

myths of the tragedians. They only very exceptionally treated historic themes, though one great national calamity,¹ and a yet greater national victory,² and in later times a few other historical subjects,³ were brought upon the stage. Such veiled historical allusions as critical ingenuity has sought not only in passages but in the entire themes of other Attic tragedies⁴ cannot, of course, even if accepted as such, stamp the plays in which they occur as historic dramas. No doubt Attic tragedy, though after a different and more decorous fashion, shared the tendency of her comic sister to introduce allusions to contemporary events and persons; and the indulgence of this tendency was facilitated by the revision (*διασκευή*) to which the works of the great poets were subjected by them, or by those who produced their works after them.⁵ So far as we know, the subjects of the tragedies before Æschylus were derived from the epos; and it was a famous saying of this poet that his dramas were "but dry scraps from the great banquets of Homer"—an expression which may be understood as including the poems which belong to the so-called Homeric cycles. Sophocles, Euripides, and their successors likewise resorted to the Trojan, and also to the Heracleian and the Thesean myths, and to Attic legend in general, as well as to Theban, to which already Æschylus had had recourse, and to the side or subsidiary myths connected with these several groups. These substantially remained to the last the themes of Greek tragedy, the Trojan myths always retaining so prominent a place that Lucian could jest on the universality of their dominion. Purely invented subjects were occasionally treated by the later tragedians; of this innovation Agathon was the originator.⁶

Thespis is said to have introduced the use of a *prologue* and a *rhesis* (speech)—the former being probably the opening speech recited by this solitary actor, the latter the dialogue between actor and chorus. It was a natural result of the introduction of the second actor that a second *rhesis* should likewise be added; and this tripartite division would be the earliest form of the *trilogy*,—three sections of the same myth forming the beginning, middle, and end of a single drama, marked off from one another by the choral songs. From this Æschylus proceeded to the treatment of these several portions of a myth in three separate plays, connected together by their subject and by being performed in sequence on a single occasion. This is the *Æschylean trilogy*, of which we have only one extant example, the *Orestea*,—as to which critics may differ whether Æschylus adhered in it to his principle that the strength should lie in the middle—in other words, that the interest should centre in the second play. In any case, the symmetry of the trilogy was destroyed by the practice of performing after it a satyr-drama, probably, as a rule, if not always, connected in subject with the trilogy, which thus became a *tetralogy*, though this term, unlike the other, seems to be a purely technical expression invented by the learned.⁷

¹ Phrynichus, *Capture of Miletus*.

² Id., *Phœnisæ*; Æschylus, *Perseus* (*Perseus-trilogy*).

³ Mœchion, *Themistocles*; Theodectes, *Mausolus*; Lycophron, *Marathonii*; *Cassandri*; *Sœtis*; Philiscus, *Themistocles*.

⁴ Æschylus, *Septem v. Thebas*; *Prometheus Vinculus*; *Danaid-trilogy*; Sophocles, *Antigone*; *Oedipus Coloneus*; Euripides, *Medea*.

⁵ Quite distinct from this revision was the practice against which the law of Lycurgus was directed, of "cobbling and heeling" the dramas of the great masters by alterations of a kind familiar enough to the students of Shakespeare as improved by Colley Cibber. The later tragedians also appear to have occasionally transposed long speeches or episodes from one tragedy into another—a device largely followed by the Roman dramatists, and called *contamination* by Latin writers.

⁶ *Anthos* (*The Flower*).
⁷ One satyr-drama only is preserved to us, the *Cyclops* of Euripides, a dramatic version of the Homeric tale of the visit of Odysseus to Polyphemus. Lycophron, one of the poets of the Pleias, by using the satyr-drama (in his *Menedemus*) as a vehicle of personal ridicule, applied it to a purpose like that of Old Attic comedy.

Sophocles, a more conscious and probably a more self-critical artist than Æschylus, may be assumed from the first to have elaborated his tragedies with greater care; and to this, as well as to his innovation of the third actor, which materially added to the fulness of the action, we may attribute his introduction of the custom of contending for the prize with single plays. It does not follow that he never produced connected trilogies, though we have no example of such by him or any later author; on the other hand, there is no proof that either he or any of his successors ever departed from the Æschylean rule of producing three tragedies, followed by a satyr-drama, on the same day. This remained the third and last stage in the history of the construction of Attic tragedy. The tendency of its action towards complication was a natural progress, and is approved by Aristotle. This complication, in which Euripides excelled, led to his use of prologues, in which one of the characters opens the play by an exposition of the circumstances under which its action begins. This practice, though ridiculed by Aristophanes, was too convenient not to be adopted by the successors of Euripides, and Menander transferred it to comedy. As the dialogue increased in importance, so the dramatic significance of the chorus diminished. While in Æschylus it mostly, and in Sophocles occasionally, takes part in the action, its songs could not but more and more approach the character of lyrical *intermezzos*; and this they openly assumed when Agathon began the practice of inserting choral songs (*embolima*) which had nothing to do with the action of the play. In the general contrivance of their actions it was only natural that, as compared with Æschylus, Sophocles and Euripides should exhibit an advance in both freedom and ingenuity; but the palm due to a treatment at once piously adhering to the substance of the ancient legends and original in an effective dramatic treatment of them must be given to Sophocles. Euripides was, moreover, less skilful in untying complicated actions than in weaving them; hence his frequent resort⁸ to the expedient of the *deus ex machina*, which Sophocles employs only in his latest play.⁹

