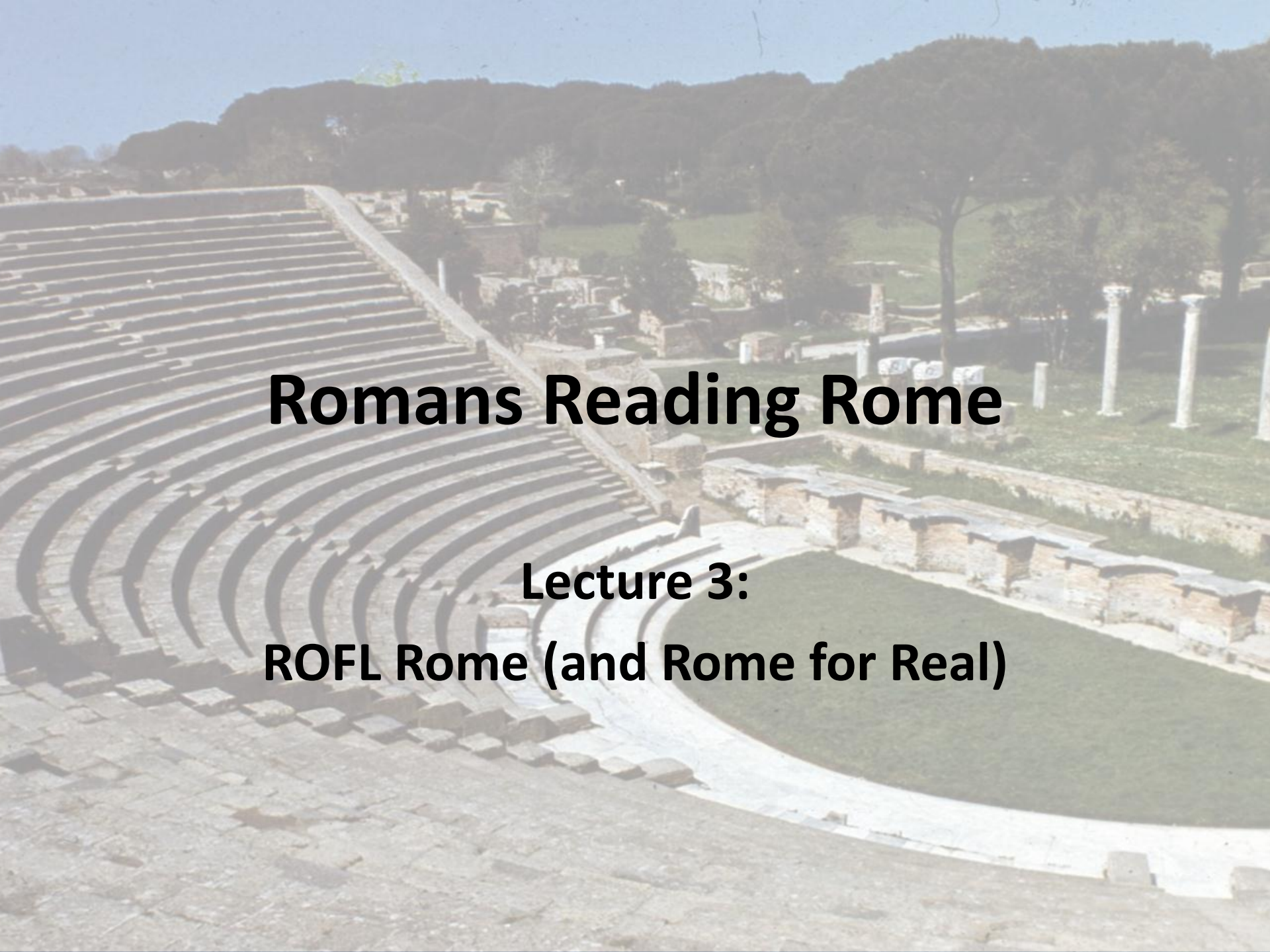




# **Romans Reading Rome**

## **Lecture 3: ROFL Rome (and Rome for Real)**



## Roman Drama – and Greek?

Mosaic from Villa di Cicerone in Pompeii, depicting a group of actors on stage playing either a scene from Menander – or one from Plautus' *Mostellaria*

# Roman Comedy

## Plautus

- C. 250-184 BC: works dating from 206 onwards
- Prolific, about 130 plays ascribe to him:  
*Amphitruo, Bacchides, Miles gloriosus, Pseudolus* (e.g.)

