tenable. Not only does this notion rest upon a very essentialist understanding of culture and ethnicity, it also denies complexity to the intercultural exchanges that had been in place in Italy well before the end of the third century B.C.E. The archeological record has long demonstrated that, just as the Etruscans and other Italic populations, the Romans were greatly affected by Greek culture at large since at least the late eighth century B.C.E. The princely tombs of Etruria, Latium, and Campania, for example, speak of a very mobile aristocratic network which included the Greek colonies and whose hallmarks were conspicuous display and ownership of land.¹ In this context, the manufacture of pottery and metalwork shows throughout that the Hellenizing style was not perceived as something foreign and superior to be caught up with; rather, it was a common language that each craftsman interpreted in his own way.² In turn, Central Italy did not exist beyond the Greek horizon. From the sixth century B.C.E. onwards, the Romans and their neighbors featured large in both Greek poetry and prose.³

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1. For a general discussion, see Cornell 1995: 81–118.
3. A concise and useful chronological survey is to be found now in Wiseman 2007b.
Over the course of the third century B.C.E., however, Rome’s relationship with the Greek world shifted in new directions. The victory over Pyrrhus in 278 B.C.E. ushered in a massive movement of spoils to Rome. Centuries later, Florus asserts that Curius Dentatus’ triumph constituted a major turning point in triumphal display, witnessing the inclusion of statues and gold from Tarentum. One needs to be cautious about retroactive periodizations, especially when they tend to oppose a primitive and simple past to a sophisticated and corrupted present. Nevertheless, it is clear that the high prestige that “things Greek” had traditionally enjoyed intersected with their increasing availability through plunder. In turn, Rome’s military success over Pyrrhus raised the stakes in the Italian-wide aristocratic competition and Greek paradigms came to be used as benchmarks for downplaying the competitors. By the end of the third century B.C.E., the increasing concentration of material, human, and cultural commodities in the city and in the hands of its most powerful citizens had altered the system of migration and circulation once and for all. The translation practices that underlie the early formation of Roman poetry ought to be viewed as an offshoot and a manifestation of these larger social, political, and cultural trends.

In his discussion of the beginnings of Latin literature, Denis Feeney emphasizes the usefulness of Mary Louise Pratt’s concept of ‘contact zone.’ This concept, he argues, constitutes a constructive tool for gauging the multilingual and competitive environment of Italy from which the creation of Latin literature found some of its impetus. In her work Pratt explains that ‘contact zone’ refers to “the space of colonial encounters, the space in which people geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict.” Borrowed from linguistics, the term ‘contact’ is used by Pratt to describe the improvised language that evolves from interaction, often in situations of trade. Finally, she specifies that at times a ‘contact zone’ overlaps with that of ‘colonial frontier.’ Within Feeney’s reconstruction, Pratt’s understanding of ‘contact zone’ serves a twofold purpose: on the one hand, it helps

5. Florus 1.13. 26–27.
6. See the Auditorium villa and the remarks by Terrenato 2001. For periodization in general, see Flower 2010: 18–34.
him explain Rome’s peripheral positioning in relation to Hellenistic culture, which at the time—he argues—was perceived as civilization pure and simple. On the other hand, it sustains his emphasis on the multilingual cultures that flourished under the Roman imperium and the mediating role played by the poets who, by moving outwards from the Hellenistic world, acted as cultural mediators working at its fringes.

What I find most productive in Pratt’s notion is its strongly localized framework which becomes that much more powerful when it is applied to well-defined spaces of interaction. In the case at hand, trying to identify these spaces opens up new interpretative paths. First of all, it allows for the possibility of moving away from discourses of cultural inferiority and superiority, center and periphery, by liberating the bilingualism or trilingualism of the early poets from fixed notions of language, culture, and identity. Second, it makes it possible to concentrate on how the poets’ linguistic and cultural proficiency was dynamically interwoven with their migration to Rome and the translations that they performed in Rome. Third, from there we may observe how the poets’ migratory subjectivity affected the strategies that they adopted in producing their translations and investigate the forms of action that belong to the translation process. Fourth, we may examine the agency that translating conferred on the poets by inserting into the frame the other agents that were involved in their translating activities. The more specific we are in defining the ‘contact zones’ in which the poets operated, the more are we in the position to explore the relations that existed between the cultural materials that underwent translation, the transfer agencies implicated, the individual translations that they produced, and the receiving public in their societal interlacements. Although our view is limited by the data available, by tackling these relationships we may assess better the cultural and social formations that poetry mediated.

In this chapter I attempt to identify some of the zones that in late-third- and early-second-century B.C.E. Rome figured encounters centered on poetic translations. By focusing on Plautus’ comic scripts I examine how they encode diverse types of patterned speech and actions and how,

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12. Feeney 2005: 237, 239. If we look, however, at the alleged origins of the early poets, the outward movement envisioned by Feeney does not apply across the board. As for the difficulty of defining imperium, see Gruen 2004: 243–44 and more extensively Richardson 2008; Mattingly 2010.

13. For recent discussions of ‘contact zones’ as ‘translation zones’ that are both methodological and disciplinary, see Wolf and Fukari 2007; Apter 2006.
in turn, performances based on them mirrored back and forth the diverse worldviews of those involved in their production and reception. Later in this chapter I turn to Livius Andronicus’ *Oduseia* and investigate what his translation of Homer’s epic reveals about the agency of the early poets vis-à-vis that of their elite sponsors. My special interest in this latter nexus of agencies is driven by my larger aim to shed light on the asymmetries that the surviving poetic texts embed when viewed vis-à-vis Cato’s prose writings. However, because any interpretation is itself mediated by the subjective frameworks of the interpreter, I find it important to preface my analysis with a few words about how my approach embraces some of the questions raised by our postmodern world and recent turns in the field of translation studies.

**Contact Zones, Translation Zones**

Our postmodern world is teaching us that any reterritorialization (and globalization indeed constitutes one form of it) leads to different but equally hierarchical structures of cultural circulation and new class formations. As Saskia Sassen argues, any city earns the stature of ‘global city’ in part by participating in a worldwide circuit of cultural commodities manufactured for its urban and wealthy professionals. In turn, the global cities have become poles of attraction for immigrants and minority groups that service these professionals and create hybrid cultural products expressing both their displaced identity and their attempt to make the new environment their home. I do not think that the modern understanding of ‘global city’ provides us with straightforward analogies to account for the ancient situation. In fact, I would suggest that the extension of Rome’s hegemony over Italy and the new role that the members of its ruling elite played in the process intensified expansionistic needs already in place. In light of these needs, the early poets were more than just cultural agents contributing to resolve the identity crisis suffered by the local aristocracy in the face of Hannibal’s menace, as Thomas Habinek has it. They also did more than simply help this aristocracy catch up with the highly competitive cultural market-place of the Hellenistic Mediterranean, as Glenn Most remarks. They were, first of all, social agents involved in the flow of resources that Rome’s political and military ascendancy had produced.

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In recent years, the notion of diaspora has become a key term for representing the multiple identifications that characterize the lives of those who come from somewhere and establish their homes elsewhere, who assimilate to the norms and values of their new homes and remain trapped in a translation state of exilic dimensions. As Douglas Robinson puts it, “a diasporic culture is a global culture that is for ever displaced, in exile, living among strangers that become the familiar characters of our homes and places of work.” Viewed in this way, diaspora and, with it, the multilingualism and cultural hybridity of postcolonial contexts make translation in the most traditional sense impossible. For this reason, it is better to understand translation as a more or less empowering negotiation between cultural and linguistic divides and as a crucial and inescapable fact of life at the same time. Once again, we cannot map our modern experiences directly on the ancient situation. What we can do, however, is to capitalize on modern insights by becoming more responsive to the migratory subjectivity of the early poets and the signs that this has left on the texts that we read today.

By emphasizing that poetry was a practice linked to individuals relocated just like the texts that they manipulated, I propose that the translation activities of the early poets were doubly ‘performative.’ They were cultural inventions largely based on the reprocessing of Greek literary materials, but they were also the means whereby their nonelite and alien inventors negotiated their adaptation to their changed reality. Those who in Rome held social and political power enter our purview because they were responsible for recruiting these poets and sponsoring their activities. In this respect, it makes sense to assume that some of their creative stimulus derived from demands sited within Rome’s body politic. To think that these demands were linked to practices of conspicuous display is justified not only because these had long typified the Italian aristocracy, but also because later accounts invoke civic festivals as the contexts in which poetry made its first appearances. From a purely methodological point of view, my endeavor to assess the forms of agency that the early poets derived from their participation in civic festivals merges with ongoing attempts to demarginalize translation and translators alike.

In recent years the strongest challenge to the notion of translation and translators as ‘secondary’ or ‘marginal’ has stemmed from the acknowl-

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16. Robinson 1997: 29. The field of diaspora studies is enormous and very much divided up into ethnic categories (African, Irish, Italian, and so on). In this sense, the articles gathered by Braziel and Mannur (2003) constitute a useful point of departure.

edgment that colonialism and translation practices have long gone hand in hand. In this respect, it is not at all surprising that some of the most radical conceptions of translation have come from former colonies around the world where the relationship with Europe used to be mapped on the metaphorical opposition between ‘original’ and ‘translation.’ What this metaphor has also suggested is that, from the point of view of the colonized, translation has always been a one-way process. Translations into European languages have served to make European expressions ‘original’ by denying or adapting the view of the colonized. Translations into the languages of the colonized, by contrast, have facilitated the imposition of European values and norms, once the most hostile resistance had been extinguished through bloodshed. Against this picture, translation theorists have been turning to ‘translation’ in order to reassess and reappropriate the term.\(^\text{18}\) On the one hand, they have been scrutinizing how textual translations have been instrumental to the reinforcement of subordination and expropriation; on the other hand, they have been exploring the creative potential located in the in-between space that the translator invariably occupies.\(^\text{19}\)

The shift of focus on the ‘translation space’ has most recently raised the need to go beyond source and target texts and to allow for the personal circumstances of the translator and the social networks in which he operates to bear on our analyses.\(^\text{20}\) In dealing with early poetic translations we are forced into a textual encounter; accordingly, some questions about the poets’ circumstances remain unanswerable. Regardless, to ask these questions is a way of factoring into the equation the poets’ self-perception in relation to how others perceived them and the multiple agencies that affected and were affected by the cultural transfer that they performed. At a macroscopic level, we may contemplate the hierarchies governing the relationship between the source-culture (Greece) and the target-culture (Rome) and look at how the poets positioned themselves in relation to both. At a more microscopic level, we may understand the translation process as a form of interpellation that affects all the parts involved by binding them together. If so, early poetry offers the possibility to take into

\(^{18}\) Bassnett and Trivedi 1999: 5 and passim. See also the seminal studies by Rafael 1993; Cheyfitz 1991; Niranjana 1992; Robinson 1997.

