Anyone who studies the history of early Latin literature is struck by its evidence of two extremes: a dependence on Greek models on the one side, and on the other an inability to reproduce those models with any degree of satisfying fidelity. Plautus' practice of contaminatio, shared with Naevius, Ennius and Terence, would be an example. So would his introduction of the canticum into the chaste elegance and controlled economy of the Greek New Comedy.

As sophistication grew, Roman writers themselves expressed impatience with their predecessors' ineptness. One of the most surprising features of Horace's literary criticism is its iconoclasm, which does not of course spare Ennius. In a conservative age, bent on the restoration of inherited values, the voice of Augustan orthodoxy is strangely raised in rejection of past achievement: *hodieque manent vestigia ruris.*

 Literary historians have often yielded to the temptation to take these assertions of discontinuity at face value. Ennius, the argument would run, was ultimately of no use to Virgil. Is the younger poet not reported to have tastefully described his relation to his predecessor as "collecting gold from Ennius' dung"? He was even less use to Propertius or Ovid. By the time of Persius, the opening of the *Annales* has become a joke. The archaists of Tacitus' time, determined to replace the *Aeneid* with something really primitive, end up reading Lucretius! Even the so-called Ennian revival of the second century has, it may be urged, much more to do with the recovery of an Alexandrian frame of reference for literary experiment, in which Ennius is cast as the inimitable Homer, than it has to do with the sober appreciation of the poet's
real merits.\(^1\)

But, although this kind of literary history has its necessary function, it can obscure what every admirer of Roman civilization knows, that beneath all the surface dissimilarities runs a persistent, common stream of Roman genius. It is this common element which the study of Ennius helps us to define.

Its first aspect is bizarre. What a jarring disharmony is produced in the mind of the Hellenist by Ennius’ assertion of his (or Homer’s) poetic phylogenesis, going right back to ornithology, at the start of his epic! Not that Greek epic writers had failed to make similar odd claims: Empedocles had declared that he had been a boy, a girl, a bush, a bird, and a scaly fish in the sea.\(^2\) But this had not been directly at the beginning of his poem, and in any case the Katharmoi was no ordinary epic. Choeirus of Samos had commented on his poetic problems at the opening of his Persica (fr. 1 Kinkel) — but with what good sense! Stesichorus may have raised something akin to Ennius’ claims, if we can trust an epigram by one of the Antipaters in the Anthology: “The burning plain of Catana is the burial ground of Stesichorus, bounteous, measureless mouthpiece of the Muse. Fulfilling Pythagoras’ doctrine of nature, the soul that earlier was Homer’s came to dwell a second time in his breast” (A. P. VII. 75).\(^3\) But Stesichorus, though he bore the burden of epic song, bore it on a lyre.

What jars the purist then in Ennius is his union of the disparate. The expository epic is one thing: the historical is another, and the choral lyric is yet a third. The Annales, so clearly by their very title a historical epic, take up into themselves a metamorphosing autobiograhy more suited to the philosopher or the lyricist, and thrust it upon the reader’s attention by inserting it at their very beginning.

The combination of the historical epic in this proem with the imitation of Callimachus’ Dream from the opening of the Aetia is of a

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\(^1\) The evidence for Ennius’ Fortleben is collected by M. Schanz — C. Hosius, Geschichte der römischen Literatur I (repr. Munich 1959), pp. 98-99. See also L. Friedlaender, Darstellungen aus der Sittengeschichte Roms II (10th ed., repr. Leipzig 1922), pp. 195, 197-98. The Alexandrian preoccupations evinced by the learned Gellius on the one side, and the poetae novelli on the other (on whom see H. Bardon, La littérature latine inconnue II [Paris 1956], pp. 233 ff.), enable us to understand how already Hadrian could express admiration for both Ennius and “neoteric” poetry. It was more than Catullus, for whom the Ennian threat was still alive, could do!

\(^2\) Fr. 117 Diels — Kranz = 104 Gallavotti.

piece with this queerness. The Alexandrians opposed Hesiod to Homer. Ennius borrowed Hesiod’s Muses from the opening of the Theogony, but makes them dance, not on Helicon, but on Olympus, as some sort of signal of his Homeric inclinations. Accius would later pay Ennius the same kind of backhanded compliment, borrowing the title Annales for what looks suspiciously like a Roman version of the Aetia. Our longest fragment seems to form an attempt to derive the Roman Saturnalia from the Athenian Cronia.

These confusions of distinctions crystal clear to the Greeks are not confined to literary symbols. E. Norden, one of the few scholars of his generation to have understood the effrontery of Ennius’ Annales, remarks on their extraordinary conversion of Roman consuls and tribunes into Homeric heroes, aided by the use of the newly imported hexameter. What could a Greek have thought, what did a Roman think when, instead of Metti Fufetti, he heard Metioeo Fufetioeo? Not merely the peacock poet but, it turns out, the whole poem is a gigantic metamorphosis. And yet this is exactly where Ennius, far from being atypical and “no use” to his successors, in fact represents the essence of the Roman aesthetic — and one may add religious — experience.

The Roman predilection for metamorphosis is well known. Ovid and Apuleius both use the title. Horace, who warns against it at the start of the Ars Poetica, ends that poem by talking about a bear which, in the final line, unexpectedly becomes a leech. The same poet claims at the end of his second book of Odes that he is being changed into a swan, complete with asperae pelles on his legs. The grotesque vision impinges too closely on middle-aged reality to be truly funny.