The other distinctions to be drawn between the dramatic qualities of the three great tragic masters must be mainly based upon a critical estimate of the individual genius of each. In the characters of their tragedies, Æschylus and Sophocles avoided those lapses of dignity with which from one point of view Euripides has been charged by Aristophanes and other critics, but which from another connect themselves with his humanity. If his men and women are less heroic and statuesque, they are more like men and women. Aristotle objected to the later tragedians that, compared with the great masters, they were deficient in the drawing of character—by which he meant the lofty drawing of lofty character. In diction, the transition is even more perceptible from the "helmeted phrases" of Æschylus, who had Milton's love of long words and sonorous proper names, to the play of Euripides's "smooth and diligent tongue;" but to a sustained style even he remained essentially true, and it was reserved for his successors to introduce into tragedy the "low speech"—i.e., the conversational language—of comedy. Upon the whole, however, the Euripidean diction seems to have remained the standard of later tragedy, the flowery style of speech introduced by Agathon finding no permanent favour.

Finally, Æschylus is said to have made certain reforms in tragic costume of which the object is self-evident,—to have improved the mask, and to have invented the *cothurnus* or buskin, upon which the actor was raised to

⁸ *Ion*; *Suppliants*; *Iphigenia in Tauris*; *Electra*; *Eulea*; *Hippolytus*; *Andromache*.
⁹ *Philoctetes*.

loftier stature. Euripides was not afraid of rags and tatters; but the sarcasms of Aristophanes on this head seem feeble to those who are aware that they would apply to King Lear as well as to Telephus.

The history of Greek comedy is likewise that of an essentially Attic growth, although Sicilian comedy was earlier in date than her Attic sister or descendant. The former is represented by Epicharmus (fl. 500), and by the names of one or two other poets. It probably had a chorus, and, dealing as it did in a mixture of philosophical discourse, antithetical rhetoric, and wild buffoonery, necessarily varied in style. Though in some respects it seems to have resembled the Middle rather than the Old Attic comedy, its subjects sometimes, like those of the latter, coincided with the myths of tragedy, of which they were doubtless parodies. The so-called *mimes* of Sophron (fl. 430) were dramatic scenes from Sicilian life, intended, not for the stage, but for recitation.

Attic comedy is usually divided into three periods or species, viz. :—

I. *Old Comedy*, which dates from the complete establishment of democracy by Pericles, though a comedy directed against Themistocles is mentioned. The Megarean farcical entertainments had long spread in the rural districts of Attica, and were now introduced into the city, where Cratinus and Crates (fl. 450) first moulded them into the forms of Attic art. The final victory of Pericles and the democratic party may be reckoned from the ostracism of Thucydides (444); and so eagerly was the season of freedom employed by the comic poets that already four years afterwards a law—which was, however, only a short time in force—limited their licence. Cratinus,¹ an exceedingly bold and broad satirist, apparently of conservative tendencies, was followed by Eupolis (446–after 415), every one of whose plays appears to have attacked some individual,² by Phrynichus, and others; but the representative of old comedy in its fullest development is Aristophanes (c. 444–c. 380), a comic poet of unique and unsurpassed genius. Dignified by the acquisition of a chorus (though of a less costly kind than the tragic) of masked actors, and of scenery and machinery, and by a corresponding literary elaboration and elegance of style, Old Attic comedy nevertheless remained true both to its origin and to the purposes of its introduction into the free imperial city. It borrowed much from tragedy, but it retained the phallic abandonment of the old rural festivals, the licence of word and gesture, and the audacious directness of personal invective. These characteristics are not features peculiar to Aristophanes. He was twitted by some of the older comic poets with having degenerated from the full freedom of the art by a tendency to refinement, and he took credit to himself for having superseded the time-honoured *cancan* and the stale practical joking of his predecessors by a nobler kind of mirth. But in boldness, as he likewise boasted, he had no peer; and the shafts of his wit, though dipped in wine-lees and at times feathered from very obscene fowl, flew at high game.³ He has been accused of seeking to degrade what he ought to have recognized as good;⁴ and it has been shown with complete success that he is not to be taken as an impartial or accurate authority on Athenian history. But partisan as he was, he was also a genuine patriot; and his very political sympathies—which were conservative—were such as have often stimulated the most effective political satire, because they imply an antipathy to every species of excess. Of the conservative quality of reverence he was, however, altogether devoid; and his

love for Athens was that of the most free-spoken of sons. Flexible even in his religious notions, he was in this as in other respects ready to be educated by his times; and, like a true comic poet, he could be witty at the expense even of his friends, and, it might almost be said, of himself. In wealth of fancy,⁵ and in beauty of lyric melody, he ranks high among the great poets of all times.

