

THEATRE AND SOCIETY IN GREECE AND ROME

While dissertating upon the definition of *poietike*, Aristotle affirms¹:

“Since living persons are the objects of representation (...). From childhood men have an instinct for representation, and in this respect man differs from the other animals that he is far more imitative and learns his first lessons by representing things”².

Since tragedy, comedy, and the dithyramb are among the arts that utilize imitation (*Poetics*, 1447a13–16), one could conclude that the remotest origin of theatre would have been the capacity to imitate. And because a capacity specific to the human race is being treated, the Aristotelian theory allows us to suppose that forms of representation could have arisen in any society and at various moments of its evolution.

On the other hand, what characterizes the theatre, among the arts that are based on mimesis, is exactly the fact that the imitator imitates human actions. In dramaturgic and representational terms, the theatre only exists, of course, in a social relationship, at least between one who imitates and the one whose action is imitated.

This, in a nutshell, should serve as a justification of my intention to look at the relation between theatre and society in the classical civilizations.

This relation is implicit in the most current theories of the origin of theatre and of the origin of specific forms of dramatic expression: the sociological theory, the connection to the cult of the dead and the Dionysian theory.

For its sociologic origin I am once again rescued by Aristotle, when he remarks upon the Doric claim to the origin of tragedy, whose practitioners, the *komodoi*, derived their name from the Doric Greek *koma*, “village”, and not from the Attic Greek *komazein*, “to participate in festive procession”:

“Their name, they say, for suburb villages is *komai* – the Athenians call them ‘Demes’ – and comedians are so called not from *komázein*, ‘to revel’, but because they were turned out of the towns and went strolling round the villages (*komai*). Their word for action, they add, is *drān*, whereas the Athenian word is *práttein*. So much then for the differences, their number, and heir nature”³.

¹ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1448 b 5–9. I would like to thank Dr. Martin Earl for the translation of this article.

² *Poetics*, 1448 a1 and 1448 b 5–9. All the translations from ancient sources to english come from Loeb Classical Library.

³ Aristotle, *Poetics* 1448 a 28–38.

In this theory, the theatre would have a strong connection to the antinomy, city/country, and would have included as part of its function the extirpation of social conflicts through the use of dramatic forms. The utilization of *déguisement*, or disguise, and especially the mask, would have derived from the necessity to – under the cover of anonymity – protect the *komodoi* (those daring inhabitants of the village who mocked the other citizens) from the anger of the victims of their curses and insults.

This conjunction of themes often occurs in comedy. In fact, the city/country opposition is quite visible in *The Clouds* of Aristophanes in the unhappy marriage of the rustic and shy goatherd, Estrepsiades, and the voluptuous city-dweller and niece of Megacles, son of Megacles, who only thought about perfumes, sex and tall cavalrymen. But it is also encountered in Menander's *Dyskolos*, where the equally rustic and misanthropic Chnemon declines the responsibility of authorizing the marriage of his daughter to Sostratos, city dweller, and the son of a city-dweller. Even in Terence's *The Mother-in-Law* the figures of Laches and Sostratos reflect this opposition.

The connection to the cult of the dead is confirmed from the outset by the use of the mask; it was a common artifact in various forms of folk theatre and in the cult of the dead, especially if we consider the innumerable Mycenaean death masks, the most well known of which is designated as the mask of Agamemnon.

This connection with festivals, or *ludi*, including dramatic games, and with funerals, and even further back than contemporaneous Greece, as in the history of the hero Adrastus⁴, or in the theme of the *katabasis* to the beyond exemplified in the descent in *The Frogs* by Aristophanes, is as well a characteristic present in italic civilizations.

In the same way, Etruscan frescos such as those of the Tomb of Triclinium at Tarquinia, with its figure of Phersu, raise the possibility that the games could have played a part in the funerals of important aristocrats, as occurred with that other celebrated spectacle, the *munera*, or games of the gladiators.

In the case of Rome, the political and social importance of the funerals of patricians is well known, as well as the fact that they contained dramatic facets such as the use of comedy and tragedy⁵.