But, even when Virgil himself comes to think about epic, whatever his surface reluctance to follow the Ennian model, he immediately

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5Fr. 3 Morel - Buechner.
moves to metamorphosis.\textsuperscript{9} A large part of the programmatic Eclogue 6 sounds like a rehearsal for the poem which Ovid would later write. Metamorphosis recurs in Georgics IV, where the story of Orpheus and Eurydice is told by a literally Protean \textit{vates}: and finally it is found in the \textit{Aeneid}, where a poet that no one will call unformed or primitive uses \textit{contaminatio} from a myriad different sources, and notably from the \textit{Iliad}, \textit{Odyssey}, Greek tragedy and the \textit{Argonautica}, to compound the shifting identities of his heroic protagonists.\textsuperscript{10} Before the moody gaze of Roman lyrical and musical genius, Greek certainties, Greek clarities, dissolve and blur, much as the canons of classic art yield, as the Renaissance ages, to the pressures of late Michelangelo’s or Bernini’s chisel.

“Greek certainties dissolve” — but, as usual, we must not push these generalizations too far. The characteristic use of metamorphosis in Greek literature can tell us a great deal about the nature of Roman aesthetic perception. If we are looking for metamorphosis in Greek, two sources are important. One is lyric, the other comedy.

Pindar, for example, likes to double his mythical figures. In the first \textit{Olympian}, Pelops finds a twin in Ganymede. Elsewhere Psamatheia finds one in Thetis (N. 5); Zeus in Poseidon (I. 8); Danaë in Alcmene (I. 7). When the poet remarks in this last passage: “She received the mightiest of the gods, when at midnight he snowed with gold” (v. 5), we expect a reference to Danaë, whose story was already alluded to in its familiar form in an early ode, the twelfth \textit{Pythian}. But the antistrophe paradoxically begins with a reference instead to Alcmene.

This blending is typical of the Greek poet’s imagination.\textsuperscript{11} The whole relevance of the “irrelevant” myth of the first \textit{Nemean} turns upon it. When baby Heracles strangles the snakes, and inspires Teiresias to a prophecy of future godhead, earned by a life of labors, to be crowned by fighting for the gods against the Giants, we have to see that already the snakes are an embryo version of the snake-limbed Giants. Only then can it be understood how the comic nursery scene,
interpreted by the religious insight of the "prophet of most high Zeus" (v. 60), forms a unity with the rest of the ode — an ode which, incidentally, ends, like comedies of Aristophanes and Menander, with a wedding. Just as the Theban seer detects in the babyhood exploit of Heracles his whole triumphant future career, so the Theban poet Pindar detects in his patron's chariot victory at Nemea the possibility and promise of a similar success in the future.\(^{12}\)

Menander is, of course, a master of metamorphosis, since what else are the kaleidoscopic tricks of New Comic plots, with their reversals of what was thought to be known, and recognitions of what was previously unknown, except the continually fresh presentations of the same truths? Like Callimachus and like Virgil, Menander is able to use a heroic model to dignify a modern scene. S. M. Goldberg, for example, notes a long messenger's speech in the Sicyonius "incorporating significant echoes of tragedy," and emphasizes that here there is no question of parody. "The tragic device keeps its own colour and value in the dramatic structure. Some of Menander's finest effects come from the juxtaposition of the two modes."\(^{13}\) Handley says of tragic influence on Menander generally that

...it extends to the subtler form of reminiscence in which a comic scene is given overtones by echoing a famous incident in tragedy, or by following a tragic pattern of structure, language, or metre...So in the Dyscolus...when the stricken Knem is brought out from his house...the situation which the comic plot has created gains in depth from the echo in stage spectacle, and perhaps in language, of the situation of a stricken hero in tragedy: the audience is to realize that the major crisis of Knem's life is at hand, and the comparison which the dramatist suggests helps to bring this realization about.\(^{14}\)

So, in talking about himself as a peacock's reincarnation, or even as Homer's avatar; in viewing Roman soldiers as Homeric heroes, Ennius was not doing anything utterly incomprehensible to the Greeks. But what they had earlier done at the popular level, in some ways marginally, was put by the Annales at the very center of Roman literature. In this respect they are a most faithful witness to the essence of the Roman aesthetic imagination, comic, lyrical, and, to the classical Greek, baroque.


\(^{13}\) The Making of Menander's Comedy (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1980), pp. 22-23.

\(^{14}\) The Dyskolos of Menander, ed. E. W. Handley (London 1965), pp. 6-7.
Metamorphosis — masking and unmasking — is a variant of mimesis, and Aristotle is not wrong when he makes mimesis the germ of literature. The Romans have too often been presented as pallid imitators of the Greeks. In reality, we should speak, as the Preface has argued, not of their imitation of Greek literature, but of their reception of it. They were not a tabula rasa waiting for a first impression. They had their own powerful tradition of mimesis. The Roman triumph, which deserves study as an aesthetic phenomenon, would be one example. Mainly however this Roman tradition centered in the ludi, ultimately in the circus, theatre and amphitheatre. No profounder discrepancy between Greek and Roman civilization could be found than at this reference point. The Athenians banished violence in their theatre to the messenger’s speech. The Romans enjoyed bloodshed, torture, death in all its forms enacted before their very eyes. And yet, for them, as for the Athenians, theatrical experience was both felt to be characteristic of their culture, and was religious!

What kind of religion was this? Here another and fundamental difference from classical Greece claims attention. The Greeks, so pessimistic about man’s lot, extended this pessimism to their myths also. Pindar’s epinicians compare their victor patrons with the heroic past with some sense of daring. In the first Nemean just mentioned, the poet concludes with the mythical prophecy of Teiresias. He does not spell out the application of his story to Chromius, his patron, directly, because he prefers his listener to do his work for him. This is certainly an artistic device. Later Callimachus, an ardent student of Pindar’s narrative technique, would sum up its rationale in the Aetia. But it is also a skilful avoidance of commitment. The poem is offered as a possibility to Chromius, not as a guarantee.