The distinctive feature of Old, as compared with Middle Comedy, is the *parabasis*, the speech in which the chorus, moving towards and facing the audience, addressed it in the name of the poet, often abandoning all reference to the action of the play. The loss of the *parabasis* was involved in the loss of the chorus, of which comedy was deprived in consequence of the general reduction of expenditure upon the comic drama, culminating in the law of Cinesias (396).⁶ But with the downfall of the independence of Athenian public life, the ground had been cut from under the feet of its most characteristic representative. The catastrophe of the city (405) had been preceded by the temporary overthrow of the democracy (411), and was followed by the establishment of an oligarchical "tyranny" under Spartan protection; and when liberty was restored (404), the citizens for a time addressed themselves to their new life in a soberer spirit and continued (or passed) the law prohibiting the introduction by name of any individual as one of the personages of a play. The change to which comedy had to accommodate itself was one which cannot be defined by precise dates, yet it was not the less inevitable in its progress and results. Comedy, in her struggle for existence, now chiefly devoted herself to literary and social themes—such as the criticism of tragic poets,⁷ and the literary craze of women's rights⁸—and the transition to Middle Comedy accomplished itself. Of the later plays of Aristophanes, three⁹ are without a *parabasis*, and in the last of those preserved to us¹⁰ the chorus is quite insignificant.

II. *Middle Comedy*, whose period extends over the remaining years of Athenian freedom, thus differed in substance as well as in form from its predecessor. It is represented by the names of thirty-seven writers (more than double the number of poets attributed to Old Comedy) among whom Eubulus, Antiphanes, and Alexis are stated to have been pre-eminently fertile and successful. It was a comedy of manners as well as character, although its ridicule of particular classes of men tended to the creation of standing types, such as parasites, courtesans, revellers, and—a favourite figure already drawn by Aristophanes¹¹—the self-conceited cook. In style it necessarily inclined to become more easy and conversational; while in that branch which was devoted to the parodying of tragic myths, its purpose may have been to criticise, but its effect must have been to degrade. This species of the comic art had found favour at Athens already before the close of the great civil war; its inventor was the Thasian Hegemon, at whose *Gigantomachia* the Athenians were laughing on the day when the news arrived of the Sicilian disaster.

III. *New Comedy*, which is dated from the establishment of the Macedonian supremacy (338) is merely a further development of *Middle*. If its favourite types were more numerous, including the captain (of mercenaries)—the original of a long line of comic favourites—the cunning slave, &c., they were probably also more conventional. New Comedy appears to have first constituted love intrigues the main subject of dramatic actions. The most famous of the 64 writers said to have belonged to this period of comedy were Philemon (fl. from 330), Menander (342–29),

¹ *Birds*.

² Aristophanes, *Frogs*; Phrynichus, *Musa*; *Tragadi-*

³ Aristophanes, *Ecclesiazusa*.

⁴ *Lysistrata*; *Thesmophoriazusa*; *Plutus II*.

⁵ *Plutus*.

⁶ Strattis, *Choricida*.

⁷ *Stratagema*.

⁸ *Plutus II*.

⁹ *Plutus*.

¹⁰ *Plutus*.

¹¹ *Æcolicon*.

¹ *Archiloche*.

² *Maricas* (Hyperbolus); *Baptas* (Alcibiades); *Lacones* (Cimon), &c.

³ *Knights*.

⁴ *Clouds*.

Improvements in costume &c.

and his contemporary Diphilus. Of these authors we know something from fragments, but more from their Latin adapters Plautus and Terence. As comedians of character, they were limited by a range of types which left little room for originality of treatment; in the construction of their plots they were skilful rather than varied. In style, as well as to some extent in construction, Menander took Euripides as his model, infusing into his comedy an element of moral and sentimental reflection, which refined if it did not enliven it. Yet it may be doubted whether either a high moral or a high artistic purpose animated this school of writers, and whether Epicurus in Lander's dialogue does injustice to Menander in suspecting him of "enjoying the follies of men in our rotten state as flies enjoy fruit in its decay." Fate or chance were the directing powers of his dramatic actions.

New Comedy, and with it Greek comedy proper, is regarded as having come to an end with Posidippus (fl. c. 280). Other comic writers of a later date are, however, mentioned, among them Rhinthon of Tarentum (fl. c. 300), whose mixed compositions have been called by various names, among them by that of *phlyacographes* from *phlyax*, useless chatter). But Greek comedy ceased to be productive after it had been transplanted from Athens to Alexandria; and though even in its original form it long continued to be acted in imperial Rome, these are phases of its history which may here be passed by.