\(^{19}\) Hose (1999) purports to adopt a postcolonial perspective, but speaks about the formation of a literary culture in Rome as a cultural colonization pursued by the politically weak followed by a struggle for emancipation from the colonial power of Greek culture. In other words, he projects colonial dynamics and postcolonial attempts to cultural self-determination back on the ancient situation by gesturing to and yet downplaying the historical fact that from the third century B.C.E. onwards Rome pursued and reinforced its political and military dominance over Italy and the Mediterranean.

account the power differentials that shaped Roman social relations at the time of its production and to consider how translating both limited and expanded the agency of each part.

A Scene of Beginning

Writing during the Augustan period, Livy dedicates a long paragraph in book seven of his history to the development of performance arts in Rome.\(^{21}\) His account begins in 364 B.C.E. when a terrible plague hit the city. Livy reports that the Romans, incapable of containing the spread of the disease and won over by superstition, summoned a number of performers (\textit{ludiones} from Etruria and instituted the \textit{ludi scaenici}. From there, Livy goes on to trace the evolution of stage performances to finally point out that from a healthy start the whole matter turned into a type of insanity “barely tolerable even in opulent kingdoms” (7.13). At this, one wonders what was so healthy about this beginning. By going back to the opening of Livy’s digression with these words in mind, a compelling scene takes shape before our eyes:

Sine carmine ullo, sine imitandorum carminum actu ludiones ex Etruria acciti, ad tibicinis modos saltantes, haud indecoros motus more Tusco dabant. Imitari deinde eos iuventus, simul inconditis inter se iocaria fundentes versibus, coepe; nec absoni a voce motus erant. Accepta itaque res saepiusque usurpando excitata. Vernaculis artificibus, quia ister Tusco verbo ludio vocabatur, nomen histrionibus inditum; qui non, sicut ante, Fescennino versu similem incompositum temere ac rudem alternis iaciebant sed impletas modis saturas discrpto iam ad tibicinem cantu motuque congruenti peragebant.\(^{22}\)

Summoned from Etruria, professional performers (\textit{ludiones}) danced to the accompaniment of the flute: they did not sing nor act out any imi-

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21. For a philological treatment and discussion of scholarship on this troublesome passage, see Oakley 1998 \textit{ad locum}.

22. Livy 7.2.4–7. It is not completely clear in Livy’s text whether the relative pronoun \textit{qui} refers back to the \textit{iuvenes} or the \textit{artifices}. I tend to believe that it refers back to the \textit{iuvenes} and expanding on their activities, after explaining the lexical shift from \textit{ludio} to \textit{histrio} in relation to nonelite individuals engaging in dances and musical performances. Cf. Oakley 1998: 41 and 42 note 1. McC.Brown (2002: 26 note 4) rightly notices a contradiction in Oakley’s commentary (who seems unable to decide whether the \textit{histriones} are professionals or amateurs) and maintains that Livy is talking about professionals.
tation of songs (carmina); their movements were decorous and in the Etruscan style. Then, native youth began to imitate them, at the same time uttering jests in uncouth verses. Their gestures were suited to the voice. Once accepted, repetition improved quality. The native professionals (artificibus), because ister was the Etruscan word for ludio, were named histriones. And, they (the iuvenes?) no longer uttered verses akin to crude Fescennines, but rather began to perform medleys full of musical measures matched to (discripto) the sound of the flute and by moving in accordance.

In this scene, the young Romans meet the imported performers and start imitating their dancing bodies, while the imported performers do not imitate the youths in return and hold back from singing or mimicking carmina. Livy’s narrow focus on encounters between alien professionals and native youth points already to the social amalgamation that in the long run this institution came to entail. Amalgamation, however, is also what Livy tries to exclude from his inaugural scene. Although the two groups engage with each other, lack of reciprocal mirroring helps to preserve social hierarchies and keeps the alien performers from affecting the practices of the local youth. This element, in turn, is reinforced by Livy’s comments on the immediate outcome of this type of encounter. By repeatedly imitating the alien dancers, the young Romans learned to produce songs qualitatively superior. But when Livy chooses the verb usurpare to indicate intensive exercise, he uncovers the logic underlying his aesthetic appraisal. In fact, the verb highlights that the songs of the native youth improved only because the movement of cultural forms and practices was unidirectional and upwards. After this, Livy’s syntax breaks down and we can hardly follow his zooming back to the performers and to the next developments. What we do catch, however, is that the performers become naturalized social entities (they are now called vernaculi artifices), although we soon realize that their new designation (histrio) keeps in view their alien origins. Finally, Livy dwells on the saturae leaving syntactically ambiguous the identity of those who performed them. Apparently, these saturae are the carmina that the young Romans had initially kept for themselves, although now they are amplified by dance and melody, that is, the cultural forms seized from the alien performers.

Riveted by the moment of cultural expropriation, Livy constructs a

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23. This etymology is shared by Valerius Maximus. 2.4.4; Plutarch, mor. 289 c–d (qualified as οἱ περὶ τον Δίονυσιου τεχνίται). Festus 89L and Isidorus, Orig. 18.48 derives them from Histria.
scene of beginning that emphasizes how alien cultural expressions and practices helped expand the cultural patrimony of free Romans. In this scene the process of cultural enrichment is represented as a two-step procedure: first, alien cultural agents are relocated into Rome in order to energize the communication between the civic community and the gods during a moment of crisis; second, by means of imitative practices the local youth takes hold of these new cultural expressions. As Thomas Habinek points out, “Livy’s narrative is emblematic of Rome’s relationship with outsiders, in particular the relationship of elite Roman males to their ‘others,’ throughout history.”

But there is something else that we should not miss. Against this scene Livy projects a number of anxieties over the intractable problem of socially distinguishing cultural practices and forms when these move across perceived ethnic and social boundaries through mimicry. Indeed, in the attempt to catch expropriation in its purest form, that is, untainted by later developments, he also suggests how the Roman elite might have wished to imagine their relationship with their ‘others’ and their culture. In an ideal world, the ‘others’ are supposed to amplify instances of communication between the civic and the divine world by working in partnership with the governing elite. Besides that, they should take a place somewhere at the margins and, from there, deliver their cultural patrimony to the dominant group without asking anything in return. In other words, an ideal situation would involve a change of ownership that denies all forms of recognition or return to the first owners. Needless to say, Livy’s wishful scenario stands far from cultural borrowing since, as a form of exchange, borrowing implies some sort of repayment for the good or service received.

To say that the Roman elite at large might have thought of outright theft as the best method for seizing the cultural patrimony of their ‘others’ means to acknowledge the proprietorial logic that sustained their cultural expansion. By following this logic, we also realize that historical reality deviated from ideals and presented forms of interaction between elite and nonelite different from it. The result of these interactions was appropriation nonetheless; but against the ideal parameter set by theft, elite cultural appropriations entailed two things at once: continuous negotiations with their ‘others’ and the emergence of culturally mixed expressions.

The Recognition of Poetic Craftsmanship in Rome

Roman poetry owes its inception to a specific group of alien cultural agents that in the late third and early second centuries B.C.E. operated in Rome. According to Cicero, poetry made its first appearance in the guise of drama the year following the first capitulation of Carthage, when Livius Andronicus wrote and staged a play for the *Ludi Romani* celebrated in that year.\(^\text{25}\) While it is easy to see that such a date does not correspond to a real beginning, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that it was around this time that poetically crafted drama became an essential element in public festivals, celebrations of military victories, temple dedications, and funeral games.\(^\text{26}\) In a way, poetic drama came to fulfill a ceremonial and religious function somewhat similar to that which it had served in the Hellenistic cities. Its practitioners, however, came to occupy a social position significantly different.

Testimonies about the activities of the *technitai* or craftsmen of Dionysus point to the fact that this designation connected writers, actors, and musicians with a tradition based on the reperformance of written texts that went back to the theater of Dionysus and fifth-century Athens. Organized in guilds that did not fall under the jurisdiction of any rulers, these guilds traveled to all parts of the Hellenistic world and negotiated on equal terms with the cities or the royal houses that contracted their services.\(^\text{27}\) Although some have posited a direct influence of these guilds and their members on the development of poetry in Rome, this hypothesis runs counter to the fact that explicit references to the hiring of *technitai* are scanty.\(^\text{28}\) On the other hand, the sources indicate that many of the poets that began to work in Rome from the mid-third century B.C.E. onwards did not move to the

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25. Cicero, *Brut.* 72–73. In this passage Cicero disparages Accius’ chronology by which Livius Andronicus staged the first play at the *Ludi Invventitis* in 197 B.C.E. after arriving as a slave in 209 B.C.E. Cf. also Cicero, *De Sen.* 50; *TD* 1.3; Gellius 17.21.42. For the reference to the *Ludi Romani*, see Cassiodorus, *Chron. ad ann.* 239. This last testimony talks about the production of both comedy and tragedy.


28. A point recently made by Brown 2002 (*contra* Gruen 1990: 87). Reference to their presence in Rome is limited to three occasions only: the Ludi celebrated by M. Fulvius Nobilio in 186 B.C.E., those celebrated by L. Scipio in the same year (Livy 39.22.2 and 10), and those by L. Anicius in 167 B.C.E. (Polybius 30.22). For a discussion of this last event, see also Edmonson 1999. The limited presence of *technitai* does not exclude the possibility that early dramatic scripts were acquired from Hellenistic guilds and that the poets used the same arrangement techniques (cutting, expanding, or altering scenes). See Brooks [1949] 1981: 171; Traina 1970: 114–16; Gentili 1979: 18.
city by choice. Some are said to have come to Rome as prisoners of war (Livius Andronicus, Caecilius Statius, and Terence), others seem to have been recruited by members of the Roman ruling elite in service abroad (Ennius). As far as we can gather, only Plautus and Naevius migrated of their own accord.

What is most important about these accounts is not so much their testimonial value but the narratives of more or less coerced relocation that they all share. Read symptomatically, these narratives point to the high profile that Rome was acquiring as a result of its increasing military and political hegemony and they encourage us to consider the specificity of the early poets’ migratory experience. In this respect, one could stress that the poets could soon rely on a guild (collegium) and from there promote their services just as their Hellenistic counterparts did; however, Festus indicates that as opposed to them, their guild was sanctioned by the governing class under special circumstances and came to be associated with the cult of Minerva:

Scribas proprio nomine antiqui et librarios et poetas vocabant; at nunc dicuntur scribæae equidem librarii qui rationes publicas scribunt in tabulis. Itaque cum Livius Andronicus bello punico secundo scripsisset carmen quod a virginibus est cantatum quia prosperius res publica populi romani geri coepta est, publice adtributa est ei in Aventino aedis Minervae, in qua liceret scribis histrionibusque consistere ac dona ponere in honorem Livi quia hic et scriebat fabulas et agebat.

