Costas Panayotakis, *Decimus Laberius: The Fragments*, edited with introduction, translation, and commentary by C. P. Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries vol. 46, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. xxix + 512, ISBN 978-0-521-88523-2.

What do we know about Roman drama? About some parts of it, quite a lot. Twenty-seven play-texts survive of *fabulae palliatae*, comedies based, however loosely, on Greek originals (21 are by Plautus, six by Terence); nine play-texts survive of *tragoediae*, on the heroic themes of Greek tragedy (all are attributed to Seneca, but one is probably by someone else); and one play-text survives of a *fabula praetexta*, a quasi-tragedy on a Roman historical theme (attributed to Seneca but certainly not by him). However, it would be a great mistake to suppose that these categories of comedy and tragedy represent the whole experience of the Roman stage, or even the greater part of it.

When contemporary authors refer to what went on at the *ludi scaenici*, they often seem to be describing something quite different from what these play-texts offer. Varro, for instance, in a work probably of the 70s BC (*Menippean Satires* fr. 513 Astbury), makes a casual reference to 'dancers in the theatre' performing the story of Actaeon. Cicero in one of his speeches (*Pro Q. Gallio* fr. 2 Crawford) refers to the leading poet at the *ludi* of 64 BC, who brought on stage Euripides arguing with Menander and Socrates with Epicurus. A few years later Lucretius, making a point about sense-perception (4.973-83), notes that those who have spent days at the *ludi* hear music and see dancers in their dreams. Phaedrus (*Fables* 5.7.23-7) describes a performance under Augustus which began with rolls of thunder, then 'the gods speaking in the traditional way', then a choral song celebrating the *princeps*. Ovid on two occasions (*Tristia* 2.519, 5.7.25) mentions that his own poems have been 'danced for the People' in crowded theatres.

When Varro tried to enumerate and classify all the different types of drama in use in his time (quoted in Diomedes *Grammatici Latini* 1.489-90 Keil), he first distinguished plays in Greek dress (*palliatae*) from those in Roman dress (*togatae*); the subdivisions of the first type were *tragoedia*, *comoedia*, *satyroi* and *mimus*, and those of the second type were *praetexta*, *tabernaria*, *Atellana* and *planipes*. But we know practically nothing about what those labels represent in terms of actual performance.

Other theorists, evidently followed by Horace (*Ars poetica* 288), put forward a slightly different categorisation, which defined *palliata* and *togata* as subdivisions of comedy, and added another comic category, *Rhinthonica* (Donatus *De comoedia* 6.1 Kaibel). Rhinthon, a playwright working in Tarentum in the early third century BC, was called the founder of 'Italian comedy' (Athenaeus 9.402b); he is supposed to have introduced 'cheerful tragedy' (*Suda* ρ 171 Adler)

and a type of comedy in hexameters which was imitated by the Romans as *satura* (Lydus *De magistratibus* 1.41). How reliable this late evidence is, nobody knows; but we may note that Cicero could quote Rhinthon in 60 BC (*Ad Atticum* 20.3.8), and that Livy (7.2.6-8) took it for granted that *satura* was a type of drama; Horace was unusual in not presenting his satires from the stage (*Satires* 1.10.37-9), as Lucilius (ibid. 2.1.71) and Varro (*Menippean Satires* frr. 218, 355 Astbury) had done before him.

Suetonius, who wrote two volumes on the Roman *ludi* (*Suda* τ 895 Adler), believed that the different the stage genres of his time had originated in comedy (quoted in Diomedes *Grammatici Latini* 1.491-2 Keil):

> 'For the *pantomimus*, the *pythaules* and the *choraules* used to sing in comedy. But because not everything could be equally excellent in the performance of everyone, those among the comedy performers who had greater ability and skill each claimed the artistic primacy for himself. So it came about that the *mimi* were unwilling to yield to the others in their own speciality, and so there was a split from the rest. For since, being more skilled, they were not prepared to serve the less skilled in the work they shared, they separated themselves from comedy; and so it happened that once the precedent had been established, the practice of each speciality began to follow suit, and not appear in comedy.'

This is a startling idea, but Suetonius was very well informed, and his information is unlikely to be wholly imaginary. The whole history and development of the Roman stage is much less well understood than we sometimes think.

Where did 'mime' belong in this immensely varied world of entertainment? Here too the evidence is very complex. On the one hand, it is clear from Cicero that in his day mime was characterised by physical clowning (*De oratore* 2.251) and obscene language (ibid. 2.242, *Orator* 88), its plots were largely improvised (*Pro Caelio* 64), and its material included personal abuse (*Rhet. ad Herennium* 1.14.24) and satirical observations about topical events (*Ad familiares* 7.11.2, *Ad Atticum* 14.3.2). On the other hand, the two leading mime-dramatists of his time were masters of the same sort of witty word-play that Cicero himself used (Seneca *Controuersiae* 7.3.8), and wrote formal scripts which Cicero refers to as *poemata* (*Ad familiares* 12.18.2, cf. Horace *Satires* 1.10.6). Two generations later, 'mime' still implied obscenity of both word and deed (Ovid *Tristia* 2.497, 515, Valerius Maximus 2.6.7), and yet the mimographer Publilius was proverbial for morally improving observations (Petronius *Satyricon* 55), and his *sententiae* were collected for educational purposes.

