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LUDIC LESSONS: ROMAN COMEDY ON STAGE AND IN CLASS*

Abstract: This afterword offers reflections on the pedagogical value of using performance in the classroom by situating the 2012 NEH Summer Institute on Roman Comedy within the wider development of Performance/Theatre Studies as a university discipline. It also examines the methodology underpinning various approaches to performance and suggests further ways of implementing the ideas proposed in the preceding articles.

The pedagogical and research aims that underpin the 2012 NEH Summer Institute on Roman Comedy are part of a broader academic trend towards analyzing dramatic works in terms of performance, not just literary genre. This “performative turn” began in the early twentieth century with Herrmann, a German literary historian and theatre theorist who argued that the ephemeral act of staging a play was the most crucial element of any play’s meaning. Herrmann differentiated between drama, which he defined as “the literary creation of one author,” and theatre, which for him resembled a game involving both actors and spectators; each group participated in equal if different ways in developing the play’s various and ever-shifting connotations.¹

Under Herrmann’s rubric, the study of “drama” implied traditional, author-centered literary criticism, founded on assumptions about the intent of individual playwrights and the primacy of the written word. By contrast, the interconnected disciplines of theatre and performance studies treated plays as physical and temporal events, and emphasized the audience’s role in producing the overall aesthetic experience that constitutes a “play.” A similar division between theatre as text and as event emerged in U.S. universities during the 1910s and 20s,² eventually generating Theatre and/or Performance Studies departments that offer both practical training in

* Thanks to Laurel Fulkerson for her patience and diligence in reading my drafts, and the Australian National University for providing me with the visitor’s status I needed in order to complete this paper.

¹ Herrmann’s observations are cited by Fischer-Lichte (2014) 12–18, whose chapter on “The History of the Discipline” provides a valuable introduction to Performance Studies.

² Fischer-Lichte (2014) 14–15.

dramatic production and theoretical study.³ Courses in Drama that approach plays primarily as texts tend to be offered as a subset of English or Comparative Literature.

The 2012 NEH Summer Institute is best understood against this historical background; by conducting empirical research into the performance of Roman *palliatae*, the scholars involved in this project have made a methodological statement about the value of staging dramatic literature, for pedagogy and for research. To engage in performance for the purpose of academic analysis is to believe that besides comprising a script, theatre also comprises costumes, props, actors, sound, light, stage space, and audience. Moreover, using performance as a pedagogical tool has two major advantages: it offers a means of bridging the divide between teaching and research, and it helps students develop their own research projects by encouraging them to engage with Roman comedy at personal as well as theoretical levels.

As the various contributions to this volume demonstrate, the visual and experiential dimensions of Roman comedy as theatre are crucial to appreciating the ancient texts. Plautus and Terence wrote for the stage, and their surviving play scripts are merely skeletal remains of what were once fully realized theatrical events. As Taplin observes, “great playwrights have been practical men of the theatre... they have supervised the rehearsal, directed the movement of their works, overseen their music, choreography, and design, and have often acted themselves.”⁴ Plautus is believed to have worked as an actor of mime or Atellan farce, and was probably involved in the technical side of dramatic production too.⁵ Distinctive features of Plautine comedy are so closely bound to theatrical performance that they achieve their full effect only when presented on stage: slapstick humor, improvisation, musical and rhythmic variation in the speech of individual characters. Plautus’ verbal virtuosity gains the further quality of aural silliness when performed. Lines such as *Pseud.* 134, *quorum numquam quicquam*

³ On the conflicting demands of theory and practice in Performance/Theatre Studies departments, see Roach (1999) 5–8.

⁴ Taplin (1978) 1.