The ancients used the term “scribe” for both “public clerks” and “poets”; now, however, those who write public accounts on tablets are called “public clerks.” Therefore, when during the Second Punic war Livius Andronicus

29. For Livius Andronicus taken captive in 209 B.C.E. there is an indirect reference in Cicero, Brut. 72–73 referring to Accius’ Didascalica. Although Accius’ chronology may be off, the narrative paradigm is what interests me. According to Gellius (4.20.13), Caecilius was a freedman and Jerome (Chron. p.138 Helm) asserts that he was an Insubrian Gaul, perhaps from Mediolanum. For Terence, see Nepos, Ter.1.
30. For Ennius, see Nepos, Cato 1.4.
31. For Plautus, see Plautus, Most. 769–70 although the reference is only limited to his Umbrian origins; for Naevius, see Gellius 1.24.2.
32. For later articulations of migratory subjectivities see, Philodemus (Rhet. 2.145 Sudhaus) who, together with Alexandria, mentions Rome as a pole of attraction for intellectual workers who move out of necessity, personal gain, or the glory of their country of origins. See also the case of Parthenius who, according to Suda π 664 = T 1 Lightfoot, arrived at Rome as a spoil of war and was freed on account of his education. In the introduction to his Erotica Pathemata, we can see that, apart from producing poetry himself, he also provided raw mythological material to be worked out by Cornelius Gallus into his elegiac poetry. See Fletcher 2011.
33. Festus L446.
had written a *carmen* which was sung by virgins, because the situation of the *res publica* of the Roman people began to turn out rather prosperously, the state assigned to him the temple of Minerva on the Aventine. In this temple scribes and actors could meet and make sacrifices in honor of Livius because he wrote and acted his plays.

In this passage, Festus suggests that the poets were socially clustered with scribes and their writing practices socially mapped on preexisting ones. Moreover, Festus points to ritual as the space within which the absorption of poetry into society was mediated by reporting that the establishment of the *collegium* was a form of recognition bestowed on Livius Andronicus for his contribution to the celebration of a rite of expiation. This rite, Livy reports, had been motivated by Hasdrubal’s crossing the Alps and by the destruction of the temple of Juno Regina on the Aventine in 207 B.C.E. To ward off civic turmoil, Roman officials drew on a number of resources: *haruspices* were called from Etruria and the matrons were urged to finance the rite with their own dowries by means of an edict of the *aediles*. The ceremony resulted in a major production and Livius’ contribution entailed the performance of a hymn written by him and sung by young aristocratic women during the celebration. But more can be said about Festus’ narrative once we compare the elite involvement that it suggests with what Livy unfolds in his scene of inauguration. Whereas in Livy the performers are alien dancers who shun singing, in Festus the performers are young Romans who sing from a composition produced by an alien professional. At one level, Festus alerts us to encounters across social lines that both counter and solidify Livy’s reservations about social and cultural mixing. At another level, he points to the shared understanding of rituals organized at moments of civic uncertainty as the original contexts around which and in which these encounters took place. In the larger economy of the recorded circumstances that contributed to the rooting of poetry in Rome, both Livy and Festus share the understanding that the social integration of the poets intersected with their progressive entanglement in the project, however troubled, of expansion (political, social, cultural, and cosmological) of the Roman ruling elite.

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34. For the presence of scribes in Etruria and Latium, see Colonna 1976 and, more generally, Harris 1989: 149–74.
35. Livy 27.36.3–4. Ps.-Acro on Horace, *Carm. Saec.* 8 (via Verrius Flaccus) talks about the commissioning of another hymn performed in 249 B.C.E. Some have linked it to Livius Andronicus (Gruen 1990: 83 note 17).
36. For the socioemotional background of crisis as the trigger for the establishment of poetry, see Habinek 1998a: 39–41.
At about the time when the temple of Minerva became the site of the new guild, Rome witnessed a burgeoning of poetic dramas and an intense exploration of cultural forms falling outside of drama itself. Trying to fit them within a system neatly codified in earlier (Greek) or later (Latin) discussions of literary genres does nothing more than throw into relief the vast array, or rather, disarray of cultural materials that these wordsmiths were able to manipulate. Perhaps a better way to tackle these texts is to focus on their mixed nature and to deal with the social relations that this mixture encoded. To do so, however, it is important to acknowledge that poetic texts were written with a view to being performed. Here I may seem to be merely stating the obvious since we are relearning how we think about early dramatic scripts by considering their performance aspect.\(^{37}\) But our narrow focus on dramatic scripts as the only type of poetic texts to be performed has led in the past to discussions about the societal impact of (say) early epic that leave unexplained its specific dynamics.\(^{38}\) Ancient narratives about early poetic activities tend to emphasize that the poets performed on stage or engaged in readings from their compositions.\(^{39}\) To give some credit to these narratives does not deny that early poetic texts may have also been objects of solitary readings; rather, it helps us see how they began to circulate in more exclusive circles. For now, however, my focus remains on the ways in which the multifarious self-identifications of the earliest poets met with the project of multifold expansion in which Rome’s rulers were engaged from the place that the Senate assigned to them and through the texts that they constructed.

In past years critics have insisted that the establishment of the guild in the temple of Minerva contributed to the social advancement of their members and granted them a great deal of independence.\(^{40}\) This interpretation has had the merit of steering the discussion away from the idea that the poets strictly served the political interests of individual elite households or, otherwise, suffered State impositions. Even so, it is hard to believe that their relationship with the Roman ruling elite was based on purely intellectual interests and a shared vision of ‘national identity.’\(^{41}\) Rather than by their intellectual or nationalistic insights, the integration

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38. The increasing awareness of this problem is nicely attested by how Goldberg (2005) builds upon his previous contribution on epic (Goldberg 1995).


41. This is basically the argument laid by Gruen 1992; 1990. For a recent assessment of Gruen’s dependency on Cicero’s representation of poetry in the Pro Archia, see Zetzel 2007: 9–13. Although focused on Ennius, see also Gildenhard 2007b: 84–85 and note 77.
of poets and actors in the social cityscape as craftsmen appears to have been sustained by an increasing elite investment in their creations. On this score, the wide range of testimonies about the emancipation of some poets from slave to free to Roman citizens suggests that what made this group of cultural agents special was their translational expertise. This implies that the early poets’ self-perception was affected by multiple factors. These include their physical migration to Rome from other parts of Italy, their progressive integration into the social fabric of Rome, their interaction with members of the Roman ruling elite, and their ability to navigate and manipulate diverse cultural traditions.

From our standpoint, traces of poetic subjectivity are to be ferreted out from the generic disarray that marks early poetic texts. At times these traces overlap with representations of the diverse worldviews of the people involved in the exchanges that sustained the creation process. At other times they are shaped by the themes explored and the occasions that hosted performances from poetic scripts. Accordingly, when we look at the early poetic material that has survived, often in a fragmentary state, it is crucial to observe the combination of different codes (be they metrical, thematic, or linguistic) that these texts bear. Equally crucial, however, is it to observe the choices that sustained their construction, the events that envisioned poetic performances, and the variety of agencies involved.

**Poetry in the City**

Festus suggests that the craftsmen who produced scripts and performed from them were integrated into Rome’s social landscape thanks to Livius Andronicus, who wrote a hymn for a rite of expiation that took place in 207 B.C.E. For the most part, however, their activities were organized around dramatic spectacles inserted in the larger program of fixed as well as occasional religious festivals that took place in the civic space. Signaled by the appearance of the actors (*actores*) before the audience, the space in which the actors performed (*scaena*) was a makeshift construction. Once the actors left the audience’s sight, no traces of the occurrence would remain in the cityscape.

Some years ago, Erich Gruen argued that erecting and dismantling the dramatic space constituted a ritual of power in itself and demonstrated the

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42. So, for example, Livius Andronicus and Caecilius are freed (Jerome, *Chron. Olymp.* 148.2 for Livius and Gellius, 4.20.13 for Caecilius), and Ennius becomes a Roman citizen (Cicero, *Pro Arch.* 22. Cf. also Ennius, *Ann.* 524 Sk).
decisive authority of the ruling class over the artistic sphere.\textsuperscript{43} Resistance to the construction of a permanent theatrical structure, however, also testifies to the challenges that poetic drama could have posed to this very authority if not properly channeled.\textsuperscript{44} If hosted in a permanent building, it certainly would have become an institution of its own. Anxieties over such a prospect emerge in Scipio Nasica’s intervention in the mid-150s. According to Livy, Nasica argued that a permanent theatrical structure would have been unprofitable and would have damaged public morality.\textsuperscript{45} Just as profitability does not imply that it was a matter of mere economics, so too Nasica’s appeal to morals does not really express a concern with the moral welfare of the Roman people as such. To erect and disassemble stages was a costly enterprise, a lavish expenditure that conspicuously pointed to the civic generosity of Rome’s ruling class.\textsuperscript{46} As such, locked within civic rituals orchestrated by the governing elite, poetic drama turned into a ceremonial accessory that celebrated the increasing hegemony of this elite and intensified its links with the divine realm. Contrary to our expectations, perhaps, the rulers’ investments in the production of poetic drama derived less from what drama communicated than from what it allowed them to do.

What made poetic drama so incredibly appealing was the poets’ ability to draw together cultural expressions existing in separate locations and different forms. In this sense, the surviving dramatic scripts can be best described as the outcome of two parallel acts of transformation. By translating theatrical texts generated in the Greek world, the poets contributed to the concentration of literary materials from other parts of Italy into an increasingly hegemonic Rome. But in the process of domesticating these materials, they also textualized the varied Italian song culture, which existed most exclusively in embodied form and included the Atellana and the Fescennine, among others.\textsuperscript{47} Thus, early poetic texts had less to do with textual translation as such than with a thorough reworking and remapping of existing cultural materials mediated through writing. In turn, these

\textsuperscript{43} See especially discussion in Gruen 1992: 183–222, but also more recently Beacham 1999: 30.

\textsuperscript{44} A point made by Beacham 1992: 66, but from a different perspective than mine. Gruen (1992: 208) disagrees with the dangers of \textit{stasis} signaled by Appian (\textit{B.C.} 1.28) asserting that the suggestion is anachronistic.

\textsuperscript{45} Livy \textit{Per.} 48. Information about this event can also be gathered from Valerius Maximus 2.4; Appian, \textit{B.C.} 1.28; Orosius 4.21.4; Vell. Pat. 1.15.3; Augustine, \textit{CD} 2.5.

\textsuperscript{46} For the high costs, see Tacitus, \textit{Ann.} 14.21. My suggestion here departs from Gruen (1992: 209) who argues that “a permanent theater, whatever its advantages in cost and convenience, would represent a symbolic relaxation of that authority.”

\textsuperscript{47} For the influence of the Atellana and the Fescennine, see Duckworth 1994: 3–16.
writings looked to the ritual occasions for which they were constructed in the first place. To come to terms with the relationship between poetry and ritual, one may start by considering the emotional work that comedy allowed the spectators to entertain.