## Terence

- C. 184 BC (Carthage), freed in Rome, works dating 166-160 BC
- Also prolific, but only six plays remaining today:  
*The Eunuch, The Brothers, The Mother-in-Law* (e.g.)

# Roman Comedy

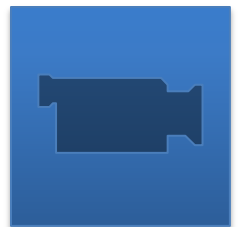
- Stock characters:
  - The clever but devious slave
  - The dense soldier
  - The young love-struck son
  - The young (orphaned) soon-to-be prostitute
  - The fooled father
  - The pretentious show-off
  - The cuckolded husband
  - The stupid slave
- Structure:
  - Prologue
  - Relies on stage set: exits to the port and the forum; three town houses
  - No choir – but music nevertheless: the *cantica*
  - In Plautus, the cantica contribute to the act structure (otherwise less clear than in Greek plays)

# Example: Plautus' Pseudolus

Stock characters:

CHARINUS: Aye, and from this you may know it. When he looks at you he'll tell, of his own accord, what it is you want with him. But what are you about to do?

PSEUDOLUS: I'll tell you. When I've dressed up my man, I intend to make him become the pretended servant of the Captain; let him take this token to the procurer, with five minæ of silver. There's the whole plot for you. As for the rest, in what way he is to do each thing, I'll instruct himself.



# Author insert: Plautus

- The clever slave in Plautus' plays is often described (or describes himself, on stage) as the director
- Characters will sometimes explicitly refuse a role that sounds to them like a comedy role
- Result: the control and independence of the writer, even within a set format, is emphasized

PSEUDOLUS:

I'll tell you. When I've dressed up my man, I intend to make him become the pretended servant of the Captain; let him take this token to the procurer, with five minæ of silver. **There's the whole plot for you.** As for the rest, in what way he is to do each thing, I'll instruct himself.

# Terence's Prologues

The poet, when first he applied his mind to writing, thought that the only duty which devolved on him was, that the Plays he should compose might please the public. But he perceives that it has fallen out entirely otherwise; for he is wasting his labor in writing Prologues, not for the purpose of relating the plot, but to answer the slanders of a malevolent old Poet.[20] Now I beseech you, give your attention to the thing which they impute as a fault. Menander composed the Andrian[21] and the Perinthian.[22] He who knows either of them well, will know them both; they are in plot not very different, and yet they have been composed in different language and style. What suited, he confesses he has transferred into the Andrian from the Perinthian, and has employed them as his own. These parties censure this proceeding ;and on this point they differ {from him}, that Plays ought not to be mixed up together.

- Unlike Plautus, he does not give information about content but about literary style:
- Terence's prologues often explicitly mentions the combination of sources to make up his plays, and implies he (and others) face criticism for this
- The prologues make clear that Menander's plays are relatively well known amongst the audience – the key thing to translate a new one
  - Terence will tone down his inventiveness; cf. Andria prologue

# Trappings

- Grotesque masks
- Grotesque costumes
- Sections with reflection on what is being put on stage:
  - Greek drama: usually in the choir passages
  - Roman drama: normally contained to the prologue (but as seen above, there are exceptions!)
  - ...is there a choir?