⁵ The name Titus Maccius Plautus suggests affiliations with Atellan farce, because the clown, *Maccus*, was a stock character in that genre. Gratwick (1973) examines the various connotations of Plautus’ name. For an overview of how native Italic theatrical practices may have influenced Plautus’ work, see Petrides (2014). Manuwald (2011) 226 cites Aulus Gellius *NA* 3.3.14 (*in operis artificum scaenicorum*) as evidence that Plautus worked in the theatre in a technical or organizational capacity, besides writing plays.

quoiquam venit in mentem ut recte faciant (in Smith's masterful translation: "you never do no good nohow"), were written to be spoken aloud.⁶

While Plautus' and Terence's extant play scripts are profitably read and analyzed as texts,⁷ dialogue is just one aspect of theatre. The plays' survival in the form of scripts — more properly, transcripts — has created an artificial division between theatre's literary qualities and its physical ones.⁸ Thinking in terms of performance reunites the abstract and concrete elements of drama, and illuminates how they interact with, complement, sometimes even contradict, one another. The papers in this volume show that the act of staging a script can give rise to new interpretive questions or bring into sharper focus issues that seemed less apparent, or important, on the page.⁹ Performance both affords scholars new insights into dramatic texts and introduces students to dramaturgy by allowing them, literally, to play with it. Simple activities such as discussing possible staging options show students how enactment can alter the tone of a scene. From here it is a short step to interrogating how men and women, masters and subordinates, interact and define their roles. Performance permits social dynamics to be presented and evaluated with nuance and deepens students' engagement with Roman values and societal norms by encouraging them to recognize their own historically conditioned perspectives.

For example, in Plautus, *Bacchides* 109–69 dramaturgy can have an artistic as well as practical purpose. In this scene, the *adulescens* Pistocleros is on his way to the house of the Bacchis sisters, attired in his best party outfit and accompanied by servants carrying myriad edible delicacies. In tow walks his erstwhile *paedagogus*, Lydus, who plays the *agelast* by criticizing the young man's pursuit of pleasure and lamenting his lack of discipline.¹⁰ The exchange between these two characters maps neatly onto Segal's theories of Saturnalian inversion: the young man uses his wit to outsmart the older

⁶ Wright (1974) 36 detects in Roman comedy "a concentration on language as an object of interest in itself." Translation by Smith (1991).

⁷ E.g. Sharrock (2009) concentrates on the specifically literary aspects of Roman comedy rather than its performance.

⁸ On play scripts as "transcripts," see Taplin (2003) 1–2. In regard to Plautus, Marshall (2006) 245–79 takes the idea one step further and suggests that extant Plautine play texts are *post eventum* records of largely improvisational performances.

⁹ Cf. Goldhill (2007) 1–5 on staging Greek tragedy.

¹⁰ The *agelast* is typically an ill-humoured individual who disdains or tries to prevent others' joviality. In his "Essay on Comedy," first published in 1877, Meredith defines the *agelast* as a core element of comic plots. For analysis of the *agelast* in Plautine comedy, see Segal (1987) 71–98; for discussion of the character Lydus, 71–4.

man; the student presumes to know more than the teacher; festive indulgence triumphs over grim restraint.¹¹ Pistoclus even puns on his tutor's name — *non omnis aetas, Lyde, ludo convenit* (“not every age is suited to school, Lydus” 129) — by which he draws attention to the competing claims of “school” (*ludus*), “childish play” (*ludus*), and “public festivities” (*ludi*).¹² The conditions of temporary freedom created by the *ludi* allow Pistoclus to invert the tutor-pupil relationship.

Plautus' dramaturgy contributes to the scene. Twice during the exchange, Pistoclus commands Lydus to shut up and follow him (*tace et sequere, Lyde, me*, 137; *sequere hac me et tace*, 169) and Lydus himself grumbles at the outset that he has been walking behind Pistoclus for long enough (*iam dudum, Pistoclere, tacitus te sequor*, 109). Beyond moving two characters across the stage, these stage directions acquire further significance in the particular context of *paedagogus* and ex-pupil, because the *paedagogus* traditionally led the pupil to school by walking ahead of his charge.¹³ By having Lydus follow Pistoclus across stage instead, Plautus uses physical movement to reflect the hierarchical inversion of these two characters.