A fine instance of this Greek reserve which is relevant to our theme is seen in the sixth Pythian. In its myth, first the poet narrates the gripping story of the self-sacrifice of Antilochus, which saved his father Nestor at a moment of danger in the battle for Troy — but at the cost of the son’s own life. The myth ends. “Those things are past,”


the poet comments (v. 44), "but of men now even Thrasybulus has most closely approached his father's measure." Eduard Fraenkel remarks of this idiomatic "of men now":

What seems to be expressed in all these passages is a definite shrinking from the use of the unrestricted superlative of praise: the measure of human modesty is preserved by limiting oneself to what can be asserted from one's personal knowledge.\(^18\)

But already Fraenkel notes that neither the Great King of Persia nor the emperor Nero felt this Hellenic \textit{aidos}. After \textit{his} success in the festival contests, Nero is extolled because "first of all Romans in history he conquered it" (Dio Cassius, LXIII. 20. 2). The student of Rome however must understand that this is not just crass insensitivity. It is a more robust outlook on life. The Greeks saw the world as running down, from gold to silver to bronze to iron. The Romans saw the ever-fresh possibility of renewal.

Some examples at the further end of the tradition will eventually illumine Ennius. Statius says of Domitian's \textit{Saturnalia}:

\begin{quote}
I nunc saecula compera, Vetustas,
antiqui lovis aureumque tempus:
non sic libera vina tunc fluebant
nec tardum seges occupabat annum. (Silvae I. 6. 39 ff.)
\end{quote}

Compare if you like, Antiquity, the times of old Jove and the Golden Age: the fact remains that in those days there were no such liberal streams of wine, nor did the harvest then run ahead of the slow yearly round.

Statius is impressed at this circus celebration by the emperor's condescension in appearing among his subjects to share their meal. At the one table, class distinction is banished. Children are there, women, the common people, the knights, the senate. Liberty relases awe. All, rich and poor alike, may boast that they are the guest of our prince. It could be a description of some Christian Communion.\(^19\) Indeed, in a later book, a letter of thanks to Domitian for a dinner invitation to the

\(^18\) \textit{The Agamemnon} of Aeschylus (repr. Oxford 1962), p. 269 with note 1. The extravagance of Pindar's eulogy of Hiero at \textit{P.} 2. 60 is visible from the contrast between \textit{τῶν πάροικων} of the text and the expected \textit{τῶν νικῶν}.

\(^19\) St. John Chrysostom's \textit{Katechetikos Logos}, used in the Orthodox Church on Easter Sunday, especially emphasizes these motifs. O. Freudenberg, \textit{Poetika Syuzheta i Zhanra} (Leningrad 1936), speaks on p. 159 of the procession before the performance of Attic tragedies as consisting of the entire city, rich and poor, in holiday attire, led by the archon in charge. Her argument (pp. 168, 179-80), that Rome exhibits in primitive form theatrical elements developed and sophisticated by the Greeks, is extremely suggestive.
imperial palace is headed "Eucharisticon."

Scholars have traced the history of the religious phenomenon of the sacred meal, enlisted in ruler cult already in the Hellenistic world. At that meal, the gods themselves are present to bless and bestow benediction. There is no question amid such revelry and good cheer of looking back wistfully to some vanished happiness. This is what Statius tells us about Domitian, who is a second Jupiter:

Parva loquor, necdum aequo tuos, Germanice, vultus:
talis, ubi Oceani finem mensaque revisit
Aethiopum sacro diffusus nectare vultus
dux superum secreta iubet dare carmina Musas
et Pallenaeos Phoebum laudare triumphos.
(Silvae IV. 2. 52 ff.)

This sort of language is very familiar to Christians. They too share a meal with their Lord, at which distinctions of earthly rank are transcended by the new freedom which is in Christ. They too know that it is not a matter of looking back to some vanished order, since the New Law far surpasses the Old. Thomas Aquinas asserts at the Feast of Corpus Christi:

In hac mensa novi Regis
Novum Pascha novae legis
Phase vetus terminat.

Vetustatem novitas,
Umbram fugat veritas,
Noctem lux eliminat. (Lauda Sion, saec. xiii)

We have come a long way from Pindar's "Those things are past," and discreet refusal to underscore the parallels between Chromius and Heracles.

O. Weinreich has expressed the Roman attitude excellently. The new reality lends a retroactive credibility to the false tales of myth, while at the same time proving the superiority of the imperial world to the past. Mythical happenings might be doubted. No one could doubt the evidence of his own eyes. The world of the emperor is more valuable than that of myth. Divine wonders are put in the shade by the miracula Caesaris. So are the wonders of the old world by the new marvel which is the Colosseum. Accordingly, the birthday of the emperor is holier than the birthday of Zeus, imperial gladiators perform

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better than Heracles.\textsuperscript{21}

The idea that the present is not a jaded copy of a superior past, but on the contrary outdoes it, was so appealing to the Roman mind that eventually it became a topos.\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Taceat superata vetustas} says Claudian of Stilicho’s exploit in putting a stop to Rufinus’ nefarious career, ‘The days of old are surpassed; let them keep silence, and cease to compare Hercules’ labours with thine!’ Here is another contrast with the first \textit{Nemean}.

Martial uses the same idiom three centuries before Claudian in the \textit{Liber Spectaculorum: sileat, 1. 1; prisca fides taceat, 6b. 3; taceantur stagna Neronis, 28. 11.} It is in the heightened atmosphere of the \textit{ludi} that these phrases make sense. The metamorphosis here and now is so complete that no rivalry of the past is possible.