The religious origin of the Attic drama impresses itself upon all its most peculiar features. Theatrical performances were held at Athens only at fixed seasons in the early part of the year—at the Bacchic festivals of the country Dionysia (vintage), the Lenæa (wine-press), probably at the Anthesteria, and above all, at the Great Dionysia, or the Dionysia *par excellence*, at the end of March and beginning of April, when in her most glorious age Athens was crowded with visitors from the islands and cities of her federal empire. As a part of religious worship, the performances took place in a sacred locality—the *Lenæum* on the south-eastern declivity of the Acropolis, where the first wine-press (*lenos*) was said to have been set up, and where now an altar of Bacchus (*thymele*) formed the centre of the theatre. For the same reason, the exhibitions claimed the attendance of the whole population, and room was therefore provided on a grand scale—according to the Platonic Socrates, for "more than 30,000" spectators. The performances lasted all day, or were at least, in accordance with their festive character, extended to as great a length as possible. To their religious origin is likewise to be attributed the fact that they were treated as a matter of state concern. The expenses of the chorus, which in theory represented the people at large, were defrayed on behalf of the state by the *liturgies* (public services) of wealthy citizens, chosen in turn by the tribes to be *choragi* (leaders, i. e., providers of the chorus), the duty of training being, of course, deputed by them to professional persons (*chorodidascals*). Publicly appointed and sworn judges decided between the merits of the dramas produced in competition with one another; the successful poet, performers, and choragus were crowned with ivy, and the last-named was allowed at his own expense to consecrate a tripod in memory of his victory in the neighbourhood of the sacred Bacchic enclosure. Such a monument—one of the most graceful relics of ancient Athens—still stands in the place where it was erected, and recalls to posterity the victory of Lysicrates, achieved in the same year as that of Alexander on the Granicus. The dramatic exhibitions being a matter of religion and state, the entrance money, (*theoricum*) which had been introduced to prevent overcrowding, was from the time of Pericles provided out of the public treasury. The whole population had a right to its

Bacchic holiday; neither women, nor boys, nor slaves were excluded from theatrical spectacles at Athens.

The religious character of dramatic performances at Athens, and the circumstances under which they accordingly took place, likewise determined their externals or costume and scenery. The actor's dress was originally the festive Dionysian attire, of which it always retained the gay and variegated hues. The use of the mask was due to the actor's appearing in the open air and at a distance from most of the spectators; its several species were elaborated with great care, and adapted to the different types of theatrical character. The *colurnus*, or thick-soled boot, which further raised the height of the tragic actor (while the comedian wore a thin-soled boot), was likewise a relic of Bacchic costume. The scenery was, in the simplicity of its original conception, suited to open-air performances; but in course of time the art of scene-painting came to be highly cultivated, and movable scenes were contrived, together with machinery of the ambitious kind required by the Attic drama, whether for bringing gods down from heaven, or for raising mortals aloft.

On a stage and among surroundings thus conventional, it might seem as if little scope could have been left for the actor's art. But though the demands made upon the Attic actor differed in kind even from those made upon his Roman successor, and still more from those which the histrionic art has to meet in modern times, they were not the less rigorous. Mask and buskin might increase his stature, and the former might at once lend the appropriate expression to his appearance and the necessary resonance to his voice. But in declamation, dialogue, and lyric passage, in gesticulation and movement, he had to avoid the least violation of the general harmony of the performance. At the same time, the refinements of bye-play must, from the nature of the case, have been impossible on the Attic stage; the gesticulation must have been broad and massive; the movement slow and the grouping hard in tragedy; and the recitation must have surpassed in its weighty sameness that half-chant of which the echoes have never wholly died out from the stage. Not more than three actors, as has been seen, appeared in any Attic tragedy. The actors were provided by the poet; perhaps the performer of the first parts (*protagonist*) was paid by the state. It was again a result of the religious origin of Attic dramatic performances, and of the public importance attached to them, that the actor's profession was held in high esteem. These artists were as a matter of course free Athenian citizens, often the dramatists themselves, and at times were employed in other branches of the public service. In later days, when tragedy had migrated to Alexandria, and when theatrical entertainments had spread over all the Hellenic world, the art of acting seems to have reached an unprecedented height, and to have taken an extraordinary hold of the public mind. Synods or companies of Dionysiac artists abounded, who were in possession of various privileges, and in one instance at least (at Pergamus) of rich endowments. The most important of these was the Ionic company, established first in Teos, and afterwards in Lebedos, near Colophon, which is said to have lasted longer than many a famous state. We likewise hear of strolling companies performing *in partibus*. Thus it came to pass that the vitality of some of the master-pieces of the Greek drama is without a parallel in theatrical history; while Greek actors were undoubtedly among the principal and most effective agents of the spread of literary culture through a great part of the known world.