Recent research into the comedies of Plautus has taught us to see that the beneficiaries of any pleasures that they provided were not only the less powerful or the disenfranchised members of the audience, but also the socially and politically dominant. As Kathleen McCarthy has recently argued, pleasure stemmed primarily from Plautus’ capacity to combine and recombine the comic modes that were at his disposal: ‘naturalism’ (generally associated with his Greek models) and ‘farce’ (loosely linked to the Italian Atellan). ‘Naturalism’ placed stable identities beneath shifting appearances until, in the moment of recognition (*anagnorisis*), these identities surfaced once again. ‘Farce,’ by contrast, saw these identities as contingent and revealed this contingency through the tricks devised by the clever slave. Through the almost inextricable combination of and dialogism between these two comic codes, poetic drama in Greek dress (*fabulae palliatae*) helped fulfill the multiple and contradictory fantasies of the audience attending the performance. On the one hand, the audience found respite from the labor of domination and from the struggle involved in maintaining one’s position in the larger scheme of social relations; on the other hand, because identities were finally restored so too were hierarchical relations dramatically confirmed and, I would add, divinely corroborated.

The effects that McCarthy describes are highly compelling since they point, among other things, to the pressures that slavery (as an institution bolstered by conquest) imposed on the dominant members of Rome’s society. While expanding the social and economic standing of the Roman masters, slaves were constant reminders of a progressive loss of self-reliance. As we shall see, this inextricable contradiction emerges in Cato the Censor’s *De Agricultura* where the mythology of the self-sufficient peasant/soldier that flickers in the Preface clashes against the representation of a farm run by slaves who fulfill the commands of the absent master. By transforming the social figure of the slave into a ‘ritual object’ or a ‘talisman,’ comedy expressed these pressures in a liberatory manner for the benefit of all. But the anxieties of those masters who also ruled the community (and commissioned the writing and the performance of poetic drama) were multiplied by the pressures inherent in their project of

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48. For these ritual transformations, see Habinek 2005a: 54 and McCarthy 2000: 19.
expansion. In a way, their successes were becoming more and more bound up with their capacity to draw on an increasingly diversified population with quite different cultural backgrounds. The creators of Roman poetic drama appear to respond to this additional set of concerns by manipulating sound patterns belonging to ethnically different traditions and transforming diverse perceptions of reality into civic song.

In her introduction, McCarthy remarks that Plautus’ interest in the dialogism between diverse comic modes is the product of an attitude towards language shared by all the early poets. In her words, “it is a manifestation of a deeper principle, the consciousness of language as a separate system that is never exactly coextensive with its function as a means of communication.”²⁹ Plautus, then, as well as the other poets, did not use the phonetic aspect of language to convey meaning but to pit sound patterns against each other. This concentration on linguistic sounds independent of the meaning that these sounds expressed can still be traced in the scripts that have survived. Focusing on Plautus’ mastery of phonetic iterations, Alfonso Traina has counted 2,283 hapax legomena and has systematized them according to categories derived from classical rhetoric: alliteration, homoioteleuton, figurae etymologicae, paronomasia, and so on.⁵⁰ This interest in phonetic repetition is often bracketed under the larger rubric of conventionality and stylization and invariably attributed to the tradition of the comedy in Greek dress in which Plautus participated.⁵¹

In Plautus’ comedies as well as in other forms of poetic drama, phonetic repetitions are not the only way in which speech is organized. For if the verbal sounds of one word reverberated on other words in the syntagm, syntagms were constrained by quantitative meters that were repeated from line to line and changed according to a specific pattern. Iambic senarii served plain dialogues; iambic, trochaic, and anapaestic septenarii and/or octonarii characterized sections chanted to musical accompaniment; Greek lyric meters of various types were used for songs strictly speaking.⁵² Accordingly, we are dealing with two ways of patterning speech

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⁵⁰. Traina 1977: 130–31. He also notes (pp. 163–65) that Plautus is not interested in onomatopoeia except when he mimics the modes of tragedy (Amph. 1094; 1062). The same case is made by Mariotti (1952: 44) in relation to the tragedies of Livius Andronicus. The only onomatopoeia that we find in comedy relates to the beating of the slave (see list in Traina 1977: 164). In this sense, one could also say that tragedy and comedy ritualized two distinct sounds/noises, transforming them into elements of song: comedy did it with the beating of slaves, and tragedy with the noises of battles. In this sense, one may want to consider also the blooming area of sound studies and the impact of soundscapes on experiences of the world.
⁵¹. See especially Wright 1974: 36 and passim.
⁵². Based on MacCary and Willock 1976: 35. But for a more recent assessment of the
sounds: one ‘phonetic’ and one ‘quantitative.’ Although merging into one another, these two formalized patterns were also distinctively linked to two different cultural traditions. Phonetic repetitions invoked Italian song genres;\textsuperscript{53} quantitative patterns reached out to the Greek literary tradition, which organized speech around syllabic length and consistently avoided phonetic reiteration. To have a sense of how powerful the ethnic correlation between formal patterns and their mixture is, it may be useful to turn to the field of American studies.\textsuperscript{54}

According to Richard Middleton, in the American musical tradition musematic repetitions are based on the reiteration of short units (musemes) and are opposed to the type of musical circularity that characterizes collective oral inventions. Discursive repetitions, by contrast, are based on the reiteration of longer musical phrases mixed together and contrasted in a hierarchical framework. In the American context, these two patterns are also historical and ethnic categories (‘black’ and ‘white,’ respectively), and their distinction or combination has always been mediated by the needs of distinct socioeconomic configurations.\textsuperscript{55} In our case, it is virtually impossible to imagine how, during the performance of poetic dramas, the combination and reiteration of diverse sound patterns were impressed on the ears of its audience. Even so, we can safely say that the poets’ manipulation of sound patterns attached to ethnically distinct traditions contributed to the creation of a ‘contact zone’ located within the socioculturally variegated environment of Rome and the realm of civic festivals at the same time.\textsuperscript{56}

Years ago Giorgio Pasquali commented that all Plautus’ characters spoke the same language; this language, however, stood far from the one used in everyday life.\textsuperscript{57} To these remarks Traina added that just as in the composite Plautine world we find innumerable fragments of Roman reality, so too in the fleshy and hyperbolic expressions of slaves, pimps, and prostitutes the turbulent audience of Plautus recognized the core of their division of comedy into arcs and their metric composition, see Marshall 2006: 203–44.


\textsuperscript{54} See, for example, Lott 1993: 173–82.

\textsuperscript{55} Middleton 1986: 164.

\textsuperscript{56} As for sound effects it is worth remarking the ways in which Plautus and Terence made the metrical ictus coincide with the tonic accent of the word, a strategy that might have helped the domestication of Greek rhythms. For this issue, see Parsons 1999 passim; see also Stuertevant 1919.

\textsuperscript{57} Pasquali 1968: 314–28.
own language. Focusing on the Greek models, others have pointed out that in Rome the metrical and lexical distinctions that in the Greek context had kept tragedy and comedy apart were completely blurred. More recently, Habinek has argued that comedy absorbed into itself song genres that spill outside the simple Greek/Italic divide. Taken together, these diverse impressions testify to the transformational powers of the poets and their effort to embrace sound patterns, cultural forms, and linguistic expressions belonging to the various peoples that lived under the Roman sun. In turn, the multiform communicative tool that the poets devised allowed the attending audience to enter a series of relations that looked to the divine world. The practice of instauratio makes the latter trajectory especially conspicuous: if the performance was interrupted or if there was some omission or mishap, it had to be repeated. The narrow focus on proper procedure manifested in this practice confirms that the ‘contact zone’ created by poetic drama had less to do with a specific physical location and more with the patterned speech and actions that concurred to create it.

It has long been recognized that when the impersonating actors performed on stage, their mixed way of speaking, singing, and dancing produced an environment located—to adopt Brooks’ (borrowing from Peter Pan) felicitous expression—in a ‘never-never land’ that was neither Greece nor Rome. Sometimes, this ‘never-never land’ is explicitly constructed through rhythm and dance as, for example, in Plautus’ Menechmi (49–56), where the prologue speaker declares that he is going to Epidamnus on “(metrical) feet (pedibus 49)” without moving from the place on which he stands (i.e., the stage) (56). Other times this location is created in words more simply, as in Truculentus (1–8; 10–11), where the poet presents himself through the character on stage as the one erecting Athens without architects in the public space (ager publicus) of Rome. The construction of a ‘never-never land,’ however, is not limited to comedy alone. For example, in a fragment attributed to Ennius’ translation of Euripides’ Medea (214–18) the Roman audience is transported into that
same location when on stage the formidable character of Medea addresses the women of Corinth as “rich and most distinguished matrons.” A trick of translation can be seen here to both domesticate the mythical location represented on stage and induce a social group within the audience to become judges of Medea’s actions. The constructedness of the ‘never-never land’ created on stage and the ways in which it was built by linguistic, musical, and bodily means calls for larger considerations about the relationship between the world on stage and the world outside of it.

One way to go about this relationship is to deploy Victor Turner’s understanding of drama as a type of “cultural performance” that works as a “magic mirror” that makes “ugly or beautiful events or relationships which cannot be recognized as such in the continuous flow of quotidian life in which they are embedded.” Following Turner, it may be said that the poets combined diverse song traditions and stylized the quotidian experiences of the spectators in order to create a make-believe world prearranged in writing. By relying on these writings the actors engendered a space through their speech and actions that reflected back on the spectators’ diverse perceptions of reality. For our purposes, the ‘reflexive’ possibilities ushered in by poetic drama are more easily detected in the metatheatrical moments scattered throughout the Plautine corpus.

**Metatheater Reconsidered**

Coined by Lionel Abel in 1963, the term metatheater has accrued over time a wide variety of meanings. At a very basic level, metatheater refers to any force in a play which challenges the idea of theater as being nothing more than an uncomplicated (or naturalistic, if you want) mirror against

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63. To be sure, this address is included in a line that is hard to reconstruct because embedded in the body of a letter addressed by Cicero to Trebatius (Cicero, *Fam.* 7.6.1). Jocelyn (1967: 357–61) discusses the various attempts that have been made to determine the original line and notices Ennius’ marked translation of the Greek γυναῖκες into *matronae* rather than into *mulieres* noting that “the Corinthian women are bound to their mates by *iustum matrimonium* and hence protected by all the majesty of the city-state’s law and custom. Medea, by implication is only a *concubina* (361).”


65. Turner’s model has undergone major criticisms but it has also triggered some very productive reflections over the position of the observer. To get a sense of both, see Taylor 2003: 8–12; Bell 1997: 72–76.