Dante, author of a religious \textit{Comedy}, borrows exactly this language when he is describing a metamorphosis in hell which he feels outvies those of pagan poetry. The direct rivalry is with Lucan and Ovid: but the formulation, \textit{taccia Lucano...taccia...Ovidio}, is from Martial and Claudian.\textsuperscript{23}

J. Sinclair adds: ‘There seems to be something of the same irony in [Dante’s] elaborately, as it may appear irrelevantly, picturesque reference to the ancient fable of the phoenix in connection with Fucci’s alternate dissolution and revival [i.e. in the previous canto, 24. 106 ff.]; as if he had said: ‘These are old stories; this is true, it is happening now’.\textsuperscript{24}

This is the attitude which Weinreich finds in the Flavian writers. It is also the attitude of Thomas Aquinas, Dante’s mentor, about the Christian Eucharist. It is the Roman Church which has historically insisted that the Bread and Wine are the Real Body and the Real Blood, not some sort of symbol or reminder of a past action. Conditioning Roman aesthetics, and also of course their product, the Roman arena offered the real bodies and real blood of its gladiators in an act not just


\textsuperscript{23}\textit{Inferno} 25. 94 and 97.

of amusement, but also of religious worship.\textsuperscript{25}

The Romans then, and Dante their successor, apprehend myth quite differently from the classical Greeks. The mythical world has not vanished. At any minute it can not only be recalled, but also outdone. When Ennius recast the struggle of Rome with Carthage in Homeric terms, he was not so much imitating Homer as challenging him, suggesting that the Roman imperial present is something bigger and better than the stories of the past. What for the Greek Thucydides, who ventured to assert that the Peloponnesian War was more important than the Trojan or Persian Wars, was the dry and audacious rationalism of prose, has for the Roman become the stuff of poetry.\textsuperscript{26}

This way of looking at the world is a fancy dress and circus affair. Roman culture is a culture of the marquee and big top, though we must avoid the error of therefore despising it.\textsuperscript{27} This is why the Roman ludi are just as important in the study of Roman aesthetic perception as the theatre of Dionysus is for that of the Athenians. Even the attendants at the gladiatorial games, for example, were got up as divine beings. Those whose job it was to test whether the fallen were dead or alive were costumed like Mercury (Psychopompus). Those who dragged out the bodies through the Porta Libitinensis were Charons. Those charged with flogging the reluctant into the fray were Larvae.\textsuperscript{28}

Martial’s poetry provides rich evidence of the identification of the combatants or victims of the amphitheatre with their mythical counterparts.\textsuperscript{29} Sidonius, the fifth-century Christian saint and bishop, helps us to realize how the populace still felt in his time. In poem XXIII to Consentius he pays homage to the realism of actors such as Caramallus or Phabaton: “Whether the daughter of Aeetes and her Jason are being


\textsuperscript{26}It communicated itself to Polybius: cf. τὴν Ρομαιῶν ἡμῶν ἐπιρροχὴν, I. 2; F. Focke, “Synkrisis,” Hermes 58 (1923), p. 349. Friedlaender, op. cit. (above, note 1), II, p. 107, notes that the Greek orator Libanius (De vita sua 5) praises certain gladiators as “pupils of the 300 at Thermopylae.” Martial would have said that they were better than their teachers.

\textsuperscript{27}Friedlaender has two unforgettable pages, II, pp. 98-99. A new analysis of the originality of Roman literature is demanded by the theories of Freudenberg and Bakhtin. But this ocean is too vast to be embarked on here!

\textsuperscript{28}Friedlaender, II, pp. 50 with n. 4 and 75; Weinreich, Studien zu Martial, p. 31.

\textsuperscript{29}Weinreich, op. cit., pp. 29 ff.
shown, with the barbarian Phasis...whether the feast of Thyestes...”

Sidonius continues with the realistic description of all kinds of old stories, which amazingly are now no longer old. All the marvellous events of myth are as available to the Roman public as the nearest pantomime. Martial had already written to Domitian: *Quidquid fama canit, praestat harena tibi.*

What the arena offers indeed is not merely the replication of the past, but its superior. Martial likes the *cedat* topos found in Statius, and before that in Propertius. His *nec se miretur, Caesar, longaeva vetustas* (*loc. cit.*) eventually found pithy expression in Claudian’s *taceat superata vetustas.* It is the fairground Barker’s exaggeration raised to the level of literature, and hence it will not surprise us to learn that the topos is already anticipated in Ennius’ older contemporary, Plautus. *Superavit dolum Trojanum atque Ulixem Pseudolus* says Simo of the eponymous hero of that play (*Pseud. 1244*), and his verb *superavit* already looks ahead five or six centuries to Claudian’s *superata.*

In the *Bacchides* (925 ff.) the slave Chrysalus develops a long analogy between his tricks and the exploits of the Greeks in the Trojan War. He makes his points by way of metamorphosis, the sliding identities so characteristic of the *Aeneid.* In the course of the same *canticum* he first tells us: *ego sum Ulixes* (940). Six lines later we hear: *ego Agamemno, idem Ulixes Lartius* (946). In another fourteen lines he has become Achilles: *ego occidit Troilum* (960). He is, it seems, a whole catalogue of heroes rolled into one, and yet we know that he is only a slave talking big! He applies his analogies to others, as the logic of his transformations demands: *sed Priamus hic multo illi praestat* he says of Nicobulus (973). “This Priam far outdoes the old.”

Eduard Fraenkel, who adduces these and other examples as characteristic of Plautus’ genius, notes that to the Roman poet’s plastic fancy Greek mythology is infinitely malleable. He asks if inconsistencies of this type could even be imagined in a Greek poet. The answer is yes — but the poet might be Pindar or Bacchylides.