The theory and technical system of the drama exercised the critical powers both of dramatists, such as Sophocles, and of the greatest among Greek philosophers. If Plato

touched the subject incidentally, Aristotle has in his *Poetics* (after 334) included an exposition of it, which, mutilated as it is, has formed the basis of all later systematic enquiries. The specialities of Greek tragic dramaturgy refer above all to the chorus; its general laws are those of the regular drama of all times. The theories of Aristotle and other earlier writers were elaborated by the Alexandrians, many of whom doubtless combined example with precept; they also devoted themselves to commentaries on the old masters, such as those in which Didymus (c. 30 B.C.) abundantly excelled, and collected a vast amount of learning on dramatic composition in general, which was doomed to perish, with so many other treasures, in the flames kindled by religious fanaticism.

"The history of the Greek stage," says Sir Walter Scott, "is that of the dramatic art in general;" and herein no doubt lies the broad distinction to be drawn between the drama of the Greeks and the isolated growths previously treated in this sketch. Yet though such is the case,—though in the Roman drama the native elements sink into insignificance when compared with those borrowed from the Greeks, and though the literary element in the modern drama of the West is directly or indirectly derived from the same source,—the Greek drama, both tragic and comic, had features of its own which it has been the principal aim of the foregoing brief account of it to mark. Tragedy never lost the traces of its religious origin; and the festive purposes of comedy are most signally apparent in precisely that period of its productivity whose works are least congenial to modern feeling and taste. But such is the wonderful power of the highest kind of art, that the tragedy of the three great masters, though its themes are so peculiar to itself that they have never been treated with the same effect by the numberless writers of other peoples who have essayed them, "hath ever been held the gravest, moralest, and most profitable of all other poems;" and such is the commanding claim of genius, that Aristophanes, who cultivated a species of comedy of an altogether eccentric kind, occupies an eminence in his branch of the drama hardly more contestable than that of the great tragic triad in theirs. What is Hecuba to us that we should weep for her,—or Antigone that our sympathy should accompany her on her holy errand, forbidden by human laws, but enjoined upon her by the behest of Zeus and of Justice dwelling with the gods below,—or Agamemnon that we should thrill with horror when his cries announce the wreaking of his doom? Why can we laugh at the ribald repartees of hide-seller and sausage-seller, careless of the merits of the former of these advanced politicians, and catch something of the dew of the rain-bringing maidens as it falls upon their beloved land, where the Bromian joy greets the advent of spring? Because in all these instances, and in every other, the art of the Greek drama, while winged by the individual power of genius, is at the same time true to its purposes as an art, and in harmony with Nature, who will not teach her laws or surrender her secrets of a sudden or to all.

In its most productive age, as well as in the times of its decline and decay, the ROMAN drama exhibits the continued coexistence of native forms by the side of those imported from Greece—either kind being necessarily often subject to the influence of the other. Italy has ever been the native land of acting and of scenic representation; and though Roman dramatic literature is in the main but a faint reflex of Greek examples, yet there is perhaps no branch of Roman literary art more congenial than this to the soil whence it sprang.

The beginnings of dramatic performances in Italy are to be sought in the rural festivities which doubtless from a

very early period developed in lively intermixture the elements of the dance, of jocular and abusive improvisations of song, speech, and dialogue, and of an assumption of character such as may be witnessed in any ordinary conversation among southern Italians at the present day. The occasions of these festivities were religious celebrations, public or private—among the latter more especially weddings, which have in all ages been provocative of mirthful demonstrations. The so-called *Fescennine* verses (from *fascinum*, or from Fescennium in southern Etruria), which were afterwards confined to weddings, and ultimately gave rise to an elaborate species of artistic poetry, never merged into actual dramatic performances. In the *saturnæ*, on the other hand—a name originally due to the goatskins of the shepherds, but from primitive times connected with the fullness of both performers and performance—there seems from the first to have been a dramatic element; they were probably comic songs or stories recited with gesticulation and flute accompaniment. Introduced into the city, these entertainments received a new impulse from the performances of the Etruscan players (*ludiones*), who had been brought into Rome when scenic games (*ludi scenici*) were, in 364 B.C., for purposes of religious propitiation, first held there. These *istriones*, as they were called at Rome (*istri* *Istriones*, had been their native name), who have had the honour of transmitting their appellation to the entire *histrionic* art and its professors, were at first only dancers and pantomimists in a city where their speech was unintelligible. But their performances encouraged and developed those of other players and mountebanks, so that after the establishment of the regular drama at Rome on the Greek model, the *saturnæ* came to be performed as farcical after-pieces (*exodia*), until they gave way to other species. Of these the *mimi* were at Rome probably coeval in their beginnings with the stage itself, where those who performed them were afterwards known under the same name, possibly in the place of an older appellation (*pluripedes*, bare-footed). These loose farces, after being probably at first performed independently, were then played as after-pieces, till in the imperial period, when they reasserted their predominance, they were again produced by themselves. At the close of the republican period the *mimus* had found its way into literature (through D. Laberius and others), and had been assimilated in both form and subjects to other varieties of the comic drama—preserving, however, as its distinctive feature, a preponderance of the mimic or gesticulatory element. Together with the *pantomimus* (v. *infra*) the *mimus* continued to prevail in the days of the empire, having transferred its innate grossness (for it was originally a representation of low life) to its treatment of mythological subjects, with which it dealt in accordance with the demands of a "lubric and adulterate age." As a matter of course, the *mimus* freely borrowed from other species, among which, so far as they were of native Italian origin, the *Atellane fables* (from Atella in Campania) call for special mention. Usually supposed to be of Oscan birth, they originally consisted in delineations of the life of small towns, in which dramatic and other satire has never ceased to find a favourite butt. The principal personages in these living sketches gradually assumed a fixed and conventional character, which they retained even when, after the final overthrow of Campanian independence (210), the *Atellane* had been transplanted to Rome. Here the heavy father or husband (*poppus*), the ass-cared glutton (*maccus*), the full-cheeked, voracious chatterbox (*bucco*), and the wily sharper (*dorsenus*) became accepted comic types, and with others of a similar kind were handed down, to reappear in the modern Italian drama. In these characters lay the essence of the *Atellane*; their plots were extremely simple; the dialogue (perhaps interspersed with songs in