66. It should be noted that this mirroring allows us today to identify class ideologies and social phenomena at large; for this sort of sociohistorical investigations, see Leigh 2004; Gruen 1992; Konstan 1983.

which the spectators view themselves and identify with the actions of characters. By sharpening our awareness of the artificiality of theater and by revealing the boundaries that separate theater from life, metatheatricality would help the spectators focus their attention on the illusoriness of life and prompt them to consider the theatricality of life itself. The notion of metatheater was first applied to Plautine comedy by Marino Barchiesi in an article published in the early seventies. In that article Barchiesi suggested that the breaks in the dramatic illusion that we find scattered in Plautus’ scripts served as moments of reflection on the history of the text’s creation and its construction from previously existing plays. In the mid-eighties Niall Slater argued that Plautine metatheater reveals an acutely self-conscious awareness of the constructedness of both the characters and the play, and contributed to the articulation of comic heroism. Incarnate in the clever slave (servus callidus), this heroism manifested itself in this character’s ability to control the plot and other characters. Recently William Batstone has disputed that Slater’s conceptualization of metatheatricality as an exclusively theatrical matter divorces Plautine theater from the life of ancient spectators: metatheatricality – Batstone reminds us—is based on the perception that “all the world’s a stage” and in Plautus this perception meets with a non-theatrical and specifically Roman view of life theatricalized. By taking Batstone’s remarks as a cue, I would like to look at two passages of the Curculio to consider the forms of actions that the break of the dramatic illusion permitted. In the first passage the character of the choragus goes out of his way to describe the social types that inhabit the forum:

Edepol nugatorem lepidum lepide hunc nactust Phaedromus.
halapantam an sycophantam mágis esse dicam nescio.
ornamenta quae locavi metuo ut possim recipere;
quamquam cum istoc mihi negoti nihil est: ipsi Phaedromo
credidi; tamen asservabo. sed dum hic egreditur foras,
communstrabo, quo in quemque hominem facile inveniatis loco,
ne nimio opere sumat operam si quem conventum velit,
vel vitiosum vel sine vitio, vel probum vel improbum.

69. Slater 2000: 9-12. Gutzwiller (2000: 103–4) argues against Slater’s association of metatheatricality with the Atellan farce. For my purposes, the origin of this technique is less important than what this technique allowed the poets to do.
70. Batstone 2005: 31; however, for larger considerations about Roman “theatricality,” see Dupont 1985 and, more recently, Dupont 2000 with a focus on the relationship between actors and orators.
Under the Roman Sun

qui periurum convenire volt hominem ito in comitium;
qui mendacem et gloriósum, á pud Cloacinae sacrum,
dítis damnosos maritos sub basilica quaerito.
ibidem erunt scorta exoleta quique stipulari solent,
symbolarum collatores apud forum piscarium.
in foro infimo boni homines atque dites ambulant,
in medio propter canalem, ibi ostentatores meri;
confidentes garrulique et maleuoli supera lacum,
qui alteri de nihilo audacter dicunt contumeliam
qui ipsi sat habent quod in se possit vere dicier.
sub veteribus, ibi sunt qui dant quique accipiunt faenore
pone aedem Castoris, ibi sunt subito quibus credas male.
in Tusco vico, ibi sunt homines qui ipsi sese venditant,
[in Velabro vel pistorem vel lanium uel haruspicem]
vel qui ipsi vorsant vel qui alis ubi vorsentur praebant.71

By Pollux, Phaedromus has nicely found himself a nice liar here. I don’t
know whether I should call him a con man or a shyster. I am afraid I won’t
be able to get back the costumes I rented out; but I don’t have business
with him: I entrusted them to Phaedromus himself; still I’ll keep watch. But
while he is away, I’ll point out where you can find any kind of person, so
that nobody spends too much effort if he wants to meet someone, someone
with or without vices, someone good or bad. Anyone who wants to meet a
perjuring fellow should go to the comitium; if he wants to meet someone
who lies and boasts, he should go to the shrine of Venus Cloacina. Let
him look for rich profligate husbands under the walls of the basilica. In
the same place will be male prostitutes, and the one who get promises of
money; the ones who contribute to group meals are at the fish market. At
the bottom of the forum good and rich men stroll about; but in the middle,
near the gutter, are the pure pretenders. The ones who are arrogant, talk-
ative, and spiteful, who brazenly speak slander against someone else on no
grounds, and who have plenty that could truly be said against themselves,
are just above the Lacus Curtius. In the shadow of the old shops are those
who give and receive money at interest. Go behind the temple of Castor
and Pollux: right there are those you would be a fool to trust. In the Vicus
Tus cus are the people who sell themselves; on the Velabrum [you can find]
a baker [or miller] a butcher or a seer, or those who themselves cheat or
offer others a place where they can cheat.
(Trans. Moore)

71. Plautus, Curc. 462–84.
The choragus, here, is a character drawn into the world on stage from the world outside of it. By following his indications critics have recently charted the social types elicited in speech on the spatial configuration of the forum and have pointed out that some of them present features that we also find in comic stock characters (the miles gloriosus, the senex amator, the adulescens, the leno, and so on).\textsuperscript{72} The identification of the forum itself as one possible performance location has led C. W. Marshall to argue that the play was performed in the Comitium, an area of it formally defined as a sacred space or templum.\textsuperscript{73} Whereas Marshall counts as a counterargument the fact that a dramatic performance would have been inappropriate for the sacredness of the place, I think that his reconstruction calls attention to the too often forgotten ritual dimension of poetic drama.\textsuperscript{74} On this score, the choragus’ speech may well suggest that the insertion of poetic drama in a public space already ritualized constituted one of the ways in which poetry accrued special status. If so, the socio-topographical map that the choragus unfolds makes clear that metatheater did not simply serve to break the dramatic illusion and reveal the constructedness of the play; it also helped generate an interface between the world created on stage and that of the spectators. This interface allowed the latter to participate in both the dramatic action and the communication with the divine that the ludi sought to establish. Accordingly, the reflecting ‘contact zone’ arranged by the poets in their scripts and realized by the actors on stage emerges here as mediating between and bestowing power on multiple perceptions of reality.\textsuperscript{75} This fact encourages us to examine the kind of agency that poets and actors derived from their participation in the ludi and how this too was reflected upon the dramatic ‘contact zone’ and reflected back outside of it.

Clues about this latter mirroring process can be found in another moment of the Curculio:

Dáte viam mihi, nóti [atque] ignoti, dúm ego hic officiúm meum facio: fugite omnes, abite et de via decedite, ne quem in cursu capite aut cubito aut pectore offendam aut genu. ita nunc subito, propere et celere obiectumst mihi negotium, nec <homo> quisquamst tám opulentus, qui mi obsistat in via,

\textsuperscript{73} Cicero, \textit{De Rep.} 2.11.
\textsuperscript{74} Marshall 2006: 47.
\textsuperscript{75} Marshall (2006: 245–79) does an excellent job at balancing out the poet’s agency in composing the script vis-à-vis the improvisational interventions of the actors.
nec strategus nec tyrannus quisquam, nec agoranomus, 
nec demarchus nec comarchus, nec cum tanta gloria†, 
quin cadat, quin capite sistat in uia de semita†.
tum isti Graeci palliati, capite operto qui ambulant, 
qui incendunt suffarcinati cum libris, cum sportulis†, 
constant, conferunt sermones inter se<se> drapetae, 
obstant, obsistunt, incedunt cum suis sententiis, 
quos semper videas bibentes esse in thermipolio†, 
ubi quid subripue: operto capitulo calidum bibunt, 
tristes atque ebrioli incedunt: eos ego si offendoro, 
ex unoquoque eorum exciam crépitum polentarium.
tum isti qui ludunt datatim servi scurrarum in via, 
et datores et factores omnis subdam sub solum. 
proin se domi contineant, vitent infortunio.76

Known or unknown, make way for me, while here I execute my commis-
sion; fly all of you, be off, and get out of the way, lest I should hurt any 
person in my speed with my head, or elbow, or breast, or with my knee. So 
Suddenly now am I charged with a business of quickness and dispatch. And 
be there no person ever so opulent to stop me in my way, neither general, 
nor any tyrant, nor market-officer, nor demarch, nor comarch, with their 
honors so great, but that down he goes, and tumbles head-first from the 
footpath into the carriage-road. And then those Greeks with their cloaks, 
who walk about with covered heads, who go loaded beneath their cloaks 
with books, and with baskets, they loiter together, and engage in gossip-
ing among themselves, the gadabouts; you may always see them enjoying 
themselves in the hot liquor-shops; when they have scraped up some trifle, 
with their covered pates they are drinking mulled wine, sad and maudlin 
they depart: if I stumble upon them here, from every single one of them I’ll 
squeeze out a belch from their pearled-barley diet. And then those servants 
of your scurrae, who are playing at catch-ball in the road, both throwers 
and catchers, all of them I’ll pitch under foot. Would they avoid a mishap, 
why then, let them keep at home.
(trans. Riley; slightly modified)

This passage represents the arrival of Curculio on stage. While performing 
the role of the servus currens, the character describes the people that he 
imagines to be crossing his path by methateatrically drawing into the frame

76. Plautus, Curc. 280–98.
a number of social types crowding the contemporary cityscape of Rome.\textsuperscript{77} In this context, the group that stands out is composed of Greeks, ethnically typified by their foreign apparel, their books, their way of moving about, their habits, and their food.\textsuperscript{78} Needless to say, these constitute also some of the visible markers that contributed to characterize the performing actors; as such, ethnic characterization here emerges as yet another poetic strategy of mirroring and inclusion that parallels the poet’s manipulation of diverse languages, sound patterns, cultural traditions, and subjective perceptions of reality. On one level, just like the formation of the verbs pergraecari and congraecari in other plays, the characterization of Greeks as ‘others’ here reflects on cross-cultural encounters experienced by the audience and thematizes the dynamics of attraction and disdain that they triggered.\textsuperscript{79} On another level, the visual identification between social actors and fictional characters indirectly conveys a larger claim: poetic drama lies open for all to see whatever the ‘others’ hide, steal, do, and chat about in real life and transforms their ‘otherness’ into a benign and empowering addition to civic life. More, however, can be said about the mirroring game played in this passage once we turn our attention to the other two social types described at the beginning and at the end of it.

At the very start Curculio strikes a defiant pose by fictionally warning those who stand on a higher station to get out of his way. The warning could be read as an interpellation of those in the audience who exercise sociopolitical authority in Rome; however, by characterizing them through a jumble of Greek words connected to public offices, Curculio reduces the consequences that such an outrageous behavior would provoke if the identification were taken at face value.\textsuperscript{80} Towards the end of the passage, Curculio singles out nonpoetic performers as slaves of scurrae who are only able to imitate each other in an undifferentiated space of the cityscape (\textit{in via}, line 296).\textsuperscript{81} Taken together, the confrontational characteri-
tions woven into Curculio’s speech call into play an implicit comparison between the power that the insertion of poetry in the program of civic festival conferred on their practitioners and the power wielded by the various social types methateatrically drawn into the dramatic space. In what follows, I expand on metatheater by considering the specific agency that the poets derived from translating Greek textual materials.