One example of the representation of comedy in funerals is *The Brothers and Hecyra*, or *The Mother-in-Law*, by Terence, whose first two performances, without success, occurred during the funeral games in honor of L. Aemilius Paulus in 160 B.C.

In the Republican epoch, tragedy was presented to the Romans as a dramatic genre, but capable of contributing, in such an important moment, as a means toward the exaltation of the family tradition or *mos maiorum*. In fact, in treating a

⁴ Herodotus, 5.67.

⁵ See C. Nicolet, *Le métier de citoyen à Rome*, Paris, 1976.

conjunction of Roman themes, in the form of the *fabula praetexta* or *praetextata*, that is, in which the actors dress in the Roman toga with purple embroidery, such a tragedy might easily take up a theme directly related to the history of the family of the deceased.

In this way the theater performed the function of encomiastic literature, comparable to private historiography and funeral speeches, or *laudationes*. Their importance in the aristocratic Republic is, as such, as understandable as their disappearance with the end of the Republic and the advent of the Empire, when dictators, candidates to tyranny and emperors reserved for themselves the right to the public ostentation of being well-known, and to personal and family glory. It is not by chance that the last and unique example preserved, the pseudo-Senecan tragedy, *Octavia*, tells us the story of the aristocratic claim to liberty before the tyranny of Nero.

Regarding Dionysian theory, we find therein a real plurality of clues that create a connection between theatre and society.

The first one is the connection between theatre and religion: in classical societies, to speak of religion was to speak principally of official religion, as a political and social act. This is what is understood immediately about the organization of the great Attic festivals in honor of Dionysus, which in this way came to see barbarity, savagery and destructiveness contextualized and circumscribed because it was framed politically in acceptable parameters or in moments of rupture with reality, wherein the freedom to speak found an escape valve.

Elucidating evidence of this connection between Dionysus and the freedom of opinion is affirmed in the *parabasis* of Aristophanes' *The Clouds*, 518–519, by the *choragus* or leader of the chorus:

“O Spectators, I will utter honest truths with accents free,
Yea! By mighty Dionysus, him who bred and nurtured me”.

We might also refer to the personal attack, or *onomasti komodein*, typical of ancient Greek comedy, in connection with this freedom of opinion. I would even say that, however much a product of the polis, the freedom to speak, or *parrhesia*, was a prerogative of *isonomia*, that is, of equality between citizens.

In ancient comedy, Aristophanes and his predecessors, especially Cratinus, utilized this characteristic to attack powerful politicians, including the archons from Pericles to Cleon, scorning the danger of being persecuted, or being brought to trial. It is true that the Athenians did not tolerate attacks on people, but they did encourage the caricature of individuals⁶.

Nevertheless, the habit of criticism and satire could only ignore the institutions themselves with difficulty. Because of this, the Aristophanic comedy is full of criticism of the Athenians, which is frequently combined with eulogies, on the pretext of *captatio benevolentiae*.

⁶ See V. Ehrenberg, *The people of Aristophanes*, Oxford, 1951, p. 25–26.

A specific case of this is the comedy *Knights*, by Aristophanes, in which the central figure of Demos symbolizes the state, and political institutions in general. This is what is understood of the evolution of agonic structure; the political struggle crosses from a domestic *agon* to an *agon* in the *boule* or 'Council', and to another one in the *ekklesia* or "General Assembly", embodying the whole population as a source of power. But, after presenting Demos as an old idiot and glutton, like *Makko* in popular comedy, decadent and senile, Aristophanes ends up provoking a volte-face that finally transfigures him into the *eirón* of popular theatre, the hero who hides his real personality in order, in this case, to more easily catch and punish the evil politicians. Consequently, at the end of the piece, Demos appears in all his resplendence, rehabilitated and rejuvenated.

In the case of stronger and more explicit criticism, above all in periods of war and crisis, the writer of comedies felt the necessity to justify himself and take precautions against the eventual accusations of a lack of patriotism or even of treason, which would subject him to being summoned to court, and to punishment.

