

FABULAE PRAETEXTAE IN CONTEXT: WHEN WERE PLAYS ON CONTEMPORARY SUBJECTS PERFORMED IN REPUBLICAN ROME?*

The *fabula praetexta* is a category of Roman drama about which we are poorly informed. Ancient *testimonia* are scanty and widely scattered, while surviving fragments comprise fewer than fifty lines. Only five or six titles are firmly attested. Scholarly debate, however, has been extensive, and has especially focused on reconstructing the plots of the plays.¹ The main approach has been to amplify extant fragments by fitting them into a plot taken from treatments of the same episode in later historical sources such as Livy, Dionysius, or Plutarch.² This method was extended by Mommsen and others in their efforts to identify new titles and plots by isolating passages in the historians which seem written in a dramatic style, and could therefore be interpreted as derivations from historical plays.³ Such a line of approach is both risky and subjective. It is based on the desire to recover a lost genre, which modern scholars feel must or should have existed. It is tempting to imagine that the Romans would have encouraged a thriving national theatre on historical themes. Such a genre, it is argued, would have been influential in shaping the average Roman's view of past events and the treatment of famous episodes by later historians.⁴ The conclusions reached have virtually no basis in the ancient sources we actually have. The result is largely a fiction created by the scholarly imagination.

The following discussion aims to lay aside entirely the method outlined above in favour of examining the cultural and social context in which the *praetexta* emerged in Rome during the Middle Republic.⁵ For plays on contemporary subjects that

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¹ For a survey of scholarship since the seventeenth century, see N. Zorzetti, *La pretesta e il teatro latino arcaico* (Naples, 1980), pp. 29–52. The following works are cited most frequently in what follows: O. Ribbeck, *Die römische Tragödie im Zeitalter der Republik* (Leipzig, 1875); L. Müller, *Q. Ennius: eine Einleitung in das Studium der römischen Poesie* (St. Petersburg, 1884); G. Boissier, 'Les fabulae praetextae', *RPh* 17 (1893), 101–8; L. R. Taylor, 'The Opportunities for Dramatic Performances in the Time of Plautus and Terence', *TAPA* 68 (1937), 284–304; A. Degraffi, *Inscriptiones Italiae* xiii.1 (Rome, 1947); W. Beare, *The Roman Stage: A Short History of Latin Drama in the Time of the Republic* (Harvard, 1951); C. Nicolet, *The World of the Citizen in Republican Rome* (Berkeley, 1980); H. Zehnacker, 'Tragédie prétexte et spectacle romain', in *Théâtre et spectacles dans l'antiquité* (Strasbourg, 1983), 31–48; F. Dupont, *L'acteur-roi ou le théâtre dans la Rome antique* (Paris, 1985); E. S. Gruen, *Studies in Greek Culture and Roman Policy* (Leiden, 1990); E. S. Gruen, *Culture and National Identity in Republican Rome* (Ithaca, 1992).

² For careful use of this method, see O. Ribbeck, op. cit. (n. 1), and A. Michels, 'The Drama of the Tarquins', *Latomus* 10 (1951), 13–24.

³ E.g. T. Mommsen, 'Porcia', *Hermes* 15 (1880), 99–102; G. de Durante, *Le fabulae praetextae* (Rome, 1966); L. Alfonsi, 'Una praetexta Veii?', *RFIC* 95 (1967), 165–8. For criticisms of these views, see Müller, op. cit. (n. 1), pp. 100–101; R. Helm, *RE* s.v. *praetexta*, and especially H. Zehnacker, op. cit. (n. 1), 34–6.

⁴ Müller, op. cit. (n. 1), pp. 286–7.
⁵ I owe much to the methodology of Zorzetti, op. cit. (n. 1), and F. Dupont, op. cit. (n. 1). E.g. Zorzetti, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 56: 'La caratterizzazione centrale della pretesta deve essere ricercata proprio in una sua regolarità occasionale nel reticolo funzionale della cultura.' My conclusions are, for the most part, quite different.

context was a clearly patronal one, at a time when many poets at Rome were dependent on one or more sponsors. What function and role did historical drama play in Roman society? What did the plays mean to the men who commissioned them and the audiences that watched them? Can answers to these questions help us to understand why so few of these plays appear to have been written?

1. THE NATURE OF ROMAN HISTORICAL DRAMA

The *fabula praetexta* was an historical drama dealing with episodes from Roman history. The name may well be archaic and refers to the fact that the main characters wore the *toga praetexta* of the Roman magistrate and general.⁶ Conversely, plays on Greek subjects were known as *fabulae palliatae*. Horace (*A.P.* 285ff.), in fact, singles out the *praetexta* as a bold departure from Greek plays both in dress and in approach. His words should warn us against attempts to reconstruct *praetextae* as 'Greek Tragedies in Roman dress'.⁷

It does not seem sufficient, however, to explain the name simply as meaning 'a type of Roman play' as opposed to 'a type of Greek play'. Rather, its very title suggests a play about Roman aristocrats and their status. A *fabula praetexta* presented a Roman aristocrat wearing the garb denoting his office and rank, and fulfilling his official duties for the good of the state.⁸ The importance and status of the hero in the play were reaffirmed in the context of his relation to the gods who granted his success and to the Roman people who benefited from it. Without doubt such a drama had potent cultural significance, especially when it was paid for and presented by a Roman noble with some direct involvement in the event portrayed. Display, spectacle, and reenactment were of vital significance in an aristocracy based on office, which presented itself as an aristocracy based on merit.⁹

Praetextae were written either about events of early Roman history, such as Naevius' *Romulus* and Ennius' *Sabinae*, or about recent exploits of the patron involved, such as Naevius' *Clastidium* (M. Claudius Marcellus), Ennius' *Ambracia* (M. Fulvius Nobilior), and Pacuvius' *Paullus* (L. Aemilius Paullus). Naevius seems to have been the originator of both types of *praetexta*. It is clear that these plays had a strong element of panegyric in their glorification of a central figure, whose exploits were at the same time closely linked to a glorification of the Roman cause in general.

There is only one apparent exception. A fragment of Valerius Antias records an anonymous *fabula* about L. Quinctius Flaminius displaying his cruelty and arrogance by killing a prisoner at his dinner table for the amusement of his mistress.¹⁰ Zorzetti interprets this as another type of *praetexta* written in an invective mode with the purpose of exposing the arrogance of a Roman general by presenting him with the

⁶ For a sound discussion of the ancient definitions, especially Festus 249.14L and Diomedes *GL* I, 489.23, see Boissier, op. cit. (n. 1), 101–8. The *testimonia* are collected by A. Klotz, *Scaenicon Romanorum Fragmenta* i (Munich, 1953), p. 358. Contra Zehnacker, op. cit. (n. 1), 37, who sees the genre of *praetexta* as a modern concept.

⁷ Some modern scholars explicitly assume that the Romans could not work without Greek models, e.g. Beare, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 33. Others assimilate the *praetexta* to a Hellenistic genre of biographical drama, e.g. P. Grimal, 'Le théâtre à Rome', in *Actes du IXe Congrès de l'Association G. Budé* i (Paris, 1975), 274–5.

⁸ On the *toga praetexta*, see Livy 1.8 and 34.7.

⁹ Nicolet, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 346: 'This is a civilization based on display, on overt praise and blame.' Dupont, op. cit. (n. 1), pp. 24ff., especially p. 29: 'Savoir convaincre à Rome, c'est savoir faire voir.' Cf. H. S. Versnel, *Triumphus: An Inquiry into the Origin, Development and Meaning of the Roman Triumph* (Leiden, 1970), pp. 101ff.

¹⁰ Valerius Antias, *Hist. frag.* 48 (Peter, *HRR*) = Livy 39.43.1.

typical attributes of a tyrant.¹¹ This seems an unlikely idea because it would have been very difficult for anyone to stage such a piece anonymously. None of the festivals or games offers a suitable context for such a performance. Therefore, it is preferable to interpret the passage of Valerius as a reference to a *libellus* of some kind, which was circulated for an invective purpose. *Fabula* can have a wide range of meanings including 'story', 'play', 'gossip', 'rumour', 'subject of conversation', 'tale', 'fiction', 'scandal', and 'slander'.

The fragments of *praetextae* are too few to reveal much about their overall tone. The fact that a new type of purely literary *praetexta*, closely modeled on Greek tragedy and designed for recitation only, was developed under the empire should not be taken as evidence that the *praetexta* was always a subcategory of tragedy.¹² Zorzetti has shown how this type of literary and tragic *praetexta* is really a completely different genre developed to voice the political regrets of aristocratic, and especially Stoic, opposition under the empire.¹³ If it is true that Cassius the liberator wrote a *Brutus* or *Lucretia* of his own after Caesar's murder then he might be the originator of this new use of the *praetexta*.¹⁴

2. WHEN WERE *FABULAE PRAETEXTAE* PERFORMED DURING THE REPUBLIC?

A number of the *praetextae* we know about, notably those on contemporary subjects, can be assigned to specific patrons who had a clear connection with the author and the content of his play. This information can be used to identify possible contexts in which a patron commissioned a given play to be performed. For easy reference a summary chart is appended at the end. For obvious reasons this study concentrates on *praetextae* dealing with contemporary subjects, which is to say Naevius' *Clastidium*, Ennius' *Ambracia*, Pacuvius' *Paullus*, and Cornelius Balbus' *Iter*.¹⁵ The patrons involved in the Middle Republic came from both patrician and plebeian families of long standing, and all were leading Romans of their day.¹⁶ Their cultural interests were wide and affected by Hellenizing influences encountered in Rome and on their travels.

Little was done to explore the occasions when *praetextae* were performed until the work of Zorzetti, Dupont, and now Wiseman.¹⁷ In fact, there were many days on which plays could be seen in Republican Rome.¹⁸ Our very scanty information about

¹¹ Zorzetti, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 78.