A fine example of Greek mythical blending may be discovered in the second *Olympian.* Describing the inhabitants of the Isle of the Blessed, Pindar reserves the end of his fourth triad for a touching vignette: “and there Achilles was borne, after she had persuaded the

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32 These Plautine examples are noted by E. Fraenkel. *Elementi plautini in Plauto* (Florence 1960), pp. 7 ff.
heart of Zeus with her prayers, by his mother’': the pathetic last noun, concluding the triad, hints at a world of maternal grief. But in fact the appeal to Zeus by a bereaved mother on behalf of a dead son, answered with a grant of immortality, was originally made, according to Proclus, by Eos on behalf of Memnon in the Aethiopis of Arctinus.34 And Memnon is shortly to be mentioned by Pindar here as the third of Achilles’ famous victims. It is after the reverberations of these names that Pindar goes on to say that he has many arrows beneath his arm, vocal to the intelligent, though to the general they need interpreters. He is asking us to look beneath the surface of his art. When we do that, we find that metamorphosis is one of the most typical procedures of a poet who so often speaks of himself in komic language.35

In one aspect then Pindar and Plautus are not so very far away from each other. Pindar is a lyric poet, using komic language to denote the essence of what he is doing. Plautus is a comic poet, using lyrical cantica to denote the essence of what he is doing, what makes his plays different from the Greek New Comedy. The Plautine elements in Plautus, the Roman elements in Latin literature, are a unique blend of the comic and the lyric. In another passage adduced by Fraenkel, Pindar remarks:

Contundam facta Talthubi contemnamque omnis nuntios;
        simulque ad cursuram meditabor me ad ludos Olympios.

(Stichus 305-06: the rhyme is noticeable)36

The combination of mythology and athletics in a comic context reminds one of scenes on certain red figure vases, perhaps the kind referred to by Pindar in his encomium to Thrasybulus.37 In the Casina (759 ff.) Plautus’ Pardalisca explicitly claims that neither Nemea nor Olympia ever had such jolly games to show as are going on now before the spectators’ eyes. The stage and the circus suddenly blend into one.38

34Fr. 1 Kinkel.
35W. J. Slater’s Lexicon to Pindar cites 10 examples of κομαέω, 15 of κώμος, 5 of ἐγκώμιος, 3 of ἐπικώμιος, 1 of προκώμιον, 1 of συγκωμάξω, 1 of ἀγαλακτόμοιος. By contrast Snell-Maehler’s Index Vocabularium to Bacchylides gives 1 example of κομαέω, 4 of κώμος, none of the others. Bacchylides does not use the word programmatically at all.
36Cf. Casina 424-26; Miles Glor. 79-81; Poenulus 720 ff. Some of this seems to anticipate the poetae novi. Cf. J. Marouzeau, Traité de Stylistique latine (Paris 1962), pp. 58 ff.
37Fr. 124 a 4, Sn.-M. “Athletes provide the largest single class of everyday life scenes in Archaic red figure’’: J. Boardman, Athenian Red Figure Vases: the Archaic Period (London 1975), p. 220.
38Circus nostrum eccum adest, Cornicula fr. 1,Leo: Fraenkel, El. plautilni, p. 7. This is the “All the world’s a stage” theme: Bakhtin, Rabelais (above, note 8), pp. 10, 288: Curtius, op. cit. (above, note 22), p. 146.
Ennius was the translator of Euhemerus’ *Hiera Anagraphe*, the most famous document of a tendency deeply layered in the Greek spirit to raise man to the level of the gods, visible earlier in another celebrated book, Prodicus’ *Horae*. Plautus had not failed at Rome to anticipate these conjunctions. *Mea Iuno, non decet esse te tam tristem tuo Iovi* says Lysidamus to Cleustrata in the *Casina* (230). And again in the *Truculentus* (515): *Mars peregre adveniens salutat Nereniem uxorem suam*; and in the *Persa*: *O mi Iuppiter / terrestris* (99-100). Fraenkel speaks of an imagination which works through “on the spot identifications.” So it was that the face of the triumphing general was painted with vermilion, like that of the statue of Jupiter Optimus Maximus on festival days. Scholars have been shocked. But do they mistake the nature of Roman aesthetics in taking all this too logically?

We can in fact see Plautus’ and Ennius’ imaginations working in parallel in this very matter. Ennius had compared Scipio by implication with Alexander the Great. Lactantius is horrified that the same Scipio should be allowed by Ennius to say:

Si fas endo plagas caelestum ascendere cuiquam est.
Mi soli caeli maxima porta patet. (fr. 23-24, *Epigr.*)

This *soli* is a study in itself. It has a long history, but within the pagan world it derives from a Greek religious use of ἐσ and μόνος, applied then to a leader such as Demetrius Poliorcetes by the Athenians, and ultimately becoming a catchword in certain academic circles. But its development at Rome was in the circus. *Hermes Martia saeculi voluptas*, cries Martial: …*Hermes et gladiator et magister…Hermes, quem timet Helius sed unum, Hermes cui cadit Advolans sed uni…Hermes gloria Martis universi, Hermes omnia solus et ter unus (5. 24). And where else were the Acclamations chanted but in the Hippodrome at Byzantium?