Let us look at the case of the Aristophanic hero Dikaeopolis, who, before a very bellicose Athenian audience, suggests defending the cause of treaties with the Spartans⁷:

"And I shall utter startling things but true.
Nor now can Cleon slander me because,
With strangers present, I defame the State.
Tis the Lenaea, and we're all alone;
No strangers yet have come; nor from the states
Have yet arrived the tribute and allies.
We're quite alone clean-winnowed; for I count
Our alien residents the civic bran.
The Lacedemonians I detest entirely;

.....

But after all – for none but friends are here –
Why the Laconians do we blame for this?
For men of ours, I do not say the State,
But worthless fellows of a worthless stamp,
Ill coined, ill minted, spurious little chaps,
Kept on denouncing Megara's little coats".

This freedom to express one's point of view at public festivals and even to attack important personalities did not take the same form in Rome, for two reasons: firstly, because the laws of the XII Tables condemned to death whoever dared to

⁷ Aristophanes, *Acharnians*, 501–517.

hurl insults on the doorstep of someone else⁸; and secondly, because of the example of Naevius, one of the first Roman dramaturges, whose virulence toward the powerful Metellus family won him a term in prison. For later dramaturges, this precedent would constitute a strong dissuasion against personal invective. Accordingly, to give just one example, *The Mother-in-law* by Terence limits its conjunction of themes to subjects of a particular nature, to the parody of the love triangle between Pamphilus, Philumena and Bachis.

But the evidence of Aristotle cited right at the beginning introduces two other questions into the discussion, that of pleasure, and of instruction. With these, we intend to determine whether theatre in general, and not only comedy, has the goal of merely amusing, or if it has didactic intentions as well.

Before advocating for the purposes of my argument, the opinions of modern criticism, I should say that the inclusion of the dramatic *agon* in vaster, more extensive festivals, where questions of religion, civics and leisure cohabitate, permits us to deduce that all of these manifestations had multiple objectives. I would include the notion of transforming the festival into an occasion of leisure, allowing for a break from work, and, consequently, rest, all the more necessary as classical societies did not know anything of the Judeo-Christian and Semitic tradition of a weekly stoppage, not to mention the modern *week-end*, with its two days of rest and relaxation each week.

And, if it is certain that the tragedy was recognizably close "to epic poetry", and, therefore, heir to the pedagogic tradition in Greek poetry, it can as well be proven that Greek comedy, and specifically Aristophanic comedy, claim for the high status of didacticism.

The recurrence of the term *didaskein* or 'to teach', in Aristophanes, coupled with the affirmation that the comic poet could as well be useful and give council to the city and defend the cause of justice, is sufficient proof that the comedy, beyond the entertainment value, could intervene civically and play a social function. I cite just three passages from Aristophanes⁹:

"For what is true even comedy can tell.

.....

Well it suits the holy Chorus evermore with counsel wise
To exhort and teach the city; this we therefore now advise.

.....

For boys a teacher at school is found, but we, the poets, are teachers of men".

For this reason, Aristophanes attempted to evolve, out of the rustic comedy, an urban comedy which was erudite and elevated, classified by the Greek term

⁸ See J. E. G. Zetzel, *Cicero: On the commonwealth*, Cambridge Univ. Press, ad 4.12: "Our own Twelve Tables, by contrast, although they established capital punishment for very few offenses, included among them this: if anyone should sing offensively or should compose a poem which brought disgrace or offense to someone else".

⁹ Aristophanes, *Acharnians*, 500; *Frogs*, 686–687 and 1054–1055.

sophron (cf. *Clouds*, v.537), the same term that is found as an etymon in the concept of *sophrosyne*, the highest political virtue.

Another clear indication is that the technical language of the theatrical *milieu* shares certain terms with pedagogic language: the director of the performance is the *chorodidaskalos* or “choirmaster”, just as the schoolmaster is called *grammatodidaskalos*.

Against those who only see in the comedy an intention to entertain, modern scholars have emphasized this didactic purpose. Such is the case with Havelock when he affirms that the Greek theatre developed as a supplement to, and successor of the epic, assuming, in the Attic world, the pedagogic functions exercised by Homer in the Greek world in general¹⁰.