¹² For the *praetexta* as tragedy, see H. D. Jocelyn, 'Ennius as a Dramatic Poet', in O. Skutsch (ed.), *Ennius* (Geneva, 1972), 82–3; B. Gentili, *Theatrical Performances in the Ancient World: Hellenistic and Early Roman Theatre* (Amsterdam, 1979), p. 48; A. La Penna, *Fra teatro, poesia e politica romana* (Turin, 1979), p. 51; Zehnacker, op. cit. (n. 1), 31 and 40.

¹³ Zorzetti, op. cit. (n. 1), pp. 93–103.

¹⁴ Varro, *L.* 6.7; 7.72.

¹⁵ Zorzetti, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 54: 'Sul versante della celebrazione di fatti contemporanei possono, invece, essere messi a fuoco i rapporti di patronato tra poeti e personaggi da essi celebrati.'

¹⁶ The Aemilii were one of Rome's oldest and most distinguished patrician families who had given their name to the tribe Aemilia. The Fulvii were of plebeian origin, perhaps coming originally from Tusculum (cf. *CIL* 1.616) and had been ennobled for over a hundred years (322 B.C.) before the capture of Ambracia. The Claudii Marcelli were also a distinguished plebeian family.

¹⁷ For earlier discussions, see especially Boissier, op. cit. (n. 1), W. Soltau, *Die Anfänge der römischen Geschichtschreibung* (Leipzig, 1909), Zorzetti, op. cit. (n. 1), and Dupont, op. cit. (n. 1).

¹⁸ For the occasions when plays were performed in Rome, see L. R. Taylor, op. cit. (n. 1), and E. Paratore, *Storia del teatro latino* (Milan, 1957), pp. 51ff. According to the *didaskalia*, Terence's

when surviving dramas in any genre were performed does not even indicate whether separate days were set aside for tragedies and comedies. Wiseman has recently proposed a new model of 'history (learned) from dramatic fiction' which presupposes a rich and active tradition of *praetextae* written for and performed at the great annual public festivals, especially at the *Ludi Romani*, but also at the *Ludi plebei*.¹⁹ He argues that plays like Naevius' *Romulus*, Ennius' *Sabinae*, and Accius' *Decius*, as well as others like them, should be placed in this specific context. He, therefore, interprets the *praetexta* as a genre close to 'popular' drama used by the Roman community to create a self-image which articulated civic identity at public festivals and under Greek influence. This theory leads him to stress those ancient commentators who describe scenes from the works of Hellenistic historians as being 'like plays'. He sees a long-standing and close connection between historiography and drama in the Hellenistic world.

Wiseman presents an attractive picture, but one which by his own admission is based on 'a priori' arguments.²⁰ His results, although not his methods, are close to the older notion, dismissed at the start of this paper, that the Romans 'ought' to have had a lively tradition of national historical drama. Although it cannot be proved his model obviously does offer a very convenient locus for *praetextae* on historical topics which are not the principal concern here. The following represents a brief expression of some reservations about the newly reformulated hypothesis that ordinary Romans learned much of their own history from historical drama.²¹

There is an almost total lack of ancient evidence to support Wiseman's wide-ranging and speculative theories, especially concerning the Early Republic.²² Cicero and our other later sources are silent about a flourishing tradition of historical drama. In fact, information about the past was passed on in many ways at Rome. Wiseman himself elsewhere notes oral traditions at the *symposium*, in laments for the dead (*neniae*), and in popular genres of storytelling.²³ To these one may add the traditions of aristocratic families rehearsed at funerals by actors wearing the masks of ancestors (*imagines*) and in the funeral eulogy (*laudatio*).²⁴ The ancestor masks, labelled with

plays were performed at the *Ludi Romani*, *Ludi Megalenses*, and at Aemilius Paullus' funeral games. The *Ludi Apollinares* of 57 B.C. included Accius' *Brutus*, Accius' *Eurysaces* with lines from Ennius' *Andromache*, and Afranius' *Simulans* (Cicero, *Sest.* 116–123). Ennius died at the time when his *Thyestes* was first performed at the *Ludi Apollinares* (Cicero, *Brut.* 78).

¹⁹ What follows is a critique of T. P. Wiseman's 1993 Ronald Syme Memorial Lecture delivered at Wolfson College, Oxford in October 1993 and published as 'The Origins of Roman Historiography' in *Historiography and Imagination. Eight Essays on Roman Culture* (Exeter, 1994), 1–22.

²⁰ See Wiseman, op. cit. (n. 19), 5, 10, and 14: 'We have no evidence, but on a *a priori* grounds the Roman festivals are the obvious place to imagine the Roman community's self-image being created.'

²¹ Wiseman, op. cit. (n. 19), 5: 'To put it crudely, I would like to propose in place of the "history from documents" idea, which I believe to be untenable, an alternative model of "history from dramatic fiction".' His dismissal of documentary theories is persuasive and sound.

²² H. Rix, 'Dichtersprachliche Traditionen aus vorliterarischer Zeit?' in G. Vogt-Spira (ed.), *Studien zur vorliterarischen Periode im frühen Rom* (Tübingen, 1989), 29–39 suggests the existence from the late fifth century B.C. of a pre-literary genre close to the dialogues of comedy and tragedy based on metrical observations. However, this can tell us nothing about the possible historical content of such verses.

²³ See T. P. Wiseman, 'Roman Legend and Oral Tradition', in *Historiography and Imagination. Eight Essays on Roman Culture* (Exeter, 1994), 23–36.

²⁴ See especially Polybius 6.53–4 and Pliny, *Nat.* 35.6–14, with H. I. Flower, *Ancestor Masks and Aristocratic Power in Roman Culture* (Oxford, forthcoming).

inscriptions (*tituli*), were kept in the *atria* of office-holding families, where they would be seen by any who entered the house. Monuments, statues, and inscriptions in many public places in the city also recalled the exploits of Rome's leading citizens.²⁵ Consequently, there is no 'need' for 'history from drama' to explain knowledge of the past. Moreover, no convincing Greek parallels for 'historical' drama survive. Phrynichus and Aeschylus set a pattern for Greek tragedy at Athens which deliberately eschewed 'contemporary' historical subjects and especially the naming of recent individuals on stage.²⁶ Myth was their chosen field and political comment was indirect and generalized. An argument from Greek influence is, therefore, rather misleading.²⁷

Furthermore, Wiseman does not make clear the relationship he envisages between history, especially Greek historiography, and drama.²⁸ It is important to note that 'tragic' language came to be used to describe history. Hellenistic historians like Duris of Samos and Phylarchus aimed to portray vivid scenes which evoked emotions like pity and fear, but also others including surprise.²⁹ This choice of 'style' in no way indicates that their sources were more 'dramatic' than those of other historians.³⁰ Hellenistic historiography in turn had a marked influence on historical writing at Rome starting with Fabius Pictor. When an ancient critic described a scene in an historian as being 'like tragedy' he was using the label in an essentially paradoxical way.³¹ The episode in question was *compared* with tragedy to bring out certain features precisely because it was not itself from a play. The difficulty in staging many of these scenes, including those cited by Wiseman, is actually very important. Hellenistic historical writing aimed to present more 'drama' and a wider range of emotions than were to be seen on stage.

The whole concept of popular drama which celebrated the *res gestae* of the 'Roman people' is problematic.³² The organizers of plays at the *ludi scaenici* were magistrates.

²⁵ On these monuments, see especially T. Hölscher, 'Die Anfänge römischer Repräsentationskunst', *MDAI(R)* 85 (1978), 315–57; 'Römische Siegesdenkmäler der späten Republik', in H. A. Cahn and E. Simon (eds.), *Tainia. R. Hampe zum 70. Geburtstag*, 1 (Mainz, 1980), 351–71; 'Die Geschichtsauffassung in der römischen Repräsentationskunst', *JDAI* 95 (1980), 265–321.

²⁶ Herodotus 6.21 tells how Phrynichus was fined 1000 drachmas for his play the *Fall of Miletus* which reminded the Athenians of a recent calamity. Both Phrynichus and Aeschylus wrote plays about the Persian Wars but Aeschylus was careful not to introduce contemporary Greek characters such as Themistocles. See especially P. Cartledge, *The Greeks: A Portrait of Self and Others* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 180–81.

²⁷ Herodotus 5.67.5 mentions tragic choruses which celebrated the life of the hero Adrastus at a festival in his honour at Sicyon (cf. Wiseman, op. cit. [n. 19], 10). The explicitly cultic context cannot be paralleled in a *praetexta* about Romulus who was not equated with Quirinus until Caesar became *pontifex maximus*. See C. J. Classen, 'Romulus in der römischen Republik', *Philologus* 106 (1962), 174–204.

²⁸ See Wiseman, op. cit. (n. 19), 14, 18–20.

²⁹ On the genre of 'tragic' history in the Hellenistic age, see F. W. Walbank, 'History and Tragedy', in *Selected Papers. Studies in Greek and Roman History and Historiography* (Cambridge, 1985), 224–41; C. W. Fornara, *The Nature of History in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Berkeley, 1983), pp. 126–37; V. H. Gray, 'Mimesis in Greek Historical Writing', *AJP* 108 (1987), 467–86; A. D. Walker, 'Enargeia and the Spectator in Greek Historiography', *TAPA* 123 (1993), 353–77.

³⁰ See Fornara, op. cit. (n. 29), p. 130: 'A special insistence on visual effects—that history should place a scene before your very eyes—is unmistakable. Thus Duris attempted to add the pleasure of poetry to history's own.'

³¹ See Livy 1.46.3, 5.21.9, 2.50.11 and Dionysius of Halicarnassus 3.18.1, 9.22.1–3 with Wiseman, op. cit. (n. 19), 18.

³² Wiseman, op. cit. (n. 19), 16: 'The Roman People had its own *res gestae*, and its own means of celebrating them. I would prefer to suppose that the selection of themes was, in part at least, the work of successive producers of patriotic and partisan drama at the *ludi scaenici*.'