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40 El. plautini, p. 92.
Evidently Ennius is turning the elder Scipio into a forerunner of the emperors. But the Roman imagination thinks of its grandees in circus terms, and this is why the same idiom is found in Plautus' comedies:

Alexandrum magnum atque Agathoclem aiunt maximas
duo res gessisse: quid mihi fiet tertio,
qui solus facio facinora immortalia? (Most. 775-78)

Fraenkel also adduces Aul. 701 ff.: ego solus supero...ego sum ille rex Philippus. Plautus is talking comically, and Ennius seriously, but the Roman aesthetic imagination hardly thinks in such polar extremes. Was not another of Ennius' patrons, M. Fulvius Nobilior, according to Livy the first to introduce both the venatio and athletics to the Roman public? Did he keep his aesthetic perceptions in two compartments?

German scholars have fine passages on the psychology inspiring the fleeting identifications of Plautus and the circus. Can it ever be defined with precision what is meant by such mythical masking? Is it conscious claim and identification? Is it jest, ambivalent comparison, formula, or just poetic small change?46 Perhaps all of these things at once. "A grotesque development projects the individual case into a fantastic world, adding to it huge dimensions and a coloring of motley unreality."47 But are these not interpretative principles which might aid the understanding of the Georgics and the Aeneid? "In his unbridled passion for images, Plautus links, with dizzying daring, things which are obviously mutually incompatible."48 Does not Ennius, the Roman Homer and Callimachus rolled into one, do the same?

We may now draw together what makes Ennius typical of the Roman aesthetic imagination.

(a) The Romans apprehend myth quite differently from the classical Greeks. Perhaps the easiest way to summarize this difference is to say that they saw it through comic rather than tragic eyes. It was not a vanished ideal, "once upon a time," but rather something which could be recovered, and indeed surpassed, in the here and now. This is why

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44C. A. Trypanis, Medieval and Modern Greek Poetry (Oxford 1968), no. 79.
45XXIX. 22. 2. See Weissenborn — Müller ad loc.
46Cancik, op. cit. (above, note 16), p. 103.
48El. plautini, p. 53.
Ennius could describe the battles of consuls and tribunes in Homeric terms, while aiming to make a somewhat different impact on his audience from the trite equations implied by the Hellenistic historical epic. His listeners would be predisposed to see the present as something likely to be better than the past, rather than to recognize with a yawn the tired propaganda put out by hired mouthpieces. Alexander the Great had said that he would rather be Homer's Thersites than Choeirius of Iasos' Achilles, and he wept at Achilles' tomb because Achilles had had such a poet to celebrate his glory (and he had not). But, for the Roman, it was not a matter of second-best. Homer was alive and well and living in Rome, and Ennius could recite his pedigree to prove it.

(b) An important corollary follows about Ennius' sense of time. If the past is recoverable here and now, time may, in that recovery, be telescoped. The whole significance of the present is that it overcomes time, coalesces with the past and the future (Statius' nec tardum seges occupabat annum). Can it be coincidence that the parts of Ennius which Cicero quotes at greatest length are Ilia's dream and the taking of the omens by Romulus and Remus from the Annales, along with Cassandra's prophecy from the Alexander? Evidently these seemed to him congenial and characteristic. In every case, we are dealing with an incident in which the past or future is suddenly available in the present (and this is true too of the opening of the Medea). The telling simile used in one of these passages, the taking of the omens at the foundation of Rome, is drawn from the circus and its chariot races:

Expectant, veluti consul cum mittere signum
Volt omnes avidi spectant ad carceris oras,
Quam mox emittat pictis e faucibus currus,
Sic expectabat populus atque ore timebat
Rebus, utri magni victoria sit data regni.49

Here, the repetition expectant, speciant, spectabat shows us a present devoured by the future with which it is pregnant. It is the drum roll, before the trapeze artist does his leap. The Romans obviously knew in a notional way that Romulus had won. Suddenly certainty dissolves, and that notional knowledge is put in doubt by a consciousness of time's ambivalence. Breathlessly, we worship at the shrine of Cronus (Chronus) / Saturn.

49 Fr. 84-88 V (translated in part above, p. vii). See Friedlaender, op. cit. II, p. 48, who also quotes Tertullian, De spect. 16. The significance of seeing / not seeing at primitive spectacles is examined by O. Freudenberg, Mif i Literatura Drevnosti (Moscow 1978): cf. the "Summary" in English, pp. 601-02.
(c) The awareness of words is another aspect of an awareness of the many facets of metamorphosing truth. The scientist may seek to capture his aseptic reality in clinically pure prose. The poet estranges his discourse, makes us think about the distorting mirror which any language must be which seeks to reflect an elusive totality. Distorting mirrors make us laugh, and a language which calls attention to itself is likely to do just that. Now perhaps we can understand why Plautus did not follow the Greek New Comedy in its limpidly exquisite simplicity. He was a Roman, and had a more powerful sense of the grotesque.\(^50\) By the same token, some of the extraordinary experiments of which Ennius is anxiously purged by his defenders may also spring from the same comic source, now raised to epic dignity, geloion become spoudogeloion, like so much in major European literature since. Once again, either / or categorizations are useless at Rome. In this regard, it may be quite wrong to set Ennius over against the Roman neoterics. They operated at the theoretical level with mutually exclusive, Alexandrian classifications. But at the practical level, Ennius may have been just as much a cantor Euphorionis in his way as any of his critics. His manipulation of the hexameter in the Ilia’s Dream fragment is extraordinary. Later, Ausonius was able to incorporate some of the old poet’s tricks into his Technopaegnia.\(^51\)

(d) The Roman, and Ennian, addiction to contaminatio\(^52\) is the product of the Roman attitude to time. The achievements of the past are not frozen, each a Platonic Form stored in a timeless heaven. One story may be seen in terms of another, be crossed with another, even at the expense of inconsistency, because the total effect sought is not one of clear logic. Lucian relates\(^53\) that one mime dancer, in his depiction of the child-devouring Cronus, strayed into that of the supper of Thyestes, while another confounded the fiery death of Semele with that of Medea’s victim Glauce. One wonders if these were mistakes on the part of the often brilliantly gifted dancers so much as incomprehension on the part of the critic. After all, we already saw in the fifth century

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\(^{50}\)G. Duckworth, The Nature of Roman Comedy (Princeton 1952), lists on pp. 345 ff. Plautus’ comically extravagant inventions, part of a long tradition still flourishing in our time (Joyce).