The subject-matter of mime evidently ranged very widely. Caecilius, who wrote comedies of the same sort as Plautus and Terence, is said to have incorporated mime material (Aulus Gellius 2.13.12); according to Nicolaus of Damascus (*FGrH* 90 F 75), the pleasure Sulla took in 'mimes and clowns' was demonstrated by 'the satyric comedies he himself wrote in his native language'; Catullus wrote a treatise *On Mimes* (quoted in Schol. Bern. on Lucan 1.543-4), which dealt with

rationalised versions of tragic plots; and Virgil's sixth *Eclogue* was sung in the theatre by the *mima* Cytheris (Servius on *Ecl.* 6.11). No doubt Cytheris danced as well as sang; mime was danced as far back as our evidence goes (Festus 438L on 211 BC), and when her younger contemporary Pylades introduced the new 'Italian dance' (Athenaeus 1.20d-e) or *pantomimus*, in which the dancer was silent and wore a mask with closed lips, it was in order to avoid the difficulty of the same performer having to sing and dance at the same time (Lucian *Saltatio* 30, Jerome *Chron.* Ol.189.3).

There were innovations in mime even before Pylades; Cicero implies that Alexandrian mime-plots were a novelty in 54 BC (*Pro Rabirio Postumo* 35), and Pliny (*Nat. Hist.* 35.199) calls the Syrian Publilius, who was active about the same time, the 'founder of the mime stage', whatever that may mean. There were stories about Publilius' rivalry with his older contemporary Decimus Laberius, including one in which he won a contest of extempore performance (Macrobius *Sat.* 2.7.7), but if he brought something new to the genre it is not at all clear what it was. No doubt all the show-business professionals were constantly trying to find something new and striking to attract their audience.

How are we to make sense of all this? The first essential is to collect what evidence there is and look carefully at what it can and cannot tell us. For this, Costas Panayotakis' new edition of the fragments of Laberius, with English translation and detailed commentary, is a huge step forward. He identifies 93 fragments, totalling 150 lines and coming from at least 44 different plays; they are cited in eleven different authors, the great majority from Aulus Gellius and Nonius Marcellus, and one even appears on an epitaph inscription (*ILS* 9519). P.'s main task – particularly demanding in the case of the Nonius citations – has been to establish the best text for each citation, and thus secure as reliable a basis as possible for the explanations and hypothetical reconstructions suggested in the commentary. The translation is very helpful, and the discussion is judicious and sensible throughout.

P.'s section on Laberius' prosody (pp. 67-76) provides a very detailed metrical analysis, with a surprising result. The longest of the fragments (fr. 90) is quoted by Macrobius in the context of an occasion otherwise known from Suetonius (*Diuus Iulius* 39.2) in his list of the *spectacula* put on by Caesar:

> 'At the games [in 47 or 46 BC] the Roman *eques* Decimus La-
> berius acted his own mime; he was granted 500,000 sesterces and
> a gold ring, and crossed over from the stage through the *orchestra*
> to sit in the fourteen rows.'

There is no hint in Suetonius that Laberius was constrained to do this against his will, but Macrobius cites a long passage as from Laberius' *prologus*, expressing the playwright's shame and disgrace. P.'s analysis reveals that these 27 lines are metrically quite distinct from the other 28 complete *senarii* in the surviving fragments. He is cautious about what conclusion to draw, but rightly observes in his commentary that 'there are serious problems with the versification of this piece, which render the attribution of the lines to L. highly suspicious' (p. 455).

One wonders whether Laberius, who died 'in the tenth month after the death of Gaius Caesar' (Jerome *Chron*. Ol. 184.2), was himself the subject of someone else's play attacking Caesar's 'tyranny'.

As is proper for the 'Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries' series, the strength of P.'s book is textual and technical. There are a couple of minor slips on historical questions: the description of the Laberii as 'a Lanuvine tribe' (p. 38) seems to be a garbled reference to the *tribus Maecia* as evidence for their origin at Lanuvium, and the attribution of a consulship to Cicero's friend P. Nigidius Figulus (p. 160) is evidently a mistake for Nigidius' praetorship in 58 BC. I noticed only one questionable translation, 'villages' for *oppida* at fr. 93 (pp. 51, 478): the places where Publilius performed were surely more substantial than that.

P.'s introductory sections 'defining the Roman mime' (pp. 1-16) and 'origins and chronological development of the genre' (pp. 16-32) are full of good material, but seem to me to imply a somewhat too dogmatic view of what mime was. As we have seen above, the evidence hardly permits a single coherent picture of 'the development of the mime from an artless dramatic form into a fully-fledged theatrical genre which ousted the plays of Plautus and Terence from the Roman stage' (p. x). P. is aware of the difficulties of the source material, but still takes it for granted that mime was necessarily a 'sub-literary genre' (pp. 12-3, 57-8) dealing with 'low-life situations' (pp. 1, 12, 78), disreputable (pp. 39, 189), vulgar and obscene (pp. 3, 5-6, 12, 15, 22), and 'popular' as opposed to 'literary' (pp. 3-4, 21, 78).

It was indeed all those things, but it was many other things as well, as P.'s own valuable list of mime-subjects (pp. 10-1, 66-7) is enough to show. P. does not define 'sub-literary', which is a paradoxical term in an edition of what is left of a major author's written texts, but he seems to apply it equally to Roman satire, 'which was as marginalised in the literary canon as the Roman mime' (p. 39). The terminology may be unhelpful, but the parallel is surely a good one. Both Laberius and Lucilius were writing for public performance to the largest possible audience, the Roman People at the *ludi*, and they were hoping to please a very wide variety of tastes. For educated people, written texts of their works could be created and circulated in the normal way. For all poetic genres, and for mime above all, literature in the strict sense was a secondary phenomenon.

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