Other public spectacles which rehearsed traditions or celebrated achievements were firmly controlled by the nobility of office, specifically the senate. Indeed the success of the *nobiles* lay partly in the popularity of their leadership. In many ways they were able to make their ancestors and family names synonymous with the great moments in Roman history.³³ It is therefore difficult to distinguish, either in theory or in practice, between the *res gestae* of the Roman people and the *res gestae* of individual leaders and their extended families.³⁴

Lastly, Wiseman does not take account of a possible aetiological and religious function for the *praetexta* in explaining Roman custom and relations with the gods at festivals, which were often closely linked with temples and cult rituals. Aetiological drama could be interpreted as 'popular' and 'didactic' in a rather different sense which was not distinguished from the concerns of the élite. This category is primarily represented by two anonymous plays about the arrival of the Magna Mater and the origins of the *Nonae Caprotinae*, performed at the *Ludi Megalenses* and *Ludi Apollinares* respectively.³⁵ It is possible that the dramatization of the arrival of the Magna Mater dwelt on the feat of Quinta Claudia and was paid for by the patrician Claudii, but that would not necessarily affect its aetiological tone or purpose.³⁶ Moreover, both the *Ludi Megalenses* and the *Ludi Apollinares* had their origin as games instituted to try to ensure victory in the late Second Punic War, around the time of Naevius' acme as a poet.³⁷ Themes of victory, triumph, and the favour of the gods will be discussed further below as they relate to *praetextae* of both types.

A play worth considering in this context is Accius' *Brutus* which portrayed the overthrow of the Tarquins by Brutus and his subsequent role in the foundation of the Republic. It can be associated with Accius' patron D. Junius Brutus Callaecus (cos. 138 B.C.). We have no secure information about when it was first performed, but we know it was restaged in 57 B.C. at the *Ludi Apollinares* when L. Caecilius Rufus was urban praetor in charge of the games.³⁸ On that occasion, lines relating to king Servius Tullius were used to rally support for Cicero. After the assassination of Caesar, M. Brutus as urban praetor for 44 B.C. also tried to revive the play commissioned by his relative about their common ancestor. After the liberators left Italy the *Brutus* was replaced by the *Tereus*. However, the *Ludi Apollinares* still witnessed significant shows

³³ See especially K.-J. Hölkeskamp, *Die Entstehung der Nobilität. Studien zur sozialen und politischen Geschichte der Römischen Republik im 4. Jhd. v. Chr.* (Stuttgart, 1987), pp. 204–40 and J. von Ungern-Sternberg, 'Überlegungen zur frühen römischen Überlieferung im Lichte der Oral-Tradition-Forschung', in J. von Ungern-Sternberg and H. Reinau (eds.), *Vergangenheit in mündlicher Überlieferung* (Stuttgart, 1988), 265.

³⁴ Wiseman dismisses too hastily the arguments of D. Timpe, 'Mündlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit als Basis der frühromischen Überlieferung', in J. von Ungern-Sternberg and H. Reinau (eds.), *Vergangenheit in mündlicher Überlieferung* (Stuttgart, 1988), 282–6 that the *res gestae* of the nobles became the history of the Roman people.

³⁵ Ovid, *Fast.* 4.326; Varro, *L.* 6.18, cf. Macrobius *Sat.* 1.11.36; Plutarch *Rom.* 29; *Cam.* 33. The *Nonae Caprotinae* fell on the 7th July during the *Ludi Apollinares*. See P. Drossart, 'Le théâtre aux nones caprotines', *RPh* 48 (1974), 54–64 and J. N. Bremmer, 'Myth and Ritual in Ancient Rome: the *Nonae Caprotinae*', in J. N. Bremmer and N. M. Horsfall, *Roman Myth and Mythography* (London, 1987), *BICS* Suppl. 52, 76–88, especially 83.

³⁶ For praise of Quinta Claudia put in the mouth of Appius Claudius Caecus, see Cicero, *Cael.* 14.34.

³⁷ For the *Ludi Apollinares*, see Livy 25.12.15 (212 B.C.) and 27.23.5–7 (208 B.C.), when the games were made annual, with K. Latte, *Römische Religionsgeschichte* (Munich, 1960), 223 and *RE* Suppl. 5 (1931), cols. 621–4. For the *Ludi Megalenses*, see Livy 29.10.4–8 and 29.14.5–14 (204 B.C.).

³⁸ Cicero *Sest.* 123. L. Caecilius Rufus (*RE* 110) was a supporter of Cicero whose *elogium* is recorded at *CIL* 14.2464.

of support for Brutus and his associates despite counter demonstrations.³⁹ We therefore have striking evidence for *praetextae* at the *Ludi Apollinares* and especially for Accius' *Brutus*. Not surprisingly our longest fragments of a *praetexta* come from the *Brutus* which was evidently well-known in the Late Republic. It is possible that Callaecus had also staged the first performance of the *Brutus* at the *Ludi Apollinares*. We do not know the date or nature of his praetorship which is usually placed before 141 B.C.⁴⁰ The play would have underscored Callaecus' rank, in the context of a vivid rendition of the founding of the Republic, while at the same time reaffirming the validity of the system and of his ancestor as the 'second founder' of Rome.⁴¹ A connection between the *res publica*, the kind of men who founded it, and the kind of men who were its heirs, as exemplified by the patron himself, was essential to the creation of a drama that was both 'popular' and 'patriotic'.⁴²

Traditionally, Accius' play has been envisaged as written for the dedication of Callaecus' Temple of Mars, which was built using war booty after his Spanish triumph.⁴³ Accius wrote some Saturnian verses which were inscribed over the door of his patron's new temple. The dedication is also a possible context although Mars does not have an obvious role in the play. The effectiveness of the drama is suggested by its repetition. It offered a well-known and presumably well-loved theme which could, at the same time, be used by the presiding magistrate to support a contemporary political stance, according to the changing circumstances from the 140s/130s to the 50s and 40s of the next century B.C.

Turning to plays on contemporary subjects, scholars have focused on funerals and triumphs as the most likely settings.⁴⁴ As I will try to show, neither of these occasions is particularly suitable or convincing, especially when compared with special *ludi* given either to fulfil a vow to Jupiter or at the dedication of a temple paid for by the spoils of a victory.

(i) *Cornelius Balbus' Iter*

The only play with a firmly attested context is Cornelius Balbus' *Iter*, a curious piece perhaps written by Balbus himself and staged by him at special games in Gades in 43 B.C. The plot dealt with his journey in 49 B.C. to try to win L. Lentulus over to Caesar's side in the civil wars.⁴⁵ Balbus was so moved by the reenactment that he was seen to shed tears. Our source is Asinius Pollio in a letter he wrote to Cicero in June

³⁹ For M. Brutus and his *Ludi Apollinares*, see Cicero *Att.* 15.12; 16.2; 16.5; *Phil.* 1.36; 10.8; Appian *BC* 3.24.

⁴⁰ Accius' first play is usually dated to 140 B.C. (Cicero, *Brut.* 229) so the 140s may be too early for his *Brutus* but this is not certain.

⁴¹ Zorzetti, *op. cit.* (n. 1), pp. 94–5.

⁴² Accius' play glorifies an ancestor of the patron who may well have been inserted into the family tree to gain prestige. There is no evidence for the plebeian Junii holding office before the fourth century B.C. but this was a matter for debate in antiquity. Plutarch *Brut.* 1.6–8 (citing Posidonius); Nepos *Att.* 18.3. E. Gabba, 'Il "Bruto" di Accio', *Dioniso* 43 (1969), 382 assumes Callaecus did not appear in the play.

⁴³ Cicero, *Arch.* 11.26 with schol. Bob. and Valerius Maximus 8.14.2 with Ribbeck, *op. cit.* (n. 1), pp. 586–93. For the temple, see Pliny, *Nat.* 36.26 with S. B. Platner and T. Ashby, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome* (Oxford, 1929) s.v. Martis Aedes and L. Richardson jr., *A New Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome* (Baltimore, 1992) s.v. Mars, Aedes in Circo Flaminio. For the Spanish victory, see Livy, *Per.* 56; Appian, *Iber.* 71ff.; Plutarch, *Ti. Gracchus* 21.2; Eutropius 4.19. Gabba, *op. cit.* (n. 42), 379 dismisses any connection with the temple or its verses. He would like to date the play before 133 B.C. and gives a full discussion of its tone, but offers no suggestion about when it was performed.

⁴⁴ Here Zorzetti, Dupont, and Zehnacker echo the work of earlier scholars such as Boissier.

⁴⁵ For Balbus missing Lentulus at Brundisium, see Cicero, *Att.* 9.6.1.

of 43 B.C. from Spain, where Balbus was serving as his quaestor.⁴⁶ Pollio says that if Cicero is interested he can get a copy of the *praetexta* from Cornelius Gallus.⁴⁷ The whole tone of Pollio's letter shows how much he disapproved of Balbus' general behaviour and especially of his boastfulness. This *praetexta* was simply the crowning example of Balbus' bad taste and lack of adherence to correct form.⁴⁸ It is immediately obvious that this occasion is in no way typical, if for no other reason than that the play was staged outside Rome to glorify Balbus in the eyes of his fellow townsmen in the old style of a Roman commander of the Middle Republic.⁴⁹ By the Late Republic such a *praetexta* which directly eulogized a leading Roman in his own presence appears as an anomaly to Pollio who draws Cicero's attention to it. However, Balbus may indeed have chosen special *ludi* as the setting for his play in imitation of earlier custom.

(ii) Funerals

Funerals and the games associated with them have been much discussed in modern scholarship as the particular context for contemporary *praetextae*. The argument has been that the Romans did not allow the representation of living persons on stage, with the result that all *praetextae* dealing with the exploits of a contemporary hero must have been commissioned for his funeral, either by him or by the relations who were in charge of organizing the funeral.⁵⁰ Balbus' *praetexta* is taken as the exception which proves the rule because it was performed outside Rome. If this could be demonstrated it would be an important addition to our understanding of the aristocratic funeral in its aspect as spectacle.