In turn, for R. Hunter, both classical tragedy and Aristophanic comedy are products of the polis and continually reflect on the life of the polis¹¹.

And, in the Greek world itself, in Aristophanes, in *Frogs*, 1500–1503, the final decision on the attribution of the prize for tragedy to Aeschylus was not based on formal or aesthetic criteria, but on the usefulness of the poet and on his capacity to advise the city.

On the other hand, Plato refused to give dramatic literature a place in his ideal city for educational and philosophical reasons, and not for aesthetic ones.

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Assuming that the relation between theatre and society is sufficiently demonstrated by inference, and by the evidence, I would now like to look at some specific questions, and to furnish certain illustrations.

So, regarding the organization of the festivals where theatre was shown, made official in Athens in 534 for the tragedy at the initiative of Pisistratus, and by 436 for the comedy, it should be emphasized that its civic function has been verified by various facts.

The first derives from the fact that, from the beginning, magistrates presided over the games – the eponymous archon during the Great Dionysias, and the archon-king during the Lenaia; the second because the state, to finance the event, chose a wealthy citizen to tax charging him with the role of *choregos*, upon whom laid the most part of the expense; the third is due to attributing to the festival a civic function especially in the Dionysia, where official ceremonies were designed to build and cement the spirit of the polis. These would include official libations at the beginning of the festival; the exhibition in the orchestra of city tributes paid by

¹⁰ E. A. Havelock, *The Literate Revolution in Greece and its Cultural Consequences*, Princeton Univ. Press, 1982, p. 267 sqq.; to the importance of recreation, see A. W. Gomme, *Aristophanes and politics*, in: *Aristophanes und die alte Komoedie*, hrsg. H.-N. Newiger, Darmstadt, 1975, p. 75–98; R. G. Ussher, *The staging of the Ecclesiazae*, in *Aristophanes und die alte Komoedie*, hrsg. H.-N. Newiger, Darmstadt, 1975, p. 394; K. J. Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy*, London, 1972, p. 159.

¹¹ R. Hunter, *The New Comedy of Greece and Rome*, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985, p. 137.

allies; the promulgation of the names of benefactors of the polis, with the offering of a crown before the representation of the tragedies; and, finally, the presentation of the war orphans who were educated by the state¹².

What stands out in this picture is that, in Greece, the performance served to illustrate and reinforce the official ideology of the polis, and the preeminence of collective interest, taking, nevertheless, the care to create a system that avoided its politicization by the magistrates. The person responsible for the games was not chosen via a process of election or in the course of public life since the *archon* had been chosen by lottery since 488/487, and constituted the highest magistrate, and the *choregos* was more interested in fulfilling his obligation by spending the least amount of money possible.

The same did not occur in Rome, where the magistrates responsible for the games, called *editor (es)*, frequently the *aediles*, took part in the *cursus honorum*, or were in the midst of a highly competitive and carefully staged political career, always facing new elections, which lead them to find a way to take electoral advantage of the games and to go beyond the budget initially guaranteed by the state, which was viewed as being compelled to limit expenditures in order to not leave less wealthy magistrates at a political disadvantage¹³.

For its part, the existence of a bifurcation in the organization of the Roman games – into plebeian magistrates and aristocratic magistrates – shows how the games had a political and social side, namely because, in Republican Rome, such a reality corresponded to the equilibrium of powers that bound together the so called patrician-plebeian state.

In Rome as well, because the Greek term *agon* or “festival, competition”, was used side by side with the Latin term *ludus*, “game, entertainment”, we can conclude that the recreational purpose and the goal to promote leisure was of a great and accepted importance.

As to theatrical spaces properly said, as much as in Athens as in other Greek cities, the identification between theatre and agora has, from remote times, been verified, since the same space was used for both theatrical performances and political meetings.

When Cleisthenes strips the agora of its function as a civic center, the construction of definitive theatres came to portend their occupation for meetings of the people, with their consequent utilization for political purposes, all of which is verified by inscriptions and statues and even, in the theatre of Pirene, by a clepsydra used to time the length of the orator's speeches¹⁴.