Not all stage activity is this transparent, however. In Terence's *Eunuchus* 225–91, the parasite Gnatho arrives, vaunts, and taunts Phaedria's slave Parmeno before entering Thais' house to deliver a gift. That “gift” is the young girl Pamphila, who is present on stage throughout the entire exchange. Although she never speaks, Pamphila is far from invisible, since both Parmeno and Gnatho call attention to her. At first sight, Parmeno declares that the girl's beauty surpasses Thais' (229–31); later, Gnatho invites Parmeno to appraise the girl, and Parmeno agrees that she's “not bad” (*non malum, hercle*, 274). Performance raises questions about characterization and actors' delivery: is Parmeno's tone grudging or admiring? Gnatho's aside, *uro hominem* (“I'm burning the man” 274) implies that Parmeno is indeed jealous; Parmeno's subsequent aside, *ut falsus animist!* (“How wrong he is!” 274) announces the opposite. Which character, if any, do we believe? Here enactment does not resolve such

¹¹ Segal (1987). Other influential treatments of Roman comedy's Saturnalian aspects include Slater (1985) and Parker (1989).

¹² For the pun on Lydus' name, see Barsby (1986) *ad loc.* and Fontaine (2010) 34 and 94. I am also indebted to Ioannis Ziogas' unpublished paper (2011).

¹³ Figurines of boys with their tutors (e.g. the one discovered at Pella, or the one in the Walters Art Museum) tend to portray the tutor walking ahead while the young boy lags slightly behind.

issues, but rather highlights them, eliciting audience awareness of nuance within the text and warning against too rigid an interpretation of the scene.

But what is Pamphila doing while Parmeno and Gnatho speak, and how might her behavior affect the tenor of this exchange? As the NEH Institute scholars were well aware, *comoedia palliata* often combines comic fun with troubling social issues: Pamphila will be raped by Chaerea later in the play, and will respond to the event with distress (659–60).¹⁴ Should the actor playing Pamphila choose to draw attention to the girl's pitiable state in this earlier scene, or play it purely for laughs, by posing to show off the beauty that excites so much comment from Gantho and Parmeno? How would the effect be different if, as in the play's original context, the role of Pamphila were acted by a man, or a young boy? Such questions arise, and become more pressing, when a dramatic text is performed as opposed to being read. They are also precisely the sorts of questions that engage undergraduates by presenting the opportunity to discuss Roman gender roles and social expectations. Analyzing the permutations of a scene's performance also highlights how much social interaction is based on and communicated through physical action. According to her pose, Pamphila may be interpreted as a victim, a (potentially provocative) beauty, or an example of gender-bending.

Such topics likewise guided the NEH Summer Institute scholars in their empirical research. Their core aims were to understand how performance might affect the reception of Roman comedy's social and sexual themes, how audiences might react to these themes, and whether ancient audiences would necessarily have reacted the same way as modern ones.¹⁵ Further, as many of the papers in this volume contend, both ancient and modern audiences are composed of multiple groups, so individual spectators may respond differently to a performance depending on their status, gender or social background.¹⁶ By exploring the various ways in which members of a Roman audience may have judged a scene, students become more aware of their own social context and how it influences their opinions. By combining performance with pedagogy, both the NEH Summer Institute and the

¹⁴ On Terence's depiction of Pamphila's suffering, see James (1998) 38–46.