There is, however, no firm evidence for such a view, which is based almost entirely on a misreading of Cicero, *De Re Publica* 4.10.12:

veteribus displicuisse Romanis vel laudari quemquam in scaena vivum hominem vel vituperari.

This is from a fragmentary text made up of verbatim quotations found in Augustine (*Civ.* 2.9). The whole context of the extract needs to be examined in order to understand this particular statement. Scipio Aemilianus is the main speaker and the only one quoted directly. The subject under discussion in the dialogue is the licence of Old Comedy to criticize and satirize named individuals on stage. Aemilianus naturally disapproves of such free expression as not suitable in the context of Roman society and as not befitting the *dignitas* of a Roman statesman.

⁴⁶ Cicero, *Fam.* 10.32.

⁴⁷ *Fam.* 10.32.5: 'Epistulam quam Balbo, cum etiam nunc in provincia esset, scripsi, legendam tibi misi. Etiam praetextam si voles legere, Gallum Cornelium, familiarem meum, poscito.'

⁴⁸ *Fam.* 10.32.3: 'Illa vero iam ne Caesaris quidem exemplo, quod ludis praetextam de suo itinere ad L. Lentulum pro consule sollicitandum posuit, et quidem, cum ageretur, flevit memoria rerum gestarum commotus;...' Cf. Dio 54.25 on Balbus' boastfulness at the dedication of his theatre in 13 B.C. provides further evidence for his love of spectacle.

⁴⁹ Boissier's attempt to use Balbus' play as the typical example of a *praetexta* is not sound because it goes so against the direct testimony of Pollio. Contra e.g. Beare, *op. cit.* (n. 1), p. 32: 'This must be regarded as merely one of the outrageous breaches of decorum of which he was guilty.' Cf. Zorzetti, *op. cit.* (n. 1), pp. 99–100.

⁵⁰ Zorzetti, *op. cit.* (n. 1), p. 55: 'È prevalsa comunemente la convinzione che i ludi funebri risolvessero ottimamente il problema dell'occasione e ad essa è certamente sottostante l'idea che nella pretesta fosse stato fatto un uso patentemente politico della comunicazione teatrale.' Also Zehnacker, *op. cit.*, 44, and E. Paratore, 'Indizi di natura sociale nel teatro latino', *Dioniso* 43 (1969), 52. Contra F. Leo, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur* i (Berlin, 1913), p. 197, who sees the celebration of a living patron on a special day as a Hellenistic concept.

Rather, in Rome the censor is responsible for such a task.⁵¹ Attention is drawn to the Law of the Twelve Tables which prescribes death as the penalty for *infamia* or *flagitia* caused by one who *occantavisset* or who wrote a *carmen*.⁵² According to Scipio, it is the job of magistrates and laws, not of poets, to reform society.

First of all, it is important to note that Scipio's other statements are apparently quite widely separated in context from the key sentence quoted above, which forms the conclusion of this section of the work.⁵³ Secondly, the discussion ranges widely from comedy to libel laws, without any specific mention of tragedy or *praetextae*. The *carmen* mentioned in the Law of the Twelve Tables may refer primarily to invective verses, an interpretation suggested by the verb *occantare*. Scholars of Roman Law, however, have doubted that the Twelve Tables would have concerned themselves with defamation or have laid down the death penalty for it.⁵⁴ Cicero is probably reflecting a rationalization of a law against *mala carmina*, originally meaning sorcery.⁵⁵

Thirdly, the final sentence has the character of a concluding *sententia*. It is not at all evident that it refers in any way to a law. The verb *placet* can be used to talk about a decision made in the senate, in which case it takes on a legal tone. However, this legal meaning does not extend to *displicuisse* here.⁵⁶ Rather, we should read the text as saying that the earlier Romans were *uncomfortable* with the representation of a living person on stage. Such a translation implies that living Romans were indeed represented on stage; indeed this must have been the case if Scipio's statements were to have any point.⁵⁷

Vel laudari... vel vituperari surely refers to the whole range of contexts in which a living person might appear in the different genres of Roman drama. Vituperation would be much more likely to be found in plays like those of Old Comedy, which was discussed earlier in the passage. As we know, the Romans preferred New Comedy with its stock characters, so this part of Scipio's statement should not surprise us. That is not to say that there was a law against writing comedies in the style of Aristophanes. On the other hand, praise of the living would probably be found in a *praetexta*. Scipio is saying that glorification of a contemporary individual was problematic in Roman society. This important information fits in with what we already know about reactions to Balbus' play. If there had been a specific law against presenting a living man on stage one might have expected Pollio to say something to that effect. In adducing Cicero's words as evidence about Roman funerals, scholars go beyond the information given in the text itself.

Our main source for the Roman funeral is Polybius (6.53–4), whose famous description of its form and function offers evidence contemporary with the *praetextae* of the Middle Republic. He certainly makes no reference to a play as an integral part of the funeral itself and it is hard to see what function it could have had in the carefully orchestrated spectacle. The principal focus of the ceremony was the parade

⁵¹ *Rep.* 4.10.11: 'patiamur, inquit, etsi eiusmodi cives a censore melius est quam a poeta notari...'

⁵² *Rep.* 4.10.12: 'si quis occantavisset sive carmen condidisset quod infamiam faceret flagitiumve alteri...'

⁵³ *Rep.* 4.10.12: 'dicit deinde alia et sic concludit hunc locum ut ostendat...'

⁵⁴ H. F. Jolowicz and B. Nicholas, *Historical Introduction to Roman Law*³ (Cambridge, 1972), p. 171 with n. 9.

⁵⁵ See Pliny, *Nat.* 28.18: 'qui malum carmen incantassit'. This seems to reflect the original version of the law. For a discussion with bibliography, see A. Ronconi, "'Malum Carmen" e "Malum Poeta"', in *Syntelesia V. Arangio-Ruiz ii* (Naples, 1964), 962–3.

⁵⁶ There are no parallels for a legal use of 'displicuisse' meaning a law against something.

⁵⁷ See Gruen, *Studies*, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 94 n. 62.

of the ancestors, represented by persons wearing their *imagines* (wax ancestor masks) and the dress and emblems of their rank, who accompanied the dead person. These ancestors, seated on ivory chairs, formed the immediate audience for the *laudatio* (funeral oration), which was often delivered by a younger member of the family. The eulogy dealt not only with the deeds of the deceased but also with those of his ancestors.⁵⁸

Dupont's theory that the whole procession would leave the city to bury the corpse and then reenter to watch a play about his life, or even about the exploits of one of their number, is pure speculation.⁵⁹ Not only is there no ancient evidence to support it, but it raises a number of very awkward questions. Would the ancestors watch too? Would the actors on stage wear the same or similar masks in the play?⁶⁰ If actors had been hired to impersonate the ancestors or even the dead man himself in the procession, would these same people perform in the play?⁶¹ Moreover, from the point of view of the function of spectacle within the funeral, such a play would be a gratuitous reduplication of material which would only serve to detract from the procession in general and the *laudatio* in particular. Funerals were held at short notice after only a few days, so that a play would have needed to be commissioned and cast in advance.

The games given at funerals were different in character from other games. They were not called *ludi* but *munera*, and consisted mainly of gladiatorial combats.⁶² Conversely, gladiators did not appear outside the context of the funeral until the Imperial period. Stage plays were performed at the funerals of Flamininus and L. Aemilius Paullus but there is no evidence that they were a regular feature of aristocratic funerals.⁶³ Paullus' funeral saw the performance of Terence's *Adelphoe* and *Hecyra*. The staging of such comedies, which were heavily influenced by Greek originals, can tell us little about the context of the *praetexta*. There is, therefore, no reason to believe that *praetextae* were in any special way a funeral genre, nor would it have been either easy or desirable to incorporate them within the format of Roman funerals as presented by our best ancient evidence.

(iii) *Triumphs*

The other possible forum envisaged by scholars for a *praetexta* was the triumph. New insights have been provided by the work of Zorzetti who showed a connection between the themes of the triumph and of the *praetexta*. He classified the *praetexta* of the Archaic period as a celebration of *imperium*.⁶⁴ Yet, at the same time, he did not

⁵⁸ Notorious distortion of history could and apparently did occur regularly in these speeches. Cf. Cicero, *Brut.* 16.62 and Livy 8.40.4. ⁵⁹ Dupont, op. cit. (n. 1), pp. 219ff.

⁶⁰ The evidence for Roman theatrical masks is very scanty. Convenient discussions can be found in G. E. Duckworth, *The Nature of Roman Comedy* (Princeton, 1952), and now D. Wiles, *The Masks of Menander: Sign and Meaning in Greek and Roman Performance* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 127–49.

⁶¹ Diodorus 31.25.2 and Suetonius, *Ves.* 19 refer to an actor hired to impersonate the dead man and imitate his gestures. It is not clear when this custom was introduced.

⁶² Polybius 31.28.5–7 mentions gladiatorial combats, costing as much as 30 T, as the main part of the funeral of Aemilius Paullus in 160 B.C. Cf. Livy, *Per.* 16; 28.21.1; 39.46; 41.28.10. G. Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer*² (Munich, 1912), pp. 465ff. points out that they were not a part of religious practice in the Republic. Cf. Taylor, op. cit. (n. 1), 299 and Gruen, *Culture*, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 197.

⁶³ Livy 41.28.11 and Terence, *didaskalia* for the *Adelphoe* and *Hecyra*.