¹² S. Goldhill, *The Great Dionysia and civic ideology*, JHS, 107, 1987, 68.

¹³ See *lex Fannia sumptuaria*, of the year 161 B.C.; the *leges Tulliae de ambitu*, of 63 B.C., forbade a public show for two years before someone was candidate.

¹⁴ See F. Kolb: *Polis und Theater*, in: *Das Griechische Drama*, hrsg. G. A. Seeck, Darmstadt, 1979, pp. 504–545; *Agora und Theater, Volks- und Versammlung*, Berlin, 1981; and *Theaterpublikum, Volksversammlung und Gesellschaft in der griechischen Welt*, “Dionisio” 59, 1989, 345–351.

What must have occurred in these theatres was that the spectators were seated selectively, with the first row being reserved for the priests and important dignitaries, and each of the tribes being assigned to one of the *kerkides*. In this way, the tendency was toward an aristocraticization of the seats closest to the orchestra, and toward an arrangement that, in this case, reproduced political-administrative divisions, mainly in Athens.

Theatre being a civic act, it became necessary to guarantee that all of the citizens, having the right to be present, would have the possibility of exercising that right. As such, free admission to the show, or payment in the form of *theorikon*, or state-paid admissions in the case of poor citizens, assured this possibility.

In addition, the civic character of the state festivals called for the creation of theatrical spaces of great capacity. That a theatre be able to hold 14 000 spectators, or even more, becomes even more significant in light of the fact that Plato's ideal city would not have exceeded 5 040 citizens¹⁵. That is, a theatrical space should technically accommodate the whole civic population, with one obvious side effect: in Athens, a play was performed once and only once, with all of the implications that this led to.

In Rome this connection between theatrical and political space took on a character of its own. Firstly, there was a rejection of definitive theatres, that is, ones of stone, when, by the year 155 BC, Scipio Nasica, probably under the inspiration of the Elder Cato, opposed the creation of a permanent theatre for moral reasons, which was another way of signifying that it was for political reasons. The side effect of this was that the Roman magnates invested in the decoration of the *scaena*, and, after consecrating it publicly, removed the luxurious appointments, which had been exhibited there, for their private use (as we will see at the end of this exposition).

The first stone theatre would only be erected in Rome in 55 B.C., under the initiative of Pompey, who, in this manner, wanted to rob Julius Caesar of his popularity. In order to construct this structure, Pompey had to employ real artifice: the *cavea* or auditorium of the theatre functioned simultaneously as a monumental stairway to the entrance of the Temple of Venus Victirx, and held 40 000 spectators.

But, on a scale of grandeur, the Theatre of Pompey was overtaken by the temporary theatre of Marcus Aemilius Scaurus, who was the curul aedilis in the year 58 B.C.. This was an edifice that was intended to serve for just one month (Pliny, *Nat.36.5*), adorned with 3 000 statues (*Nat.34.36*), 360 marble columns (*Nat.36.5*), and elegantly varied in the decoration of its three-story *scaena* (*Nat.36.114–115*):

“As aedile he constructed the greatest of all the works ever made by man, a work that surpassed not merely those erected for a limited period but even those intended to last for ever. This was his theatre, which had a stage arranged in three storeys with 360 columns; and this, if you please, in a

¹⁵ Plato, *The Laws*, 737–738.

community that had not tolerated the presence of six columns of Hymettus marble without reviling a leading citizen. The lowest storey of the stage was of marble, and the middle one of glass (an extravagance unparalleled even in later times), while the top storey was made of gilded planks. The columns of the lowest storey were, as I have stated, each 38 feet high. The bronze statues in the spaces between the columns numbered 3 000, as I mentioned earlier. As for the auditorium, it accommodated 80 000; and yet that of Pompey's theatre amply meets all requirements with seats for 40 000 even though the city is so many times larger and the population so much more numerous than it was at that time. The rest of the equipment, with dresses of cloth of gold, scene paintings and other properties was on so lavish a scale that when the surplus knick-knacks that could be put to ordinary use were taken to Scaurus' villa at Tusculum and the villa itself set on fire and burnt down by the indignant servants, the loss was estimated at 30 000 000 sesterces".