the Saturnian metre) it was left to the performers to improvise. In course of time these plays also assumed a literary form, being written out at length by their authors; but under the empire they were gradually absorbed in the pantomimes.

The regular Roman drama, on the other hand, was of foreign (*i.e.*, Greek) origin; and its early history, at all events, attaches itself to more or less fixed dates. It begins with the year 240 B.C., when at the *ludi Romani*, held with unusual splendour after the first Punic war, the victory was, according to Macedonian precedent, celebrated by the first production of a tragedy and a comedy on the Roman stage. The author of both, who appeared in person as an actor, was Livius Andronicus (b. 278 or earlier), a native of the Greek city of Tarentum, where the Dionysiac festivals enjoyed high popularity. His models were in tragedy the later Greek tragedians and their revisions of the three great Attic masters, in comedy no doubt Menander and his school. These continued the examples of the regular Roman drama during the whole of its course, even when it resorted to native themes.

History of Roman tragedy.

The nature of Roman tragedy admits of no doubt, although our conclusions respecting its earlier progress are only derived from analogy, from scattered notices especially of the titles of plays, and from such fragments—mostly very brief—as have come down to us. Of the known titles of the tragedies of Livius Andronicus, six belong to the Trojan cycle, and this preference consistently maintained itself among the tragedians of the “Trojgensæ;” next in popularity seem to have been the myths of the house of Tantalus, of the Pelopidæ, and of the Argonauts. The distinctions drawn by later Roman writers between the styles of the tragic poets of the republican period must in general be taken on trust. The Campanian Cn. Nævius (fl. from 236) wrote comedies as well as tragedies, so that the rigorous separation observed among the Greeks in the cultivation of the two dramatic species was at first neglected at Rome. His realistic tendency, displayed in that fondness for political allusions which brought upon him the vengeance of a noble family (the Metelli) incapable of understanding a joke of this description, might perhaps under more favourable circumstances have led him more fully to develop a new tragic species invented by him. But the *fabula prætecta* or *prætextata* (from the purple-bordered robe worn by higher magistrates) was not destined to become the means of emancipating the Roman serious drama from the control of Greek examples. In design, it was national tragedy on historic subjects of patriotic interest—which the Greeks had only treated in isolated instances; and one might at first sight marvel why, after Nævius and his successors had produced skilful examples of the species, it should have failed to overshadow and outlast in popularity a tragedy telling the oft-told foreign tales of Thebes and Mycenæ, or even the pseudo-ancestral story of Troy. But it should not be forgotten to how great an extent so-called early Roman history consisted of the traditions of the *gentes*, and how little the party-life of later republican Rome lent itself to a dramatic treatment likely to be acceptable both to the nobility and to the multitude. As for the emperors, the last licence they would have permitted to the theatre was a free popular treatment of the national history; if Augustus prohibited the publication of a tragedy by his adoptive father on the subject of *Œdipus*, it was improbable that he or his successors should have sanctioned the performance of plays dealing with the earthly fortunes of Divus Julius himself, or with the story of Marius, or that of the Gracchi, or any of the other tragic themes of later republican or imperial history. The historic drama at Rome thus had no opportunity for a vigorous life, even could tragedy have severed its main

Prætexta.

course from the Greek literature of which it has been well called a “free-hand copy.” The *prætextæ* of which we know chiefly treat—possibly here and there helped to form—legends of a hoary antiquity, or celebrate battles chronicled in family or public records; and in the end the species died a natural death.³