⁶⁴ Zorzetti, op. cit. (n. 1), pp. 58ff. and p. 75 where he says the *praetexta* can be seen as a tool for political advancement 'come tutti i rituali trionfali'.

rule out the funeral as an alternative and equally suitable context. Along similar lines, Dupont asserts that the contemporary *praetexta* was a type of solemn reenactment of a triumph at a man's funeral, although in a completely different format from the jovial festivities of the triumphal *pompa* itself.⁶⁵

Most of the *praetextae* we know of, whether contemporary or on historical subjects, have a connection with triumphal themes and the celebration of *imperium*. One may cite Naevius' *Romulus*, which may have dealt with the military exploits of Rome's founder, who, according to tradition, was the first to celebrate a triumph and the first to dedicate the *spolia opima* to Jupiter Feretrius whose shrine he established.⁶⁶ It is striking that the only surviving lines from Ennius' *Sabinae* declare that no spoils or victory can be gained in a battle against one's own kin.⁶⁷ This kind of struggle is not the right use of *imperium* and consequently it cannot result in the same rewards for success. The line apparently comes from the climax of the play when the Sabine women are pleading with their fathers and husbands not to fight a battle on their account. Without more fragments we cannot tell how important this theme was for the play.

Accius' *Decius vel Aeneadae*, which celebrated the self-sacrifice of P. Decius Mus at the Battle of Sentinum in 295 B.C., is an even clearer example of a play focusing on the holder of *imperium* as the leader of his people, the one who assures their victory by his own valour and his good relations with the gods.⁶⁸ There is no evidence for a patronal context for Accius' play and a family connection remains elusive.⁶⁹ At the same time, it is clear from Cicero that the Romans themselves were quite aware that the Decii and their tradition of self-sacrifice in battle could be used as a strategy of self-advertisement.⁷⁰ Cicero rejects the whole notion that the gods would accept a traditional *devotio* in which a commander could pledge his life in return for the victory of Rome.

Zorzetti has posited a specifically religious significance for the *praetexta* in the context of the thanksgiving which was part of the triumph.⁷¹ Contrary to his assertions, there is no demonstrable connection between the cult of Fortuna in particular and either the triumph or the *praetexta*. He is drawing his inspiration and evidence from the opening sections of Plutarch's treatise on the *Fortune of the Romans* 3–8. No doubt Roman commanders were seen as favoured by the gods, but many deities were involved and Fortuna seems to have had no monopoly of ensuring military success. Plutarch's remarks prove no more than that the fortune or lack thereof of various groups was a popular topic in the debating schools. The gods may well have appeared in a *praetexta*, but this is true of comedy also, and perhaps of all Roman dramatic genres.

⁶⁵ Dupont, op. cit. (n. 1), pp. 219–20.

⁶⁶ Livy, 1.10 with R. M. Ogilvie, *A Commentary on Livy 1–5* (Oxford, 1965), *ad loc.* and *ILS* 64. Donatus' reference to a play about the early life of Romulus and Remus is late and probably refers to Naevius' *Lupus*. See Ribbeck, op. cit. (n. 1), pp. 63–6 and E. V. Marmorale, *Naevius Poeta*² (Florence, 1950), pp. 154–5.

⁶⁷ O. Ribbeck, *Tragicorum Romanorum Fragmenta* i² (Hildesheim, 1962), p. 279: 'Cum spolia generis detraxeritis, quam inscriptionem dabitis?' Cf. Jocelyn, op. cit. (n. 12), pp. 82–7 and 94 for discussion of this play.

⁶⁸ Polybius, 2.19; Livy, 10.27ff., cf. Livy 8.9 for the father's *devotio* in 414 B.C.

⁶⁹ The alternative title of *Aeneadae* cannot be explained by anything known about the Decii, and therefore raises serious questions about the content and purpose of this play. The family is not recorded as having held office after the mid-third century B.C. except the praetor of 115 B.C. and a tribune of the plebs between 52 B.C. and 44 B.C.

⁷⁰ Cicero, *N.D.* 3.15: 'consilium id imperatorium fuit, quod Graeci στρατήγημα appellant.'

⁷¹ Zorzetti, op. cit. (n. 1), pp. 58ff. This is perhaps the most controversial part of his book.

It is possible to imagine the *fabula praetexta* as an informal type of drama like a pageant, which grew out of the extended procession at the triumph. Some use could perhaps have been made of the spoils or paintings as props for the performance. Such a play might consist of no more than a narrator introducing a series of scenes or sketches. There is, however, no reliable ancient evidence which attests to dramatic performance (*ludi scaenici*) being staged at a triumph during the Republic.⁷² This observation lends credence to the argument that there would have been no occasion to perform a *praetexta* on the day of the triumph itself. A play about the victory would have reduplicated the material already presented to the public in the more traditional format of the triumphal procession to the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus. Similarly, the general was already honoured in his own person in a highly theatrical way. The procession belonged almost as much to the soldiers as to the general, whom they satirized with improvised songs and chants. Another context needs, therefore, to be found for a play celebrating a contemporary victory, a context linked closely to the general in question but not on the actual day of his triumph.

(iv) *Ludi magni votivi*

Ludi magni votivi were great games in honour of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, modeled on the *Ludi Romani*, and vowed by a general in battle. Similar votive games were vowed with some regularity by the consul on behalf of the senate and people promising ten days of games if the *res publica* continued to prosper for the next five or ten year interval.⁷³ The consul made the vow at the Capitol on the instructions of a *senatus consultum* and according to the formula dictated to him by the *pontifex maximus*.⁷⁴ Such games could also be ordered for averting *prodigia* (Livy 42.20.3). Privately vowed *ludi magni* seem to have followed a very similar pattern but were linked to a specific military objective. Of the ten days of games which were standard, four were usually for *ludi scaenici*.⁷⁵

Scipio Africanus was apparently the first to vow such games privately during a mutiny in Spain.⁷⁶ His innovation is not surprising in view of his special cultivation of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, whose temple he often visited in Rome, and his flair for publicity.⁷⁷ Moreover, he was not allowed a triumph for his achievements in Spain because of his age and station which may explain his interest in special games. He gave a second set of *ludi magni votivi* after his final victory in Africa (Livy 31.49.4). It is perhaps no coincidence that his example was followed next by his cousin Scipio

⁷² For discussion, see K. Latte, op. cit. (n. 37), p. 153 and Gruen, *Culture*, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 196. The only direct evidence for the Republic, Tacitus, *Ann.* 14.21.2, is unclear. Mummian's triumph may only be mentioned here for purposes of dating.

⁷³ For state sponsored votive games, see Livy 27.33.8; 30.27.11–12; 34.44.6; 42.28.8 with A. Piganiol, *Recherches sur les jeux romains* (Strasbourg, 1923), p. 78ff. and Taylor, op. cit. (n. 1), 296.

⁷⁴ Livy 36.2.2ff. of 191 B.C., 36.2.3–4: 'si duellum, quod cum rege Antiocho sumi populus iussit, id ex sententia senatus populi que Romani confectum erit, tum tibi, Iuppiter, populus Romanus ludos magnos dies decem continuos faciet, donaque ad omnia pulvinaria dabuntur de pecunia, quantam senatus decreuerit. Quisquis magistratus eos ludos quando ubique faxit, hi ludi facti donaque data recte sunt'.

⁷⁵ Taylor, op. cit. (n. 1), 298. Contra Gruen, *Culture*, op. cit. (n. 1), pp. 195–6 who calls the evidence thin but does not take full account of the parallel structure of the *Ludi Romani*.

⁷⁶ Livy 28.38.14 and 28.45.12 with Piganiol, op. cit. (n. 73), pp. 83ff. and Taylor, op. cit. (n. 1), 297.

⁷⁷ For Africanus in the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, see Valerius Maximus 8.15.1–2 and Appian, *Iber.* 23.89.

Nasica and then by his brother Lucius Scipio. Livy, however, singles out Nasica as the innovator, perhaps because he was the first to ask the senate to pay for his privately vowed games.⁷⁸

The lavish scale of ten days of games, on a par with the grandest sponsored by the state, suggests the amount of booty required for the general to finance such games himself. Additional contributions were often sought, both from the newly conquered and from the allies.⁷⁹ Such a vow could also be closely associated with a vow for a temple.⁸⁰ A *praetexta* performed at *ludi magni votivi* would have illustrated the vow of the general and the importance of his victory. Such leading generals tended to be controversial figures and political targets, who needed to justify their actions to as wide an audience as possible. A *praetexta* could be commissioned as part of the lengthy preparations for the games, which often featured artists and performers from abroad.⁸¹

(v) *Ludi for the dedication of a temple*

A further occasion for which a play could be commissioned was the *ludi* held at the dedication of a temple. These games were celebrated on a grand scale and several days of theatrical performances are attested.⁸² During the Middle and Late Republic temples were almost always erected by successful generals and paid for from their war booty. The temples would also be decorated with art objects taken from captured cities, as well as paintings illustrating the victory.⁸³ These paintings often appeared before at the triumph or were specially executed for the new temple.⁸⁴ The motivation for the building of a new temple was the vow taken by the general before his victory. The choice of deity, therefore, reflected his own aims and tastes, or those of the cities he had conquered.

The dedication of the temple took place some, if not many, years after the victory itself and any accompanying triumph.⁸⁵ It is easy to see how a special play could have been used to remind people when and why the original vow, now being fulfilled, had been made. While ostensibly illustrating the favour of the particular god towards the Roman people, such a drama would also celebrate the exploits of the general and patron, who was the special intermediary with the gods. In this context religious themes could be combined conveniently with a celebration of *imperium* and military glory.

A vow taken by a general, either before a battle or during a siege, is the element shared by the *ludi magni votivi* and the *ludi* for the dedication of a temple. A great

⁷⁸ Livy 36.36.1–2 and 35.1.8 for Nasica and 39.22.8–10 for Lucius Scipio.

⁷⁹ Livy 39.22.8–10 for Lucius Scipio and Livy 40.44.8–12 for Fulvius Flaccus.

⁸⁰ Livy 40.44.8–12 records the vows of Q. Fulvius Flaccus in 179 B.C. for votive games and a temple of Fortuna Equestris. He was subject to an overall spending limit and a new law against coerced contributions.

⁸¹ E.g. L. Anicius' games in 167 B.C., held on an especially large stage (Polybius 30.22).

⁸² Livy 36.36.5–7: temple of Juventas in 191 B.C.; 36.36.4–5: Magna Mater (Ludi Megalenses); 40.52.1–3: Juno Regina and Diana (3 and 2 days); 42.10.5: Fortuna Equestris (4 days). See Taylor, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 298 for further references.