\(^{52}\)Somewhat played down by H. D. Jocelyn, Ennius (Cambridge 1967): see his index s.v. ‘contaminatio’. But must not the remark of Terence, Andria prologue 16 ff. be given due weight?

\(^{53}\)De salt. 80: Friedlaender II, p. 132.
B.C. another choric poet making similar "errors."\(^5^4\)

To borrow an analogy from choral lyric, the Roman voice is not univocal, but polyphonic. Aeneas and Turnus play hide-and-seek with the Homeric stereotypes of Achilles and Hector because, in so complex a world, no simple equations with the fixed, heroic past are possible. *Senseram quam idem essent* Cicero had written in solemn earnest of Caesar and Pompey.\(^5^5\) Manilius and Cassiodorus agree that, in its lighter aspect, such identity in diversity is the art of the pantomime.\(^5^6\)

Virgil carries this Protean mutability into his epic. Seneca carries it into his tragedies. His Hippolytus is like Pentheus, his Phaedra like Pasiphaë, his Medea like Orestes. Lucan makes his Caesar and Pompey like Jason and Medea, who also came to grief in Thessaly. It is a Plautine technique, the *Comedy of Errors* suddenly become a nightmare.\(^5^7\)

(e) The parallels for Roman imagination in Greek literature, if we are to do justice to a poet like Ennius, should be sought primarily in lyric and comedy. These are sometimes the same thing, since there is a comic — or komic — lyric. The boundless optimism of the Plautine world spills over into that of Ennius. At the court of Ptolemy Euergetes, Callimachus had assailed Euhemerus. Ennius translated him. Not Isis, as Ptolemaic propaganda declared, but human genius could transform the world.\(^5^8\)

Mathematical logic operates with the concept of the "null class," basically meaning that a certain set of categories is handy, even when its real reference is minimal. In studying Roman literature, we need perhaps to operate with the concept of "suppressed laughter,"\(^5^9\) that is to say, the comic apparatus continues to be deployed, even when the expected response is hardly a smile. The techniques are the same, but the scherzo is transposed into the minor mode. Does not Plato argue that comedy and tragedy are both likely to be written best by the same best poet? So in Roman literature, Ovid is Lucan’s teacher, even though Lucan is not, ostensibly at least, writing a *Metamorphoses*. Reading some of the outrages detailed by the *Pharsalia*, we hardly know at times whether to laugh or cry. But Servius remarks in his preface to

\(^{54}\) Above, p.176.

\(^{55}\) *Ad Att. X. 8. 5: see Augustus and the New Poetry* (above, note 17), pp. 249-50.

\(^{56}\) Manilius V. 481: Cassiodorus, *Var. IV. 51. 9*: Friedlaender II, p. 129.


the fourth book of the *Aeneid*: *paene comicus stilus est.* If we could avoid categorizing Roman literature in terms of a classicizing hierarchy of genres — epic, tragedy, and only then comedy, lyric, satire — we might view its achievements in a juster perspective. What I am really saying is that the literary historian of Rome should begin from the *spoudogeloion*. This would carry the implication that Varro Reatinus is a major poet of the classical period.

(f) It is indeed Varro who records that once upon a time the Capitoline Hill overlooking Rome was called instead *Mons Saturnius,* exactly, one may add, as the Hill of Cronus overlooked the Altis at Olympia. Varro points to Ennius' name for Latium, *Saturnia terra*. The *Sacra Historia* told how, driven all over the world by armed pursuers, Saturn had with difficulty found a refuge in Italy. Saturn lived on in the Roman mind as the god of a golden age. Virgil himself promises that Augustus will restore that bountiful time: *aurea condet / saecula qui rursus Latio, regnata per arva / Saturno quondam* (*Aen*. VI. 792-94). The blood of her father continued to flow in the veins of Juno, and Ennius does not want us to forget it: *Respondit luno Saturnia sancta dearm* (*Ann*. fr. 64 V: cf. 491). Juno represents some principle of opposition to Jupiter's purposes (*Ann*. fr. 291). All this is either completely unknown to Homer, or else, as in the case of Juno's opposition, slanted quite differently by the Roman poet.

The Roman state in Ennius' own lifetime had officially recognized the importance of both Saturn and Juno in new ways. In December 217, after the terrible defeats of Trasimene and Cannae, Livy reports that sacrifice was offered at the temple of Saturn and a *lectisternium* ordained, arranged by the senators themselves, along with a public feast: *ac per urbem Saturnalia diem ac noctem clamata, populusque eum diem festum habere ac servare in perpetuum iussus* (XXII. 1. 20). The *Saturnalia* had of course been celebrated long before 217. Livy's account describes some public acceptance by the authorities of a popular festival into state cult, no doubt occasioned by the desperate need to

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60. Cf. Friedlaender, II, p. 119, note 5: "Interessant ist, dass sich hier (i.e. in the later imperial period) ein unverkennbares Eindringen von Elementen der Komödie in die Tragödie zeigt."
62. *Sacra Historia* 95-97 V.
bolster morale. This explains why Saturn is so much more important to Ennius than Cronus is to Homer.