Q. Ennius (239–168), the favourite poet of the great families, was qualified by his Tarentine education, which taught the Oscan youth the Greek as well as the Latin tongue (so that he boasted “three souls”), to become the literary exponent of the Hellenizing tendencies of his age of Roman society. Nearly half of the extant names of his tragedies belong to the Trojan cycle; and Euripides was clearly his favourite source and model. M. Pacuvius (b. c. 229), like Ennius subject from his youth up to the influences of Greek civilization, and the first Roman dramatist who devoted himself exclusively to the tragic drama, was the least fertile of the chief Roman tragedians, but was regarded by the ancients as indisputably superior to L. Accius. He again was generally (though not uniformly) held to have been surpassed by L. Accius (b. 170), a learned scholar and prolific dramatist, of whose plays 50 titles and a very large number of fragments have been preserved. The plays of the three last-named poets maintained themselves on the stage till the close of the republic; and Accius was quoted by the emperor Tiberius.⁴ Of the other tragic writers of the republic several were *dilettanti*—such as the great orator and eminent politician C. Julius Strabo; the cultivated officer Q. Tullius Cicero, who made an attempt, disapproved by his illustrious brother, to introduce the satyr-drama into the Roman theatre; L. Cornelius Balbus, a Cæsarean partisan; and finally C. Julius Cæsar himself. Tragedy continued to be cultivated under the earlier emperors; and of one author, the famous and ill-fated L. Annæus Seneca (4 B.C.–65 A.D.), a series of works has come down to us. In accordance with the character of their author’s prose-work, they exhibit a strong predominance of the rhetorical element, and a pomposity of style far removed from that of the poets Sophocles and Euripides, from whom Seneca derived his themes. The metrification of his plays is very strict, and they were doubtless intended for recitation, whether or not also designed for the stage. A few tragic poets are mentioned after Seneca, till about the reign of Domitian (81–96) the list comes to an end. The close of Roman tragic literature is obscure than its beginning; and, while there are traces of tragic performances at Rome as late as even the 6th century, we are ignorant how long the works of the old masters of Roman tragedy maintained themselves on the stage.

It would obviously be an error to draw from the plays of Seneca—unfortunately the only examples of Roman tragedy we possess—conclusions as to the method and style of the earlier writers. In general, however, no important changes seem to have occurred in the progress of Roman tragic composition. The later Greek plays remained, so far as can be gathered, the models in treatment; and inasmuch as at Rome the single plays were performed by themselves, there was every inducement to make their action as full and complicated as possible. The dialogue-scenes (*deverbia*) appear to have been largely interspersed with musical passages (*cantica*); but the effect of the latter must have suffered from the barbarous custom of having the songs sung by

Characteristics of Roman tragedy.

¹ Nævius, *Lupus* (*The Wolf*); *Romulus*; Ennius, *Sabina* (*The Sabine Women*); Accius, *Brutus*.

² Nævius, *Clastidium* (*Marcellus*); Ennius, *Ambracia*; Pacuvius, *Paulus*; Accius, *Eneada* (*Decius*).

³ Balbus’s *Iter* (*The Mission*), an isolated play on an episode of the Pharsalian campaign, seems to have been composed for the mere private delectation of its author and hero. *Octavia*, a late *prætextæ* ascribed to Seneca, was certainly not written by him.

⁴ “Qderint dum metuant” *Atreus*.

a boy placed in front of the flute-player (*cantor*), while the actor accompanied them with gesticulations. The chorus (unlike the Greek) stood on the stage itself and seems occasionally at least to have taken part in the action. But the whole of the musical element can hardly have attained to so full a development as among the Greeks. The divisions of the action appear at first to have been three; from the addition of prologue and epilogue may have arisen the invention (probably due in tragedy to Varro) of the fixed number of five acts. In style, such influence as the genius of Roman literature could exercise must have been in the direction of the rhetorical and the pathetic; a surplus of energy on the one hand, and a defect of poetic richness on the other, can hardly have failed to characterize these, as they did all the other productions of earlier Roman poetry.

History of Roman comedy.

Palliata.