⁸³ J. M. Dentzer, 'Les témoignages sur l'histoire de la peinture italique dans la tradition littéraire latine et le problème de la peinture murale en Italie', *MEFR* 79 (1967), 7–27 collects the references.

⁸⁴ The evidence for triumphal paintings can be found in G. Zinserling, 'Studien zu den Historiendarstellungen der römischen Republik', *WZJena* (1959/60), 403–48.

⁸⁵ The time taken to build could vary greatly e.g. from 16 years (M. Livius Salinator, Livy 36.36.6–7) to 6 years (Q. Fulvius Flaccus, Livy 42.10.5).

victory might be celebrated by both types of games at an interval of some years.⁸⁶ This same vow was perhaps also at the heart of the *fabula praetexta*. The vow explains the plot of the play and suggests its tone and purpose. Eulogy appeared didactic and could be presented as an act of piety. Emphasis would surely be placed on the *quid pro quo* exchange of correct relations with the gods. 'Foundation' and 'continuity' themes could also be important as a new cult was being integrated with the established religion sanctioned by the state.

3. THE CONTEXTS OF CONTEMPORARY *PRAETEXTAE*

The information outlined above about the possible context for a *fabula praetexta* now needs to be integrated with the plays on contemporary subjects: in chronological order, Naevius' *Clastidium*, Ennius' *Ambracia*, and Pacuvius' *Paullus*. Balbus' *praetexta*, which was performed at special games in Spain, has already been discussed. Are special games also the most likely context for the other three plays?

(i) *Naevius'* *Clastidium*

Naevius' *Clastidium* was written to celebrate the victory of M. Claudius Marcellus over the Insubres (222 B.C.) and his winning of the *spolia opima* by killing their king Viridumarus, after he had made a vow to Jupiter Feretrius at the start of the battle.⁸⁷ This was the third and last time the *spolia opima* were dedicated during the Republic.⁸⁸

For reasons which were never fully explained, earlier scholars favoured Marcellus' funeral in 208 B.C. as the time when the *praetexta* was performed.⁸⁹ However, the confused tradition about the circumstances surrounding the death of Marcellus and the return of his body to Rome creates serious problems.⁹⁰ Livy was in doubt as to how to write up this episode, and notes that there were three traditions in Coelius, one of which originated with the eulogy given by Marcellus' son at the funeral. Marcellus had been caught and killed in an ambush by Hannibal, who then used the consul's signet ring to try to trap the Romans by issuing his own orders for troop movements (Livy 27.28.5). Livy asserts that it was Hannibal who buried the body. Plutarch was familiar with two traditions, both of which had Hannibal cremate the body and attempt to return the ashes to Rome. In one the ashes were scattered by the Numidians; according to the other they were returned safely to the family and buried with all due ceremony.

⁸⁶ A significant victory which resulted in *ludi magni* or a new temple could help the victor become censor. The building or dedication of a temple was often connected with a censorship, either held by the same general or an ally. E.g. Livy 42.10.5: Fulvius Flaccus dedicated his temple to Fortuna Equestris as censor.

⁸⁷ Polybius 2.34–5; Livy, *Per.* 20.; Propertius 4.10; Frontinus, *Strat.* 4.5.4; Plutarch, *Marc.* 6–8. A. Degraasi, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 550: 'M. Claudius M. f. M. n. Marcellus cos. de Galleis Insubribus et Germ[an(eis)] k. Mart. an. DXX[XI] isque spolia opima rettu[lit] duce hostium Viridumaro ad Clastid[ium] interfecto'. Plutarch, *Marc.* 8 describes the triumph.

⁸⁸ Octavian did not allow Licinius Crassus to dedicate the *spolia opima* in 29 B.C. on the grounds that his victory had not been won under his own auspices (Livy 4.18–20 and 32; Dio 51.24). Caesar may have dedicated them around 44 B.C., according to Dio 44.4.

⁸⁹ E.g. Leo, op. cit. (n. 50), p. 89; Marmorale, op. cit. (n. 66), p. 153; P. Grimal, *Le siècle des Scipions; Rome et l'hellénisme au temps des guerres puniques*² (Paris, 1975), p. 82 substitutes it for the *laudatio*; Zehnacker, op. cit. (n. 1), 41. Contra Gruen, *Studies*, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 94 who favours a date closer to 222 B.C., in Marcellus' lifetime.

⁹⁰ Livy 27.27–8; Plutarch, *Marc.* 29–30. For a full discussion, see M. Caltabiano, 'La morte del console Marcello nella tradizione storiografica', *CISA* 3 (1975), 65–81.

These were highly unusual circumstances in which it is unlikely that a normal funeral could have been arranged by the family. Indeed, there seems to be serious doubt as to whether the ashes were returned after Marcellus' tragic and unexpected death. Hannibal can hardly have sent the ashes back at once if he was trying to conceal Marcellus' death for intelligence purposes. On the other hand, there is a tradition that Marcellus' son, who had witnessed his father's death, did deliver a eulogy for his father, which probably served as a source for Augustus' eulogy of his nephew Marcellus in 23 B.C.⁹¹ It is possible that the family afterwards tried to conceal the fact that the ashes had not been returned. Some support for this view comes from Plutarch who quotes Augustus himself, perhaps in his eulogy, as stressing that the ashes were returned and a full funeral held.⁹² Even if a funeral was held, it would not have been a suitable context for a celebratory *praetexta*.

A more likely occasion was offered by the special games presided over by Marcellus' son in 205 B.C. at the dedication of the Temple of Honos and Virtus near the Porta Capena.⁹³ The temple had originally been vowed at Clastidium and the vow renewed by Marcellus after the capture of Syracuse.⁹⁴ The dedication seems a good time to recall the famous victory, and to try to rehabilitate Marcellus' earlier career once the memory of his death had faded.⁹⁵

(ii) *Ennius'* Ambracia

Ennius had a number of different patrons, not the least important of whom was M. Fulvius Nobilior.⁹⁶ The poet accompanied his patron on the expedition to Ambracia in 189 B.C. and wrote his *praetexta* of that name as an eyewitness to the capture and sack of the town. Even if Ennius served on Fulvius' cohort in some practical capacity during the campaign, there can be little doubt that he had been invited from the start in the hope that he would celebrate his patron's deeds. According to Skutsch, Ennius originally intended that Fulvius' Ambracian campaign with its triumph be the climax and conclusion of his *Annales*. He seems to have treated this theme at some length in book 15.⁹⁷

Upon his return Fulvius celebrated a splendid triumph in December 187 B.C.,⁹⁸ followed by special votive games for Jupiter Optimus Maximus in 186 B.C.⁹⁹ The

⁹¹ Livy 27.27; Dio 53.30.5; Servius, *A.* 1.712 and 6.861.

⁹² Plutarch, *Marc.* 30.

⁹³ Livy 29.11.13 with Platner and Ashby, *op. cit.* (n. 43), s.v. Honos et Virtus, aedes. Games for Honor and Virtus are also attested outside Rome at Puteoli (*ILS* 5317) and Terracina (*ILS* 5051), which suggests the importance of the cult and the games associated with it. See G. de Sanctis, *Storia dei Romani* iv.2.1 (Florence, 1967), pp. 302–3.

⁹⁴ Livy 27.25.7–9 and Plutarch, *Marc.* 28 record Marcellus' own attempt to hold the dedication shortly before his death.

⁹⁵ Gruen, *Studies*, *op. cit.* (n. 1), p. 94 misreads the situation when he adduces Polybius 2.34 to show that Naevius' play was a general celebration of Roman victory rather than of Marcellus' own feat. Polybius, friend of the Cornelii, had every reason not to mention Marcellus' special honours, which were not shared by his fellow consul Cn. Cornelius Scipio.

⁹⁶ For Ennius and Nobilior, see especially E. Badian, 'Ennius and his friends', in O. Skutsch (ed.) *Ennius* (Geneva, 1972), 183; M. Martina, 'Ennio "poeta cliens"', *QFC* 2 (1979), 17–74; Gruen, *Studies*, *op. cit.* (n. 1), pp. 113–16.

⁹⁷ O. Skutsch, *The Annals of Q. Ennius* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 553ff.

⁹⁸ Degraffi, *op. cit.* (n. 1), p. 554: '[M. Fulvius M. f. Ser. n. Nobilior II, pro cos., de] Aetoleis et Ceph[allenia] X k. Ian. an. DLXVII'. Cf. Nobilior's dedication of his Greek spoils at the Temple of Hercules of the Muses *CIL* 1.615 = *ILS* 16: 'M. FOLVIVS M. F. SER. N. NOBILIOR COS. AMBRACIA CEPIT'.

⁹⁹ Livy, 39.5 and 22.1–2: 'decem deinde dies magnifice apparatus ludos M. Fulvius, quos voverat Aetolico bello, fecit. multi artifices ex Graecia venerunt honoris eius causa. athletarum quoque certamen tum primo Romanis spectaculo fuit, et venatio data leonum et pantherarum, et prope huius saeculi copia ac varietate ludicrum celebratum est.'

games were marked by a lavish expenditure of money and booty, as well as by a display of performers and athletes who were brought from Greece for the occasion (Livy 39.5–6). The Ambraciots were vociferous in their complaints against their conqueror and claimed that only the door posts of the temples remained for them to worship after Nobilior had stripped them of their statues and other works of art (Livy 38.43). Questions were raised in the senate both about the triumph itself and about the special collection of gold Nobilior had raised to pay for the votive games (Livy 39.5). Nobilior's enemy, the consul of 187 B.C., M. Aemilius Lepidus and his ally the tribune M. Aburius tried to prevent the triumph from taking place and encouraged the Ambraciots to send a delegation to complain about him. A motion was even successfully passed, in a thinly attended senate, to the effect that Ambracia had not actually been taken by storm, but had capitulated, which would have prevented Nobilior from triumphing.¹⁰⁰ In the end Nobilior moved his triumph from its original date in January 186 B.C. and held it in a hurry because he realised that Lepidus was on his way back to Rome to try to stop the triumph, but had been held up by illness on the way (Livy 39.5).