Poetry as the Art of Translating

In Plautus the technical term used for translation is *vertere*. As James Halporn put it some years ago, the relationship between early poetic drama and its Greek ‘originals’ conjured up by this verb could be called “the Homeric question of Latin studies.” To be sure, it is since the publications of Friedrich Leo (*Plautinische Forschungen zur Kritik und Geschichte der Komödie*, 1912) and Eduard Fraenkel (*Plautinisches im Plautus*, 1922) that critics have been trying to assess the degree of faithfulness and/or originality of the Roman tradition vis-à-vis their Greek predecessors. Thanks to these types of assessment, Roman poetic drama can now be approached as a poetic form worthy of being studied on its own merit without forcing Latinists to take an apologetic stance towards its ‘secondariness.’ But if at this juncture we are to fully understand the nature of this ‘secondariness,’ we might also want to recognize that any interest in qualitative comparisons between Greek ‘originals’ and Latin ‘translations’ is a byproduct of a long and conflicted history fought over the Greek literary tradition.

In relation to comedy, this historical trend surfaces most clearly in Quintilian where the author comments on Plautus, Caecilius, and Terence by stating that “deprived of the advantage of writing in Attic Greek, they were only able to aspire to achieving a mere shadow of their originals.” In Gellius the qualitative comparison between a passage from Menander and a passage from Caecilius’ *Plocium* leads him to consider the latter a very poor rendering of the ‘original.’ By taking this history as normative, a case can be made for the early poets being responsible for changing the rules of Roman engagements with Greek culture by making its literary

83. In this sense, it is significant that in looking at Plautine drama in its own right McCarthy (2000: 9 note 12) underscores only in a footnote that her use of ‘secondary’ does not imply any lesser value.
84. For a general discussion, see Bain 1979.
85. Quintilian 10.1.99.
86. Gellius 2.23.
tradition a resource worthy of competing for. In this respect, the historical shipwreck of the ‘originals’ curiously places us in a position that is not much different from the one occupied by the earliest audience since our access to them is similarly mediated. Although there is no doubt that these early recipients were somewhat familiar with the ‘originals’ manipulated by the poets, one may suppose that they hardly met them as textual entities. Eventually, the elite sponsors overcame their dependency on poetic mediations by putting their hands on them and by acquiring the transformational skills of the poets. Initially, however, the poets thrived on their advantage.

Standing outside the drama proper and introducing the dramatic action, Plautine prologues tend to present an impersonating actor luring the audience into the performance to come. On those moments, the poet shows off by proxy the Greek origins of his plots in the same way as victorious generals paraded their foreign spoils during their triumphs. With the unfolding of the play the initial focus on the poet’s handling of Greek ‘originals’ shifts onto the ability of the clever slave to improvise plots and schemes; at times, remarks about the clever slave’s mastery of the comic game dovetails with considerations about the dramatic skills of the poet. For this reason interpreters have long understood the fictional construct of the clever slave as a special locus of poetic self-reflection.

In a much-studied scene of the *Pseudolus* the identification poet/clever slave emerges when Pseudolus addresses the spectators and comments on his attempt to devise a plot to cheat money from Simo:

> Sed quasi poeta tabulas quom cepit sibi,
> Quaerit quod nusquam gentiumst, reperit tamen,
> Facit illud veri simile quod mendacium est
> Nunc ego poeta fiam: viginti minas

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87. In Terence, *Eun.* 19–22 we find represented the process of evaluation through which a script went before their staging; the magistrate in charge relies exclusively on the poet’s presentation of it.

88. The case made by Gentili (1979) about the longstanding Southern Italian performance tradition is a case in point in relation to the Roman audience exposure to it. For performances in Greek in Rome in the late Republic, see Cicero, *Ad Fam.* 7.1.

89. For appeals to the audience’s responsiveness to return favors, see Plautus, *Amph.* 20–23; 46–49; *Asin.* 14–15; *Cas.* 1–2; for their martial successes, see Plautus, *Amph.* 75–76; *Capt.* 68; *Cas.* 88; *Cist.* 197–98; for moral uprightness, see Plautus, *Amph.* 64–85; *Cist.* 199–200.

90. For references to Greek originals and advertisement of poet’s translating activity, see Plautus, *Trin.* 18–19; *Asin.* 11; *Merc.* 9–10; *Cas.* 32–34; *Miles* 86–87; *Poen.* 52–53. For the parallel, see Connors 2004: 204 and McElduff forthcoming.

Quae nusquam sunt gentium, inveniam tamen.92

But just like a poet, when he takes up his tablets,
Searches for what is nowhere but still finds it,
Making what is a lie seem like truth
Now I will become a poet: I’ll find
The twenty minae that are nowhere.

Here Pseudolus assimilates himself to the poet and asserts that if his job inside the world of fiction is to find (\textit{invenire}) money that does not exist anywhere, the job of the poet outside of it is to find cultural materials to summon onto his tablets in order to lay the foundations to the verisimilar world realized on stage.93 As William Fitzgerald has aptly observed, the link between the poet and the clever slave construed here is later expanded to include the relationship between the poet and the audience:94

suspicio est mi nunc vos suspicarier
me idcirco haec tanta facinora promittere,
qui uos oblectem, hanc fabulam dum transigam,
neque sim facturus quod facturum dixeram.
non demutabo. Atque etiam certum, quod sciam,
quo id sim facturus pacto nihil etiam scio,
nisi quia futurumst. Nam qui in scena provenit,
novo modo novum aliquid inventum adferre addecet:
si id facere nequeat, det locum illi qui queat.95

I suspect that you suspect that I am promising all of these exploits just to amuse you while I perform this play, and that I won’t do what I have said that I would do. I won’t break my word. Though, as far as I know, I don’t know how I’ll do that, only that I will. For anyone who comes on stage must bring some new invention in some new fashion; if he can’t do that, then let him give space to someone who can.

In this typically metatheatrical moment Pseudolus continues to play the same game of identification by linking the poet’s pressure to find ever new material to show on stage to the compulsive desire of the audience to enjoy

more and more instances of poetic drama. In an earlier passage, however, when Simo suspects that Pseudolus is colluding with the pimp, Pseudolus indirectly expands on the pressure factor by indirectly exposing the poet’s dependency on the vouching authority of his superiors:

Aut si de istac re umquam inter nos convenimus
quasi in libro quom scribuntur calamo litterae,
stilis me totum usque ulmeis conscribito.\textsuperscript{96}

Or if we cannot find an agreement about this matter, then as if letters in a book which are written with a reed, scribble all over me with rods.

Fitzgerald has pointed out that with these words Pseudolus brings into the purview of the audience the precarious position that the clever slave shares with his creator by suggesting that the ultimate power to write the script does not reside with the poet but with those who exercise their authority over him.\textsuperscript{97} Thus, if in the world of fiction the poet’s creative power met with the clever slave’s cunning, in the real world the poet confronted himself with the hierarchies that shaped life in Rome. Insofar as the poets engaged in the business of entertainment and at this point shared with actors the same \textit{collegium}, it is not unreasonable to think that they too suffered \textit{infamia} and, therefore, were liable to corporal punishment from which other citizens were legally protected.\textsuperscript{98}

In the Plautine corpus the most explicit reflection on those liabilities is spawned from yet another moment of identification between poet and clever slave in a passage of the \textit{Miles Gloriosus}:

illuc sis vide,
quem ad modum adstitit, severo fronte curans cognitans.
pectus digitis pulsat, cor credo evocaturust foras;
ecce avortit: nixus laevo in femine habet laevam manum,
dextera digitis rationem computat, ferit femur
dexterum. ita vehementer icit: quod agat aegre suppetit.
concrepuit digitis: laborat; crebro commutat status,
eccere autem capite nutat: non placet quod repperit.
quidquid est, incoctum non expromet, bene coctum dabut.

\textsuperscript{96} Plautus, \textit{Pseud}. 544–46.
\textsuperscript{97} Fitzgerald 2000: 47.
ecce autem aedificat: columnam mento suffigit suo.
apage, non placet profecto mi illaec aedificatio;
nam os columnatum poetae esse inaudivi barbaro,
cui bini custodes semper totis horis occubant.
euge, euscheme hercle astitit et dulice et comoedice.99

Just look at him, how he stands there with bent brow, considering and
cogitating. He is tapping his chest with his fingers. Intends to summon
forth his intelligence, I suppose. Aha! Turns away! Rests his left hand on
his left thigh, and his right hands reckons with his fingers. He hits his right
thigh and so vehemently: his plan is having a hard birth. Snaps his fingers!
He’s in distress. Constantly, changes his position! Look there, though; he
is shaking his head—that idea won’t do! He won’t take it out half baked,
whatever it is, but give it to us done to a turn. Look though! He is build-
ing—supporting his chin with a pillar! None of that! I don’t fancy that sort
of building, not for a minute. For I happen to have heard that a foreign poet
has a pillared face and a couple of custodians always lying on him hour
after hour. Glorious! A graceful and comic pose!
(trans. Nixon; slightly modified)

In this passage Periplectomenus describes the bodily postures that the
clever slave, Palaestrio, assumes in the process of devising a scheme. The
description sets in motion a ‘deictic’ trajectory that breaks the boundaries
of fiction and points to a poet under custody located outside the dramatic
action.100 In past years, the allusion has been understood as an explicit
reference to the incarceration of Naevius for lampooning individual aris-
tocrats; however, in his 1970 article on metatheater Marino Barchiesi
points out that the portrayal could also be understood as yet another crucial
moment of poetic self-reflection over the compositional process.101 If so,
these lines more directly thematize the poet’s concern with appeasing his
superiors and his perception of them as presences haunting the creative
process. Apart from that, it would appear that the ‘first generation’ of poets
had a rather free approach to their sources.

100. Here I use the adjective ‘deictic’ loosely, building upon the study of deixis in Greek
materials and its cultural work elaborated by Bakker (2005) on linguistic grounds. Note that in
our passage the boundaries of fictionality are crossed at the intersection with the deictic illaec
(210).
In a passage from *Mostellaria* Tranio, the clever slave, reflects on Plautus’ relationship with his Greek ‘originals’ in the following way:

si amicus Diphilo au Philemoni es
dicito quo pacto tuos te servos ludificaverit
optumas frustrationes dederis in comoediis.\textsuperscript{102}

If you are a friend of Diphilus or Philemon, tell them how your slave has cheated you: in comedies you will give them excellent deceptions.