¹⁵ For the Institute's aims, see: <http://nehsummer2012romancomedy.web.unc.edu/the-institute-in-a-nutshell/>

¹⁶ Richlin (2013) and (2014) favor a heterogeneous Roman audience comprising not only slaves and women, but also people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Moore (1998) 19–20 remarks that characters in Plautus' plays address particular lines to particular segments of the audience, implying a varied group of spectators. By contrast, Fontaine (2010) 184–5 argues persuasively that audiences attending *palliatae* were predominantly elite.

papers in this volume of *Classical Journal* touch upon problems at the heart of Performance Studies: how to merge the practical with the theoretical, and how to derive educational value from staging — or merely thinking about staging — a play.¹⁷

Broadly speaking, there are two ways to perform ancient drama, each with differing objectives and results. One aims for nominal authenticity by reconstructing as minutely and faithfully as possible a play's original performance conditions, including the original technicalities of performance — stage space, masks, costumes, music etc. — even if their effects on a modern audience diverge wildly from how we assume they affected an ancient one. The other, which Gamel calls “inductive authenticity,” favors re-contextualizing the work for a modern audience in the hope of reproducing an analogous version of the work's original — or intended — effects by updating ancient material to engage the audience “as the original production might have done.”¹⁸ A classic example is putting contemporary political references into Aristophanes.¹⁹ Reconstructive performances appear more “academic” in adhering to ideals of “accuracy” sought through painstaking research and careful consideration of archaeological, textual and art historical evidence. To some extent, however, such authenticity is an illusion, because theatrical performance itself is an inherently unstable, unpredictable medium. Even a play staged in its original context can shift and change its meaning according to the actors' choices, to their skill and to the audience's mood (or moods!) and, in the case of Rome's outdoor theatres, to the weather. To paraphrase Heraclitus, one cannot watch the same play once. The variability of theatrical performance is an argument often cited in favor of modernizing or reinterpreting ancient dramatic texts.²⁰

Because enactment is such a multivocal and contingent event, many scholars believe that authenticity and accuracy are virtually impossible, and see intellectual value in acknowledging that all reconstructions of ancient

¹⁷ This tension between the practical and the theoretical, the physical and the analytical, lies at the heart of a lot of academic work on theatrical performance. Describing the difficulty involved in “capturing” a performance, Hardwick (2010) 193 remarks, “academic analysis does not easily map onto the practices and experiential aims of theatre;” it is just as true that the experiential aims of theatre do not always harmonize with the research or pedagogical aims of the academy.

¹⁸ Gamel (2010) 153–70. Although a viable solution to the challenges of re-staging ancient drama, “inductive authenticity” is a potentially self-contradictory concept because it makes assumptions about authorial intent and original meaning even as it seeks to expose them as intellectual mirages.

¹⁹ As in Gamel (2010) 160.

²⁰ This idea pervades many of the essays in Hall and Harrop (2010).

drama, however nominally authentic, always involve reinterpretation.²¹ As the papers in this volume make clear, students and scholars can learn just as much from modernizing or adapting ancient drama as they can from reconstructing it. In fact, modernizing ancient dramatic texts and performances prompts students to consider how plays affect audiences and how context affects meaning. Whereas reconstruction tends to divide the past from the present, reinterpretation/adaptation aims to unite the two (or, at least, to show that they cannot really be divided). Although each approach is necessarily selective, both are immensely valuable for academic research and for pedagogy.

Looking Back on the Volume: Summary and Conclusions

Translating ancient drama is a standard classroom activity that tackles issues of “authenticity” and reinterpretation. Moodie’s paper explores the competing claims of original text versus contemporary audience: should we aim for a linguistically faithful version of the scene between Ballio and his slaves in *Pseud.* 133–229 or a version that generates similar effects? And how do we know what effects it would originally have generated? Although Morrison overstates the problem when he declares literalism a “lifeless corpse,”²² it is nonetheless true that translating ancient comedy for performance poses a special challenge, because these plays derive their impact from a very specific linguistic and cultural context.²³ Keeping too close to the original risks losing the joke; straying too far to provoke laughs risks losing Plautus and Terence.