Both of these theatres were, in their turn, outdone by an even more extravagant construction, the suspended twin theatres of C. Scribonius Curio, the follower of Caesar who, by the year 52 B.C., had constructed out of wood two twin, pensive theatres that rotated (Pliny, Nat.36.117–120).

As I have written recently, the seating of spectators in the Roman theatre, "following the *lex Roscia theatralis* of 67 B.C., and afterwards completed by the *lex Papia Poppaea* of 9 A.D., was selective: senators were seated in the orchestra; *equites* or knights in the first fourteen rows; women and the unqualified in the *summa cavea*, which was sometimes in the form of a portico. This selective seating arrangement was a clear sign of politicization, as far as it distinguished, or segregated, different strata of the population along hierarchical lines. In doing so, it permitted that whatever demonstration by one of these groups might occur it be clearly identifiable, giving a voice to social strata that would not have been able to speak collectively in other circumstances"¹⁶.

I am, in arriving at these conclusions, implicitly disagreeing with opinions as well known as those of P. Veyne, for whom the spectacles contributed to the total de-politicization of the Romans¹⁷, and advocating the line Balsdon and Edmondson have taken; for them, the games permitted the expression of public opinion once the popular assemblies had been annulled: "after the decline of Roman political institutions, they represented almost the last remaining opportunity for political debate between the plebs and the prince"¹⁸.

¹⁶ F. Oliveira, *Actividades de lazer em Roma*, in: *O espírito olímpico no novo milénio*, Coimbra, 2000, p. 118.

¹⁷ P. Veyne, *Le pain et le cirque. Sociologie historique d'un pluralisme politique*, Paris, 1976; and R. Auguet, *Cruauté et civilisation: les jeux romains*, Paris, 1970.

¹⁸ J. Edmondson, *Dynamic Aeneas: Gladiatorial presentation in the city of Rome and the construction of Roman society*, in: *Roman Theater and Society*, éd. W. J. Slater, Univ. of Michigan Press, 1996, p. 72; cf. J. P. V. D. Balsdon, *Life and Leisure in Ancient Rome*, Toronto, 1969, p. 265; E. Tengström, *Theater und Politik im Kaiserlichen Rom.*, in: "Eranos" 1977, 47–48.

From this point of view, it is only once we are beyond the republican period that we can speak about the politicization of the theatre, which, from the beginning, gave voice to such strata of the population as women and slaves, who did not have a seat in the citizen's assemblies; in this manner, the performance and the theatre were sociologically more representative than the political assemblies.

During the imperial period, it would also be germane to consider, in addition, the histrionic character of power, in so far as the proximity of power was revealed ostentatiously, even, as in the case of Nero, directly and actively participating in the *ludi*; or in the placement of the statue of the emperor in the center of the *frons scaenae*, adorned with all the symbology of imperialism, as was the case with the statue of Augustus in the theatre of Orange; and, finally, in the presence of the whole imperial court in their reserved seats.

It should also be stated that, in the case of Imperial Rome, that a civilization of leisure and spectacle was considered to be a superior form of life and, for this reason, as a powerful vehicle for romanization; hence, this constellation of theatrical and sport spaces throughout the entire Empire. And it is not without significance that the myths themselves of the founding of Rome transformed the games into an element of attraction and enlargement of influence and territory, as was the case of the celebrated *Rape of the Sabine Women*.

I recall the evidence of Martial, from the imperial period, *Spectacles*, 3. 1–2, about the fascination exercised by the games that had been offered by the Emperor Domitian:

“What race is so remote, so barbarous, Caesar, that no spectator from it is in your city?”