William Anderson has argued that in this passage the roles of the slave Tranio and the poet are fused together so that they each taunt their masters, Theopropides and his Greek predecessors respectively.\textsuperscript{103} But given that Plautus likes to present the clever slave as the master of the dramatic game, it would be more precise to say that the fusing of the clever slave with the poet’s self discloses the particular investment that the poet had in translating Greek ‘originals.’ By admitting to have been found in them Tranio sustains Plautus’ aggressive use of his sources as reservoirs of raw materials; by proclaiming to be the prime manifestation of the poet’s translational skills, he frames a case for respect on his behalf from his superiors. In my view, the fluid manner in which poet and clever slave merge into one another makes this metatheatrical instance a case in point for understanding their identification in general as highly dynamic as the poet’s perception of his selfhood.

Perhaps, one way to go about grasping the slippery relationship poet/clever slave is to think of identification in terms of ‘projection’ and ‘introjection.’ Formulated to describe children’s mental development, these notions feature large in object-relations theory and have been extended to explain mental processes in adults.\textsuperscript{104} To put it rather simply, projection in adults is generally regarded as a defense response based on displacing and attributing threatening or undesirable qualities of the self to an object. Introjection, on the other hand, relates to the self who replicates behaviors, attributes, or other aspects of the surrounding world that are perceived as desirable and attractive. In psychoanalysis these two mechanisms are recognized as being intimately connected and as promoting an individual’s sense of self-esteem in the fluctuations that shape the relationship of the self with reality as the self perceives it.

\begin{footnotesize}

\textsuperscript{102} Plautus, *Most.* 1149–51. On this passage, see Anderson 1993: 33.
\textsuperscript{103} Anderson 1993: 33.
\textsuperscript{104} For a useful overview of object-relations theory as developed from Freud onwards, see Greenberg and Mitchell 1983.
\end{footnotesize}
If we take the clever slave as the object to which the poetic self relates, its slavishness can be described as a projection of the negative attributes that make up the poet’s social alterity and its cleverness as an introjection that allows the poetic self to overcome those very attributes. In our case, however, the poetic self’s stake in the dynamic relationship between projection and introjection is complicated by the role that slavery as an institution plays in the conception of the clever slave as an object in the first place. As variously recognized, Roman masters conceived of their slaves as both nonhuman and human, as objects through which they could aggrandize themselves and as subjects with the power to do what they themselves could not (or were not allowed to) do. Accordingly, Plautus appears to be using the clever slave to extend himself on stage and assert his control over his Greek sources. By the same token, because mastery has a lot to do with the ability to harness the subjectivity of inferiors to one’s will, the triumphing language that the poet puts in the mouth of the clever slave promotes the perception of the poet’s cultural mastery as a version of sociopolitical power. His superiors are thus invited to exercise this power by using the poet as a surrogate.

Outside the Plautine corpus, the assimilation between cultural and sociopolitical power is explicitly explored in a fragment from Naevius’ Tarentilla:

Quae ego in theatro meis probavi plausibus
Ea non audere quemquam regem rumpere:
Quanto libertatem hanc hic superat servitus!106

What I had approved in the theater with my plaudits no king can ever dare to destroy: by how much does servitude here surpass that freedom!

Generally assigned to the clever slave, the speaking ‘I’ featured here exploits the reciprocal identification poet/clever slave in order to construct the world on stage as the place in which the freedom of the underdog to do whatever is denied to top dogs finds its fullest realization. The applauses of the audience metatheatrically absorbed into the dramatic frame confirm the poet’s success in having his recipients conform to his will and vouch

105. Finley 1980; Bradley 1994 passim; for a reflection on slavery along these lines, see McCarthy 1998: 183–87.

106. Naevius, Com. frg. 72–74 Ribbeck. According to Marino Barchiesi (1970: 126) this passage should be read next to the allusion to the incarcerated poet in the Miles Gloriosus. By understanding it as a reflection on the misadventures of the poet Naevius, Barchiesi suggests that Plautus sent a rather nonheroic message of political disengagement to the clever slave speaking in the Tarentilla.
for his claim to a share of power. Although circumscribed by the boundaries of fiction, this power is nonetheless projected outside of them as a mark of unquestionable distinction.

It is a common assumption to understand the literary aesthetic that shapes Plautus’ comedies as common property of the poets who engaged with the *comoedia palliata*, that this aesthetic was ‘traditional’ in the strictest sense of the word. My analysis suggests that this tradition was also open to the use of fictional constructs for self-reflexive purposes.107 This is not to say that early poetic texts are transparent windows through which we can now look at the life of their authors.108 Rather, it only means that the clever slaves who on stage devised schemes to meet the desires of their young masters give us clues as to how these early poets deployed their linguistic and cultural expertise in order to stretch the social constrictions that limited their agency in Rome. Slater has coined the phrase ‘mobile sensibility’ in order to refer to the clever slaves’ ability to understand the wishes and the beliefs of their masters without necessarily espousing them.109 I suggest that this sensibility dovetails with explorations of the power that resided in the opaqueness of the poets’ alterity with respect to the distinguishing source of their craftsmanship (Greek ‘original’ texts) and the migratory subjectivity that informed their being in the world.

**The Inauguration of Epic**

The highly fragmentary state and the lack of contemporary evidence about its reception makes the interpretation of Livius Andronicus’ *Odiseia* problematic; even so, its first line reveals that Livius engaged in an identificatory game very similar to the one that we see played out in comedy:

Virum mihi, Camena, insece versutum (*Ody.1*)

Sing to me, Muse, of the man of twists and turns.

In his work *The Rhetoric of Imitation*, Gianbiagio Conte uses this line to point out that Livius the translator enjoys a conditional freedom and unprotestingly accepts the limits imposed by the original: “Livius Andronicus,

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107. For an exploration of traditionalism, see Wright 1973; for a reflection on self-expression in comedy, see McCarthy 2000: 7–10.
in his translation of the *Odyssey*, shows his acute awareness of the position of the translator: he admits in his first line that his freedom is limited, showing a respect for the original that is almost obsequious.”

Like other commentators before and after, Conte follows the tradition of comparing ‘original’ and ‘translation,’ and focuses on the degree of faithfulness of the latter by evaluating the coincidence between each lexical item. Accordingly, he remarks on the archaizing choice of *insece* for ἐνεπε, emphasizes the semantic parallelism between *vērūtum* and πολύτροπος, notices the alliteration *vīrum–vērūtum*, and considers the substitution of *Camēnā* for Μοῦσα. More recently, however, Stephen Hinds has gone a little further:

If we are prepared to allow to his [i.e., Livius Andronicus’] *incipit*-line the concentratedness of meaning commonly granted to an *incipit* in “new poetry,” we may just see his artistic self-consciousness further demonstrated in a deft programmatic pun through which he defines his project and differentiates it from Homer’s. “Tell me, *Camēnā*, of the man who was *vērūtus*.” *Vērūtus* “characterized by turns” like the Greek πολύτροπος; but in particular characterized by the “turn” which he has undergone from the Greek language into Latin. *Vertēre* is the technical term *par excellence* for “translation” in early Latin literature (as in *Plautus vortit barbare*); and here in this programmatically loaded context our poet introduces a Ulysses whom the very linguistic switch to which he owes his textual existence has been made part of his proverbial versatility, has been troped into his πολύτροπια.

With these words, Hinds has raised the likelihood that in the very opening of his translation Livius staked out a very self-conscious claim of poetic authorship precisely where, according to Conte and others, he seems to make no claims to any. Indeed, it would appear that Livius attributed to Odysseus the very qualities that made up his professional selfhood and articulated his authorship through a mutual referentiality between his migratory subjectivity and the Homeric characterization of Odysseus as

111. To be sure, Conte relies on the works of Mariotti 1952; Traina 1970. But for a more recent reenactment of this line of interpretation, see Goldberg 1995: 64. As for Livius as a nonfaithful translator, see Kytzler (1989: 43), for whom the line would appear shorter than the original. As for when he actually pursued this translation some critics think that he did before he began to produce drama (see, for example, Hardie 1920: 198), others afterwards (see Kaimio 1979: 212). Although I discuss epic after drama, in no way do I imply that they were developed at different times.
the cunning traveler *par excellence*. The dichotomy between Livius the poet-translator and Odysseus the translated hero is thus erased and the locus of meaning displaced somewhere between the text that bears the translation and the worldviews that the text mediates.\(^\text{113}\) Accordingly, just as in comedy, so too in Livius’ epic the central character is exploited as an object of both projective and introjective identification and translation is represented as an occasion for playing with the gaps and boundaries that stood between perceived realities and fictional constructs. This fact is not at all surprising since Livius was also a playwright; in this respect, it is also not at all usurping to find Pseudolus, in the homonymous Plautine play, characterized by way of the same adjective (line 1243). In my view, these homologies invite us to move beyond the strictly textual and take into account similarities and differences between poetic drama and epic from a performance perspective.

On one level, both genres are cultural forms based on the reprocessing of Greek literary texts, linguistic codes, cultural traditions, and embodied practices. On another level, poetic drama suggests that the textual outcomes produced by the poets acquired value just to the extent that they sustained and informed an encounter with an audience. The possibility that Livius produced his translation with a view of it being performed encourages us to think about the social configuration of the receiving audience, the contexts for which the text was initially constructed, and the fact that epic, if anything, implies a one-person performance. Since the text as it stands does not provide any secure evidence, to work with this possibility means to face the challenging task of navigating between later testimonies and the contemporary *comparandum* offered by poetic drama.

In the *De Grammaticis et Rhetoribus* Suetonius asserts that both Livius Andronicus and Ennius engaged in exegetical translations from Greek texts and in exemplary readings from their Latin compositions in both private and public spaces (*domi* and *foris*).\(^\text{114}\) Although Suetonius’ historical reliability is controversial, the contexts of reception that he conjures up coincide with what we know about epic in Greece during the archaic and

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113. If we also consider that first lines worked also as titles to identify works (as Possanza 2004: 53 points out), perhaps Livius looked to advertise himself as translator in view of later receptions of his text as well.

the classical period. By obliquely relying on the Greek precedent and contemporary poetic drama, some scholars have stretched the reference to foris by insisting that Livius and the other early epic poets performed in propria persona during civic festivals. By capitalizing on Suetonius’ indication of domi as the other context of reception, others have argued that Livius used his translation for educational purposes in the household of Salinator. Whereas the first hypothesis cannot be verified, the second relies on Horace who, centuries later in his so-called Letter to Augustus, asserts that when young he had to learn by heart the Oduseia through the mediation of a grammaticus:

Non equidem insector delendaque carmina Livi
esse reor, memini quae plagosum mihi parvo
Orbilium dictare.

I am not in pursuit of Livius’ songs and don’t think that they ought to be destroyed, which I remember Orbilius dictated to me when a boy with his rod.