# Tragedy



- Poets attentive to the need for the audience to connect with the content – stories linked to Troy particularly popular
- Tragedy on Roman history written first by Naevius, then also by Ennius:  
**praetexta**
- Context: Expansion of the Roman empire

# Differences: Context!

- As in Greece, comedy and tragedy both are part of religious and state festivals
  - Triumphs, dedications of temples, funerals, state festivals: April (Magna Mater), July, September (ludi Romani), November
- Unlike Greek practice, there are no permanent theatre sites or complexes – the first wooden temporary build 68 BC
- Theatre of Pompey, 55 BC
- Roman theatres eventually also change the stage space compared to classical-period Greek stages:

# Roman theatre at Ostia



# Terence: *Hekyra*, 1<sup>st</sup> prologue

- *Hecyra* is the name of this Play; when it was represented for the first time, *an unusual disaster and calamity interrupted it, so that it could not be witnessed throughout or estimated; so much had the populace, carried away with admiration, devoted their attention to some rope-dancing.* It is now offered as though entirely a new Play; and he who wrote it did not wish to bring it forward then a second time, on purpose that he might be able again to sell it. Other Plays of his you have seen represented; I beg you now to give your attention to this. (Terence, *Hekyra*, 1<sup>st</sup> prologue)

# Standing of drama

- ...these differences an indication of a different standing of drama within the Roman context
- Competition much stronger from other types of entertainment:
  - Mime: initially silent but thoroughly rude comedy on everyday themes
  - Games
  - Races
  - Outside of the festival period: public corporeal punishment
  - On this, cf. Wiseman in this lecture's Moodle space
- ...and this has also been held to be the reason for the lack of choir sections in Plautus – **the need to keep the audience there!**

# Controlling the stage?

- These types of entertainment all put on by the same people: the *aediles*
  - Junior civil officials on the first rung of the political career ladder: the more elaborate games, the more votes
  - Cf.: *Already long ago, from when we sold our vote to no man, the People have abdicated our duties; for the People who once upon a time handed out military command, high civil office, legions — everything, now restrains itself and anxiously hopes for just two things: **bread and circuses*** (Juv. 10.77-81)

# Running games

- It has been suggested that closer ties to political patronage contributed to the lack of political satire and comment in Roman drama
- Remember: Greek New Comedy, while not political in the same way as Old, Aristophanic, Comedy, nevertheless expressed and formed contemporary society – so does Roman Comedy!

# Cicero, Letter to M. Marius 55 BC

On the whole, if you care to know, the games were most splendid, but not to your taste. I judge from my own. For, to begin with, as a special honour to the occasion, those actors had come back to the stage who, I thought, had left it for their own. Indeed, your favourite, my friend Æsop, was in such a state that no one could say a word against his retiring from the profession. On beginning to recite the oath his voice failed him at the words “If I knowingly deceive.” Why should I go on with the story? You know all about the rest of the games, which hadn’t even that amount of charm which games on a moderate scale generally have: for the spectacle was so elaborate as to leave no room for cheerful enjoyment, and I think you need feel no regret at having missed it. For what is the pleasure of a train of six hundred mules in the “Clytemnestra,” or three thousand bowls in the “Trojan Horse,” or gay-coloured armour of infantry and cavalry in some battle? These things roused the admiration of the vulgar; to you they would have brought no delight. [...] For I don’t suppose you wanted to see Greek or Oscan plays, especially as you can see Oscan farces in your senate-house over there, while you are so far from liking Greeks, that you generally won’t even go along the Greek road to your villa. Why, again, should I suppose you to care about missing the athletes, since you disdained the gladiators? in which even Pompey himself confesses that he lost his trouble and his pains. There remain the two wild-beast hunts, lasting five days, magnificent—nobody denies it—and yet, what pleasure can it be to a man of refinement, when either a weak man is torn by an extremely powerful animal, or a splendid animal is transfixed by a hunting spear? [...] The last day was that of the elephants, on which there was a great deal of astonishment on the part of the vulgar crowd, but no pleasure whatever.