Statius relates, as well, how the same emperor transformed the traditional distribution of sweets, already attested to in Aristophanes, into a festive banquet in the middle of the *cavea*, creating, in effect, an authentic political staging of the myth of the age of gold¹⁹:

“Thou dost nourish alike the circle of the noble and austere and the folk that wear the toga, and since, O generous lord, thou dost feed so many multitudes, haughty Annona knoweth nought of this festival. Come now, Antiquity, compare with ours the age of primeval Jove and the times of gold: less bounteously then did the vintage flow, not thus did the harvest anticipate the tardy year. One table serves every class alike, children, women, people, knights, and senators: freedom has loosed the bonds of awe. Nay even thyself – what god could have such leisure, or vouchsafe as much? – thou didst come and share our banquet. And now everyone, be he rich or poor, boasts himself the Emperor's guest”.

¹⁹ Statius, *Silvae*, 1.6.35–50.

Here we see this culture of leisure merging with that of town planning; this is visible in Rome in whose reconstitution the great edifices designed for social use stand out.

In various cities of the Empire, from Pompeii to provincial towns like Merida, Arles, Pergamum or El Jem, the theatre, the circus, or an even vaster architectonic complex of buildings, dictated urban organization of space and exercised a strong psychological and propagandistic influence, and still today are noticeable in the urban web.

This fact has much to do with the relation of theatre and the games with foreign policy, already evident in Athens, where the diversity of audiences in attendance at the Lenaea, the winter festival directed exclusively at the citizens of the *polis*, differed from that of the Great Dionysia, the spring festival open to the citizens of other cities, and led the writers of comedy to treat questions of domestic policy and of an intellectual and metatheatrical nature in the Lenaea, and questions of a pan-Hellenic nature in the Dionysia. In this way, the Great Dionysia contributed to the spotlighting of Athenian foreign policy, either by silencing internal dissention, or by aligning themselves with the climate of patriotic exaltation before allies and foreigners.

In Rome, this relation is inherent, and from its origins, can be attested to by two facts: by the year 364 B.C., in order to reestablish peace with the gods, the Romans for lack of other solutions, sent for Etruscan mummers to fight against a terrible plague. In this way, the theatre becomes a vehicle of cultural exchange and foreign relations.

But clearly still, in the year 240 B.C., to commemorate victory in the 1st Punic War and to honor the official guest, Hieron, tyrant of Syracuse, and important ally against the Carthaginians, Rome mounted a theatrical piece. This novelty was assigned to the intellectual, Livius Andronicus, a Greek who, by the age of twelve, had been brought as a slave from Tarentum to Rome, and who later, already a freedman of the *gens* Livia, became the president of the artist's association, or *scribae*.

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Many other questions could be raised with respect to the present subject, but the lack of time does not permit us to discuss, for example, the theatre as a vehicle of the Hellenization of Roman culture; the chronological *décalage* between the models of imitation and the contemporary social reality; the efficacy of demonstrations and protests in the theatre; the signification of the exoticism of the ambiance of the *palliata*; the reason behind the choice of originals, and of figures such as mercenary and cook so contrary to Roman reality. But the choice of Greek originals did not prevent the presence of Roman elements, which are visible in pieces like Terences' *The Mother-in-law*, with its clear Romanization of themes

such as the figure of the *noverca*, or the mother-in-law, the dowry, the *sine manu* marriage, the family *pietas*, the goddess *Salus*, and the authority of the *paterfamilias*.

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In conclusion: the various theories about the origins of theatre, read in a way that would manifest solidarity with Aristotle's *Poetics*, would agree in affirming that the theatre established an intense dialogue with society, in Greece as much as in Rome.

Without being able exactly to speak of committed theatre, we would however say that, beyond the religious, political, and entertainment aspects, the theatre tried to promote a didactic intention to create an ideology for the polis in Greece, and a civic, social and propagandistic, intention in Rome.

With the politicization of the theatre in Republican Rome by the presiding powers, the theatre, and the theatrical space, constituted the point of contact with the government giving voice to different social classes kept away from the republican assemblies, and, after the silencing of the republican constitution, permitted the demonstration of public opinion during the imperial regime.

In line with Greek practices, the Romans, from 240 B.C. until Nero, promoted the importance of the theatre as an instrument of foreign policy.

On the other hand, and this also has much to do with foreign relations, the theatre appears, in the Roman context, to be a catalyst to luxury, an agency in the development of urban architecture and a cultural index promoting romanization.

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