To negotiate this difficulty, Moodie recommends having students produce two translations: one literal, one adapted. Students learn from this activity that there is no one-to-one correspondence between languages, and that translation is far more than just a linguistic enterprise. Helpful in this regard is the burgeoning discipline of Translation Studies, in particular, the General Theory of Verbal Humor developed by Attardo and Raskin, which isolates and analyzes core elements of jokes, thereby proposing ways of rendering them into another language: if not literally, then at least in a culturally equivalent form.²⁴ Although the approach has been applied,

²¹ See Hall and Harrop (2010), especially the last two sections: “Translating Cultures” and “Practitioners and Theory.”

²² Morrison (2010) 253.

²³ Aristophanes’ “profusion of Athenian topical allusions” is a good example; see Gamel (2010)160.

²⁴ Attardo and Raskin first proposed the theory in their co-authored essay (1991); see also Raskin 1985.

briefly, to Roman satire, scholars working on Roman comedy have yet to exploit its academic value.²⁵

Tackling issues of translation in the classroom can also highlight the development of *comoedia palliata* as a distinct genre in ancient Rome. As Moodie points out, Plautus and Terence themselves employed a lot of creative license when modifying and reshaping Greek New Comedy for a Roman audience. A fruitful way to begin discussion on this topic is to have students compare Plautus *Bacchides* 494–561 with the corresponding fragment of Menander’s *Dis Exapaton* (*P.Oxy.* 64.4407), and to ask them whether and how Plautus’ text diverges from this earlier version.²⁶ From here, students can be invited to analyze the sliding scale of difference between “translation” and “adaptation,” and to consider how the purpose of any given translation will inevitably affect its form.

Compared to translating ancient texts, handling the physical and aural aspects of Roman comedy is further from most classicists’ areas of expertise. The mask is a case in point. Essential to almost all forms of ancient drama apart from the mime, masks are so unfamiliar to contemporary theatre audiences that we are inclined to forget them when reading ancient plays.²⁷ Yet, as Meineck’s recent work on tragic masks demonstrates, masked performance deeply affects actors’ movement and spectators’ responses to that movement.²⁸ Lippman’s contribution to this volume emphasizes the importance of masks in the physical presentation and acting styles of *comoedia palliata*. By dividing the body into three physical “centers” Lippman creates a neat schema whereby students can construct a stage character from a series of individual gestures. An additional activity could take the form of having students think about which kinds of movements are used to communicate specific emotions: does someone in a hurry take big steps or small ones? Do bowed shoulders indicate old age, or sadness, or fear? Besides creating opportunities to discuss characterization and the role of stock characters in Roman comedy, movement-based exercises can quell students’ anxiety about performing in front of their peers because they distill the process of acting into small, manageable actions.

²⁵ Vincent (2011) examines how the General Theory of Verbal Humor could affect translations of Juvenal.

²⁶ Fontaine (2014) 519–26 is a useful resource for this activity.

²⁷ Scholars now generally agree that masks were used in Roman comedy: see Wiles (1991) 132–33 and Petrides (2014) 433–40. As noted by Duckworth (1952) 92: “one would naturally assume that the Romans, in adapting the Greek plays and preserving the settings and costumes of the originals, would likewise have taken over the convention of masks.”

²⁸ Meineck (2011).

Accurate reconstruction of the Roman comic mask is virtually impossible due to lack of evidence,²⁹ but ultimately all masks, including from other traditions such as *commedia dell'arte* or Japanese Noh, have a similar general effect upon the wearer's movement. Lippman argues that even a basic, paper mask can do the trick. If experimenting with masks is not feasible, as in a large lecture class, students can still imagine what a masked drama looks like, perhaps with the aid of the Institute's videos, to grasp more fully its potential visual effects.