Under these circumstances it is obvious why a *praetexta* would have appealed to Nobilior, as a reenactment of his glorious victory and as a demonstration of his generous treatment of the Ambraciots. It also seems clear that the splendidly staged votive games are a more likely context than a triumph held at short notice.¹⁰¹

The fierce opposition to Nobilior's triumph needs to be seen in the general context of the heightened competition between aristocrats which was a feature of this period. Rome's expanding empire in Greece and the East was flooding the city with money and the art of the Hellenistic world. The first point of impact often came in the triumph of a returning general, and it was at this very time that the triumph itself was expanding into something much more ambitious and extravagant.¹⁰² Tensions surfaced in the political classes both because of the increased competition for wealth and glory between individual commanders, and also because more traditional Romans like Cato disapproved of such display and of the assimilation of foreign art and culture.¹⁰³

Cato apparently attacked Nobilior's censorship of 179 B.C. in a speech which may have gone back over the issues of the campaign in Ambracia.¹⁰⁴ At the heart of many disputes was the question of booty and how much a general was entitled to, as well as how free a use he could make of it for the purposes of his own display. Inscriptions show that the *manubiae*, which comprised the general's share of the booty, were technically his private property.¹⁰⁵ Yet fragments of the speeches of Cato show that he chose not to take *manubiae* for himself or to distribute any among his friends

¹⁰⁰ Livy 38.44; 39.4.

¹⁰¹ Gruen, *Studies*, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 117 n. 186 dismisses the *ludi votivi* and Nobilior's funeral as contexts for the *praetexta* without offering any alternative. Yet the play must have been performed and the occasions are limited.

¹⁰² Cf. Lucius Scipio's triumph in 188 B.C. which was also disputed: Polybius 21.24.16ff; Livy 37.58.6–59.6; 38.59.3; 45.39.1, likewise those of Minucius in 190 B.C. (Livy 37.46) and Cn. Manlius Vulso in 187 B.C. (Livy 38.44–50). For a full discussion of disputed triumphs and booty, see Gruen, *Studies*, op. cit. (n. 1), pp. 129ff.

¹⁰³ Zorzetti, op. cit. (n. 1), highlights this time of crisis; p. 76: 'il sistema culturale romano manifesta una crisi di valori e di funzioni.' Cf. p. 77: 'al centro della polemica era proprio la celebrazione, momento simbolico di aggregazione e di sanzione dei vantaggi materiali e morali.'

¹⁰⁴ See Festus 282L and Cicero *De Orat.* 2.256 for word play on Nobilior/Mobilior. Cf. A. E. Astin, *Cato the Censor* (Oxford, 1978), p. 74.

¹⁰⁵ *ILLRP* 431 and *ILS* 886 with I. Shatzman, 'The Roman General's Authority over Booty', *Historia* 21 (1972), 177–205. Cf. Augustus, *Res Gestae* 21.1.

(*ORF*³ 203). He spoke against the practice of the appropriation of religious statues for use as decoration in private houses (*ORF*³ 98). Clearly he wanted new rules that restricted the general's complete control over booty. The accounts of Polybius and especially of Livy seem to reflect contemporary rhetoric on this subject. For instance, the augurs were consulted as to whether Nobilior's vow really constituted a religious obligation to spend all the gold he had collected, amounting to 100 pounds, on his special games (Livy 39.5.3–11). Ennius' *Ambracia* surely constituted a statement on behalf of poet and patron in response to the criticisms levelled at Nobilior.

After his triumph Nobilior also built and dedicated the Temple of Hercules of the Muses using spoils from the Aetolian campaign.¹⁰⁶ He brought statues of the Muses from Ambracia to be installed alongside the *aedicula* to the Camenae attributed to Numa, which had been temporarily kept in the Temple of Honos and Virtus. The introduction of the Hellenized patrons of art and literature accompanied by their protector Hercules has been connected with their presentation in the work of Ennius.¹⁰⁷ Nobilior aimed to be a patron of literature and the arts in a Hellenistic vein and even in the Hellenistic setting of a Mouseion, thus inviting comparison between himself and a Hellenistic monarch.¹⁰⁸ The dedication of the temple of Hercules of the Muses is also a possible occasion for this *praetexta*, although we do not know the date or whether Nobilior himself presided.¹⁰⁹

During his censorship Nobilior went on to build a theatre and *proscenium* which provided a convenient physical space for the theatre and games close to the temple of Apollo and along the triumphal route (Livy 40.51.3). Ennius shared in many, if not all, of his patron's projects and was surely eager to defend him from attack and ensure his position of power. We do not know when Nobilior died or anything about his funeral.

(iii) *Pacuvius' Paullus*

Pacuvius wrote a *praetexta* called *Paullus* which seems to have celebrated the victory of L. Aemilius Paullus at Pydna in 168 B.C. Like Nobilior, Paullus encountered an attempt to block his triumph over Persius engineered by Servius Galba.¹¹⁰ He was an object of envy for having brought a swift end to a war that had been dragging on. He returned to Rome by sailing up the Tiber in a royal galley with sixteen banks of oars. His triumph was notably lavish and lasted three days, including the parading of the captive Perseus with his family and court.¹¹¹ It is striking that Cn. Octavius, who celebrated a naval triumph over Perseus immediately after Paullus, had no prisoners or spoils of any kind in his procession, which must have been a stark contrast with

¹⁰⁶ Cicero, *Arch.* 27; Pliny, *Nat.* 35.66; Servius, *A.* 1.8; Eumenius, *pro rest. schol.* 7.8. Platner and Ashby, op. cit. (n. 43), s.v. Hercules Musarum; B. Tamm, 'Le temple des Muses à Rome', *OpRom* 3 (1961), 157–67; Badian, op. cit. (n. 96), 187ff.; Gruen, *Studies*, op. cit. (n. 1), pp. 114–23. For Pyrrhus and the Muses, see Livy 38.9.13–14 and Pliny *Nat.* 37.5. The shape of the building, as seen on fragments of the marble plan of Rome, has been interpreted as containing an enclosed central area perhaps especially designed for the meetings of a guild of poets.

¹⁰⁷ Badian, loc. cit. (n. 106).

¹⁰⁸ See Livy 38.42.10 for Aemilius Lepidus presenting Fulvius in a negative light.

¹⁰⁹ *ILS* 16, quoted in n. 98 above, perhaps suggests that Fulvius made dedications of statues at his temple before his censorship in 179 B.C., although it is also possible that these stood in the precinct before the building was finished. Cf. *ILLRP* 327–31 for similar inscriptions of L. Mummius. His rival Aemilius Lepidus was dedicating temples in this very part of the city in 179 B.C. while they were both censors (Livy 40.52.1–3).

¹¹⁰ Livy 45.35ff.; Plutarch, *Aem.* 31.

¹¹¹ Degraffi, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 556: 'L. Aimilius L. f. M. n. Paullus II, procos., ex Macedon(ia) et rege Perse per triduum IIII, II[II], pridie k. Decem. a. DXXX[VI]'. Cf. Livy 45.40; Plutarch, *Aem.* 32–4.

what had just gone before (Livy 45.42). Moreover, Paullus had already celebrated games of such splendour in Macedon that Antiochus IV felt compelled to give rival games at Daphne outside Antioch (Polybius 30.25–6). In addition, Paullus made a dedication at Delphi which advertised his victory.¹¹²

Particularly interesting for our purposes is the saying of Paullus recorded by Polybius and Livy, that a man who knows how to give good games and organise a lavish entertainment and banquet also knows how to marshal his troops against the enemy.¹¹³ In effect, Paullus is himself telling us about the importance of games and spectacle to his position and rank. There is no ancient evidence that he celebrated votive games in Rome, but it would be surprising if he had not, considering the magnitude of his victory.¹¹⁴ Such games would have provided a good context for Pacuvius' play.¹¹⁵

The fragments suggest that the play included mention of the famous outflanking movement performed by the young Scipio Nasica in leading his troops over a mountain pass, as well as the bravery of Cato's son who lost his sword during the battle and was determined to recover it.¹¹⁶ The implication is that tribute was paid to the young men of the commander's cohort who shared in his victory and had a special place in the triumphal procession following close behind the general himself.

We know that Terence's *Adelphoe* and *Hecyra* were performed at Paullus' funeral in 160 B.C. but there is no evidence for a *praetexta* to accompany them. Paullus was said to have died poor and to have had a relatively simple funeral, marked mainly by the good will shown to him by all (Polybius 30.22). The claim of poverty is undercut by the magnificence of the inherited wealth of his sister Aemilia. Polybius records that she was famous for the splendid clothes she wore and the equipment she had carried with her in processions at festivals and sacrifices (Polybius 30.26ff.). Scipio Aemilianus passed all this on to his own mother after Aemilia's death and was praised for his *pietas* by the ladies of Rome. At the same time he had no trouble in immediately paying the dowries of 50 talents each for the two sisters of Paullus. He helped his brother Q. Fabius Maximus to put on funeral games for their father Paullus and it is in this context that Polybius reminds us that such games could easily cost 30 talents. This family knew how to use display and spectacle in every aspect of their lives and certainly aspired to a level of extravagance and ostentatious consumption to rival any Hellenistic monarch.

4. WHY WERE PRAETEXTAE PERFORMED SO RARELY?

In considering the *praetexta* on a contemporary subject in its cultural and political context, it is logical to ask why more Roman generals did not choose to have themselves or their families celebrated in this way.¹¹⁷ We know that triumphal and

¹¹² CIL 1².622 = ILLRP 323: 'L. Aemilius L. f. inperator de rege Perse Macedonibus cepet'. Livy 45.27; Plutarch, *Aem.* 28.