In Roman comedy two different kinds—respectively called *palliata* and *togata* from the names of dress—were distinguished,—the former treating Greek subjects and imitating Greek originals, the latter professing a native character. The *palliata* sought its originals especially in New Attic comedy; and its authors, as they advanced in refinement of style, became more and more dependent upon their models, and unwilling to gratify the coarser tastes of the public by local allusions or gross seasonings. But that kind of comedy which shrinks from the rude breath of popular applause usually has in the end to give way to less squeamish rivals; and thus, after the species had been cultivated for about a century (c. 250–150 B.C.), *palliata* ceased to be composed except for the amusement of small circles, though the works of the most successful authors, Plautus and Terence, kept the stage even after the establishment of the empire. Among the earlier writers of *palliata* were the tragic poets Andronicus, Nævius, and Ennius, but they were alike surpassed by T. Maccius Plautus (254–184), nearly all of whose comedies esteemed genuine by Varro—not less than 20 in number—have been preserved. He was exclusively a comic poet, and though he borrowed his plots from the Greeks—from Diphilus and Philemon apparently in preference to the more refined Menander—there was in him a genuinely national as well as a genuinely popular element. Of the extent of his originality it is impossible to judge; probably it lies in his elaboration of character and the comic details of his dialogue rather than in his plots. Modern comedy is indebted to him in all these points; and in consequence of this fact, as well as of the attention his text has for linguistic reasons received from scholarship both ancient and modern, his merits have met with their full share of recognition. Statius Cæcilius (an Insubrian brought to Rome as a captive c. 200) stands midway between Plautus and Terence, but no plays of his remain. P. Terentius Afer (c. 185–159) was, as his cognomen implies, a native of Carthage, of whose conqueror he enjoyed the patronage. His six extant comedies seem to be tolerably close renderings of their Greek originals, nearly all of which were plays of Menander. It was the good fortune of the works of Terence to be preserved in an exceptionally large number of MSS. in the monastic libraries of the Middle Ages, and thus (as will be seen) to become a main link between the ancient and the Christian drama. As a dramatist he is distinguished by correctness of style rather than by variety in his plots or vivacity in his characters; his chief merit—and at the same time the quality which has rendered him so suitable for modern imitation—is to be sought in the polite ease of his dialogue. In general, the characteristics of the *palliata*, which were divided into five acts, are those of the New Comedy of Athens, like which they had no chorus; for purposes of explanation from author to audience the prologue sufficed; the Roman versions were probably terser

Terence.

than their originals, which they often altered by the process called *contamination*.

The *togata*, in the wider sense of the term, included all Roman plays of native origin—among the rest the *prætextæ*, in contradistinction to which and to the transient species of the *trabeatæ* (from the dress of the knights) the comedies dealing with the life of the lower classes were afterwards called *tabernariæ* (from *taberna*, a shop), a name suited by some of their extant titles,¹ while others point to the treatment of provincial scenes.² The *togata*, which was necessarily more realistic than the *palliata*, and doubtless fresher as well as coarser in tone, flourished in Roman literature between 170 and 80 B.C. In this species Titinius, all whose plays bear Latin titles and were *tabernariæ*, was succeeded by the more refined L. Afranius, who, though still choosing national subjects, seems to have treated them in the spirit of Menander. His plays continued to be performed under the empire, though with an admixture of elements derived from that lower species, the pantomime, to which they also were in the end to succumb. The Romans likewise adopted the burlesque kind of comedy called from its inventor *Rhinthonica*, and by other names (*cf. ante*).

The end of Roman dramatic literature was dilettantism and criticism; the end of the Roman drama was spectacle and show, buffoonery and sensual allurements. It was for this that the theatre had passed through all its early troubles, when the political puritanism of the old school had upheld the martial games of the circus against the enervating influence of the stage. In those days the guardians of Roman virtue had sought to diminish the attractions of the theatre by insisting upon its remaining as uncomfortable as possible; but as was usual at Rome, the privileges of the upper orders were at last extended to the population at large, though a separation of classes continued to be characteristic of a Roman audience. The first permanent theatre erected at Rome was that of Gn. Pompeius (55 B.C.), which contained nearly 18,000 seats; but even of this the portion allotted to the performers (*scæna*) was of wood; nor was it till the reign of Tiberius (22 A.D.) that, after being burnt down, the edifice was rebuilt in stone. See THEATRE.

Though a species of amateur literary censorship, introduced by Pompeius, became customary in the Augustan age, in general the drama’s laws at Rome were given by the drama’s patrons—in other words, the production of plays was a matter of private speculation. The exhibitions were contracted for with the officials charged with the superintendence of public amusements (*curatores ludorum*); the actors were slaves trained for the art, mostly natives of Southern Italy or Greece. Many of them rose to reputation and wealth, purchased their freedom, and themselves became directors of companies; but though Sulla might make a knight of Roscius, and Cæsar and his friends defy ancient prejudice, the stigma of civil disability (*infamia*) continued to adhere to the profession. The actor’s art was carried on at Rome under conditions differing in other respects from those of the Greek theatre. The Romans loved a full stage, and from the later period of the republic liked to see it crowded with supernumeraries. This accorded with their military instincts, and with the general grossness of their tastes, which led them in the theatre as well as in the circus to delight in spectacle and tumult, and to applaud Pompeius when he furnished forth the return of Agamemnon in the *Clytemnestra* with a grand total of 600 heavily-laden mules. On the other hand, the actors were nearer to the spectators in the Roman theatre

¹ *Augur*; *Cinerarius* (*The Crimper*); *Fullonia* (*The Fuller’s Trade*); *Libertus* (*The Freedman*); *Tubicina* (*The Flute-girl*).

² *Brundisina*; *Ferentinatis*; *Setina*.

The Roman theatre.

Actors.