Music in Roman comedy may also feel foreign to contemporary theatre-going audiences. It often surprises students to learn that Roman comic actors sang their parts at least as frequently as they spoke them. Once the musical component of these plays is acknowledged, *comoedia palliata* resembles less the modern sit-com (to which it is frequently compared) than comic opera, Broadway musicals and the tradition of *commedia dell'arte*.³⁰ Music affects both the tone and pace of scenes in performance and brings out both metrical and aural complexity in Plautus' and Terence's language. It also punctuates the physical action on stage and, as Moore has shown, specific motifs can introduce individual characters, rather like a theme tune.³¹

Recreating the music of Roman comedy, however, involves even more uncertainty than the reconstruction of *palliata* masks. Any musical performance of these plays must rely heavily on adaptation and innovation, as Moore and Gellar-Goad demonstrate in their contribution to this volume. The videos created by the NEH Summer Institute, along with Moore and Gellar-Goad's suggestions, provide starting points for classicists intrigued but daunted by this pedagogical move.³² In addition to illuminating stagecraft, thinking in terms of musical notation may help students comprehend Latin meter, with its reliance on syllable length as opposed to stress. In fact, incorporating music — or just recitation of the Latin text — into the study of *palliata* emphasizes the value of speaking metrical passages aloud and thereby appreciating their fundamentally acoustic properties.

A simple and effective method of prompting students to think about performance is to present them with the text of a scene and ask them to insert stage directions according to verbal clues within the text itself. This

²⁹ Recent work on this topic includes McCart (2007) 262–4 and Manuwald (2011) 79–80; see also Lippman in this volume.

³⁰ On music in *commedia dell'arte*, see Heck (2015) 255–67.

³¹ Moore (2012) *passim*.

³² See also Moore (2012) and Deufert (2014).

activity both alerts students to the absence of original, paratextual stage directions in Greco-Roman drama and requires students to pay close attention a scene's language, noting where characters use plural verbs or imperatives, or describe one another's movements. As Klein observes, it is also particularly useful for detecting the presence of mute characters, who pass literally unheeded when a play is only read. Though relatively inconspicuous in the text, the conduct of mute figures can radically alter a scene's tone, as demonstrated by the multiple NEH Institute versions of Ballio's *canticum* (*Pseud.* 133–234), by the example discussed above (*Eu.* 225–91), and more broadly in Klein's piece.

As Klein points out, in performance the visual presence of silent characters can contradict or undercut a scene's verbal elements. Yet their relative invisibility on the page prompts questions about how they move and what they do on stage. Some answers may be deduced by investigating ancient comic acting styles, which, during the time of Plautus and Terence appear to have been more physical and fast-paced than their tragic counterparts, both because the *soccus* allowed for greater and speedier movement than the *cothurnus*, and because the characters themselves often describe their own rapid actions as they are performing them: it would be very incongruous if the actor delivering Acanthio's speech at *Mercator* 111–19 were to walk at a leisurely pace instead of running frantically.³³ Csapo suggests, in addition, that comic actors performed in a quasi "realistic" style, replicating the gestures and movements of everyday life.³⁴ This kind of information is invaluable because it provides clues as to how mute characters would have conducted themselves on the ancient stage, allowing us to interpret their movement even without the aid of dialogue.

Besides examining mute characters' movement, Klein uses them to investigate the power dynamics that prevailed in 3rd- and 2nd-century BCE Roman society. Silent characters are perfect material for such a project, since they belong overwhelmingly to menial or marginalized social groups. By

³³ Quintilian *I.O.* 11.3.112 remarks that youths, old men, soldiers, and matrons move more solemnly on the stage, while slaves, handmaids, parasites, and fishermen move more rapidly (*itaque in fabulis iuvenum senum militum matronarum gravior ingressus est, servi ancillulae parasi piscatores citatius moventur*). The description at *Mercator* 111–19 is obviously a self-conscious parody of Acanthio's role as the *servus currens*. As regards footwear, the *cothurnus* had developed into such a high boot (virtually a platform shoe) by the imperial period that it must have severely impeded actors' movements.