¹¹³ Polybius 30.14; Livy 45.32. For Paullus' interest in Greek culture cf. Livy 45.8.8; Plutarch, *Aem.* 28.

¹¹⁴ Taylor, op. cit. (n. 1), 297: 'L. Aemilius Paullus can hardly have failed to hold games for his Macedonian victory, but we have no record of them.'

¹¹⁵ R. E. A. Palmer, 'Cults of Hercules, Apollo Caelispex and Fortuna in and around the Roman Cattle Market', *JRA* 3 (1990), 234–44, has shown how tenuous the connection is between Paullus and a temple of Hercules in the Forum Boarium, which Pliny, *Nat.* 35.19 describes as containing paintings by Pacuvius.

¹¹⁶ Ribbeck, *Tragicorum Romanorum Fragmenta*, pp. 280–81: 'Nunc te obtestor, celere sancto subveni censorio!...' and 'Qua vix caprigeno generi gradilis gressio est.'

¹¹⁷ Müller, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 286; Zorzetti, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 55; Zehnacker, op. cit. (n. 1), 45.

funeral displays only became more elaborate as time went on. Scholars have offered many possible explanations but most have ended by either despairing of the evidence, or concluding that such plays were not a success and were abandoned as crude or inferior.¹¹⁸ The patrons and performances explored above suggest rather the opposite, that they were boldly innovative and daring pieces, staged in a highly politicized atmosphere. At the same time, the opportunity to fulfil a vow by giving votive games or celebrating the dedication of a temple financed by spoils was a rare occasion. Even the most distinguished general would probably only be in such a position once or twice in his lifetime, at high points in his career.

Much ancient evidence points to the theatre as a political forum in Rome.¹¹⁹ It presented one of the few occasions when Roman citizens were assembled en masse and able to express their opinions openly, in the presence of all the various sections of society.¹²⁰ Only a few of the most important points need be summarized here, as Nicolet has written a definitive treatment of this phenomenon at the theatre. Demonstrations of a specifically political nature were frequent, especially in the Late Republic.

It was in the 190s B.C. that seating in the theatre began to be separated by rank, so that members of the élite no longer mixed with ordinary citizens, and could more easily identify the source of any demonstration.¹²¹ By the Late Republic seating had become even more segregated and opinions could easily be attributed to a particular section. Roman politicians watched the reactions of the crowd as a barometer of public sentiment.¹²² Expressions of support or disapproval might greet the arrival of key political figures.¹²³ Riots were orchestrated by rival gangs to disrupt notable shows.¹²⁴ Especially important was audience response to key lines in tragedies, which could be applied to contemporary political contexts,¹²⁵ often leading to spontaneous voicing of opinions and calls for encores of the lines involved. The organizers could

¹¹⁸ Müller, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 287; T. Hermann, 'La tragédie nationale chez les romains', *C&M* 9 (1947), 152 and Beare, op. cit. (n. 1), pp. 33–4: 'The *praetexta* was never more than a paragon for a few writers of tragedy.' Whereas, some claim, on equally scant evidence, that *praetextae* were especially popular with audiences, e.g. H. Kindermann, *Das Theaterpublikum der Antike* (Salzburg, 1979), pp. 150–52, and R. C. Beacham, *The Roman Theatre and its Audience* (Cambridge, MA, 1992), p. 24.

¹¹⁹ Dupont, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 30, calls the theatre 'le coeur véritable de la vie politique'. Cf. Nicolet, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 364ff. for discussions of this. Note especially *Sest.* 115–26. Diodorus 37.12 suggests the political nature of the theatre outside Rome, cf. N. Purcell in M. Fredericksen, *Campania* (Rome, 1984), 336. For the possibility of *praetextae* elsewhere in Italy, see E. Rawson, 'Theatrical Life in Republican Rome and Italy', *PBSR* 53 (1985) 470–72.

¹²⁰ Other similar occasions were provided by *contiones*, elections, and public trials. Cicero, *Sest.* 106: 'Etenim tribus locis significari maxime de re publica populi Romani iudicium ac voluntas potest, contione, comitiis, ludorum gladiatorumque consessu.' *Att.* 2.19.3: 'Populi sensus maxime theatro et spectaculis perspectus est.'

¹²¹ Livy 34.54.4–8 in 194 B.C.; *Sest.* 115 claims it is easy to see where a demonstration is coming from. Cf. Suetonius, *Aug.* 40 for further reforms on seating.

¹²² Cicero, *Att.* 14.3.2 asks for news of demonstrations in the theatre.

¹²³ *Sest.* 115–26; *Att.* 2.19: Caesar is upset at his lukewarm reception compared with cheers that greeted Curio, especially from the *equites*. *Phil.* 1.37: Cicero claims that he personally has never paid attention to how he was greeted or which section of the audience the reaction came from. Plutarch, *Aem.* 39, notes the demonstration during Paullus' illness and absence. *Ad Fam.* 8.2.1: Caelius writes to Cicero about Hortensius being booed for the first time in his career after a dubious acquittal he won for a client.

¹²⁴ See Cicero, *Har.* 22; *Phil.* 1.36 and 10.4.8; Appian, *B.C.* 3.24 for demonstrations on behalf of the liberators.

¹²⁵ *Sest.* 123; *Att.* 2.19.3: 'nostra miseria tu es magnus' was a line used to taunt Pompey in 59 B.C.

Summary chart

Poet	Fabula	Patron/subject	Possible occasion (and date)
Cn. Naevius	<i>Clastidium</i> (= <i>Marcellus</i> ?)	M. Claudius Marcellus cos. 220, 215, 214, 210 208, <i>RE</i> 220	1 Triumph with <i>spolia opima</i> , 222 2 Funeral?, 208 3 Temple of Honos & Virtus, 205
	<i>Romulus</i>	?	?
	<i>Lupus</i>	?	?
Q. Ennius	<i>Ambracia</i>	M. Fulvius Nobilior cos. 189, cens. 179 <i>RE</i> 91	1 Triumph, 187 2 ludi magni votivi, 186 3 Temple of Hercules Musarum 4 Funeral, after 178?
	<i>Sabinae</i>	?	?
M. Pacuvius	<i>Paullus</i>	L. Aemilius Paullus cos. 182, 168, cens. 164 <i>RE</i> 114	1 Triumph, 167 2 ludi magni votivi, ? 3 Funeral, 160
L. Accius	<i>Decius</i> (= <i>Aeneadae</i> ?)	Decii?	?
	<i>Brutus</i>	D. Junius Brutus Callaecus cos. 138 <i>RE</i> 57	1 Ludi Apollinares by 141? 2 Spanish triumph, c. 136 3 Temple of Mars
Cassius?	<i>Brutus?</i> <i>Lucretia?</i>		47–45?
L. Cornelius Balbus	<i>Iter</i>	self! q. 44, <i>RE</i> 70	Games at Gades, 43
P. Pomponius Secundus	<i>Aeneas</i>	?	?
<i>Aetiological</i>			
Anon	<i>Claudia</i>	Claudii?	Ludi Megalenses
Anon	<i>Nonae Caprotinae</i>	?	Ludi Apollinares
<i>For recitation only under the empire</i>			
Curatius Maternus	<i>Cato</i> <i>Domitius</i> <i>Nero?</i>		
[Seneca]	<i>Octavia</i>		after Nero?

Cf. Ribbeck, op. cit., p. 365 for known titles (all dates are B.C.).

choose plays which might lend themselves to topical references. Nicolet astutely places this habit in the wider context of Roman education which encouraged word play and double entendre as well as assimilation of myths as stock examples of certain situations.¹²⁶

There are sufficient examples in Cicero to demonstrate that the average Roman theatre-goer was both politically informed and ready to pick up such references. Naturally actors could also contribute in the way they might deliver a given line. Audience participation was an essential part of the theatre. If this was the case for plays on Greek mythological topics, it must have been even more true for a *praetexta* which presented political material of contemporary import. Here, surely, we can find

¹²⁶ Beare, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 33 suggests that the habit was encouraged by the fact that there were so few plays containing direct contemporary references.

a reason why contemporary *praetextae* were not staged more often, namely that they were too controversial and gave the patron direct control over audience reactions.¹²⁷ The stability of the *res publica* depended on careful state control of aristocratic competition and of the public distribution of praise and blame within a highly honorific society. This brings us back to the passage of Cicero's *De Re Publica* discussed above which can be used as direct evidence for the *praetexta* as a controversial genre.

CONCLUSIONS

Praetextae on contemporary themes were pieces written for a particular patron on a specific occasion, probably special *ludi*, whether *ludi magni votivi* or games celebrating the dedication of a temple. They were much less suited to funerals or triumphs. Their meaning and importance was inextricably connected to the spectacle itself in the context of the immediate political climate, and this helps to explain their ephemeral interest and the few fragments quoted by later authors. The contemporary *praetextae* discussed here, were apparently never as topical again, although their themes were recalled on later coins.¹²⁸ By their very nature, they might be of little long-term relevance, although this does not mean that they were intrinsically bad plays or that they were not a success on the day of performance. Indeed, their impact as political spectacle, glorifying a man on stage in his own lifetime or shortly after his death, made them a controversial genre patronized by only a handful of leading statesmen. Their purpose was precise and directly connected with explaining a vow taken by a general in battle. The vow would later be fulfilled either by votive games or by the dedication of a temple, at which a *praetexta* could recall the circumstances of the promise, the character of the general, and his relationship with the gods.

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¹²⁷ Contra Müller, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 288 who feels that crowds could always be controlled and that poets rose above any political considerations.

¹²⁸ Cf. M. H. Crawford, *Roman Republican Coinage* i (Cambridge, 1974), no. 410 = Hercules in a lionskin with a lyre labelled Hercules Musarum struck by Q. Pomponius Musa in 56 B.C. No. 415 = the victory at Pydna struck by L. Aemilius Lepidus Paullus in 62 B.C. No. 439 = a denarius of 50 B.C. with Marcellus and the *spolia opima* minted by P. Cornelius Lentulus Marcellinus.