As Hinds acutely notes, these lines encode Horace’s attempt to outwit Orbilius, who was also a well-known interpreter of archaic Latin poetry. Indeed, Horace takes a condescending attitude towards the poetic skills of Livius by choosing insector only to flaunt, through this very choice, his thorough understanding of the older poet’s choice of insece in the first line of his poem. As crucial as it is for understanding Horace’s poetry, the passage in itself does not provide any corroborating data in relation to the immediate reception of Livius’ poem. In the light of this, a better start is to look at Horace’s overall characterization of Livius’ epic in his didactic poetry about poetry and from there reconsider the kind of authorial presence that the poem mediated.

In the Ars Poetica, Horace famously discusses the shortcomings of the “faithful translator” by offering his own version of the Odyssey’s opening lines:

116. The most explicit formulation of this view is in Wiseman 2007a: 40–41.
117. Jerome, Chron. Olymp. 148.2 (with reference also to the fact that because he taught the sons of Salinator he gained freedom). As for a purpose that went beyond teaching, see Gruen 1990: 84–85. See also Goldberg (2005: 46) on the limited circulation of the poem.
118. Horace, Epist. 2.1.71–73.
Dic mihi, Musa, virum captae post tempora Troiae
Qui mores hominum multorum vidit et urbes.\textsuperscript{120}

Tell me, Muse, of the man who after the conquest of Troy
Saw the customs and the cities of many men.

In a way, these lines can be read as a corrective commentary on Livius’
seemingly faithful translation meant to displace the attention away from
Horace’s own investment in translation.\textsuperscript{121} By leaving \textit{πολυτρότοπος}
untranslated, Horace debunks the self-referentiality inherent in Livius’
choice of \textit{versutus} and erases the old poet’s claim to authorship. Moreover,
by invoking the Muse he plugs his own translation into a composition
structured in Homeric hexameters. In the economy of Horace’s poetic
project, these two moves are justified by the abbreviated history of Latin
poetry inserted into his \textit{Letter to Augustus}:

\begin{verbatim}
Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit et artes
intulit agresti Latio; sic horridus ille
defluxit numerus saturnius, et grave virus
munditiae pepulere.\textsuperscript{122}
\end{verbatim}

Conquered Greece conquered her fierce victor in turn and introduced the
arts into rustic Latium; and, it was in this way that the uncouth Saturnian
ran dry, and refinement drove off the fetid smell.

In these lines Horace summarizes the dynamic relationship between
military conquest and cultural fascination that shaped Rome’s relationship
with Greece from the late third century B.C.E. onwards. We are just able
to take in the complexity of this relationship inasmuch as Horace quickly
displaces our focus on to the civilizing effects attributed to the introduction
of Greek \textit{artes}. This would coincide with the hexameter superseding the
Saturnian and the blotting out of “foul smell” from Latium.

As Maxime Pierre has recently pointed out, the aesthetic framework
informing these lines rests on the representation of formalized speech that
does not match Greek versification as shapeless and uncouth.\textsuperscript{123} Even more

\textsuperscript{120} Horace, \textit{Epist.} 2.3.141–42.
\textsuperscript{121} As for Horace’s own poetic project, as Feeney 2002 points out, the poet never ventures
to discuss Greek lyric.
\textsuperscript{122} Horace, \textit{Epist.} 2.1.156–59.
\textsuperscript{123} Pierre 2005, see especially 232–36.
to the point, perhaps, Horace exploits here the disparaging association of non-Hellenized cultural forms with excessive rusticity and primordiality that we find more fully articulated in rhetorical texts from the first century B.C.E. onwards.\(^\text{124}\) By building upon this association, he advocates the desirability of Greek *artes* and naturalizes their attributes by claiming that they are an essential component of Rome’s civilizing mission. In the process, Horace suppresses not only the problems associated with the social secondariness of poetry’s origins in Rome, but also the Saturnian’s association with the sphere of power and authority. Interestingly, the later grammarians who attempted to find a fixed form for the Saturnian (to no avail) speculated about its Greek origins as well.\(^\text{125}\) But when they did so, they acted in opposition to received opinion: from the late first century B.C.E. onwards this opinion linked the Saturnian to Saturn and the original site of Rome.\(^\text{126}\)

The relationship with Rome attributed to the Saturnian that we find in later sources echoes Livius’ aim at geographically anchoring his translation to the spring of the Camenae located somewhere close to Porta Capena.\(^\text{127}\)

In turn, it seems clear enough that Livius’ choice of the Saturnian found its impetus in a more or less contemporary development. Around the same time, compositions in Saturnians were springing up everywhere in Rome. Some of these constitute perhaps the first manifestation of the Greek-based epigram; whatever the case, these compositions are all tightly associated with the dominant members of Roman society.\(^\text{128}\) Indeed, the Saturnian frames textualized *dicta* and ritual songs performed by aristocrats as well as inscriptions representing the achievements and the moral qualities of individual aristocrats inside tombs and in more public contexts.\(^\text{129}\) Against this backdrop, Liv-

\(^\text{124.}\) Connors 1997.

\(^\text{125.}\) McElduff forthcoming. For the Greek origins of the Saturnian, see Caesius Bassus, GL VI.265.8; Festus 432.13; Porphyrius, ad Hor. *Ep.* 2.1.157. For a recent reassessment of the Saturnian in relation to remains of Faliscan, South Picene, Umbrian, and Oscan, see Mercado 2006 based on Parsons 1999.

\(^\text{126.}\) For Saturn and Rome, see Virgil, *Aen.* 8.355–58; Varro, *LL* 5.42 (with reference to the Capitolium and citing the authority of Ennius). See also Luiselli 1967: 26 and *passim*.

\(^\text{127.}\) The *Camenae* were connected with a sacred grove and a spring just outside Rome’s Porta Camena or Capena (cf. Vitruvius 8.3.1). In Livy (1.19.5; 1.21.3) Egeria, the most famous of these deities, has an affair with Numa and whispers to him divine rites; subsequently, Numa dedicated a grove to her and the Camenae.

\(^\text{128.}\) Van Sickle (1987) constructs his argument about the influence of Greek epigrams by focusing especially on the Scipionic eloquia. See footnote below.

\(^\text{129.}\) See Appius Claudius’ *dicta* (*FPL* pgs. 1–3); the *carmen saliare* and the *carmen arvale* (*FPL* pgs. 2–11); the Scipionic eloquia (*CIL* 1.29–30; *CIL* 1.32; *CIL* 1.33; *CIL* 1.34) and the *elogium* of Atilius Calatinus (*FPL* pp. 13–4); the *tabulae triumphales* of Acilius Glabrio and L. Aemilius Regillus (*GL* 6.265.29) and the inscription located in the temple of Hercules Victor in which the 146 B.C.E. victory of Lucius Mummius at Corinth was commemorated (*CIL* 1.541). As for recent remarks about the Saturnian as a form of speech linked to significant acts and
ius’ translation bears the signs of a cultural operation that goes much beyond the mere translation of a text written in Greek into a text composed in Latin. For one thing, it reveals that Livius situated his handling of a longstanding and influential Greek tradition right within a nexus of Roman geographical and elite connections. Moreover, his virtuosity involved reducing the whole poem into a composition fitting a single roll and directly confronting the power of language as his superiors understood it. Accordingly, any appeal to the authority of Homer and the Greek epic tradition on our part occludes the extent to which Livius actually overrode it.

If we return to the first line of the *Oduseia* and use comedy as a benchmark, the fluid game of object relation that Livius plays with Odysseus appears to be based on the same instrumental approach towards Greek ‘originals’ that we find spelled out in Plautus. But while in comedy the proclaimed source of authorization is the success that the poet enjoys with the audience and the ritual context in which his craft is consumed, in Livius’ epic the only source that we can detect is the Camena who is called to pursue/sing (*insece*) to the poet (*mihi*) about Odysseus and the poet at the same time. The power of this claim can be better appreciated if we also take into account the stereotypes of cunning and untrustworthiness that the Romans applied to the Tarentines. If we do so, Livius appears to exorcise the negative characterization of his geographical origins by transforming it into a strategy of self-fashioning and by calling into play the performativity assigned to the Saturnian. Although we are not in the position to measure the immediate reception of Livius’ poem, to think about the *Oduseia* as a solo performance sheds some interesting light on his poetic game.

In a theatrical performance the poet and the actor are distinct agents that meet each other through the fictional character. Put rather simply, the poet creates a character that the actor impersonates by adopting words and actions that conform more or less accurately to what the poet intended. As we have seen, in comedy the character of the clever slave takes on something of the poet’s subjectivity, but the audience’s encounter with it is mediated through the body of the actor. Accordingly, if the actor somehow bungles his performance, the poet has some space for dispelling from himself any negative consequence. If we think of Livius’ epic as a solo per-

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130. For the drastic reduction in length, see Goldberg 1995: 46.
131. Goldberg (2005: 20–21) takes this authority for granted even while highlighting the discontinuity of its success.
132. For a survey of the construction of these stereotypes, see Lomas 1997.
formance carried out by the poet *in propria persona*, the distance between
the audience and the poet is reduced and the possibility that their encoun-
ter may not be felicitous increases the poet’s stake. In case of failure, the
only course of redress would have resided in his ability to renegotiate the
boundaries between fiction and reality.

The ways in which later authors return to Livius and identify him as
the fountainhead of Latin poetry may suggest that his exploration of epic
was predicated on the privileged status that he had managed to achieve
during his professional life in Rome. Certainly, during his performances
he supported existing structures of visibility by turning his body into a
source of entertainment and by playing with the ethnic stereotypes of his
audience. And yet, he challenged normativity by appropriating for himself
the socially loaded Saturnian and by equating the prestige of the Homeric
tradition with his own cultural competence. This competence involved
knowledge and understanding, but also the ability to negotiate sociocul-
tural breakpoints and to untie the nodes of communication where conflicting
interests come together.

Naevius continued to explore these breakpoints and nodes by creat-
ing an epic in Saturnians focused on the achievements of Rome’s leaders
and by inserting himself directly into the representational frame. Ennius
followed by presenting himself as a reincarnation of Homer and rejecting
the Saturnian in favor of the hexameter. In the next chapter, I explore the
interventions of both Naevius and Ennius and read aestheticizing narratives
such as that of Horace against the grain offered by Cato’s representation
of poetry. For the moment, I find it important to stress that by giving up
the idea that the Romans met Greece only some time around the late third
century B.C.E. and were seduced, there and then, by the cultural superiority
of the Greeks, we let the poets and their sociocultural import take the center
stage. What remains of their outputs allows us to observe that the social
advancement of a small number of them and the valorization of poetry as a
practice were linked to the anthropologically recognized fact that sociopo-
litical potency relies on a continual effort to capture someone else’s inalien-
able possessions; to embrace someone else’s ancestors, magic, power; and
to transfer parts of these identities on to oneself and the next generation. 133
Through self-display and self-promotion the poets provided their elite spon-
sors with new means whereby to express their project of communal and
individual expansion. At the same time, they turned themselves into highly
prized resources for their sponsors to both court and exploit.