³⁴ Csapo (2010) 117–39. Marshall (2006) 92–3, drawing on Quintilian *I.O.* 11.3.178–80, similarly argues for individual styles of performance, that actors would have tailored to suit both their own skills and their preferred comic roles.

situating them within their broader historical context, students can compare their stage roles to their actual roles in everyday Roman life. Not only does this activity encourage students to think more critically about Roman status and social practice, it also deepens their awareness of their own social *mores* and the way they employ those *mores* to make judgements about Plautus and Terence's plays.

The last three papers in this volume also address Roman comedy's social dimension. Bungard investigates the various ways in which master-slave relationships may be played out on the Plautine stage; Safran argues for the use of "breakout scenes" to facilitate students' engagement with the troubling or unfamiliar aspects of *palliata* plots; Sultan reflects on how to stage Roman comedy in a recreated ludic context, and what kinds of reactions this enterprise elicited from the students involved, either as audience members or as actors. All three demonstrate how performance can inspire students to engage with Roman comedy actively and personally.

Since performing a role entails stepping inside a character's life to evaluate his or her motivations, enactment is a powerful way of prompting students to empathize with and thereby enhance their understanding of the *dramatis personae* that populate the Plautine and Terentian stage.³⁵ Bungard's contribution to this volume uses Ballio's *canticum* at *Pseud.* 133–234 as a model for exploring power relations between masters and slaves in Roman comic drama and in Roman society. The performance he describes accentuates Ballio's violent tendencies and reinforces his dominance by having his slaves react in fear, yet the scene can be rendered differently. When students experiment with lighter or darker versions they appreciate that every directorial choice offers an opinion on what a scene means. In turn, this activity may introduce students to the most enduring academic debate about Plautine comedy: whether it supports or subverts prevailing Roman social hierarchies.³⁶ A funnier rendition of Ballio's *canticum*, for instance, may seem more in line with the "Saturnalian" model, in which the slaves acquire sufficient autonomy to mock the pimp.

Other Institute versions of Ballio's *canticum* were less serious than Bungard's: one group performed the scene in hip-hop, another with an all-female cast. Classicists reluctant to stray too far from the text, even in the

³⁵ Cf. Quintilian *I.O.* 6.2.31 describing the need for Roman orators to create emotional appeals by imagining themselves in their victim's place. Yet psychological realism is not the only way to approach characterization, and Lippman's paper in this volume demonstrates how a stage *persona* can emerge from a collection of physical actions.

³⁶ E.g. Segal (1987) represents the subversive model, McCarthy (2000) a more conservative one.

name of experimenting with power relationships or Roman social practices, may balk at the inauthenticity of such versions, yet creative forms of re-enactment can be effective teaching tools, especially because they allow students to explore the central issues of Roman comedy via analogy. While hardly faithful to the extant play script, a hip-hop rendition of the *Pseudolus* nonetheless enables students to probe topics such as marginalization, rebellion, and subculture. At the same time, it demonstrates the musical, verbal, and metrical richness of Plautine drama. Thus performance remains “good to think with” even when not infallibly accurate.

Performance further grants students more control over the reception of the text/theatrical play, permitting them to express their reactions to the material and to formulate their own arguments and research topics. In this regard, the “breakout scenes” described by Safran in her article become a particularly productive class activity. The technique allows actors to step out of character and reflect on their roles, behaving momentarily, as an audience for their own performance; it is the dramatic equivalent of reading a text with a commentary, only more fluid and multivocal. Safran recommends it for helping students confront and express their concerns about Roman comedy’s ethically disturbing aspects: violence, rape, exploitation. While “breakout” techniques do not aim at re-enactment of original performance conditions, they can be used to elucidate the specific socio-historical context of Roman comedy, for the students themselves and for audience members. The process of creating a “breakout scene” conveys significant pedagogical benefits by compelling students to think carefully about the text’s reception, what they believe are the most pressing issues in any given scene, and what they feel the audience needs to know. In addition to Safran’s suggestions, students could be asked to follow up their “breakout” activity by defending their dramaturgical choices in writing, or using their recent performance as an initial step towards developing an essay topic.