Similarly, in 207, Juno received extraordinary honors on the Aventine, with a procession and hymn written by Livius Andronicus. A fragment of Livius (14 Morel = 12 Buechner) is variously attributed to this hymn, or to the Odissia: sancta puer, Saturni filia, regina. It has the same "Saturnian" ring as Ennius' Iuno Saturnia. Nothing corresponds to this in Homer.

The Roman Saturnalia, originally perhaps the celebration of the winter sowing, carried with them their own peculiar ethos, and notably the freedom granted to slaves. Horace's Davus takes advantage of it to read his master a Stoic lesson (Sat. II. 7). It is indeed the essence of this popular style to be open to question, polyphonic rather than monotonous. There never can be any final answers. But too great fidelity to the comic spirit entailed its own dangers: in Alexandria, there was the fate of Sotades (though Ennius did write Sotadea). In Rome, there was the fate of Naevius, who had written Libera lingua loquemur ludis Liberalibus. This was another rustic festival of fruitfulness and fertility. In spite of this, the tradition of free speech persisted at Rome to quite a surprising degree. Seven hundred years after Naevius (509 A.D.) Cassiodorus writes, paraphrasing Martial (who also wrote in Sotadic meter):

Mores autem graves in spectaculo quis requirat? Ad Circum nesciunt convenire Catones. Quidquid illic a gaudenti populo dicitur, inuria non putatur. Locus est qui defendit excessum. Quorum garrulentas si patienter excipitur, ipsos quoque principes ornare monstratur.65

Emperors and embryo-emperors had to tolerate this outspokenness on the part of their subjects. In 59 B.C. popular opposition to Julius Caesar made itself apparent, according to Cicero, in the theatre.66 At the other end of the time scale, in Byzantium, the Hippodrome continued to provide an outlet for protests. A modern scholar remarks of the Acclamation of the Greens already quoted above (p. 186):

Much has always been made of the remarkable complaint addressed to Justinian by the Greens....It is certainly a strange and interesting conversation, but those who argue (or imply) that this sort of interchange is a new development of the Byzantine period are evidently unaware what a thoroughly Roman tradition it is.67

There was not of course a coherent political program which inspired such manifestations. The Byzantine emperors were not interested in dialogue with their subjects in any real sense, and eventually their Russian successors would reduce the people to total silence. But even ritualized survivals are survivals of something, and tokens of possibility. The \( \kappa \omega \phi \delta \nu \, \pi \rho \sigma \omega \pi \omicron \) of Boris Godunov remains a mighty presence on stage.\(^68\)

While they lasted, these demonstrations actually took literary form. Dio Cassius speaks of the outcry for the end of the civil war between Severus and Albinus in 196 as seeming to come from a well trained choir (LXXV. 4. 5 ff.). In Byzantium, the transference of the so-called “political meter” from the Acclamations to literature gave modern Greek poetry (from about the year 1000) its principal meter.\(^69\) Once again we have striking proof of the centrality of the circus atmosphere to the Roman aesthetic experience.

Ennius’ patron, M. Fulvius Nobilior, we noted, was the first Roman to introduce the venatio. In the tenth century, the princes of Kiev, in their anxiety to set up a Russian state which should in no way fall short of the Byzantine model, arranged that they should pass from palace to cathedral along corridors painted with circus scenes\(^70\) — a last memory of the great days of Rome Old and New. Even Mr. Hearst of San Simeon, like a Renaissance prince, surrounded his version of Schi-fanoia with caged exotica. The tradition of the circus king is very long. Nero, who took his decision to murder Britannicus during the Saturnalia when he was himself such a king, did the same as Hearst.\(^71\)

We stand here in an area whose boundaries are not easily drawn. The circus king is transient, a figure of fun, and yet at the same time an object of religious awe. In our day, Georges Rouault has made us familiar with the mocked Christ as an example of this ambiguity, not so


\(^{68}\) Cameron has a fine chapter (op. cit., pp. 175 ff.) which modifies romantic liberal notions of the role of the Hippodrome. For the silence of the Russian people, see Pushkin’s last stage direction in Boris Godunov: narod bezmolvstvuet.


much imposing this interpretation, as simply rediscovering the intent of the Gospel narratives.\textsuperscript{72} An emperor like Constantius II could enjoy the witticisms of the audience, and his subjects indulge in them, because, when understood in the proper spirit, such jokes were quite in harmony with the recognition of his claim to overlordship, were indeed a religious affirmation of his status. At the Roman triumph, the soldiers of the victorious general were permitted to make rude remarks about their leader, and at his side in the chariot a slave kept whispering \textit{Hominem te memento}, rather like the priest on Ash Wednesday, after Mardi Gras the day before. But great generals — even Cicero — still craved triumphs!

At the end, a \textit{caveat}. Although the triumphant general at the end turned his chariot up the Capitoline Hill, said by Varro to have been once the hill of Saturn, himself a carnival king, it does not look as if this spirit communicated itself to the \textit{Annales}. Ancient tradition accuses Ennius anyway of having been a bad comedian, and Ennius does not seem to have leavened his fusions of myth and Roman reality with the necessary awareness of transience (Fraenkel’s “identificazioni immediate”). In this regard, he may have been frightened by Naevius’ fate, and the reminder given to the Romans by Accius in his \textit{Annales} of the true nature of the Roman \textit{Saturnalia}, in which master and slave reverse their roles, may have been pointed. This could also explain Accius’ exaggerated notions of his own importance as a writer.\textsuperscript{73} When later the great Augustan epics of Virgil and Ovid restored to their heroes the element of ambivalence missing in Ennius, they may have been truer to the essence of the Roman aesthetic imagination and, by giving it more convincing formulation, have contributed to the ultimate disappearance of their pioneering forebear.

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