# Cicero's letters

- Wealth of information about daily, political, and literary life: considerable parts of our knowledge of how literary texts circulated in the Republic comes from Cicero
- 864 letters: Real letters, not edited to be a collection
  - Letter writing conventions; the letter as a literary form both for fun and for business; handbooks on letter writing
  - Cf. Pliny the younger

# Petrarch

To Marcus Tullius Cicero [1] Your letters I sought for long and diligently; and finally, where I least expected it, I found them. At once I read them, over and over, with the utmost eagerness. And as I read I seemed to hear your bodily voice, O Marcus Tullius, saying many things, uttering many lamentations, ranging through many phases of thought and feeling. I long had known how excellent a guide you have proved for others; at last I was to learn what sort of guidance you gave yourself. [2] Now it is your turn to be the listener. Hearken, wherever you are, to the words of advice, or rather of sorrow and regret, that fall, not unaccompanied by tears, from the lips of one of your successors, who loves you faithfully and cherishes your name. O spirit ever restless and perturbed! in old age---I am but using your own words---self-involved in calamities and ruin! what good could you think would come from your incessant wrangling, from all this wasteful strife and enmity? Where were the peace and quiet that befitted your years, your profession, your station in life? What will-o'-the-wisp tempted you away, with a delusive hope of glory; involved you, in your declining years, in the wars of younger men; and, after exposing you to every form of misfortune, hurled you down to a death that it was unseemly for a philosopher to die? Alas! the wise counsel that you gave your brother, and the salutary advice of your great masters, you forgot. You were like a traveller in the night, whose torch lights up for others the path where he himself has miserably fallen. [3] Of Dionysius<sup>1</sup> I forbear to speak; of your brother and nephew, too; of Dolabella<sup>2</sup> even, if you like. At one moment you praise them all to the skies; at the next fall upon them with sudden maledictions. This, however, could perhaps be pardoned. I will pass by Julius Caesar,<sup>3</sup> too, whose well-approved clemency was a harbour of refuge for the very men who were warring against him. Great Pompey,<sup>4</sup> likewise, I refrain from mentioning. His affection for you was such that you could do with him what you would. But what insanity led you to hurl yourself upon Antony<sup>5</sup>? Love of the republic, you would probably say. But the republic had fallen before this into irretrievable ruin, as you had yourself admitted. Still, it is possible that a lofty sense of duty, and love of liberty, constrained you to do as you did, hopeless though the effort was. That we can easily believe of so great a man. But why, then, were you so friendly with Augustus<sup>6</sup>? What answer can you give to Brutus<sup>7</sup>? If you accept Octavius, said he, we must conclude that you are not so anxious to be rid of all tyrants as to find a tyrant who will be well-disposed toward yourself. Now, unhappy man, you were to take the last false step, the last and most deplorable. You began to speak ill of the very friend whom you had so lauded, although he was not doing any ill to you, but merely refusing to prevent others who were. I grieve, dear friend at such fickleness. These shortcomings fill me with pity and shame. Like Brutus, I feel no confidence in the arts in which you are so proficient. What, pray, does it profit a man to teach others, and to be prating always about virtue, in high-sounding words, if he fails to give heed to his own instructions? Ah! how much better it would have been, how much more fitting for a philosopher, to have grown old peacefully in the country, meditating, as you yourself have somewhere said, upon the life that endures for ever, and not upon this poor fragment of life; to have known no fasces, yearned for no triumphs, found no Catilines to fill the soul with ambitious longings!---All this, however, is vain. Farewell, forever, my Cicero. [4] Written in the land of the living; on the right bank of the Adige, in Verona, a city of Transpadane Italy; on the 16th of June, and in the year of that God whom you never knew the 1345th.

# To take away from this lecture

- Differences between Greek and Roman theatre partly tied to Roman life
  - Entertainment and competition influencing even the form of theatre
- Similarities of the two presuppose close cultural ties
- Popularity of Republican playwrights steady well into Augustan times
- Cicero's letters