The final paper in this volume revisits ideas of authenticity and accuracy in Sultan’s attempt to recreate the *ludi Megalenses* at Illinois Wesleyan University, complete with a reading of Plautus’ *Pseudolus*. While Klein, Bungard and Safran variously use performance to explore the social context of *comoedia palliata*, Sultan examines the crucial elements of spatial and ritual context as well. Goldberg demonstrates the importance of such issues at Rome, arguing that the relatively cramped space in front of Cybele’s temple on the Palatine would have affected not only the size of the audience attending the initial performance of Plautus’ *Pseudolus*, but also the mood

and style of this theatrical event.³⁷ Restaging an entire festival can test these and similar hypotheses; as Marshall remarks, productions are experiments that allow us “to corroborate and modify conclusions that would otherwise have remained theoretical.”³⁸ Full reconstruction of the *ludi Megalenses* is, however, a Herculean task that requires students to negotiate between the oft-competing concerns of accuracy and accessibility, scholarly opinion and personal belief, objective and subjective forms of knowledge. Scholars are increasingly coming to recognize re-enactment as a means of forming personal connections with the past, and acquiring a corporeal or emotional knowledge that cannot be gleaned from the more distanced and regulated act of reading.³⁹ Preparing and participating in the *ludi Megalenses* requires students not only to contemplate scholarly issues such as historical accuracy, but also to step into the role of Romans at a 2nd-century B.C.E. festival. This dual perspective grants students fresh, personal insight into ancient practices while keeping them aware of the academic challenges of studying Roman comedy.

The contributors to this volume of *Classical Journal* argue strongly for employing performance as a pedagogical tool in classes about *comoedia palliata*. Although often marginal to current classroom practice, dramatic re-enactment can enhance students’ understanding of Plautus’ and Terence’s plays in deep and vital ways, from recreating and thereby exploring the technical aspects of theatre to situating play scripts in their social, historical or ritual contexts. Certainly, classroom performances require effort, but significant advantages may be derived even from the simplest activities, such as getting students onto their feet or having them read aloud. Moreover, the role-play that performance involves has long been a staple element of education, which the Romans themselves pursued to remarkably similar ends when they trained young boys in the art of public speaking by having them impersonate and rehearse the authoritative roles they would assume later in life.⁴⁰ Central to Roman rhetorical training were issues of identity, hierarchy, violence and social interaction — much the same topics as those

³⁷ Goldberg (1998).

³⁸ Marshall (2006) xi.

³⁹ See, for instance, Schneider (2011).

⁴⁰ On rhetorical training as a performance of upper-class masculinity in Rome, see Richlin (1997), Bloomer (1997), and the broader study by Gleason (1995). Although most of the evidence for these declamatory exercises comes from the late Republican and early Imperial periods, Romans in Plautus’ day likely were pursuing, or at least developing, similar educational practices.

addressed by Klein, Bungard, and Safran.⁴¹ Since the Romans themselves used performance to articulate and negotiate power dynamics, it makes sense for those teaching or studying the social roles of Roman comedy occasionally to adopt equivalent techniques.

Both modernized and authentic performances lay equal claim to pedagogical value even though they employ divergent methods that often originate from conflicting scholarly attitudes. Theatrical productions that remain faithful to the script can generate insights into the original performance conditions of Plautus' and Terence's plays; productions that engage in creative reinterpretation, on the other hand, tend to highlight the socio-historical factors governing any audience's response to Roman comedy, whoever that audience may be. Theatre is such a multifaceted medium that it warrants multiple approaches. And if those approaches succeed in raising the profile of Roman comedy, both in the classroom and in scholarly research, then so much the better.

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⁴¹ Bloomer (1997) investigates social issues in Roman declamations.